

Bosnia Herzegovina

Last update:	31 mei 2021
Population:	3,263,459 (World Bank 2021)
Prime minister:	Fadil Novalić
Governemental type:	Parliamentary republic
Ruling coalition:	
Last election:	2022 (general elections)
Next election:	2024 (municipal elections)
Sister parties:	Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP BiH)

Since the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was signed in 1995, nationalistic parties have dominated the political scene in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The local elections held in 2016 and the general elections of 2018 show these tendencies. The outcomes of these elections show no real shift, especially as there is a tendency to vote along ethnic lines and for nationalistic parties. The situation in the country is not very stable. However, Serbs and Croats are working together towards further federalisation of the country. The third and largest ethnic group, the Bosniaks, heavily oppose this initiative.

With regards to the EU integration, Bosnia-Herzegovina is lagging behind other countries in the Western Balkans, because it is unable to implement the requested reforms. Under the current constitution, established in the DPA, the decision-making process follows ethnic lines. This causes a complex system of national and entity-level decision making, making it very hard to find consensus needed to work on further EU integration. Citizens went to vote in 2018 for the general elections to decide whether their country will move towards the European Union membership and NATO integration or whether the society will continue to live along the lines of ethnic fragmentation.

Although the Social Democratic Party (SDP) has increased their support on a national level from 9.5 to 13.9%, the balance between nationalist versus citizens' parties has not shifted. Consequently, nationalist parties have formed the ruling majorities. After a 14-month long impasse, a government was finally installed in December of 2019. Since the 2019 elections, Croatia has been negotiating with the EU and NATO to force Bosnia to reform its electoral process and its constitution to ensure equality among the three components. The 2020 local elections proved a break with the trend of voting solely along ethnic lines, with the opposition parties dealing a strong blow to the governing right-wing ethnic parties.

Political Situation

The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) signed in 1995 to end the war in BiH, determined the Bosnian constitution. As a result, the political system is complex and inefficient. The country is composed of two political entities, Republika Srpska (49 per cent of the territory) and the Bosniak-Croat Federation (51 per cent of the territory). The Federation is divided into ten cantonal units. A 2013 census revealed that with approximately 50%, the Bosniaks make up the largest ethnic group. Serbs make up about 31% of the country's population, with the Croats around 15%. The country's institutions, which are there to support the stability of the country, are constructed taking into consideration these ethnic divides.

As such, BiH is a highly decentralised state with a mixture of a parliamentary and presidential political system. Each political unit has its own governing body, accumulating 700 elected state officials and more than 140 ministers. The consequence is that the state system measures approximately 60% of the state budget. The EU High Representative, German diplomat Christian Schmidt, is working with the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, reports to the UN on the situation in the country and is the highest authority within BiH. In the following, the Federation of BiH will be referred to as F BiH and the Republic Srpska will be referred to as RS.

Deadlock after October 2018 elections

In October 2018 general elections were held. After the October 7 elections, Milorad Dodik, leader of the Alliance of Independent

Social Democrats, SNSD, and Dragan Covic, the head of Bosnia's Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ, confirmed a coalition agreement. Both parties want to work together to form governments on all levels in Bosnia, from cantonal to state level. According to Covic, the results of the elections showed that governments could not be formed without these parties.

The current presidential trio consists of Dodik, President of Republika Srpska (RS) and head of its governing SNSD, Šefik Džaferović, from the main Bosniak party, the SDA, and Zeljko Komsic, from the Democratic Front. Even though Covic lost the Croat seat on the presidency against Komsic, Covic's party HDZ gained enough support to remain one of the key political parties in Bosnia. Despite anti-government protests in Republika Srpska, the main Serb nationalistic SNSD party of pro-Russian Milorad Dodik kept a stronghold on power.

Bosniak member				
	Šefik Džaferović	Party for Democratic Action	212,581	36.61
	Denis Bećirović	Social Democratic Party	194,688	33.53
	Fahrudin Radončić	Union for a Better Future of BiH	75,210	12.95
	Mirsad Hadžikadić	Mirsad Hadžikadić - Platform for Progress	58,555	10.09
	Senad Šepić	Independent Bloc	29,922	5.15
	Amer Jerlagić	Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina	9,655	1.66
Croat member				
	Željko Komšić	Democratic Front	225,500	52.64
	Dragan Čović	Croatian Democratic Union	154,819	36.14
	Diana Zelenika	Croatian Democratic Union 1990	25,890	6.04
	Boriša Falatar	Our Party	16,036	3.74
	Jerko Ivanković-Lijanović	People's Party for Work and Betterment	6,099	1.42
Serb member				
	Milorad Dodik	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats	368,210	53.88
	Mladen Ivanić	Alliance for Victory	292,065	42.74
	Mirjana Popović	Advanced Serb Party	12,731	1.86
	Gojko Kličković	First Serb Democratic Party	10,355	1.52
Invalid/blank votes			120,259	-
Total			1,812,575	100
Registered voters/turnout			3,355,429	54.02

The political parties tried to form a government, leaving the country without a government for over a year. On August 5, the party leaders agreed on a range of issues which had complicated the formation of the government. Still disagreements over the submission of Bosnia's Annual National Programme- a precondition for Bosnia's Membership Action plan for NATO- thwarted the establishment of a government. The Bosnian and Croat parties support the plan and NATO membership, but the Bosnian Serb representatives do not.

Once the disagreement about the Bosnian Membership Action Plan was resolved, a council of ministers was finally appointed in December of 2019. There had been much disagreement about what parties would receive what ministerial posts. The government was well welcomed, as the country had been without a government for over 14 months. Zoran Tegeltija was appointed as chairman of the Council of Ministers and put forward nine ministers, coming from Bosnia's three largest right-wing ethnic parties. Many blamed Bosnia's elaborate and many-layered government for the long-lasting dysfunction.

