

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

**MOSTAR AND THE LOSS OF ITS (PARTIAL) UNIQUENESS :
A HISTORY, 1990 - 2009**

DISSERTATION

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Introduction

“Mostar is the past that does not pass” wrote Antonella Pocecco in 2007¹. Indeed, when you walk through the streets of the town, it is impossible to avoid the feeling that something has remained suspended, latent. Mostar is the closest reality to schizophrenia I have ever met. It is as much peaceful, slow, conscious, as it is silently tense, electric, unaware of the lessons of its past. It is *“frozen in a time without memory”*², even though, simultaneously, the burden of its recollections prevents it from living as a single city.

The complexity of the Herzegovinian capital is such that, in my view, it is impossible to understand its history through the adoption of a rigid conceptual cage. Mostar is fluid, liquid, permeated by the Neretva river even in its most intimate fibers. This is why I chose to adopt an exclusively historical approach, by renouncing to present the history of the city as a case study coherent with some wider formulation. From the “clash of civilizations” to the limits of democracy in a post-war society, passing through the influence of external actors or the archetypical clash between the city and the countryside, too many factors should be taken into account, and the general frame would be in any case disappointing. Therefore, I preferred to concentrate on the very changes of the town’s nature, by bearing particular attention to the developments of its political scene, as I believe that they have proved to constitute both a reliable indicator and a primary driving force for the evolutions of the town’s status quo.

I chose to divide the last two decades of Mostar’s history in three main periods. The First Chapter focuses on the pre-war reality of the Herzegovinian capital and on its destruction. I decided to begin in 1990 because that is the year of the first multi-party Bosnian elections, which emphasized some features that have become a constant of both Mostar and BiH’s political scene. Generally, pre-war Mostar is described as the most integrated place of Former Yugoslavia, so much that it is believed to have been in a way “dragged” within the conflict. Much of this vision fits with the pre-war reality of the town, which did represent a remarkable example of inter-ethnic harmony. Nonetheless, as the 1990 voting pointed out, such an idealistic vision is oblivious of the fact that a certain degree of national tensions had never disappeared from the basically integrated city centre and that, above all, a silent fracture had developed between the centre of Mostar and its highly nationalist outskirts. The war left a devastated town, especially in its Eastern part, and determined a permanent change in the structure of its population.

¹ My translation from the Italian: “Mostar è il passato che non pass” (GRESINA S., “Tra stereotipi e attese: Mostar nei Balcani”, *IUIES Journal*, 1-2007, p. 91)

² My translation from the Italian: “Congelata in un tempo immemorabile” (*Ibidem*)

The Second Chapter is dedicated to the very first post war years (1994-1999), throughout which Mostar stayed as partitioned as ever. From the dialing code to the judicial system, everything was double, as a sort of legacy of the war-time split. This inheritance favored the rootedness of two systems of parallel institutions, which represented the bulk of the town's real power, in spite of the formal democratic regime. The frequent post-war elections provided a sort of indisputable legitimization to the local nationalist élites, which had the greatest political as well as economic interest in fostering the partition of the town. This insistence on early voting was one of the many errors that the IC committed both in Mostar and in the rest of BiH.

The last chapter opens in November 1999, with the death of Franjo Tudjman. Such an event deeply influenced the important changes in Zagreb that consistently weakened Mostar's Croat hard-liners, who were also threatened by a new resoluteness on the part of the IC. Nevertheless, above all thanks to the persistence of their parallel network of power, the Croat hard-liners managed to ride the storm. Given the fact that the hottest problems of the town had remained unresolved, the administrative reunification of the city, imposed by decree in 2004, remained mainly a formal passage. In addition, the constitutional crisis in which Bosnia has fallen since 2005-2006 has further complicated the political situation of Mostar. The October 2008 city's elections have determined the beginning of a political stalemate, to date unsettled, the solution of which is likely to determine a rearrangement of the local power's relations

In the conclusion, I try to frame the history of Mostar in the last two decades, which has been marked in the first place by the loss of the town's (partial) uniqueness. I focus in particular on the dynamic evolutions of Mostar's value for BiH. Before the conflict, the Herzegovinian capital was essentially perceived as an inter-ethnic lab, a kind of vanguard which traced the way for the whole Yugoslavia. With the beginning of the war, Mostar's role was completely twisted, so that it turned into a reliable mirror of the apparently irreparable partition of BiH. Mostar, moreover, became one of the basic ganglions for the balance of the whole country, as it represented the fundamental test-bed for both the Bosnian Croats' ambitions and for the feasibility of the Croat-Muslim cooperation.

After the political changes in Zagreb and Belgrade (2000), which contributed to the opening of a less instable phase for Bosnia, the Herzegovinian capital became a burden for the whole country, as it persisted on its highly belligerent path. With the beginning of the BiH constitutional crisis and the sharpening of the city's political stalemate, Mostar ended up being once again a faithful mirror of the more and more enigmatic Bosnian reality, by remaining, of course, one of the crucial points for the national balances.

1. Cosmopolitan Mostar and its Destruction

1.1 Mostar's growth in Former Yugoslavia

Mostar, “*the jewel of the Neretva valley*”³, was one of the most shining gems of Tito's regime. Just a few months before the outbreak of hostilities in 1992, the capital of Herzegovina, which traditionally tended to be tolerant and inclusive⁴, still represented a striking example of inter-ethnic integration. The city's identity before the conflict was mainly based on its status of inter-cultural cross-road and meeting point⁵. According to the currently predominant account of the reality of pre-war Mostar, the local population had given life to a unique inter-cultural synthesis, Yugoslavian in nature rather than Muslim, Croat or Serb⁶. In a way, therefore, the Herzegovinian capital represented one of the best examples of Tito's slogan of “brotherhood and unity”⁷, the closest achievement of Yugoslavia as a nation, and not only as a federation of peoples.

At the end of WWII, Mostar became the destination of an important wave of immigration from Western Herzegovina, a Bosnian region with a mainly Croat population. Because of its strategic position, the central government in Belgrade in fact had decided to increase the size of the town, which it had selected for industrial development. The most important factory of the city was the *Aluminij Mostar*, which employed over 5.000 workers⁸.

³ GRANDITS H., “The Power of ‘Armchair Politicians’: Ethnic Loyalty and Political Factionalism among Herzegovinian Croats”, essay published in: BOUGAREL X., HELMS E., DUIJZINGS G., *The New Bosnian Mosaic*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2007, p. 99

⁴ Since its foundation, the Herzegovinian capital has sheltered a highly mixed population. Despite some important moments of tension, the town developed a tolerant and inclusive ethos. Michele Colafato uses the word “*mostarinity*” (my translation from the Italian “*mostarinità*”) in order to define the originally open-minded, creative, anti-nationalist and disenchanted spirit of Mostar's inhabitants (COLAFATO M., *Mostar. L'urbicidio, la memoria, la pulizia etnica*, Edizioni SEAM, Roma, 1999, p. 27)

⁵ MAKAS E. G., *Representing Competing Identities: Building and Rebuilding in Postwar Mostar*, Department of Architecture, Cornell University, 2007, p. 347 (as published at: www.emilymakas.com)

⁶ Muslims, as stated by the reformed SFRY Constitution of 1963, were one of the three constituent nationalities of BiH (the other two being the Serb and the Croat ones). In occasion of the 1991 census, the term was replaced by the equivalent definition of “Bosniak”. In this work, therefore, I will use both the expressions, since they have a corresponding meaning. As Paul Garde points out (GARDE P., *Le discours balkanique*, Fayard, Paris, 2004, ch. XX), the affiliation to the Muslim/Bosniak nationality is determined both by a linguistic and a confessional criteria: “*Whoever belongs to the Serb-Croat linguistic domain and to the Muslim religious tradition is said to be a Bosniak*” (my translation from the French: “*Est dit Musulman quiconque appartient au domaine linguistique serbo-croate et à la tradition religieuse musulmane*”). Therefore, a Muslim (nationality) is not necessarily a Muslim (religious faith).

⁷ The Herzegovinian capital was in fact known throughout the SFRY as “the red Mostar”, or “Mostar the Partisan” (My translation from the Italian: “*Mostar la rossa*” and “*Mostar la partigiana*”, TERZIC D., “Da Mostar a Mostar”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 19/1/2004)

⁸ BOSE S., *Bosnia after Dayton*, Hurst & Company, London, 2002, p. 131. For a history of the *Aluminij*, see TERZIC D., “Abbraccio di ferro”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 13/11/2006

The second, with its 3.000 employees⁹, was the *SOKO*, the only Yugoslavian firm which produced military planes¹⁰; both factories were established on the Western bank of the city¹¹ and therefore, after the war, passed under the control of the Croat nationalists. Another important activity for the town's economy was represented by tourism¹²: according to Amir Pasic¹³, Mostar attracted up to 1.000.000 people a year, mainly thanks to the fame of its historic centre. The increase in Mostar population, driven by its economic progress, is summed up in the next table¹⁴:

Table 1.1

Year	Population
1961	72.452
1971	89.589
1981	110.377
1991	126.067

Economic development was not accompanied by a homogenous growth of the town. The centre of Mostar, where the standard of living was higher, was mainly inhabited by those who occupied a privileged position in the collective economy¹⁵. This part of the city was the most ethnically mixed and integrated, as shown by the results of the 1990 elections and the 1991 census. The greatest part of the Western Herzegovinian immigrants settled instead at the outskirts of the town¹⁶, which became a kind of vanguard of the mainly nationalist

⁹ RIBAREVIC-NIKOLIC I., JURIC Z., *Mostar '92, Urbicide*, Croatian Defense Council- Mostar, Public Enterprise for Reconstruction and Building of Mostar, IDP- Municipal Headquarters Mostar, Zagreb, 1992, p. 64.

¹⁰ PIRJEVEC J., *Le guerre jugoslave*, Einaudi, Torino, 2001, p. 154

¹¹ MAGGETTI M., *La guerre dans les esprits: "culture de guerre" et retour des réfugiés à Mostar 1994-2000*, Université de Fribourg, 2002, p. 61. Other important firms were: *Hercegovacka Auto*, producing cars and specialized in the aluminum manufacture; *Hepko*, which led the development of the agricultural sector; *UNIS*, a Sarajevo-based firm leader in the electronic field (RIBAREVIC-NIKOLIC I., JURIC Z., *op. cit.*, p. 64)

¹² Mostar's tourist appeal was further increased by the development of Medjugorje (30 km far from Mostar) as a pilgrimage site. In just twenty years, Medjugorje had become the first world's Marian pilgrimage centre, surpassing Lourdes and Fatima. "By 1995, promoters claimed that 20 million pilgrims had visited the site" (SELLS M., "Crosses of Blood: Sacred Space, Religion, and Violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 64, No. 3, Special Issue Autumn 2003, pp. 309-331).

¹³ RAMEL S., *Reconstruire pour promouvoir la paix? Le cas du « Vieux Pont » de Mostar*, Institut européen de l'Université de Genève, 2005, p. 77. Amir Pasic has been one of the overseers of the Stari Most's reconstruction. Even if the assessment he provides is perhaps overestimated, given the pre-war Mostar's touristic facilities, I find it helpful to convey the importance of tourism for pre-war Mostar's economy.

¹⁴ Figures are collected from: COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19

¹⁵ *Ibi*, p. 24

¹⁶ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 61

populations of Herzegovina¹⁷. Most of these settlements rose on the Western bank of the Neretva and tended to be ethnically homogeneous, as well as less accepting of Mostar's tradition of inclusion and integration¹⁸. "*The further you get from the centre of the town, the deeper the demographic unbalance*"¹⁹. Thereby, a silent fracture, which even deepened throughout the long SFRY's political and economic crisis, developed between the basically integrated centre and the mostly nationalist outskirts.

1.2 Mostar at the eve of the conflict

The results of the 1991 census highlight Mostar's complexity and very subtle balance, as well as the differences between the centre and the periphery of the city²⁰:

Tab. 1.3

Nationalities	Mostar munic. area (1981)	Mostar historic center (1991)	Mostar Outsk. (1991)	Mostar munic. area (1991)
Muslims	31% (*34.200)	34,3%(*25.900)	*35,6%(*18.000)	34,8%(*43.900)
Croats	33,5%(*37.000)	28,8%(*21.700)	*41,3%(*20.900)	33,8% (*42.600)
Serbs	19% (*21.000)	18,7%(*14.100)	*19,6% (*9.900)	19% (*24.000)
Yugoslavians	15% (*16.600)	15,3%(*11.500)	*2,2% (*1.100)	10% (*12.600)
Others	1,5% (*1.700)	3,2% (*2.400)	*1,2% (*600)	2,4% (*3.000)
Total pop.	110.377	75.465	*50.602	126.067

¹⁷ COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 24

¹⁸ Western Herzegovina was one of the less economically developed SFRY's regions. Its backwardness was experienced for a long time as a kind of punishment by the central power for the region's deep nationalism, as it had represented one of the most faithful Ustaschi's strongholds throughout WWII. The victory of the partisans over Pavelic's followers, marked by very traumatic episodes such as the Bleibourg slaughter, did not put an end to the nationalist attitude of the local population, which remained one of the less integrated in the Yugoslavian system, as well as one of its most fierce opponents. Thereby, Western Herzegovinians who settled in Mostar's outskirts tended to have a very negative opinion of the Federal Socialist Republic, as opposed to most of the inhabitants of the town's centre.

¹⁹ My translation from the Italian: "*Quanto più ci si allontana dal centro, tanto più lo squilibrio demografico si approfondisce*" (COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 22)

²⁰ Figures are taken from: MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 61, for 1981 Municipal area; from BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100, for 1991 Historic centre; from COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 20, for 1991 Municipal area. All the numbers marked with the sign "*" have been figured by the author of this dissertation on the basis of the available data

In comparison with 1981, Muslims had slightly exceeded the Croat population. This put Mostar in a particular and highly symbolic condition, as it was situated in a region in which Bosniaks were by far a minority²¹. An interesting element to stress is the percentage of people who identified themselves as “Yugoslavians”. Since Yugoslavia was a federation of peoples, such choice generally implied the desire to overcome the original ethnic affiliation, in favor of a new perspective. This “Yugoslavian” self identification was thus in open contradiction with the traditional nationalist positions. The analysis of the census’ results highlights the fact that people who identified themselves as “Yugoslavian” lived by and large in central Mostar rather than at its outskirts. In some central communities, the “Yugoslavian” option was chosen by 20% of the population (with a general average of 15,3%), while in many parts of the outskirts it was never taken (with an overall average equivalent to 2,2%)²². The global result of the municipal area (10%) was however among the highest of BiH²³. Mostar’s predominantly cosmopolitan character was confirmed also by the fact that it presented the second highest rate of inter-ethnic marriages of the whole SFRY²⁴.

Although it may now seem hard to believe, in 1991 the two banks of the Neretva were not at all monopolized by a single nationality: even though Muslims tended to be more numerous in the Eastern part of the city and Croats in the Western, the situation was such that it was impossible to trace a clear ethnic border within the town. More than 30% of the 45.000 Western *Mostari*²⁵ were Bosniaks, while about 6.000 inhabitants out of the 15.000 on Neretva’s east bank were Croats. The Serbs were equally distributed all over the city²⁶.

A superficial look at these figures could confirm the prevailing account which portrays pre-war Mostar as the most integrated town of Yugoslavia, and as a kind of “*lost paradise*”²⁷ that needs recreating. Yet this was not the case, at least not completely: as already noted, Mostar’s traditional inclusiveness was mainly limited to its central part, while the newer outskirts experienced a development that was often opposite to that of the center. In addition, as confirmed by the nationalists’ good results even in central Mostar at the 1990 elections, the historic centre also knew a certain degree of ethnic polarization²⁸. However, it is interesting to

²¹ *Ibi*, p. 17

²² COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, pp. 20-23 See here tab. 1.2

²³ See BURG S. L., SHOUP P. S., *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, M. E. Sharpe, London, 1999, pp. 30-32

²⁴ The city with the highest number of inter-ethnic marriages was Vukovar (“Banja Luka e Mostar : A.A.A. cercasi matrimonio misto, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 18/4/2002).

²⁵ The Serb-Croat term *Mostari* means “inhabitant of Mostar”

²⁶ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100

²⁷ My translation of the French “*paradis perdu*” (RAMEL S., *op. cit.*, p. 91)

²⁸ MAKAS E., *op. cit.*, p. 350. Such consideration is confirmed by the fact that in some central communities like Carina (1%), Luka I (5%), or Zahum (9%), the results of the Yugoslavian option were well below the city centre’s average. Given the fact that the results of the “Other” option in those communities tended to be as low as

notice that, in 1991, 5% fewer people in the Mostar municipal area identified themselves as “Yugoslavian” as compared with the 1981 census’ results. In my view, this evolution can be explained both by the continuous growth of the deeply nationalist outskirts and by the effects of the longstanding Yugoslavian crisis, which determined a further polarization of the Bosnian society along ethnic lines.

To sum up, if it is undeniable that Mostar’s pre-war identity was largely based on its peaceful and multicultural nature, we must also bear in mind that such an image “*before the war [...] was seldom explicitly and self-consciously celebrated as it has been during and since*”²⁹. In a way, the post-war idealization of Mostar’s character before the conflict, largely fostered by the IC, exceeded in stressing the perfect integration of the town. In the Herzegovinian capital, then, just like in the rest of Yugoslavia, the national question, although largely appeased, had never disappeared.

1.3 The 1990 Elections

By 1979, Yugoslavia had fallen into a very deep economic crisis³⁰, which soon moved to the political field, given the resistance of the communist apparatus to any kind of reform and its failure to permanently pacify national conflicts. As a consequence of the Federation’s impasse, “*from the end of 1988 [...] the polarization of Bosnian society along national lines gained momentum*”³¹.

The effects of the crisis were particularly severe in Western Herzegovina, the region where most of the inhabitants of Mostar’s outskirts came from³². Such situation fostered their refusal of the Yugoslavian regime and reinforced their already strong national feelings, thus further increasing the ideal distance between Mostar’s centre and its periphery.

In 1990, like all the other Yugoslavian communist parties, the Bosnian one, “*once reputed to be the harshest in Yugoslavia*”³³, accepted the carrying out of the first multi-party voting. However, both its attempts to forbid the participation of ethnic parties and to schedule

usual, these figures further confirm the existence of a substantial degree of ethnic polarization even within some areas of the centre of the town (COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23)

²⁹ *Ibi.*, p. 348

³⁰ As far as BiH, it has to be noted that, despite the 1960s-1970s rapid growth, this republic remained generally poorer than the rest of Yugoslavia: its GNP per capita in 1981 was 35% below the SFRY average (BURG S. L., SHOUP P. S., *op. cit.*, p. 43).

³¹ BURG S. L., SHOUP P. S., *op. cit.*, p. 46

³² “*At the time [the late 1960’s], more than two thirds of the households [of Western Herzegovina] had at least one member in Germany or Austria, and Gastarbeiter (“guest workers”) remained the main source of support for many households throughout the difficult 1980s and 1990s*” (GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 107).

³³ SUDETIC C., “A Yugoslav Republic Holds a Contested Election”, *The New York Times*, 19/11/1990

the elections at the beginning of the year met with failure. The Bosnian vote delivered an “*overwhelming victory*” to the three biggest nationalist parties³⁴: the SDA, the HDZ-BiH and the SDS³⁵. Mostar’s results were not very different from the national ones, in spite of a pre-vote poll according to which 68% of the interviewed *Mostari* supported “*the decision by Bosnian leadership to forbid the formation of nationally oriented parties*”³⁶.

Tab. 1.4

Mostar’s electoral results (in number of seats at the municipal assembly)³⁷

HDZ-BiH	30
SDA	19
SDP	16
SDS	15
SRSJ	12
Others (liberals, ecologists...)	8

Once again, the centre and the outskirts of Mostar showed a very different and conflicting attitude. Non-nationalist parties almost did not cast any vote outside the centre of town, where, on the other hand, they obtained one of their best national performances. The nationalist parties won 64 seats out of 100 in the City Council. The only important distinctive element with regard to the national context was that Mostar’s most voted party was the HDZ-BiH, rather than the SDA. This was due both to the monolithic compactness of the Croat electorate and to the stronger appeal that non-nationalist parties exercised among Bosniaks³⁸.

