

THE END OF LIBERAL PEACEBUILDING? STATEBUILDING RECONFIGURATION IN THE EMERGING INTERNATIONAL ORDER: A POST-DAYTON CASE STUDY

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Abstract: *This article examines the relationship between the Dayton Peace Agreement, liberal peacebuilding, and the contemporary challenges of democratic backsliding within the transformation of the liberal international order. It argues that the Dayton Agreement ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and preserved state sovereignty, but only partially achieved its long-term objectives of democratic consolidation, effective state-building, and sustainable political integration. Persistent ethnic divisions, institutional fragmentation, and contested statehood continue to shape political development and complicate European integration. The article situates Dayton within liberal peacebuilding scholarship by tracing three generations of debate: early optimism about democratization and institutional transfer; a second generation of institutional critiques focused on sequencing, legitimacy, and capacity; and a third generation of post-liberal and hybrid approaches that question externally driven peacebuilding. Engaging scholars such as Roland Paris, Simon Chesterman, Oliver Richmond, David Chandler, Roger Mac Ginty, and James Dobbins, it highlights both the achievements and limitations of liberal peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts. The study connects these debates to the contemporary crisis of the liberal international order, marked by geopolitical rivalry, domestic polarization, and declining Western normative authority. It concludes that Bosnia and Herzegovina's stalled state-building reflects both constraints embedded in the Dayton framework and broader systemic uncertainty regarding the future of liberal international engagement.*

Keywords: *Dayton Agreement, liberal peacebuilding, Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Integration.*

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Introduction and research methodology

In his renowned book *The End of History*,² Francis Fukuyama describes the victory of the democratic system over communist and, previously, fascist regimes in the context of the Cold War as the final stage in the evolution of mankind. From his perspective, human history can be understood as a directional and evolutionary process shaped by economic development and scientific progress.³

At the same time, another important variable is the struggle for recognition, inspired by the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel argued that humans engage in conflict in order to obtain recognition and dignity.⁴ Fukuyama viewed the liberal democratic regime as the endpoint of conflict, as it creates a social, economic, and political environment in which the rights of all citizens are recognized, all individuals are treated equally, and liberty and human dignity are guaranteed. In this sense, the victory and rise of liberal democracies represent the end of conflict, the end of humanity's struggle for recognition, and ultimately, the end of history.

The current chain of events, particularly over the last two years, but also throughout the past decade, suggests that the international system is undergoing significant change, though not through the expansion or consolidation of the principles of liberal democracy. On the contrary, these principles appear to be increasingly in contention with one another. Paradoxically, history seems to have challenged Francis Fukuyama's thesis, and ultimately, Friedrich Hegel may have the last laugh. This is not necessarily because alternative regimes, such as fascist or communist systems, are prevailing - although the Chinese model is becoming increasingly influential in the international arena - but rather because liberal democracies are experiencing internal erosion.

The West is no longer as cohesive as it was in the 35 years following the end of the Cold War.⁵ The United States is no longer fully consistent in its foreign policy regarding relations with European countries, and its

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*, New York: The Free Press, 1992, pp. 15-26.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 37-50.

⁴ Gary Browning, "Hegel on War, Recognition and Justice", in Andrew Buchwalter (ed.), *Hegel and Global Justice*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2012, pp. 193-209.

⁵ Georgios Varouxakis, *The West: The History of an Idea*, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2025, pp. 325-329.

commitment to liberal democracy appears to be gradually declining,⁶ as can be observed in the positions of the Trump administration on human rights, press freedom, international law, and international peace.⁷ The wars between Ukraine and Russia, between Israel and Gaza, and the tensions involving Iran, the United States, and Israel are often interpreted as clear signs that democracy did not emerge as the uncontested winner after 1991. One reason for this is that liberal democratic states are no longer consistently defending or actively maintaining the core values of their political systems.

Besides Fukuyama's apotheotic approach, a clear outcome of the changes following the end of the Cold War was the increased involvement of the international community in conflict resolution, significantly shaped by a liberal perspective within the United Nations and with the United States as a primary actor.⁸ The UN was not only seen as a mediator between warring parties, but also as an actor seeking to promote the democratization of former theatres of war as a form of conflict resolution intended to reduce the likelihood of renewed violence.⁹ During the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the international response to war - especially intra-state conflicts - was characterized by a liberal peacebuilding approach aimed not only at ending hostilities, but also at fostering the establishment of democratic governance.

The peacebuilding strategy emphasized the long-term goal of achieving a more positive peace, which sought to develop the rule of law in order to ensure justice, provide retribution for victims, and, at the same time, offer more effective mechanisms for conflict management. Other objectives included the liberalization of markets to generate economic interdependence among different segments of society and to create prosperity for communities,

⁶ Staffan I. Lindberg, "Democracy Report: Unraveling The Democratic Era", 2026, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf.

⁷ Katya Adler, "Trump's New World Order Has Become Real and Europe Is Having to Adjust Fast", BBC, February 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cddn002g6qzo>.

⁸ James F. Dobbins, "America's Role in Nation-building: From Germany to Iraq", in *Global Politics and Strategy*, vol. 45 no. 4, 2003, pp. 87-110, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mr1753rc>.

⁹ Edward Newman, "'Liberal' Peacebuilding Debates", in Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond (eds.), *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding*, Tokyo: UN University Press, 2009, pp. 26-53.

rather than competition over resources and territorial claims. Finally, another key goal was the strengthening of human rights and civil society as safeguards against authoritarian relapse.¹⁰

An illustrative case for this liberal perspective is the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which the international community played a major role not just in the ending of the war but also created a strategy for a democratic environment in Bosnia. Roberto Belloni critically analyzed the situation of the Dayton Agreement and outlines extremely well the limits of liberal peacebuilding for the three ethnic communities.¹¹ In his work he conceptualizes institutionalization of ethnicity, the dependency of the Bosnian state from external factors and in general the stabilization of the process with the lack of transformation.

