Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Resistance or Emancipation?

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Introduction

Despite the EU’s longstanding engagement in the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is in the middle of what some local actors think is its most serious constitutional crisis since the war,1 Chandler (2009: 74) is right to say that BiH is an ‘inverted state’, not representative of local interests, but of external agendas. It represents the EU’s ambitions in the field of peacebuilding (Björkdahl et al., 2009; Juncos, 2005) in the form of a slowly evolving EU Peacebuilding Framework (EUPF) (Richmond, Björkdahl & Kappler, 2009). This is based on the liberal peace model and is the sum of its generally uncoordinated constituent parts, including aspirations for ‘normative power’, member states’ individual interests, and the Union’s specific historical character in political, economic, and social terms. Such dynamics are closely related to its geographic sphere of influence. This is the background for the Union’s engagement in the Western Balkans, where the carrot of eventual membership provides a particular attraction for both elites and on the ground (Juncos, 2005: 98), for often different reasons not necessarily related to those the EU expects.

Despite the promising prelude of the Stabilisation and Association process (SAp) in the region, which was greeted with much enthusiasm on both sides, the success of the EUPF has been very limited. Rhetorically it has had a major impact on hopes for accession, and it seems to have had an impact in material terms and on governance even if it has not reached the heady heights internationals expected. Yet the lack of progress regarding the accession process represents a stalemate in which neither the EU nor the partners of the SAp are willing to move forward. The EU, as with the OHR previously, perceives this as a result of a lack of progress from the local politicians and the fragmented state structure.ii

This paper attempts to explore such dynamics in the context of the EUPF, although this does not imply that the EUPF is a single, static and coherent model: indeed it is rather fragmented, ill-coordinated, and represents complex negotiating processes and even dissensus over its objectives. It is thus no surprise we argue that in response localized peacebuilding agency is often expressed as resistance in order to reclaim the state from external interests. Indeed, since the siege of Sarajevo from 1992-5, discussions of politics and peace in BiH have been replete with debates about culture, identity, resistance to national and international narratives, music, sport, religion and alternative forms of political association.iii This has been to avoid being co-opted by local elites and increasingly to distance itself from national and international policies. In such processes, local agencies develop their own alternative peacebuilding strategies. Uncovering such approaches depend on an ethnographic approach to understanding the types of

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political debates that emerge from the hidden, local, spaces of peacebuilding. Our data draws on separate field visits conducted by the authors since 2004, interviews in formal peacebuilding institutions (both in BiH and abroad), focus groups and semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors who do not necessarily classify themselves as resistant, and less easily categorisable meetings with informal and localized actors; and crucially, upon the development over time of relationships of trust with such actors. We do not represent their views but merely discuss our understanding of their implications. Issues of consent and reciprocity, as well as the protection of sources in a tense environment, have been carefully noted.

Consequently, this article aims to identify some manifestations of local critical agency for peacebuilding in BiH. To do so, a brief outline of EU engagement in the country will represent the basis on which some major emerging pitfalls can be identified, drawn from the broader critical literature on peacebuilding. Local critical peacebuilding agencies will then be analysed, especially in their resistant capacity. Finally, we evaluate the interaction – or negation- of the EUPF and such agencies.

EU Peacebuilding in Bosnia since Dayton

Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, the EU has shown different degrees of involvement in the Bosnian state. What gradually emerged in the late 90s was a regional approach during the course of which the EU established a coordinated set of political and economic conditionalities aimed at infrastructure reconstruction and institution-building. This became, alongside social cohesion and development, a priority between 1998 and 2000 (European Commission, 2001), and was linked to the SAP for South-Eastern Europe in 1999 that was supposed to bring the countries in the region on the path to eventual European integration.

2001 marked another important cornerstone for EU engagement in the region, not only due to the launch of a new programme, CARDS, but also as a result of the general strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as the second pillar of the EU. Its goal was the implementation of the liberal peace: to strengthen the security of the EU, as well as international security, to international co-operation, and to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (European Union, 1992). The focus of the Union mainly concentrated on harmonising Bosnian law and society with the acquis, for which the SAP was used. In 2005, negotiations for the country’s Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) were opened and two years later initialled in Sarajevo. In 2008, BiH signed the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

The presence of the EU in the country cannot be viewed as a coherent or homogeneous one, with the EU Special Representative (EUSR) playing a role closely related to the OHR and thus acting much more politically than the Delegation of the EU in BiH. The latter is more technical in its approach and less concerned with direct governance due to a stronger focus on member-state building and the acquis. EUFOR in contrast, has a military focus, while the EU Policy Mission (EUPM) is working on the training and reform of the Bosnian police force. Despite the divisions between different EU institutions in their approach and methodology, the EU can be said to promote a specifically liberal version of peace. This ties in with the Union’s ambition to be considered a homogeneous actor in the peacebuilding mosaic. The fact that there are common threads running through the policies of different EU institutions are mirrored, for instance, in the Union’s ambitions to unify BiH to have a single interlocutor to talk to, rather than a number of representatives from different levels of governance.

