

Chapter 12: Populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “folksy” Politics in an Ethno-Nationalist Partocracy

Maja Savić-Bojanić

1. Introduction

Populism is a long-contested term in political science whose definitions offer broad interpretations. With interpretations ranging from a unitary concept (Ionescu and Gellner 1969: 3) to specific typological orientations calling for variations between “agrarian populism and political populism” (Canovan 1981), how to define populism is surely a matter of scientific debate. Stigmatized as a danger to democracy, almost as a political pathology, populism indicates a guileless, folksy, and often simplistic political content which promises “a quick treatment for the cure of its immediate manifestations; and the causes are ignored” (Ghergina et al. 2013: 4). Nowhere is this last interpretation of populism more applicable than in case of post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a country-symbol of an ethno-nationalist partocracy,¹ with some 140² registered political parties in which only a handful have effectively held influential political posts and filled both chambers of the country’s Parliament.

Stuck in a limbo of post-war socio-economic ills, Bosnia and Herzegovina currently stands in the European backyard that is still burdened by war-time memories, narratives of reconciliation, and little progress. All of this is worsened by the fact that the majority of its leading political parties in the years following the signing of the Dayton Agreement in 1995 have led explicitly ethnically oriented politics, frequently evoking the ‘vital national issue’ question, and doing very little to address the real societal problems. The country’s geographical division into two distinct ethnic units, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Republic of Srpska (RS), does not ease the already fraught situation, but further exacerbates

-
- 1 Form of government in which one or more political parties lead the country’s politics and where the role of the citizen or individual politicians is limited or missing entirely.
 - 2 The Central Election Commission of BiH lists 149 registered political parties as of September 2017.

the nationalist, regressive, and reproachful rhetoric which can be observed in the discourse of mainstream ruling parties.

In such a constellation, the analysis of the populist traits of these political organizations is necessary and needed, insomuch as little academic research is available locally or internationally on this subject. Alternatively, as De Raadt et al. (2004) argue, populist behavior, if seen as an ideology, is very hostile towards representative democracy, a case in point for Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there is limited citizen and individual involvement in politics. In other words, political activism is confined in the hands of a handful of political parties, and apart from a few locally organized movements, these parties have, more or less continuously, ruled over this small state (Repovac-Nikšić et al. 2022).

Hence, this chapter is devoted to two historically prominent political parties from both entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska): the Party of Democratic Action (SDA)³ and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD).⁴ More precisely, this work is an analysis of the level to which the two parties exhibit populist traits outlined in the available academic literature on populism (Canovan 1999; Mudde 2002; Mény and Surel 2002; Taggart 2004; Gherghina et al. 2013). The justification for the choice of these two particular cases lies in the fact that, just as Heinisch and Mazzoleni (2017) claim, to examine populism is to focus on the role of the actor(s) who are the key protagonists of populist labels and the true carriers of populist claims. Ultimately, the leaders of the SDA and the SNSD, possessing both the endogenous conditions and exogenous conditions of possibility (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2017: 113-115), have successfully been able to upkeep their credibility and notably remain trusted as critical change agents among 'their people,' thus effectively creating policies and politics in BiH for a few decades.

2. *The approach*

Comprehending populism is a difficult matter, most notably if the analysis succumbs to a belief that all political parties can and do exert populist characteristics from time to time (Raadt 1998; Mudde 2002). However,

3 Stranka demokratske akcije (SDA).

4 Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata (SNSD).

there are specific ‘populist traits’ which can be examined. Canovan (1999) regards populism as a revolt against the ruling elite in the name of the people. According to her, populism has only one authority and that is ‘the people,’ whose style is simple and direct and whose focus is on ‘the populist mood,’ which usually evokes emotions and enthusiasm.

Mény and Surel (2000; 2002) also place the primary focus on ‘the people,’ stressing the role of the community and downgrading the ‘horizontal cleavages’ (left vs. right), whereby the people are portrayed as victims of the ruling elites, as a betrayed bunch who are subjected to corruption and victimized through political abuse of power. In this context, populist leaders rise, carrying a strong belief of ‘betrayal of the people’ and demand that “the primacy of the people” (Mény and Surel 2002:13) must be re-established and led by the new (populist) leader.

Similarly, Taggart (2000; 2002) accepts the paramount essentiality of ‘the people’ while also emphasizing antagonism towards ‘others.’ This hostility towards ‘the other’ is the key feature of populism according to Taggart, since there must exist a true crisis between the two for populism to emerge (Taggart 2002: 69). In this context, populism offers clear rules of the game, simple and easy solutions and clear orientation. For Taggart (2002), populist movements are episodic and occur as a reaction to a crisis. Ultimately, this signifies a ‘chameleonic’ nature of populism.

Finally, but just as others, Mudde (2004) defines populism as an ideology whereby the society is split into two realms: the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite.’ In this constellation, he argues that politics should be the “*volonté générale*” of the people (Mudde 2004: 543). Thus, it is clear to see that most definitions of populism center on the popular revolt against the established political structures, a revolution in which a charismatic leader takes over the process and acts as the critical communicator between the good people and the evil ‘other.’