It can be observed that even during a period of dominance of the liberal international order, the peacebuilding strategy had significant limitations in creating a democratic environment capable of reducing ethnic tensions among the three constituent groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. More recently, Bosnia and Herzegovina has made a series of advances in its European integration process, and the question of state reform has re-emerged on the public agenda. However, as has been the case throughout the 35 years of the Dayton regime, Bosnia and Herzegovina has once again encountered major obstacles regarding reform, and the EU integration process cannot advance toward the opening of negotiation chapters due to the structural issues analyzed by scholars such as Roberto Belloni.¹²

Therefore, the goal of this article is to understand how current developments in the international system, as well as the reconfiguration of great powers and the values that may shape a possible new world order, influence existing political arrangements. It can be argued that these changes may lead to the decline or even erosion of the liberal approach, and that cases

¹⁰ Michael Barnett and Christoph Zürcher, "The Peacebuilder's Contract: How External Statebuilding Reinforces Weak Statehood", in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 23-52.

¹¹ Roberto Belloni, Stefanie Kappler and Jasmin Ramović, "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Domestic Agency and the Inadequacy of the Liberal Peace", in Oliver P. Richmond and Sandra Pogodda (eds.), *Post-Liberal Peace Transitions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 47-64.

¹² Berta López Domènech, "Unlocking Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU Accession Path", April 2026, <https://www.epc.eu/publication/unlocking-bosnia-and-herzegovinas-eu-accession-path/>.

such as the Dayton Agreement could be significantly affected by this transition. In order to explain this process, the article addresses the following research question: “How does democratic backsliding within the international liberal order influence the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement?” This question represents an important step toward explaining the dependence of conflict resolution on external factors and understanding why cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot fully achieve the democratic objectives of liberal peacebuilding without sustained support from the international community.

To achieve this, the article adopts a poststructuralist perspective in order to examine the relationship between external policy and identity.¹³ One objective is to analyze how the international community constructed borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on its perception of ethnic realities in the country, and how it subsequently came to frame ethnic division as an internal problem, in line with R. B. J. Walker sovereignty theory and the broader sovereignty debate. Concomitantly, another poststructuralist perspective used to analyze the Bosnian case draws on James Der Derian, particularly his argument that diplomacy functions not only as a tool of mediation, but also as a mechanism of estrangement. Although it contributed to ending the war among the three ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it also helped produce a political system that is inherently competitive and allowed political parties to constitutionalize ethnic divisions and maintain ethnic narratives.

The Dayton Agreement - from the ambitious past to the visionless stagnation

The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed on 21 November 1995 in Dayton and became widely known as the Dayton Agreement.¹⁴ The treaty ended the hostilities among the warring parties, succeeded in preserving the sovereignty of the Bosnian state, and established a constitutional and political framework for post-war governance.

¹³ Lene Hansen, “Poststructuralism”, in John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 169-183.

¹⁴ Dayton Peace Agreement, <https://bih.osce.org/bih/126173>, accessed April 12, 2026.

In order to achieve this, the agreement reorganized the territory according to the principle of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, dividing the country into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, both operating under the political framework of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁵ Alongside the territorial reorganization, the agreement established the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to ensure the continuity of the state through a highly decentralized political system, the recognition of the “three constituent peoples” (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs), and the creation of shared institutions such as the tripartite Presidency and the bicameral Parliamentary Assembly (the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives).¹⁶

The most relevant aspect for this article is Annex 10, which outlines the Agreement on Civilian Implementation and establishes the international oversight mechanism of the Dayton Agreement under the supervision of the High Representative. The High Representative is appointed through a United Nations Security Council resolution and is responsible for managing relations between the political elites of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international organizations and states involved in the Agreement.¹⁷ The role of this actor is to monitor the implementation process, maintain relations with the parties in order to ensure compliance with the civilian provisions of the Agreement, coordinate various civilian organizations, and report to international bodies and states interested in the development and implementation of the Dayton framework.

In order to better understand the agreement and the manner in which it was politically constructed, the following section examines the work of Richard Holbrooke as one of the principal architects of the treaty. Holbrooke led the United States negotiating mission in his capacity as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs. Several years after the signing of the agreement, he published the book *To End a War*, which provides an important firsthand account of the Bosnian peace process from the perspectives of diplomatic history, strategic analysis, and political memoir.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ General information, <https://www.ohr.int/about-ohr/general-information/>, accessed April 12, 2026.

Even as a diplomat, Richard Holbrooke argued that diplomacy alone was not sufficient to end the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his book, he explained that the approaches adopted by the United Nations and European actors had failed because they relied heavily on neutrality and attempted to maintain peace through peacekeeping operations without the credible use of military force.¹⁸ After being appointed to manage the Bosnian issue, Holbrooke proposed an approach based not solely on diplomacy, but on the combination of military pressure and coercive diplomacy, supported by American leadership. In his view, diplomacy became effective only after the dynamics of the war shifted in 1995 due to the leverage created by NATO airstrikes. The United States abandoned its neutral position and decided to bomb Bosnian Serb military targets in order to alter the military balance and compel the parties to negotiate from a cost-benefit perspective in which continuing the war became too costly.¹⁹

First, one variable that can be identified in this work is the role of coercive diplomacy, in which the parties at the negotiating table were not entirely voluntary participants in the bargaining process.²⁰ The involvement of the United States represented a major factor in compelling participation and, at the same time, limited the range of choices available to the parties involved. Richard Holbrooke combined diplomatic negotiations with NATO military intervention, political isolation, economic sanctions, and psychological pressure.²¹ It can be argued that diplomacy alone would not have ended the war within such a short period without the support of military pressure; however, the question remains as to how effective a peace mediated through power can ultimately be.