Yet, the weak and potentially fragmenting state structures that the EU sees as an obstacle to reform may also be an outcome of a local debate about the nature of the peace being developed in BiH. Instead, local actors argue external actors focus on fixed, external standards, with little contextuality. The carrot that the EU has to offer is not modifiable and only works if
local actors comply. This is perceived in context as undermining the peace dividend for citizens, and offering them dependency and conditionality, enshrined in a settlement local actors cannot change.

Despite its potential to shape peacebuilding in a distinctive way to the securitized and state-centric liberal approach, the EU has failed to learn from its mistakes, undermining its symbolic power to create legitimacy on the ground (Merlingen, 2007: 436; Björkdahl et al., 2009). Yet although EU documentation shows some limited evidence of attempts to move beyond the imposition of ‘universal’ blueprints onto conflict regions those aspects that transcend these, such as allusions to social justice, pluralism, local ownership, normative aspirations, and internal free movement of people, goods, and services, have not yet reached most of the Western Balkans.

As a result local agencies have emerged and localized peacebuilding has become resistant even to the ‘emancipatory project’ of liberal peacebuilders, including that of the EU (Richmond, 2005, 2009a). This resistance has tried to reframe emancipation as local agency and autonomy, internationally supported, perhaps, rather than externally provided. At the national level, RS is an example of this. Such dynamics at grassroots level have combined some of the very norms that the EU sees as crucial to peacebuilding, and indicates some success in its project of engaging and enabling local agencies. It also contradicts some if its objectives in constructing a liberal, multi-ethnic state in BiH.

There is a tendency towards claiming autonomy from the regional and international sphere. Peacebuilding at the grassroots has become partly synonymous with independence. It has re-politicized and given substance to the local agencies that have emerged. This can be seen in two ways: either peacebuilding as resistance revitalizes the liberal social contract and gives these externally constructed states internal substance, or it enables a more proactive encounter between the liberal peace and its ‘others’, in which the hegemonic weight of the liberal peace project is countermanded by local desires for autonomy, and local agency for emancipation (Richmond, 2009a).

This raises the problem of how to identify local peacebuilding agency particularly in instances where it is impossible to know a priori what the ‘local’ context might entail, how it is made up, how it communicates via which channels, and what it is concerned with (Tocci, 2008). The question of agency also matters with respect to issues and demands for self-determination and self-governance in a post-socialist or trusteeship environment, where stakes for various groups are high, power becomes a key issue and competition for dominance in the self-determination discourse is crucial for the survival of specific identity groups. This represents a challenge for the EU in terms of how centralized institutions may find ways of assisting such processes of transition from externally-led to locally-based governance. The focus of the Union has emerged as mainly concentrating on harmonising Bosnian law and society with the acquis, for which the toolbox of the SAP was used. The objective is the integration of BiH “into the economic and political mainstream of Europe” via the SAA process (European Commission, 2001). This in turn is linked to the belief in the possibility of transforming the structural roots of conflict (Tocci, 2008: 3), coupled with the hope “that increasingly transparent economic liberalization will open up competition and squeezing out those entrepreneurs who have no managerial talents beyond extortion.” (Pond, 2006: 254).

Such ambitions set into sharp relief the dissatisfaction of the population of the region, and especially for those concerned with the prospect of membership for BiH. Clearly, political and ethnic groupings have different perspectives on accession. For example, Bosniak and Croatian politics expect international actors (or even the OHR) to sort out or even arbitrate the current deadlock over accession, and ‘frozen war’ which they see as partly created by the separatist tendencies of Republika Srpska (RS), whereas Serb parties expect the issue to be resolved locally by a confederation in order to prevent international opposition to RS shaping the outcome of the accession process. They think that the stance of the EU currently, awaiting local reform before the process moves ahead has created unnecessary local tensions. Indeed, it has been
suggested that the EU and international stance on Bosnia has imprisoned or even disabled local agency in unintended ways.\textsuperscript{xix}

**Major issues**

*Romanticising civil society*

Civil society has come to serve as a key area of international intervention (Belloni, 2001: 166). This is no different in BiH, where the focus on building civil society from the grassroots has emerged as a strategy to circumvent political stagnation (Fagan, 2005). An ambivalent tendency can be observed, given that the Commission has also adopted a hands-off approach to political integration, arguing that reform is up to political elites whenever an issue becomes too complex or cannot be agreed upon. In the context of such approaches, it is assumed that the lack of reform at the state level will not hinder the growth of civil society. Liberal peacebuilding relies on a form of civil society that is relatively free of ethno-nationalism and generally oriented towards the norms and values of the peacebuilding and statebuilding project, while influencing elite level debates to eventually move the country towards a state with the characteristics of an EU member state. At the same time, it is assumed that civil society will respond to the same tonic as in EU member states as well as consisting of similar organisational forms.

There is a Bosnian view that “We don’t do choirs and football clubs.”\textsuperscript{xii} This critiques the external tendency to view Bosnian civil society as roughly compatible with, or similar to civil societies within the EU – which, despite the heterogeneities between countries and regions is seen as a homogeneous liberal network (Bono, 2006: 154). This arises out of the historical development of ‘civil society’ in the European context.\textsuperscript{xiii} Civil society can be seen to be linked to specific normative prescriptions and suggestions about what the ‘ideal’ ‘civil’ society should look like. Ideas of what this is vary considerably, not only between different peacebuilding actors, but also between different EU sub-bodies, according to context and necessity.