Hence, according to these definitions, it is possible to point to several indicators of populist behavior and tendencies: the role of the people, leadership (characterized by a charismatic leader with extraordinary qualities), and promotion of cultural harmony through emotions and simple language (the focus here is on ethnic harmony), coupled with anti-establishment discourse, or rather revolt against the existing structures. The last indicator leans closely on to negativism, that is “the negative drive of populism [...] apparent in many ways because populists are always much clearer about what they are against than what they are for” (Taggart 2002: 72).

In what follows, this work examines the extent to which the above-mentioned traits are present in the two political parties selected for this study. This chapter investigates how these parties construct ‘the people’ based on their ethnicity and religion, whether their organization is ‘chameleonic’ in nature when adapting to current political trends, in order to achieve success, impact politics, liaise with other parties, and ultimately answer the question of what is the level of populism that they exhibit.

3. Populism among Bosnian ruling parties: from simple folks to revolt

3.1 The role of the “people”

In the midst of the Yugoslav demise and the raging war in the neighboring Croatia, the 1st Congress of the SDA was held in Sarajevo in November of 1991. The then-president of the party, Alija Izetbegović, formerly accused of Bosnian nationalism for publishing a manifesto titled “Islamic Declaration” in 1970 and imprisoned in 1983 for five years, warned the gathered crowds of what the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina would entail for its people:

“[...] some new cartographers, completely unaware that they are sitting on a powder keg, are drawing new maps and massively dividing Bosnia [...] If the keg explodes, everything will disappear in smoke and shame, the cartographers and generals, and all parties and leaders, and all laws and institutions, and the majority of what generations have built through years. Because they are unlucky and cannot be destroyed, three bloody and defeated groups will remain, confused and brought on the verge of barbarianism” (*History of the SDA* n.d.).

At that time, it was clear that the term ‘the people’ did not pertain only to Muslims, although Izetbegović was a declared Muslim, but comprised all three groups, including Serbs and Croats and possibly numerous other ethnic minorities that resided in the country. However, the SDA’s ‘personal profile’ further describes that:

SDA was a response to 50 years of political and cultural marginalization of Yugoslav Muslims and an obvious atmosphere of war which fell over Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a broad ‘people’s movement,’ it became the carrier of political emancipation of Bosnian Muslims and key political actor in defending the state and legal continuity of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of the 20th Century. (*History of the SDA*, n.d.)

Clearly, the framing of ‘the people’ was initially ambivalent, almost hesitant. This was a natural outcome considering that the war in BiH had not yet begun,⁵ so ethnic labels were avoided and instead everyone was put into a hybrid category of ‘groups,’ although their numbers (three) were specified. Hence, an ethnic connotation, although hidden, was halfheartedly disguised. The SDA’s example clearly supports the fact that the use of the term ‘people’ varies across contexts and time, as the second example demonstrates a clear ethno-nationalist appeal of the party, clearly outlining its ethnic preferences and thereby tailoring its political goals. In the case of the SDA, the synonym for ‘the people’ are exclusively Muslims, as they furthermore declare that the SDA defines itself as a “political union of citizens of Yugoslavia who belong to Muslim cultural and historical circles [...]” (*History of the SDA* n.d). The SDA’s manifesto further reveals the strife for the “cultural rights protection of Bosniaks⁶ in Sandžak (Serbia) and other regions” (SDA Manifesto, 2015).

Consequently, ‘the people,’ from an ambivalent categorization, emerge into an ethnos, a trait typical of the changing and transitional political environments of post-communist spaces. What is true of BiH, however, is that the country did not experience the typical post-socialist re-birth of a nation-state where the single people, the one nation, would be presented as a “natural extension of the demos” (Mikenberg and Perrineau 2007: 30), hence preventing the SDA from putting the entire population at the center of its populist discourse. This resulted in a very careful approach to ‘the people,’ where the initial ‘ordinary men’ soon became, with the changing socio-political context, the men of Muslim cultural and historical roots, thereby extending the party’s goals and aspirations to ethno-nationalism, a populist trait which is archetypal of transitional democracies of South East Europe.

That the SDA focuses on ‘the people,’ engages in the ‘us vs. them’ discourse and posits a homogenous mass of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) as their ‘people’ is indicated in its 2011 election campaign slogan “The People Know” (*Narod zna*) and “Country before everything” (*Država, prije svega*). Amir Zukić, the then Secretary General of the SDA, explained the meaning

5 However, it would do so less than half a year later, in April of 1992.

6 The Bosniaks are considered to be Muslims. They are the largest ethnic group in Bosnia and Herzegovina and one of the three constituent peoples, according to 1995 Dayton Constitution.

of this slogan, in which ‘the people’ are placed at the center and represent the highest judicial authority (the people decide):

First, the people should really know who worked the most and whose main priority is this country and this people, ahead of all personal and individual interests. Second, SDA is the people’s party and a member of European People’s Parties. Third, people should be reminded of all those reasons and facts which point to what SDA did for BiH.” (Al Jazeera Balkans)

Clearly, the political officials of the SDA speak in the name of ‘the people’ (“who did the most?”), act in the name of the people (people’s party) and make decisions for them (reminding of what the party did for the people). The role of ‘the people’ in the eyes of the SDA changes yet again, clearly pointing to its chameleonic nature, the adjustment that occurs in viewing the masses as it fits the socio-political contexts and timeframes. The obvious label of ‘us in general,’ which pertains to SDA voters (Bosniaks – Muslim) is void of an ethnicity, but it points rather to a religious attachment which differentiates between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (other groups or citizens who refuse to identify with either of the three constituent peoples).

