
Book review: Szymon Sochacki, *Bośnia i Hercegowina 1995–2012. Studium politologiczne* [Bosnia & Herzegovina 1995–2012. Political science study], Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2015, pp. 345

by Patryk Madej

Bosnia & Herzegovina is one of the most forgotten states of the Balkan Peninsula. Federation that consists of two entities is independent from Yugoslavia since 1992. Multicultural society of this country is making it one of the most interesting, surprising and miscellaneous places of the world. This aspect has a big influence on the political structure of this state – since its general “shape”, through its state authorities to the internal international relations. Research on this country is certainly intriguing because of its unprecedented feature in the world. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of thorough publications in this topic on the Polish and European market. One of them is for sure a scientific dissertation “Bosnia & Herzegovina 1995–2012. Political sciences study” (pl. “Bośnia i Hercegowina 1995–2012. Studium politologiczne”) of Szymon Sochacki.

Szymon Sochacki has graduated from Mikołaj Kopernik University of Toruń in two fields of study: International relations studies and Slavic studies with specialization in Serbian language. Since 2012 he is also a doctor of political sciences. His

research is focused mostly on the countries of former Yugoslavia, especially, on Bosnia & Herzegovina. Knowledge of one of the most useful languages of the Balkan area is for sure a big advantage of Szymon Sochacki. He is also one of the editors of the publication “Balkans in XX and XXI century: history – policy – culture: materials from the conference “To know Balkans”” (pl. “Bałkany w XX i XXI wieku: historia – polityka – kultura: materiały z konferencji “Poznać Bałkany”) from 2009.

The impressive bibliography (more than 50 legal acts over 250 publications, extremely big netography) is giving a promise of reliable research with a wide-looking point of view. Big list of Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian publications that were used by Szymon Sochacki should ascertain a great number of information coming from persons who are living in this country and have a direct personal connection with Bosnia & Herzegovina.

List of abbreviations draws attention because of its size – 112 positions for the book of almost 280 pages of the main text book. It consists mostly of names of

international organizations, institutes of them, names of political parties and others. It can be useful for getting knowledge of names of political parties of Bosnia & Herzegovina (more information about that can be found also in Chapter 3). Anyway, this list has deficiency – no standard of it. Some abbreviations are coming from the names in Polish, another are in English, Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian. From one point it is understandable because of originality of this names, from the other point – there is no consistency, so abbreviations are not logical, what is hampering reading and understanding huge and important fragments of book.

This publication, because of its specification should be not only be a great position for Balkan and Bosnia & Herzegovina lovers, but also for all amateurs who could be interested in getting to know this forgotten, multicultural and beautiful country and this region of the world. Unfortunately, this publication has got a lot of factual mistakes that are modifying reality. People who know already Balkans and its countries can be disappointed or even annoyed with such number of unacceptable mistakes. Beginners would not recognize these mistakes, but for person who wants to learn something about that topic can obtain a lot of incorrect information what is for sure unwanted. Some mistakes are extremely unforgettable.

On the first page of introduction there is already visible huge mistake of the author.

Szymon Sochacki puts a hypothesis that political system implemented in Bosnia Herzegovina and based on the consensual model of democracy is not typical for this region of Europe. This information is not correct. Beside Bosnia & Herzegovina there is another country with political system based on general rules of consensual model of democracy – Republic of Macedonia (Orlovic, 2015). In a big part of existing literature about this special political system, both Bosnia & Herzegovina and Macedonia are mentioned as examples, so this mistake is unacceptable for Balkan lovers.

Again, on the first page of the first chapter can be found extremely huge aberration. During enumeration of nations creating Bosnia & Herzegovina Szymon Sochacki is mentioning: Muslims, Serbians and Croats. Moreover, a little bit later he emphasizes that Muslims profess Islam, Serbian – Orthodoxy and Croatian – Catholicism. Some pages later can be found the tip of the iceberg – mentioning Muslims as nation. This mistake is more than unacceptable for not only Balkan specialist, but in general for any scientist. Unfortunately, it is repeating a lot of time in this publication. In the moment when author is talking about “secular Muslims” it is sure that Muslims are for him something different then for the rest of the world. Even attempt to use term “Muslims” as synonym of the word “Bosnians” is more than incorrect and incomprehensible.

