

A review of challenges in the process of European integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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European Union, Western Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, European integration process

Summary

This paper analyzes specific aspects of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the European Union (EU) following the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, with a particular focus on the length of this process and the obstacles encountered. The paper indicates that the constant generation of crises and the unconstitutional actions of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in BiH have impeded the European integration process. Special attention is paid to the protracted nature of the process, which has negatively affected public opinion in both BiH entities—Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH. A survey conducted for this paper confirms a high overall level of support for EU accession. Nevertheless, a significant difference was observed between the entities: respondents from the Federation of BiH showed greater enthusiasm compared to those from Republika Srpska. Respondents place their greatest hopes in the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law. Support for NATO membership is lower, and the perception of Russia as a positive security factor is markedly low. The paper also covers a broader context, positioning BiH within the framework of the artificially coined term, the “Western Balkans.” It shows that, despite positive progress reports, the path to full EU membership remains uncertain. The final goal is for all the collected data to assist the authors in drawing conclusions about the fate of BiH’s European path.

Słowa kluczowe

Unia Europejska, Bałkany Zachodnie, Bośnia i Hercegowina, Republika Serbska, Federacja Bośni i Hercegowiny, proces integracji europejskiej

Abstrakt

W niniejszej pracy przeanalizowano specyficzne aspekty współpracy Bośni i Hercegowiny (BiH) oraz Unii Europejskiej (UE). Analiza dotyczy okresu po podpisaniu Porozumienia Pokojowego w Dayton w 1995 roku. Szczególną uwagę

poświęcono długości tego procesu i napotkanym przeszkodom. W pracy wskazano, że ciągłe generowanie kryzysów utrudnia proces integracji europejskiej, a także antykonstytucyjne działania Urzędu Wysokiego Przedstawiciela (OHR) w BiH. Szczególna uwaga została poświęcona długości trwania procesu, która negatywnie wpłynęła na poparcie opinii publicznej w obu częściach BiH.

Badanie ankietowe przeprowadzone na potrzeby tej pracy potwierdza wysoką ogólną ocenę poparcia dla wstąpienia do UE. Niemniej jednak, zaobserwowano znaczne różnice w udzielonych odpowiedziach. Respondenci z Federacji BiH wykazali większy entuzjazm. W Republice Serbskiej entuzjazm jest niski. Respondenci największe nadzieje wiążą z walką z korupcją i wzmocnieniem praworządności. Poparcie dla członkostwa w NATO jest niższe. Postrzeganie Rosji jako pozytywnego czynnika bezpieczeństwa jest również wyraźnie niskie. Praca obejmuje również szerszy kontekst, tj. pozycjonuje BiH w ramach sztucznie ukutego terminu „Bałkany Zachodnie”. Wskazano, że droga do pełnego członkostwa w UE pozostaje niepewna, pomimo pozytywnych sprawozdań z postępów. Ostatecznym celem jest, aby wszystkie zebrane dane posłużyły autorom do wyciągnięcia wniosku o losie europejskiej drogi BiH.

Introduction

This paper will present a historical overview of the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the progress achieved on its path toward full EU membership. The pace of its journey in this process has been greatly determined by its geographical position, as it, along with its neighboring countries to the east, is encompassed by the artificially created geographical term, Western Balkans, conceived specifically for the needs of the European integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter BiH), Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania.

Over the period of more than twenty years during which BiH has been engaged in this process, European institutions consider that it has made significant progress in several areas important for the European integration process itself. However, unfortunately, it has not yet become a full member of the European Union. This protracted nature of the process has also been reflected in a decline of public opinion support in BiH, which this paper will illustrate through a scientific survey conducted specifically to obtain the most accurate data and accompanying explanations. All the collected data and other sources cited will serve as the basis for the conclusion regarding the fate of BiH's European path.

