

When Russian linkages meet domestic interests: The
Rise of the Russian vector in foreign policy of
Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explain the rise of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. Bosnia and Herzegovina has traditionally been oriented to the West and the country's main goal was integration into the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Over time and due to various reasons, this integration has stagnated and thereby opened the way for foreign actors to project their influence, mainly detrimental to Bosnia. Russia is one of those countries whose actions and presence in Bosnian foreign policy form the focus of this research. While there are several explanations that show the role and actions of Russia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, none of them seems sufficient. This thesis will argue that two, independent and complementary explanations are, in fact, better able to explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. The first explanation views Russian influence through the lens of linkages, ranging from political to cultural, as the cause of the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. The second explanation focuses on the role of some members of the Bosnian political elite whose interests significantly determine the degree of the Russian vector's presence in Bosnian foreign policy. This thesis finds that it is rather the combination of the above two explanations that can provide a general conclusion about the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. It contributes to the existing literature by integrating already existing, general explanations into a unique mechanism that highlights reasons behind the increased presence of Russia in Bosnian foreign policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is part of the Western Balkan club of countries, has traditionally been oriented towards the West as its most important foreign policy vector. Since the war in Bosnia ended, in 1995, the country was aiming to integrate into Western economic, security, cultural institutionalized structures such as the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that carried the promise of development and, most importantly, stability. It is these actors, along with individual countries such as the US, UK with whom Bosnia has close relations, that the thesis groups under the label “West” and “Western vector of foreign policy”. Over time, the integration into EU and NATO gradually dropped down on the Bosnia’s foreign policy agenda, and paved the way for other foreign actors, especially Russia, to emerge that do not carry the same promise as the West does.

Explaining the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy therefore becomes of central importance. Russian influence on Bosnia raises the perception that Bosnian foreign policy is becoming multi-vectoral. This foreign policy multi-vectoriness is visible both through governmental actions and in elite discourses as regards foreign policy dimension. An example of this is the EU Commission country report (2021). In the report, it is said that Bosnia has made limited or no progress at all in areas deemed crucial for progressing on EU integration tracks. The perspective of EU integration is still existing but recently, there is growing Euroscepticism among Bosnians (Karcic 2021). The question that this thesis addresses is how to explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multivectoral foreign policy. Therefore, the dependent variable is the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multivectoral foreign policy.

While previous studies detected the change in the vectors of Bosnian foreign policy, they mainly sought to explain the fading of the Western vector and blamed the EU itself. These studies argued that more frequent actions by EU member states aiming to block enlargement efforts in EU institutions have led to a decline of EU's transformative power (Bieber and Tzifakis 2019).

This claim has been voiced also during the term of EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker who pointed to EU enlargement fatigue and made it clear that no enlargement will occur during his term in office (Rexha 2019). EU enlargement fatigue is not the only EU-related explanation for the exclusion of Bosnia from the EU. Another explanation points to the EU's weak transformative power. Vachudova (2019) highlights the inability of the EU to successfully use its leverage to forward its goals of combating corruption and enhancing the rule of law, but also its enforcement inability that ultimately resulted in requirements left unfulfilled or partially fulfilled.

However, these EU-related explanations are not sufficient as they tell only part of the story. The thesis argues that, for Bosnia, the lack of EU membership cannot be the only reason that explains the presence of the Russian vector. Moreover, the EU internal dynamics cannot explain active involvement of foreign actors, such as Russia, China and Turkey, in Bosnian politics. These authoritarian actors are trying to present themselves as alternatives to Western democratic values and integration processes. Out of these actors, the thesis will focus on Russia because it is considered to be the most assertive foreign actor in Bosnia. Furthermore, these efforts are also supported by part of the Bosnian political elite for whom Russia is the better option for their own interests such as power preservation. This addresses the research question by pointing to the influences of domestic elites and illiberal external actors on Bosnian foreign policy.

Hence, addressing the changes in the vectors of Bosnian foreign policy, the primary goal is to explain the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy since 1995 until the present by looking at official foreign policy documents, excerpts of elite speeches and foreign policy actions by both states. The thesis elaborates two complementing explanations. The first explanation sees the presence of the Russian vector as an outcome of Russian influence. Russia not only tries to fill the void left by the EU but actively works to increase its presence and influence in Bosnian politics. Therefore, this thesis treats Russia as a cause of changing Bosnian foreign policy. Russia increases its presence by deliberately influencing Bosnia through multiple channels, ranging from economy

to culture, but there are also activities which are not visible to the public eye (Bieber and Tzifakis 2019). In fact, it is often these kinds of activities that are most consequential.

The second explanation sees multi-vector foreign policy as a result of domestic elites' own interests. These explanations are, this thesis argues, not isolated from each other but combine to produce the specific outcome. With the focus on these two explanations the thesis challenges the literature that points to EU-related causes of multi-vectorness, namely the EU enlargement fatigue and Bosnia's lack of membership perspective, and the Western Balkans in general. The thesis uses process tracing to find the underlying causal mechanism that explains the research question. Three hypotheses, two of them related to independent variables separately while the third is a combination of two, are tested. The thesis finds that Russian influence and domestic elite interests alone cannot explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy over the observed period, from 1995 until the present. It is rather the combination of Russian influence, seen through linkages across various sectors, and part of the domestic elites' interests that can explain the, now, increased presence of the Russian vector of Bosnian foreign policy.

The outcome that the thesis wants to explain is the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. The increasing appearance of the Russian vector in Bosnia's traditional pro-Western foreign policy is embedded into the literature on post-Soviet cases that exemplify a similar starting point for the case of Bosnia. This regards the specific geopolitical location, commonalities as regards evolution of the political system but also the interplay between several foreign actors in domestic politics. For example, multi-vectoral foreign policy in the case of Ukraine is, among other things, linked with the existence of internal competing constituencies whereby some of them orient towards Russia while others towards the West. The same is true for Bosnia where the Bosnian Serb ethnic group identifies more with Russia than with the West.

One can find in contemporary literature a close overview of what exactly constitutes Russian influence in foreign countries. For instance, Huskic (2019) outlines three dimensions along

which Russian influence is projected in Bosnia. One of them relates to purely economic interests through investments in the energy sector while the other involves identity politics in the sense that Russia tries to appeal to people who share the same religious and cultural outlook. The final dimension is that of power politics, whereby Bosnia is seen as the battle between major powers over influence. While there is literature showing Russian channels of influence in Bosnia, but also in the whole region, so far there has not been an attempt to link those influences with the phenomenon of multi-vector foreign policy. Related to measuring Russian influence, there is the concept of linkage and leverage by Levitsky and Way (2005) which enables one to measure a country's vulnerability to foreign leverage and also see the density of ties.

The second explanation is embedded in the literature on elites and elite discourse. The latter presents studies looking at populist frames and discourses used by the president of the smaller Bosnian entity, Republic of Srpska (RS) which encourage the polarization of an already divided Bosnian society (Weichselbaumer and Gyula 2019). This polarization, which is both constitutionally embedded and co-created by elites, can be also seen as one of the factors making Bosnia fertile ground for Russian influences and tilting the country towards the Russian vector of foreign policy. This thesis looks at the most relevant discourses, excerpts of speeches by elites that help explain the outcome.

The next chapter more precisely links contemporary research with the independent and dependent variables to see whether and how the case fits or not into these research findings. The second chapter presents the research design while the third one consists of a thorough empirical analysis of the case study. In the final chapter this thesis will summarize the findings and present limitations and avenues for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to embed this thesis into contemporary literature that will highlight the main theoretical strands which are going to be used to answer the research question. It is divided into five subsections. The first one looks at foreign policy in general but also at specific ways in which it is going to be considered in the thesis. The second subsection highlights one particular type of foreign policy, multivectoral foreign policy. Then, the third subsection moves to show what constitutes Russian influence and how it can be manifested. The penultimate subsection talks about the link between elites and multivectoral foreign policy and finally, the last subsection presents the well-known concept of linkage and leverage.