³⁴ My translation from the French : “*Victoire écrasante*”. The nationalist parties won 201 seats out of 240 at the national Parliament (SDA 86, SDS 70, HDZ 45). The SDP and Ante Markovic’s reformer coalition obtained just 35 seats. The results ended up mirroring the country’s ethnic make-up, since the Bosniaks obtained 41,25% of the seats, the Serbs 34,5% and the Croats 20,75% . (“Succès des partis nationalistes en Bosnie-Herzégovine”, *Le Monde*, 25/11/1990).

³⁵ For all the acronyms, see the List of Abbreviations

³⁶ GAGNON V. P., *The Myth of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press, London, 2004, p. 43. Such decision was annulled before the voting (HARTMANN F., “Elections libres en Bosnie-Herzégovine. La peur de l’écclatement de la Fédération”, *op. cit.*)

³⁷ Figures are taken from: BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp., 102

³⁸ Such consideration is confirmed “*by the fact that the SDA received only 19% of seats in a system of proportional representation, whereas Muslims made up at least 40% (counting in a likely Muslim component among declared “Yugoslavs”) in the Mostar municipal area*” (BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp., 102). It has also to be added that, albeit SDP’s platform was clearly non-nationalist, it mainly relied on Muslims’ votes (LATAL S., “Local Polls Deepen Sense of Crisis in Bosnia”, *Balkan Insight*, 1/10/2008)

Globally, Mostar's results confirmed at the same time both the influence of the cosmopolitan ethos of the town, as non-nationalist parties obtained there a better result than their national average, and its only partial rootedness, given the fact that, however, ethnic parties proved to be the most voted in the city.

As for the voting context, the explanation that Burg and Shup provide for the national level seems to fit with Mostar's reality. According to them, given the climaxing tensions throughout the country, the nationalist success was somehow "*fraudulent*", because mainly based on the electorate's feeling of fear³⁹, rather than on its adhesion to such parties' platform⁴⁰. The timing of the elections, carried out when the Yugoslavian crisis seemed hardly resolvable, played a crucial role, by leading the ethnic electorates to unite around their own nationalist parties. According to Ljiljana Smajlovic, "*Serbs simply acted out of fear that even if they withheld their vote from a Karadzic, their Muslim neighbor would still give his vote to an Itzbegovic. In the end, they were afraid of weakening their own nation in an hour presaging the ultimate confrontation*"⁴¹: it is perfectly logical that both the Muslim and the Croat electors shared the same attitude.

Such argumentation helps to explain the good score of the nationalist parties in the basically cosmopolitan Mostar's centre, while the outskirts' populations seemed naturally closer to the nationalist claims. We should also bear in mind that the long Yugoslavian crisis had left important traces in Mostar as well, reinforcing the anti-communist, and thus anti-Yugoslavian, feelings.

However that may be, the 1990 results constitute a significant denial of the generally idealistic vision of pre-war Mostar, which tends to describe the town as immune from national tensions. Though mainly for "defensive reasons", in fact, the city's ethnic groups, just like the national ones, preferred to reinforce their own national parties, by highlighting the frailty of the multinational ethos of Mostar when faced with potentially destabilizing inter-ethnic tensions.

Given these results, in the Herzegovinian capital also the situation was such that, with the partial exception of the SDA, the nationalist parties could count on an overwhelming support within their own national electorate, while none of them could count on the majority at the global level. The 1990 elections, then, pushed the nationalist leaderships to increase their call for the maximum degree of autonomy, as their power could be completely displayed only within ethnically pure entities.

³⁹ As to the climate of the voting days, see HARTMANN F., *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ BURG S. L., SHOUP P. S., *op. cit.*, p. 57

⁴¹ *Ibidem*

The voting results highlighted that there was little room for long-standing coalitions, since such operation should be based on the cooperation of the nationalist parties, that proved very soon to have conflicting interests. With regard to Mostar, only the SDA - and not all the time - seemed to support the multiethnic status of the city, while the SDS and the HDZ-BiH, the latter especially after Boban's ascent to power (1992), aimed at its annexation or at least at its ethnic partition.

1.4 The symptoms of the war and the Serb attack

In the year and half following the 1990 elections, the fate of Mostar embodied that of the whole BiH. When the SDS chose to boycott the national Parliament (December 1991), denouncing the existence of a Croat-Muslim anti-Serb union, local Serbs left Mostar's Municipal Assembly and created an "Autonomous Serb Municipality"⁴². In September 1991, some thousands Montenegrin and Eastern Herzegovinian reservists⁴³ of the JNA were stationed in the town⁴⁴, with the official mission of protecting Mostar's population from the "terroristic threats" of the HOS⁴⁵. However, the soldiers' often violent behaviour⁴⁶ and the irreversibility of the Federation's crisis created a condition of constant tension among *Mostari* and JNA troops⁴⁷, which were soon seen as an instrument of Serbs' expansionistic designs. Bosniaks and Croats' worries further increased after the arrival of Momcilo Persic at the head of the JNA contingent, in early 1992⁴⁸.

In March 1992, local Serbs organised the blockade of Mostar's railway⁴⁹, while some clashes opposed the JNA and Muslim militias in the region surrounding the city⁵⁰. In the Herzegovinian capital, a shoot-out caused the death of a reservist and of a local inhabitant⁵¹. *Mostari* started then to prepare for a war that seemed unavoidable. The third of April, a fuel cistern blew up in front of a JNA barrack, killing two reservists. The following day, Mostar's road communication with Sarajevo was interrupted by the Serb population of Bijelo Polje⁵².

⁴² FALL J., *Mostar: une territorialité contrainte*, Université de Genève, 1997, p. 11

⁴³ Eastern Herzegovina was and still is a mainly Serb region

⁴⁴ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 63

⁴⁵ HOS was a Croat paramilitary group (see MUDRY T., *Histoire de la Bosnie Herzégovine*, Ellipses, Paris, 1999, p. 344) with important programmatic differences as opposed to HVO

⁴⁶ "Les tensions interethniques se multiplient dans le chef-lieu de l'Herzégovine", *Le Monde*, 6/2/1992

⁴⁷ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 88

⁴⁸ COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 33 Persic was the JNA general who had directed the brutal bombing of Zadar in summer 1991

⁴⁹ *Ibi*, p. 34

⁵⁰ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 141

⁵¹ COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 34

⁵² *Ibi*, p. 12

In the same hours, the Federal Army started the shelling the city, with the declared aim of restoring calm in the town⁵³.

The Serb strategic objective was the inclusion of at least the Eastern part of Mostar in the newly born *Republika Srpska*⁵⁴. The offensive became soon violent, with many cases of brutality against the local population, including ethnic motivated rapes⁵⁵. The bombing was often directed against civilian objectives: according to the “Association of the architects of Mostar”, one third of “*individual housing*” was hit, while almost every block of apartments was at least damaged⁵⁶. The town’s infrastructural network was destroyed or severely impacted, as well as most of public utility buildings, while the industries were either wrecked, or plundered⁵⁷.

JNA’s commanders, just like the Croat ones would do a year later, paid particular attention to the constructions bearing a symbolic value: mosques and catholic churches were a primary target, as well as any other building that pointed to the town’s past inter-ethnic integration. As a reprisal, the only Orthodox church was blown up. Paolo Rumiz wrote: “*Destroying the ancient stone means mortgaging the future; cutting the memory of those who will come. Telling them that cohabitation has never existed, there is no room for it, and therefore it will never be*”⁵⁸. Hitting those symbols, then, corresponded to a process of material rewriting of history. It is symptomatic that JNA’s fury concentrated on highly symbolic, and not just tactical targets like Mostar’s bridges: seven out of eight were destroyed.

The Serb attack marked also the first important alterations in the structure of Mostar population, by causing the mass exodus of its Serb inhabitants and their replacement by Bosniak and Croat refugees⁵⁹. In 1994, only one tenth of the original 23.846 Serbs were still in the city⁶⁰.

The Serb offensive met an intrinsically fragile, even if resolute, Croat-Bosniak resistance, led by the Croat Defense Council (HVO). Such coalition gave proof of its weakness very soon. In February 1992, Mate Boban, the leader of a HDZ-BiH hard-line

⁵³ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 64

⁵⁴ TOL Editorial, *The Minority Fear*, 27/1/2004 (as published at: <http://www.ciaonet.org>, 2/2/2004)

⁵⁵ CACACE R., MENAFRA A., MIOZZO A., *Questa guerra non è mia- dalle Donne per Mostar*, EUAM-Cooperazione italiana, Lissone, 1994, p. 19. Ethnic motivated rapes were committed not only by the besiegers, but also by HVO’s soldiers (HELSINKI WATCH, *War Crimes in Bosnia Herzegovina*, New York, 1993, p. 345)

⁵⁶ RIBAREVIC-NIKOLIC I., JURIC Z., *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30. It must be said that the authors of these estimations were part in the conflict, having been among the bombed population, and that the book was edited also by the HVO

⁵⁷ *Ibi*, p. 64

⁵⁸ My translation from the Italian: “*Distruggere la pietra antica significa ipotecare il futuro; tagliare la memoria di chi verrà. Dirgli che la coabitazione non è mai esistita, non può esserci, dunque non ci sarà mai*” (RUMIZ P., *Ma la città è ancora divisa*, La Repubblica, 17/7/2004)

⁵⁹ FALL J., *op. cit.*, p. 17. See here paragraph 1.6

⁶⁰ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 65

faction favorable to Bosnia's territorial partition, had assumed the presidency of the HDZ-BiH⁶¹. It was thus logical that he found more common ground with the Serbs' leadership, rather than with the Bosniaks' one. On May 6th, 1992, Boban met with Karadzic in Graz, in order to achieve an agreement on the division of BiH. The negotiations seemed so promising, that they arrived at a truce. A few days before, when journalists had asked the negotiators where they intended to resettle the Muslims, their answer had been laconic: "*In the Neretva river*"⁶². The partition discussed in Graz was not realized because of mutual dissent about Mostar's borders, since both parts sought the control of the town's historic centre⁶³.

In June, Mostar was liberated by the Croat-Bosniak coalition, thanks to the contribution of 15.000 soldiers of Zagreb's regular army⁶⁴. Nonetheless, the belief that the town had simply been the object of a Serb-Croat swap was widespread among the Muslim population⁶⁵. The fact that the JNA had abandoned "*considerable assets*"⁶⁶ during its withdrawal increased such fears⁶⁷.

However that may be, since June 1992 "*Boban and his associates could concentrate all their energy and resources on seizing exclusive control of Mostar, already designated as the future capital of the purified BiH Croat statelet of Herceg-Bosna*"⁶⁸. The end of Mostar's "First war", thus, already announced the beginning of the even more destructive second one, which had the Herzegovinian capital as its very center.

1.5 The Croat siege and the ghetto of East Mostar

The proclamation of the Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna had not at all improved Croat-Bosniak relations⁶⁹. The tensions between the two formal allies soon led to episodes of armed confrontation, as it had happened after the Graz summit of May 1992- a meeting that

⁶¹ Boban's ascent to power had been for the most possible thanks to Tudjman's support (GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 109). His arrival at the head of the party marked the official birth of the extremist "Herzegovinian lobby", which played a deep influence on the elaboration of Zagreb's policies (see for instance "La solidarité avec les Croates d'Herzégovine pèse de plus en plus lourd à Zagreb", *Le Monde*, 27/7/1993). Its main members were Mate Boban, Franjo Tudjman and the Croat Defense Minister Gojko Susak. This kind of political as well as business alliance granted the centrality of Herzegovina in both the HDZ and HDZ-BiH's priorities.

⁶² PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 164

⁶³ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 103

⁶⁴ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 182

⁶⁵ COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 36

⁶⁶ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 103

⁶⁷ "*It seems by now that they [the Serbs] had withdrawn, rather than lost the town*" (my translation from the French: "*Il semble aujourd'hui qu'ils se soient retirés plutôt qu'ils n'aient perdu la ville*" - MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 65)

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*

⁶⁹ The Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna was replaced since 24/8/1993 by the independent Republic of Herceg-Bosna (FALL J., *op. cit.*, p. 12)

the Bosniaks had experienced as pure betrayal⁷⁰. Similar fights arose again in occasion of a new Karadzic-Boban summit, in October 1992. This time, after the Croat attacks to the Muslim populations of Prozor and Novi Travnik, carried out also by Zagreb's troops, the clashes took place in Mostar as well.

It was by then evident that, despite his official assurances, Tudjman aimed at the annexation of the Croat BiH, with Boban's support⁷¹. In order to reach this goal, Zagreb needed to ensure the ethnic homogeneity of the claimed lands. Therefore, the Boban-led apparatus of the Croat Community of Herceg-Bosna and the HVO engaged in deep ethnic cleansing, which mainly followed the borders drawn by the Vance-Owen Plan⁷². The often violent reaction of the Bosniak troops and their frequent provocations had the effect of further precipitating the events⁷³. The height of tensions was reached with the Croat slaughter of Ahmici (16/4/1993), which caused the death of 117 civilians⁷⁴.

An open Croat-Muslim conflict seemed to be just a matter of time. Mostar population was well aware of that, so that the town started to embody the physical fracture developing all around the country. Months before its beginning, both parts were ready for the new war, in a general mood of increasing tensions⁷⁵. Mostar, after all, was the strategic heart of the new conflict, since Boban and his associates wanted it to become the capital of the secessionist Republic of Herceg-Bosna⁷⁶.

On April 15th, the HVO disposed the blockade of Bosniak refugees's arrival in Mostar. On the same day, the Croat Defense Council barred the supplies of displaced Muslims who were already in the city and ordered them to leave by May 9th⁷⁷. Finally, the HVO commanded the UN Spanish contingent to depart from the town. Throughout the following months, Spanish troops just played the role of observers, thus fostering a feeling of strong discredit for the International Community (IC) among the town's population⁷⁸.

Mostar's Second war started on May 9th. "*Drunk on wine and blood, HVO soldiers went on a rampage of excesses*"⁷⁹. In the early morning, thousands of Bosniaks were expelled

⁷⁰ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 164-165

⁷¹ SCOTTI G., *Storie di profughi e di massacri*, Asterios, Trieste, 2001, p. 89

⁷² MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 66

⁷³ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 283

⁷⁴ SCOTTI G., *op. cit.*, p. 91

⁷⁵ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 103

⁷⁶ TOL Editorial, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 283

⁷⁸ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 68

⁷⁹ My translation from the Italian: "*Ebbri di vino e di sangue, i soldati del Consiglio Croato della Difesa si lasciarono andare ad eccessi di ogni sorta*" (PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 284). The Croat siege was accompanied by the "*conspicuous silence*" of the Rome Church as to the Croat "*religiously motivated crimes*" (MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 378)

from their houses in the Western part of the town: about 2000 of them were imprisoned in concentration camps⁸⁰, while many others, mainly intellectuals, were executed. In the same hours, the HVO started the “merciless”⁸¹ bombing of Eastern Mostar, using even phosphor grenades⁸².

Such operation of ethnic cleansing was repeated on June 30th on a wider scale, which involved all Muslim males between 18 and 60 years⁸³. At the end of the conflict, about 30.000 people had passed through Mostar’s concentration camps⁸⁴, where conditions of detention were described as tough as those of the better known Serb camps⁸⁵.

Expelled people sought shelter in East Mostar, which thus became a kind of giant ghetto, constantly bombed, hosting more than 50.000 people⁸⁶ (not only Muslims, but also Jews, Gypsies and dissident Croats)⁸⁷ and deprived of everything, from water to electricity⁸⁸. International organizations were denied access for ten weeks, when their supplies represented the main source of sustenance for the besieged population⁸⁹. In July, all the international observers were expelled from the town⁹⁰. Trapped, the Muslims fighters often replied to Croat atrocities with their own⁹¹. However, it must be said that West Mostar suffered much less destruction than the eastern bank, where 80% of the houses were totally or partially destroyed⁹². Zagreb’s responsibilities were evident, since it provided the HVO of both its political and material support. This led the Croat journalist and deputy Vesna Pusic to state that “*Mostar is where the Croat nation stands on trial*”⁹³, as it had become the symbol of the Croatian crimes.

Despite the clear Bosniak inferiority in armaments and supplies, the front line hardly moved during the ten months of fighting⁹⁴. The border was represented by the Neretva and, in the very centre of the town, by the *Bulevar*, the main North-South road artery on the right bank of

⁸⁰ According to Vanna Vannuccini’s estimate, the deported persons on May the 9th were not 2000, but 5000 (VANNUCCINI V., “Mostar citta' martire affronta un' altra guerra”, *La Repubblica*, 4/6/1993)

⁸¹ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 96

⁸² PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 284

⁸³ COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 12

⁸⁴ CACACE R., MENAFRA A., MIOZZO A., *op. cit.*, p. 97

⁸⁵ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 67

⁸⁶ “Aiuti USA dal cielo per Mostar assediata”, *La Repubblica*, 25/8/1993

⁸⁷ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 284

⁸⁸ VANNUCCINI V., “Mostar citta' martire affronta un' altra guerra”, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ BENETAZZO P., “Mostar non esiste più”, *La Repubblica*, 22/3/1994

⁹⁰ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 285

⁹¹ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 285

⁹² MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 75

⁹³ PUSIC V., “Mostar- In the Croat Name”, *Bosnia Report*, April-June 1996. For instance, when the HVO was faced with a resolute Bosniak counter-offensive, Zagreb supplied 50-70 tanks and 200 pieces of heavy artillery, which were for the most part used in the siege of Mostar (PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 286)

⁹⁴ TOL Editorial, *op. cit.*

the river. Muslims managed to hold a strip of land on the Western side of the city, thus keeping the area of the Old Bridge, the only one to survive the Serb attack, under their control.

The Old Man, as the Stari Most was named by local inhabitants⁹⁵, was destroyed on November 8th, 1993, by the HVO artillery, under the command of the general Slobodan Praljak⁹⁶. With the “*single most notorious act of vandalism of the war*”⁹⁷, the Croats achieved the destruction of a symbol of both the ancient Ottoman heritage and the past cosmopolitan dimension of the town.

Mostar’s Second war ended officially on March 1st, 1994, with the signature of the US sponsored “Washington Agreement”⁹⁸. Such arrangement determined the birth of the Croat-Muslim “Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (FBiH) and announced a future European Administration for Mostar⁹⁹.

Mostar was split in two. The ethnic division of the town had been almost completely realized, and a highly controlled border which traced the former front line still divided the city. The eastern and the western sides of the town were simply not in communication, as in a sort of Berlin of the Balkans¹⁰⁰, with the turbulent waters of the Neretva and the ruins of the *Bulevar* in place of the wall’s bricks.

1.6 The consequences of the war on the population’s make-up

Beyond the death and destruction, the most important long term effect of the war on Mostar was the radical alteration of its population’s make-up¹⁰¹. After two years of fighting, about 70% of pre-war *Mostari* had left the town, replaced by a slightly inferior number of Bosniak and Croat refugees¹⁰².

The first important movement of population was registered in occasion of the Serb attack. As Maurizio Maggetti points out, the strategy of expulsion of the Serb community seems to have

⁹⁵ MATVEJEVIC P., “Bridge that Connects East and West”, Center for Peace and Multiethnic Cooperation in Mostar, (article published in: “The Old Bridge in Mostar- Monument of Peace- Chronology: 1994-2004”, p. 6. See: <http://www.centarzamir.org.ba/eng/pro/hrono/hronologija.html>)

⁹⁶ PIRJEVEC J., *op. cit.*, p. 368

⁹⁷ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 96

⁹⁸ The Agreement can be consulted at:

http://www.usip.org/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/washagree_03011994.pdf. At the end of the two wars, about 3.000 civilians had been killed and 8.000 wounded; the permanent invalids amounted to 3.500 (the estimates are provided by: CACACE R., MENAFRA A., MIOZZO A., *op. cit.*, p. 95)

⁹⁹ Washington Agreement, 1/3/1994, ch. VIII

¹⁰⁰ PEHAR M., *Le journaliste, victime et complice- Le journaliste dans la guerre à Mostar entre 1992 et 1995*, Institut de Journalisme de l’Université de Fribourg, 1997, p. 9

¹⁰¹ TOL Editorial, *op. cit.*

¹⁰² COLAFATO M., *op. cit.*, p. 13

followed a double path: on the one hand, Serbs were driven out by Muslim and Croat nationalists. On the other, many of them were warned by SDS activists of the imminent attack and told to leave town before the beginning of hostilities¹⁰³.