2014 protests see no change in following elections

In 2014 the popular appetite for social change manifested itself in a mass protest in the Federation. The trigger for them was the closure of privatised companies and, consequently, the loss of many jobs. The spontaneous worker's protest reflected widespread

discontent with politics, political corruption and the economic situation. In the aftermath of these demonstrations, people on the streets started organising themselves in so-called Plenums (open parliaments of citizens), which, to a certain extent, proved to be a new democratic instrument. This bottom-up platform for change succeeded, among other things, in forcing the government of the Tuzla canton to resign. Independent experts with no political affiliation set up a new local government in consultation with the Tuzla Plenum. The Plenums, however, lacked the political vehicle to achieve sustainable change.

In October 2014, citizens, again, voted along ethnic lines. The Bosniak majority in the Federation voted for the conservative Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Serbs in RS voted for nationalist Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) of Milorad Dodik and Croats for the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the party that objected the Croat member of the BiH rotating presidency because he was not a 'real' Croat candidate, meaning not from their ranks. The multi-ethnic Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Democratic Front (DF, a SDP split off) obtained respectively 10 and 13 per cent of the votes and ended up in opposition.

In June 2015, a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and BiH entered into force. The next month parliament adopted a Reform Agenda on socio-economic advancement as well as the advancement on the area of the judiciary, but the leaders of the RS refused to sign it. In 2016, political elites in the country finally managed to agree upon a reforms agenda that will lead to concrete steps in the EU integration process and applied officially for EU membership in February 2016. However, further progress has remained difficult as the local elections results in 2016 showed a continuation of the dominance of nationalist parties and nationalist tendencies within BiH. This complicated decision making when it comes to Bosnia's commitment to reforms needed for EU membership.

Political division

Due to the political division within the country, the recent formation of the state-level government was not just another distribution of seats among the political elite. The officials in Republika Srpska continue to undermine the power of state institutions, Bosnian Croats continue to work towards a third Croatian entity and Bosniaks remain divided internally. Adding to this the sense that the EU — the Office of High Representative (OHR) still has the supreme governing authority — and the international community have no real strategy for BiH, it is questionable if important steps forwards will be taken in the near future.

Furthermore, Dodik's ruling Serb SNSD is supporting the ruling Croatian HDZ in their demand for a Croatian entity, while the ruling Bosniak SDA sees this dynamic as a proof that Croats and Serbs want to divide BiH, something they say will, and cannot, happen peacefully. It is this dynamic that puts all issues in an ethnic jacket of which the ethnic parties profit. Even if citizens know the party of their choice is corrupt and will bring no change to their socio-economic position, they tend to vote because of the ethnic profile of the party.

The presumption by the international community that the continuous reduction of international supervision and the magnetic attraction of EU integration would convince Bosnia's political leaders to pursue the rigorous reforms necessary for EU accession has proven to be illusory. If anything, the opposite has been the case. Negotiations to amend the existing constitution, established by Dayton, to strengthen state institutions and transform the country into a non-ethnic parliamentary democracy, have so far failed to make much progress.

Presence of the international community

The presence of the international community is coordinated through the Office of High Representative for BiH (OHR) which is the state's ultimate authority, responsible for overseeing the implementation of civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The international community's High Representative (HR) in BiH, German diplomat Christian Schmidt, assists the authorities of the country to implement the five objectives and two conditions set out by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The PIC was established during the Dayton Accords.

The Steering Board of the Council provides the HR with political guidance. However, it has proven to be difficult to reach a consensus on main issues between members of the PIC Steering board that consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference represented by Turkey. Therefore the position of the HR on certain issues is vague. The HR's office must stay in place until the set goals have been achieved and ensure implementation of the 1995 Dayton Accords, which include "peaceful coexistence within one single state of different ethnic communities". When these goals are achieved, the HR will be replaced by an EU Special Representative for BiH. The EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, headed by Peter Sorensen, has increasingly taken up several tasks and is the second-largest delegation of the world.

The road to EU-membership

The two Western Balkans states that are de facto a protectorate of the International Community, Kosovo and BiH, are lagging behind in the EU integration process compared to their neighbours. On the one hand, BiH has not been able to implement reforms that would move the country further towards EU accession, while on the other hand, the political elite has an interest in containing the status quo. The constitution that is based on ethnic division and the unwillingness of the political elite to change it has proved to be a major obstacle. As a consequence, the EU's strategy regarding the country changed from reform-related conditionality to socio-economic challenges it faced.

A written commitment to reforms by the BiH institutions and leadership led to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) entering into force in June 2015. The process of establishing the SAA took more than ten years, initiated only after BiH agreed on reforms set as a condition by the European Commission (EC) in its Feasibility Study published in 2003. In the sixteen areas identified by the EU that needed reform, reform of the defence, the police and the establishment of state law on the public broadcasting system proved to be the most difficult areas to meet EU conditions. This was due to the reluctance existing within the RS entity, opposing strong state government at the expense of the entity's power.

Only in 2008, the obstacles were overcome, resulting in new agreements visa facilitation and readmission, as well as an interim Agreement on Trade and Trade-related issues. As a consequence of the political deadlock after the 2010 elections no further required reforms were implemented and the country fell even further behind in the EU integration process. The ethnic and political division and the lack of willingness among the political elite to move forward as the status quo benefits the ruling elite seem to be the main reasons for the slow implementation of the reforms. Pressure from within society has proven to be crucial for achieving progress. Clear and achievable goals, such as visa liberalisation, are important tools for making concrete steps on the road to EU membership.