1.1. FOREIGN POLICY

Understood as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor in international relations” (Hill 2003, 3), foreign policy will be considered here both as action but also as discourse. Foreign policy as discourse excludes all other foreign policy actions and looks at policies as outcomes of varying discourses (Larsen 2018). In this case, the thesis looks if and how do discourses by Bosnian elites produce or affect foreign policy orientations. In opposition to discourse, by foreign policy action the thesis follows Rosenau's (1976, 17) concept of foreign policy as “an activity” of state behavior in the international arena with regards to its own “orientations, plans and commitments”. The thesis elaborates this more precisely in the third chapter.

Foreign policy studies the interaction of various actors, ranging from states to individuals, in an international setting but is also a product of combined internal and external factors that make foreign policy (Alden and Aran 2016). It is affected by both, internal and external, policies but also as historical, ideological and other attributes that direct foreign policy-makers in a specific policy direction. In the case of Bosnia, foreign policy is additionally affected by ethnic group interests but more specifically, by the international community personified in the institution of the High

Representative (OHR) that came as a result of the Dayton Accords which makes Bosnia a rather exceptional case to study.

The complex Bosnian political system can also be seen as bearing responsibility for the lack of compliance with the requirements set out by the EU. Vachudova (2019) points out that it is domestic political parties that are mainly responsible for explaining (non)compliance with the EU except for Bosnia due to its complex institutional political structure. Dzihic and Wieser (2011) explain the lack of compliance with the EU on the part of the Bosnian political elite by showing the risk, that such compliance entails, of losing power domestically while this power per se relies on ethno-nationalism.

A theoretical offshoot of International Relations (IR) theory that emerged out of a need to look beyond state-centrism but instead on groups of actors, whose main importance lies in the foreign policy decision-making realm is Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). One of the most important works that form the basis of FPA is the book by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (1954) which departed from the usual, IR perception, of the state as a unitary actor and focused on human decision-makers. They equalized the state with human decision-makers by arguing that “State action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state. Hence, the state is its decision-makers” (Snyder et al. 1954, 36-7). Foreign policies of states are influenced by international but also domestic factors that shape its content (Hill 2013). These factors go beyond economic explanations and include decisionmakers' attitudes, emotions, perceptions, values that shape the outcome of their decisions (Singer and Hudson 2020). The recent Bosnian history is characterized by war and destruction while the country politically still functions on the basis of the post-war Dayton peace accords. Therefore, it is logical to argue that this certainly influences decisions taken by the Bosnian political elite.

The task of formulating foreign policy gets more complicated in states where there are multiple diverging interests and preferences. The FPA approach unpacks the black box of states

and identifies individual and collective actors, such as government agencies that, under conditions of bounded rationality, influence the policies that states take in particular circumstances (Hudson and Vore 1995). In our case, the thesis looks at these collective actors such as the political elite of Bosnia that influence foreign policy. In general, it is assumed that citizens have more limited knowledge about their country's foreign policy than domestic policy which implies that foreign affairs are the concern of a small circle of people (Novotny 2010).

In Bosnia, foreign policy formulation is the duty of the three-member Presidency that consists of one representative from each constitutive ethnic group (Bosniak, Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat). However, this thesis argues that they decide on foreign policy exclusively with their own agenda in mind rather than that of the ethnic group which they represent but also other ethnic groups that share overlapping interests. Hill (2013), while criticizing the concept of national interest on objectivity grounds, supports this line of argumentation by attributing executive dominance over foreign policy-making to complexities inherent in democratic systems. This thesis can make the conclusion that the executive dominance over foreign policy is attributable to the dysfunctionality of the Bosnian consociational, power-sharing system but that it also leads to the failure to formulate a coherent national foreign policy due to competing ethnic interests.

1.2. MULTIVECTORAL FOREIGN POLICY

As Huskic (2019) notes, post-war Bosnian foreign policy was strongly oriented, both in terms of ideological values and national interests, towards the West. By West this thesis means actors and structures that share a liberal democratic agenda such as the European Union (EU) and NATO, but also individual Western countries, most importantly the US, that support Bosnian integration into this club of actors. The thesis will not present these actors as individual vectors of foreign policy. Instead, they are grouped into one, pro-Western foreign policy vector for the sake of simplification. The thesis argues that there is an increasing presence of the Russian foreign policy vector in the traditional single-vector, pro-Western Bosnian foreign policy.

In the literature on foreign policy, there is a scholarly discussion about foreign policy vectors and empirical cases of countries that pursue multivectoral foreign policies. While there is not yet a clear definition of multivectoral foreign policy, several attempts have been made to conceptualize the term. In one of these cases, Vanderhill et al. (2020, 976-7) define multivector foreign policy as “a policy that develops foreign relations through a framework based on a pragmatic, non-ideological foundation”. For the purposes of this thesis, this definition includes not just pragmatic reasons for developing multi-vector foreign policies, but also ideological, cultural/identity and religious ones. Kurc (2018) adds political, security and cultural resources that shape a state's foreign policy direction.

In studies on the multi-vectoral foreign policies in post-Soviet states, a common finding is that such policies emerged as a result of strategic competition between Russia and the EU (Gnedina 2015). A similar argument for Bosnia can be made, where multiple foreign actors, due to their power projecting ability, influence foreign policies of the whole Western Balkan region (Rasidagic 2013).

One can argue that countries pursuing multivectoralism lack a common national interest due to their divergent commitments in the international arena which does not enable them to develop long-term foreign policy strategies. Looking at the case study of Bosnia, the three ethnic communities comprising the state all have competing interests as regards both domestic and foreign policy issues. Since Bosnia emerged out of the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, the previous communist ideology was overtaken by nationalism which was embraced by all three ethnic groups. A similar case is outlined by Kuzio (2003), who views multivectoralism as a product of confused, unclear national identities that resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union but also because newly independent post-Soviet countries were led by Soviet-era, ideologically amorphous elites.

1.3. RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ABROAD

In order to understand the tools Russia has at its disposal for influencing other states or even whole regions, this thesis needs to look at literature that analyses how states can stall democratization efforts and even promote authoritarianism in other countries. This also means looking beyond domestic explanations for authoritarian persistence and low levels of democracy. The case of Russia is well researched in this literature which generally refers to countries such as China, Saudi Arabia and Russia as some of those that provide favors and support for fellow autocrats (Yakouchyk 2019). Concepts that so far tried to explain these influences are authoritarian diffusion, promotion, collaboration and autocracy support but this thesis will not be describing each of them since this goes beyond the limits of this thesis. In addition to this, it is still not clear in the literature whether authoritarian powers intentionally try to promote their own model of governance or whether they pursue economic and geopolitical objectives that might be conflated with authoritarian promotion efforts (Way 2015). What the thesis can draw from these concepts is the fact that there are activities, intentional or not and manifested through various means, that go in the direction of preserving and encouraging authoritarianism in other countries.

A common name used by many authors to denote actors that support authoritarianism abroad and stall democratic efforts is the term “black knights” coined by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010). Tolstrup (2015) speaks of Russia playing the role of a black knight in the elections of some post-Soviet countries by using various means. Some of them include intensive support for their preferred, pro-Russian candidate as was the case of the Ukrainian 2004 presidential elections through campaign financing and threatening opposition candidates. While many studies have been done on Russia's black knight role in countries like Ukraine and Belarus, other regions were less studied but not neglected. For instance, Natalizia (2019) shows a multiplicity of strategies that Russia uses in the South Caucasus to bolster authoritarianism. He points to strategies ranging from soft power whereby Russia wants to present itself and its culture in a positive light to material

support for pro-Russian office holders. In a similar vein, Melnykovska et al. (2012) show, among other things, how Russia reaches out to Russian minorities in Central Asia by way of soft power strategies such as Russian culture and language promotion. The same authors also point to the potential use of Russian military force if proved necessary.