The subject of this paper is the analysis of specific aspects of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union following the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Aćić, Grujić, 2022, p. 16). The problem addressed by the paper lies in the duration of the European integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the obstacles encountered. The paper also examines the change in public opinion support in Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH in relation to the duration of this process.

The main research objectives are to provide a historical overview of the European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, the paper intends to:

- demonstrate the progress BiH has achieved on the path to full EU membership;
- illustrate the decline in public opinion support in BiH related to the long-term nature of the process;

- draw a conclusion on the fate of BiH's European path based on collected data and other sources; and
- correlate the length of the process with the change in public opinion support in Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH.

The main research question is: "How has the duration of the BiH European integration process been reflected in the level of public opinion support in Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH?" Based on all the above, the research hypothesis is: "Due to the protracted nature of the process and the obstacles encountered, support for European integration has significantly declined, especially among the population in Republika Srpska."

The Western Balkans and the EU

The very concept of the Western Balkans was "coined" in Brussels by the European Union (hereinafter EU) institutions to facilitate the management of the European integration process for the countries of the former Yugoslavia (excluding Slovenia and Croatia), to which Albania was added.¹ Historically, the Western Balkans region spent the greater part of its existence under the occupation of various conquering powers, whether the Frankish, Ottoman, or Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Excluding the period after the First and Second World Wars, when this area began to develop in accordance with the national policies of the peoples living there, it must be emphasized that none of the foreign occupiers managed to establish sustainable development in what is today called the Western Balkans or to lead to a reduction of hostilities between the peoples residing in this area.

In recent history, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the area has been visibly influenced by two processes that significantly determine its economic, political, and geopolitical importance: the European integration process and the NATO integration process, the significance of which history will judge (Aćić, 2022, p. 68).

Although many authors believe that these processes are conditioned by "the integration of one into the other"² (Schimmelfennig, 2003, pp. 193–203), and that a "long-term relationship between NATO and European integration exists, and the dynamics of security and defense policy in Europe are firmly linked to the evolution of EU-NATO relations" (Ratti, 2023, pp. 308–344), today, in terms of full membership, deviations are evident. Thus, Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro are members of the NATO alliance, while Serbia and BiH are not.

¹ Regardless of geographical and other anomalies, the term "Western Balkans" will certainly circulate freely in the political vocabulary until all the countries to which this term applies enter the European Union. These countries are Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and Macedonia, totaling an area of 207,784 square kilometers, or close to 40 percent of the Balkan Peninsula's surface, with a total of 17,936,991 "Western Balkan" inhabitants. See more: <https://www.politika.rs/sec/clanak/475604/balkan-na-zapadu>, accessed 11 November 2025.

² See more: Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe: Rules and Rhetoric* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Luca Ratti – "The Enduring Relationship between NATO and European Integration," in: *The Cambridge History of the European Union – Volume 1: European Integration Outside In*, edited by Mathieu Segers and Steven Van Hecke, (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Concerning the European integration process, the actual situation is much clearer: none of the Western Balkan countries has yet become a member of the European Union, even though the intention to achieve this goal was clearly formulated by the EU members. From today's perspective, this happened a long time ago, in 2003, at the Thessaloniki Summit, with the adoption of the "Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans." Although this document triumphantly stated the importance of the process and highlighted the unbreakable link of the Western Balkans to the EU through the provisions of its text, which read: "the endorsement yesterday by the European Council of 'The Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans: Moving towards European Integration' represents a new important step in the privileged relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans. Its content shall be considered as our shared agenda, and we all commit to its implementation. The countries of the region will focus their efforts on meeting the recommendations this Agenda refers to" (EU-Western Balkans Summit, Declaration, Thessaloniki, 2003. Document 10229/03, pp. 2–3), nothing specific has happened regarding the membership of these countries in the EU to date.

