

It's time to confront an uncomfortable truth: Bosnia and Herzegovina, as currently organized, is not working. The governing structure is a tangled mess, and the claim of democracy is belied by the fact that the people there are governed by a modern-day colonial viceroy. Historic resentments are deep, and division among the people is ever-present. The Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs don't trust each other. How could they? Ancient animosities, sectarian violence, and shifting boundaries go back centuries.

This past week, Milorad Dodik, the leader of the Serbian SNSD party in Republika Srpska, renewed calls for a separate Croatian entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina. Reflecting the fear over the expressed goal of Bosniak Muslim political leaders for the creation of a centralized Muslim unitary state, Dodik has proposed creating a "third entity." He argues that the only way to stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina is for all three constituent peoples be granted true self-determination, where no one group, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, is placed in a subordinate position. In this spirit, Dodik has proposed dividing the Federation into two: Bosniak and Croat.

Almost 30 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the Bosnian War, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains frozen in time — politically dysfunctional, socially divided, and economically stagnant. Despite the end of armed conflict, the post-war framework imposed by Dayton has failed to transform the country into a stable, unified state.

In the years following the Dayton Agreement, Western politicians began to centralize authority and erode the autonomy of the Serbian and Croat Christian minorities. As a result, ethnic divisions are deeper than ever, with Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs continuing to live in parallel realities. The political system — built on forced cooperation and mutual vetoes — has become a permanent deadlock. And making matters worse, the country is governed not by the will of the people, but by a foreign High Representative with the power to unilaterally disqualify duly elected Presidents.

This status quo cannot last. The region is a ticking time bomb. If the right to self-determination of all three constituent groups is not established, history reminds us that violence and war will be the inevitable outcome.

To move forward, the country needs a new constitutional framework that reflects political and demographic realities. A permanent solution could be found in the formal creation of three autonomous entities — one each for Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs — under a loose confederation. This would not be a call for partition or renewed conflict, but rather a pragmatic approach to governance, modeled in part on recent international peace efforts elsewhere, such as the Trump administration's normalization deals in the Middle East.

The Dayton Accords stopped the war — that is their undeniable success — but they were never designed to be a long-term blueprint for statehood. The current structure includes two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (mainly Bosniaks and Croats) and Republika Srpska (mainly Serbs). Within this setup, Croats have long argued that they are treated as a junior partner, often politically outvoted by the more numerous Bosniaks within the Federation. This

has led to repeated calls for a third, Croat-majority entity, a demand that remains unaddressed and increasingly urgent.

Attempts at reform have failed. The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina — especially its three constituent peoples — remain divided not just politically, but in their aspirations, identities, and historical narratives.

Creating three autonomous entities — for Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs — would acknowledge the demographic and political facts on the ground. It would allow each group to exercise a high degree of self-governance in cultural, educational, and internal administrative matters, while maintaining a minimal but functional central government responsible for international relations, currency, and border policy.

This approach would reduce tensions caused by constant inter-ethnic competition at the state level. Rather than forcing unity from the top down, it would allow coexistence from the bottom up. Importantly, each group would have a stake in preserving the peace within its own domain, while having less reason to fear domination by the others.

It would also address Croat and Serb grievances and help stabilize the Federation, which has become an increasingly dysfunctional entity precisely because it tries to govern three peoples with different political priorities. Republika Srpska, meanwhile, already operates with significant autonomy, but its sovereignty is constantly undercut by a German High Representative who has engaged in lawfare to thwart the will of the Serbian people. The challenge is real autonomy, which is distributed fairly and evenly.

The proposal for three entities in Bosnia bears some resemblance to the approach taken in the 2020 Abraham Accords and other normalization efforts led by the Trump administration in the Middle East. These deals did not attempt to erase divisions or resolve every long-standing grievance. Rather, they focused on establishing practical arrangements that allowed parties with deep differences to coexist and cooperate on shared interests — particularly in trade, security, and development.

Trump's Middle East peace strategy prioritized realism over ideology. For decades, the global community had pursued all-or-nothing solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often failing because it insisted on a comprehensive resolution before allowing any normalization.

Similarly, in Bosnia, waiting for perfect unity or complete reconciliation before reforming the political structure is not only unrealistic — it is counterproductive. The longer the country remains paralyzed by its dysfunctional setup, the more resentment builds. Like in the Middle East, a deal that acknowledges current realities, even if imperfect, can open the door to long-term peace and cooperation.

To be clear, a three-entity model is not without risk. Minority protections within each entity would be essential. A strong constitutional court and human rights framework would be needed to prevent discrimination and ensure freedom of movement and expression for all citizens, regardless of ethnicity.

Three Entities for Lasting Peace - 10/19/25, 12:21 PM / 3

Moreover, the office of the foreign High Representative should be abolished, and international actors — especially the United States, along with the European Union, Russia, and Hungary, who have a lot of goodwill in the region— can play helpful roles. Their goal should not be to impose solutions, but to facilitate a peaceful, democratic process in which all three groups have a genuine say. The reward of a clear EU accession path could serve as a powerful motivation for consensus.

Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot afford another decade of political limbo. Pretending that ethnic divisions will vanish with time or pressure is wishful thinking. Like the Trump-era peace deals in the Middle East, a new approach for Bosnia should focus on pragmatic coexistence, not utopian unity.

By formalizing a three-entity structure under a minimal federal framework, Bosnia could finally create a political system that reflects its complex identity — not one that fights it. Stability and prosperity can grow when people feel heard, represented, and secure. That is the essence of peace — and it's long overdue in Bosnia.

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