Fragments describing legal structure and procedures are more prescribed than described. There are almost no conclusions during this research, what gives an impression of useless of this part – especially in the second chamber of the publication. In some sentences there are sth small misunderstandings of legal definitions. This disadvantage is especially important for people without legal background, because cannot give any knowledge about that topic, though of information that could be found anyway in legal acts.

Some of the images used in this publication are in bad quality – in example in one, presenting the map of Bosnia & Herzegovina, it is not possible to distinguish controlled territories of Serbs, Bosniacs and Croats. Even if this picture is taken from external source – there is no correction to make this map readable – so in conclusion, adding it to the book is totally useless. The same situation is happening unfortunately also later in the book.

There are some more weaknesses and mistakes in this publication, but it has got also a lot of useful and interesting information, conclusions. Some overview can be get during going through this book chapter by chapter.

The structure of this publication consists of introduction, five chapters and final observations. This division is thoughtful, logical and allows its reader to go step by step into basic knowledge about the political essence of Bosnia & Herzegovina.

First of the chapters called “The collapse of Yugoslavia” (pl. “Rozpad Jugosławii”) is focused on history of Civil war, Dayton Agreement including all processes going around that and having on target closing the conflict on the territory of Bosnia & Herzegovina and institutionalization of international intervention. This part of the book, though of mistakes mentioned-above, is a good historical research. Big advantage for sure is wide point of view – all information is objective and give most likely picture of the history of Bosnia & Herzegovina. Determination of Szymon Sochacki in scheduling facts created a good opportunity for readers to go correctly through next historical circles of this country.

In the second chapter “State and society after the war” (pl. “Państwo i społeczeństwo po zakończeniu wojny”) Szymon Sochacki describes legal structure of Bosnia & Herzegovina and its entities with focusing in another subchapter on self-government and Civil society. Although big part of it is more prescribed then described as I mentioned some moments before – importance of all this information is huge because of its impact on reader’s knowledge about functioning of this state. The second subchapter shows general idea, structure and competences of self-government. The last part of this chapter, about civil society allows reader to get knowledge about the attitude of Bosnian society in aspect of participating in country-building and creating.

Third chapter “Political parties” (pl. “Partie polityczne”) is divided in two parts. First one explains legal regulation about political parties, its creating and financing – author could go a little bit more into this topic, but this general overview provides needed minimum. In the second section Szymon Sochacki presents entities of Bosnian political scene. Small description of each of them allows reader to understand the shape of political reality of this country.

“Election in Bosnia & Herzegovina in years 1996–2010” (pl. “Wybory w Bośni i Hercegowinie w latach 1996–2010”) is a fourth chapter of the reviewed book. Author is going through all elections conducted in Bosnia & Herzegovina with objective description of circumstances of the times and results. It is definitely useful to read this part after getting knowledge from the first chapter to the third to be able to understand development of political direction and civic climate of Bosnians, Serbs and Croats living in this country.

The last chapter called “Internal and foreign policy of Bosnia & Herzegovina after 1995” (pl. “Polityka wewnętrzna i zagraniczna Bośni i Hercegowiny po 1995 roku”) is an astute description of essence of Bosnia & Herzegovina. In the first part of it can be found information about development, changes, status of this country with large depiction of welter around the Constitution and all activities of its changes. There is also a lot of points connected with political existence of Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Next parts are focusing on relations with the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including integration with them. In the last part Szymon Sochacki tried to summarize cooperation with International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia with special accent of difficulties going around that relation.

Final observations are a catalogue of accurate conclusions. Szymon Sochacki correctly puts attention at the hardness of existence and functionality of Bosnia & Herzegovina, which is coming from its creation root – external, international intervention.

Reviewed book “Bosnia & Herzegovina 1995–2012. Political sciences study” is one of not so many publications focused on Bosnia & Herzegovina. Its structure is logical and helps readers to find themselves in the wood of information. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ignore huge number of mistakes and deficiencies. In my opinion amateurs should be careful with reading this book because of possibility of getting a lot of wrong information. Balkan lovers have to remember to have big distance during penetration of pages of this book. Anyway, in the moment of getting “Bosnia & Herzegovina 1995–2012. Political sciences study” in hands it is important to remember that the title state is a kind of artificial creation and some elements of it can be incomprehensible for person from the countries with high-developed and deep ingrained democracy.

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