Second, another variable, and arguably the most important one, was the military leverage of NATO under the leadership of the United States. Operation Deliberate Force significantly weakened the military position of the Bosnian Serbs while attempting to minimize humanitarian casualties as

¹⁸ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War: The Conflict in Yugoslavia--America's Inside Story--Negotiating with Milosevic*, New York: The Modern Library, 1998, pp. 21-33.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 142-152.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 153-168.

²¹ Leon Hartwell, "Conflict Resolution: Lessons from the Dayton Peace Process", in *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2019, pp. 443-469, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nej.12300>.

much as possible.²² The operation became an important precedent for the concept of Responsibility to Protect and contributed to reducing the reluctance of Western states to become involved in intra-state conflicts. However, once again, the question must be raised as to how neutral the United States could be as part of the mediation process, especially from the perspective of the Bosnian Serb side, which was targeted during the NATO campaign.

Coercive diplomacy is later described as a hybrid strategy that combines diplomacy and military pressure, requiring a carefully balanced approach situated between deterrence and compellence.²³ One of its major limitations is the relatively low probability of achieving political regime change due to the resistance of the targeted state. At the same time, throughout history, coercive diplomacy has been used primarily by the United States as a tool for promoting liberal peacebuilding and for justifying the use of military force in conflicts in which either NATO or the United Nations initiated humanitarian interventions.

Even so, the success rate of humanitarian interventions during the decade between the 1990s and the early 2000s was only approximately 32%.²⁴ In particular, this strategy of diplomacy faces its greatest challenges in the context of regime change, because the use of military force can strengthen the resistance of the targeted actors and potentially enhance domestic resilience. Sanctions and military pressure may also reinforce nationalism as a response to perceived external threats.

However, the issue does not concern only the targeted actors, but also the precarious position of the strategists who employ this method, as they must maintain a precise balance between threats and negotiations while constantly facing the risk of conflict re-escalation. At the same time, this approach carries a significant risk of undermining the credibility of the mediation process among all parties involved in the bargaining process and

²² Piers Robinson, "Misperception in Foreign Policy Making: Operation 'Deliberate Force' and the Ending of War in Bosnia", in *Civil Wars*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2001, pp. 115-126, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240108402490>.

²³ Bruce W. Jentleson, "Coercive Diplomacy: Scope and Limits, Theory and Policy", in Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 404-414.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 407.

may even create an excessive level of dependency on international support and oversight for the implementation of peace agreements.

After examining these limitations, this paper must also address the critiques of the Dayton Agreement and, furthermore, analyze the legacy of the agreement over the years. One of the most important critiques comes from David Chandler, who argued that the Dayton Agreement created a Bosnian state without genuine sovereignty.²⁵ In his view, Annex 4 established state continuity and de jure sovereignty, but the constitutional structure was so weak and fragmented that it could not function properly without international supervision and management.²⁶

David Chandler described the political objectives of the Dayton Agreement as a postponed state-building strategy rather than a definitive solution to the conflict at that time.²⁷ The relevance of his argument remains significant, considering that Annex 4 and the complex role of the High Representative continue to be central components of the Bosnian political and decision-making framework more than 30 years after the signing of the Agreement. Overall, it can be argued that the Dayton framework provided long-term stability; however, an important question remains as to whether stability itself was the ultimate objective, or whether the true goal was democratic reform.

From the perspective of fragmentation, another important critical approach is the ethnicization of the state, as explained by Roberto Belloni.²⁸ The Dayton Agreement succeeded in ending the war, but it also institutionalized ethnic divisions at the foundation of political life. Belloni argues that the power-sharing arrangement among the three constituent peoples ensured peace at the cost of embedding wartime divisions within the constitutional order. As a result, political representatives became conditioned by ethnic categories, a dynamic that remains visible today in the majority of political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

²⁵ David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton*, London: Pluto Press, 1999, pp. 34-53.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 54-65.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 187-191.

²⁸ Roberto Belloni, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia*, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 43-49.

After examining part of the debate surrounding the entry into force of the Dayton Agreement, the following section analyzes the subsequent ten years in order to assess whether any of the initial issues were resolved. Sumantra Bose described the Agreement not as an ideal solution, but rather as a realist and institutional compromise designed to create a framework for coexistence within a deeply divided society, rather than a unified national state.²⁹ Bose emphasizes the consociational structure of the system and the manner in which power was shared among Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats.

Even though this is a generally positive perspective on the outcomes of the Agreement, Sumantra Bose still views the Dayton framework as an evolving arrangement rather than a permanently frozen settlement, leaving room for future improvement.³⁰ When examining the current results of this evolutionary framework, Bosnia and Herzegovina has so far been prevented from experiencing a renewed war; however, the mechanisms for coexistence and cooperation remain limited, particularly between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska.

Another important academic perspective on the first decade following the Dayton Agreement is provided by Florian Bieber in *Post-War Bosnia: Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance*.³¹ This work shares several similarities with the perspective advanced by Sumantra Bose, particularly in viewing the Dayton Agreement both as the peace settlement that ended the war and as a state-building framework, since it effectively established the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Bieber places greater emphasis on the second dimension by examining the shortcomings of the political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and analyzing whether this framework could eventually enable the Bosnian state to evolve toward a more democratic environment, particularly from the long-term perspective of European integration.

Florian Bieber acknowledges several achievements associated with the Dayton Agreement, such as the prevention of renewed war, the facilitation

²⁹ Sumantra Bose, "The Bosnian State a Decade after Dayton", in *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 322-335, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310500074028>.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Florian Bieber, *Post-War Bosnia Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 43-45.

of refugee returns, the preservation of sovereignty, and, more broadly, the normalization of the post-war environment following the Bosnian War. However, the author is also critical of the long-term consequences that became increasingly visible after the first decade of the Agreement's implementation.