From this brief overview of Russian influence on foreign countries, the thesis can draw several conclusions. One of them is the active engagement of Russia in such efforts and the great variety of tools at its disposal. These include, but are not limited to, material support used for endorsing pro-Russian incumbents and their electoral campaigns, the threat of military force and soft power strategies. Russia uses a combination of these and many other tools to pursue its authoritarian promotion, anti-democratic agenda or pure geopolitical interests. As this thesis will show later, a number of these Russian tools and ways of influence are also visible in our Bosnian case. Here, Russia engages to counter the EU and NATO integration paths of Bosnia by actions that involve even parts of the Bosnian political elite which, similar to some post-Soviet incumbents, embraces Russian influence.

1.4. ELITE EXPLANATIONS OF MULTI-VECTORAL FOREIGN POLICY

Before showing how elites can influence changes of foreign policy, the thesis first needs to know what elites are, how are they differentiated and on what sources they draw their power from. The concept of elite inevitability is common to prominent, early elite theorists such as Robert Michels (1915), Vilfredo Pareto (1916) and Gaetano Mosca (1939)

The concept of elite inevitability is, in essence, a reaction or response to Marxist theories that entailed an egalitarian outcome for societies but also an acknowledgement that complex, modern societies are governed by “enlightened elites” (Higley and Burton 2006, 4). This raised questions about elite types, (trans)formation, behavior and differences between them across cases. Bozoki (2003) argues that research into elites has flourished as a result of scholarly interest in regime change and regime transitions to democracy which was considered to be an elite-driven

process. Pareto (1916) understood individuals who outperformed others or excelled in their spheres of interest or activity, be it science, arts, as elites. He further divided this elite group into two: the governing elite and non-governing elite (Pareto 1916).

Robert Putnam (1976) linked his typology on political elites with regime types and associated the consensual elite type with Communist regimes, the competitive with democratic and coalescent elites in multiethnic regimes. It seems that the latter greatly resembles the Bosnian political elite because it assumes elite cooperation in divided societies through, for instance, political parties that represent different interests (Hoffmann-Lange 2018). However, in order to avoid differentiating among multiple types of Bosnian ethnic elites, the thesis will use the concept of politically-relevant elite (PRE) (Perthes 2004) which, as the name suggests, can encompass ethnic, economic, religious and all other types of elites into a single one. The key is that their decision-making is relevant for the country.

Gnedina (2015), in her paper about multivectoral foreign policies of Ukraine, speaks of domestic elites' roles in multivectoralism as a combination of short-term goals and playing multiple external actors against each other by, for instance, threatening with switching loyalty to the other side. This latter logic implies that the more a state is tied or linked with an external actor the less room it has to negotiate with other external actors or orient itself towards another foreign policy vector.

For instance, while the elite member representing ethnic Serbs is considered to be the strongest supporter of Russia in Bosnia, at the same time he is being targeted for sanctions by the EU for engaging in secessionist attempts (Trkanjec 2022). In the Bosnian context, the member of the elite representing ethnic Croats, is seen as a Russian proxy in Bosnia while simultaneously making pro-EU statements (Gadzo 2022). Since the Bosnian political elite is composed of three ethnic elites, each has its own interests to pursue. Apart from the obvious one, to preserve power, both the Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb ethnic elites are taking actions that undermine the

Bosnian state institutions. The ultimate aim of these actions is to either secede from Bosnia, best seen in the case of Bosnian Serb elite actions, but also the Bosnian Croat one and, with regards to the latter, to create a third, Bosnian Croat, federal entity within Bosnia.

1.5. LEVERAGE AND LINKAGE

Levitsky and Way (2010), while acknowledging various attempts at explaining international influences on democratization and, more generally, Western democracy promotion efforts, develop their own framework of leverage and linkage. This analytical framework aims to account for many deficiencies of previous concepts such as their lack of explanatory power in terms of variation but also to integrate them into a coherent, more nuanced framework. Their concept has not only been applied to explain Western democracy promotion but also of autocracy (Beyer and Wolff 2016). Levitsky and Way use the concept to explain that the various degrees of Western democracy promotion success are highly influenced by different degrees of leverage and linkage which, according to them, refer to different things. However, there is space to argue that the dividing line between leverage and linkage is often blurred and lacking additional nuance. Next, the thesis will briefly address both, leverage and linkage, to see what they refer and also mention one of the most prominent critiques and adjustments of it.

Western leverage is defined as “governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 40). There are structural elements that can determine the degree of leverage, that is, the ability of the target state to resist Western leverage. These elements include a country's geographical size but also of its economy, the presence of different strategic, foreign policy objectives on the side of the democratizing country and lastly, the presence of “black knights” that refer to powers that have the potential to curb democratizing pressure in third countries due to the strength of their political, diplomatic, military, economic tools (Levitsky and Way 2010, 41). The authors acknowledged that leverage cannot be a sufficient explanation of

democratization on its own and therefore introduced the linkage dimension to which this thesis now turns.

Levitsky and Way (2010, 43) define linkage as “the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) among particular countries and the United States, the EU (and pre-2004 EU members), and Western-dominated multilateral institutions.” The role of linkages is of main importance in explaining the success of external democratization efforts and the concept's originators have also made a division of these linkages six criteria or dimensions ranging from economic to social linkages. But the concept is not flawless either. Critics, such as Lebanidze (2020), point to the fact that indicators used for measuring are distinguished but, in reality, can be attributed to both leverage and linkage. Tolstrup (2013) criticizes linkages, among other things, because of their inherent determinism and instead provides an upgraded framework that takes also agency into account, not just structural factors. He (2013, 718) proposes the concept of “gatekeeper elites” which “actively facilitate or constrain ties to external actors”. This concept puts more light on domestic elites and how their particular interests drive them to behave differently towards external actors.

The thesis will apply and further elaborate on some aspects of this concept, leverage and linkage, in the Bosnian and Russian cases, in the empirical analysis in Chapter 3 since it largely explains some Bosnian political elite behavior not caught with other theories. The next chapter is about research design where the research question coupled with hypotheses, methods and operationalization will be analyzed in greater detail. There, the thesis will situate the research in methodological terms which will serve as a blueprint for the empirical analysis.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

After having established the theoretical ground or basis from which this thesis will depart, in this chapter, the thesis aims to set the stage for the empirical analysis part. Here, the thesis provides methodological details that direct the empirical analysis. This chapter consists of two sections. The first one contains the outline of the research question, three hypotheses that were developed from it, operationalization of dependent and independent variables and, finally, the justification for using process tracing as the research method. The second section outlines the case justification and the time frame under study.

2.1. RESEARCH QUESTION, HYPOTHESES, METHOD AND OPERATIONALIZATION

As already noted, empirical observations point to a change in Bosnian foreign policy. While Bosnia has been traditionally oriented towards pro-Western actors and structures, exemplified by the EU and NATO, over the last decade especially, this reality today encompasses the presence of other foreign policy vectors, especially the Russian vector. Having in mind the fact that multiple actors are making inroads into Bosnian both, domestic and foreign, politics, it leads us to think that multi-vector foreign policy is now the norm in Bosnian foreign policy. Therefore, the research question that this thesis wants to answer is “How can we explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multivectoral foreign policy?”

