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Herzegovina – Between East and West (Springer, Cham, p. 413)**

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The book titled “The Geography of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Between East and West” provides an extensive insight into the physical and social geographical characteristics of the “*land of a thousand years*” Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors deal with various topics and aspects of the country, starting from its geographical positioning in the region of the Balkans, and including the physical geographical description of the main geological formations, climate, and vegetation as well as the diverse hydrological, pedological, and biogeographical elements of the area. They also cover the historical and cultural background, the geopolitical dynamics, the population composition, the characteristics of urban and rural settlements, and the economy and its sectors, evidenced by an immense collection of figures, tables and graphs compiled by the authors during their field research over the years. The collective of the authors consists of co-operating professors from the University of Sarajevo and from the University of Pécs: they are specialized in different fields of geography; therefore, accurate and valuable research points can be read in each chapter.

The book has a rich content. Comprising fifteen chapters grouped into five parts, it provides a comprehensive overview of geographical complexities, issues, and challenges, offering a basic source for academic and school literature. The book is organized in a systematic way.

In the first part, the authors introduce the spatial position of the country in global and regional context. As conveyed in the book’s title, the country’s location between East and West determines its character: it includes contact areas with the wider Pannonian Basin (Sava River in the north) and with the Central Mediterranean (Adriatic Sea in the south), and is dominated by the Dinarides. On the other hand, the area lies in the middle of the northern hemisphere, on the Eurasian continental bloc. The country is located in Southeastern Europe, on the Balkan Peninsula placed as a land bridge between



East and West, and is surrounded by the former member republics of Yugoslavia including Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Such a position can have its advantages and disadvantages from a geostrategic and geopolitical point of view, which is described in the book from the beginnings of the human civilization until the recent political structure.

It is widely recognized in geography that both physical and human factors play a significant role, and are interconnected in shaping the geographical characteristics of a region. In the second part about physical geography, the authors emphasize the long and complex geology and geomorphology of igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks influenced by the topography, climate, hydrographic system, and vegetation composition. The area of the country belongs to the mountain range of Dinarides within the geotectonic unit of the Balkan Peninsula. 29% of its total area is characterized by Cenozoic, 59.7% by Mesozoic, 7.9% by Paleozoic formations, while 3.4% have rocks of unknown age. Deposits of igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks are dispersed across the territory and come mostly from the Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous age, as clearly explained by the map interpretations of the eras. Present relief has been shaped by the Alpine tectonic cycle separating the Dinarides into three units: Outer, Central, and Inner parts. The relief is determined by positive (antiforms) and negative (synforms) morphostructures, divided by rivers. Orographic structure and extensive river basins are the main factors influencing the climate.

Weather conditions are influenced by two different air masses. The first one includes low pressure, barometric depressions formed over the northwestern part of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. The second one consists of high-pressure air masses called anticyclones formed over the area of the large islands in the North Atlantic. Annual precipitation ranges from 700 mm to 1200 mm. Geological and climatic elements have impacted on the hydrographic system. It is regulated by surface and underground freshwater flows and freshwater bodies. The predominant pattern of the river system is dendritic. The river basins can be classified into two main catchment areas that belong to the Adriatic Sea and to the Black Sea. The Adriatic basin covers the area along the Mediterranean Sea and the macroregion of the High Karst, i.e., the southern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It includes the basins of Neretva, Trebišnjica, Cetina, and Krka rivers, and their tributaries. The Black Sea basin covers the Peripannonian and the Mountain-Valley catchment areas. It is formed by several river systems including the immediate basin of Sava, Glina, Korana, Una, Vrbas, Ukrina, Bosna, and Drina, and their tributaries. Comparing the two areas, it can be stated that the Black Sea basin (74.7%) has a larger extension than the Adriatic Sea basin (25.3%).