Following the exodus of the Serb community, Mostar had become a highly attractive destination for DP, since it offered thousands of empty houses. In some initially Serb quarters, refugees amounted to 70% of local population¹⁰⁴. The attribution of such lodgings became soon a very profitable activity for the “*ethnocracies*”¹⁰⁵ which controlled the territory. This was especially true in the case of the western bank, where every-day life was by far less dramatic and where the expulsion of 85% of local Muslims¹⁰⁶ had created a further offer of accommodations. In addition, West Mostar hosted the bulk of the town’s housing facilities. “*The hundreds of apartments vacated as a result became source of easy profit for many HVO and HDZ officials, either rented out or sold in return for hard cash- sometimes to Croats who had lost their homes, but often to persons who simply wanted to have an apartment in Mostar*”¹⁰⁷.

At the end of the war, the population of central Mostar had declined to about 60.000 people¹⁰⁸, out of the 76.000 registered in 1991. Municipal area’s inhabitants had decreased from the pre-war 126.000 to about 106.000. In this sense, Mostar was an exception in the Bosnian panorama, since the urban population in BiH had tended to grow during the conflict. Displaced Persons in the whole town were about 45.000¹⁰⁹. In East Mostar, they amounted to 60% of population, while in the Western side they corresponded to about 30%¹¹⁰. This significant difference was due to the fact that the emigration stream had been and still was much stronger among Muslims.

Another important element of distinction between the two sides of Mostar was the apparently higher degree of tolerance of the western bank, where non-Croat inhabitants represented more than 15% of total population. However, as we will see in the next chapters, the very harsh expulsion policies of West Mostar’s hard-liners continued with considerable intensity up to 1997-98¹¹¹, with the open complicity of the local authorities.

¹⁰³ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 65

¹⁰⁴ FALL J., *op. cit.*, Annexe 4.

¹⁰⁵ PUGH M., *Protectorate Democracy’ in South-East Europe*, Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 2000 (as published at: <http://ciaonet.org/wps/pum01/>).

¹⁰⁶ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 105

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁸ GRESINA S., “Il paradosso culturale di Mostar”, *IUIES Journal*, 1-2007, p. 91

¹⁰⁹ CACACE R., MENAFRA A., MIOZZO A., *op. cit.*, p. 24

¹¹⁰ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76

¹¹¹ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 105

The following table, drawn up by the Repatriation Information Centre, summarizes the post-war situation in the municipal area¹¹².

Tab. 1.5

Population	West Mostar		East Mostar	
Bosniaks	6.303	11.26%	49.023	98.2%
Croats	47.103	84.16%	251	0.5%
Serbs	1.782	3.18%	439	0.88%
Others	778	1.39%	208	0.42%
Total	55.966	100%	49.921	100%

Throughout the conflict, Mostar had been subjected to a deep social cleansing, which continued in the post-war years¹¹³: as a consequence, it was as if the town had become less urban and more rural. The highest majority of displaced persons who had settled in the Herzegovinian capital came from small country villages, where habits and culture were very different from Mostar's inclusive tradition¹¹⁴. Emigration, in the meanwhile, had been and remained particularly strong among the intelligentsia and the middle-class professionals of the town, i.e. the more cosmopolitan segments of the local society¹¹⁵. Mostar was thus permanently transformed, since its post-war dominant element consisted of "*dispossessed people, less educated and trained*"¹¹⁶. These changes in the population's make up did contribute to the harsh intolerance that followed, though they were not its only reason.

Emptied and resettled, Mostar had finally lost all of its celebrated uniqueness: having abandoned its pre war role of inter-ethnic lab, it had turned instead into a mirror of the national problems of the post war period, as well as one of the "*make-or-break*" issues¹¹⁷ of the whole DPA's architecture.

¹¹² The table is published in: MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 65

¹¹³ BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 10

¹¹⁴ RUMIZ P., *op. cit.*

¹¹⁵ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 106. Scandinavia, Canada and the US represented the first destinations for the *Mostari* Diaspora (TERZIC D., "Da Mostar a Mostar", *op. cit.*)

¹¹⁶ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 106

¹¹⁷ MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 236

2. The Two Mostar (1994-1999)

2.1 The Territorial Partition and the Parallel Networks of Power

According to Richard Holbrooke, the conflict and the post-war years had made the Herzegovinian capital “*the most broken city on the European continent*”¹¹⁸. Between the two sides of Mostar there was no communication. The freedom of movement was simply an illusion, since the circulation was obstructed by check points located in key passages. In the first months after the war, only one hundred people per day were allowed to pass from one bank to the other¹¹⁹. The situation improved slightly with the Madrid Agreement¹²⁰, despite which, however, the limits to the circulation remained very strict: until July 1995, even patients needing medical care were blocked at the check points and prevented from getting to the main hospital, situated in West Mostar¹²¹.

The Interim Statute (promulgated on February 18th, 1996) reaffirmed the right to an unlimited freedom of movement, at least theoretically. However, men old enough to fight who dared to cross the Neretva still risked their life¹²². The first effective step in realizing freedom of movement was taken in 1998, when the OHR imposed the adoption of a unique license plate for all Bosnian cars. In spite of this, Maurizio Maggetti points out that, in the very first years of the new century, 90% of *Mostari* had still not visited the other bank of the Neretva. After all, a bus service connecting the two sides of the town was inaugurated only in June 2000¹²³.

Mostar’s partition was consistent with the interests of the ruling élites, who had found the basis of their political support and economic improvement in the clash between national communities¹²⁴. At the administrative level, such division was epitomized by the strict separation of the town’s institutions and infrastructures. Nothing, from the police force to the

¹¹⁸ HOLBROOKE R., “Battles After the War”, *The New York Times*, 14/9/1999

¹¹⁹ They were just women, old people and boys, as men old enough to fight were forbidden to cross the border (CACACE R., MENAFRA A., MIOZZO A., *op. cit.*, p. 24)

¹²⁰ The Madrid Agreement, among other measures, called for the rise of the “passing quotas”, which by then were established at 250 persons per day and direction, and for the unlimited access to the EU buildings (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP (ICG), *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, Balkans Report No. 90, Sarajevo/ Washington/ Brussels, 19/4/2000, p. 7) The Croats, however, refused to use their daily quota (MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 83)

¹²¹ VANNUCCINI V., “Mostar, fallimento europeo”, *La Repubblica*, 12/6/1995

¹²² OURDAN R., « Bosnie: les élections à Mostar risquent d’entériner la partition ethnique », *Le Monde*, 26/5/1996. Micheal Ignatieff reports the case of a Bosniak boy who had gone to West Mostar to visit an old school-mate, in January 1996. Before he had the opportunity of going over the former confrontation line, he was shot in the head by the Croatr police (IGNATIEFF M., *Empire Lite: nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, Vintage, London, 2004, pp. 32-33)

¹²³ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 143

¹²⁴ The argument of the nationalists’ political and economic interest in the partition of Mostar is well developed in : BAZZOCCHI C., “Riunificare Mostar: il caso EUAM (1996-1997)”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, November 2001

sewer system, was unified. Despite all the pro-reunification agreements signed since the end of the war, Mostar had two *de facto* police forces, two judicial systems, two hospitals, two fire departments, two bus and rail companies, two public work enterprises, two electric, telephone and postal networks. As Neven Tomic noted, “*even traffic signs point in opposite directions for motorists trying to reach the centre of the city*”¹²⁵. Until the forced reunification of the town (January 2004), public budgets kept two separate voices and different sources of financing. The income of a Croat policeman, for example, was almost twice as high as that of a Bosniak official with the same functions¹²⁶.

Like in the rest of Bosnia, the school system was strictly segregated: every nationality had developed an autonomous curriculum, where teachings were often in open contradiction with those of the other groups¹²⁷. In the case of Mostar, it has to be stressed that most of the Croat schools’ textbooks came directly from Zagreb¹²⁸. It is obvious that the conflicting curricula constituted and still represent a primary threat for the very existence of a multicultural BiH¹²⁹.

To sum up, since the beginning of the Second War, instead of one Mostar there were two. The town was divided by an “*unofficial border*”¹³⁰, the same which prevented the existence of FBiH as a unique entity. The boundary simply traced the former confrontation line: it was as if the Parties had rewritten the peace agreements by accepting those results issued from the war that the IC was trying to overthrow.

2.2 The Parallel Networks of Power

The new “*apartheid regime*”¹³¹ of the Herzegovinian capital had given life to a very complex network of parallel institutions, through which the nationalist parties exercised their effective power¹³². These networks were a direct inheritance of the institutional war-time separation: throughout the conflict, both the Bosniaks and the Croats had developed autonomous government structures which were monopolized respectively by the SDA and the HDZ-BIH’s strongmen. Such institutions continued to work even after they were formally

¹²⁵ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, Europe Report No. 150, Sarajevo/Brussels, 20/11/2003, p. 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibi*, p. 14. In 1998, the cantonal budget for the Bosniak section of the police force amounted to 8,8 ml DM, while that for the Croat section corresponded to 18 ml DM (ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, ICG Balkans Report No. 80, Sarajevo, 28/10/1999, p. 37)

¹²⁷ Only in May 2000, the OHR mediated an agreement between the three National groups aimed at “*expunging offensive material*” and at creating some points of contact between the curricula (BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135)

¹²⁸ TARLAO G., *op. cit.*, p. 81

¹²⁹ POPOVIC P., “Harmony a Long Way Off in Bosnia’s Disunited Schools”, *Balkan Insight*, 6/11/2007

¹³⁰ My translation from the French: “*limite officieuse*” (FALL J., *op. cit.*, p. 17)

¹³¹ SELLS M., *op. cit.*, p. 322. Michael Sells uses this expression with regard to the whole Western Herzegovina.

¹³² BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 123

replaced by the new FBiH's bodies. As we will see, the parallel networks of power were not solely political, since they had important ramifications in the most profitable economic activities as well, criminal ones included.

The continuous existence of war-time networks determined the establishment of parallel chains of command within the "official" structures, which were thus subjected to the illegal networks' hierarchies. According to the December 2000 FBiH Forum, parallel institutions "*continued to exist throughout the Federation in the intelligence services, legal systems, public communications, and financial institutions*"¹³³. In addition, the post-conflict wave of privatizations had reinforced the unofficial networks. A legal frame for the sale of public assets was created only in July 1999¹³⁴. Before that date, privatizations were realized through a very questionable process of co-capitalization, mainly aimed at granting the nationalist control on the Federation's key economic resources, as well as the personal enrichment of the nationalist parties' strongmen¹³⁵.

As a confirmation of their primary interest in the existence of the parallel networks, the SDA and the HDZ-BIH concluded some arrangements to keep a strong hold on them. For example, the two nationalist parties agreed at the Federal level to privatize only minority quotas of the public enterprises, in order to maintain the political control of their capital and profits¹³⁶.

The local power-brokers had important connections with the organized crime as well¹³⁷. This assumption was particularly evident in the case of the unlawful evictions of West Mostar's non Croat residents and the economic business¹³⁸ which derived from that. Likewise, the unlawful building permissions issued by the municipalities, rather than by the city's urban planning department, became a primary generator of illegal profits¹³⁹. Hence, many criminals enjoyed of a kind of legitimization that came directly from the political sphere. This is why the link between the criminal interests, the "formal economy" and the political world constituted a crucial point for the reunification of the town¹⁴⁰. In the view of

¹³³ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 25

¹³⁴ DEL CHIAPPA P., "Mostar: aspetti economici", *IUIES Journal*, op. cit., p. 101

¹³⁵ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 55. The co-capitalization procedure, for instance, allowed Mijo Brajkovic and Dragan Covic, two HDZ-BIH hard-liners, to legally assume the control of the Aluminij Mostar and the Soko, which were already controlled by the Croat forces before the end of the war. This kind of privatizations proved to be necessary for the very survival of the parallel networks of power, since the incomes coming from the sold assets turned out to be basic for its funding. For further details about the Aluminij's privatization, see: "Privatizzazioni in Bosnia, fra scandali e grosse aspettative, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 25/10/2001

¹³⁶ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 53

¹³⁷ BOSE S., op. cit., p. 133

¹³⁸ BAZZOCCHI C., op. cit., p. 6

¹³⁹ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, op. cit., p. 2

¹⁴⁰ BAZZOCCHI C., op. cit., p. 12

the International Crisis Group (ICG), the personal profit of the local power-brokers was the ultimate reason of the parallel networks of power's existence, especially in the Croat case: "*Herceg-Bosna is a functioning parallel state and its politics are about capital accumulation*"¹⁴¹. Therefore, the first and foremost measure to hit such structures was to strike at the economic interests of the local strongmen, as well as to dry up the financing sources of the unofficial networks. However, if it is undeniable that the ill gotten profits of the ruling élites were a primary reason for the continuous existence of those parallel institutions, we cannot ignore that such unlawful structures reflected the very deep fracture existing within both Mostar and Bosnia's society¹⁴².

In conclusion, Mostar's "real power" lied very far from the public space, since the parallel institutions were managed by hard-line politicians, businessmen and criminals whose agendas were not submitted to any kind of democratic control. Once again, Mostar represented a fitting metaphor for BiH, where the ruling classes emerged from the conflict were trying to consolidate their power through illegal and mono-national networks, as well as fostering new inter-ethnic tensions.

2.3 The First Phase of the International Intervention

The reunification of Mostar became a priority for the IC as soon as the Washington Agreement was signed. The Herzegovinian capital might represent a prototype for a unified and tolerant BiH, as well as a direct test for the viability of the Croat-Muslim Federation¹⁴³. Simply stated, because of its symbolic and strategic value, Mostar was "*essential to peace*"¹⁴⁴. The goal of the IC, then, was to make the town an example of what Bosnia could become¹⁴⁵. And Mostar indeed played such role, although with a completely different nuance.

The very first phase of the international intervention was directly driven by the EU. The Memorandum of Understanding, signed in Geneva on April the 6th 1994, delegated the interim administration of the city to the European Union. On May the 6th, the European Council deliberated the creation of the EUAM (European Union's Administration of Mostar), which started to operate on July 23rd, with a two-year mandate¹⁴⁶. The general goal of the

¹⁴¹ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 34

¹⁴² BOSE S., op. cit., p. 30

¹⁴³ ORUCEVIC S., op. cit., pp. 24, 27

¹⁴⁴ "Croats Fire on Muslims in Bosnia", *The New York Times*, 11/2/1997

¹⁴⁵ RAMEL S., op. cit., p. 12

¹⁴⁶ BAZZOCCHI C., op. cit., p. 3. After the June 1996 elections, the EUAM was replaced by the OSEM. OSEM was a European mission, finalized at consolidating the EUAM's results and at managing the passage of powers from the EU Administration to the OHR, realized on January the 1st 1997.

EUAM was the reunification of the town, while its specific objectives were: the creation of the necessary climate of stability for a multiethnic and self-governed city administration; the promotion of democratic elections; the protection of human rights; the introduction of the conditions for the return refugees and DP's return¹⁴⁷. The head of the mission was Hans Koschnick, the former social-democrat mayor of Bremen¹⁴⁸. The Administration was allocated seven departments, with the same competencies of a "normal" local authority¹⁴⁹, and was assisted by an international police force.

The most remarkable contribution of the EUAM regarded the reconstruction's effort. In the description of the *New York Times*, the scope of Mostar's devastation was "*an apocalypse beyond imagining even for people in other long-besieged cities like Sarajevo*"¹⁵⁰. From the beginning, the EUAM chose a very pragmatic approach. In two years, it spent around 300 ml DM¹⁵¹ for the reconstruction of most of the town's housing, infrastructural network and main utilities.

However, the EUAM's attitude presented a basic contradiction with its political aims. EU financings ended up contributing to the reinforcement of the ethnic partition of Mostar, through the direct funding of the parallel networks. Because the mono-ethnic institutions and firms were the only ones that really worked, a great amount of the European aid was assigned just to them. Therefore, we had the paradox of an international administration which openly opposed the division of the city but that, in the meanwhile, fostered the main instruments of such partition¹⁵². The same attitude was shared by many other foreign players, private companies included¹⁵³.

In 1996, it was already evident that the European reconstruction effort was reinforcing the national divide of the town. Nonetheless, the EUAM went on funding mono-national companies. Safet Orucevic, the most influent Eastern Mostar's politician, explained such

¹⁴⁷ TOICH M., "Dinamiche dell'azione della Comunità internazionale ed istituzioni locali a Mostar", *IUIES Journal*, op. cit., p. 120

¹⁴⁸ For a short description of Koschnick's career and approach, see OURDAN R., "Hans Koschnick, le Robinson de Mostar", *Le Monde*, 2/4/1996

¹⁴⁹ The departments were: City Administration; Finance and Taxes; Reconstruction; Economy and Infrastructures ; Education and Culture; Health and Social Services; Public Order; Cultural Life; Youth and Sport. Every chief-department had two deputies, one Croat and one Bosniak. Koschnick was assisted by six European advisors, the EU Ombudsman and UNPROFOR's official. He was also the President of the Assembly of the Counselors, the composition of which reflected the ethnic make-up of pre-war Mostar. (BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 4)

¹⁵⁰ KINZER M., "Muslims of Mostar Emerge, Bitterly, to a City Laid Waste", *The New York Times*, 9/3/1994

¹⁵¹ OHR website, "Short History of the Office"

(www.ohr.int/ohr-offices/mostar/history/default.asp?content_id=5533)

¹⁵² ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 3

¹⁵³ The most known case was that of the *Elektroprivreda Herceg-Bosna* (the Bosnian-Croats' electric company, a pillar of the Croat parallel system of power), where the Spanish ISINEL invested between 77 and 97 ml DM in 1997 (*Ibi*, p. 6)

attitude by underlying that the EUAM needed to give an appearance of progress, both for the international public opinion and for its prestige in Mostar. In conclusion, the European Administration was not investing in a unified town, but rather in the status quo and, ultimately, in its very survival¹⁵⁴.

The spectacular reconstruction of the town masked the disastrous reality of its economy, which remained largely a “gutted wreck”¹⁵⁵. The unemployment rate was dramatic (probably around 70%) and constituted a primary obstacle to the normalization of the city¹⁵⁶. In addition, the firms that emerged from the conflict were strictly mono-ethnic, mainly controlled by the nationalist parties’ sponsored *tajkuni*¹⁵⁷. In such a condition, the main source of employment was represented by the public administration which, of course, was entirely controlled by the nationalist parties and their power-brokers¹⁵⁸. At the beginning of the new century, even the most optimistic *Mostari* did not expect to reach the pre-war standards of life before 10-15 years¹⁵⁹. The huge difficulties of the local economy, undermined also by the organized crime and by a very high degree of corruption, testified to a superficial and not structural rebuilding¹⁶⁰.

If the reconstruction’s assessment of the Europe-driven reconstruction was contradictory, the political one left much to be desired. The EUAM’s primary goal, the reunification of the town, was even more distant in 1997 than in 1994, and none of the specific objectives had been met¹⁶¹.