The thesis argues that there are two complementary explanations to this question. The first explanation is external in that it centers on the Russian influence on Bosnia and it sees the presence of the Russian vector as an outcome of Russian influence. The second explanation is domestically oriented because it looks at the role of the domestic, political elite that actually instrumentalizes Russian influence for its own purposes. This thesis assumes that this elite is not just passive to Russian influence but that it actually has the ability to instrumentalize it according to their own interests. By instrumentalization this thesis means that elites either embrace Russian influence or not. Therefore, this thesis will test three hypotheses:

H1: Russian influence has affected the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multi-vectoral foreign policy

H2: The interests of some members of the Bosnian political elite have resulted in an increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multi-vectoral foreign policy

H3: A combination of Russian influence and Bosnian political elite interests has resulted in an increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multi-vectoral foreign policy

The three hypotheses are very general but the thesis acknowledges that empirical reality and the answer to our research question is much more complex than these hypotheses. In order to catch this complexity, the thesis will use abduction or the combined use of deduction and induction which is one of the hallmarks of explaining-outcome process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2019). This research has some hunches about possible causes of the outcome but one cannot know how exactly they affect the outcome. Therefore, after an empirical analysis one will be able to see a simplified, general causal mechanism.

In order to explain the causal mechanism that links Russian influence and elite explanations to a change in Bosnian foreign policy, this thesis will do process-tracing which is well suited for this exploratory study. Tracing the causal mechanisms that explain a specific outcome is the goal of explaining-outcome process tracing which is also case-centric. In this process-tracing approach, “theories are tested to see whether they can provide a minimally sufficient explanation that accounts for an outcome, with no redundant parts” (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 63). Explaining-outcome process tracing also means that different causes only together produce the outcome. But, in this research, the thesis also wants to look at how does each causal mechanism on its own influence the outcome. However, our third hypothesis suggests that none of these individual causes in the first two hypotheses alone, is sufficient to explain the outcome but rather a combination of the two.

One can already see that this research design also has elements of theory-building process tracing whose differences with explaining-outcome process tracing are often blurred. In of the usages of theory-building process tracing, one does know the outcome but is not sure about the causes which is true in our case. Also, as Beach and Pedersen (2019, 154) show, “A sufficient explanation is not being built; instead, a relatively parsimonious mechanism is uncovered that contributes to Y occurring but does not fully explain it.” This thesis will collect evidence inductively, in a bottom-up fashion and try to make a simplified, general explanation of why Russian influence or domestic elites or both of them combined produced the outcome. Also, the presence of different process tracing elements (from theory-building and explaining-outcome process tracing) in our research design suggests that this thesis also uses existing observations and findings, including a deductive element, to inform our inductive collection of empirical data. The next paragraph begins with operationalization of the dependent and independent variables.

The thesis operationalizes the dependent variable through foreign policy as it is defined in official foreign policy documents and elite discourse. The former include only two in the Bosnian case, the 2003 and 2018 foreign policy strategies, because there are no more. In the Russian case, there are multiple strategies but only a few of them mention the region of which Bosnia is part. The independent variables are operationalized through foreign policy understood as actions. The dependent variable, the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy, is much in line with Vanderhill et al.s’ (2020) definition, which refers to a foreign relations policy that Bosnia develops with Russia through a framework based on political, economic, cultural and religious foundations. The thesis analyzes, besides foreign policy actions and discourses, official foreign policy documents that will help to operationalize the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy since 1995 until the present.

In order to conceptualize Russian influence, this thesis looks at it through linkages, inspired by Levitsky and Way’s (2005) concept of leverage and linkage, which is elaborated in the chapter on the theoretical framework. Similar to their definition of linkage, this thesis refers to linkages as

the density and type of ties between Russia and Bosnia. By showing the density of ties, this concept will enable one to link it with the direction that Bosnian foreign policy is assumed to have taken. Therefore, this thesis will not directly apply the framework of leverage and linkage but use it as a reference point for our own approach.

To conceptualize the domestic elites the thesis looks at Jakub Tolstrup's framework of "gatekeeper elites". Tolstrup (2013) criticized Levitsky and Way's framework for giving primacy to structures instead of looking also at "gatekeeper elites" which are not only recipients of external influence but active players that facilitate and constrain those ties. The gatekeeper elites are in our case not a separate elite but refer to the Bosnian political elite. This thesis will look at the politically relevant elite (PRE) as developed by Volker Perthes (2004). This concept is more inclusive in the sense that it can cover individuals from all backgrounds and by judging whether their power and influence are considered relevant in politics. Perthes (2004, 5) defines the PRE as "people in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision-making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values, and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues."

This thesis will look at some members of the Bosnian Presidency and entity Presidents as composing the Bosnian politically relevant elite (Bosnian political elite) because foreign policy is the domain of the Presidency. However, it is important to bear in mind that the Presidency is composed of members that represent different ethnic groups hence interests while the decision-making is conditioned by consensus among the members. The Bosnian elite actions consist of actions aimed at embracing and strengthening Russian ties and those that aim to further their agenda of secessionism and preserving of power.

2.2. CASE SELECTION AND TIME FRAME

This thesis puts the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia) in focus due to a number of reasons. Most studies on multi-vectoral foreign policies use cases from the post-Soviet region. The Western Balkan region, of which Bosnia is part, shares many features that make countries candidates for pursuing multiple vectors of foreign policy. It is to these that this thesis now turns.

Both regions were once part of large, communist federations which broke up accompanied by bloody wars, more so in the case of the Yugoslav federation, followed by the creation of weak, newly independent states ridden with identity and many other issues (Anastasakis 2022). After the bloody conflicts of the 1990s, the EU engaged in an effort to promote a liberal democratic and economic agenda with the ultimate aim to integrate the region and thereby prevent the possible occurrence of new conflicts (Bieber and Tzifakis 2019). Bosnia, not only due to its small territory and population and many problems associated with regimes in transition, can be regarded as a small state because, as Hill (2003) notes, the prosperity and even survival of small states depends on external actors and international organizations which is, to a certain degree, true for Bosnia.

It is common for small states to seek shelter in larger multilateral security organizations and alliances or even pick military neutrality, as is the case with Serbia (Kovacevic 2019). Bosnia embraced European integration as one of its highest foreign policy priorities while the potential integration into NATO is stalled because the willingness to join runs along ethnic lines in Bosnia whereby the Bosnian Serb population strongly opposes NATO integration (Bieber and Tzifakis 2019; Gadzo and Karcic 2019). The EU enlargement process carries with it a promise of significant political and economic development but for some, such as entrenched domestic ruling elites in the Western Balkans, it is a threat to their status (Vachudova 2015).

During the past two decades, external factors, such as the Eurozone and migration crises, Brexit, Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, US foreign policy reorientation towards Asia and many others, have resulted in the EU enlargement process significantly slowing down

(Flessenkemper and Kmezic 2019). Over the years, these factors have resulted in the flourishing of illiberal politics, corruption, state capture in Western Balkan countries but also in a void that other, non-Western actors try to fill, pushing the region further away from Euro-Atlantic integrations (Boskovic et al. 2015).

Bosnian foreign policy is much more complex than those of other Western Balkan states. The prime reason is the complex political structure that was enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement after the 1990s war ended whereby the country was politically divided among its three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats (Huskic 2014). The complex political system of Bosnia, which is composed of two entities and three ethnic groups sharing power makes it very vulnerable to foreign influences. Each ethnic group has its own interests with regard to both domestic and foreign policy although there are no accounts about Bosniak members of the elite pursuing a pro-Russian agenda. The veto powers, inherent in the Bosnian constitution, make it easy for one group to block interests of others and vice versa.

Since the war ended, the political parties representing these main ethnic groups held power most of the time, while other parties held power only in minor stints in the 1990s and 2000s (Bieber 2018). Since Bosnia is considered to be a consociational democracy, sharing power along ethnic lines and each of these having veto powers, any policy-making is inherently complex since it requires consensus among ethnic representatives in state institutions. The sponsoring of the Dayton Peace Agreement by external actors but also the ability of the international community to affect the way politics is conducted in Bosnia, through the Office of the High Representative, adds another layer of complexity with regards to foreign policy making (Rasidagic 2013). If one looks at the Bosnian constitution, foreign policy making is the responsibility of the three-member Presidency which implies that each member basically pursues and represents his ethnic groups' interests which, more often than not, are in conflict with other groups' interests (Hasic and Karabegovic 2019).