However, by simplifying societal processes, international actors in conflict zones generally tend to romanticize local cultures by ascribing authenticity to one strand, hence instrumentalising a specific cultural discourse that fits into their goals of governing and shaping society in a given direction (Linnekin, 1991: 447). Or they operate as if there are no capacities in context, and so import external versions of civil society (Richmond, 2009b). In the Balkans, this has mainly led to a focus on ethnicity and its sovereign implications. At the same time, it is necessary to distance the local sphere and construct it as an isolated sphere with discrete boundaries in order to govern it rationally, rather than empathetically. Hence, a rather simplistic and undifferentiated representation of culture and identity are used to denote ‘otherness’ which justifies a distancing of local everyday life. Yet at the same time the agencies which stem from culture are not recognized by external actors.

There is a growing acknowledgement of such exclusionary tendencies even within the EU, where individual actors have claimed that the EU tends to ignore collectivities, such as groups which do not fit into its liberal rights or market economy framework. Some groups are only rarely represented in NGOs.\textsuperscript{xiv} Along similar lines, MESS (one of the biggest cultural institutions in the country specifically known for their theatre festivals) did not receive funding for a cultural initiative centering on EU-related issues, which was at the same time expected to have a huge influence on the public discourse about EU membership.\textsuperscript{xv} The lack of support can mainly be attributed to the fact that the initiative was not intended to use traditional civil society channels (e.g. workshops, conferences, dialogue fora), but rather pursuing unconventional
methods in favour of a more creative approach that meant to visualize issues and potentials with respect to EU accession through architectural artwork in Sarajevo. In that sense, alternative discourses outside the civil society framework have been marginalized in the EU’s peacebuilding approaches, even though they may include significant and influential networks, which would be positive forces for peacebuilding stemming from civil society. This is the context in which the Centre for Human Rights in Sarajevo challenges knowledge about human rights, as an externalized concept taken for granted within the bigger, donor-led peacebuilding projects. Indeed, the centre intentionally produces reports to give a voice to alternative discourses on such issues.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Aiming to make civil society a simple, easily identifiable and instrumentalisable category, the EU tries to make it compatible with a specific set of policy tools, while supporting the construction of a [neo-] liberal state. The much criticized emphasis on privatisation in the economic sector is one of the key priority areas according to which the EU assesses ‘progress’, thus following the guidelines of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in the country (Commission of the European Communities, 2009: 27). Such processes in turn have fostered the creation of a neo-liberal state, with NGOs often serving as a donor-led way of compensating the failure of the state to provide for welfare and social security. This is one of the reasons why the EU funds NGOs that take over such duties – the Mozaik Community Development Foundation being one example of this – to make up for the state’s lack of ability to provide for such services. Yet many organisations work only with selected communities and projects,\textsuperscript{xvii} and such programmes can never be comprehensive or respond to the variety of needs throughout the country. However, they may support the EU in maintaining a sheen of legitimacy, although this might not always reach the peripheries.

\textit{Failure to embed a social contract in local culture}

These dynamics are particularly problematic in terms of how an individual or a social group can have political agency and rights when materially and ideologically excluded from the peacebuilding project, as has been noted amongst the Bosnian peacebuilding community on many occasions. This ties in with discourses about the ‘spoilers’ of peace. The recent protests among war veterans is just one example of the contested nature of (just) peace.\textsuperscript{xviii} The liberal peace framework offers a notion of the individual as a producer/ worker/ consumer, rather than as located within contextual social and cultural networks. Thus, the concept of civil society reflects the marketized and neoliberal ideology of already liberal developed states, where political rights take precedence over other capacities, expectations and experiences, in this case stemming from the earlier experience of socialism, from identity and culture.

The EU has a tendency to treat culture as an instrument that can only be considered if conducive to its political projects in the region, particularly with the requirements of the SAP and the associated conditionalities. This is reflected in the language of the Union’s policy documents and country assessments.\textsuperscript{xix} Aspects of local culture that deviate considerably are considered a potential threat to the ‘peace project EU’ and hence represent an obstacle to enlargement unless transformed by both grassroots and elite-level processes.\textsuperscript{xx} In that sense, organisations representing less coordinated cultural elements are usually denied funding and support – this would be the case for most museums, choirs, galleries and musicians. On the other hand, if a cultural approach is linked to the goals of an official peacebuilding project, chances are much higher that the respective organisation will enjoy EU support. An example would be the Nansen Dialogue Center in Mostar, which has pursued cultural projects, but only received EU support for a project dealing with human rights training for teachers.\textsuperscript{xxi}

This is linked to the assumption that Bosnia will become ‘European’ in terms of gradually adopting EU values and standards. There is a notion that this will be a linear and automatic process eventually leading to EU integration and adoption of the \textit{acquis}. It is the latter
that the social contract is expected to emerge from, rather than from local agency, which is instead expected to be compliant with the Europeanisation process.