Although official representatives of the EU have repeatedly confirmed what was written in Thessaloniki, and new conditions have been added again and again, the progress remains negligible. In support of this, the President of the European Commission stated in 2017: "To fulfill the criteria for EU membership, and also in their own interest, the Western Balkan countries need to implement comprehensive reforms in key areas. The rule of law, fundamental rights, and governance must be significantly strengthened. Justice reforms, the fight against corruption and organized crime, and public administration reform must yield tangible results, and the functioning of democratic institutions needs serious improvement. Economic reforms must be resolutely continued to tackle structural weaknesses, low competitiveness, and high unemployment rates. All countries must unequivocally commit, both in word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past by achieving reconciliation and resolving open issues, especially border disputes, well before accession to the European Union" (European Commission, 2018; Europe Direct Čakovec, 2025).

Summarizing the views of the EU bodies from the beginning of their engagement with the Western Balkans, specifically from 2003 until today, it can be said that the process is moving in a *circulus vitiosus* (Aćić, Grujić, 2023, p. 26), and progress towards full membership remains uncertain for many reasons (Dudley, Saez, 2022), which will be discussed later in the text.

The content of the 2025 Progress Report on the Western Balkan Countries serves as the best evidence for these claims. The report states that progress exists, that it is visible, and yet, instead of concluding that official accession should begin, all positive statements end with a "but":

EU enlargement remains an important priority for the European Commission. This year's reports show that the accession of new Member States, in line with the consistent merit-based approach, is becoming increasingly plausible. Visible progress has been made in implementing necessary reforms, particularly in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights, but more needs to be done (European Commission, 2025).

Bearing all the above in mind, it seems most appropriate to agree with the statement made by professors Polović and Dujić Frlan, who point out that "after almost three decades of 'top-down'

governance or the application of various Western concepts and strategies, and promises of a European perspective, the Western Balkans remains an example of deep asymmetries and structural imbalances that firmly position it as an unstable periphery of the European Union. Given that the complex social reality of the region's countries is burdened by political instability and economic and social depression, there is a need to discuss the applied matrix of European and Western enlargement policy. Namely, the promised prosperity and stability of the region have failed to materialize, and the legacy of applied Western policies is extreme poverty, exceptional unemployment, and emigration, the collapse of public policies, and continuous economic disintegration, as well as the renewed 'activation'" (Polović, Dujčić Frlan, 2019, p. 166) of old crisis hotspots, primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the unconstitutional imposition of laws by the Office of the High Representative for BiH, contrary to the Dayton Peace Agreement. We can also conclude that a crisis hotspot has flared up due to the violation of Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council by its signatories, through the unlawful arming of Kosovo and Metohija and the permission for the continued violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms against the Serbian community in Kosovo and Metohija, which has resulted in new killings, attacks, injuries, and ultimately, additional emigration of members of the Serbian community from their ancestral homes.

The process of European integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As one of the countries located in the Western Balkans, BiH has been striving to become a full member of the EU for over twenty years. Unfortunately, although it was granted candidate status in 2022, this goal has not been achieved, largely due to the constant generation of crises and the unconstitutional actions of the Office of the High Representative in BiH (OHR), which operates as a colonial administrator in the country. The OHR has intervened in and imposed decisions upon the legal systems of Republika Srpska, the Federation of BiH, and the joint institutions of BiH over 850 times to date (Aćić, 2022, pp. 363–369).

The European integration process of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) began immediately following the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995, which ended the war in BiH and established the country's new constitutional structure with two equal entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH. Immediately following the commencement of the Dayton Peace Agreement's implementation, the international community, particularly the European Union, began actively engaging in the stabilization and reconstruction of the country (European Union, EU Support to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1996, p. 4). This aid and these projects were particularly intensified from 1996 onward, when BiH began receiving significant financial and technical assistance through the first pre-accession programs, including the CARDS and Phare programs. These aimed to build administrative capacities and to prepare the country for future EU integration, as specifically stated in European Commission documents (European Commission, CARDS Programme Overview, 1997, p. 2). During the 1998–2000 period, the European Commission specifically monitored BiH's reform progress and introduced mechanisms for the regular assessment of advances in the rule of law,

human rights, and the market economy, which represented a precondition for formal association negotiations (European Commission, Regular Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2000, p. 5).