Quite the contrary to the SDA stands the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Positioned as a right-wing party when it comes to social policies and center-left when it comes to the economy, the SNSD is ideologically a social-democratic Serb nationalist party. Founded in the post-Dayton period, more precisely in 1996, the SNSD was considered a moderate, new, and non-nationalist alternative to the Serb Democratic Party (SDS).⁷ However, its real successes can be traced back some twelve years ago to 2006, when the party won 41 out of 83 seats in the National Assembly of RS with close to 45% of the popular vote. It was at this time that the party adopted an aggressive approach to Serb nationalism and even propagated the breakup of BiH with the secession of the smaller entity from the rest of the country.

Hence, the ideological orientation of the SNSD, unlike in the case of the SDA, experienced a significant switch, which was mainly brought on by rising nationalist tendencies in early 2006 when the police reform—which the SNSD deemed unconstitutional and termed as an attempt to “amend the Constitution of the Republic of Srpska” (Monograph “20 Years of Srpska” 2016)—changed the party’s priorities. Once again, the focus of such new nationalist rhetoric as fabricated by the SNSD’s political officials was on

7 Srpska demokratska stranka (SDS).

'the people.' However, the rhetoric of the SNSD does not embrace Serbs in the way which the SDA points to Muslims; instead of the 'us in general' label, the voters of the SNSD can be deemed as 'genuine citizens.' A permanent feature of the policy led by the SNSD for all these twenty years has been the responsibility towards the Republic of Srpska and victims fallen for its formation [...] Unfortunately, those who lost their third consecutive election in the Republic of Srpska are part of the government at state level at the moment (Monograph "20 Years of Srpska" 2016:27).

Clearly, the 'genuine people' are those who gave their lives for the RS. Yet, they were misled by 'them,' who are still trying to deceive its creators by participating in state-level government. Hence, the split between two types of Serb supporters is obvious. Moreover, the monograph states that the SNSD "is a political party of free people and spirit, the party of peace, changes and economic progress, equality and justice [...]" (Puhalo 2008). The ambivalent language of "free people and spirit," with its emotional simplicity and a straightforward message of a good-spirited party, emphasizes the genuineness—the message that is so attractive to ordinary voters who indeed do see themselves as carries of such traits.

Despite these divisions which the language of the SNSD clearly portrays in its manifest, the questions pertaining to national interests, that of all Serbs, do not entail such divides. When Milorad Dodik, who has been leader of the party since 2010, announced a popular referendum for 2016 on the issue of celebrating Republic Day Srpska, a holiday that is illegal and not recognized at the national level, the divisions between Serbs disappeared. He spoke in the name of 'the people:'

The referendum on the question of the Day of Republic of Srpska is not a test balloon, as pointed by Bakir Izetbegović,⁸ but a question of our status and a question of our lives. Nobody can minimize the referendum on the Day of the Republic in such a way [...] You should object the attempts of Bakir Izetbegović, who thinks that can he can tell us what the day of Republic of Srpska is and decide in our name [...] . I call the people to take part in the referendum [...] (RTS 2016)

Here, the nationalist tendencies of the SNSD are installed in a singular voice of a powerful leader. He speaks in the name of the people and calls upon the people. By calling them 'the us,' which clearly denotes all Serbs living in the RS, a sense of common identity is installed into the people

8 Leader of SDA and a Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency.

and authority is installed into the leader. The chameleonic nature is yet again obvious: in this case ‘the people’ are the subject of party preferences and serve to support the leader’s authority over time, but across varying contexts and spaces. The ‘true people,’ who were once just the loyal ones, have now become ‘all the people,’ or ‘the us,’ a construction, just as in the case of the SDA, based on ethnicity and religion. The leader, and a charismatic one, perceptibly plays a strong role in such constructs and will thus be examined in greater detail.

3.2 *The leader and charisma*

Charisma, as presented by Max Weber “inheres in the relationship between a leader and his followers” (Van der Brug and Mughan 2007: 31), which means that charisma, by itself, is not a single indicator of the leader’s ability to attract and keep the follower masses bound together. Hence, charisma has more to do with influence than with personal virtue, at least when it comes to its connection to populist leaders. Van der Brug and Mughan (2007) argue that “charisma is often attributed to populist party leaders [...] after their parties have registered electoral success in the polls” (31). In the post-Dayton political reality of BiH, this last trait is easily observable. To lead an ethno-national party and present ‘the people,’ i.e., the voters, as the saviors of their ethnic group, is not an effortless venture. In fact, it takes much charisma to lead masses in ‘their’ struggle for ethnic predominance or success. Sačić (2007) states that: “If the criticism delivered by ‘the enemy’ has a strong basis, the leader-charisma without which ethnopolitics could not be established, takes the scene [...] Ethnopartisan democracy is based on fronting a charismatic personality and not on political programs” (149-150).