There are several factors which make Bosnia prone to foreign influences. Rasidagic (2013) also notes that members of the Bosnian Presidency have an informal agreement among them over diplomatic, ambassadorial appointments abroad which adds to the belief that institutions are being privatized by its holders. Recently, it has been argued that Russia utilizes this lack of consensus on strategic issues, such as NATO accession of Bosnia, by destabilizing the country through the Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency (Gadzo and Karcic 2019). It is through the Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency, that Russia has de facto influence over Bosnia as a whole (Bieri 2015). The assumed change of Bosnian foreign policy towards multiple vectors is not a single event but rather an ongoing process seen through the lens of increased links with actors that do not fall within the pro-Western foreign policy vector. One can conclude that Bosnia is the most likely case for Russian influence to change Bosnian foreign policy. More specifically, the institution of the High Representative and the Peace Implementation Council, which provides guidance to the former, enables multiple foreign actors to voice their own preferences with regards to Bosnian politics.

By giving foreign actors the means, through participation in the PIC, to affect Bosnian politics, this also can imply a preference for one ethnic group over the other but also for the Bosnian nation as a whole. Therefore, the foreign influences on Bosnia are actually given and embedded into its post-war peace settlement provisions. Burg and Shoup (2015) highlight, through the lens of power-sharing, that ethnic elites have institutional veto powers and the sole preserve to define what constitutes their group's vital interest. One can argue that this gives them the ability to instrumentalize foreign influence. These formal veto powers, embedded in the Bosnian constitution, strong party leadership and personalization of ethnic parties is furthered by a third factor which is ethnic elite control over media (Hasic 2020).

The thesis argues that Bosnia has experienced variation with regards to the dependent variable since the war ended in 1995 until the present day which constitutes the period of

observation. The thesis will divide the dependent variable three subperiods that reflect the dynamic of Russian vector presence in Bosnian foreign policy. Therefore, the periodization is not made for the primary purpose of comparing periods but rather is a longitudinal analysis. The latter implies looking at the same case through different periods of time and it is also, according to Robert Yin (2018), one of the rationales for doing a single-case study.

The period starting from 1995 is important because the Dayton Agreement, which ended war in Bosnia, was signed and one of several countries that witnessed to the Agreement were Russia but also the EU as an organization. The late 1990s were also a period when the Euro-Atlantic integration of Bosnia started. Also, during this time frame there were major events in international relations, such as EU enlargement and Russian annexation of Crimea that echoed in Bosnia in ways that this thesis describes in the empirical analysis section. After providing the methodological foundation of the research in this chapter, the next one, on empirical analysis, will apply methodological tools to the Bosnian case and look for the causal mechanism that gives an answer to this thesis' research question.

CHAPTER 3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, this thesis will look at evidence that points to the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy but also the presence of Bosnia in Russian foreign policy. A timeline where one can differentiate between subperiods, each characterized by varying degrees of Russian presence in Bosnia, will be briefly presented. This chapter links those periods with major turning points that explain the different degrees of Russian presence such as the latter's annexation of Crimea but also tie them to important shifts in the global international arena. Turning points are windows of opportunity that amplify the influence of some factors. What follows next in the analysis, after description of the Russian vector in the subperiod, are the Russian actions during these subperiods after which the thesis looks at Russian specific linkages in general, without attributing them to a subperiod. The third section will look at the alternative, elite-centered explanation where one will see specific instances of how Bosnian elite interests led them to embrace Russia in the hope of fulfilling their interest.

3.1. THE RUSSIAN VECTOR IN BOSNIA

Foreign policy will be operationalized as it is written in official foreign policy documents and elite discourses. This thesis will look at both interchangeably in our subsections. In his conceptualization of foreign policy, James Rosenau (1976) talks about three conceptualizations. The first one sees foreign policy as orientation which refers to main directions that a state may take in the international system and those directions can, for example, be found in a constitution. Then, there is foreign policy as plans and commitments which, as Fatih Tayfur (1994, 116) describes, are “seen as translations of orientations to actual situations”. Finally, Rosenau (1976, 17) conceptualizes foreign policy as an “activity” of state behavior in the international arena with regards to its own “orientations, plans and commitments”.

Applying this conceptualization to the Bosnian case, this thesis can look into the document that was put forward by the Bosnian Presidency in 2003, called “General directions and priorities for implementation of foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina”. In this document, one can see that Bosnian foreign policy will be driven, among others, by a priority to join Euro-Atlantic integration processes. More important for this study, the next article of the same document, on general directions and activities of Bosnian foreign policy, contains a reference to Russia. There, it is written that, “Bosnia and Herzegovina will develop bilateral relations, in particular with the member countries of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, with the USA, Russian Federation, Great Britain, France, China other member countries of the UN Security Council, member countries of the European Union, countries in the region, member countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference and with other countries which significantly contribute to reconstruction and development of BiH” (The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003).

From the specific mention of developing relations with certain countries, one can see that Russia was grouped among countries that contribute to Bosnia's reconstruction and development by way of its participation in the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board whose role is to support peace implementation in Bosnia (OHR 2022). The document follows Rosenau's conceptualization of foreign policy in that it includes principles on which Bosnian foreign policy is based but also general directions and activities, more specific in nature.

During the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, the 1990s, it was a tough period for Russia due to many reasons, mostly because of the bleak economic situation. Russia cut military spending, engaged in multilateral activities led by the US where it was acting as a junior partner rather than an equal but also engaged in UN-led activities related to stopping the war in Bosnia (Schleifer and Treisman 2005). Besides the bleak economic picture of 1990s Russia, the country also suffered from internal ethnic conflicts, like the Chechen one, which further limited Russian ability to play a significant role in the Western Balkans and Bosnia.

The second subperiod was characterized by Vladimir Putin and Dymitry Medvedev's term as presidents of Russia. After winning elections in 2000, the new Russian president, Putin, was seen as someone capable of restoring Russia's great power status and ambitions. It is visible from the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept that its focus lies in addressing then pressing issues, most importantly terrorism and ways to counter it after 9/11. It also suggests a rather modest foreign policy due to Russia's limited capabilities in terms of resources (Smith 2000). No reference is made to Bosnia in this Foreign Policy Concept while references to the Balkans include those relating to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. These were years when Russia was becoming economically stronger due to high oil prices and Putin's market reforms (Tsygankov 2018). This enabled Russia to become more economically engaged in Bosnia as will be presented in the section on Russian actions. After Dimitry Medvedev succeeded Putin as president of Russia in 2008, the Russian approach to Bosnia did not change significantly. Only in the 2013 foreign policy concept were the Balkans mentioned to be of strategic importance.

2014 was marked by the Russian annexation of Crimea which echoed in Bosnia and initiated a period of more intense engagement in the Western Balkans. There are several reasons why Russia intensified its, by then limited, presence in the Western Balkan in general and Bosnia in particular. The first reason regards the fact that the region, of which Bosnia is part, remains one of the last ones left outside Euro-Atlantic integrations which makes it a target for Russia's greater game of undermining the West. As Stronski and Himes (2019) show, preventing the region from integrating into Euro-Atlantic structures would shift the Western focus away from more pressing issues in Russia's near abroad. In addition to this, Russian aggressive foreign policy under Putin, best exemplified through Russian annexation of Crimea raised fears in the West that the Western Balkan might be the next target. Finally, EU enlargement fatigue and lesser US engagement in the region under Donald Trump can be seen as further conditions that facilitated Russian presence in the Balkans and Bosnia. While Russian foreign policy strategies/concepts have been updated more

or less regularly, it was only in 2018 that the Bosnian Presidency adopted a new foreign policy strategy since 2003 (The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018) It is clearly visible that Bosnia's integration into the EU and NATO is of strategic importance. The strategy also acknowledges the changes that happened since its 2003 version, including the cooling relations between Russia and the West.