His general critique is directed toward the entrenchment of ethnic divisions within the structure of the state.³² Bieber highlights the effects of this process by examining the fragmentation of governance in the public sphere, including major differences between the two entities, overlapping institutions that deepen decentralization, and the weak state capacity of Bosnia and Herzegovina due to limited political leverage.³³ All of these factors operate within a system that creates incentives for nationalist politics driven not only by the public interest, but also by ethnic interests.

Twenty years after the Agreement, the academic community continued to emphasize its dual nature by further recognizing its success in maintaining peace among the three constituent peoples while simultaneously acknowledging that the legacy of the Agreement has become a source of many of Bosnia and Herzegovina's long-term political issues. Soeren Keil and Anastasiia Kudlenko argue in their article that the Dayton framework failed to establish a coherent system for democratization, sustainable governance, and state consolidation.³⁴ By examining this dual perspective on the peacebuilding strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authors highlight a "paradox" generated by the institutionalization of contradictions within the political system.

Soeren Keil and Anastasiia Kudlenko comparatively examine a series of concepts that are inherently contradictory: ethnic autonomy versus multiethnic reintegration, decentralization versus a functional central state, power-sharing versus liberal democracy, and refugee return versus the ethnic territorial stability established through the Inter-Entity Boundary Line.³⁵ As a result of these inconsistencies within the goals of the Dayton peacebuilding strategy, each major political actor has been able to interpret

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 108-119.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-39.

³⁴ Soeren Keil and Anastasiia Kudlenko, "Bosnia and Herzegovina 20 Years after Dayton: Complexity Born of Paradoxes", in *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 22, no. 5, pp. 471-489, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2015.1103651>.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

the Agreement differently, while ethnic elites selectively defend the provisions that are most beneficial to their own interests. Furthermore, minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina have often been excluded from this confrontation among the three principal parties involved in the original peace negotiations.

Another layer of criticism is directed at the constitutional system, which combines federalism and consociationalism with ethnic vetoes and territorial autonomy while simultaneously promoting human rights, democratic citizenship, and reintegration.³⁶ As a result, the long-term process of democratization has had to operate within a system characterized by ethnic parties, patronage networks, and territorialized ethnic representation. Although ethnic tensions no longer manifest through armed conflict, they continue to persist through political contestation within a democratic project that remains incomplete.

Another analysis of the twenty years following the Dayton Agreement, approached more from a policy-oriented and normative perspective, is the work of Livia Benková.³⁷ Her approach is more direct and critical, arguing that the Dayton framework has exhausted its usefulness, represents an obstacle to the prospect of European integration, and should eventually undergo fundamental revision.

Taking into account the recent developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU accession path, the Dayton Agreement has not completely blocked the process; however, the lack of institutional and constitutional reform remains a major obstacle. In order to understand how Bosnia and Herzegovina managed to make significant progress toward the European Union, it is important to examine the following five to ten years to determine whether substantial changes occurred. Explain the frozen perspective from the other analysis that make a transition to the 25 years.

Another perspective, more closely connected to the present context, is the analysis of Sandra Davidović.³⁸ Once again, the central achievement of

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Livia Benková, "The Dayton Agreement Then and Now", in *Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik*, vol. 6, 2016, pp. 1-5, <https://www.aies.at/download/2016/AIES-Fokus-2016-07.pdf>.

³⁸ Sandra Davidović, "Dayton Legacy - 25 Years of Building Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *The Review of International Affairs*, vol. LXXI, no. 1179, pp. 5-20,

the Dayton Agreement is identified as its ability to maintain peace over the long term, even 25 years after the signing of the Agreement. The author highlights that this accomplishment is often underestimated and overshadowed by critiques of the ethnically divided system established by Dayton. Although the Agreement institutionalized ethnic divisions within the state, it also created an arrangement that succeeded in encouraging Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats to accept peace and maintain a certain level of political dialogue.

Simultaneously, Sandra Davidović nuances this perspective by arguing that the post-war political system encouraged “ethnic outbidding,” in which political elites gained support primarily through ethnic identity rather than through policy performance or democratic accountability.³⁹ After 25 years, the result has become increasingly evident: governance has become fragmented, limited, and, to some extent, inefficient. However, the author does not interpret these weaknesses as proof that the Dayton Agreement failed. Instead, she argues that the deep ethnic divisions within Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate that strong centralization would be both unrealistic and potentially dangerous for the broader peacebuilding project. Therefore, this perspective raises an important debate regarding state reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly whether the decentralized structure should be understood as a necessary compromise that successfully preserves peace while also potentially limiting the overall functionality of the state.

As mentioned in the previous articles, a similar perspective is expressed in the work of Zijad Bećirović,⁴⁰ who interprets the Dayton Agreement as more than a simple ceasefire arrangement. Its long-term outcomes demonstrate that it also established a comprehensive framework for the reconstruction process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The comprehensive nature of the Agreement is reflected in its contribution to the consolidation of peace and security, the rebuilding of state institutions despite the challenges posed by ethnic

<https://doi.org/10.18485/iipe.ria.2020.71.1179.1>.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ Zijad Bećirović, “25 Years After the Dayton Peace Agreement - Way Ahead”, in *International Scientific Journal European Perspectives*, vol. 11, no. 19, pp. 143-170,

<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1241977>.

divisions, the ongoing process of refugee return and reintegration, and the ambition to orient the country toward Euro-Atlantic structures.