The charismatic leader, hence, takes the center stage in the quest for ethnic supremacy. In attaching the label of a ‘charismatic leader’ to current, but also long-time leaders of SDA and SNSD, is not entirely applicable, as neither possess the true charisma and the “extraordinary qualities of a charismatic leader” (Gherghina et al. 2013:4). However, in the case of both leaders, Bakir Izetbegović (SDA) and Milorad Dodik (SNSD), two different types of leadership are discernible, neither projecting a true charisma, but nevertheless efficiently exerting influence and authority on ‘their people.’

When Alija Izetbegović, the founder of SDA and a long-time leader of Bosniaks in the post-Dayton period, died in October of 2003, his son Bakir,

who stepped into the world of politics some three years before, entered the Parliament of BiH in 2006. In 2010, he was elected as the Bosniak member of the tripartite presidency, and in 2015, he became the president of the SDA. Surely following the footsteps of his charismatic father, Bakir entered into a 'political template' that was left over—safeguard democracy, foster the economy, and protect Bosnian Muslims. On the other hand, Izetbegović has been one of the leading figures of the party for almost eighteen years, thus his charisma had a chance to be dispersed. However, Izetbegović never had the charisma of his father and was, in fact, often critiqued for lack of real leadership, mediocre eloquence, and blunt phrasing, which was strongly illustrated with the phrase which explains BiH's and Turkey's current relations: "Alija recognized a future strong leader in him and left him to take care of BiH, as his legacy. I think that Erdogan is carrying this legacy well [...]" (Klix.ba 2017).

Izetbegović uttered this sentence publicly, and while he was praised by Bosniaks, the statement angered the general public and especially his political opponents. However, it is difficult to speak of charisma here, and although this declaration does excite the SDA's voters (Bosniaks), nothing about it is fascinating, promising, or calling. In fact, Izetbegović directly jeopardizes his credibility, as he sees the land as his own, as that of his family and father, and ultimately as Turkey's heritage. Not only does this imperil the security of the country, it also undermines his credibility as a leader whose party's aims are to safeguard democracy and the stability of the country. And even though it might seem like Izetbegović is acting like the protector of BiH, he rather personalizes politics and risks making inter-party adversaries. This personalization of politics, in fact, lies in the core of transforming a democratic society into a partocracy and also a leader-centered party (Cavalli 1994; Karvonen 2010). In this process of individualization, the voters' trust may collapse, as a "shift from collective bodies to monocratic top" (Viviani 2017) occurs and shatters leaders' credibility. Moreover, this strong statement was not a strategy intended to appeal to voters (which would explain the act of personalization, but not necessarily populism). Rather, it was a strategic act of trying to appeal to 'the people' who identify with BiH, a strong Bosniak sentiment, and the first and deceased leader, as well as to create a sense of belonging to the party, which has such an important foreign power safeguarding what their first leader created for them. This is what makes this act a populist one, although the charisma is largely lacking. A charismatic populist leader never portrays himself as a representative of the people, which, in this case, Izetbegović

did, but as the member of the people. By showing a degree of ‘ownership’ over the country, Izetbegović did precisely the opposite.

In an interview for Faktor, a local media outlet, Bakir Izetbegović also commented on the question of his personal charisma, which, as stated by the interviewer, has long been disputed:

It is a fact that I was elected on all levels, whenever I was a candidate [...] I had strong rivals. I also won the inter-party elections, apart from those during the 5th SDA Congress in 2009. My rise lasted for more than a decade. It was slow and thorough. I gradually convinced the party structure and the people that they can lean on me. There was a lot of work and results—successful appellations to the Constitutional Court, investments, credits, and new friendships in the region and abroad... (Faktor.ba 2015)

As observed, the representation of the leader as part of ‘the people’ is missing. He is not the serving leader, but rather the ultimate power which the common men should thank for all their successes. The distance that Izetbegović creates with such statements clearly shows a lack of charisma that a true people’s leader should have. On the contrary, he praises himself and not the people who elected him. Hence, in the case of Bakir Izetbegović, one can only speak of his ‘inherited charisma’ and the importance of ‘family fame,’ the endogenous conditions which shaped this leader’s populist profile.

Quite the contrary to Izetbegović stands Milorad Dodik, the president of the SNSD, whose popularity is rising steadily—despite a previous decline—reaching a current of 47% in the RS.⁹ As Dodik enjoyed the support of the Serbian population in the RS (he won 46.9% of the vote in 2007), he also benefited from the initial trust of foreign powers, including the most influential players such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union, which offered aid packages to the smaller entity during his term in office. But even after he lost the external support, Dodik remained an iconic figure in BiH’s politics in general. In contrast to Bakir Izetbegović, his supporters often call him ‘Dodo,’ which shows that his voters often feel like he is one of them. His numerous singing acts at popular weddings, pre-election campaigns, and religious celebrations distance him from the purely political and elitist circles. In doing so, he shows his ‘folksy’ nature, which is precisely what ordinary people consider

9 Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022.

to be charisma. He is the leader who fascinates people with his jokes, a trait appealing to common men, as well as his blunt, sharp, and often times inappropriate statements, which divert the political opponent's attention to his personality, rather than to political debates.