Notable discourses which highlight the presence and strengthening of the Russian vector can be found already in the 1990s. Yeltsin stated “Someone is trying to solve the Bosnian issue without Russia’s participation. We will not allow that” (Gorskii 2011), which shows that Russia not just allowed, but band wagoned with the US and NATO's policies in Bosnia much to the detriment of Serbs. Later, in the 2000s, in a leaked diplomatic cable from Wikileaks (2007), Titov expresses the need to close the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia. Even before this, in a press statement, Dodik said “Russia is for abolishing Bonn powers of the High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling” (Jutarnji list 2006). In 2007, after an invitation from the US to Dodik and Haris Silajdzic (Bosniak member of Presidency), the former said “U.S.-sponsored talks in Washington this week are unlikely to break the deadlock over reforms in Bosnia” (Stanic 2007).

In 2009, Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sergey Lavrov, visited Bosnia and said “The election of Bosnia to the [UN] Security Council [in October] makes especially relevant the issue of Bosnians taking the fate of their country in their own hands, so they can finally rid themselves of outside supervision”, which is a reiteration of Russia’s opposition to the OHR in Bosnia (Radio Free Europe 2009). The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 was welcomed by Milorad Dodik, then President of Republic of Srpska, who implied that a similar scenario would be possible also in Bosnia. At a news conference in Banja Luka, in 2014, Dodik said “Our next step is the opening of a dialogue ... on the restructuring of Bosnia as a confederation consisting of three states” and “If this proves impossible, Republika Srpska retains the right to hold a referendum on its status” (Reuters 2014).

The period from 2014 is when members of the Bosnian political elite began more openly and frequently stating their support for Russia. In a 2014 meeting with Putin in Russia, Dodik publicly stated his support for Russia. This is visible from the following statement, which is available on the official website of the Russian president (2014): “Naturally, there is no question that we support Russia. We may be a small and modest community, but our voice is loud. While your support has always been important for us”. Dodik said this while he was President of the Republic of Srpska. The 2014 Bosnian Presidency issued an official statement regarding the “political situation in Ukraine”, which was different from Dodik’s regarding the annexation of Crimea. The Presidency “offers full support to efforts aimed at overcoming the current situation and keeping peace and necessary security” (N1 BiH 2022). In instances of Dodik’s threats of holding a referendum, Russia also provided verbal support. Russian ambassador, Petar Ivancov, openly supported such an unconstitutional move by saying “We believe the people of Republika Srpska have the right to declare themselves on vital issues” (Kovacevic et al. 2016). Despite the Constitutional Court ban, the referendum was held in 2016 while days before, Dodik had a meeting with Putin in Moscow after which he said “As for the referendum, there have not been any specific conversations, except for the conclusion that the people have the right to the referendum” (Kovacevic 2016).

3.2. RUSSIAN ACTIONS

The outcome and manifestation of Russian weakness during Yeltsin is best exemplified by Russia voting “yes” on a UNSC Resolution which authorized NATO to intervene in Bosnia (Marten 2018). This was a blow to Russian-Serbian brotherly relations which did not pass without criticism in Russia. After the war in Bosnia ended, Russia was one of the countries that guaranteed the US-brokered Dayton Agreement that ended the war.

Some Russian actions can be regarded as having a positive effect, at least theoretically, in the sense that it participated in preserving the peace in Bosnia. For instance, during the early 2000s,

Russia contributed peacekeeping troops within the NATO-led Stabilization Force in Bosnia until 2003, when Russia withdrew its troops. A reflection of Russian economic power at this time, in the case of Bosnia, is best exemplified by Russia buying two oil refineries, both based in the Bosnian Serb-dominated entity (Garding 2021). From 2006 onwards, when Milorad Dodik became Prime Minister of Bosnia's smaller entity, Russia increasingly supported the latter's secessionist actions. A year later, Bosnia faced a new political crisis over police reform (that aimed to integrate the entity police into one, national police) which ultimately led the then-High Representative, Miroslav Lajcak, to use his Bonn powers (allowing him to make binding decisions) to impose faster decision-making rules which would prevent politicians from blocking state institutions (Moore 2007). This led to protests, from the side of Bosnian Serbs, where one could see among placards a picture of Vladimir Putin.

After the protests, Dodik met Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov in Belgrade after which his rhetoric became even more harsh. This is just one of the meetings after which Dodik, almost always, changes his rhetoric. The latter two can be considered as indications of Russian meddling in domestic affairs of Bosnia in a manner that runs contrary to EU interests to help the country reform. Russia was, as mentioned in the previous section, opposed to the OHR as was Dodik who was pessimistic about reform talks facilitated by the international community, led by the West. This a priori attitude from Dodik can be interpreted as driven by an anti-Western sentiment that follows much the Russian logic of that time, that consisted of opposition to reform brokered by the West. Looking back from this perspective, this move would significantly contribute to Bosnian destabilization, having in mind the political crisis the country was drawn into. It also shows us an early indication of the battle between Russia and the EU through the OHR in Bosnia (Valasek 2008).

The subsequent years were also characterized by meetings between top Russian and some Bosnian officials where Russian opposition to the role of the OHR in Bosnia was further

highlighted. Some meetings were followed by straightforward statements of support for Russia. A natural assumption that one could make from such statements is that Dodik would not speak of secessionism without Russian support, however indirect it may be. His encouragement after Russian annexation of Crimea is indicative of the possibility that Russia may support Dodik if he would attempt a similar strategy. This would certainly open up possibilities of deeper Russian involvement in Bosnian domestic affairs.

The closeness between Dodik and Putin can be seen by looking at the number of meetings they have had. Since 2014, Dodik and Putin have met on multiple occasions. Usually these were instances when Dodik and his party stood for elections at both, entity and state levels. Salvo and De Leon (2018) find that between 2015 and 2018, Dodik and Putin met eight times officially, and possibly many more on the margins. Privileging Dodik over the other two members of the Bosnian Presidency indicates Russia's commitment to the interests of one ethnic group. This also means privileging politicians with an anti-Western foreign policy attitude.

3.3. RUSSIAN LINKAGES IN BOSNIA

The absolute majority of Russian influence across any channel is visible in Republic of Srpska while the other Bosnian entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is neglected. A good pretext for exerting influence over Bosnia through its smaller, Bosnian Serb-dominated entity, are linkages that run across the identity channel. Russia stresses common Slavic and Orthodox backgrounds of Russians and Bosnian Serbs which, in turn, results in its favorability over the West in the smaller Bosnian entity. This can be seen in an IPSOS survey from 2017, which shows 89% of Bosnian Serbs having a positive view of Russia's involvement in Bosnia compared to 18% on the EU and 26% on the US, respectively (International Republican Institute 2017). This thesis looks at political, religious and cultural linkages that are important channels for Russia through which to project its influence.

Political linkages, similar to Levitsky and Way's (2010) diplomatic linkages, refer to Russia's membership in the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) in Bosnia, which is one of the places where Russia frequently makes clear its anti-Western position. For instance, after Dodik threatened a possible referendum on Republic of Srpska's independence, the PIC members held a meeting and expressed concern over such a move except Russia, which did not sign the joint statement (Dnevni avaz 2016). Russian opposition in the PIC is a frequent occurrence and political tool used in favor of Dodik and Republic of Srpska. The first instance of Russian opposition in PIC dates back to 2007, when it had an opposing view towards a decision by the OHR (Huskić 2019).

Similar to this, Russia uses its position of a permanent member in the UNSC to protect the interests of Bosnian Serbs and Serbians in general. A notable instance happened in 2015 when Russia vetoed a UNSC Resolution that would qualify the Srebrenica massacre as genocide despite immense recognition by the international community (BBC 2015). The first Russian veto against a UNSC Resolution, that was not favorable to Serbs, was during the war in 1994 (Preston 1994). Paying back for this loyalty, Dodik in both of his capacities, first as President of Republic of Srpska and later as member of Bosnian Presidency, refused to condemn the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (BIRN 2019). In 2022, he openly opposed imposing any sanctions against Russia which, earlier this year, launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Brezar 2022).