Zijad Bećirović pays particular attention to European integration as an intended outcome of the original 1995 agreement, rather than merely a later foreign policy ambition.⁴¹ In his view, Dayton played a historical role in peacebuilding, state-building, and the implementation of reforms that could align the interests of Bosnia and Herzegovina with those of the Western world and ultimately facilitate its integration into organizations such as the European Union and NATO. However, Bećirović also examines the paradoxical nature of the Agreement. Although it was intended to create the democratic, functional, and Europeanized conditions necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina's development, he also highlights many of the issues identified by the scholars discussed above, particularly the limitations and complications of the power-sharing arrangements and entity-based system. These structural features continue to represent major challenges to the country's European and broader Western integration path.

After examining the historical evolution of the Dayton Agreement and its legacy, it can be observed that the general perspective within the literature is that the Agreement struck a balance between the objectives of negative peace - the cessation of violence among the three ethnic communities - and those of positive peace, as reflected in the liberal peacebuilding approach, which seeks to overcome the limitations imposed by ethnic divisions within the political system. The process of state-building evolved from preserving the sovereignty of the state, to creating mechanisms for dialogue among communities, and ultimately to supporting the ambition of European integration. Therefore, the final section will examine how the legacy of the Dayton Agreement continues to affect statehood in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its European integration process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina became a candidate country for membership in the European Union at the end of 2022 and, in March 2024, formally opened accession negotiations. However, it has so far failed, together with EU institutions, to make substantial progress in defining and advancing the negotiation chapters. When examining the European integration process, it is important to recognize that many of the structural weaknesses of the

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

Dayton Agreement continue to represent significant challenges for state representatives. As I argued in one of my previous articles, the Dayton framework promotes identity politics and discourages democratic reform,⁴² which complicates the EU accession process because the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* would require substantial constitutional and institutional reforms within the Bosnian state. Yet such reforms do not appear feasible in the current context due to the persistence of ethnic parties, the reproduction of identity-based politics, the tension between the consociational structure and EU accession requirements, and the general lack of political will for reform, particularly when reform is often associated with greater state centralization.

Another contemporary academic perspective on this issue is the concept of contested statehood, as developed by Hamza Preljević and Mirza Ljubović.⁴³ From their perspective, although Bosnia and Herzegovina is recognized as an independent state within the international system, the contestation they identify occurs within the state itself. In their article, Preljević and Ljubović define this concept as the absence of a shared agreement among the major political actors, a condition that has become increasingly pronounced in recent years. They attribute this lack of consensus to disagreements regarding the legitimacy of the state, the distribution of power within its political system - particularly in relation to future constitutional reforms - and, to some extent, differing views on the desirability of the state's continued existence, especially among political actors in Republika Srpska.

This variable is particularly important from the perspective of European integration because one of the key conditions for Bosnia and Herzegovina to advance along its European path is constitutional reform,⁴⁴ which represents a major step in the development of state-building capacities. In order to achieve this objective, the state requires more effective institutions, greater legitimacy at the central level of governance, enhanced administrative capacity, and the ability to adopt and implement EU legislation. Returning

⁴² George Horațiu Bontea, "Enhancing Community Security in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Impact of Identity Politics on European State-Building Strategies", in *Studia Securitatis*, vol. 1, pp. 52-62.

⁴³ Hamza Preljević and Mirza Ljubović, "Contested Statehood and EU Integration: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *Politics in Central Europe*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 403-435, <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2024-0018>.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

to the core contribution of Preljević and Ljubović's work, contested statehood in Bosnia and Herzegovina leads political actors to perceive such reforms as measures that would reduce the autonomy of the entities established under the Dayton system. Consequently, these reforms become politically contested, limiting progress toward deeper institutional transformation and European integration.

As can be observed from three decades of analysis of the Dayton Agreement, its legacy, and its impact on both peace maintenance and state-building capacities, the academic literature consistently praises its success in ending violence among the three constituent peoples. Some scholars also highlight its capacity to facilitate continued dialogue among these communities. At the same time, ethnic divisions remain a highly influential factor within the political framework of the state. Consequently, more than 30 years after the signing of the Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to require mediation and support from the international community. This persistent stagnation, together with the incomplete fulfillment of the Agreement's original objectives, suggests that both the Dayton framework and the Bosnian state remain dependent on the liberal peacebuilding mechanisms that initiated the conflict resolution process in 1995.

Liberal peacebuilding is slowing down, and this could mean the declining of its related principles

This theory and practice in international relations sought to preserve peace in war-torn societies by promoting liberal democracy and integration into the global economy.⁴⁵ The core assumption of this approach is that liberal political and economic systems reduce the likelihood of war; consequently, the transition toward these values became one of the central objectives of international conflict resolution efforts led by Western states, the United Nations, international financial institutions, and various non-governmental organizations. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the key pillars of liberal peacebuilding and its state-building approach are democratization (free elections and political pluralism), the rule of law (independent courts and constitutional governance), market liberalization

⁴⁵ Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, New York: Norton&Company, 1997, pp. 230-249.

(free markets and integration into global trade), and civil society development (human rights protection and free media).

This theoretical approach emerged immediately after the end of the Cold War, following the ideological victory of the Western bloc over the Soviet Union and the triumph of the capitalist economic model as the dominant global paradigm. The new world order was shaped by liberal institutions, which were regarded as the principal framework for promoting peace, stability, and long-term development.⁴⁶ As a result, the resolution of international conflicts became strongly influenced by liberal principles, and the first generation of liberal peacebuilding scholarship was characterized by a strong sense of historical optimism.