In February 2016 the country submitted its application to join the EU. This seemingly important international step forward is contradicted by the divisions on the ground and war-time rhetoric by political leaders. According to international observers, the lack of progress mainly has to do with the role of the EU, which "neglected its role in promoting democracy among aspiring member states", a Freedom House report of February 2017 said. Instead of addressing the problems with the Bosnian political elite, the EU has chosen to endorse the elite. In the past years, the Bosnian political elite has only looked to the international actors' position, and never felt the need to be represented and serve its citizens.

Lack of improvements trigger leak of EU non-papers

The EU appears undecided on how to conduct its strategy towards BiH. Meanwhile, the United States (US) has been too busy with internal affairs to have adopted a clear-cut strategy for BiH. Though in more recent times there seems to be more attention for BiH and Germany has been pushing for revitalising the OHR, new plans face much criticism. The OHR is accused of a lack of democratic accountability. The leak of two EU non-papers in the spring of 2021, on redrawing the Balkan border to accelerate EU integration of the Western Balkans, can be considered a consequence of a lack of progress, especially in BiH, but also its neighbouring countries Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania.

The controversial non-papers were undisclosed and unofficial documents that shared confidentiality between governments and governing institutions. The non-papers proposed Serbia, Croatia and Albania swallowing up parts of neighbouring BiH, North Macedonia and Kosovo. The essence of the plan was to divide the Balkan along ethnic lines, which caused a major controversy. The EU was quick to respond that it was fully committed to BiH's sovereignty and unity. However, high placed EU officials have kept silent on the issue. Though nothing will likely come from the papers, it shows how the EU is struggling when it comes to its relation with BiH, which has been discussing EU membership for a long time now.

In late 2021, Christian Schmidt issued a report in which he warned for intensifying ethnic and political tensions that threaten the legitimacy of BiH state institutions. The report says that domestic and international policy changes are needed to prevent BiH from breaking apart and possibly sliding into war again.

Female representation and women's rights

The authorities in BiH seem to have little interest in addressing the human rights problems, which the country has been struggling with for many years now. During the Bosnian War and Bosnian genocide, women suffered from mass sexual violence. Estimates of rape range from 12,000 to 50,000. In 2020 the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) still concluded that the country had failed to conduct adequate investigations into conflict-related sexual violence and compensations were often unsatisfactory. There have been improvements since the War though, with the in 2003 adopted Gender Equality Law. In theory, the constitution ensures equality between men and women now.

In practice, society remains much committed to traditional gender roles. To illustrate, although the constitution states that 30% of political candidates need to be female, this number was less than 20% during the local elections of 2020. On a national and regional level, about 26% of those elected are female. However, there has been a trend towards more women in local politics in recent years, supported by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and the OSCE. They are paving the way for more gender equality. Just like in many of the world's countries, the COVID-19 pandemic and following government restrictions led to an increase of domestic gender based violence.

LGBTI rights

LGBTI people still need to deal with discrimination and face challenges that non-LGBTI people do not. However, especially in recent years, BiH has seen quite some improvements when it comes to LGBTI rights. As it is one of the guarantees for becoming a full EU member, in 2016 the government adopted a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, making it illegal to discriminate against someone based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. Since 1996 homosexuality has been legal, with BiH's different entities following in the years afterwards, but there is still no legal recognition of same-sex couples on a national level. The government has been considering adopting this since 2018 though and might follow the example of neighbouring Montenegro.

Religion continues to play an important role in Bosnian society, which has its negative implications on the attitudes towards the LGBTI community. LGBTI events often end up in violence, with the 2008 Queer Sarajevo Festival being the most notable example. A 2017 poll by Pew Research showed that 13% would support same-sex marriage, with 84% opposing it. The trend has been positive though. The second Sarajevo Pride march took place in August of 2020, without any major incidents. LGBTI activists saw an increase in online threats during the march though. Like in many other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic marked year saw an increase in violence against LGBTI people.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

Bosnia and Herzegovina (state-level)

The parliament consists of two houses. The House of Peoples has 15 delegates: five for each ethnic group. The Serb representatives are appointed by the parliament of the RS and Bosniaks and Croats are employed from the parliament of the F BiH. The House of Representatives has 42 members. Two-third is elected from the F BiH and one third from the RS by regular elections for a four-year mandate. Their role is to adopt the state budget, to elect the government on the proposal of the presidency, and to adopt laws. The government is presided by a prime minister with the official title of Chairman of the Council of Ministers. As both entities also have a prime minister, it is important to understand the difference and on which level these Prime Ministers operate.

The Presidency

The presidency consists of three persons elected by direct election for a four-year mandate. The Serb member of the presidency is elected from the RS and the Croat and Bosniak members are elected from the F BiH. They rotate every eight months on ethnic principle.

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (entity)

Similar to the state-level, the entity F BiH has a two-house parliament. The House of Peoples has 58 delegates elected from ten cantonal assemblies: 17 Bosniaks, 17 Croats, 17 Serbs and 7 other nationalities. Its role is to protect the ethnic interests of the represented ethnic groups. The House of Representatives has 98 members elected directly from election districts on open lists. The F BiH's leader is a Prime Minister.

Republic Srpska (entity)

RS has a two-chamber parliament as well, consisting of the Council of Peoples and the National Assembly. The Council of Peoples has the same responsibilities as the House of Peoples in F BiH but has a different structure. There are four ethnic clubs: 8 Serbs, 8 Bosniaks, 8 Croats and 4 other elected municipal councils because there are no cantons in RS. The national assembly has 83 members elected for a four-year term, around three quarters elected in multi-seat constituencies and one quarter through compensatory lists. RS also has a prime minister, but other than F BiH also has a separate president.