Selective reinforcement of power structures

Numerous EU policies tend to be exclusive by failing to give voice to smaller groups. As it has been suggested above, collectivities that are not viewed as part of the more mainstream civil society framework, find it difficult to get access to the public peacebuilding sphere. In this context, an activist pointed to past attempts to set up local organisations on an ad-hoc, and non-professionalized basis. While he stated that donors – the EU amongst others - would generally not trust such projects and therefore refuse funding to them, it has been much easier for more 'corporate', Western-based NGOs to get funds. For instance, ‘Ambrosia’, a local organisation founded in 1995 for the promotion of non-commercial, alternative musical performances has been struggling to survive and lives on the contributions of its members, whereas the international ‘Musicians Without Borders’, with a very similar agenda, had much easier access to funding due to the fact that it was established in Utrecht and could maintain closer links to European donors.xxii This pattern is reproduced through the levels of peacebuilding that have been occurring.

More powerful actors cannot be ignored, of course, due to their capacity to undermine the overall peacebuilding project. Political parties have been made a central element in the triangle EU-local civil society-local authorities, xxiii so that existing power relations are reproduced in the peacebuilding project. In this sense, definitions of ‘peace’ and ‘justice’ do not automatically reflect the complex and diverse debates about those issues as they occur on the ground. They may confer a comparatively high degree of power mainly to elites, business people and journalists, and those with regional rather than local connections. Ignoring those parts of society that cannot be reconciled in the short-run with the more ‘mainstream’ or ‘European’ ideas about peace has not been compensated for by local ownership rhetoric.

Framing peace by state and market

A key problem that is faced by the liberal peace is its tendency to be framed by the state and by the market. The local context is distantly engaged with through the state, or the international regime or institution (Richmond, 2009b). The first partner for the EU is usually the government and elites, while EU officials state a clear need to have an interlocutor on the state level. In that sense, the power of the EU is dependent on the functioning of the government and its coordinating system.xxiv

This is particularly problematic in a divided country such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, where engagement with the ‘state’ is not straightforward, given that RS does not feel represented by the central state and is therefore not willing to accept any decisions made on its behalf.xxv Indeed, in RS, BiH is often referred to as ‘something else’.xxvi Yet if the EU ignores such complicating conditions in its programmes it risks relying on a problem-solving logic and conditionalities to “fix” deficiencies in the political and economic system, whereas deeper issues effecting society and individuals in their everyday lives remain unresolved.

Despite the EU’s own aspirations to change traditional notions of national sovereignty it builds on a state-centric approach, claiming that “[t]he most important dialogue is that between government and civil society in the partner countries.”xxvii This relates to the assumptions local actors will eventually share the peacebuilders’ vision of a state and the associated form of peace. Indeed, the SAP that the EU concluded with BiH reflects the belief into the market as a
promoting tool for peace, with a clear emphasis on ‘free trade’, ‘transition into a functioning market economy’ and economic cooperation across the region (Council of the European Union, 2008). Yet what emerges in discourses on the ground is a very critical stance towards the ways in which the state and the market are framed. This points to an obvious contradiction in ex-socialist countries such as Bosnia, where capitalism is often seen as predatory or playing in the hands of elites, has failed to culturally and economically take root, and people’s attitudes towards the state can be viewed as rather sceptical, given their respective historical experiences. Against this background, the EU prefers funding organisations that are to some extent based on a market and/or profit-logic and has, possibly for this reason, a long history in supporting Mozaik, an NGO that aims to make community life profitable.xxviii

Consequences for the EU Peacebuilding Project

Where are the local agencies?

Such problems can mainly be attributed to international attempts to build a prescriptive peacebuilding framework without detailed knowledge of local agencies. This reflects the EU’s externalized conception of civil society. The Commission’s Mapping Study of Non-State Actors reflects an ambition to move towards a more sophisticated understanding of local society by looking at a variety of actors involved in a wide range of areas, engaging with a range of organisations and associations (European Commission, 2005).xxix Despite replicating problems relating to categorising the ‘other’ instrumentally, the report does engage with the creation of an ‘NGO market’ and the lack of connection with the country's traditional forms of organisation. It points to the discrepancy between traditional and imposed organisational forms (European Commission, 2005: 25, 30). Yet the study excludes actors working on transitional justice, identity and inter-religious work, in churches, sports organisations, children’s associations, dialogue forums, neighbourhood, arts and writers’ organisations, as well as ad hoc and unstructured social movements that emerge spontaneously and often disappear quickly. This is partly why its impact has failed to materialize on the ground, and it has not been taken up in other policy documents, even within the EU. This confirms a certain degree of institutional paralysis where the EU has the intention of using its capacity to engage with local issues and social mobilisation, knowing that it needs to be more accountable to the local. Yet it fails to act because it is not in the interests of the institution to share its capacity and resources with locals actors who have not yet accepted its agendas, or are often not believed trustworthy, and who would probably attempt to significantly modify its local agendas.

However, there are significant and critical agencies within the 'local-local' (i.e. contextual everyday actors, representing the diversity of society) already developing their own peacebuilding strategies. Three categories of local agency appear to be present.