Once again, as mentioned in the introduction, one of the most influential academic works within this school of thought was *The End of History* by Francis Fukuyama,⁴⁷ which advanced the idea of the triumph of liberal democracy. Fukuyama described liberal democracy as the final stage of humanity's ideological evolution. His argument was not that conflicts would disappear entirely, but rather that no alternative political ideology would emerge with the same degree of legitimacy or universal appeal as liberal democracy. As will be discussed later, this work influenced a significant number of policymakers and scholars who embraced the view that liberal democracy represented the most advanced and legitimate form of political organization. Consequently, international peacebuilding efforts increasingly sought to promote democratization in conflict-affected states, viewing it as the final stage of political development in accordance with Fukuyama's intellectual framework.

An important extension of the theoretical foundations of liberal peacebuilding was provided by the work of Michael W. Doyle. He developed the theory of democratic peace, which advances the well-known argument that liberal democracies rarely engage in war with one another. Peacebuilding policies were significantly influenced by this perspective and were based on

⁴⁶ Daniel Bessner, Michael Brenes, and Michael Franczak, "A Brief History of Cold War Liberalism", in *Cold War History*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2024, pp. 299-308, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2024.2310155>.

⁴⁷ Fukuyama, *op. cit.*

the assumption that democratic states are more peaceful.⁴⁸ Consequently, the promotion of democratic governance became a central component of international peacebuilding efforts, as it was believed to contribute to both domestic stability and international peace.

This intellectual climate resulted in peacebuilding missions that increasingly emphasized democratic elections, constitutional reform, political pluralism, the protection of human rights, and the development of civil society. The optimism that characterized the first generation of liberal peacebuilding scholarship during the 1990s and early 2000s was based on several core assumptions: that liberalism is universally applicable rather than culturally specific, that democratization promotes peace through free and competitive elections, that market economies foster stability when economic liberalization is properly implemented, and that institutions can be built, strengthened, and transferred through international assistance.⁴⁹

In the mid-2000s, a second generation of liberal peacebuilding scholars emerged in response to the disappointments and unintended consequences associated with the first generation of the approach. This second wave emphasized the limitations of liberal peacebuilding theory, seeking both to identify its shortcomings and to propose solutions that would preserve its relevance for international state-building efforts.⁵⁰ Following a decade of international interventions during the 1990s and early 2000s, numerous cases of liberal peacebuilding had been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Cambodia, and several African states affected by intra-state conflict. These experiences prompted a broader and more systematic evaluation of the liberal peacebuilding model. Scholars associated with this period argued that liberal peacebuilding was often implemented too rapidly and without sufficient consideration for local institutional capacity.

This perspective was the institutional critique of liberal peacebuilding, and one of its most influential proponents was Roland Paris in his book *At*

⁴⁸ Doyle, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Hawthorn, "Liberalism since the Cold War: An Enemy to Itself?", in *Review of International Studies*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1999, pp. 145-160, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021059900145X>.

⁵⁰ Roland Paris, "Understanding the 'Coordination Problem' in Postwar Statebuilding", in Paris and Sisk (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 53-78.

War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict.⁵¹ In this work, Paris argues that post-Cold War interventions shared a common strategy centered on rapid democratization, market liberalization, and integration into international institutions. These policies were based on the assumption that they would automatically generate peace and stability; however, Paris found that the opposite often occurred. Rather than consolidating peace, rapid liberalization in post-conflict societies frequently intensified political competition, exacerbated existing social divisions, and weakened fragile institutions.

Firstly, in cases of premature democratization, societies emerging from war tend to have fragile political institutions, alongside the resurgence or persistence of nationalist currents.⁵² This is because competitive elections often reward ethnic mobilization, populist rhetoric, and wartime networks, rather than encouraging moderation or fostering cross-ethnic political competition. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic parties were, and continue to be, a persistent feature of the political system and state institutions.

Secondly, rapid market reform did not automatically create stability; instead, the urgency of these reforms often led to unemployment, corruption, social inequality, and the concentration of wealth among former wartime elites.⁵³ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, even European financial assistance is sometimes perceived as being used in support of “stabilitocracy” dynamics and as being linked to clientelist relations within ethnic party systems. To address these issues, Roland Paris proposes institutionalization as a key corrective approach, advocating the establishment of strong institutions before the introduction of full political and economic competition. In his view, this involves strengthening the judicial system, developing administrative capacity, and establishing mechanisms of accountability and regulatory frameworks. Through this approach, Paris maintains that liberal democracy can still remain a long-term objective, but only if pursued through a more gradual and carefully sequenced process.

⁵¹ Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 13-38.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 97-110.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

Another important contribution to the second generation of liberal peacebuilding scholarship is provided by Simon Chesterman,⁵⁴ who addresses the problem of legitimacy in international interventions. Chesterman notes that international actors frequently exercise powers that would normally be considered sovereign prerogatives of states. These include drafting laws with direct effect in domestic legal systems, appointing officials, and overseeing judicial institutions. In his view, this creates a paradox: it raises the question of how democracy can be constructed through institutions that are themselves not democratically accountable.

This tension is particularly evident in the case of the Dayton Peace Agreement, where the Office of the High Representative, through the so-called Bonn Powers,⁵⁵ has exerted significant influence over Bosnia and Herzegovina's political framework while remaining outside direct democratic accountability to Bosnian citizens.

A more policy-oriented contribution is offered by James Dobbins through his nation-building perspective.⁵⁶ He examines cases such as Germany and Japan as successful nation-building projects sustained by extensive international support, while contrasting them with cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Afghanistan, which he argues failed to achieve comparable outcomes. A key variable in his analysis is the investment capacity of international donors. Dobbins argues that these failures did not occur because liberal peacebuilding is conceptually flawed, but rather because external actors were unwilling to commit sufficient resources. He emphasizes the importance of adequate financial investment, long-term engagement, security provisions, administrative capacity, and effective international coordination. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, investments have increasingly been provided by the European Union, while at the same time there remains, to some extent, a lack of coordination within the Peace Implementation Council.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Simon Chesterman, *You, the People*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 126-153.