The next step was the EU–BiH Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), preparations for which began in 2000 following positive Commission reports on the progress of reform processes. This period was also marked by the first serious discussions about BiH's potential EU membership, as part of the broader strategy for the integration of the Western Balkans (European Commission, Enlargement Strategy Paper, 2001, p. 7).

The foundation for the Stabilization and Association Process was laid by the Thessaloniki Agenda in 2003, when the European Council confirmed that “the future of the Western Balkan countries lies within the European Union” (European Council, Thessaloniki Summit Declaration, 21 June 2003, p. 2).

The first institutional step in the relationship between BiH and the European Union was the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the other part, signed on June 16, 2008, in Luxembourg, and entering into force on June 1, 2015 (Council of the EU, Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the other part, 2008, p. 133). This agreement establishes the fundamental political and economic relationship between BiH and the EU, and Article 70 states that “the essential aim of the association shall be to establish conditions for the future membership of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union” (Council of the EU, p. 135).

Subsequently, on February 15, 2016, BiH submitted its official application for membership in the European Union in accordance with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (Council of the EU, Conclusions on the Application of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Membership of the EU, 20 September 2016, para. 1). In its conclusions, the Council invited the European Commission to prepare an Opinion on the application and emphasized that the “accession process will depend on the degree of implementation of the necessary political and economic reforms” (Council of the EU, para. 3).

In response to this request, the European Commission published the Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union in May 2019 (European Commission, 2019). In this document, the Commission highlights that “Bosnia and Herzegovina can become a member of the European Union when it fulfills the Copenhagen criteria and stabilizes the institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the protection of minorities” (European Commission, Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's Application for Membership of the European Union, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, the same document lists fourteen key priorities that BiH must fulfill before accession negotiations can be opened (European Commission, 2019, pp. 7–9).

Following significant progress in several areas, the European Commission recommended the granting of candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina on October 12, 2022, conditional upon the continuation of the implementation of reform measures (European Commission, 2022 Enlargement Package – Bosnia and Herzegovina Report, 12 October 2022, p. 2). Based on this recommendation, the European Council unanimously decided on December 15, 2022, to grant BiH official candidate

country status (European Council, Conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process, 15 December 2022, p. 4). Finally, on March 21, 2024, the European Council confirmed its readiness to open accession negotiations with BiH once the country fulfills the remaining technical and political conditions (European Council, Conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, 21 March 2024, p. 3). This decision concluded a significant cycle in BiH's European integration process and confirmed the European Union's strategic commitment to integrating the Western Balkans.

Unfortunately, although this is a substantive process in which progress is visible, BiH's EU membership is still not on the agenda of the EU institutions' sessions. Support for European integration among the population of Republika Srpska, as one of the two equal entities in BiH, is significantly declining, which the authors will confirm with data from the scientific research specifically prepared for the purpose of this paper.

Analysis of EU accession support

There is a range of public opinion surveys, particularly in recent times, providing data on current and recent attitudes, with entity-level divisions, regarding the views of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) toward joining NATO and the EU.

Generally, support for EU membership is traditionally high at the BiH-wide level but shows significant differences between the entities. Recent surveys (e.g., from the Directorate for European Integration – DEI) show support for EU membership in a referendum to be around 70% of citizens (e.g., 69.9% in June 2025, according to available results, showing a slight decrease compared to the previous year) (Direkcija za evropske integracije, 2025).