The evaluation of the EU Court of Auditors confirmed this opinion: “[...] in the case of political objectives, progress has been slow due to the various parties’ refusal to cooperate”¹⁶². According to Claudio Bazzocchi¹⁶³, the EU’s failure did not depend just on the

¹⁵⁴ ORUCEVIC S., *op. cit.*, p. 25

¹⁵⁵ BOSE S. *op. cit.*, p. 129

¹⁵⁶ *Ibi*, p. 131

¹⁵⁷ The word *tajkuni* means “oligarch” (GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 110)

¹⁵⁸ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 133. In Bosnia, in 2002, public institutions’ financings amounted to 64% of the National expenditure. With six municipalities, one central zone and a joint administration for a town of about 100.000 inhabitants, Mostar was the most paradoxical example of the absurd costs that the institutional partition imposed, as well as of the political importance of the public employments’ control (ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. i)

¹⁵⁹ TARLAO G., *op. cit.*, p. 82

¹⁶⁰ BOSE S. *op. cit.*, p. 131

¹⁶¹ In reality, the EUAM did contribute to the unfolding of democratic elections, in June 1996. However, the voting’s issue ended up strengthening the nationalist parties, which were hardly a model of democratic management of power. Moreover, the strict control that the HDZ-BIH and the SDA exercised on their own sectors of society, as well as the very Mostar’s climate, put into question the democratic nature of that ballot

¹⁶² Information Note Concerning Special Report NO 2/96 of the Court of Auditors- Administration of Mostar by the European Union and the Administrator’s Account , 3/7/1996 (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=ECA/96/2&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>). The whole report can be consulted at:

Parties' non-cooperative attitude, but rather on a completely wrong approach by EUAM. Since the beginning, the European Administration committed a major mistake in choosing the local political élites as its only interlocutors since they had no interest in working for the reunification of the town. The EUAM should have, on the contrary, given voice to Mostar's social components, to the "popular leaders" who had emerged during the situation of war-time humanitarian emergency. In short, for Bazzocchi, the EU Administration failed to conceive the reconstruction phase as an opportunity of social participation, as the occasion that could propose the political process under a new light, different from the usual national clash¹⁶⁴.

Moreover, the EUAM chose a quite unrealistic approach by putting both the HDZ-BiH and the SDA on equal footing. If it is true that the Party of Democratic Action also played on the ethnic partition of the town, from which derived conspicuous benefits, and maintained an often ambiguous attitude, it is undeniable that the main responsibility for Mostar's permanent division belongs to the Croat ethnocracy. The HDZ-BiH's leadership systematically boycotted the agreements aimed at the rapprochement of the two Neretva banks and, simultaneously, even more than the SDA, fostered a policy of constant inter-ethnic clash, in order to keep the level of tension high¹⁶⁵.

It has to be stated, however, that the EUAM's conditions of work were far from ideal. If it is undeniable that the EU mission was faced with a non-cooperative local political class, it is even truer that, in the hottest moments, it was left alone by the European chancelleries¹⁶⁶. Likewise, the EU and the US were not at all prompt in addressing the connection existing between Mostar's Croat parallel network of power, the stronger one, and Tudjman's regime¹⁶⁷.

The European errors were largely shared by the rest of the IC in the years following the EUAM's departure. The OHR did not show a greater resolve in facing the nationalist obstruction, and the parallel institutions went on flourishing. The basic problem laid in the IC's lack of willingness to implement the DPA principles, for fear of escalating tensions and

www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A4-19960386&language=EN&mode=XML#Contentd125409e304

¹⁶³ C. Bazzocchi was the director of the Italian Consortium of Solidarity's office in Mostar from 1995 to 1998

¹⁶⁴ BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, pp. 1-13. In Bazzocchi's opinion, such error was a direct consequence of the Western Chancelleries' narrow interpretation of the war, exclusively seen as a clash of conflicting nationalisms.

¹⁶⁵ The most evident proof of this comes from the Liska Street's incident (February 1997), in occasion of which the Croat police shot on a Bosniak procession that wanted to reach a partly Muslim cemetery located in West Mostar. There are evidences of the fact that the incident had been carefully planned by the Croat hard-liners (see ICG, *Grave Situation in Mostar: Robust Response Required*, ICG Bosnia Report No. 19, 13/2/1997)

¹⁶⁶ Special Report NO 2/96 of the Court of Auditors- Administration of Mostar by the European Union and the Administrator's Account, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁷ BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 12

the subsequent possibility of IC's casualties¹⁶⁸. Only in 1999, in the context of a wider reaction, the IC adopted a more determined approach which, in the long run, led to some results in Mostar as well¹⁶⁹.

Among the scarce unquestionable IC's success, was the imposition of significant freedom of movement, the creation of a single monetary space and the realization of substantial material reconstruction¹⁷⁰. The key to its political failure, on the other hand, rested in the lack of the necessary resoluteness to directly address the parallel networks of power, i.e. the structures which most impeded the reunification of the town.

In conclusion, the failure of the first phase of the international intervention in the Herzegovinian capital seems clear. Eventually, its definitive proof lies in the fact that, at the end of the century, the problems in Mostar, like in the rest of BiH, tended to be exactly the same as those of 1994-1995¹⁷¹.

2.4 The Interim Statute and the Croat Insurrection

The guidelines of the Interim Statute of Mostar had been already provided by the Mostar Annex to the DPA¹⁷². The coming into force of the Statute, elaborated by the EUAM, determined the division of the city's administration into six independent municipalities and one jointly ruled central zone. The act established also the creation of a common City government, with exclusive authority on quite a restricted range of matters. Most of the competencies were attributed to the single municipalities¹⁷³, which enjoyed of a very broad mandate. As noted by Mattia Toich, such highly partitioned institutional architecture was in a way "*specular*" to that of the whole BiH¹⁷⁴.

Of course, the six municipalities' borders were carefully designed, so that the Croats presented an indisputable majority in three of them, as the Bosniaks did in the other three. Their delimitation tended to trace the former front-line. Every Municipal Council was formed

¹⁶⁸ ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, op. cit., p. 52

¹⁶⁹ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 119

¹⁷⁰ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 112

¹⁷¹ POCECCO A., "Tra stereotipi e attese: Mostar nei Balcani", *IUIES Journal*, op. cit., p. 16

¹⁷² "Annex To The Dayton Agreement On Implementing The Federation Of Bosnia And Herzegovina- Agreed Principles for the Interim Statute for the City of Mostar", 14/12/1995 (the annex is available at: http://www.ohr.int/other-doc/contact-g/default.asp?content_id=3567)

¹⁷³ The city government was charged of the management of: Finance and Tax Policies; Urban Planning; Infrastructure; Economic Policy; Public Transportation; Mostar Airport; Central zone's administration. All the other competencies were attributed to the municipalities ("Annex To The Dayton Agreement On Implementing The Federation Of Bosnia And Herzegovina- Agreed Principles for the Interim Statute for the City of Mostar", *op. cit.*, artt. 5-6)

¹⁷⁴ My translation from the Italian: "*speculare*" (TOICH M., *op. cit.*, p. 116)

by 25 members, whose nationality reflected the 1991 ethnic composition of the municipality. With the only exception of Mostar South-East, which presented an already defined Bosniak majority, in all the other Municipal Councils the number of representatives for each national group (Croat, Bosniak, "Other") was such that, theoretically, an alliance between the two minority communities could confine the biggest one at the opposition¹⁷⁵. Actually, those coalitions were never formed at the municipal level, so that the Croats and the Bosniaks did exercise a monopolistic control over "their own" territories.

By the same token, the city-wide electoral rules were designed to boost the creation of multi-national alliances. In this case, they met with a relatively greater success: the first elections showed that the Muslims were inclined to form a government coalition with the Serb representatives, in order to enjoy a safe majority in the city's common administration.

Article 8 of the Mostar Annex to the DPA stated that "*the City Council shall be composed of 48 members, of which 16 seats shall be reserved for representatives of the Croatian community, 16 seats for representatives of the Bosniac community and 16 seats for others [...]*". Afterwards, the council's size was reduced to 30 members (10 Croats, 10 Bosniaks and 10 "Others")¹⁷⁶.

As soon as the power-sharing rules were conceived, the SDA and the HDZ-BIH started to elaborate stratagems to get round them¹⁷⁷. Such rules, however, did not regard just the electoral competition. The Interim Statute established the creation of a number of "deputy" roles in the executive charges, to be occupied by minority groups' representatives, in order to prevent the monopolization of the executive power by the dominant nationality. Therefore, the city and all the municipalities had a mayor and a deputy mayor, the latter chosen in the second biggest national group. Likewise, every police district had a chief and a deputy chief, and so on. Although the reasons at the basis of such duplication were intended to soften the partition of Mostar, its application entailed a basic problem: when the mechanism was effective (rarely)¹⁷⁸, it led to the creation of a double chain of command, which consistently reinforced the strength of the parallel networks of power, as well as the political division of the town.

¹⁷⁵ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 120

¹⁷⁶ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 119

¹⁷⁷ The SDA and the HDZ-BIH, for instance, started to present in their own lists persons coming from the Serb group, in order to dispose of a greater number of counselors. "*This surely does not mean that the HDZ-BIH [or the SDA] can be trusted to represent Serb [...] interests*". In some cases, the HDZ-BIH managed even to present Bosniak candidates. (BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 122)

¹⁷⁸ In many cases, however, when they were not openly and often violently boycotted by the majority group, the deputy roles were merely figurative: "*When IC donors visit, the ruling nationalist parties often parade minority officials before the visiting foreigners in order to cultivate an image of a non-existent, co-operative, multi-ethnic municipality*" (*Ibi*, p. 125)

The goal of the initially restricted city government was to create the conditions for a gradual transfer of competencies from the municipalities to the common administration. Indeed, what happened was exactly the opposite, given the boycott of the joint government by both the HDZ-BIH and the more extreme wing of the SDA. The city council rarely met, and the city administration still did not dispose of a permanent seat as late as 2000¹⁷⁹. Moreover, its most important competencies were absorbed by other bodies or by the parallel institutions. The municipalities, for instance, attended to the collection and the distribution of taxes¹⁸⁰. Likewise, the hydroelectric plants were managed by separate and mono-national companies, rather than by the city government, so that their profits ended up fostering the parallel networks' finances¹⁸¹.

The most neglected task of the city government was the administration of the Central Zone. This was not at all surprising, since such territorial entity represented the most advanced effort to dismantle the ethnic partition of Mostar. The Central Zone was intended to create a nucleus of joint administration, by transferring the municipalities' wide competencies to the city government, even if only for a small slice of land. Such administrative unit had to consist *"of a geographical area around the Neretva River and the former front line in the centre of Mostar, as well as three power plants on the Neretva River, the fresh water sources around Mostar and the city airport"*¹⁸².

Even before its creation, the Central Zone had become a primary source of conflict between the two biggest nationalist parties¹⁸³. The focus of contention regarded just its extension. Being mainly favorable to the reunification of the town, both for demographic and ideological reasons, the SDA longed to have it as big as possible. On the contrary the HDZ-BIH, which opposed the very idea of a future Mostar's reunification, aimed at rendering it insignificant. On February the 7th 1996, following weeks of fruitless negotiations that were stalling the coming into force of the whole Statute, Hans Koschnick imposed the size of the Central Zone

¹⁷⁹ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 42

¹⁸⁰ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, op. cit., p. 3

¹⁸¹ Two out of the three Mostar's hydroelectric plants were managed by the Bosniak *Elektroprivreda BiH*. The other one was administrated by the Croat *Elektroprivreda Herceg-Bosna*. The Muslims hence enjoyed of a position of advantage which to the national direction of the SDA did not want to renounce. Therefore, in 1996, the SDA-nominated head of "Elektroprivreda BiH" refused a EU offer of 12 ml of DM for the reunification of Mostar's electric production system (BOSE S., op. cit., p. 134). In many other occasions *tajkuni* refused international offers which would improve Mostar's services and infrastructures. The better known case (2000) regarded the creation of a unique water and sewer system, thanks to a 12 ml dollars founding by the World Bank, that the HDZ-BIH did not want to accept. After months of international pressure, the Croat party was forced to capitulate. (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 52)

¹⁸² ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 8. The Central Zone included also the train and the bus stations.

¹⁸³ TOICH M., op. cit., p. 116

by decree, consistently with his powers¹⁸⁴. He opted for a kind of compromise solution between the Croat and the Bosniak requests. After a short while, the mayor of West Mostar, Mijo Brajkovic, called for a popular manifestation of protest in front of the EUAM headquarters. Some one hundred Croats tried to overturn and shoot Koschnick's car, where he remained trapped for almost one hour¹⁸⁵.

Following the very grave events of February the 7th, the Italian Presidency of the EU organized an extraordinary summit in Rome, on February the 18th¹⁸⁶. The summit ended up welcoming the Croat claims and, thus, disowning the legitimate Koschnick's decree. The meeting in Rome represented a turning point for Mostar's politics, as it strengthened the already preponderant HDZ-BIH: the impression deriving from such summit was that "*the reunification of Mostar was no more at the order of the day*"¹⁸⁷. By abandoning Hans Koschnick¹⁸⁸, who resigned a few weeks after, the EU demonstrated that it "*was willing to back down when threatened with violence*"¹⁸⁹. This signal, of course, was noticed also beyond Mostar.

After the definition of the Central Zone's limits, the Interim Statute came into force. However, it lacked a basic element for the working of the whole architecture, i.e. the IC's credibility, which had been largely wasted in Rome. Under those conditions, the nationalist parties felt free to adapt the directives of the statute to their ends. The distorted application of the Statute, therefore, institutionalized the war inheritance of "*national parallelism, intransigence and lawlessness*"¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁴ OURDAN R., "Hans Koschnick, le Robinson de Mostar", *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁵ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 86. This was the second time that Koschnick risked to be killed by Croat extremists. A few days after the EUAM's arrival in Mostar, his office was destroyed by a rocket. He escaped only because he had remained at the Hotel Ero's bar with some friends (*Ibi*, p. 77)

¹⁸⁶ The results of the Rome summit were in a way anticipated by the Italian foreign minister Susanna Agnelli, who had visited Tudjman soon after the Mostar's incident. Coming out from that meeting, she affirmed: "*Well, at the end of the day, the Croats have their reasons too*" (my translation from the Italian: "*Beh, in fondo, anche i croati hanno le loro ragioni*" – BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 11). It is interesting to stress that, according to the ICG, Zagreb was directly involved in the facts of February the 7th (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 10). For a list of the participants to the Rome meeting, see: "More appeasement at Rome summit", *Bosnia Report*, No. 14, February-March 1996

¹⁸⁷ My translation from the French: "*La réunification de Mostar n'était plus à l'ordre du jour*" (OURDAN R., "Hans Koschnick, le Robinson de Mostar", *op. cit.*)

¹⁸⁸ A general lack of support for the German Administrator was denounced also by the EU Parliament: "*The European Parliament [...] regrets that Mr Koschnick did not always receive the full and unreserved political backing of the Council Presidency and EU foreign ministers*" (Resolution on Special Report No 2/96 of the Court of Auditors concerning the accounts of the Administrator and the European Union Administration, Mostar (EUAM), accompanied by the replies of the Commission and the Administrator of Mostar (C4-0513/96), 21/11/1996 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A4-1996-0386+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=SK>))

¹⁸⁹ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 9

¹⁹⁰ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 3

2.5 The Nationalist Entente

The political scene of post-war Mostar was monopolized by the HDZ-BIH and the SDA. Despite their obvious rivalry, they gave life to an implicit- and seldom explicit-agreement for the management of power, both at the city and the cantonal level. This evolution was not at all surprising since, as noted by Juliet Fall, the two nationalist parties presented many common features¹⁹¹.

The milestone of their silent agreement consisted in the acceptance of the territorial and institutional partition that resulted from the war. The nationalist politicians were well aware of the fact that the division of the town and the consequent state of permanent tension between the Croat and the Bosniak communities represented the *conditio sine qua non* of their political consensus¹⁹². As well, nobody ignored the “*symbiotic nexus*” existing between the partition of the town and the economic interests of the ruling élites¹⁹³.

Therefore, despite a façade of mortal opposition, the SDA and the HDZ-BIH found important common grounds, which constituted the basis of their silent entente. Such situation was not at all original to Bosnia, where the rule of the ethnic politicians represented a constant of the post-war years. The result was the creation of three “*one-party-systems*”¹⁹⁴ throughout the country, in which the nationalist formations fulfilled “*a role similar to that of the pre-war Communist Party*”¹⁹⁵. In Mostar, such reality was even more evident than elsewhere.

The HDZ-BIH and the SDA, however, presented also some important structural differences. The situation within the Bosniak party seemed by far more dynamic and fluid. First of all, the SDA tended to have a more decentralized distribution of power than the Croat Democratic Union. Second, and more important, the Party of Democratic Action presented a sort of double vocation, due to its condition of being at the same time both a Bosniak and a Bosnian nationalist party. Unlike the HDZ-BIH and the SDS, in fact, Itzbegovic’s formation has always insisted on the existence of a unitary, multicultural BiH. At the same time, nonetheless, the SDA has played the role of the main defender of the Bosniaks’ interest, by assuming even xenophobic positions in open contradiction with its cosmopolitan image¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹¹ FALL J., *op. cit.*, p. 12

¹⁹² TARLAO G., *op. cit.*, p. 82

¹⁹³ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 134

¹⁹⁴ ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, *op. cit.*, p. 51

¹⁹⁵ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 18

¹⁹⁶ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 142

“*With the Croats, you know what you are dealing with: they are fascist separatists-says a diplomat*”¹⁹⁷. The Croat Democratic Union’s political goals seemed clear: to foster the partition of Mostar and to undermine the Washington and Dayton agreements¹⁹⁸. In order to gain the necessary support, the HDZ-BIH proved to be very able in “*translating the legitimate concerns of everyday Croats into fear*”, through the interpretation of most issues in terms of threats to their national identity¹⁹⁹. Actually, the HDZ-BIH was much less compact than it seemed. It was, and still is, split in many factions, deathly opposed to each other. The only unifying elements were the nationalist attitude and a mostly formal deference to the Catholic Church²⁰⁰. The greatest difference with the SDA was that the distribution of power within the Croat party was much more unitary, as local strongmen enjoyed a minor autonomy²⁰¹. This was possible mainly because, since Boban’s ascent to power, the Croat Democratic Union has been a Herzegovina-based party. The Herzegovinian centrality, fostered by the Tudjman and Susak’s lobby, had much to do with the strategic importance of the region, since the plans for a Greater Croatia included its annexation²⁰². Thereby, as long as Tudjman was alive, Herzegovina was *de facto* attached and dependent from its neighboring country. Croat political leaders representing other region’s interests were hence destined to irrelevance. Such situation did not know any evolution until Jelavic’s resignation from the head of the party (2002).

Another important difference between the two first parties of Mostar regarded their hold on their own national electorates. The Croat one was monolithically centered around the HDZ-BIH and its defense of the Croat identity, while the Bosniak tended to be less compact. Such situation was the product of many factors. First, the Muslims proved to be more faithful to the idea of cosmopolitan Bosnia and Mostar, at least at the moment of voting. Unlike Mostar’s Croat electors, in fact, a growing minority of the Bosniaks has voted for the SDP since 1991.

¹⁹⁷ My translation from the French : “ *Avec les Croates, on sait à quoi s’en tenir : ce sont des séparatistes fascistes, dit un diplomate* ” (OURDAN R., “ Les nationalistes croates acceptent à Mostar un accord de façade ”, *Le Monde*, 8/8/1996)

¹⁹⁸ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 2

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*

²⁰⁰ GRANDITS H., op. cit., p. 109. Grandits reports the categorization of the different HDZ-BIH factions by a local journalist, in May 2001: “*On the one hand you have the right wing ideologists, who really believe in their national mission [...] Then you have the army generals. Here you have two groups: the calm ones and the ‘involved ones’ [in dubious activities]. Then you have the mafijasi [Mafiosi] (...) And a major part of the party leaders are pure technocrats*” (GRANDITS H., op. cit., p. 112)

²⁰¹ MAGGETTI M., op. cit., p. 143

²⁰² GRANDITS H., op. cit., p. 121

Secondly, the SDA had to face a far stronger competition within its own national group. Since 1998, its consensus began to be eroded by another Bosniak nationalist party, the SBiH, which surpassed the formation of Itzbegovic in many occasions.

The third point regards the parallel networks of power and their political profitability. The HDZ-BIH exercised a stronger control on the mono-national institutions than the SDA did, and the war had granted to the Croat party the control of the more important town's firms²⁰³. These elements put the HDZ-BIH in a condition of almost complete control over the poor and traumatized post-war society: the Croat ethnocracy, actually, exercised an effective control on the most part of the local sources of wealth. In other words, if someone wanted to work, he had to be approved by the party. Zagreb's financings²⁰⁴, furthermore, fueled the existence of a party-ruled patronage welfare²⁰⁵, which often represented the only source of sustenance for many war ruined families.