Religion proves to be a fertile ground for Russian exercise of power in Bosnia. One of the reasons why this is the case is the relatively large number of the population identifying with Orthodoxy, 31% in Bosnia alone (Secieru 2019). Looking back at the role of religion in the 1990s war in Bosnia, one can see that Orthodox clerics from Serbia and Russia have actively been discussing political issues framed in religious terms. For instance, a meeting was held between Serbian and Russian patriarchs where the two outlined a peace plan whereby Bosnian Serbs would be able to enter into a confederation with Serbia (Evans 2002). In 2018, just before general elections in Bosnia, numerous officials from Russia and Republic of Srpska, including Dodik and Russian

ambassador, initiated the construction of a Russian church and cultural center (Kovacevic 2018). This effort was set to be jointly funded and serve the purpose of further strengthening ties between Russians and Bosnian Serbs. Also, having in mind the timing of the event, it is logical to assume that Dodik used this event to boost his electoral chances of success.

A number of organizations, that speak of themselves as cultural and with close to the Russian state, frequently visit Bosnia. A notable example also involves the Russian motorcycle gang called “Night Wolves”. In 2018, this group entered Bosnia with an alleged aim to tour across Republic of Srpska. The group, according to their own Kremlin-affiliated leader, is advocating pan-Slavism, Orthodoxy but its members are also known as having participated in the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Jackson and Jeffrey 2021). Falling within this groups of visible expressions of Russian influence, also on the eve of 2014 elections, is the arrival of more than one hundred Russian Cossacks which allegedly was a cultural visit (Borger 2014).

As Bajrovic et al. (2018) note, there are dozens of such groups which are registered as non-governmental organizations, have ties to the Kremlin and Dodik while their role is to amplify social divisions and fuel anti-Western sentiment. Russia also used media outlets to amplify its good relations with Serbs in general especially Sputnik, which favorably covers Dodik and negatively the Western actors (Karcic 2022). Less visible ways of Russian influence in Bosnia include various cultural, academic events that are jointly organized by Russia and entity institutions (Vichova 2020).

3.4. ELITE-CENTRIC EXPLANATION

Now that the thesis has identified tools of Russian influence in Bosnia, it is time to look at the alternative explanation of the Russian vector’s presence in Bosnian multi-vector foreign policy. As already mentioned in some previous chapters, the Bosnian politically relevant elite is composed of three ethnic elites, each having divergent interests. While the Bosniak part of the elite strongly pushed for Bosnia’s EU and NATO integration since the prospects of it appeared on the political agenda, the same cannot be said about the Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb elites. The latter's

actions over the period of analysis were almost always directed towards the break-up of the country and its partition into smaller entities that would join either Croatia proper, in the case of the Bosnian Croat elite, and Serbia, in the case of the Bosnian Serb elite. Although one can find data, such as speeches and official documents such as the two Bosnian foreign policy strategies, where Bosnian Croat and Serb elites mention the aim to join either the EU, NATO or both, this can be interpreted as a cover up of their true, destabilizing, secessionist aims. These efforts of Bosnian Croat and Bosnian Serb elites have been supported by Russia due to multiple reasons, which explains why those elites embraced Russia and not Western actors. It is the latter argument that this thesis aims to explain next.

In this section, the thesis will not strictly follow the time periodization that it used in some previous sections. Instead, this thesis will focus our attention to the most important and visible actions by parts of the Bosnian political elite that will help us in explaining our research question. The Bosnian political elite's concern with Euro-Atlantic integrations varied over the years. Cepo (2019) notes that more active engagement on the side of the Bosnian political elite towards Euro-Atlantic integrations would certainly undermine their hold on power. This clearly shows that the actions of the Bosnian gatekeeping elite go in direction of sometimes even constraining ties to an actor, deemed as the most strategically important one. Vachudova (2019) speaks in a similar vein, pointing to rent-seeking elites in the Western Balkans in general as being responsible for limited to no progress towards the EU. Bartlett (2021) puts the blame on the EU by showing that it continued providing assistance to Western Balkan states despite the latter's failure to comply with EU requirements but also overlooked this due to its own, distinct foreign policy goals.

However, this thesis is interested in instances where parts of the gatekeeping elite facilitated or embraced ties to Russia because it suits their agenda. Now the thesis turns to the agendas of the Bosnian gatekeeping elite. Since the rise of Dodik to power through entity and state ranks in Bosnia, he has frequently called for the secession of the smaller, Bosnian-Serb dominated, Republic of

Srpska entity. A notable instance which shows Dodik's embrace of Russian influence was the former's call for a referendum on RS "statehood day" which the Bosnian Constitutional Court banned in 2015 (Salvo and De Leon 2018).

Furthermore, Russian ambassadors were present at the subsequent celebrations of the RS "statehood day" which further illuminates Russian support for Dodik's actions and the latter's embrace of Russian support. Instances of meetings between Dodik and Putin but also between Dodik and, other than Putin, Russian state officials received significant media coverage in the RS entity (Chrzova et al. 2019). One can argue that disseminating pro-Russian sentiments throughout government-controlled (read Dodik) media shows an attempt by Dodik, as member of the gatekeeping elite, to justify his embrace of Russian influence. This goes in line with Tolstrup's (2013) argument that gatekeeper elites build ties with those actors who share their own worldview, values and identity and vice versa.

Again, the closeness of ties can be seen through meetings between top Russian and Bosnian state officials. In a more recent instance, Russia invited Dodik to attend Victory Day celebrations in Moscow where he was present over the last years (SRNA 2020). However, this time Dodik did not attend. Having in mind the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, one can argue that, this time, Dodik's strategic calculation went in the direction of constraining ties to Russia because this would undermine his power domestically. This could have led to additional sanctions against him, besides the existing ones imposed by the US (Al Jazeera 2022). It could also further severe already severed ties to the EU where the majority of member states already called for sanctioning Dodik.

It is not only the Bosnian Serb members of the elite that facilitate, or embraces ties to Russia, but also the Bosnian Croats. The Bosnian Croat member of the elite, Dragan Covic, who served two terms as member of the Bosnian Presidency did the same. Hasic (2020) notes that both, Dodik and Covic, publicly display a pro-EU stance while simultaneously developing ties with Russia. The Russian ambassador has on several occasions supported Covic's position which goes

in line of creating a third entity within Bosnia (Vijesti.ba 2017). Some actions of high-ranking members of Covic's Croatian Democratic Union party (HDZ BiH) have clearly been not in line with their public pro-NATO view. Authors of the Kremlin Watch Program (2020) note an instance when the defense minister, coming from HDZ BiH, continuously failed to submit to NATO the Annual National Plan (ANP), a necessary precondition for Bosnia's NATO membership. Turcalo and Kapidzic (2014) show that HDZ BiH also ties progress on Bosnia's NATO integration path to domestic deals with the other two ethnic elites. Russian support for Covic and his party's cause of Bosnian destabilization by advocating the creation of a separate entity is not only political but extends also into the economic realm whereby Russian funds are finding their way into the Bosnian economy through the HDZ BiH party (Salvo and De Leon 2018).

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian multivectoral foreign policy. It did this by providing two complementary explanations whose combination in a particular setting result in the specific outcome, one external and the other internal. The former explanation shows that it is Russian influence, through various linkages with Bosnia, as being the cause behind the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. The latter explanation put the focus on domestic elite' interests whereby elite instrumentalization of ties to Russia, resulted in the same outcome. However, the thesis did not find each explanation sufficient to explain the outcome on their own. Rather, it is a combination of both, their mutual interaction that, over the years, made the Russian vector more present in Bosnia than at the start of the period of observation. The thesis utilized process-tracing in order to find a general explanation of the outcome. Below, one can see Figure 1, showing the causal mechanism that captures the logic that resulted in the particular outcome.