Firstly, some of these represent local-local actors, hidden from the external donor gaze, including that of the EU. The music organisation Ambrosia is an example of this, deliberately refusing to represent themselves as a donor-funded NGO to be flexible in their approaches and refusing to make compromises on their agenda. Such organisations often work on identity and needs related issues.

Secondly, others operating at this level translate donor frameworks on rights and institutions into local contexts or lobby internationals to do so themselves. Pravo Ljudski, a human rights film festival initiative, organises screenings to address human rights issues and even unconsciously, connect donor discourses to local perceptions and needs.xxx

Thirdly, others operate within the more visible realm of civil society, but maintain transversal connections with local-local actors and issues. An example is the Nansen Dialogue Center, which is locally staffed organisation, visible in the public sphere, which receives a considerable amount of donor support. Generally speaking, despite the EU’s apparently openness
to such actors, it tends only to relate to those that are both compliant and visible to its different wings. In that sense, ‘Mozaik’ seems a convenient partner to the EU, given that its staff members directly respond to the Union’s own interests and guidelines. Some organisations work directly within the politics of peacebuilding, while others, such as Mozaik are mainly concerned with community development initiatives, and do so more indirectly, but with significant impact on their own constitutions. They also create networks of meaning, relating culture and identity in positive ways to peacebuilding and politics, from which critical and resistance agency emerges. Such agencies and the networks they form are part of the reason why the liberal/neoliberal model of state and many of the EU’s conditionalities have not been adopted. They may not be adopted until such policies are contextually representative as well as representative of a broader EU consensus. This indicates how such local agency mediates the liberal peace, projected in this case by the EU, and produces local-liberal forms of hybridity (Richmond, 2009a).

More openness, and therefore a mutual engagement with such critical peacebuilding agency requires an engagement with prickly and resistant groups and organisations that are hard to gain access to or disagree openly with liberal/neoliberal norms, too, to take religious actors, ad hoc social movements, mayors, professionals, activists and students into account. It appears paradoxical, as the president of the alumni association ACIPS claimed, that although religious NGOs are trusted most in the country, they are often excluded from EU programmes. It is even worse for smaller organisations that address issues related to religion, but do not operate under the umbrella of a concrete religious community, from where they might get support. Such organisations, albeit working close to communities and their everyday concerns, find it particularly hard to get access to ‘formal’ funds. Local groups have observed a tendency of donors, and particularly the EU, to avoid addressing or funding potentially sensitive policy areas, unwilling to risk ‘failure’ of both the liberal project and personal careers. This in turn results in the Commission funding organisations it is familiar with and limits the institutional ability to open up channels for alternative voices.

This evolution of a strategy towards conditionality rather than localized legitimacy and consent, on the part of the EU and other donors is a response to the lack of political agreement on the ground, particularly at the elite level, but has followed a perverse (and classically liberal) course where a lack of compliance with superior external norms is met by coercion rather than negotiation. It has underestimated the political salience of local peacebuilding agencies in a range of areas, focused on externalized blueprints and norms, and thus has failed to enable the grassroots to maintain a social contract with elites.

**Resistance, Co-optation, and 'Apathy'**

The challenge is to understand what peace and justice means on an everyday level in BiH and how competing claims can be responded to. Such an effort involves looking at agency from a local perspective without preselecting, but also in the context of the evolution of the EUPF. Local exercises of autonomous or critical agency or resistance should not be seen as undermining the EUPF, but rather as a source of inspiration in terms of what the peacebuilding project accommodates to find a more dynamic way of engaging with local society. This is not to argue that local agencies are clearly 'mappable'. Indeed, Bosnian society consists of a variety of agencies with competing claims about the quality of peace and justice, while perceptions of these also change over time.

Local actors have, while acknowledging the benefits of peacebuilding and statebuilding in some areas, tended to see such processes as undermining the legitimacy of their own version of peace, as depoliticising, undermining their rights of self-determination and human rights, as portraying a lack of respect for their cultural norms, or as examples of either hegemonic or ideological western conditionalities. Different forms of resistance and co-optation have emerged on the ground, either trying to affect peacebuilding in various ways, or alternatively by
withdrawing from public life. Indeed, a number of actors have decided to pursue their goals in semi-public or even private spheres, defying control from donors and other actors that are perceived as either manipulating or irrelevant to public and private life. Even when local actors might support the introduction of elements of the liberal peace via the EUPF, they might not necessarily agree with the ways in which these are being implemented. Although there seems to be a broad consensus on the importance of human rights standards, local actors have complained about the fact that the Bosnian constitution impedes their application, for instance by not allowing people from mixed ethnic backgrounds to run for public office.xxxvi

In many cases, organisations are not solely engaged in resistance, but they resist specific elements while, at the same time supporting other elements that they see in their interests. Youth centres all over the country, for instance, have voiced resistance to the dominance of ‘ethnic language’ in the public sphere by creating spaces where ethnic identity becomes irrelevant for social interaction.xxxvii This certainly contradicts the language used by most peacebuilding actors, who have not managed to find ways to circumvent ethnic language.