In addition, there exists the district of Brcko which is a self-governing administrative unit, established as a neutral area under joint Serb, Croat and Bosniak authority.

Current system

State Level

Bosniak president - Bakir Izetbegović
 Croat president – Dragan Čović
 Serbian – Mladen Ivanić
 Chairman of the Council of Ministers – Denis Zvizdić

Party of Democratic Action
 Croatian Democratic Union of BiH
 Party of Democratic Progress
 Party of Democratic Action

Entity level

RS
 President - Milorad Dodik
 Prime Minister - Zeljka Cvijanovic
F BiH
 Prime Minister - Fadil Novalić

Union of Independent Social Democrats
 Union of Independent Social Democrats
 Party of Democratic Action

Elections

Parliamentary and presidential elections 2018

On Sunday 7 October 2018, national elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Voters were able to elect lawmakers for the national House of Representatives, for the entity parliament of either the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F-BiH) or the Republika Srpska (RS), and for the three members of the rotating presidency of the country. The RS elected a new President for their entity. Milorad Dodik, leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) has won the Serbian seat in the rotating presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 53.8% of Republika Srpska votes in his favour. Dodik has until now been the president of that entity, having won votes for the position in his favour in every election since 2006. Not only did the SNSD regain the Serbian seat in the national rotating presidency, but it also saw its candidate Željka Cvijanović win the presidency of Republika Srpska.

Quite a change has taken place regarding the Croatian seat of the national presidency. After having been absent from it for four years, Democratic Front (DF) leader Željko Komšić has won the Croatian seat of the national presidency, with almost 20% more votes than the current occupant of that seat, Dragan Čović of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ-BiH). Šefik Džaferović from the mainly Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) has won the Bosniak seat of the national presidency over Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP) candidate Denis Bećirović, by around 4%. This means that the position remains in the hands of the more nationalist SDA over the more moderate social democrats of the SDP as it has been in almost all of the past 20 years.

All in all, the 2018 general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown little progress in comparison with previous elections. Bosnians still mainly cast their votes along ethnic lines, and ethnic-nationalistic parties again hold a majority in all parliaments and the presidency seats. However, the SDP and other multi-ethnic parties have experienced some growth. This shows that there are people in the country who would like to see a change in multi-ethnic politics and reform. Hopefully, this trend will continue, and multi-ethnic parties will gain more ground in the future. For the new government, however, the chance of tangible reforms being carried through is not much higher than it was in the past years.

Official results BiH House of Representatives

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	2018	Seats	2014
Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	25.5%	8	27.9%
Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) – coalition	14.7%	5	12.2%
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	14.2%	5	9.5%
Democratic Front – Citizens' Union (DF-CU)	9.7%	3	15.3%
Union for a Better Future (SBB-BiH)	6.8%	2	14.4%
Naša Stranka (Our Party)	4.9%	2	
Nezavisni Blok	4.2%	1	
Pokret Demokratske Akcije (PDA)	3.9%	1	

A-SDA Za Evropsku BiH – Zajedno	3%	1	
Republika Srpska	2018	Seats	2014
Union of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)	39.1%	6	38.5%
Serb Democratic Party (SDS) – coalition	24.3%	3	32.6%
Party of Democratic Progress (PDP)	12.6%	2	7.8%
Democratic People's Union (DNS)	10.3%	1	5.7%
Socialist Party (SP)	4.7%	1	
Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	4.5%	1	
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	1.5%	-	-

Official results Republika Srpska entity parliament

	2018	2014
Union of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)	31.8%	32.3%
Serb Democratic Party (SDS) – coalition	18%	26.2%
Democratic People's Union (DNS)	14.4%	9.2%
Party of Democratic Progress (PDP)	10.2%	7.4%
Socialist Party (SP)	8.2%	5.1%

Results Republika Srpska Presidency

	2018
Željka Cvijanović (SNSD)	47 %
Vukota Govedarica (SzP)	41.8 %

Official results Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina parliament

	2018	2014
Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	25.2%	27.8%
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	14.5%	10.1%
Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) – coalition	14.4%	11.9%
Democratic Front – Citizens' Union	9.4%	12.9%
Union for a Better Future (SBB-BiH)	7.1%	14.7%

Official results rotating presidency

Bosniak Member	Croatian member	Serbian Member
Denis Bećirović (SDP)	Željko Komšić (DF)	Željka Cvijanović (SNSD)

57.37%	55.80%	51.65%
Bakir Izetbegović (SDA)	Borjana Krišto (HDZ-BiH)	Mirko Šarović (SDS)
37.25%	44.20%	42.74%
Mirsad Hadžikadić (PzP)	N.a.	Vojin Mijatović (SDP)
5.38%		1.86%

Election observers

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), concluded that the general elections were genuinely competitive but characterized by continuing segmentation along ethnic lines. The freedoms of speech, movement and association were generally respected, "We saw that fundamental freedoms were respected but, at the same time, there is enduring mistrust in the country's institutions," said Ambassador Peter Tejler, head of the ODIHR election observation mission. The voter turnout stood at 53.4%, which was slightly lower than in the 2014 general elections.

2020 local elections

The most recent elections in BiH were the local elections held on 15 November 2020, in which citizens could vote on the councils of 143 municipalities, as well as the mayors of 22 towns and cities. The elections yielded interesting results, with the opposition parties managing to deal a strong blow to BiH's three major nationalist parties. The Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Bosnian Serb Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) will still remain in control over the largest number of municipalities, but none of the parties were celebrating after the election results came in.