⁵⁵ Slaven Knežević, "The High Representative and the Constitutional Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *SVAROG*, vol. 28, 2024, pp. 139-161, <https://doi.org/10.7251/SVR2428139K>.

⁵⁶ James Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2003, pp. 149-159.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 87-92.

During the 2010s, a third generation of liberal peacebuilding scholarship emerged. Building on the experiences of international interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Timor Leste, and Cambodia, a growing consensus developed that, while these interventions had often succeeded in ending violence, they produced mixed results in terms of state-building outcomes. In many cases, they failed to establish sustainable democratic governance, strong local ownership, political legitimacy, and self-sufficient state institutions.⁵⁸ Scholars associated with this third generation identified several recurring patterns, including dependence on international supervision, weak domestic legitimacy, resistance from nationalist actors to externally imposed reforms, the persistence of local and regional power structures, and the continuation of ethnic or communal divisions despite extensive social and institutional engineering. As a result, these scholars moved beyond the institutional critique advanced by the second generation and adopted a more fundamental perspective that challenged the underlying assumptions upon which liberal peacebuilding was based.

Oliver Richmond is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures of this third generation of liberal peacebuilding scholarship. His academic contributions significantly reshaped the epistemological debate surrounding liberal peacebuilding approaches. After liberal peacebuilding became the dominant model of post-conflict intervention, Richmond challenged the assumption that peace can be designed and implemented from above by international actors. Instead, he argued that peace is not merely a technical project, but rather a political and social process that must be negotiated among local actors.⁵⁹

His central argument is that liberal peacebuilding often prioritizes international standards of governance over local understandings of legitimacy. As a result, state-building projects may create institutions that appear successful on paper but lack genuine social acceptance and local legitimacy.⁶⁰ Consequently, while such institutions may formally satisfy international

⁵⁸ Oliver P. Richmond, "Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace", in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2010, pp. 665-692, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298103650>.

⁵⁹ Oliver P. Richmond, *A Post-Liberal Peace*, London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 66-91.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 92-110.

expectations, they often struggle to achieve long-term effectiveness and sustainability within the societies they are intended to serve.

Oliver Richmond made another significant contribution through the development of the concept known as the “local turn.”⁶¹ Earlier peacebuilding literature had primarily focused on international organizations, states, peace agreements, constitutions, and formal institutions. Richmond and other critical scholars argued that this perspective often overlooked the individuals and communities who actually lived within post-conflict societies. Consequently, the concept of the “local turn” shifted attention toward local communities, informal institutions, everyday political practices, traditional authority structures, and grassroots forms of peacebuilding.

Returning to Richmond’s understanding of peace,⁶² and particularly his concept of the post-liberal peace, sustainable peace cannot simply be imposed from above. Instead, it must be negotiated, constructed, and ultimately owned by local actors. From this perspective, durable peace emerges not from the mere implementation of externally designed institutions, but from the interaction between international initiatives and local forms of legitimacy, agency, and political participation.

Building upon Richmond’s concept of the post-liberal peace and in order to explore a more sustainable model of peace, it is important to consider the concept of hybrid peace developed by Roger Mac Ginty. Mac Ginty rejects the notion that international actors can simply implement peace according to a predetermined blueprint.⁶³ Instead, he argues that peacebuilding is a hybrid process that emerges through the interaction of international norms with local traditions, power structures, identities, and political practices.

This synthesis of insights from both the institutional critique and post-liberal peace perspectives suggests that peacebuilding outcomes are never purely “international” or purely “local.” Rather, they are the product of continuous negotiation, adaptation, and contestation between external

⁶¹ Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building: a Critical Agenda for Peace”, in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 5, 2013, pp. 763-783, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.800750>.

⁶² Oliver P. Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding: Intervention, the State, and the Dynamics of Peace Formation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 133-162.

⁶³ Roger Mac Ginty, *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance Hybrid Forms of Peace*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 68-90.

and internal actors. Consequently, the concept of hybrid peace provides a nuanced explanation for why peacebuilding processes rarely unfold according to externally designed plans and why local agency remains central to the long-term sustainability of peace.

In a more critical and direct approach, David Chandler also made an important contribution to this school of thought by outlining what he describes as the paradox of liberal peacebuilding. Although this approach is justified through the language of democracy, self-government, and political participation, external actors frequently exercise extensive control over domestic political processes.⁶⁴ Chandler argues that this dynamic produces a form of “democracy without sovereignty,” as liberal state-building strategies often substitute external governance for genuine democratic self-rule.

His critique challenges the fundamental assumptions of liberal peacebuilding from the perspective of democratic legitimacy, political autonomy, and meaningful self-government. The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly illustrative of his argument.⁶⁵ Through the Office of the High Representative, the international community has exercised significant influence over the country’s political development. The High Representative possesses the authority to remove elected officials who are deemed to be obstructing the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, impose legislation, and play an active role in interpreting and reshaping constitutional arrangements. Consequently, Bosnia and Herzegovina represents, in Chandler’s view, a prominent example of the tension between externally guided state-building and democratic self-governance.

After the third generation, academic debate on liberal peacebuilding declined in prominence, as from the second half of the 2010s onward attention shifted toward the broader crisis of the liberal international order. This is not understood as a complete collapse of that order, but rather as a process of gradual erosion and fragmentation.

⁶⁴ David Chandler, *Empire in Denial*, London: Pluto Press, 2006, pp. 26-47.

⁶⁵ *Idem*, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy After Dayton*.