Custom and culture are often the most immediate local sources of stability and peace on the one hand, but also of sustenance and resilience on the other. Culture bears a rich inventory of practices with which actors can make their voices heard, for instance by comparing the social history of the country with the failure of the post-war peacebuilding process and the associated perceived loss of culture in this context.xxxviii Against this background, a number of cultural initiatives such as theatres, museums, film producers and so forth have developed methods that address the country’s cultural past, at the same time pointing to issues that the peacebuilding context is not able to resolve. xxxix This is not always, but often linked to a reluctance to follow donor logic by developing methods of working in a less professionalised, but more dynamic environment. The founder of the Duplex Gallery in Sarajevo, for instance, considers the gallery as a space of resistance, in which artists can express their needs and ideas beyond the prescription of donors and policy-makers.xl In a more indirect way, individual artistic directors in theatres resist the ways in which the international community goes about conflicts resolution by confronting people with their own traumas, sometimes in uncontrollable ways, for instance by deliberately shocking the audience in performances. xli

Through these processes various forms of agency, autonomy and resistance emerge at different levels of society. Passivity, small everyday acts of resistance, the use of local and customary institutions rather than the state, co-optation, or more obvious forms of non-violent discursive and activist all contribute to localized versions of peacebuilding. This critical understanding of peacebuilding at the local level often represents an attempt to avoid the conditionalities of the liberal and neoliberal versions of statebuilding (though it often still needs donor support), perhaps to replace them with a nationalist version, or more hopefully to offer an emancipatory version from a local perspective which does not rely on tradition state/national/ethnic/class perspectives. Indeed, it can be argued that it is often through resistance to liberal peacebuilding, statebuilding, development, the market or to modern or normative praxes that a civil society and a social contract comes into being. In this sense, the new social contract that is emerging in BiH represents a reassertion of the local and an attempt to reconnect peacebuilding more decisively not just with discussions of governance, power and institutions, but with basic needs and cultural empowerment and non-ethnicized identities, in order to facilitate a civil peace.

No stake in peace

Clearly, the social, economic, and political reconstruction of BiH (or any post-conflict state) would be ineffective without local participation and cooperation of local political or business elites and civil society. There is also a need to engage with a local beneath civil society (ie. a local-local), which is more combative about the conditionalities, ideologies, and approaches associated with liberal peacebuilding. The lack of a peace dividend and so cooperation–
deliberate or otherwise - by local actors is derailing the EUPF, as well as provoking a contest between centripetal ethnic and centrifugal liberal impulses.

Clearly, the structural problems created by the Dayton Peace Accords remain part of the problem and certainly are exploited by the local actors. Internationals, in contrast, are afraid that including a variety of local actors would undermine its liberal ethos and lead to further state fragmentation. This in turn mirrors the tendency to distrust the ‘local’ and consider it inferior and less ‘civil’ than the ‘liberal’. Yet such dynamics of marginalisation are observable in a two-fold way: on the one hand, peacebuilding tends to ignore local voices in its construction of a specific form of peace. On the other hand, some claim that society aspires to distance itself from the political space, mainly because entering this space by members of one ethnic group would be considered as an usurpation of power by the other groups and thus constitutes a risk that people want to avoid. This results in a distance between the state and its citizens, with the latter having the impression that they do not have a stake in the former. Local actors have, for instance, pointed to issues related to freedom to travel, social and economic rights, ethnic discrimination as well as the freedom to have an understandable peace agreement and constitution. Given that the DPA has not managed to take such concerns seriously in order to give Bosnians a stake in the peace created, local agencies are kept on the margins of a society based on an imposed, foreign constitution.

This risks fragmenting society even further, given that individuals, families, and communities in a post-conflict setting need to rely on their own strategies for survival. Due to the inability of the free market to provide for welfare and care, people revert to subsistence strategies, grey or black markets or even to militias to develop a productive capacity. Indeed, many people point to the need for a functioning health system, social protection and the provision of good education as the main elements of desirable peace. However, the fact that people feel the need to resort to informal markets undermines the capacity of the state to provide for a welfare system in which citizens have a stake through taxation. The EU specifically is not much involved in welfare and social protection issues, given that this is not an element of the acquis. This would at the same time require engaging with the complex structures of the state, which is not in line with the EU’s requirements to have a single interlocutor for the entire country.

In contrast the immediacy of needs and human and political rights is a given in any peacebuilding context. This relative devaluing of cultural and welfare rights and needs, sheds doubt on whether the civil component of the liberal peace can survive, unless it reconstitutes itself in opposition to liberal peacebuilding and develops a strategy which reconciles difference and supplies welfare and representation to its participations in contextual, local terms.

Co-optation of the peace project by local elites

Polarized and nationalistic local political elites are opting out of the internationally backed liberal state building process in Bosnia, as recent developments in RS illustrate. This lack of cooperation is derailing the EUPF’s attempt to promote the construction of a multi-ethnic and democratic state, perhaps because a liberal democratic state would ultimately undermine elite political, social and cultural power bases. The resultant political stalemate between nationalist groups, particularly in parliament raises the questions of why the liberal peace has not been taken up, why it remains in the executive sphere of international peacebuilders, and what can be done about this, especially when those who were implicated in the promotion of such a state-centric version of peace in BiH complain that the country is slipping back towards war (Ashdown & Holbrooke, 2008).

