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Determinants of the Formation and Current State of the Polish National Minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze the factors of migration of representatives of the Polish nation to the area of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), to present the main assumptions of Bosnia and Herzegovina's policy towards national minorities living there after 2000 and to analyze the spatial distribution of the Polish diaspora in the territory of BiH. The issues raised concern: legal and institutional aspects of BiH's policy towards national minorities, the size of the Polish minority, the conditions for the formation of the Polish national minority in the area of today's BiH and the spatial diversity of occurrence and dynamics of changes in the population of the Polish national minority in BiH. With regard to the main assumptions of BiH's policy towards national minorities, the author puts forward hypothesis H1: With the formal and legal complexity of BiH it is difficult for national minority organizations to function in the field of preserving cultural heritage. The research questions to which the author will try to find answers are: what legal regulations regulate the activities of non-governmental organizations – immigrant organizations? Do national minority organizations have free access to their own media or broadcasts in minority languages? With regard to the presence of the Polish national minority in BiH, the author puts forward the H2 hypothesis: The population of the Polish national

minority in BiH is systematically decreasing and its share in the population of BiH is negligible. In Polish literature, the problem of Polish national minorities living in the Balkan Peninsula, and the former Yugoslavia in particular, is rarely discussed. Hence, in the author's opinion, the topic discussed is original and at the same time, in the context of widely discussed migration problems in Europe, particularly important.

BiH appeared as one of the nations formed after the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Analysing the issues faced by national minorities in BiH requires considering the historical context and the circumstances surrounding Yugoslavia's disintegration. The breakup of the SFRY had profound socio-economic and political impacts, reshaping regional and international dynamics. As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, Yugoslavia was unique, being one of Europe's oldest nations at the time (1918–1990) and governed by a liberal Constitution for a socialist country (adopted in 1974). Studies, such as those by Galtung, suggest that states promoting autonomy and confederal structures are less likely to fragment.¹ Similarly, Richardson observed that nations with long histories are less prone to internal conflicts.² However, Richardson also highlighted that religion is a strong predictor of conflict, with religious and national diversity often correlating with civil wars.³ Collier reinforced this by noting that internal conflicts are more likely in states with multiple large ethnic groups competing for power.⁴ Przeworski further pointed out that democracy tends to be more stable when a single ethnic group forms a clear majority.⁵

Despite Yugoslavia's long history and its 1974 Constitution, these factors could not suppress underlying national and religious tensions or the aspirations of the individual republics for independence.⁶ BiH declared sovereignty on March 3, 1992, following a referendum boycotted by ethnic Serbs. The proclamation of

¹ J. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*, SAGE, Los Angeles 2011.

² L.F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, Pacific Grove 1975; L.F. Richardson, N. Rasmovsky, E. Trucco, *Arms and Insecurity: A Mathematical Study of the Causes and Origins of War*, Literary Licensing, Ann Arbor 1978.

³ B. Hayes, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, "American Scientist", 2002, vol. 90(1), <https://doi.org/10.1511/2002.13.3269>; L.F. Richardson, *op. cit.*

⁴ P. Collier, *On Economic Causes of Civil War*, "Oxford Economic Papers", 1998, vol. 50(4), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/50.4.563>.

⁵ A. Przeworski, *Self-Enforcing Democracy*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, eds. D.A. Wittman, B.R. Weingast, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009.

⁶ J. Olchowski, *System polityczny Bośni i Hercegowiny*, [in:] *Systemy polityczne państw bałkańskich*, red. T. Bichta, M. Podolak, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2012.

independence was met with pronounced resistance from Bosnian Serb leaders who, supported by Serbia and Montenegro, pursued secessionist aspirations aimed at the ethno-territorial reconfiguration of BiH in line with the project of a so-called "Greater Serbia". In the north-eastern regions, they established a self-proclaimed entity, the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Banja Luka as its political centre. Concurrently, Bosnian Croat representatives declared their own self-styled polity, Herceg-Bosnia, designating Mostar as its administrative capital. International recognition of BiH came on April 17, 1992, from the European Union and the United States.⁷

The subsequent conflict persisted until the initiation of the Dayton Peace Agreement on 21 November 1995. Conceived as a provisional mechanism to terminate hostilities, the agreement introduced a complex consociational political framework that, remarkably, endures to the present day. It institutionalised two autonomous administrative entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, as well as the self-governing Brčko District. BiH formally operates as a parliamentary republic, yet it is unique within the European context insofar as its constitutional order has never been ratified by its citizens. Rather, the country's constitution is codified in Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 by the Republic of Croatia, BiH, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Notably, although the constitution is declared to exist in the official languages of BiH (Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian), the only authoritative version was authenticated in English.

Over the past three decades, BiH has experienced significant depopulation, a trend consistent with broader patterns in Southeastern Europe. From 1990 to 2020, BiH's population declined by 26.5%, marking the largest drop in the region. Other countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia, also experienced population decreases of 20.5%, 16.9%, and 15.3%, respectively. Conversely, nations like Greece, Slovenia, and North Macedonia saw population growth of 5.1%, 5.1%, and 3.8%, respectively, during the same period.⁸ Two key phases defined these demographic shifts: the first, from 1990 to 2000, was characterized by mass migrations, both internal and external; the second began in 2005 and continues, driven by the European Union's expansion.⁹

⁷ A. Antoszewski, R. Herbut, *Systemy polityczne współczesnego świata*, Arche, Gdańsk 2001; J. Olchowski, *op. cit.*

⁸ T. Zienkiewicz, E. Zienkiewicz, *Wybrane czynniki depopulacji w Europie Południowo-Wschodniej*, "Wiadomości Statystyczne. The Polish Statistician", 2024, vol. 2, <https://doi.org/10.59139/ws.2024.02.1>.