Finally, the Croat society was more "militarized" than the Muslim one, thanks to the presence of organizations like the HVIDR-a and the UDIVR-a²⁰⁶, which openly supported the more intransigent wings of the Croat Democratic Union²⁰⁷. The HVIDR-a often acted as the "paramilitary arm"²⁰⁸ of the HDZ-BIH, by conducting violent actions against the Croat opponents and the Bosniak returnees. The homogeneity of the Croat society was pursued also through the control of the local media, which without exception sided with the HDZ-BIH. The control of the sources of information proved to be crucial when newly born Croat parties seemed to threaten the HDZ-BIH supremacy, because the Croat Democratic Union easily succeeded in portraying them as traitors of the national cause. In order to assist with the overtaking of the HDZ-BIH by another Croat party in Mostar, it has been necessary to wait until the October 2008 elections.

To sum up, the Croat Democratic Union, unlike the SDA, was in a position to exercise an almost totalitarian control over its society. This, of course, does not mean that the SDA was exempt from authoritarian temptations. Yet, the Party of Democratic Action had evident structural limits, like its double and contradictory vocation, the fragmentation of its electorate

²⁰³ BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 12

²⁰⁴ Every year, until 2000, about 600 ml KM belonging to the Croat Ministries of Welfare, Defence and Reconstruction passed through Herzegovina

²⁰⁵ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 106

²⁰⁶ CHATELOT C., "Les radicaux d'Herzégovine sont devenus orphelins", *Le Monde*, 12/12/1999

²⁰⁷ HVIDR-a means "Association of Croat War Invalids of the Homeland War". Like the UDIVR-a ("Association of Volunteers and Veterans of the Homeland War"), it pursued widespread political goals and enjoyed a great deal of public influence. In many occasions, the two associations harshly attacked the more moderate HDZ-BIH politicians, as well as those suspected of corruption. Both organizations were involved in organized crime's activities and played a central role in the illegal allocation of the West Mostar's houses that belonged to the expelled Bosniaks and Serbs. (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 32)

²⁰⁸ ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, *op. cit.*, p. 4

and the absence of support from a foreign power. This is why, if compared with the HDZ-BiH compact front, the SDA has often seemed a secondary player in Mostar's political scene.

2.6 The Democratic Legitimization of the Nationalist Parties

According to the ICG, “one of DPA's biggest flows was its insistence on early elections in a war-torn country with no democratic tradition”²⁰⁹. Not only had the country just come out of a disastrous war, but the unique Bosnian precedent of democratic elections in 1990 was largely disappointing. In the very first years after Dayton, it was difficult to expect any issue different from the democratic legitimization of the same élites that had based their rule on the BiH's ethnic partition, since such ethnocracies were firmly in power throughout the country and their strictness reflected a widespread attitude.

In occasion of the June 1996 electoral appointment, Mostar proved to be once again a reliable barometer for the future evolutions of Bosnia. As the town had been “pacified” long before the rest of the country, Mostar's elections assumed the role of pilot experiment for the first Bosnian administrative elections, which were scheduled in September. The IC was split about the opportunity of organizing such an early ballot, as the risks of that option were evident. However, in the end, the pro-voting faction, consistently represented within the Clinton Administration²¹⁰, managed to enforce its positions.

Observers in Mostar remained quite skeptical²¹¹. The unfolding of the electoral run did confirm their fears. Non nationalist politicians were forced to “campaign covertly”, as they were prevented to accede to the local media and often received death threats²¹². The IC demonstrated its inability to promote any kind of inter-ethnic debate, since Muslims campaigned only in Eastern Mostar and Croats in the Western side of the city²¹³. As an OSCE official recognized: “The only way we could finally get this election to go ahead was to rig it in such a way that the Muslim and Croat nationalists were sure to win”²¹⁴. The voting took place on June the 30th 1996 and no major incidents were registered, also thanks to a massive IFOR vigilance²¹⁵.

²⁰⁹ *Ibi*, p. 11

²¹⁰ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 116

²¹¹ OURDAN R., « Bosnie : les élections à Mostar risquent d'entériner la partition ethnique », *Le Monde*, 26/5/1996

²¹² HEDGES C., “Bosnian City's Elections Only Widens Ethnic Gap”, *The New York Times*, 30/6/1996

²¹³ *Ibidem*

²¹⁴ HEDGES C., “Bosnian City's Elections Only Widens Ethnic Gap”, *op. cit.*

²¹⁵ OURDAN R. « Les nationalistes croates acceptent à Mostar un accord de façade », *op. cit.*

The Citizen's List for a Unified Mostar, led by the SDA and at least formally calling for the reunification of the town²¹⁶, gained the majority in the City Council. This result was made possible by the SDA's alliance with the elected Serb representatives²¹⁷. Of course, all the six municipalities were won by the local majority nationalities. This meant that the three Eastern municipalities went to the SDA, while the Western ones were ruled by the HDZ-BIH. The city-wide results are presented in the next table:

Tab 2.2²¹⁸

List/Party	Votes	Seats in the City Council
SDA-led List	49 % (28.505)	21
HDZ-BIH	46% (26.680)	16
Non Nationalist List	3,5% (1.937)	/

The only positive comments about the elections, beyond the local winners, came from the IC. The OHR defined the voting process a success both for Mostar and the EU, by underlying the lack of important clashes and the substantial freedom of movement throughout the ballot hours²¹⁹.

The problem with the OHR's balance was that it omitted the effective voting results. Less institutional observers, such as foreign journalists or NGOs, provided diametrically opposite judgments. The *New York Times* wrote that "*this election has turned out to be a farce, a game manipulated by nationalists to solidify their power and their privilege*"²²⁰. Both the Interim Statute and the voting process had ended up providing legitimization to those politicians who had the greatest interest in the crystallization of the existing situation²²¹, by exposing "*the limits of external actors in manipulating local politics*"²²².

²¹⁶ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 12

²¹⁷ Eleven seats out of the sixteen reserved to the "Others" were blocked following the non-participation of the Serb *Mostari* settled in the *Republika Srpska* (OURDAN R., « Les séparatistes croates contestent l'élection du maire bosniaque à Mostar », *Le Monde*, 14/7/1996)

²¹⁸ The voter turnout amounted to 55% (BOSE S., op. cit., p. 116-117).

²¹⁹ BOSE S., op. cit., p. 116

²²⁰ HEDGES C., *Bosnian City's Elections Only Widens Ethnic Gap*, op. cit.

²²¹ TOICH M., op. cit., p. 119

²²² PUGH M., op.cit. Pugh's reflection regarded the whole Bosnian voting process, not only Mostar's one

In sum, the 1996 elections represented not only a failure, but a consistent regression on the reunification's path.

What followed in the post-electoral period was even more discouraging. The HDZ-BIH contested the regularity of the ballot, because of a "technical error" committed in a foreign polling station²²³. Therefore, it insisted for the repetition of the elections, meanwhile blocking the formation of both the city and the municipal governments. The reason for this behavior was that the Croat party was strongly disappointed with the June results. Hence, it aimed at postponing the establishment of the joint authorities up to September 1997, when a new electoral appointment was scheduled²²⁴.

However, the IC was not inclined to have such a let-down. It started to pressure both the Bosnian Croats and Zagreb's government. The EU, backed by Washington²²⁵, threatened to leave Mostar and to reconsider its relationship with Croatia²²⁶. In the end, following Tudjman's intervention, an agreement was signed on August the 6th. The HDZ-BIH granted its participation to the first City Assembly before the end of August. In exchange, it obtained that the first mayor would be a Croat, despite the fact that the Croats were a minority within the Council.

Once again, understandably, the only positive comments about the arrangement came from the IC. Nonetheless, by rewarding its tactics with the concession about the nationality of the mayor, the international actors proved again too yielding toward the HDZ-BIH's arrogance. Moreover, the agreement left untouched the core problem, i.e. the will of the Croat party to foster the division of Mostar²²⁷. This, however, did not seem to upset the IC, since the arrangement of August the 6th had been conceived principally to preserve the September's nation-wide administrative elections²²⁸.

Not surprisingly²²⁹, the Croat Democratic Union refused to honor also the August agreement. Thereby, in December the city institutions had yet to be formed: the municipal councils were not created before June 1997, that is, three months before the new elections.

²²³ After verification, EU's authorities certified that this error was purely technical and in any case irrelevant. The HDZ-BIH did not accept such pronouncement. (OURDAN R., « Les séparatistes croates contestent l'élection du maire bosniaque à Mostar », *op. cit.*)

²²⁴ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 13

²²⁵ "Election Rehearsal in Mostar", *The New York Times*, 12/8/1996

²²⁶ "Declaration by the Presidency on the Behalf of the European Union Concerning Mostar", 26/7/1996 (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PESC/96/64&format=HTML&aged=0&language=IT&guiLanguage=en>)

²²⁷ OURDAN R., « Les nationalistes croates acceptent à Mostar un accord de façade », *op. cit.*

²²⁸ OURDAN R., « A' Mostar, Croates et Musulmans ont bien voté », *Le Monde*, 2/7/1996

²²⁹ With regard to an agreement signed in March 2000, the ICG commented: "Given the HDZ's past history of not honoring signed agreements, the International community should not hold its breath while waiting for this agreement to translate into policy" (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 45)

Evidently, the HDZ-BIH had reached its goal of not implementing the 1996 results. Even when it formed the Western Municipalities' institutions, it refused to adopt the "vital interests' clauses"²³⁰, in order to prevent the Bosniaks and the Serbs from exercising a sort of control on its own fiefs. In consequence of such a permanently instable situation, the normal functioning of the city and municipal institutions remained only a fiction even when they were effectively established²³¹.

The 1996 elections had well illustrated the path of post-war politics in both Mostar and Bosnia. Up to the year 2000, elections did not bring any significant change, although it was possible to observe a constant, if slow, growth of the SDP. The balance of powers did not encounter important modifications, and the parallel networks continued to thrive. The 1997 city and municipal elections substantially replicated the 1996 results²³².

The general elections of September 1998 seemed to offer an opportunity to bring some change in the Croat field, since the HDZ-BIH was for the first time openly challenged by another Croatian nationalist party. However, given its control over the local media, the HDZ-BIH easily succeeded in portraying the leader of the New Croatian Initiative (NHI), the old HDZ-BIH's President Kresmir Zubak, as a traitor of the national cause, thus conserving an overwhelming majority among the Croat electorate²³³.

To conclude, the 1996 Mostar's elections provided a glance into the future of BiH's political scene, which was destined to remain substantially untouched until the death of Franjo Tudjman (December 1999) and the subsequent changes in Croatia. The Herzegovinian capital, much as the rest of the country, continued to be monopolized by the nationalist parties. Such formations were strengthened by the democratic legitimization provided by the ballots, no matter how this consensus was obtained. In addition, the substantial paralysis of the political system, crystallized around the nationalists' interests, brought about a widespread disillusion toward the electoral process.

Like in the rest of Bosnia, the situation of Mostar in 1999 appeared to be at least as critical as it had been at the end of the conflict. All traces of the Herzegovinian capital's pre-war (partial) uniqueness seemed to have definitively vanished: rather, in the very first post-war years, the city appeared to have turned into a reliable mirror for the state of the whole country.

²³⁰ The vital interests' clauses disposed that when voting on issues of primary interest, a majority of all the national groups was required. "These areas of vital interest are culture, education, religion, national monuments and housing affairs" (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, op. cit., p. 13)

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24

²³² The only modification issued from the 1997 appointment regarded the switch of positions between Orucevic, by then mayor of the town, and Prskalo, passed from the seat of mayor to that of deputy-mayor, as established by the August 1996 agreement (BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 118)

²³³ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 114

3. The Reunification of Mostar? (2000-2008)

3.1 Hopes for the new century

For Mostar the new century started a few weeks ahead of the year 2000. On December 10th, 1999, Franjo Tudjman had died in Zagreb. The former Croat President, “*truly persuaded that the easiest way to settle the Bosnian problem was to make Bosnia disappear from the map*”²³⁴, was the ultimate authority recognized by HDZ-BiH’s hard-liners. His death, therefore, created huge hopes in Mostar²³⁵, or at least in its eastern bank, as it implied the end of the privileged axis which had tied Zagreb’s government with Herzegovinian extremism. Such hopes were fostered by the results of the Croat national elections of January 2000. For the first time since the country’s independence, the ballot determined the victory of the Social Democrats over the HDZ. In February, Tudjman’s opponent Stjepan Mesic, backed by the Liberal Party, won the Presidential elections, thus causing a crushing defeat for HDZ. The partisans of Mostar’s reunification did hope that the new Zagreb’s leadership would cut the financial support which had so far fed the Croat parallel network of power. The first decisions by the Croatian government in this matter were quite encouraging, since they caused a concrete impoverishment of the HDZ-BiH-led welfare system²³⁶. Likewise, Stjepan Mesic had no hesitations in condemning Zagreb’s behavior in BiH, as well as its financial support to the “*remnants of the Herceg-Bosna*”²³⁷.

The HDZ-BiH’s situation was further complicated by the resoluteness of the IC which, under the direction of the new High Representative Wolfgang Petrisch (1999-2002), realized many important operations against the Croat nationalists’ structures²³⁸. In addition, a OHR and OSCE disposition of February 21st, 2000, established that Bosnian elected officials could not sit on the public enterprises’ board. In this way, the IC delivered a first, important blow to the use of public assets for the sake of the parallel networks of power²³⁹.

²³⁴ My translation from the French: “*Sincèrement convaincu que le plus simple moyen de régler le problème bosniaque était de faire disparaître la Bosnie de la carte*” (TREAN C., « Franjo Tudjman, ou le nationaliste fourvoyé », *Le Monde*, 12/12/1999)

²³⁵ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 142

²³⁶ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 116

²³⁷ HEDL D., “La Croazia e lo Stari Most”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 27/7/2004. Throughout his first presidential visit in Sarajevo, Mesic declared: “*The involvement [of Croatia] in the internal affairs of BiH is coming to an end ...In every sense there is still the continued big problem of the continued existence of the remnants of Herceg-Bosna, and Croatia cannot and should not finance these. It is clear that all of these must be incorporated into the Federation and into BiH*” (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 29)

²³⁸ The most known achievement, beyond the *Hercegovacka Banka* raid (see paragraph 3.3), was the *Westar Operation*, which directly struck the Herceg-Bosna intelligence service (MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 128)

²³⁹ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 54

In short, it seemed that the wind had finally changed. Even the more nationalist extremists had to admit that the dream of a “Greater Croatia”, as conceived by Tudjman, Susak and Boban, was no more feasible²⁴⁰. Herzegovina had become marginal in Zagreb’s agenda²⁴¹ and the previously powerful HDZ-BiH had to face the growing criticism of the small Bosnian Croat parties, that began to question its claim to be the only true representative of the Croatian interest in BiH²⁴².

Once again, the parallel institutions proved to be crucial for the HDZ-BiH’s equilibriums. Even in occasion of this very hard time, the Croat Democratic Union still enjoyed crucial benefits thanks to the ramification of its unofficial network of power. The reduced support by the government in Zagreb, therefore, became a serious threat rather than a mortal one. The Party had many other important sources of financing, deeply rooted in the parallel network, which supported it in such a difficult moment. The privatized enterprises like *Aluminij*, the collection of tax and revenues, the *Hercegovačka Banka*’s funds and the profits of some important criminal activities²⁴³ allowed the HDZ-BiH to ride over the storm. Moreover, Zagreb’s change of attitude was never complete. After Tudjman’s death, an underground fight had opposed the former President’s supporters with the new reformers. Critical assets, like the army or the intelligence, had remained in the hands of the hard-liners of yore²⁴⁴.

In response to the mentioned difficulties, the HDZ-BiH’s hard-liners chose to escalate, by radicalizing their rhetoric. Given the fact that the control of the public resources remained in any case basic, a defeat in both the local (April 2000) and the general elections (November 2000) could foster the decline of the Party, by putting into question the existing relations of power within Bosnian Croat society. The 2000’s electoral campaigns, therefore, were probably those in which the Croat Democratic Union deployed the harshest threats and tactics: the radicalization, as shown by the events of the following months, was considered a “*bid for survival*”²⁴⁵.

The HDZ-BiH chose then to play the nationalist card once again, by calling the Croat people to fight for its very survival. The next table sums up the April electoral results for Mostar²⁴⁶:

²⁴⁰ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 146

²⁴¹ OURDAN R., “Isolés, les séparatistes croates d’Herzégovine choisissent la fuite en avant”, *Le Monde*, 12/11/2000

²⁴² ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 36

²⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 29-30

²⁴⁴ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 144

²⁴⁵ GALL C., “Nationalist Fires, Fanned by Croats, Singe Sarajevo Again”, *The New York Times*, 16/4/2001

²⁴⁶ Data are taken from: BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 120-121

Tab 3.1

Party	Votes (%)	Seats at the City Council
SDA/SBiH	42%	16
HDZ-BiH	37%	11
SDP	12%	3

Also in such instance the political radicalization fostered the hoped for outcome, as the Party managed to maintain its hegemonic position among the Croat electorate. Nevertheless, in spite of the partially encouraging outcome, the April elections delivered a clear warning to the HDZ-BiH's leadership: voting abstentions by Croats had increased considerably²⁴⁷, revealing an evident detachment between the party and its own supporters. Despite the strength of the nationalist argument, other factors, like quality of life, seemed to have played an increasing role in determining the ballot results. In view of the November elections, these were not at all good news for the Croat Democratic Union's leadership.

The April 2000 elections, in any case, proved to have a crucial importance on the reunification process of Mostar. The Zagreb's political changes and the Croat hard-liners' difficulties notwithstanding, they froze the post-war status quo, by providing four other years of democratic legitimization to the same ethnocracy which should have been most weakened by the recent changes²⁴⁸.

In the very first years of the new century, in sum, Mostar proved to be a liability for BiH, rather than a mirror of what could be: while the national situation seemed to slightly improve, the Herzegovinian capital had remained the centre of deep inter-ethnic tensions, once again originated mainly to provide legitimization for the ruling national élites.

3.2 The Ups and Downs of the Return's Rate

The HDZ-BiH's impasse had important consequences on the return's rate as well. At the end of the conflict, Bosnian refugees and DP amounted to 2,3 million²⁴⁹. The situation was particularly delicate in the urban centers, which had been subjected to ethnic as well as social cleansing. The return process in the cities, therefore, had a double political value, since

²⁴⁷ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 116

²⁴⁸ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 29

²⁴⁹ 1,2 ml were hosted in a foreign country, while 1,1 had been displaced in Bosnia. Of the 2,3 ml refugees and DP, 1.025.000 came from the FBiH (MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, pp.72-73)

it permitted both to alter the existing inter-ethnic equilibriums and to foster the restoration of a potentially more tolerant environment²⁵⁰. This was especially true in the case of Mostar, that had been largely abandoned by its original inhabitants and resettled by other refugees and DP, for the most part of rural extraction. The carrying out of the return policies presented huge problems in the Herzegovinian capital, where “*politics, not rule of law govern the return process*”²⁵¹. The same difficulties were shared throughout the rest of the Canton Seven, which was the most polarized and divided of FBiH²⁵².

Since the first post-war days, the HDZ-BiH had posed the more serious obstacles to the implementation of the agreements regarding the return of ethnic minorities, especially in a highly strategic place like Mostar. For the partisans of the Herceg-Bosna the very idea of the returns was unacceptable, since ethnic purity was the ultimate *raison d'être* of the Croat entity²⁵³. Thereby, the party apparatus was deeply engaged in preventing the enforcement of the same agreements that its leaders had signed in order to please the IC. A further problem regarded the fact that the majority of houses seemed to be controlled by the Hvidra-a²⁵⁴, which had no intention to yield to the IC's pressures: the allocation of the houses of the refugees represented too much a profitable activity, both under the economical and the political point of view, to let foreign actors meddle into it. As a consequence of such open opposition, up to March 2000 only 176 Muslims and 165 Serbs had returned to Western Mostar²⁵⁵.