Local dissent has derailed the liberal peace by opting out, forcing it down a path towards either illiberalism of the partition of the polity into mono-ethnic units. Yet, from the perspective
of local-local actors in Bosnia, many of whom look to the EUPF for their salvation, peace is rooted in an authentic and localized version of everyday life, also anchored within the normative and political framework of the EU as well as a potentially post-Dayton state. The nationalist rhetoric of ethnic parties remains. Indeed, pluralism is seen by some nationalists as a way of eliminating difference rather than accommodating it. From this perspective, peace would represent the accommodation of these different dynamics. EU accession is seen as both providing this and simultaneously as a way of sidestepping the very difficult questions and issues that political reconciliation leads to (as a result there is also a suspicion that there exists some local contempt for the internationals’ liberal agenda).

Local elites tend to only adopt reforms that do not undermine their power base, thus co-opting peacebuilding. There is a consensus among politicians of various backgrounds about EU accession even though there are differing views on the ground. This shows the extent to which politicians claim to speak on behalf of Bosnian society, assuming a high degree of homogeneity, which clearly relates to contradictory policy goals. Local politicians develop agency in their interactions with the international community by disempowering society. This reflects the extent to which national elites are capable of instrumentalising peacebuilding discourses to undermine local-local agency while also using it to modify the approach of international actors.

**Lack of space for the development of local peace dynamics**

From the local perspective of peacebuilding in BiH, states, institutions and governmental practices have displaced aspects of human needs in order to place an emphasis on political rights. Not only does this limit local opportunities to design the peace process, but it is also seen critically by some local actors, who want the EU to just ‘let them live’ instead of interfering in all aspects of daily life. Yet, local attempts to develop their own, distinctive processes of reconstruction and governance after conflict and the space for alternative social processes has been reduced by external actors to make peacebuilding less ‘problematic’ or ‘complicated’.

Many local peacebuilding agencies, NGOs, social movements, non-secular identities, and even claims to customary forms of ‘neighbourliness’, have been overlooked in BiH. Accession criteria have also reduced their space for expression, and EU project planning drives an uncontextual agenda of liberal governance and modernisation not locally resonant or necessarily locally legitimate. Instead it has focused on regional rather than contextual legitimacy. As a result many local peacebuilding actors hold the view that reconciliation is now about both transgressing both ethnic identity and the role of internationals in pushing for a specific form of state. This has produced a situation of competition 'until death' between politicians, civil society, between NGOs, rather than facilitating a political debate about the nature of peace that might emerge free of external conditionality. In general terms, such local, critical agencies, seem to concur on the possibilities of social democracy and EU entry in a loose confederation. But such possibilities are censored by international actors.

This is the background against which ‘peacebuilding as resistance’ has emerged, indicating processes by which local actors develop their own peacebuilding strategies that run parallel to or impede the EUPF approach. Some organisations, which are considered as a risk to peacebuilding and hence marginalized by funding and peacebuilding discourses, have chosen to ‘go underground’, working in hidden spaces and often paying for their activities from their own pockets. As a result, parallel structures and locations of agency have emerged, developing distinct forms of peacebuilding. Given that such parallel local approaches, where they are apparent at all, are often internationally viewed as inferior and in need of transformation, there
has developed significant tension, especially in critical local discourses, between the EUPF and those marginalized, disempowered or disappointed by it.

**Conclusion: A challenge for the EU**

Given these major problems with liberal peacebuilding, the EUPF in BiH faces a major challenge. This relates in particular to the need to recognize and respond to unfamiliar local critical agencies and resistance in more positive forms than merely downplaying complexities of local processes. Some key areas remain worth considering. There is a need to rethink the social contract that is established. In Bosnia, there is no real chain of accountability and responsibility between the implementing agencies and the people on the ground. The legitimacy of a ‘new’ social contract would rest upon its provision of social, cultural, economic and political resources sufficient to meet the demands made upon it by its local, everyday, constituencies as they define themselves, and an international community of which they should be a stakeholder. Instead of displacing local agency with inflexible institutions that obscure the everyday, this would represent an international-local social contract in an evolving form, focusing on an everyday peace, and the necessary emancipatory and empathetic structures and institutions this may require.

The failure of the EUPF so far in Bosnia can partly be ascribed to the fact that a high number of ‘uncomfortable’ voices have been mostly excluded. This has been reduced to the consultation of local elites and those already in power, hence preventing a deeper contextualisation of peace in its very social and cultural background. Herein lies local legitimacy for the state, represents political agency and requires autonomy. They are essential parts not just of a democratic process but also a social and economic discussion about what the state is for and what type of peace it produces locally, regionally and internationally. Peace, in turn, is about the attempted restoration of resonant normality to everyday life taking the interaction of those processes into account. In this context, empathy and an aspiration towards self-government (not in neoliberal terms), especially within a ‘deep civil society’ (the local-local) derived from a more empathetic engagement, offers a conceptual way forward.