It seems like a trend that started during the 2018 general elections, with multiethnic opposition parties booking some minor successes, has continued. Although the voter turnout remained beneath 50%, the voters that cast their ballot sent a strong message to the governing parties. Already prior to the election, it was predicted that the SDA, SNSD and HDZ would be punished for their poor performance and ongoing corruption scandals, amid the country's COVID-19-related health, political, economic and social crises. There is some belief that this trend could continue working towards the 2022 general elections, which would pave the way for new leadership in BiH.

Social Democratic Parties

Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP B&H)

Party Leader: Nermin Nikšić

Number of seats: 4

<http://sdp.ba/>

The SDP B&H is a full member of the Socialist International and an Associate Member of the Party of European Socialists. The Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP BiH) is a multi-ethnic political party that advocates strong state institutions and European integration of Bosnia. Founded in 1909 by the trade unions and progressive intellectuals, SDP fractions merged into the Communist Party and Socialist Party of BiH. During the war, in 1992, the SDP was shortly part of the government of National Unity. However, they left the coalition after the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) supported the formation of a national army.

In 1996, the SDP led coalition ('Joint list') won less than 5 percent of the votes, while at the 1997 local election the party went alone and doubled its score. In 1998, the second general election after the war, the SDP further increased its support and created local branches in Republika Srpska (RS). In the run up to the local elections of 2000, a fraction of the Social Liberal Party from RS, top-level members of the Croat Peasant Party and Social Democrats – led by Selim Beslagić – joined SDP. In the same year SDP had a great result winning elections in 21 municipalities, mainly in urban parts of the country. In the November 2000 general elections the SDP became the strongest party on national level with 21,5 percent of the votes. The "Alliance for change" was formed consisting of

several parties and the SDP held important government positions. In the RS the SDP remained weak.

Despite the strong engagement in reforms, the party was subject to negative campaigning of the nationalist parties. The SDP was blamed for the bad economic situation, for not finishing the reforms, and for discriminating respectively Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks. In the 2002 general elections SDP got only 16,5 percent of the votes in FBiH and 10,5 percent on national level. Most SDP supporters did not get out to vote, being disappointed by the achievements of the party during two years in government. The election defeat caused a split within the SDP. A part of the leadership wanted to make a deal with the nationalists in order to secure their positions. However, the main board decided not to join a nationalist coalition, a decision confirmed by the party congress. As a result, several figures - Ivo Komsic, Sead Avdic, Miro Lazovic and Sejfidin Tokic - left the party and formed a new one.

At the 2010 general elections the SDP strongly increased its support again becoming the main Party on national level (19 percent) resembling 8 seats in the House of Representatives, in comparison with 5 seats in the 2006 general elections. This was a result of a strong modern campaign (focusing on economy, education, justice, health care and social policy) and the disappointment among citizens in the ruling parties. They also won the most seats in the Federation of BiH (25 percent). During the 2014 elections, the party suffered quite some losses, but recovered slightly during the 2018 general elections.

Over the years SDP has strengthened its party structures, for example, forming well organized youth and women organisations. Although the party made steps in improving the internal party democracy, the party leadership is criticised for strengthening their power in the party structures. Zlatko Lagumdžija, who had been leading the party since 1997, is propagating a multi-ethnic European Bosnia, not accepting that the current reality of political and societal division is the future of the country. In 2014 he was replaced as president of the party by Nermin Nikšić.

Socialist Party of Republika Srpska (SPRS)

Party Leader: Petar Djokic

Number of seats:

<http://socijalisti.ba/>

The original party leadership was made up of officers of the Bosnian Serb army. The SPRS was the main Serb opposition party against the SDS, but they shared the SDS's opinion that Republika Srpska should become part of Yugoslavia. The party's views changed over the years from radical Serbian nationalism towards a moderate democratic oriented party. For the September 1998 elections the SPRS joined the Sloga coalition (created by SNSD). In February 2000, however, SPRS left Sloga, because Dodik sacked SPRS' Deputy Prime Minister Gligoric.

In 2002 the SPRS split, when the youth of the party formed the DSP (Democratic Socialist Party) and later joined SNSD. At their last congress the SPRS clearly stated that they will never go in coalitions with SDS again. They also stated that their goal is to create a new image and to involve at least 30 percent of youth in the party boards and election lists. After these conclusions the leader, Zivko Radisic, resigned and left the party. The influence of the party on the political field today is marginal.

At the elections in 2006 the party lost its seat in the House of Representatives of BiH but gained 3.70 percent of the vote and retained its 3 seats in the elections to the National Assembly of Republic of Srpska. In the October 2010 elections they won 4 seats in the RS Assembly out of 83 seats. During the 2014 and 2018 elections the party increased in size again, winning 7 seats in the latest general election.

Other Parties

Party of Democratic Action (SDA)

Party Leader: Bakir Izetbegović

Number of seats: 8

<http://www.sda.ba/>

The mainly Bosniak party is in favour of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a decentralised but unitary state with ethnically mixed cantons. It

advocates political and economic unity and cultural autonomy for the ethnic groups. The SDA was founded in 1990 by Alija Izetbegovic, Fikret Abdic, Adil Zulfikarpasic and Omer Behmen. In the first presidential elections in 1990 Fikret Abdic won the majority votes but he stepped down in favour of Izetbegovic. Later Abdic collaborated with the Serbs and formed his own state during the war and now is prosecuted for war crimes. Izetbegovic was an important political figure during the war in Bosnia.

During its existence, the party, like Izetbegovic, changed its political course. From a multi-ethnic federalist party, the SDA became an ethnic Muslim party. In 1996 one of the influential leaders in SDA, Haris Silajdzic left SDA and created the Party for B&H, thereby reducing SDA for 1/3. From 1996 till 2000 the Party for B&H was in coalition with the SDA and supported by the Liberal Party. On 13 October 2001 Izetbegovic stepped down as party leader of the SDA and Sulejman Tihić was elected to lead the party.