From a pedological point of view, soils can be divided into automorphic and hydromorphic types. Due to anthropogenic impacts including artificial drainage, irrigation, and humification most soils have been transformed. A highly diverse

environmental mosaic has been created by active physical geographical factors. About half of the area is covered by forests of temperate-deciduous, mixed-deciduous, coniferous, and alpine vegetation. Natural resources such as land, forest, water, and ores are discussed in part four, which deals with their importance for the country's economic development. The diversity of the flora and fauna, and the high share of endemic species and relicts is due to the numerous karst springs, mountain streams, speleological systems, and canyons, making the country rank third on the list of the most diverse areas in Europe. However, according to the UCIN, Bosnia and Herzegovina has only 2.6% of its territory under protection. Preservation of biological and landscape diversity is based on the implementation of international regulations and legal frameworks on a national level, and on the inclusion of the non-governmental sector.

Part three elaborates on the human geography of the country. In historical context, the authors refer to the ancient origins of Bosnia and Herzegovina being a sovereign state since the early Middle Ages. A historical overview from the ancient times until the contemporary situation helps to understand the factors that influenced the beginnings of the nation and the region: "traces of habitat in Makljenovac near Doboj discovered in 1949, then in Kulaši near Prnjavor and Sokolac are a witness to this". The Neolithic period is primarily characterized by settlements in the valley of Bosna River and its northern tributaries, i.e., in the valley of Neretva River. There are two primary cultural zones: the Adriatic one in Herzegovina and the Pannonian-Balkan one in Bosnia. The upper basin of Bosnia is a transitional area between these zones. In the settlements traces of different cultures have been found. Their artifacts indicating spiritual life, various ceramics, decorations and figures, or the numerous mines of salt and gold deposits, as well as sites of metal production were influenced by their regions. In the Middle Ages, the region started to be inhabited by Slavic tribes: the Slavs prevailed, imposed their language, and became the ruling social class.

The formation of the medieval Bosnian state is believed to take place in Visoko Valley, although the historical and archaeological findings are scarce. The first ruler was Prince Stjepan Bosanski who ruled over today's Sarajevo and Visoko Valleys. Later, in the era of Tvrtko I Kotromanić, Bosnia was one of the strongest feudal states in the region of Balkans, which often is referred to in a proverb "ever since the Kulin Ban and good old days." However, the Ottomans conquered the region in the 15th century and erased the previous independence of the Bosnian state. The final fall of Bosnia took place in 1463. Whichever the narrative of the Ottomans is as being conquerors or liberators, they have significantly influenced Bosnia through their military organized administrative system. In the period 1878–1908, the country belonged to the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. According to the decision of the Berlin Congress, the formally Ottoman province got under the control of the Central European dual monarchy. After the full annexation declared by Emperor Franz Joseph, Bosnia and

Herzegovina did not have any self-governing rights: it constituted “a corpus separatum” and the local citizens were treated as Bosnian nationals.

By 1919, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes had formed, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established. This period contributed to a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of the Southern Slavic nations, laying the foundation for the later ethnic conflicts. Redrawing of the administrative units' (banat) borders in 1929 neglected all ethnic and historical borderlines, and erased the traces of the Bosnian entity. Being the most diverse republic of Yugoslavia in the socialist times, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a subject of strong repressions and reprisals affecting religions, languages, and human rights. This multi-ethnic political dynamic lasted until the breakup of SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in the 1990s. After the unsuccessful attempts to reorganize Yugoslavia, republics began to claim their independence and hold parliamentary elections. Alija Izetbegović was the first president of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Shortly after, BiH was formally recognized as a state and ceased from being part of SFRY, led to an outbreak of war and aggression in 1992. This conflict introduced the usage of the phrase “ethnic cleansing.” The Yugoslav People's Army and Bosnian Serb paramilitary authorities kept the capital Sarajevo under the siege for 1425 days, striking with snipers, shelling and grenading ten thousands of people and children. Many other cities like Foča, Višegrad, Bijeljina, Banja Luka, Prijedor, and Doboj were occupied by the Serb military forces massacring Croats and Bosniaks. In the town of Srebrenica in July 1995 was committed an organized siege and genocide to Bosniak civilian population. The list of the victims includes 8,372 names, but it has not finished. The war ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Ohio, USA) on the 21st of November 1995. The acts of war under Bosniak, Croat, and Serb population was appealed to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The main contributors, namely Radovan Karadžić, the former president of Republika Srpska and Ratko Mladić, a former commander of the Army of Republika Srpska were convicted. They were sentenced life in prison for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Despite that, the denial of the genocide and the mass crimes as well as the celebration of the war criminals is an everyday occurrence in the Bosnian society: “all historical processes have their beginning and end.”

Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a product of historical-political complications. The period of gruesome aggression has influenced the future of the country becoming decentralized and politically divided. It created a tension between the citizens and affected the spatial distribution of the population since Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a national state. Signing the Dayton Peace Agreement and organizing the Office of the High Representative can be regarded as the foundation of a definitely dysfunctional regime, built up administratively from two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. The Brčko District is divided between the two entities and stays under

the direct control of the federal government. The global political landscape is very specific: exploitation of religious groups has become the basis of statehood, and ethnic differences are used by the political elites to encourage disintegration processes. As the authors say: “BiH has been the focus of the world attention more than ever in its history has not been to its advantage.” Becoming a part of the European Union is a priority of the country’s future political ambitions. The Euro-Atlantic path of Bosnia and Herzegovina began in the last years of the 20th century with the Stabilization and Association Process of the Western Balkan countries. In the Declaration of the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, the EU paid attention to the accession of the Western Balkan, i.e., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Serbia (European Commission 2003). In February 2016, Bosnia and Herzegovina has applied for the EU membership. However, further steps that would bring the country closer to the EU were (are) slow-moving. Most BiH institutions have not intensified their activities to harmonize the local regulations with the EU legislation. In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina was given a candidate status, taking a new, optimistic step before membership negotiations has been opened in 2024.

The penultimate part four of the book presents the economic characteristics of the country through the lens of natural resources. Physical geography of the country, as it was detailed in the second chapter, is important for the economic development. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a rich potential for agricultural production primarily due to its land, forest, and water resources. According to the Strategic Plan for Rural Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018–2021 adopted within the IPA II 2014–2020, agricultural land occupies about 2.2 million hectares (43% of the total area), arable land occupies about 1.6 million hectares (72% of the agricultural land), and there are 602 thousand hectares of uncultivated surfaces which counts for 27% of the agricultural land (European Commission 2014). The 2016 Country Report by the European Commission highlights that agriculture has a high share of gross domestic product and represents 17% of the employment. Challenges of the sector can be described by the fragmentation of the agricultural land, outdated production technology, low productivity of cattle breeds and plants varieties that are predominantly grown. The report presents the insufficient infrastructure and job opportunities in the rural areas (European Commission 2016). Industrialization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is mostly connected with the period after the Second World War and with the existence of the socialist system in Yugoslavia. Within the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a middle-developed country following Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. In the period after 1991, consequences of the war (e.g. fall of GDP, loss of foreign markets and production capacities) reflected in the economy. In addition, the 20 years transition period after the war resulted in a further decline and now Bosnia and Herzegovina is the least competitive and lowest per capita GDP country in the region. There is a dependence on foreign

aids and export revenues of metals, energy, textiles, and furniture. The country's transitional economy is affected by the uneven distribution of the economic centers and by the decentralized governmental decision-making processes determining economic reforms.

Geographic regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina are presented in the final part of the book also dealing with the challenges and issues of geographical regionalization. Attention is paid to the complexity of the country in terms of regionalization and to the applied methods of the analyses. The authors refer to Nurković and Mirić who differentiated four macroregions on the first, and eleven mesoregions on the second level. The four macroregions are: Peripannonian Bosnia in the north which belongs to the southern edge of the Pannonian Basin; Planinsko - Kotlinska (Mountain - Valley) Bosnia in a central position between the regions, also referred as the core of the Bosnian statehood; High Karst of Bosnia and Herzegovina positioned along the Dinaric Mountain chain; and the Mediterranean Bosnia and Herzegovina often referred as "Low Herzegovina". In order to become a member of the EU, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have the means to establish NUTS regions. This is very similar to the case of other required socioeconomic policies, plans and reform implementations, and is due to the disharmonious and ineffective political system. The book provides a complex picture about the country. It is the result of a broad and thorough research conducted by the authors which represents their plethoric interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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