However, Dodik has not tried to downplay his extremist opinions about Bosnia and Herzegovina, often calling it a 'rotten state' for which he cannot wait to dissolve. He also has not refrained from inviting illegal paramilitary groups from the RS to this entity's parliament and is readily photographed with them. His public engagement appears indiscreet, openly ultra-nationalist, secessionist, and very appealing to the common masses outside of BiH. He openly exploits topics related to the RS' independence, but also talks about peace, reconciliation, and democracy. His messages are mixed and resonant, which does not necessarily entail trust that a charismatic leader embodies in his relationship with the common men, but he indubitably plays on people's longing for social change and does so at the right time. This trait is easily observable in his comment on current brain drain from the RS: "Brain drain is real and nobody is denying it, we cannot prohibit people to leave. However, I personally know people from Laktaši who went to Germany and are now pleading to return to their previous jobs" (Dodik 2018a).

A message to the people which contains personal details, an emotional story, but no solution to the problem is appealing at first. Again, Dodik has failed to cultivate trust, but his statements have resonated in the heads of his followers and influenced them. Personal stories create a weak bond, but a bond, nevertheless, between a leader and their followers, allowing them to wield an influence which is necessary for a leader to be considered charismatic.

As observed, the charisma of the leader is not always consistent with populism. While in the case of the SDA and the SNSD, the party leaders displayed a certain degree of charismatic authority, one based on 'inherited charisma' and the other on simplicity and approaching the 'common man,' it cannot be said that the charismatic role of the two leaders is detrimental to the success of the party, at least not in the case of the SDA. A charismatic leader articulates the demands of the people and fulfills them. What is evident in the two cases observed is a mere influence, a rather weak one, as both rely on multiple and very weak attributes, i.e. inherited fame and advertising resources (endogenous conditions), personalized stories and simple communicative skills, and self-esteem, all of which dangerously undermine their influence and increase the distance between the leader and

the critical mass of support. As both party leaders are strong political competitors, they have altered their populist claims in response to socio-economic changes and contexts beyond their control, illustrating once again, in the words of Taggart (2004), the 'episodic nature' of populism..

3.3 *Playing with emotions through linguistic simplicity: an expression of revolt in an ethno-nationalist context*

To dwell and grow as a populist party in an ethno-national, post-conflict space entails the existence of a political playground that illuminates emotions which stem from an ethnic past and symbolism—to hate and fear. All these sentiments are part of ethno-nationalist politics, a type of populism in itself, which relies on the creation and maintenance of constant inter-ethnic conflict. The result is twofold—an emotional incitement and revolt against 'the other,' which sometimes, but not by always by default, represents the 'establishment.' In the case of the SDA and the SNSD, the 'anti-establishment' is precisely 'the other,' so the populist discourse does not draw from the typical 'anti-elitist' dialogue, but rather the revolt against the other ethnic group, the 'Sarajevo-centered state level, Bosniak-led institutions' in the SNSD's views, as opposed to 'stability-shattering, peace-endangering and secessionist Serb fractions of the country,' in the language of the SDA. Hence, when examining the role of emotions in the examined parties' discourse, a joint analysis of the presence of 'revolt' (the anti-establishment) is a necessary precursor to understanding the dynamics of the SDA's and the SNSD's populism in an ethno-nationalist Eden.

In understanding the emotional play of the populist discourse in an ethnically divided society, we can lean on the definition of ethnopolitics proposed by Mujkić (2008) who defines it as

[...] some kind of a melting pot of various bits and pieces of political doctrines and principles: socialism, liberal democracy, fascism, romantic nationalism, religious nationalism, but also a melting pot of various cultural pieces: historical narratives, mythologies, literature, religion, tradition, or other events that are considered of vital importance to the identity of one particular ethnic group. Unlike most other political doctrines, ethno-politics as non-doctrine has no other goal or vision, or eschatology – but to remain in power [...] its reason d'être is crisis, appeal to constant existential danger of the group. (22)

Translating the concepts of historical narratives, the importance of myths and the symbolic value placed on tradition, notably religious tradition in the examined context, but also the notion of ‘territory of imagination’ in the words of Taggart (2004), into the political reality of BiH, the emotional game used to provoke a reaction among ‘the people’ represents one of the most notable populist traits in the political performance of the SDA and the SNSD.