After that the party moved towards the political centre, becoming more open to non-Muslim Bosnians. In the 2006 elections, the SDA won a majority of seats in state (9 out of 42 seats), the Federation (28 out of 98) and cantonal parliaments and formed governments with SNSD, SBiH, HDZ BiH, HDZ 1990, NSRZB and PDP. The party slightly declined during the 2010 elections, but has maintained most of its support during the following 2014 and 2018 elections. In 2018 it once again became the country's largest party and, as such, has sought to form a governing coalition on all of the country's levels. The party is currently led by Bakir Izetbegović, the only son of founder Alija Izetbegovic.

Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)

Party Leader: Milorad Dodik

Number of seats: 6

<http://www.snsd.org/>

The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) was founded in 1992 by Milorad Dodik. He has been party leader ever since, holding the post of Republika Srpska's (RS) Prime Minister (1998-2010) and President (since 2010). During the war Dodik propagated inter-ethnic tolerance and managed to increase support for his party. In these years Dodik was a protégé of the international community, which regarded him as a moderate politician who could decrease the influence of the nationalistic Serb Democratic Party (SDS), formerly led by Radovan Karadžić.

In 1996, the SNSD led the 'Alliance for Peace and Progress', the only Serb party that ran in the elections in both RS and the Bosniak-Croat Federation. In 1998 the party initiated 'Sloga' (Concord) coalition, the main opposition block in RS against the nationalist SDS/SRS. 'Sloga' won the elections and formed a new government. In the November 2000 elections, however, the SNSD suffered a crushing defeat by the nationalistic SDS. In 2000 a part of the Social Liberals of RS joined the SNSD (another part of Social Liberals joined SDP) and the SNSD declared itself as a party for the whole of BiH, setting up party branches in the whole country. In 2002 the SNSD merged with the Democratic Socialist Party of RS (DSP).

At the 2006 general elections the SNSD won conveniently, securing a majority in the Serb entity. Despite their social democratic orientation, the party set up a rather nationalist campaign to secure votes, presenting itself as the protector of Serb nationalist interests. The international community and other political parties in Bosnia have been accusing SNSD and its leader of slowing down the reforms and EU integration of the country. However, SNSD expressed their commitment to EU integration and argued that all reforms must be approved by all political actors and ethnic groups in the country. Due to nationalist rhetoric of its officials SNSD lost its international support and the party's membership has been suspended by the Socialist International (SI).

Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ-BiH)

Party Leader: Dragan Covic

Number of seats: 5

<http://www.hdzbih.org/>

The conservative, Christian Democratic, nationalistic party was formed in 1990 at the first party convention held in Sarajevo. During the war, the moderate wing of the HDZ lost from the radical wing, which sought unification of Herceg-Bosna (the Bosnian Croatian republic established by ultra-nationalist Herzegovinian Croats during the war) with Croatia. The HDZ is striving for ethnic autonomy, varying from autonomy within the Federation B&H to a confederate structure with Croatia. This has occasionally led to conflicts with the High Representative.

HDZ split a few times, first in 2000 when Kresimir Zubak and Croats from northern Bosnia formed the New Croat Initiative. After that, several moderates were expelled from the party. When the OHR dismissed the president of HDZ from all political functions, Dragan Covic took over the leadership of the party in 2005. Between 1998 and 2001 he was the Deputy Prime minister and Minister of Finance of F BiH. Covic was the Croatian member of the Presidency on state level from 2002-2005, when he was dismissed by the HR Paddy Ashdown after he was indicted by the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for financial malfeasance and misuse of office. In 2006 another group of members broke away and formed the HDZ 1990 out of discord with the policies of the HDZ and its leader.

The HDZ has participated in several Bosnian governments until 2000. They returned to power in 2002, where it remained until 2006. In the elections of 2006 the party joined the Croatian Coalition with the Croatian Party of Rights of BiH and the Croatian People's Union. Together they won 3 seats in the National Assembly and 8 seats in the entity of the Federation. In the latest elections the HDZ went alone and won 3 seats in the National Assembly and 12 seats in the parliament of the Federation. In later elections the party managed to remain one of the most influential political forces in the country, participating in the government after the 2014 and 2018 elections.

Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ-1990)

Party Leader: Ilija Cvitanović

Number of seats:

<http://www.hdz1990.org/>

In April 2006 the HDZ 1990 was formed. The party was established by former members of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) who disagreed with the policies of the HDZ and its leader Dragan Covic. The president of the party is Bozo Ljubic. As the party's name suggests, the founders were all key figures from the original HDZ who have walked out or have been expelled. The party strives for a federal Bosnian state in which the Bosnian Croats would have a federal unit. HDZ 1990 is a nationalist party which aims at protecting the national interests of Croats in Bosnia, but has marginal influence. In 2006 the HDZ 1990 won 7 seats in the Assembly of the Federation. For the 2010 elections the party formed a coalition with the Croatian Party of the Rights (HSP) and together they won 2 seats in the National Parliament of BiH and 5 seats in the parliament of the Federation. In the years afterwards, the party declined and currently holds no seats in any assembly.

Serbian Democratic Party (SDS)

Party Leader: Mirko Šarović

Number of seats:

<http://www.sdsrs.com/>

Until the September 1998 elections, the SDS was the leading Serbs party in the Republika Srpska. The party's ideological orientation is nationalistic. The party's sole preoccupation with the fate of Republika Srpska hampers any discussion on other political issues. During and directly after the Bosnian war, all the party's actions and positions seemed to revolve around its political leader, indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic. His role during the war and political positions on most issues were unpredictable.