This trend has been associated with rising populism and polarization within Western states,⁶⁶ increasing geopolitical contestation from actors such as China and Russia, and, in some accounts, parts of the Global South, as well as a relative decline in the normative authority of liberal institutions compared to the period between 1990 and 2005. From a realist perspective, this contestation has been particularly emphasized by John J. Mearsheimer,⁶⁷ who interprets these developments as evidence of intensifying great-power rivalry and structural constraints on liberal internationalism.

Mearsheimer's central argument is that the liberal international order was destined to encounter significant limitations due to its pursuit of three highly ambitious projects: the global spread of democracy, the construction of deeply institutionalized forms of international governance, and the maintenance of hyperglobalization.⁶⁸ In his view, the limitations of democratization ultimately became one of the major weaknesses of the liberal order. Efforts by the United States to promote liberal democracy abroad frequently generated nationalist resistance, while the logic of the balance of power encouraged rival states to counter attempts at liberal expansion.

Furthermore, interventions in countries such as Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan often produced instability rather than sustainable democratic governance. As a result, these outcomes undermined the legitimacy of the liberal international project and reinforced skepticism regarding the capacity of external actors to transform political systems through intervention and state-building initiatives.

Simultaneously, the liberal international order has also experienced destabilizing pressures from within its own societies, contributing to processes of democratic backsliding.⁶⁹ Two factors stand out in this broader pattern of decline: tensions surrounding sovereignty and identity, and the rise of populist politics. Identity-based tensions intensified as a result of increased immigration and the delegation of authority to international

⁶⁶ Irene Palacios, "How Democratic Backsliding and Populism Affect Trust in Democratic Institutions", in *Democratization*, vol. 32, no. 8, 2025, pp. 1827-1850, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2494246>.

⁶⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order", in *International Security*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2019, pp. 7-50, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

institutions, developments that, in many cases, generated nationalist backlash. Populist movements were, in turn, fueled by these tensions and increasingly positioned themselves in opposition to liberal elites, globalization, and supranational governance.

The political consequences of these developments can be observed in events such as Brexit, the election and subsequent re-election of Donald Trump, and the broader polarization affecting many Western democracies. These trends also illustrate, and to some extent reinforce, Mearsheimer's argument regarding the weakening of the liberal international order. Furthermore, they have contributed to growing normative and political divergences between the United States and the European Union, actors that were traditionally regarded as the principal defenders of the liberal democratic values associated with the post-Cold War international order.

Building on a similar diagnosis of the decline of the liberal international order, but offering a more optimistic assessment of its future, G. John Ikenberry argues that the current crisis should be understood not as the collapse of the liberal order but rather as a period of transformation and adaptation. In his view, the roots of this crisis lie not in the failure of liberal internationalism, but paradoxically in its success. The expansion of globalization and the broadening of the liberal order weakened some of the political foundations that had sustained it during the Cold War.

Ikenberry identifies two principal drivers of this crisis. The first is a crisis of governance, generated by the inclusion of a growing number of diverse states that seek greater representation and influence within international institutions. As the liberal order expanded, it became increasingly difficult to maintain consensus among actors with different political systems, interests, and historical experiences. The second is a crisis of social purpose, resulting from the erosion of the shared identity, strategic cohesion, and security concerns that had historically united the Western democracies.

Despite these challenges, Ikenberry remains more optimistic than many realist scholars regarding the future of the liberal international order. He argues that its survival depends on two parallel processes: the renewal of progressive domestic policies within liberal democracies and the reform of international institutions to better accommodate rising powers and developing democracies. Rather than abandoning liberal internationalism,

he contends that adapting its institutions and renewing its domestic foundations represent the most viable path toward preserving the liberal order in a changing international environment.

Conclusions

The Dayton Agreement succeeded in ending the war but only partially fulfilled its broader peacebuilding objectives. While it preserved peace and the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it failed to fully achieve democratic consolidation, effective state-building, and sustainable political integration. Consequently, ethnic divisions, institutional fragmentation, and contested statehood continue to constrain the country's governance and complicate its path toward European Union membership. Conclusion of this part is that the not just the Dayton agreement did not met its long-term but also the liberal peacebuilding had its limits and therefore based on the dependency and evolution of the concept Bosnia's future need a liberal approach to progress toward EU.

At the same time, the evolution of liberal peacebuilding scholarship reveals a growing awareness of the limitations of externally driven state-building projects. From the institutional critiques of Roland Paris and Simon Chesterman to the post-liberal perspectives of Oliver Richmond, David Chandler, and Roger Mac Ginty, the academic debate has increasingly questioned the capacity of international actors to engineer democratic and legitimate political orders through external intervention alone. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the literature does not suggest the abandonment of liberal peacebuilding as a framework. Rather, it points toward the need for more gradual, locally legitimate, and institutionally sustainable approaches.

This debate acquires particular relevance in the contemporary context of democratic backsliding and the gradual erosion of the liberal international order. As Western democracies face increasing domestic polarization, geopolitical competition, and a declining normative influence, questions arise regarding their future willingness and ability to sustain liberal peacebuilding projects abroad. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, this challenge is especially significant, as the implementation of the Dayton framework and the advancement of the European integration process remain closely linked to international support and liberal institutional norms.

As things stand, the current status quo suggests that state-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina has stagnated, partly due to the broader crisis of the liberal international order.

Therefore, the central conclusion of this article is that the limitations of the Dayton Agreement should not be understood solely as failures of domestic governance. Rather, they must also be interpreted in relation to the evolution and contemporary challenges of liberal peacebuilding itself. Although the liberal peacebuilding model has revealed important shortcomings, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to depend on many of its core principles - including democratic governance, institutional reform, the rule of law, and international engagement - in order to advance toward European Union membership. Consequently, the future development of the Bosnian state and the implementation of the Dayton framework remain closely connected to the resilience of the liberal international order and its capacity to continue supporting post-conflict state-building and democratization efforts.

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