Although the thesis showed that the combination of Russian influence and domestic elites' interests result in the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy, this is not always the case. One can see from Figure 1, that Russia is able, via political linkages and its status in some international, multilateral bodies, to increase its presence in Bosnian foreign policy without the agency of parts of the domestic elite. The same is true for Russian participation in the PIC, where it can independently exert influence in Bosnia. There are two limitations to the research. Firstly, the ambiguity of the discourses used in the thesis. The empirical section presents and treats discourses, speeches by some elites as the outcome not the cause but one can claim that it could refer to both, the cause and outcome. One would then need to observe the specific timing of the discourse and look whether there was variation in the dependent variable before or after the discourse.

Secondly, there is the limit of external validity of this thesis. The specificity of the Bosnian case which makes foreign influence somehow inherent in its political system which, in turn, is also embedded and reflects a different empirical reality makes it hard to generalize these findings to other cases. Post-Soviet states, share some semblance with the Bosnian case, in terms of geopolitical position, shared elements of political history and culture, but the fact that parts of the Bosnian political elite actively work to divide their own country makes it hard for one to generalize these findings to other cases.

Nevertheless, this thesis has challenged some common explanations that view EU enlargement fatigue and inability of the EU to “enforce” its agenda in the whole Western Balkan region. The empirical part showed several structural conditions which enabled foreign actors, in general, and Russia in particular, to project their influence in Bosnia. The latter’s complex, consociational political system, a legacy of the Dayton Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia, which gives each ethnic group veto powers and the role of the OHR, make Bosnia prone to foreign influences. It can be said that competing ethnic elite interests further amplify and facilitate this permeability to foreign influences.

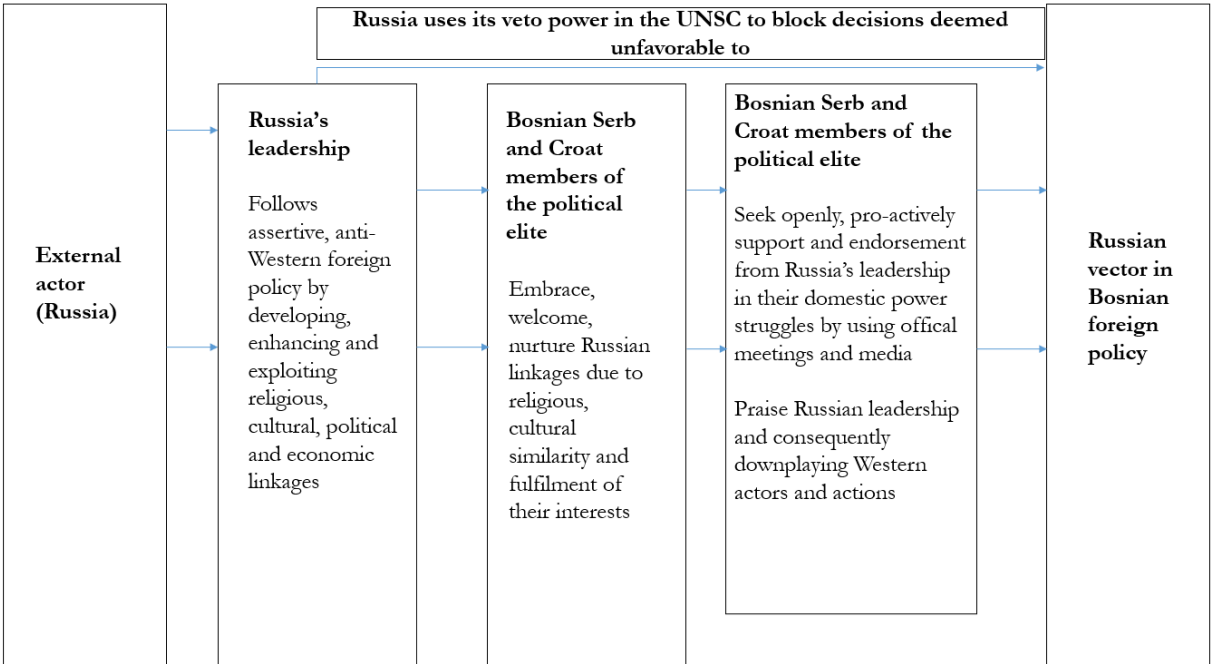


Figure 1 - Causal mechanism of external and domestic actors' effect on the presence of Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy

The particular settings in which Russia was able to influence Bosnia were differentiated by subperiods. The first subperiod, immediately following the post-Dayton political reality was not pervaded by Russian influence that could increase its presence in Bosnian foreign policy. The reason for this is structural. Namely, the 1990s were the period of US predominance in international relations without a competing superpower. Coupled with this were weak internal conditions in Russia that found itself confronted with more important, internal issues than Bosnia, Western Balkans and other regions. The second subperiod saw a more economically stronger Russia that increased its economic linkages with the smaller, Bosnian Serb-dominated entity and later but also its political linkages with the emerging Bosnian Serb-leader, Dodik. It is visible from this that Russia could not increase its presence in Bosnian foreign policy without active facilitation of these linkages by Dodik, the leading figure in the Bosnian Serb ethnic elite. The final period set the stage for increasing political, religious and cultural linkages due to growing disinterest of Western actors with the Western Balkans in general but also because of Russian assertive foreign policy that went unsanctioned.

The events in and after 2014 can be interpreted as encouraging Russian overtures to Bosnia, a suitable target for Russian anti-Western foreign policy. Simultaneously, overlapping interests of Bosnian Serb and Croat ethnic elites, those of breaking up Bosnia, were met with endorsement from the Russian side. By having these parts of the Bosnian political elite as loyal clients, Russia benefited in several ways. First, Russia acknowledged that, by continuing to support these elites, it is able to fulfill its larger anti-Western agenda at a low cost. The cost included political support in the UNSC, which does not necessitate agency of the domestic elite and small-scale economic transactions to finance elements of religious and cultural linkages. Russian officials' meetings with Bosnian Serb and Croat members of the Bosnian political elite further testify to the strength of their ties. The latter embrace through both discourse and actions, Russian linkages which leaves no doubt about their foreign policy preferences, despite official documents showing otherwise.

One can conclude that Bosnian Serb and Croat members of the political elite play both, Western and Russian, foreign policy cards as it suits their interest. The Western, pro-EU card is used not to stop receiving EU funding as part of the accession process while the Russian card serves to support their secessionist agenda. One can also say that the Russian card is used to downplay the role of the EU, which does not support any threat to the integrity of the Bosnian state. With all of the above in mind, Russian influence and domestic elite interests on their own, cannot produce the outcome. The thesis finds support that the first hypothesis, that blames Russian influence on the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy, does provide a limited explanation to the research question. The same is true for the second hypothesis, which argues that interests of some members of the Bosnian political elite, namely the Bosnian Serb and Croat members of the elite, are the cause for the outcome. But, it is only when Russian influence is coupled with the active engagement by parts of the Bosnian political elite but also some favorable structural factors, EU enlargement and assertive Russian foreign policy, that one can explain the presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy. In the simplified causal mechanism from Figure 1, one can see that Russian leadership, as part of their assertive, anti-Western foreign policy develop and maintain linkages with parts of the Bosnian political elite which, in turn, embrace these linkages. First, because of shared identity features and secondly, because it helps them to fulfil their interests.

It is rather a two-dimensional process between Russia and domestic elites, whereby the latter similarly nurtures and develops ties with Russian leadership, utilizing official meetings and media, in order to increase chances of getting continued support for their interests. The outcome of this causal process is the increased presence of the Russian vector in Bosnian foreign policy, attributed to both, domestic elite agency and Russian influence.

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