Karadzic was forced to resign from his positions in the party he helped to found, because in the Dayton Accords it was decided that people indicted by the Tribunal are not allowed to hold public posts, and are not allowed to run in any elections. Initially, neither the SDS nor Karadzic himself were inclined to obey this ruling, but with strong international pressure they did it to secure political life for the SDS. Even in the time of the Alliance for Change, the SDS had a strong position in RS.

In the 2006 general elections SDS gained 3 seats in the national House of Representatives and won 17 out of 83 seats in the parliament of Republika Srpska, becoming the second party in RS. In the 2010 elections the SDS won 4 seats in the national parliament and came second in the entity elections of RS winning 19 percent of the votes. After initially forming a government, it has served as an opposition party. It was one of the country's largest winners during the 2014 elections, but lost some seats after 2018. It currently holds 16 seats in the Republika Srpska parliament. Mirko Šarović has been the party's leader since 2019.

Party for Democratic Progress (PDP)

Party Leader: Branislav Borenović

Number of seats:

<http://pdp.rs.ba/>

PDP is a moderate Serb nationalist party formed by Mladen Ivanic, a professor of Economy from Banja Luka University, in 2000. In just a few months before the elections in 2000 they gathered considerable support and as a result they became the second party after the SDS in RS. The PDP supports the idea of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but decentralized and strictly according to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Their program aims at securing the position of the RS as a strong entity which has to protect the Serb national interests. The party has been supported by the international community. Most of PDP's members are former SDS members and supporters who were not satisfied with the economic reforms carried out by SDS. PDP became part of the Alliance for Change on state level in 2001.

After the elections in October 2002, PDP formed a government on state and RS level with support of SDS, SDA, S BiH and HDZ. Mladen Ivanic is former minister of foreign affairs. Former Minister for European Integrations - Dragan Mikerevic became Prime Minister of RS, but Ivanic still has strong influence on him. In the general elections of 2006, PDP became the third party in RS having 8 out of 83 seats in the parliament of RS, which number slightly declined in the 2010 elections to 7 seats. Mladen Ivanic, the party's leader at the time, managed to be elected for the presidency of BiH, but lost the 2018 election. The party itself won though, and managed to increase its number of seats to 9.

Alliance for a Better Future of BiH (SBB)

Party Leader: Fahrudin Radončić

Number of seats:

<https://www.sbb.ba/>

The Union for a Better Future of BiH is a newcomer on the Bosnian political field. It is a Bosniak party led by the media tycoon Fahrudin Radončić who founded the party in September 2009. He is the owner of Dnevni Avaz, the largest daily newspaper in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The party surprisingly won 4 seats at the October 2010 elections, becoming fourth in the national assembly of BiH. Radončić's speeches have tended to focus on economic issues. However, besides Radončić's attempts to portray himself as the great rebuildier, the party's political program is vague and is centred primarily on Radončić as a personality. During the 2014 and 2018 elections the party did not manage to muster any broader support and only holds 2 seats currently.

Our party (NS)

Party Leader: Predrag Kojović

Number of seats:

<http://www.nasastranka.ba/>

Our Party is a social-liberal, multi-ethnic party founded in 2008. The party is active in both the Republica Srpska (RS) and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F BiH) and tries to break the dominance of nationalist parties within the Bosnian political system. Rule of law and closer ties with the EU are also important for NS. Until recently the party had no representation in the entities, but only on local level. In 2018 it managed to win 3 seats in the BiH's House of Representatives.

Smaller Parties

Party Leader:

Number of seats:

Smaller parties

There are a number of smaller parties competing for seats in the entities. The Serb Radical Party of Republic Srpska (SRS RS), an ultra-nationalist party who supports the idea of a Greater Serbia, stretching from Istria to Thessaloniki. And the more moderate, multi-ethnic, parties: Democratic People's Alliance (DNS), Democratic National Union, People's party of work for progress and the Croatian Party of Rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also, there are a number of smaller parties that have seats in the cantons of the Federation but no seats in the entities assembly. One of them is the New Croat Initiative (NHI) formed in 1999 after the first split in the HDZ by moderate politicians of HDZ mostly from Central and Northern Bosnia. Their founder and leader is Kresimir Zubak, former president of F BiH and member of the state

presidency in the first years after the war. They formed a coalition with the Croat Peasants Party (HSS) in 2007. Although the HSS has 'Croat' in its name, the HSS is not a nationalist Croat party, but strongly supports the Bosnian-Herzegovinian state. Its backing mainly consists of Croats driven away by the Serbs from central and northern Bosnia. The HSS is close to social democratic political thinking, but some top members tend towards a more centrist political view. Their party leader is Marko Tadić.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDS) was formed in 2002 by the merger of the Liberal Party of BiH (LS BiH) led by Rasim Kadić and the Bosniak Liberal Party led by Muhamed Filipović. Before the 2006 elections the Alliance for Change and the LDS merged because they were close to disappearance from the political scene, but that did not help: the LDS hardly passed the threshold of 3 percent and they are only represented in a couple of Cantons in the FBiH. The LDS is a member of the World Liberal Association.

Another smaller party is the radical national socialistic Bosnian Party (BOSS) that advocates a Bosniak national state. Their party leader Mirnes Ajanović has a charismatic appearance in public with his "duce" like speeches, in which he accuses everyone for the bad situation in the country without any arguments.