Provoking an emotional outcry among its voters is regularly used in the discourse of Bakir Izetbegović, notably when talking about the country’s stability or threats to its unity, which present itself in the form of other political parties. Usually, the revolt part of his discourse lies in imagined threats against the country as produced by ‘others’:

In this country you have parties whose main business is to hurt it, divide it, make in it some new entities, collect political points, but you also have this (SDA) which is the cement, the bond of this country, which offers solutions, pulls forward, does not cheat on the people, and offers ready-made solutions. (Klix 2017)

The emotions provoked are obviously fear, as spurred by potential divisions and threats to the country’s safety, but also pride in a sense of belonging to the party which ‘does not cheat’ and ‘offers solutions.’ The simplicity is yet another component which is evident in this statement. It is easy to understand, but it offers no real solution and only seemingly recognizes the ills of BiH’s people (‘the ready-made solutions’). That emotions and simplicity do not end with such straightforwardly accusatory statements is mirrored in the SDA’s use of historical narratives to bring up the common past and potentially keep its supporters:

You cannot defeat the people who do not recognize defeat. If somebody said then—look what those who are ready to jointly attack BiH have—nobody would tell that the war would last so long and that we would not be defeated [...] we supplied all the resources, and now we hear from ‘smart heads’ that we were not organized, that we had no logistics and that people organized randomly. One thousand tons of weapons, fuel, food, each day [...] those are the heroes whom you don’t know, about

whom nobody speaks and writes. But they will write about them, God willing [...]. (Bakir Izetbegović speech 2017)¹⁰

The 'remind and rule' factor, as an emotional and linguistic play, is used interchangeably to provoke a popular outcry based on collective memory and ostensible downplay of important facts. What is more, the focus on the heroic achievement of unknown heroes is used to remind the people of the past hardships that the Bosniaks went through during the war. Hence, the use of emotional speeches with simple and easy to understand language is strongly present in the public discourse of the SDA's leader. The indirect message is easy to perceive, as the words 'somebody,' 'they,' and 'smart heads,' empty of deeper meaning and devoid of labels, are used to clearly distinguish between 'us' and 'them,' a trait which is an indicator of ethno-political discourse and romanticization of one's 'own people.' The emotions of the SDA's supporters are also spurred through the use of historical narratives which point to injustice committed against 'the people:'

The new distribution of power and a changed political reality, which placed Bosniaks from the role of a majority to the level of endangered national minority, caused a cultural and spiritual crisis, not only among Bosniaks [...] Bosniaks are the bonding tissues of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the foundation and frame for Bosniaks' survival [...] they were bound to disappear as a political and cultural player, the aim was to kill their self-conscious as special people [...] their aim was the same: to eliminate Bosniaks as a political, social, religious and cultural and linguistic special group, the culmination of which was between 1941 and 1945. (Faktor.ba 2017)

The focus on the past is especially interesting in this context, as historical narratives rarely play an important role in the populist speeches of Western European parties. The exclusivity of such discourse, however, remains very relevant in post-Dayton and the post-conflict context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where strong emotions are provoked by deep interpretations of past regime dealings with a specific ethnic group. Interestingly, history is not only tied to recent wartime events. It is also used to mobilize the people and ensure support through emotions, as the SDA attempts to strengthen the ethnic unity of Bosniaks through a linguistic attack of the past regime:

10 The speech was made on August 4, 2017, on the mountain Igman near Sarajevo, a strategic wartime location and a stronghold of the Bosnian Army in the period from 1992-1995, during a traditional event "The Defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

The statements of leading communists, such as Edward Kardel, who said that ‘Muslims are not and cannot be a nation, but only an ethnic group’ or Moša Pijade who said that ‘Muslims have nothing to do with the question of nationality’ or Milovan Đilas who abolished an existing recognition of Muslims as a nation [...] clearly depicts the future position of Bosniaks within the context of new Yugoslavia. (Faktor.ba 2017)

The claims against the former regime can also reinforce present support for a populist party. In the eyes of the people, a leader who pledges recognition, assurance of survival, and a fight against those who are perceived as enemies, is an extraordinary vanguard of the group. The emotions recalled are reinforced by simple language, but again, without solutions to the present situation. Hence, the revolt against the existing situation is present, but embedded in emotionally charged messages typical of populist leaders in ethno-national contexts.

A similar emotionally charged populist platform is offered by Milorad Dodik of the SNSD, whose statements and speeches bring forward emotions mostly through the revolt against the existing Bosniak structures reinforced by foreign presence and historical narratives, expressed as injustices towards Serbs coupled with the romanticization of Serb people.

We are all for this referendum. We will not accept the position of the judiciary and the Court [...] we talk with the Prime Minister and President of Serbia, and Serbia supports BiH and the Dayton Agreement [...] BiH is a country that does not serve anything except as a foreign playground [...] Izetbegović can ride the balloons that he is talking about [...] Bosniaks in BiH have lost their identity. (Politika 2016)

On another occasion, the Vice-President of the SNSD, Nikola Špirić, adds that:

The very announcements of the president of the party, Milorad Dodik, that he might run for the Serb member of BiH’s Presidency created havoc [...] they are aware that Serb people know that the RS will have everything with Dodik and the SNSD, and that BiH will only have what was written in Dayton (Klix 2018).

