AVİM Commentary • No: 2026 / 12 •

BOSNIA AND THE BALKANS: SECESSIONISM, EUROCENTRIC PARTITIONING

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From Bosnias crisis to Balkan fragmentation

Recent developments around the leadership of Republika Srpska, including its intensified secessionist rhetoric and high-profile external contacts, have once again propelled Bosnia and Herzegovina to the forefront of regional security debates. These moves are frequently treated as a narrowly defined constitutional dispute within a single post-conflict state, to be managed through incremental sanctions or diplomatic pressure. This commentary starts from a different premise: it asks how secessionist pressures in Bosnia intersect with the broader ways in which Europe has conceptualised and organised the Balkans over the past three decades. It argues that the current crisis is inseparable from a longer-standing pattern of divisive labels, fragmented integration tracks, and semi-peripheral statuses that weaken regional coherence and leave Bosnia in a structurally vulnerable grey zone.[1]

Dayton framework, secessionism, and external actors

The Dayton Peace Agreement ended the Bosnian war in 1995 by creating a highly decentralized but formally unified state composed of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, under an ethnically based power □□□□□□□□ constitutional framework that entrenched ethnic power □□□□□□□□ at all levels. Within this framework, Republika Srpska enjoys extensive autonomy but remains legally bound to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with no explicit right to secede. Over the past decade, however, its leadership has repeatedly used secessionist rhetoric, vetoes, and institutional obstruction to challenge central institutions, while deepening political and symbolic alignment with external patrons, most notably Russia. These moves exploit ambiguities and veto points in the post-Dayton order, as well as Bosnias incomplete progress toward EU and NATO integration, turning constitutional safeguards and integration conditionality into levers for continued leverage and destabilization.[2]

Divisive policies and the Western Balkans construct

Building on this post □□□□□□ context, external approaches to the region are often perceived as reinforcing fragmentation rather than overcoming it. The entrenched use of the Western Balkans label, along with differentiated integration roadmaps and ad hoc groupings, tends to separate a handful of states from the wider Balkan whole and to frame them as a semi □□□□□□□□□ appendage to the European project. In conceptual terms, this vocabulary weakens the idea of the Balkans as a coherent historical and political space, replacing it with a set of loosely managed sub □□□□□□□□ For Bosnia and Herzegovina, this has translated into a prolonged grey zone: a country that is repeatedly affirmed as a partner and candidate, yet whose integration advances in fits and starts, leaving it structurally exposed to external pressure, internal secessionist leverage, and chronic institutional fragility.[3]

Bosnias stalled integration and secessionist leverage

Against this backdrop, Bosnias internal design and external trajectory together create a particularly fertile environment for secessionist leverage. The consociational, ethnicity □□□□□ power □□□□□□□ system entrenched by Dayton guarantees representation but also provides multiple institutional choke points through which secession □□□□□□ elites in key entities can block decision □□□□□□ or hollow out state competencies. When this is combined with slow, conditional, and often reversible progress toward EU and other forms of integration, obstruction becomes a low □□□□ strategy: it rarely leads to decisive sanctions, yet it keeps Bosnia in a grey zone that external actors can exploit. As long as political arrangements reward delay and brinkmanship, and integration incentives remain distant or ambiguous, calls for partition or de facto separation will recur as effective tools of pressure rather than as marginal or self-defeating tactics.[4]

A Balkan-wide integration approach

Against this cumulative background, responding to Bosnias crisis requires moving beyond episodic sanctions and reactive crisis management toward a regionally coherent strategy. Such an approach would treat the Balkans as a political whole rather than as a set of segmented sub □□□□□□□□ and would prioritise institutional arrangements that reinforce Bosnia and Herzegovinas sovereignty and functionality while offering a credible, time □□□□□ path toward deeper integration. Instead of normalising permanent interim formulas and open □□□□□ transition statuses, European and international actors should aim to close the grey zone that enables secessionist brinkmanship. Abandoning fragmenting labels and double standards, and fostering regional cooperation explicitly on a Balkan basis, would help undercut both partitionist agendas and the room for manoeuvre enjoyed by external powers seeking to instrumentalise Bosnias institutional vulnerabilities.[5]

Resisting partition, restoring regional coherence

Taken together, these dynamics show that secessionist projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not merely the product of local political opportunism, but are closely linked to broader conceptual and institutional fragmentation in the Balkans. A policy environment that tolerates ambiguous labels, semi □□□□□□□□□□ statuses, and permanent transitional arrangements inadvertently sustains the grey zone in which threats of partition and de facto separation can thrive. Safeguarding peace and legal order, therefore, requires more than defending Dayton on paper: it calls for resisting partitionist narratives, closing the space for secessionist blackmail by clarifying Bosnias integration horizon, and re □□□□□□□□□ external engagement in a coherent understanding of the Balkans as an integrated region rather than a loose collection of sub-segments.

*Picture: Eurasiareview

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To cite this article: TULUN, Teoman Ertuğrul. 2026. "BOSNIA AND THE BALKANS: SECESSIONISM, EUROCENTRIC PARTITIONING." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Commentary No.2026 / 12. February 17. Accessed November 24, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/BOSNIA-AND-THE-BALKANS-SECESSIONISM-EUROCENTRIC-PARTITIONING

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