Biographies

Fadić Novalić

Prime Minister

Fadić Novalić was born on 25 September 1959 and became the Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 15 March 2015. Novalić is a member of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), for which he chaired the SDA Board for Economic-Financial Policy. He graduated in 1983 as a mechanical engineer, at the University of Sarajevo. During the 1992 – 1995 war, as volunteer and soldier he was member of the 107th Gradačac Brigade of the BiH Army and Leader of the project for production of arms and military equipment at TMD Gradačac. Novalić is married and has three daughters

Šefik Džaferović

President of BiH (Bosniak member) and Party of Democratic Action

Šefik Džaferović is the vice president of SDA and the current Bosniak Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Šefik Džaferović was born in 1957 in the Bosnian town of Zavidovići. After he graduated from the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, he worked in judicial institutions and for the police in Zavidovići and Zenica until 1996.

In 1996 he was elected to the council of Zenica-Doboj Canton. That same year he became a delegate in the House of Peoples of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Four years later he entered the House of Peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 2002 elections he became a member of the Parliament of FBiH. In 2014 he was elected to the Parliament of BiH with 30.000 votes. In the 2018 elections he won as the Bosniak Member of the Presidency of BiH with over 36% of the votes.

Milorad Dodik

President of BiH (Serb member) and Leader Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)

Milorad Dodik (1959) was born in Banja Luka and studied Political Science at the University of Belgrade. He was chairman of the executive board of the local assembly in Laktasi from 1986 to 1990. In the first multiparty elections in former Yugoslavia, held in 1990, Dodik was elected a member of the BiH parliament. During the 1992-1995 conflict in BiH he opposed the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) that was led by Radovan Karadžić, in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska (RS) with his Independent Members of Parliament Caucus (IMPC).

In 2001 the IMPC merged into the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and Dodik has acted as its president ever since. Dodik served his first term as the entity's (RS) prime minister from 1998 to 2001. On 28 February 2006, Dodik took up the post for the second time after the RS Parliament elected him, after voting out the previous Serbian Democratic Party-led government, headed by Pero Bukejlović. Subsequently Dodik became President of Republika Srpska (RS) on 15 November 2010. He has served in various important posts in Bosnia's complex political system, including as President of the Republika Srpska. Currently, Dodik serves as the Serb Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such, Dodik is an important political

figure in BiH.

Initially, the SNSD leader was supported by the EU and the US as a moderate alternative to the dominance of the nationalistic SDS party. But once in power, Dodik proved to be a smart politician that knew how to balance between a pro-European attitude towards Western partners and nationalistic rhetoric within the entity, where he blocked reforms more than once.

Željko Komšić

President of BiH (Croat member) and Social Democratic Party (SDP)

Željko Komšić (1964) was born in Sarajevo. He studied law at the University of Sarajevo and went to the School of Foreign Service at the University of Georgetown in Washington, USA. At the beginning of the 1992-1995 war, he joined the Army of BiH and in 1995, he received the highest military decoration of the BiH Army. From 2000 to 2001, he performed the duty of the Head of Municipality of New Sarajevo and in 2001, he became the first BiH ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro. Due to his disagreement with the policy, he resigned from the post of ambassador in 2002.

However, at the local elections in 2004, he was elected for another term as a Head of Municipality of New Sarajevo. He stayed on that post until the October elections 2006, when he became elected BiH President for the Croat seat in the rotating presidency as a candidate of the SDP which was prolonged after he was re-elected in the October 2010 elections. Komšić is a popular figure in BiH. His re-election of President of the Croatian seat in the rotating Presidency frustrated the HDZ who believe he is not representing the Croats, but is too pro-Bosniak. After the 2014 election he was replaced as President, but in the 2018 election managed to regain the position.

Bakir Izetbegović

Speaker of the House of Peoples of BiH

Bakir Izetbegović (1956) was born in Sarajevo, where he also completed his schooling. He is the son of Alija Izetbegović, Bosnia's wartime president. Bakir Izetbegović graduated from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Sarajevo in 1981, after which he became the Director of the Construction Bureau of the Sarajevo Canton until 2003. Starting from 2000 Izetbegović got involved in politics and became a Member of Assembly and Chair of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) MPs Club in the Sarajevo Canton Assembly. From 2006 to 2010 he served as a member of Parliament of BiH for the SDA and on 3 October 2010 Izetbegović was elected as the Bosniak Member of the rotating Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the general elections. He served for eight years and afterwards became the Speaker of the House of Peoples of BiH.

Željka Cvijanović

President of Republika Srpska

Željka Cvijanović is a Bosnian Serb politician and President of Republika Srpska representing the Bosnian Serb SNSD party. From 12 March 2013 to 19 November 2018, Cvijanović acted as Prime minister of the Republika Srpska. Cvijanović is a professor of English language and literature and also has a master's degree in diplomatic and consular law from the Banja Luka Law school. During the 2010-2014 parliamentary term she was an expert member of the Committee for European Integration and Regional Cooperation of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. Cvijanović became the President of Republika Srpska in December of 2018, a position she still holds.

Nermin Nikšić

Leader of the Social Democratic Party

Nermin Nikšić was born on 27 December 1960 and served as prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2011 till 2015. Nikšić joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1993, a year later he became president of the SDP in Konjic. After Nikšić became deputy mayor of Konjic he soon resigned. He became a member of the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2006 he became the leader of the SDP faction in the House of Representatives. In March 2011, after the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nermin Nikšić was named Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He served that position for four years, after returning as a member of the house of representatives in 2018.

Christian Schmidt

High Representative for BiH

Christian Schmidt is the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina since August 2021. He served as Minister of Food and Agriculture in Germany from 2014 to 2018 and was member of the Bundestag from 1990 to 2021. He succeeded the Austrian diplomat Valentin Inzko as High Representative. Inzko had resigned from the function.

In November 2021, Schmidt issued a stirring report on the ethnic and political tensions in BiH, warning that the country could break, leading into civil conflict.

Source

General information

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Gender

- [Trading economics](#)
- [Gender Index](#)
- SDP BiH MP Besima Borić