Local actors are materially and discursively able to resist external demands and implications. This exertion of critical forms of local and often marginal agency occurs on a very small and fragmented scale, but it is effective. Resistance can occur in different ways, such as operating in ‘hidden spaces’ provided by cultural or customary frameworks, creating small civil society organisations for advocacy, for identity, needs, or rights purposes, vocal and physical resistance, discursive deconstruction or co-option of institutional frameworks for their governance, and through a process of negotiation over the nature of the peace that is being laid down. Indeed such resistance often results in a subtle co-option, rather than outright rejection, of the liberal peacebuilding process by local actors who are assumed to be its subjects, as has occurred recently for example in Kosovo (Richmond & Franks, 2009). This produces hybrid forms of peace, representative of local forms of agency and their unexpected capacities. This argument does not represent a reification of local actors, but simply an engagement with their capacities and an attempt to understand how these impact on the peacebuilding process.

There are significant and critical agencies within the ‘local-local’ in BiH already developing their own peacebuilding strategies. Some of represent local-local actors, hidden from the external donor gaze working on identity and needs related issues. Some translate donor frameworks on rights and institutions into local contexts. Some operate within the more visible realm of civil society, but maintain transversal connections with local-local actors. The EU tends
only to relate to those that are both compliant and visible. However, they create networks of meaning from which critical and resistant agency emerges, aimed at making external strategies contextually representative and hybrid.

Taking these into consideration in the peacebuilding process would essentially change the role of the EU and produce a less conditional and artificial dialogue with local society. This might ultimately require the EUPF to be far more supportive of such critical agency, which may also facilitate the reform and accession process (given that it is a long stated goal of governments across the region), as well as modify the way the latter is conducted. This in turn requires a debate about how a more locally legitimate state could be constructed in the framework of a regional approach. It would also entail reconciliation in which politics, autonomy, agency, rights, and needs debates were present, rather than merely relying on international institutions and frameworks to mitigate unresolved conflict as is currently the case. The liberal peace has not managed to take hold in BiH and the EUPF has failed so far in connecting with the local. This may well be because, as Chandler has said, the EUPF positions BiH’s politics and people as dysfunctional, rather than being open to the interplay of power, political subjectivity, and the loss of meaning inherent in the ‘death of liberalism’, which has occurred in a Bosnian context where liberal rights, reconciliation, and autonomy have been subsumed by ‘statebuilding’. Ironically, the existing political order has become a hybrid of often corrupt, ethnicized elites and liberal frameworks that encounter resistance or are co-opted by those elites.

However, local agencies excluded from EU discourses have found hidden spaces in which they can develop their own versions of ‘peace’. This in turn has led to emancipation from official and visible structures. Such forms of emancipation may not represent the goals of international peacebuilding agencies, but can rather be considered as a response to the failure of the latter to connect to the diverse range of local agencies. Against this background, the challenge for the EU is to search for a peacebuilding framework that is more locally legitimate before adopting it as a policy. But this should not be an excuse for a more biopolitical approach to emerge, reproducing the EU's vision of itself and its interests. Resistance should be seen as an input to the development of peacebuilding strategies, whereby local agencies and autonomy are taken seriously for their emancipatory tendencies, and the main focus is placed on responding to contextual needs, rights, and society as opposed to institutional and geo-strategic interests. Such autonomies and agencies ultimately, as the larger sum of many small and hidden parts, have had a far greater impact on peacebuilding than is often suspected. Indeed, it may well be that local resistance to the EUPF’s tendency to 'banalize' BiH can be seen as a social and political contract in the process of coming into being.

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Xavier Oleiro Ogando, Delegation of the European Commission to BiH, Personal Interview, Sarajevo, 08/03/10. Confer also Catherine Ashton, High Representative / Vice President, “The EU and the Western Balkans in a changing world”, Civil Society Meeting Belgrade, 18 February 2010.


Henceforth, we use the term ‘the local’ to denote what international actors normally perceive as a range of actors and terrains spanning their non-western and non-liberal partners for liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding at the elite level, (whilst also acknowledging that many local actors may have extensive transnational and transversal experience of liberal politics), and civil society. We use the term ‘local-local’ to indicate the existence and diversity of communities and individuals that constitute political society beyond this often liberally projected artifice, who may also have transnational and transversal exposure. This latter is where the everyday is at it most powerful as a critical tool. On the local and its interconnections see Massey, Doreen, 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press; see also, Santos, Boaventura de Sousa, 2007. ‘Human Rights as an Emancipatory Script’, in Santos, Boaventura de Sousa, ed., *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. London: Verso (3-40).

When we asked representatives in parliament to describe what was distinctive about local capacities for peace they were somewhat confused, being used to discussions of deadlock and a lack of capacity. After some thought they mentioned community traditions of ‘neighbourliness’ and cohabitation, of egalitarianism, decentralisation, though there was silence on whether the state or the community should lead in building peace from the Serb representative. Focus Group, EU Accession Parliamentary Commission, Op. Cit.


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