The anti-establishment revolt is clear—the SNSD does not support the foreign influence, which is obvious in the politics on the state level, and, in his opinion, led by the SDA. The only credible actor is the Serb kinstate, although Serbs in BiH are not a national minority and are, in fact, a constitutionally recognized constituent group. Additionally, the claims about

the leading political party in BiH (SDA) are yet another demonstration or revolt against the mainstream political party from the larger entity. By undermining the credibility of its leader, Izetbegović, Dodik plainly and in very crude and simple language expressed his views about Bosnia and Herzegovina, bluntly connecting its existence only to the Bosniak people. In this context, this is what served his policy to organize a referendum about the celebration of the National Day of the RS, once again showing the SNSD's very thin ideology, since on another occasion he speaks: "The RS is ready to accept the Constitution of BiH [...] We are looking for answers on many issues in BiH, but they are missing [...] It is redundant to even speak about it; I am not crazy to create an international intervention" (Dnevni List, January 14, 2018).

Although the SNSD and especially its leader Milorad Dodik, do occasionally recognize the supremacy of state-level institutions over those belonging to the two entities, including the RS, the latter is the primary tool of strong emotional ties that the SNSD creates to bind the Serbs living in the RS, who are, after all, its main supporters:

[...] unquestionably, the RS is a permanent category for the Serb people, articulated by a generation of people who live here, who dreamed those ideas of freedom [...] I think that Serbs did not create the RS so that only they can be free, they gave it also to others who want to live here, regardless of how different they are [...] They are now aware that the RS is on a right path. That is the biggest value. (RTRS 2018)

Just as Izetbegović touches on the ideas of longstanding unity and ethnic freedom of Bosniaks, Dodik exploits the ideas of liberty and uses it to point to 'the people,' who, with their own creation, have reached their ultimate goal of being free and on the right path. Again, these words are empty of meaning, thus emphasizing the use of simplistic language which is so common among populist leaders in general. The emotional play is further reinforced using historical narratives which overemphasize the role of Serb heroism and injustice committed towards them. In discussing the verdict of the tried war-criminal Ratko Mladić, a wartime General of the Army of the RS, Dodik emphasizes his heroic role:

No matter the verdict, we all have a feeling that it aligns with what we have seen committed against the Serbs so far, Ratko Mladić will stay a legend among the Serb people. He was a man who gave all his professional and human capacities for the defense of freedom of the Serb people, no matter where he was. A man who commanded the Army of the Republic of

Srpska, an army which defended the freedom of this people and an army which made possible the creation of the Republic of Srpska. (NI 2017)

The final verdict of Ratko Mladić as a war criminal presented an excellent opportunity for creating an emotional response among the people in the RS. Labels such as an ‘our war hero’ and ‘Serbian hero’ were seen as big panels across the RS in the early winter of 2017. The ‘remind and rule’ trait is hence also present in the rhetoric of the SNSD, thus reiterating the importance of emotional language and romanticization of one’s own people (wartime heroes) in populist discourse in divided ethno-nationalist contexts. Furthermore, distant history and the blame placed on all other regimes, except for the current, is also a characteristic of the SNSD. The firm belief in the martyrdom of Serbs is clearly portrayed in Dodik’s speech delivered in February 2018:

We did not create a single Karadorđe, but many of them, known and unknown heroes who fought for freedom. Serbs had to go through many deceptions, one of them being Yugoslavia [...] today, the Serb people have two states—Serbia and the RS. We proudly gather around the idea of Serbian people. (Dodik 2015b)

Again, by recalling historical heroes (Karadorđe) and reinforcing ethnic unity, the SNSD assures its supporters of their people’s survival; they are tied to Serbia, they have two states and are assured that they will never go again through the past treacheries in the name of others. Thus, just as in the case of the SDA, the revolt against the past, the existing ‘other’ regimes, and parties, presents itself in the form of anti-establishment discourse, but remains embedded in emotional and strong, yet simple language which overemphasizes heroism, historical myths, and symbols, and uses them to remain a mainstream leader among a single ethnic group in a divided society.

4. Conclusion

The image of the SDA and the SNSD that emerges is one of a populist party which lacks a coherent political agenda, which rather presents itself as anti-establishment. Without a struggle to find their place on the political playground of post-Dayton BiH and assure support among ethnically divided voters, these two mainstream parties, both of which have exhibited a strong historical presence in the post-war period, demonstrate the

chameleonic nature of populism. Worried about issues related to historical presence, ethnic solidarity, liberty and assurance of individual ethnic supremacy, and not about moral salience, the trajectory of the SDA and the SNSD does not support the argument that populist parties are moralistic rather than pragmatic. The only emphasis that both parties place on the common good is that of a common good of their ethnic group. Thus, their discourse is highly emotional, offering simplistic outlooks on 'the other' and overemphasizing 'otherness' in finding blame for BiH's current feeble development. Simple messages that they convey easily translate into oversimplified policies directed solely against this 'other.' Moreover, both parties never went through an existential crisis, which furthered their political strength and assured they would receive support in mainly ethnically clear areas. This situation allowed them to behave like non-populist parties; they had an inner strength that was regularly assured through strong hierarchical organization. Furthermore, the fact that, at least in the case of SDA, the importance of 'inherited leadership' and consequently leadership charisma attached to a non-charismatic leader is what led the party further and assured continuous support among its voters.