The Directorate for European Integration (DEI) of BiH regularly conducts public opinion surveys on citizens' attitudes toward EU accession. Contextual data indicate that support in the Federation of BiH (FBiH) is significantly higher, often exceeding 80% (e.g., 82.9% in June 2025). Support in Republika Srpska (RS) is traditionally lower, ranging from around 40–50% (e.g., 46.1% in June 2025) (Direkcija za evropske integracije, n. d.). Although the percentages in FBiH and RS have fallen by about 2% compared to the previous year, support for EU accession still represents the only dominant foreign policy consensus (Direkcija za evropske integracije, 2024).

Given the country's wartime past and foreign policy influences, attitudes toward NATO membership are more complex and polarized. Data vary depending on the methodology and timing of the research, but support is generally lower compared to support for the EU. Some surveys by the Center for Security Studies (CSS) from September 2025 (on a specific sample) show that the majority (51%) believe there is no better guarantee for peace and security than NATO (Centar za sigurnosne studije, 2025).

Support is considerably higher in FBiH. In RS, support for NATO membership is consistently low, often with a high percentage of respondents opposing it. Research conducted by the Eda Enterprise Development Agency from Banja Luka (in cooperation with other organizations) during the 2019–2022 period in RS consistently showed low support for NATO accession.

The Eda Enterprise Development Agency (Banja Luka) published several reports on the attitudes of the citizens of Republika Srpska towards BiH's accession to NATO and the EU (e.g., reports from 2020 and 2022) (Draganić, 2022, 14 June; Agencija za razvoj preduzeća Eda, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci, 2020).

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) occasionally conducts surveys on NATO perception. The views of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on full membership in the NATO Alliance are deeply divided, depending on the entity. Although there is support for NATO integration at the state level, it is significantly lower compared to support for the European Union. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), support for the NATO Alliance is traditionally high, often due to the perception of NATO as a key guarantor of stability. Conversely, in Republika Srpska (RS), support for membership is consistently low. Research by the Eda Enterprise Development Agency (May 2022) showed that only 5.2% of citizens in Republika Srpska support NATO membership, with strong opposition and a high level of support for military neutrality. At the same time, newer research, such as that by the Center for Security Studies (CSS) from September 2025, indicates that in the overall sample, 51% of respondents consider NATO to be the best guarantee of peace and security, which highlights the sharp polarization of views between the two entities (Savić, 2021).

Citizens' motivation for supporting European integration is primarily economic and security-related. The most important reasons for supporting EU membership, according to the same survey, are the freedom of movement of people, goods, and capital (35.1%) and the guarantee of lasting peace and political stability (32.3%) (Direkcija za evropske integracije, 2024). On the other hand, respondents who do not support BiH's entry into the EU primarily cite higher living costs and taxes (43.7%), as well as fear of excessive centralization (13.7%) and the emigration of the population (12.8%) (Direkcija za evropske integracije, 2024).

EU membership – reality or delusion

To test the proposed hypothesis, a public opinion survey was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina during November 2025. The sample consists of a total of 1,111 respondents, of which 568 (51.1%) are women and 543 (48.9%) are men. The average age of the participants is 42.60 years, while the average length of service is 21.86 years.

The majority of respondents have a secondary school education, numbering 472 (42%), followed by 449 individuals (40%) with a university degree, while 176 persons (16%) hold a master's degree. Geographically, 606 respondents (54.5%) are from Republika Srpska, and 505 (45.5%) are from the Federation of BiH.

Regarding the size of the employer, small enterprises dominate, employing 785 individuals (70.66%), while medium-sized enterprises are represented by 247 employees (22.23%). Micro-enterprises and large companies constitute a smaller portion of the sample, with 22 (1.98%) and 57 (5.13%) respondents, respectively.

Salary analysis shows that the largest number of respondents, 374 (33.66%), receive between 1,500 and 2,000 KM. This is followed by the group with incomes between 2,500 and 3,000 KM,

comprising 369 individuals (33.21%), and the group earning between 2,000 and 2,500 KM, with 266 respondents (23.94%).