The Eastern authorities, at least formally, presented a completely different approach. In many occasions, Safet Orucevic and other Muslim politicians did encourage the return of both the Croats and the Serbs to their pre-war houses. The Bosniak authorities, however, posed some obstacles to the whole process. In the ICG's view, such drawbacks were due to “*a combination of gangsterism, bitterness [...] and the presence of a disturbing hard-line element in the SDA*”²⁵⁶. Beyond the SDA's hard-line faction's attitude, therefore, it seems that there was no political design aimed at thwarting the return policies. Nevertheless, the Croat return pace in eastern Mostar was largely disappointing. The HDZ-BiH was partly responsible for this, since it used to “pressure” the Croats inclined to come back to their pre-war homes, in order to preserve the ethnic purity of the two Neretva's banks²⁵⁷. This helps to explain why

²⁵⁰ BAZZOCCHI C., *op. cit.*, p. 10

²⁵¹ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 38

²⁵² BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 114

²⁵³ ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, *op. cit.*, p. 37

²⁵⁴ ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, p. 41

²⁵⁵ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 132

²⁵⁶ ICG, *Is Dayton Failing?*, *op. cit.*, p. 37

²⁵⁷ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 113

even throughout 2001, when the returning refugees in Mostar had consistently increased, the Croat return rate had remained very low²⁵⁸.

Two elements associated the SDA and the HDZ-BiH's attitude. First of all, neither of the two parties was willing to back the evictions of the contended houses' illegal occupants, as most of such squatters were DP and refugees settled in Mostar since the war, i.e. the fundamental electoral basis of the two nationalist formations²⁵⁹. Secondly, both parties were much more inclined to accept the return of the Serbs, given that their coming back could permit to gain the IC's approval and did not pose major threats for the existing inter-ethnic balances²⁶⁰.

The blockade of the return process did affect the permanent division of the town. As of 1998, 99,5% of Mostar Croats lived in the western bank, while 89% of the Bosniaks were settled in the eastern one²⁶¹. In addition, the number of non Croats' expulsion from Western Mostar exceeded the actual returns until 1997-1998.

In the first post-war years, pressured by the IC, the SDA and the HDZ-BiH signed many agreements in which they bound themselves to remove the existing obstacles on the return path. Such promises were regularly disregarded, mainly by the Croat party. The first, significant turning point came with the 16/4/1998 agreement, which called for unlimited return on both sides and scheduled very precise stages to be respected on a reciprocal basis²⁶². Mostar, nonetheless, remained one of the most problematic places of the whole country. When, in 2000, the return rate in Bosnia increased from 40.000 persons to 67.000 in the space of one year, such progress was hardly felt in the Herzegovinian capital²⁶³. Also, during the same year, in Mostar only 21% of the requests for restitution of real estate to the pre-war owners was executed, while the Federation presented a rate exactly twice as high²⁶⁴.

The April Agreement, then, had opened the way for a concrete improvement, but a more resolute international effort was needed. In November 1999, the OSCE and the OHR removed 22 non-cooperative officials, among whom three from Mostar²⁶⁵. The HDZ-BiH opted for a very stiff response to the IC's dismissals, by resorting to the "empty chair"

²⁵⁸ *Ibi*, p. 115

²⁵⁹ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 134

²⁶⁰ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114

²⁶¹ MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 357

²⁶² For the details of the agreement, see MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114

²⁶³ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 114

²⁶⁴ TOICH M., *op. cit.*, p. 121. The Central Zone scored the third worst result of Bosnia as to the properties' restitution, with a recovery rate equal to 4,05% of the total requests (MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 134)

²⁶⁵ Mostar's officials were the mayor and the housing office's director of the Mostar's South-West Municipality, controlled by the HDZ-BiH, and the housing office's director of *Stari Grad*, a SDA-led municipality (ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28)

tactic²⁶⁶, so that the benefits of such move became evident only after a certain delay. The resolute OHR's approach, however, did produce a significant improvement, as confirmed by the 2001 figures: from January to October, 1.477 returns occurred²⁶⁷ in the Herzegovinian capital, in spite of the rising tensions due to the Croat call for self-determination.

Of course, the mentioned figures seemed so positive because the previous situation in Mostar was largely disappointing. In the following years, because of the progressive IC's disengagement, the town remained largely segregated, its formal reunification (2004) notwithstanding. In 2007, Emily Makas wrote: *"Though administratively there are no longer sides, and though the pace of returns of families to their prewar homes has increased dramatically in recent years, the overall statistics have not shifted significantly and the city still remains divided for many of Mostar's inhabitants, regardless of where they physically live"*²⁶⁸. Also, in most cases, when the pre-war rights of property were recognized, *"the houses were exchanged or sold, whilst only a minimal part [of Mostari] chose to come back to its pre-war place"*²⁶⁹.

The new centuries' hopes, hence, proved to be nothing more than illusions. Once again, Mostar seemed not only to have lost all of its celebrated uniqueness, but to have replaced it with the worst features of the post-conflict Bosnia.

3.3 The Croat Call for Self-Determination

The ultimate proof of the capability of the Croat hard-liners to consolidate their power through a political clash came with the November 2000 elections. Feeling its hegemony threatened, the HDZ-BiH chose to follow an even more aggressive path than the one taken in occasion of the April ballot. Jelavic's party intensified its attacks, by directing them against a double target: the non-aligned Bosnian Croat parties and the generic discrimination against the Croat people in BiH²⁷⁰. The whole campaign, which played out under the slogan *"self-determination or extinction"*²⁷¹, pivoted on the call for the creation of a third, Croat entity. The HDZ-BiH's leadership was evidently looking for an enemy that would unite once more

²⁶⁶ The "empty chair tactic" consisted in the refusal of the ruling party to appoint any other official in order to replace the removed ones: the result was a complete paralysis of the system, as sought by the nationalist hard-liners, which could be overcome only with the OHR's imposition of new administrators

²⁶⁷ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 115

²⁶⁸ MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 357

²⁶⁹ My translation from the Italian: *"Le case venivano scambiate oppure vendute, mentre solo una minima parte decideva di tornare dov'era prima della guerra"* (TERZIC D., *"Da Mostar a Mostar"*, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, *op. cit.*)

²⁷⁰ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 117

²⁷¹ BOSE S., *op. cit.*, p. 144

its electorate; in the end, the “perfect villain” was found in the IC, which was accused of preventing the realization of the Croat people’s rights.

Jelavic’s party gave life to an electoral cartel, known as the “Croatian National Congress” (HNS), which included all the extreme right Croat formations and most of the Christian democrat politicians²⁷². The HNS even organized a referendum on the political platform of the alliance - which the OHR condemned as illegal²⁷³ - and scheduled it for the same day of the elections²⁷⁴. In general, the climate that the HDZ-BiH managed to create was such that a Croat not voting for a HNS’ party would be considered as a traitor to his own national cause. In response to all these provocations and offences, the OHR disposed the removal of many candidates from the HDZ-BiH’s lists²⁷⁵.

The tendency of the Croat’s electorate to abstain, clearly shown in the April election results, appeared again on the occasion of the November ballot. This time, the consequences of the abstentions were much more problematic for the HDZ-BiH than in April, as the SDP-led “Alliance for Change” managed to form a new Federal government which excluded both the HNS and the SDA. For the first time since Dayton, therefore, the Herzegovinian ruling political axis, i.e. the silent HDZ-BiH- SDA’s entente, was overtaken and left out of the division of power. This blow risked to be fatal for both nationalist formations, since the control of the public resources was crucial for the maintenance of their patronage systems.

However, even if declining in power, the HDZ-BiH had remained by far the most voted Croat party²⁷⁶. Its leadership, thus, claimed that the new Federation’s government was illegal, as it excluded the Croat most representative force. The HDZ-BiH consequently increased its attacks against the IC, which was accused of having manipulated the voting process.

The intensity of the political clash escalated. At the beginning of March, the HNS proclaimed the “temporary autonomy” of the Croatian community in BiH²⁷⁷. The Croat parties gave rise to the boycott of the country’s institutions and backed the desertion of about 10,000 soldiers from the FBiH’s army²⁷⁸. The non collaboration strategy was extended also to the local

²⁷² GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 118 (OURDAN R., “Isolés, les séparatistes croates d’Herzégovine choisissent la fuite en avant”, *op. cit.*)

²⁷³ OURDAN R., “Isolés, les séparatistes croates d’Herzégovine choisissent la fuite en avant”, *op. cit.*

²⁷⁴ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 145. In spite of the triumphal figures provided by the HDZ-BiH, the Italian journalist Vanna Vannuccini highlighted how the polling stations for the referendum remained essentially empty (VANNUCCINI V., “Bosnia, trionfo nazionalista”, *La Repubblica*, 13/11/2000)

²⁷⁵ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 118

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 119

²⁷⁷ “Strappo dei croati di Bosnia”, *La Repubblica*, 5/3/2001

²⁷⁸ OURDAN R., “La force de l’Otan intervient contre la banque des extrémistes croates”, *Le Monde*, 20/4/2001

administrations in which the HDZ-BiH still occupied important positions. The subsequent clash with the IC brought about some of the worst violence in Bosnia since 1995²⁷⁹.

The OHR perfectly understood the importance of what was at stake. Yielding to the HDZ-BiH's claims would imply that the electoral results could be manipulated, as well as to admit that the IC had still "*not settled the question of the existence of a unitary Bosnia*"²⁸⁰. Its reaction, therefore, was as resolute as ever. The OHR defined the Croat call for self-rule "illegal" and disposed the removal of Ante Jelavic from the collective Bosnian Presidency.

The heart of the HDZ-BiH's system was represented by the *Hercegovacka Banka*, through which most of the necessary funds for the working of the parallel network of power usually passed²⁸¹. It was mainly thanks to the *Hercegovacka* that the HDZ-BiH disposed of the necessary resources to support the army's deserters, i.e. the backbone of the whole rebellion. On April the 6th, the SFOR troops burst into the main seat of the Mostar *Hercegovacka* and ten peripheral branches, in order to seize some documents and impose the temporary administration of the bank²⁸². They were faced with an even stronger reaction: an angry mob surrounded the *Hercegovacka*'s main seat, and forced the international force to give back the documents²⁸³. The IC's objectives were realized thanks to a second raid, arranged in a much more discrete way, which was carried out on April the 18th²⁸⁴. Throughout all this period, the HDZ-BiH organized in Mostar daily demonstrations against the IC.

In the end, the *Hercegovacka* raid proved to be a crucial move. The Croat Democratic Union found itself in the impossibility of paying the 10,000 deserters, thus determining the failure of the uprising. With the passing of time, moreover, most of Mostar's Croat population began to think that the HDZ-BiH had chosen the path of political escalation just in order to

²⁷⁹ "Croat Nationalists Attack Peacekeepers in Bosnia", *op. cit.*

²⁸⁰ My translation from the French: "[...] *que la communauté internationale n'a pas encore réglé la question de l'existence d'une Bosnie unitaire*" (OURDAN R., "La force de l'Otan intervient contre la banque des extrémistes croates", *op. cit.*)

²⁸¹ Founded in 1997, the *Hercegovacka* constituted the glue of the HDZ-BiH's ruling faction, which was largely represented within the bank's board. (GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114). The bank was the financial intermediary between Zagreb and the Herzegovinian hard-liners. According to Toby Robson, the interim IC's administrator of the *Hercegovacka*, between March 1998 and January 2001 216 million of KM would have passed from Zagreb to the Herzegovina's Bosnian Croats through the bank's accounts. For Robson, however, a great deal of the amount of money ended up in the pockets of a few individuals, rather than financing the entire community ("BiH: cosa è successo all'Hercegovacka Banka", *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 18/12/2002)

²⁸² "Bosnia, guerriglia a Mostar", *La Repubblica*, 7/4/2001

²⁸³ More than twenty peacekeepers were hurt in the riot ("Croat Nationalists Attack Peacekeepers in Bosnia", *The New York Times*, 7/4/2001), as many international officials were forced to issue "confessions" while threatened with a gun (DI LELLIS S., "La Bosnia torna a rischio ultrà croati all'attacco", *La Repubblica*, 8/4/2001)

²⁸⁴ OURDAN R., "La force de l'Otan intervient contre la banque des extrémistes croates", *op. cit.*

preserve its own position²⁸⁵. At the October Congress, Jelavic announced the end of the self-government phase. He resigned from the party's presidency six months later. Isolated from Zagreb and excluded from the Federation's government, the HDZ-BiH lived its most difficult moment. Yet, it was at just these delicate months that the IC missed the opportunity to realize the decisive attack against the Croat parallel network.

Despite the huge difficulties of the 2000-2001 biennium, in sum, the HDZ-BiH's dominance over the Bosnian Croat population was never seriously put into question, above all in Herzegovina: though seriously set back by the *Hercegovacka* raid, the HDZ-BiH's *tajkuni* and local administrators still disposed of the control of basic resources, untouched by the IC intervention, which eased the party's impasse.

In Mostar, thereby, the situation did not improve significantly. In 2004, when the OHR imposed the administrative reunification of the town and inaugurated the New Old Bridge, the main city's problems were still unsolved. The Herzegovinian capital, then, proved once again to have turned into an even more problematic reality than the rest of the country.

3.4 The Definitive Statute

At the end of the New Old Bridge's reconstruction, in summer 2003²⁸⁶, Mostar was still composed of two separate cities, with "*profoundly conflicting interests*"²⁸⁷. Throughout the "*decade of division*"²⁸⁸, the scheduled gradual passage of competencies from the municipalities to the City Government had been regularly disregarded. The result was an absurdly costly public administration, which did weigh on the distressed economic condition of the town²⁸⁹. Moreover, according to the new HR Paddy Ashdown, the divided city was

²⁸⁵ GRANDITS H., *op. cit.*, p. 120

²⁸⁶ In occasion of the Stari Most's rebuilding, the IC once again failed to conceive the material reconstruction as an opportunity of social participation. Gilles Péqueux, one of the project's overseers, had proposed the creation of a stone cutter school, opened to the Bosniak and the Croat communities, to be involved in the rebuilding. The World Bank and the UNESCO, however, opted for the cheapest and the fastest option, by delegating the work to a Turkish enterprise and by hiring Croat labor force. The bridge, rather than the whole reconstruction process, had become a goal *per se* (RAMEL S., *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76). Thereby, many local inhabitants began to feel that the Stari Most had been "expropriated" by the IC (MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 238-239). The rebuilding of the bridge and its surroundings cost 15,5 million of dollars. The main financers were the WB, the City of Mostar, and Italy (for the whole list of contributors, see RAMEL S., *op. cit.*, pp. 72-72). Also Zagreb gave its contribution, with about 600.000 dollars (HEDL D., *op. cit.*).

On July 15, 2005, Mostar's Old City, i.e. the area of the Stari Most, was included on UNESCO World Heritage's List (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/946>), by further increasing the touristic potential of the city

²⁸⁷ OHR, "Decision prohibiting city-municipalities of Mostar from assigning names to or change existing names of streets, squares, bridges and other such public places", 26/2/2004 (http://www.ohr.int/decisions/mo-hncantdec/default.asp?content_id=31911)

²⁸⁸ MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 357

²⁸⁹ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 7

“exercising a baleful, cancerous influence which spread far beyond Mostar, into the higher echelons”²⁹⁰.

The decisive push toward the approval of a new city statute came with the 2002 Constitutional amendments, which extended also to the Serbs the status of “constituent people” of the FBiH. The Interim Statute of Mostar had thus become unlawful, since its power-sharing mechanisms were confined only to the Bosniak and the Croat communities²⁹¹. According to a poll taken in 2003, 72% of *Mostari* believed that the right moment for the reunification of the town had come²⁹². Moreover, the inauguration of the Stari Most in a still divided city would be an unbearable slap-in-the-face for the IC. Given all the previous considerations and the ethnocracies’ “vested interest” in maintaining the status quo²⁹³, the elaboration of a new Statute for the Herzegovinian capital became one of Ashdown’s four top priorities²⁹⁴.

The accomplishment of the town’s reunification would be hardly realizable without the consent of the political force which had so far most prevented such move, i.e. the HDZ-BiH. The turning point came in 2003, when the Federal Statistic Bureau published its estimations about the ethnic make-up of the population of Mostar: according to the Bureau, the Croat community had overtaken the Muslim one. The Croatian advantage among the registered voters seemed to be even more pronounced, as suggested by the lists provided by the BiH Electoral Commission, realised in June 2002.

Tab 3.2²⁹⁵

Estimated ethnic make-up of Mostar’s population (Federal Statistic Bureau, 2003)		Estimated ethnic make-up of Mostar’s registered voters (ICG, 2003)
Croats	51.000 (48%)	35,858 (58,2%)
Bosniaks	50.000 (47%)	28,843 (40,3%)
Serbs	3.030 (3,5%)	904 (1,5%)

²⁹⁰ WOOD N., “Mostar Journal; an Effort to Unify a Bosnian City Multiples Frictions”, *The New York Times*, 15/3/2004

²⁹¹ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, op. cit, p. 7

²⁹² *Ibidem*

²⁹³ OHR, “Decision prohibiting city-municipalities of Mostar from assigning names to or change existing names of streets, squares, bridges and other such public places”, op. cit.

²⁹⁴ TERZIC D., “Da Mostar a Mostar”, op. cit.

²⁹⁵ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, op. cit, pp. 6-7. The estimated total population amounted to 105,408 persons

In view of these figures, the traditional HDZ-BiH and SDA's positions about the reunification of the town magically switched. The Croat Democratic Union became the most convinced assertor of the necessity to create a unique administration, while the Party of Democratic Action started to support a diametrically opposite stance²⁹⁶. The SDA found itself in a very embarrassing position, as the call for the reinforcement of the central power and for both a unified Mostar and Bosnia occupied a central place in its platform. Given the HDZ-BiH's history, however, the SDA's fears about a probable Croat dominion in a unified town seemed understandable²⁹⁷.

After the failure of the first Commission for the elaboration of the new Statute, which had been boycotted by the SDA representatives²⁹⁸, Ashdown disposed the creation of a second board, headed by the international chairman Norbert Winterstein²⁹⁹. The focus of contention between the SDA and the HDZ-BiH regarded the electoral rules for the composition of the City council, as well as the definition of the vital interests clauses' coverage and the mechanisms for their safeguard³⁰⁰. As for the electoral system, the HDZ-BiH pushed for a pure proportional representation, while the SDA demanded that both the Croat and the Bosniak peoples disposed of the same number of representatives within the Council.

The final draft of the Statute was published in December. With regard to the crucial point, i.e. the City Council's composition, the conclusions of the Commission were by far closer to the Bosniak requests than to those of the Croats³⁰¹. Given the population's ethnic make-up and the constituencies' territorial delimitation, the rules of the Statute implied that, within an Assembly made of 35 councilors³⁰², both the Bosniaks and the Croats would elect fifteen representatives, the Serbs four and the "Others" one. The OHR choice, therefore, determined that the Croat electors, roughly 60% of the voters, would dispose of just 42% of the city's representatives³⁰³. Regarding this last point, the OHR was driven by the

²⁹⁶ POCECCO A., *op. cit.*, p. 23. The Bosniak political block, however, was not united, since the SBiH continued to support the reunification's advisability (TERZIC D., "Da Mostar a Mostar", *op. cit.*)

²⁹⁷ MAGGETTI M., *op. cit.*, p. 369

²⁹⁸ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 7

²⁹⁹ TERZIC D., "Da Mostar a Mostar", *op. cit.*

³⁰⁰ For the details of the HDZ-BiH and the SDA's proposal both about the City Council and the vital interest clause, see: ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 9

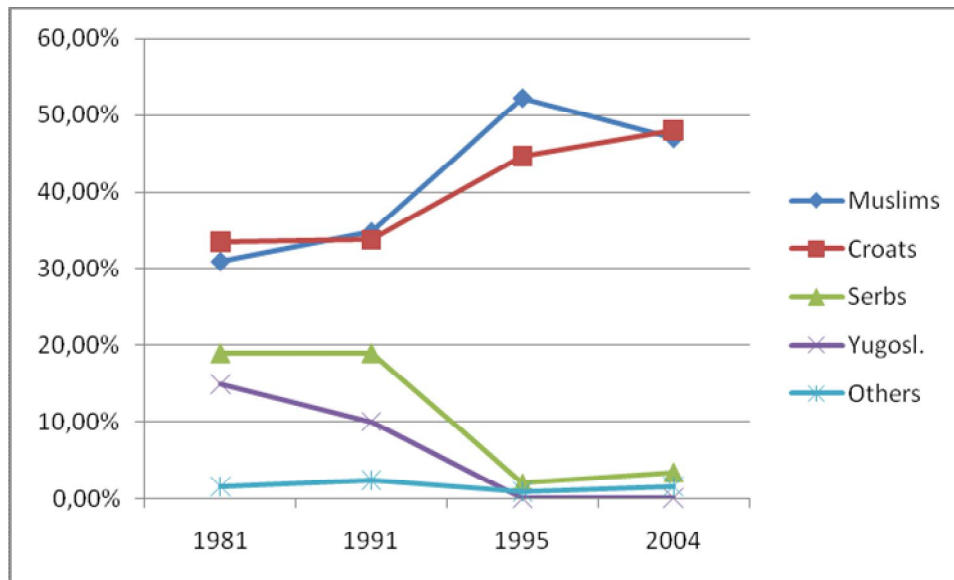
³⁰¹ Article 14 stated that the City Council should be composed of 35 members. Articles 15 and 17 disposed that the six electoral districts, traced on the former municipalities, should elect the same number of representatives, while Article 16 directed that each constituent people should enjoy of a maximum of 15 councilors and a minimum of four, while the "Others" should choose at least one representative (Statute of the City of Mostar, http://www.ohr.int/decisions/mo-hncantdec/default.asp?content_id=31707)

³⁰² TERZIC D., "Un asino come sindaco", *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 30/4/2009.