On the other hand, folksy vernacular, and 'cheap' ethnicity-driven talk is what defines the weak charisma as exhibited by the SNSD's leader. In both cases, we can observe "highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the 'gut feelings' of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543). Such emotional appeals are reinforced by historical narratives that draw a clear line between historical circumstances and the current status of an ethnic group. The latter creates a sense of crisis, and people in the "heartland" (Taggart 2004) are threatened, an urge that mobilizes "the people" in times of real socio-political change. Such party behavior paints a picture of political urgency in an ethno-national political context. Although it only weakly mirrors the populist discourse seen in Western democracies, it achieves success through the manipulation of emotions such as faith, pain and pride. These fundamental feelings lead to further disorientation of people through the use of historical narratives that place them squarely on the pedestal of ethnic saviors. Such voter manipulation makes it possible to put anything "ethnic" on the political agenda and is one of the strongest features of political parties in ethnically divided post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Works cited

- Canovan, Margaret. *Populism*. New York, Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1981.
- . "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1, Wiley-Blackwell, Mar. 1999, pp. 2–16.
- De Raadt, Jasper, et al. "Varieties of Populism: An Analysis of the Programmatic Character of Six European Parties." *Working Papers Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2004, pp. 1–23. [research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/70284501/Hollanders_Raadt_and_Krouwel_2004_Varieties_of_Populism.pdf](https://www.research.vu.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/70284501/Hollanders_Raadt_and_Krouwel_2004_Varieties_of_Populism.pdf).
- Džananović, Nedžma and Valida Repovac Nikšić. "Populism in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Horizontal Traditions and Vertical Novelty". *Populist Political Communication across Europe: Contexts and Contents*, edited by Agnieszka Stępińska, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2020, pp. 15–36.
- Dodik, Milorad. "Dodik: Sramota Što Je Vučurević Imenovan Za Ambasadora." *ATV*, 2 Feb. 2018a, www.atvbl.rs/dodik-sramota-sto-je-vucurevic-imenovan-za-ambasadora. Accessed 29 July 2023.
- . "'Srbi Morali Da Prođu Mnoge Zablude, Jedna Je Jugoslavija': Interview for B92." *B92.net*, 15 Feb. 2018b, www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2018&mm=02&dd=15&nav_id=1359145. Accessed 29 July 2023.
- Gherghina, Sergiu, et al. *Contemporary Populism: A Controversial Concept and Its Diverse Forms*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
- Heinisch, Reinhard, and Oscar Mazzoleni. "Analysing and Explaining Populism: Bringing Frame, Actor and Context Back In." *Political Populism: A Handbook*, edited by Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni, 1st ed., Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017, pp. 105–22.
- "History of the SDA." *The Official Website of the SDA*, www.sda.ba/stranica/historijat-sda/9. Accessed 1 Aug. 2023.
- Ionescu, Ghita, and Ernest Gellner. *Introduction: Populism - Its Meanings and National Characteristics*. Edited by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969.
- Mény, Yves, and Yves Surel. *Par le Peuple, Pour le Peuple: Le Populisme et les Démocraties*. Paris, Fayard, 2000.
- . "The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism." *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel, New York, Palgrave, 2002.
- Mudde, Cas. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, no. 4, Cambridge UP, Sept. 2004, pp. 541–63.
- Mujkić, Asim. *We, The Citizens of Ethnopolis*. Sarajevo, University, Human Rights Centre, 2008.
- Puhalo, Srđan, et al. *Ideološki Profil Glasača i Apstinenata u Bosni i Hercegovini*. Edited by Igor Lukšić and Nebojša Petrović, Artprint, 2008, library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/06047.pdf.
- Repovac-Niksic, Valida, et al. "The Social Movement for Truth and Justice - Pragmatic Alliance-building With Political Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina." *Filozofija i Društvo*, vol. 33, no. 1, Jan. 2022, pp. 143–61.

- RTRS. "Dodik Za RTS: Republika Srpska Je Trajna Kategorija Za Srpski Narod." *Republika Srpska - RTRS*, 9 Jan. 2018, lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=284857. Accessed 29 July 2023.
- RTS. "Dodik: The Referendum Is Not a Trial Balloon, but a Matter of Life." *RTS Region*, 15 Aug. 2016, www.rts.rs/vesti/region/2420463/dodik-referendum-nije-probni-balon-vec-pitanje-zivota.html. Accessed 3 Aug. 2023
- Taggart, Paul. "Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 9, no. 3, Routledge, Oct. 2004, pp. 269–88.
- . *Populism*. Buckingham, Open UP, 2000.
- . "Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics." *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, edited by Yves Mény and Yves Surel, 2002, pp. 62–80.
- Van Der Brug, Wouter, and Anthony Mughan. "Charisma, Leader Effects and Support for Right-Wing Populist Parties." *Party Politics*, vol. 13, no. 1, SAGE Publishing, Jan. 2007, pp. 29–51.