Questions were formulated to provide the variability necessary for regression analysis, using a Likert scale with available responses ranging from 1 to 5. A rating of 1 represents complete disagreement, and a rating of 5 represents complete agreement.

There is strong support for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union among all respondents. The overall mean score is high at 4.38. Respondents from the Federation of BiH show slightly higher enthusiasm (mean score of 4.47) compared to respondents from Republika Srpska (mean score of 4.31). The strongest proponents of this idea are individuals employed in large enterprises (mean score of 4.61), while respondents with higher education (VSS) also express high support with a mean score of 4.56. Men (4.41) support accession only slightly more than women (4.35). At this point, it should be emphasized that there were significantly more '1' ratings (complete disagreement) in Republika Srpska compared to the Federation of BiH. Thus, binary support ('yes' or 'no') is not measured, but rather a graded assessment. For example, the ratio of '1' ratings in Republika Srpska versus the Federation of BiH is 15:2. Although the trend of declining support from previous research aligns with the higher number of complete disagreements ('1' on the scale) in Republika Srpska in our survey, the overall mean support score (4.38 at the BiH level, and 4.31 in RS) still remains dominantly high. This suggests that the decline has not reached a critical point in terms of the complete rejection of the idea of EU integration.

Expectations regarding economic progress upon joining the EU are moderate, with an overall mean score of 3.14. There are no significant differences in attitudes between the entities, as the results in FBiH (3.14) and RS (3.15) are nearly identical. The highest optimism is shown by respondents with higher vocational education (VŠS), whose mean score is 4.00. The lowest rating is given by individuals with a Ph.D. (2.00). Respondents whose households have a monthly income between 2,000 and 2,500 KM are the most optimistic, with an average of 3.56.

Respondents believe that EU membership would significantly assist in the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law. The overall mean score for confidence in European mechanisms is 4.15. Employees in large companies particularly emphasize this aspect (mean score of 4.58). This conviction is more pronounced in the Federation of BiH (score of 4.25) than in Republika Srpska (score of 4.06). Individuals with secondary school education (IV degree) also give a high rating, above the average, with a score of 4.30.

The fear of losing national identity and cultural diversity upon joining the EU is negligible. The mean score is very low, at only 1.61, which indicates strong disagreement with this claim. The least concern is expressed by women (mean score of 1.51) and respondents from the Federation of BiH (1.44). A slightly higher degree of concern is observed among men (1.71) and respondents from Republika Srpska (1.75). Individuals with incomes between 2,500 and 3,000 KM express the highest level of concern (average of 2.11).

Support for joining the NATO Alliance is present but is lower compared to support for the European Union. The overall mean score is 3.71. Interestingly, women express greater support (3.87) for NATO accession than men (3.54). Data show slightly higher support for this process

in the Federation (score of 3.78) than in Republika Srpska (score of 3.62). The highest support is given by those employed in large enterprises, with an average of 4.40. Similar to support for EU accession, there are significantly more '1' ratings in Republika Srpska.

Respondents generally believe that NATO membership would ensure long-term peace, with a mean score of 3.70. There is a large difference in attitudes between genders, with women having significantly greater confidence in the stabilizing role of the alliance (4.18) than men (3.20). Respondents from the Federation of BiH are more optimistic on this matter (3.88) than those from Republika Srpska (3.55). Here, too, employees in large companies show the highest confidence (average of 4.39).

The prevailing view is that NATO membership is necessary for defense against external threats. The mean score is 3.68 and follows the trend of other NATO-related questions. Respondents from the Federation of BiH consider this argument more important (3.84) than respondents from Republika Srpska (3.54). Women are also more inclined to give an affirmative answer (3.75) than men (3.60). The highest support for this claim comes from those employed in small enterprises (average of 3.81).