³⁰³ TERZIC, "Mostar: referendum, arresti e unificazione forzata", *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 30/1/2004

consideration that, much as this disposition might seem anti-democratic, a pure proportional representation would have rewarded the 1990s' ethnic cleansing of Mostar, without which the Croats would likely have never overtaken the numbers of the Muslim community, as confirmed by the next graphic³⁰⁴:

Graphic 1 (author's elaboration)



The Croat Democratic Union, of course, did contest the draft of the Statute. It stated that it would accept it only if the same electoral rules were to be applied to the other FBiH's cities. The HDZ-BiH even organized a popular referendum - in which, according to the Croat Party, 70% of Mostar Croats participated- by expressing a 90% preference for a "truly complete" reunification of the town³⁰⁵. Notwithstanding the Croat opposition, Paddy Ashdown came to Mostar on January the 28th and announced the promulgation of the Statute, which would enter into force on March the 15th. Meanwhile, the municipalities were prevented from taking potentially controversial decisions³⁰⁶.

The imposition of the definitive Statute generated an important structural change which, nevertheless, did not affect Mostar's physical and psychological partition³⁰⁷. The 2004

³⁰⁴ While the curve that represents the Croat population constantly grows, the Bosniak one starts to decline at the end of the conflict. The reason for such a turnaround lies both in the harsh HDZ-BiH's post-war expulsion policies - which, of course, were not at all a novelty - and in the Croat hard-liners' monopolization of the most profitable economic activities of the town. In addition, in the very first years after the conflict the destruction of Eastern Mostar was so wide that the Muslim side of the city was simply not appealing. Not even the growth of the Bosniak returns' rate since 2001 has been sufficient to reverse such a demographic trend.

³⁰⁵ TERZIC D., "Mostar: referendum, arresti e unificazione forzata", *op. cit.*

³⁰⁶ See for instance: OHR, "Decision prohibiting city-municipalities of Mostar from assigning names to or change existing names of streets, squares, bridges and other such public places", *op. cit.*

³⁰⁷ MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 195

administrative election, which was expected to “*seal the reunification of the town*”³⁰⁸, produced the usual, disappointing results:

Tab. 3.3

List/Party	Number of Seats
HDZ-BiH's coalition	13
Radom za Boljitač	1
Croatian Party of Rights' coalition	1
SDP	4
SDA	10
SBiH	4
Independent	2

The 2004 ballot reasserted yet again an already learned lesson: “*without a political revolution from within, the construction of ‘democracy’ has for the most part legitimated the authoritarian nationalist spoils of war*”³⁰⁹. Surprisingly, the external imposition of the Statute did not seem to have fostered such revolution.

Too many questions had remained unresolved. The burden of the conflict and the post-war years, the significant change of the population’s social and political make-up, as well as the persistency of the parallel networks of power and the political profitability deriving from the adoption of a nationalist rhetoric did prevent an effective reunification of the city.

The authoritarian intervention of Paddy Ashdown, in sum, did not go beyond obtaining a formally unified town for the Stari Most’s opening ceremony.

3.5 Business as Usual

The imposition of the Definitive Statute made more evident the hiatus between the IC-proclaimed reconciliation of the town and the reality on the ground³¹⁰: the citizens and

³⁰⁸ ABADIE L. “A Mostar, la symbolique du vieux pont reste assez éloignée du réel”, *Le Monde*, 27/7/2004

³⁰⁹ PUGH M., *op. cit.*

³¹⁰ RAMEL S., *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2

political representatives of Mostar had remained “*as divided as ever*”³¹¹, while the parallel networks of power had not given up an inch. The City council, which took three months to be formed after the 2004 elections, became soon paralyzed by the opposite blocks. It proved to be completely unfit to settle the most controversial questions, like the management of the Municipal enterprises or the local media’s regulation. In 2006, with the aim of putting an end to such situation, the HR sent Norbert Winterstein to Mostar, as his special representative³¹².

Unfortunately, Winterstein’s mission was carried out in the context of a much wider political crisis, from which Bosnia does not seem to have yet recovered. Faced with Dayton’s inadequacies and contradictions, the Bosnian political élite did not manage to agree on the necessary constitutional reforms, which had to be approved not later than March 2006³¹³. Such stalemate caused a rise of political tensions, which led to new fears of an escalation of inter-ethnic violence³¹⁴. The renewal of the *Republika Srpska*’s claims for self-determination, revived by the RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik³¹⁵, contributed to the increased political instability. In October 2008, Srećko Latal noted that “*since the last general elections in 2006 the country appears to be on the verge of collapse*”³¹⁶.

To date (end of June), 2009 has not brought any positive change; rather, it has dramatically demonstrated the IC’s lack of strategy for Bosnia. In January 2009, the HR Miroslav Lajcak suddenly announced his intention to leave the post, as he had been offered to become the new Slovak Foreign Minister³¹⁷. For a certain time it has not been clear whether the OHR’ institution would definitively leave BiH or not³¹⁸. The biggest nationalist parties did not miss the opportunity to exploit such impasse: just a few days after Lajcak’s announce, the SNSD, the SDA and the HDZ-BiH leaders met in Banja Luka, in order to discuss a new territorial arrangement for the country, to be divided in four units³¹⁹. The second round of talks, which took place in Mostar, failed apparently because of Dodik’s intransigence³²⁰. The question of a new territorial order for BiH, however, remains still open.

³¹¹ JELACIC N., “Bosnia’s Hollywood State”, *Balkan Insight*, 11/9/2007

³¹² TERZIC D., “Tu chiamala se vuoi supervisione”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 25/9/2006

³¹³ In December 2005, Bosnian politicians bounded themselves to respect such deadline, as the constitutional reforms were necessary for the path of approach to the EU (MUSTAJBEGOVIĆ S., “Bosnia: Constitution reform Setback”, *Balkan Insight*, 18/9/2007)

³¹⁴ LATAL S., “Bosnians Hope Threat of New War will Fade”, *Balkan Insight*, 10/3/2009

³¹⁵ BILEFSKY D., “Bosnian Serb leader accused of corruption”, *The New York Times*, 24/2/2009

³¹⁶ LATAL S., “Local Polls Deepen Sense of Crisis in Bosnia”, *op. cit.*

³¹⁷ TERZIC D., “Equilibrio”, *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 29/1/2009. The UN, however, communicated that Lajcak would provisionally continue to exercise his powers (BILEFSKY D., “Tensions Rise in Fragile Bosnia as Country’s Serbs Threaten to Seek Independence”, *The New York Times*, 26/2/2009)

³¹⁸ DERENS J.-A., “Une nouvelle Partition de la Bosnie”, *Le Monde*, 28/1/2009

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*

³²⁰ BILEFSKY D., “Tensions Rise in Fragile Bosnia as Country’s Serbs Threaten to Seek Independence”, *op. cit.*

The 2006-2008 biennium was very delicate for the HDZ-BiH as well, since it had to face a fierce competition within the Croatian electorate. In 2006, a faction of the Croat Democratic Union, led by Bozo Ljubic, left the party and founded a new party, the HDZ 1990. The split evidenced the Bosnian Croatian electorate's weakness when divided. On the occasion of the 2006 Presidential voting, for the first time the HDZ-BiH did not place one of his politicians in the Bosnian collective Presidency: the HDZ 1990 had absorbed a consistent percentage of the votes of Ivo Miro Jovic (HDZ-BiH), so that the seat was won by the Croat candidate of the SDP, Zeljko Komsic³²¹. In Spring 2009, however, pressed by the Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, the two HDZ have undertaken the path toward reunification³²².

The second challenge to HDZ-BiH's dominance took place directly in Mostar. In occasion of the 2008 local election, for the first time, the HDZ-BiH was overtaken by another party mainly rooted within the Croat electorate, the *Narodna Stranka Radom za Boljitak* (NSRZB) of the Ljjanovic brothers. The NSRZB chose a more pragmatic approach than that of the Croat Democratic Union: while the latter insisted in its highly nationalist claims, the former's rhetoric pivoted on the concepts of efficiency and growth, by focusing on the everyday problems of the Bosnian people.

Tab 3.4

Party	Number of Seats
SDA	12
NSRZB	8
HDZ-BiH	6
HDZ 1990	3
SDP	3
SbiH	2
Independent	1

³²¹ PUGH M., *op. cit.*

³²² Sanader's involvement in the HDZ-BiH – HDZ 1990 rapprochement has led to many speculations about a new, revived role for Zagreb in Bosnian politics. (LATAL S., "Leading Bosnian Croat Parties Eye Reunification", *Balkan Insight*, 2/4/2009)

The 2008 results appear quite difficult to interpret. On the one hand, for the first time the Croat field resulted more divided and confused than the Bosniak one, while the SDA obtained one of its best performances. On the other hand, the very legitimacy of the NSRZB's victory was put into question: according to the local correspondent of *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, the fact that the Lijanovic's brothers had bought most of their votes was a kind of "open secret"³²³ in Mostar. The journalist even provided the amount of money promised to the NSRZB's "persuaders" for their performances. After all, their 2008 electoral campaign had been almost invisible and they had already adopted questionable methods in the past³²⁴. Not surprisingly, the party's leadership rejected all the charges.

The potential earthquake produced by the 2008 election was the main cause of the events which took place in the following months. Since the October elections, Mostar fell into a political paralysis which for its intensity and consequences can be likened only to the 1996-1997 HDZ-BiH's boycotting of the town's institutions.

The formation of the City Council required the "usual" three months. The Presidency of the Assembly went to a member of the HDZ-BiH, as scheduled by a 2004 HDZ-BiH-SDA's agreement. The arrangement disposed also that in 2004-2008 the office of the mayor would go to a Croat, while the Presidency of the Council would go to a SDA member. The two parties were supposed to switch their charges after the 2008 elections. In spite of this, in the Croat Democratic Union refused to vote for the SDA's candidate, and presented its own former mayor³²⁵.

The SDA-HDZ conflict led to a complete deadlock. As late as June the 26th, i.e. seven months after the ballot, the situation was still unresolved and the town had no "definitive" mayor³²⁶. Throughout this period, the new City government was not formed, so that the approval of the annual budget proved impossible. The political collapse, thereby, spread to the economic and social spheres³²⁷, already tried by the economic world's crisis³²⁸. A Sarajevo's newspaper summed up the situation with the following headlines: "*Mostar threatened by famine*"³²⁹, and it did not exaggerate at all: the public soup kitchens, main source of sustenance for many,

³²³ My translation from the Italian: "*Segreto di Pulcinella*" (TERZIC D., "Il voto di Mostar", *Osservatorio sui Balcani*, 17/10/2008)

³²⁴ After the 2004 elections, the Lijanovic brothers had thanked each of their electors with the gift of a chicken (*Ibidem*)

³²⁵ TERZIC D., "Un asino come sindaco", *op. cit.*

³²⁶ Until his resignation in June 2009, the former HDZ-BiH mayor, Ljubo Besic, remained the interim mayor of the city ("Bosnia's Press Review – June 26", *Balkan Insight*, 26/6/2009)

³²⁷ LATAL S., "Distressed Bosnians Suggest Donkey for Mayor", *Balkan Insight*, 16/3/2009

³²⁸ See "Police in Bosnian Town 'Live like Beggars", *Balkan Insight*, 19/8/2008, or "Bosnian Aluminium Smelter Cuts Output, Pay", *Balkan Insight*, 17/12/2008

³²⁹ LATAL S., "Distressed Bosnians Suggest Donkey for Mayor", *op. cit.*

have indeed risked to be closed for lack of funding. The approval of a three-month budget, in March, turned out to be an insufficient measure. Angered by the continuous stale-mate, in March some citizens paraded with a donkey, by suggesting him for mayor³³⁰.

The length and the intensity of the political crisis, in my opinion, can be explained in view of three factors. First, the HDZ-BiH's intention not to yield to the disappointing electoral results. For the Croat party, surrendering would imply the breach of its historical dominion in Mostar. Such an option would be at odds with the fact that, despite the electoral reverse, the party still enjoys a consistent power, mainly thanks to the parallel network.

Second, it is possible that the Croat Democratic Union has fuelled the present political impasse in order to create the conditions for a reform of the rules for the mayor's election. Resorting to the direct appointment of the head of the city, in fact, would prevent a similar stalemate to arise again. Given the actual make-up of Mostar population, such a reform could provide the basis for a permanent Croat rule over the city.

Third, the nationalist talks that followed to Lajcak's announce did increase the importance of what was at stake, since one of the discussed four territorial units was designed to have Mostar for capital³³¹ - a proposal that seems to fit with the Croat calls for a third entity. Precisely in such a moment, thereby, the HDZ-BiH's control of the town might prove to be crucial. It is then obvious that the HDZ-BiH has not intended to yield just when the Bosnian constitutional crisis and the IC's lack of strategy could create the conditions for the achievement of its own long-standing strategic goal. Indeed, as Emily Makas pointed out in 2007, "*the separatist attitudes that characterized nationalist Croat action during the war and resulted in Mostar partition persist today*"³³².

To conclude, in such a moment, the Herzegovinian capital represents both a mirror for BiH and a "key-stone" for its order³³³, as it constitutes the crucial ganglion of the Croat-Bosniak relations and the fundamental test-bed for the HDZ-BiH's ambitions. Much of the solution of the Bosnian riddle, then, seems to be still linked to the destiny of Mostar, which, fourteen years after Dayton, has remained one of the "make-or-break issues" of the country's equilibrium.

³³⁰ TERZIC D., "Un asino come sindaco", *op. cit.*

³³¹ TERZIC D., "Equilibrio", *op. cit.*

³³² MAKAS E. G., *op. cit.*, p. 236

³³³ TRAINOR I., "Bridge Opens, but Mostar Remains a Divided City", *The Guardian*, 23/7/2004

Conclusion: Mostar the Mirror and the Cross on Mount Hum

The main aspect which emerges from the analysis of the last two decades of Mostar's history is the loss of the very celebrated uniqueness of the town. The Herzegovinian capital, much as this could sound oversimplified, had been one of the most dynamic places in Europe throughout the period taken into consideration in this essay. Its image as well as its role in the national context have been subject to a continuous process of redefinition, which has not yet come to an end. In the space of fifteen years, Mostar has passed from the condition of symbol par excellence of Yugoslavian cosmopolitanism (until 1991), to that of mirror of the country's worst realities (1992-1999), to that of liability for the whole peace process (1999-2005) and, once again, to that of most faithful representation of the problems that prevent Bosnia from being a fully realized state (2005-today). Throughout these years, and especially after Bosnian independence, Mostar has also represented a crucial point for the order of the whole country.

The developments of the town's recent history have even led to a partial reconsideration of the idyllic depiction of its status during the Socialist era. The prevailing account portrays pre-war Mostar as the most successful realization of Tito's imperative of "brotherhood and unity". According to such vision, different communities that historically inhabited the town not only lived in harmony, but also gave life to a unique, new inter-cultural whole: Mostar, in a way, was the closest accomplishment of Yugoslavia as a nation, not only as a federation of peoples. The Herzegovinian capital was a lab, a privileged observatory of social study, the vanguard of the Socialist solidarity *à la yougoslave*. Or, at least, this is how the town tended to be perceived, although it must be stressed that the height of the celebration of Mostar's pre-war harmony took place when this reality had already disappeared, i.e. after the beginning of the 1992-1995 conflict.

Such an image is well-founded, though exaggerated. When Michele Colafato uses the word "Mostarinity"³³⁴ to describe the open-minded, creative, anti-nationalist and disenchanted ethos of the Herzegovinian capital's inhabitants, he does provide a fitting representation of what Mostar used to be. The problem with such a description is that it risks to confuse the widespread spirit of the town's centre with that of the whole city.

The bulk of the interethnic conflicts, in fact, tended to reside mainly in the mostly nationalist outskirts of the town. As described in the first chapter, Mostar's periphery knew a constant development after the end of WWII, when the city had become the destination of an emigration stream from the mainly Croat Western Herzegovina. Given the general hostile

³³⁴ See paragraph 1.1, note 4

attitude of Western Herzegovinian Croats toward Socialist and multinational Yugoslavia, such districts, which were mainly ethnically homogenous, stayed impervious to the spread of the traditionally inclusive Mostar's ethos. The result was the development of a silent and highly symbolic fracture between the centre of the town and its outskirts. It must also be said that a certain degree of ethnic polarization had never disappeared even within the historical boundaries of the city.

The 1990 election results constitute a significant evidence of the idealism which permeates the mainstream description of pre-war Mostar. In spite of the relatively good performance of multiethnic parties in the city centre, the town's results were in line with the nation-wide triumph of the nationalist formations. Thereby, in a moment of deep tension, the multicultural ethos of the city proved to be globally weaker than the call for uniformity of the ethnic electorates. It must be said that the nationalist success, particularly in the Herzegovinian capital, was probably due to the widespread feelings of fear and insecurity which had accompanied the SFRY's crisis, rather than to a full adhesion of the local electorates to the nationalist parties' platform. Nonetheless, such results implied that the development of a shared and synthetic identity in Mostar was far from complete. The pre-war Herzegovinian capital, in sum, was indeed one of the most integrated places of Yugoslavia, an example for the whole country, yet such integration was riled with strong interethnic tensions and fears, especially- but not exclusively- at the outskirts of the city.

The very idealistic representation of pre-war Mostar led some scholars, like Szilvia Gresina, to affirm that the Herzegovinian capital was somehow "dragged" into the war³³⁵, since the town's spirit was naturally opposed to any kind of old-style nationalism. In my view, such assertion is doubly wrong: first, because it interprets the conflict exclusively as the product of national clashes, passing over all social, economic and political reasons which fuelled it³³⁶; second, because it does not take into account the just mentioned interethnic unrest which existed in the city's area throughout the period of pre-war Yugoslavia.

If the deployment of the JNA troops was, in fact, a decision of the central power, the active support of the local Serb population to the Federal Army's siege, as well as the creation of mono-national defensive militias did imply the existence of locally based ethnic tensions. The success of the joint Croat-Bosniak coalition, which seemed to preserve at least a part of the pre-war identity of Mostar, was actually burdened by the rising tensions between the two

³³⁵ GRESINA S., *op. cit.*, p. 91

³³⁶ As to the "not-ethnic" explanations of the war, a very eloquent work is: RUMIZ P., *Maschere per un massacro*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1996, in which the author explains how the war has represented a mean for the consolidation of the Yugoslavian political class that was being mortally threatened by the collapse of the old power's structures.

formal allies. A large number of events which preceded the open Croat-Muslim confrontation, such as the Boban-Karadzic meetings for the partition of Bosnia or the Parties' reinforcement of their respective positions in Mostar, already denounced the definitive reversal of the city's pre-war equilibrium, not to speak of its inclusive ethos.

The Herceg-Bosna's main goal of war was the "Croatization" of the town, or at least its ethnic partition along the Neretva banks. Mostar was in fact considered as *the* Croat city in BiH³³⁷, the natural capital of the newly born entity. Since the beginning of hostilities, then, the town had turned into the fundamental test-bed for Croatian ambitions. Thereby, the roughness of the Croat siege, consistent with the Herceg-Bosna's strategic design and openly backed by Zagreb, made Mostar the symbol par excellence of Croat crimes. Like many other Bosnian cities, the Herzegovinian capital was subject to a deep ethnic as well as social cleansing. The nationalist forces paid a close attention to the persecution of the potentially more tolerant segments of society, by replacing them with more reliable populations, mainly of rural extraction. The arrival of Croat and Bosniak refugees not used to Mostar's past dimension of coexistence implied a permanent transformation of its political landscape, by further fostering the radicalization of the interethnic clash.

The war, then, determined a profound reversal of the city's symbolic meaning. If before the hostilities the Herzegovinian capital had represented a kind of social vanguard, a virtuous example of what Yugoslavia could become, the conflict rendered it a mirror of the worst Bosnian reality, the most perfect embodiment of its apparently irreparable partition.

The question of who actually won the war in Mostar has received many answers, often in contradiction one with the other. In my view, the real winner was the Croat ethnocracy, rather than the Croat nation in general: if it is true that, in spite of a clear inferiority, the Bosniaks had resisted and even managed to maintain a strip of land on the western bank of the Neretva, it is undeniable that the Bosnian Croat strongmen had assumed the control of the majority of the most economically and strategically profitable assets of the town. In addition, the rude partition of the city rendered the Muslim threat something very concrete for Mostar's Croat citizens, by facilitating the HDZ-BiH's resort to the nationalist card in order to secure the control of the local society.

Such an argument, of course, was even truer in the Bosniak case. Yet, the higher frailty of the SDA and the inferior compactness of its electorate prevented the Party of Democratic Action from exercising a comparable control on its own portion of society.

³³⁷ MAKAS E., *op. cit.*, p. 379

Even more clearly than throughout the rest of the country, in the Herzegovinian capital the real power lied very far from the public space. The city's maneuvers were in fact the parallel networks of power's strongmen, who were not subjected to any kind of democratic control and who had the greatest economic as well as political interest in the persistence of the war-time separation.

The ethnic parties' necessary political consensus for the occupation of the public charges was pursued both through their harsh nationalist rhetoric and through the extensive control they exercised on the local society. Given the mentioned elements and the freshness of the war-time memories, the outcome of the first post-war electoral competitions consisted unsurprisingly in the "*pseudo-democratic legitimization of extreme nationalist power structures and ethnic cleansing*"³³⁸. This is why the IC's insistence for early elections before in Mostar and later in BiH seems hardly explainable, if not for reasons that have nothing to do with the Bosnian context.

The IC's approach to Mostar reality, as shown by the June 1996 elections, was marked by many errors that the international actors committed also at the national level. The representatives of the EUAM, for instance, chose to bypass the local civil society, by considering Mostar's political élites as their only interlocutors. Also, the IC not only failed to effectively address the parallel networks of power, which represented the most serious impediments to the overcoming of the post-war division of Mostar, but even financed them indirectly through the reconstruction process. Thereby, with the freezing of the 1994-1995 status quo, the first post-war years coincided with the apogee of the nationalist parties. Mostar, "*perhaps the single most difficult local site for the international state-building and democratization project in post-war Bosnia*"³³⁹, confirmed its status of national mirror, by refracting "*in a concentrated microcosm practically all the problems Bosnia & Herzegovina faces in the aftermath of the apocalypse of 1992-1995*"³⁴⁰.

With the end of the Nineties, the image of Mostar knew a further evolution. Both the political changes in Zagreb and Belgrade and the resoluteness of the HR Wolfgang Petrisch gave the impression that the country was entering a new phase. Nonetheless, the Herzegovinian capital remained trapped in deep inter-ethnic tensions, which risked to undermine the whole Bosnian balance. Mostar, in a way, had passed from the condition of mirror of the country to that of heaviest national burden, a hotbed of inter-ethnic tensions which proved to be dangerous for BiH as a whole.

³³⁸ PUGH M., *op. cit.*

³³⁹ BOSE S. *op. cit.*, p. 146

³⁴⁰ *Ibidem*

The most evident proof of Mostar's perniciousness came in occasion of the Croat call for self-determination (2000-2001), throughout which the Herzegovinian capital became the centre of a rebellion that, according to Remy Ourdan, represented the most serious threat to the peace process since the signing of the DPA³⁴¹. The dissolution of the Herzegovinian lobby in Croatia and the new attitude of Zagreb toward BiH had led the HDZ-BiH hard-liners to exasperate their radicalization, in the attempt to preserve the status quo within Bosnian Croat society. In the end, they proved to be right, as the still resisting parallel network of power, though damaged, managed to supply the necessary economic and political support for the survival of the Croat ethnocracy. As far as this point goes, the IC bears a great responsibility, since it failed to address a decisive attack against the Croatian parallel institutions in the moment in which they appeared weaker.

Thereby, when throughout the country the situation seemed to improve slightly, or at least its constant deterioration had been temporary stemmed, Mostar's reality had remained as partitioned as ever, while the level of tension had even increased. In such a context, as summed up by the ICG, the rebuilding of the Stari Most "*served as a species of Potemkin village, designed to create the illusion of inter-party, cross-national cooperation, rather as a manifestation of the real thing*"³⁴².

The same impression seems to fit with the reunification of the town, imposed by decree in January 2004. Too many basic questions had remained unresolved before Ashdown's intervention, and it was unrealistic to expect that the OHR's enforcement could magically settle such matters. The 2004 elections did confirm the partition of the electorate, while the first steps of the newly born joint institutions were anything but encouraging, since they proved to be hostage of the same dynamics which had so far prevented the working of the City administration. The "Decade of division", then, seemed to have come only to a formal end.

Of course, the effects of the city's reunification should be judged in a temporally wider perspective, as it is possible that the obligation to work side by side will push the Parties to abandon their exclusively belligerent attitude. Yet, as of June 2009, this does not seem the case; moreover the sector of Education, the most strategic for the spread of a new inter-ethnic attitude, is undergoing old problems and rigid partition³⁴³.

Bosnia fell in a political dead-lock around 2005-2006, because of the parties' failure to agree on the necessary constitutional reforms: "*Corruption is on the rise, reforms are not*

³⁴¹ OURDAN R., "La force de l'Otan intervient contre la banque des extrémistes croates", *op. cit.*

³⁴² ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*, *op. cit.*, p. 5

³⁴³ POPOVIC P., *op. cit.*

being implemented and mafia rules the state”³⁴⁴, noted Nerma Jelacic in 2005. Since the 2006 elections, which marked the beginning of the deepest phase of the crisis, the national political situation has become much more fluid and hardly predictable. As of 2009, the rise of political tensions led to a widespread fear of an eventual escalation of interethnic violence, while Lajcak’s sudden announce of his intention to leave the HR post (January 2009) opened the way for the nationalist talks of Banja Luka and Mostar, that even assumed a new territorial order for the country. The probable near closure of the OHR office seems likely to worsen the BiH’s precariousness, not to speak of the Herzegovinian capital’s unrest.

The political stalemate in which Mostar has fallen since the October 2008 elections is not at all surprising, but rather, once again, a faithful representation of the national impasse. It is likely that the solution of the Herzegovinian capital’s dead-lock will exercise an influence on the whole Bosnian crisis, as it will plausibly imply a reassessment of the local power’s relations. After all, Mostar is at the same time both a mirror of the country and one of its keystones, as it represents the basic test-bed for the Croat ambitions in BiH and the centerpiece of the FBiH.

As of today, the political impasse in Mostar has delivered a clear signal: in spite of the electoral results, the HDZ-BiH, though weakened, remains the driving-force of the town’s politics, the one which can even manage to paralyze the whole city if disappointed with the ballot. In a way, paradoxically, the stalemate originated by the HDZ-BiH’s electoral reverse represents the ultimate proof of the Croat hard-liners’ success in Mostar: even when they lose, they are not defeated.

Given such considerations, the Stari Most does not represent, in my view, a fitting symbol of the actual reality of the town, in spite of its world-wide celebrity. As soon as a visitor enters Mostar, his or her attention cannot help being caught by another, far less known monument: the Jubilee Cross of the Mount Hum, on the Western bank of the Neretva. Such monument, which reaches the height of 30 meters, was erected in June 2001 on top of the same hill from which the HVO artillery used to bomb Eastern Mostar in 1993-1994. It is impossible to avoid the sight of the Cross from any part of the town, as it dominates all the quarters; it is even lit after sunset, so that, when the hill disappears in darkness, it seems to fly over the city.

The symbolic opposition between such an exclusivist monument and the Stari Most, a bridge that in its rebuilders’ view should embody the multicultural ethos of pre-war Mostar, could not be more meaningful. The Jubilee Cross and the New Old Bridge are separated from the

³⁴⁴ JELACIC N., *op. cit.*

same distance which passes between the frailty of a wish and the concreteness of everyday life. Much as this can be unpleasant to admit, the Jubilee Cross seems much more rooted in Mostar's reality than the New Old Bridge does.

The basically tolerant and inclusive Mostar disappeared under the ruins of its first shelled bridges, from which the city has never recovered. The efforts of some segments of the local society to revive its pre-war cosmopolitan ethos are impotent, when faced with the power of those who take profit from the town's division. Ravaged by the experience of both the conflict and the long post-war years, Mostar has become something radically different from the (partially) unique place it used to be: in a way, it has become more banal, ordinary. This is why it has turned into a mirror and a crucial ganglion for the equilibrium of the whole country. And this is why its future, just like the Bosnian one, appears at minimum enigmatic, if not dark.

The cross of Mount Hum, known also as the "Jubilee Cross" (<http://media.photobucket.com>)



List of Abbreviations

BiH: Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Bosna i Hercegovina*)

DP: Displaced Persons

DPA: Dayton Peace Accords

EUAM: European Union's Administration of Mostar

FBiH: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

HDZ 1990: Croat Democratic Union 1990 (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990*)

HDZ-BiH: Croat Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine*)

HNS: Croatian National Congress (*Hrvatski Narodni Sabor*)

HOS: Croatian Defence Forces (*Hrvatske Obrambene Snage*)

HSP: Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava*)

HVIDR-a: Association of Croat War Invalids of the Homeland War" (*Zajednica Udruga Hrvatskih Vojnih Invalida Domovinskog Rata*)

HR: High Representative

HVO: Croatian Defense Council (*Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane*)

JNA: Yugoslavian National Army

KM: Convertible Mark (*Konvertibilna Marka*)

IC: International Community

ICG: International Crisis Group

IFOR: Implementation Force

NHI: New Croatian Initiative

NSRZB: People's Party Working for Betterment (*Narodna Stranka Radom za Boljitak*)

OHR: Office of the High Representative

OSEM: Office of the Special Envoy for Mostar

RS: *Republika Srpska*

SBiH: Party for BiH (*Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu*)

SDA: Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*) SBiH: Party for BiH (*Stranka za Bosnu i Hercegovinu*)

SDP: Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska Partija BiH*)

SDS: Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka*)

SNSD: Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata*)

SRFY: Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

SRSJ: Alliance of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia (*Savez Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije*)

UDIVDR-a: Association of Volunteers and Veterans of the Homeland War (*Udruga hrvatskih vojnih invalida domovinskog rata*)

UNPROFOR: United Nations Protection Force

Appendix 1

Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Source: <http://www.maparchive.org>

Map of Central Mostar



source: <http://comune.fi.it>

Mostar's Essential Chronology (1990-June 2009)

1990-1994

- Dec. 1990: Carrying out of multi-party elections at both national and local level
- Sept. 1991: A few thousand JNA's reservists are deployed in Mostar
- 18/11/1991: Mate Boban proclaims the existence of the "Croat community of Herceg-Bosna"
- Dec. 1991: The Serb community of Mostar creates an "Autonomous Serb Municipality"
- Feb. 1992: Mate Boban obtains the Presidency of the HDZ-BiH
- 4/4/1992: The Federal Army starts the bombing of the city
- 6/5/1992: Karadzic and Boban meet in Graz.
- June 1992: The Croat-Bosniak coalition, with the support of Zagreb's army, drives the JNA troops out of the town
- 3/7/1992: The HDZ leaders announce the establishment of a "provisionary" executive power, under the Presidency of Mate Boban, with Mostar as capital
- Oct. 1992: New Karadzic-Boban summit
- 15/4/1993: The HVO orders the blockade of Bosniak refugees in Mostar and commands the UN Spanish contingent to leave the town
- 9/5/1993: The Croatian Defense Council starts the shelling of Eastern Mostar and accomplishes the first wide-scale ethnic cleansing of West Mostar's non Croatian inhabitants
- July 1993: External observers are expelled from Mostar
- 24/8/1993: Proclamation of the "Independent Republic of Herceg-Bosna"
- 8/11/1993: Destruction of the Stari Most
- 1/3/1994: Signature of the Washington Agreement. Boban leaves the HDZ-BiH Presidency
- 6/4/1994: Signing of the Geneva Memorandum of Understanding
- 23/7/1994: The EUAM starts to operate in Mostar
- 11/9/1994: First attempt on Koschnick's life by Croat hard-liners

1995-1999

- 24/10/1995: Signature of the Madrid Agreement about Mostar
- 14/12/1995: Formal signing of the DPA, in Paris
- 7/2/1996: Imposition of the size of the Central Zone by EUAM's decree; attempted lynching of Hans Koschnick by a Croat mob
- 18/2/1996: Rome Summit and revision of the Interim Statute. Koschnick resigns a few weeks later; the new head of the EUAM will be Perzez Casado

30/6/1996: Mostar holds the first post-war Bosnian elections, after which the EUAM is replaced by the OSEM, directed by Sir Martin Garrod

6/8/1996: Signature of the August Agreement, to put an end to the HDZ-BiH's boycott of the June electoral results

1/1/1997: Conclusion of the EU's mission to Mostar. The OSEM is replaced by the OHR's regional office

June 1997: The City Council is finally formed, almost one year after the ballot

14/9/1997: Second post-war local elections

10/2/1997: Liska Street incident

16/4/1998: Signature of the April Agreement for the return of displaced *Mostari*

14/10/1999: The SFOR accomplishes in West Mostar the "Westar Operation", which hits the illegal activities of the Bosnian Croat intelligence

Nov. 1999: The OHR and the OSCE remove twenty-two Bosnian non-cooperative officials, two from Western Mostar and one from the Eastern side of the town

10/12/1999: Death of Franjo Tudjman

2000- June 2009

3/1/2000: For the first time, the HDZ is defeated in the Croat national elections

8/2/2000: Stipe Mesic wins the Croatian Presidential ballot

8/4/2000: New Bosnian Municipal elections. The HDZ-BiH further exasperates its rhetoric

June 2000: Inauguration of the first bus service connecting Eastern and Western Mostar

11/11/2000: Bosnia's general elections. For the first time, the HDZ-BiH and the SDA are excluded from the FBiH's government.

Mar. 2001: The HNS proclaims the "temporary autonomy" of the Croat community in BiH

6/4/2001: First raid of the IC against the *Hercegovacka Banka* and violent reaction of the Croat hard-liners

18/4/2001: After a second blitz, the *Hercegovacka* is put under the international control

June 2001: Inauguration of Mount Hill's Cross

Oct. 2001: Ante Jelavic announces the end of the Croat temporary autonomy

Other (2001): The Bosniak refugees' returns rate in Mostar experiences a considerable growth

June 2002: The BiH Electoral Commission publicizes its lists of registered voters

27/6/2002: Cutting of the first stone for the reconstruction of the *Stari Most*. The whole rebuilding is completed on August 21, 2003.

Apr. 2003: Appointment of the first board for the drafting of Mostar's definitive Statute

15/9/2003: Setting-up of the second commission for the elaboration of Mostar's definitive Statute, headed by Norbert Winterstein

28/1/2004: Paddy Ashdown announces the promulgation of the definitive Statute, which enters into force on March the 15th

23/7/2004: 23/7/2004: Official inauguration of the new Old Bridge. The material reconstruction of the Stari Most had been concluded on August 23, 2003

2/10/2004: First local elections after the imposition of the new Statute

15/7/2005: The Old city of Mostar is inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage's List

1/10/2006: The Presidential elections contribute to the beginning of the deepest phase of the Bosnian constitutional crisis

5/10/2008: Unexpected exploit of the NSRZB at Mostar's municipal ballot. Beginning of the city's political stalemate, to date (end of June 2009) still unresolved

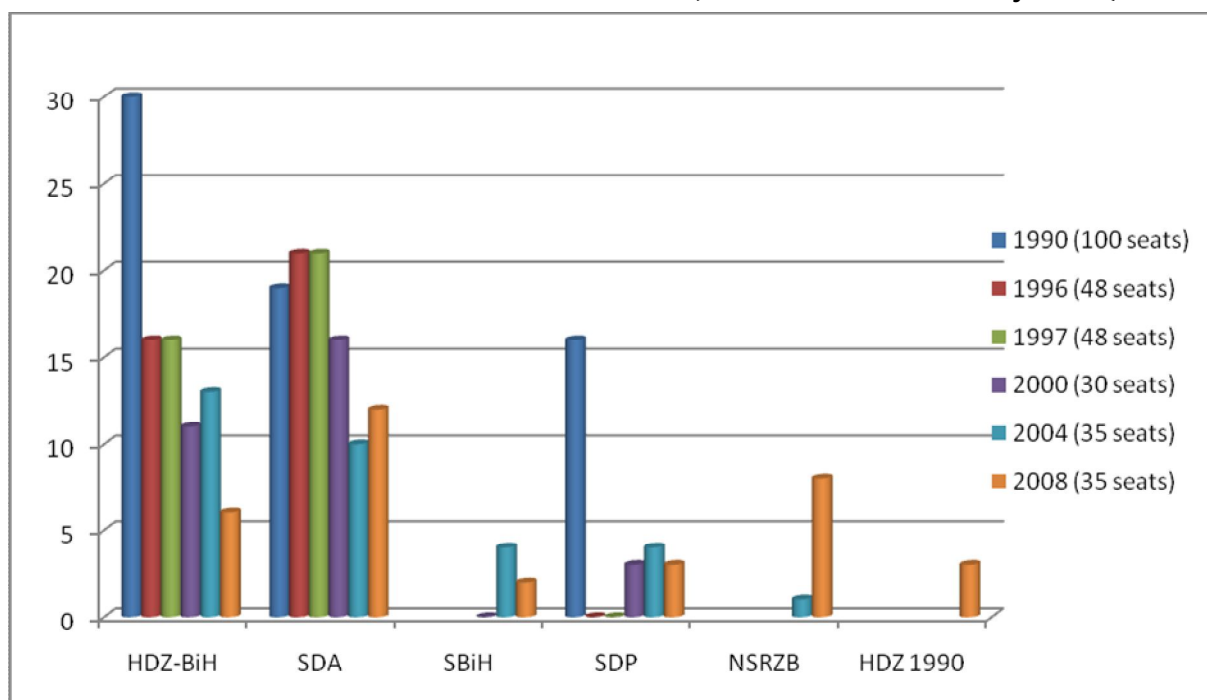
23/1/2009: The HR Miroslav Lajcak is appointed as new Slovak foreign minister and announces his intention to leave his office in Bosnia

26/1/2009: The SNSD, HDZ-BiH and SDA's leaders meet in Banja Luka, to discuss a new territorial arrangement for the country.

23/2/2009: Second round of nationalist talks, in Mostar

26/6/2009: Ljubo Besic, the interim mayor of the town, resigns after that the City council failed for the thirteenth time to elect a definitive mayor and to approve the annual city budget.

The Electoral Performances of Mostar's Most Influent Parties (in number of seats at the City Council)



(In 2000, the SBiH ran in coalition with the SDA. They obtained 16 seats as a whole, while in the graphic the seats are attributed only to the Party of Democratic Action)

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