The perception of Russia as a positive factor for BiH's security is extremely low. The mean score of 1.92 indicates general distrust. Men hold a slightly more positive view of Russian influence (2.22) compared to women (1.63). As expected, respondents from Republika Srpska give slightly higher ratings (2.10) compared to those from the Federation of BiH (1.69). Individuals with incomes between 1,000 and 1,500 KM give the highest average, which is 2.93.

Many respondents view the EU and NATO accession processes as inseparable, with a mean score of 3.60. Women significantly more often than men believe that these paths must proceed together (3.89 versus 3.31). The view on the interconnectedness of these integrations is more pronounced in the Federation of BiH (3.78) than in Republika Srpska (3.46). Individuals with higher vocational education (VŠS) are almost completely in agreement with this view (average of 4.00).

The self-assessment of being informed about Euro-Atlantic integration is high. Respondents generally consider themselves well-informed about these processes, with a mean score of 4.24. On average, women consider themselves better informed (4.41) than men (4.06). Individuals with a master's degree express the highest confidence in their knowledge (average of 4.55). Between the entities, individuals from the Federation of BiH consider themselves slightly better informed (4.28) than those from Republika Srpska (4.21).

The surveyed citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina express strong and dominant support for the country's entry into the European Union (mean score of 4.38), with particularly high expectations for positive effects in the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law (4.15), while concern about the loss of cultural identity is minimal (1.61). Support for NATO membership is also present but moderate and lower (3.71), with women and employees in large enterprises being the strongest supporters of this option. The perception of Russia as a positive factor for BiH's security is extremely low (1.92). Citizens generally consider themselves well-informed about these processes (4.24), but they rate the potential direct impact of EU membership on their personal economic standard moderately (3.14).

Conclusion

The historical overview demonstrates that the European integration process of BiH has lasted 30 years, commencing after the Dayton Agreement in 1995. Although BiH was granted candidate status at the end of 2022 and its readiness to open negotiations was confirmed in March 2024, full membership is still not on the agenda of the EU institutions. This protracted duration and constant conditionality, coupled with the external influence of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), contribute to the decline in public opinion support. Such a development leads to the conclusion that the process is moving in a *circulus vitiosus* and that progress remains uncertain.

The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina express strong and dominant support for the country's entry into the European Union, with a mean score of 4.38. However, the paper emphasizes a significant difference in support between the entities, which aligns with the findings of earlier research. The greatest expectations regarding membership concern the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law. Simultaneously, concern about the loss of cultural identity is minimal. There is a moderately low assessment of personal economic advancement due to EU membership. Support for NATO membership is present, but it is lower and more moderate, with a mean score of 3.71.

The public opinion analysis shows a strong polarization of views between the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. In the Federation of BiH, support for the EU is significantly higher (over 80%), as is support for NATO. Conversely, in Republika Srpska, support for the EU ranges around 40–50%, and support for NATO is consistently low, with strong opposition. Specifically, the ratings offered in the survey are not binary, i.e., not zero or one (“no” or “yes”). This does not deviate from the hypothesis. The survey conducted for the purpose of this paper used a Likert rating scale (1–5), while data citing 40–50% support refer to binary declarations (for/against) within the scope of other research. This explains the large difference in the presented figures and highlights that citizens of Republika Srpska, although less enthusiastic than those in the Federation of BiH, give a high rating to the very idea of EU integration (4.31).

The perception of Russia as a positive security factor is extremely low at the overall BiH level, but it is slightly higher in Republika Srpska. These data indicate deep internal differences that represent an obstacle on the path to integration.

The research provides a current picture of the citizens' attitudes in both entities toward integration, using a representative sample. The results show a decreasing trend in support, particularly in Republika Srpska, in correlation with the duration of the process. A limitation can be seen in the fact that the survey research focuses primarily on support and perception, and less on the deeper reasons for political and economic uncertainty and its causes. Future research should focus on analyzing the concrete socio-economic effects of the prolonged candidate status on citizens' living standards and should more thoroughly investigate the link between geopolitical factors, external influence, and the change in public opinion support.

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