⁹ P. Eberhardt, *Przemiany demograficzno-etniczne na obszarze Jugosławii w XX*, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2005; G. Penev (ed.), *Migracije, krize and ratnisukobi in the Balkans s kraja 20. veka*, Društvo

BiH, still as a union republic that was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was not a nationally homogeneous area. The most numerous nationalities are Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats (Table 1).

Table 1. Ethnic structure of BiH according to censuses from 1961–2013

Nationalities	1961	1971	1981	1991	2013	Dynamics	Dynamics
	number	number	number	number	number	1961–2013	1991–2013
Total population	3,277,935	3,746,111	4,124,256	4,377,033	3,531,159	253,224	-845,874
Bosniaks	842,247	1,482,430	1,629,081	1,902,956	1,769,592	927,345	-133,364
Serbs	1,406,053	1,393,148	1,319,762	1,366,104	1,086,733	-319,320	-279,371
Croats	711,660	772,491	758,863	760,852	544,780	-166,880	-216,072
Other	317,975	98,042	416,550	347,121	130,054	-187,921	-217,067

Source: Author's own study based on: Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine, *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini 2013*.

Between 1961 and 1991, the population of BiH grew by 33.5%. However, after 1991, the population experienced a significant decline due to the Bosnian War (1992–1995), migration, and demographic changes. During the 1961–1991 period, the Bosnians' population increased significantly, from 842,247 to 1,902,956 (a rise of 125.9%), but between 1991 and 2013, their numbers fell by 7% to 1,769,592. This group experienced substantial growth during the earlier period, partly due to cultural factors such as larger family sizes, raising their share of the total population from 25.7% in 1961 to 43.5% in 1991. Although their numbers declined after 1991, they stayed the largest national group in 2013.

The Serb population showed a slight decrease between 1961 and 1991 but experienced a sharp drop between 1991 and 2013 due to mass migrations caused by the war. Their share of the population fell from 42.9% in 1961 to 30.8% in 2013. The Croatian population remained stable between 1961 and 1991 but declined drastically after the war, decreasing from 21.7% of the population in 1961 to 15.4% in 2013. The increase in the “Yugoslav” identity between 1961 and 1991, promoted by the state, contributed to these shifts. However, after the war, the “remainders” category saw a steep decline of 62.5%, due to emigration and growing ethnic polarization.

The Bosniaks experienced the most significant population growth from 1961 to 1991, with an increase of over one million people, fuelled by high birth rates

and the acknowledgment of their national identity during the 1960s. Conversely, the Croats and “remainders” saw the largest declines between 1991 and 2013, primarily due to migration and post-war ethnic transformations. By 2013, Bosnians had become the majority national group (50.1% of the population), overtaking Serbs, who previously held that position. The demographic shifts reflect the long-term impacts of the war in the 1990s, including significant migration and a decline in ethnic diversity. Between 1991 and 2013, the population of BiH dropped by 850,000, highlighting the lasting effects of conflict and displacement.

Material and methods

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative demographic analysis with qualitative document review. Demographic trends (1991–2013) are examined based on census data and demographic data from the Statistical Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991 and 2013 censuses and inter-census estimates). These data quantify the decline in the number of people of Polish origin living in BiH and its geographical distribution, answering research questions for H2. Qualitative sources include legislative texts (e.g. the 2003 BiH Law on National Minorities) and secondary literature on minority policy. We also reviewed academic and institutional reports to contextualize the Polish experience. The text analysis covers the period 1991–2021 and covers the period of post-war transformation in Bosnia. Relevance to Questions/Hypotheses: Quantitative analysis of census data directly evaluates the prediction of H2 about population decline. Document analysis and review of institutional rules provide a basis for H1, revealing the legal and institutional environment for minority culture (e.g. rights to education and media). In summary, statistical data substantiate the demographic aspect of the research questions, while political and secondary sources shed light on the socio-political mechanisms behind the hypotheses.

Primary sources are official population censuses (Statistical Office of BiH) and legal texts (Official Journal of BiH). Secondary sources are peer-reviewed articles and reports on minority regimes in BiH and Polish communities in the region. Calculations were performed using an MS Excel spreadsheet. The author is aware of the limitations of the lack of up-to-date statistical data. The information obtained directly from the Statistical Office of BiH does not allow for the detailed spatial distribution of the Polish minority in BiH.

The main limitations of the data are the exceedingly small size of the Polish sample and gaps in records. There was no census during the war years 1992–1995, and the 2013 census may underestimate the number of assimilated Poles.

Furthermore, identification of “Polish origin” depends on self-declaration, which is sensitive to assimilation. Qualitative evidence (e.g. reports of associations) may be anecdotal. These limitations mean that the results are illustrative rather than statistically robust.

Research and results

The collapse of the SFR Yugoslavia forced the successors to regulate the issue of national minorities. This was required by the multi-ethnic area of each of the new states. Especially in the most conflicted countries, i.e. BiH and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it was not easy. According to international standards, all minorities should have equal rights within a given country.

In BiH, the rights and protection of national minorities are regulated by a number of legal acts. The key legal acts that address the issues of national minorities include: 1) Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina;¹⁰ 2) Law for the Protection of National Minorities’ Right; 3) The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; 4) Commission for the Protection of Monuments; 5) European Convention on Human Rights, European Court of Human;¹¹ 6) Ombudsman;¹² 7) Bosnia and Herzegovina Gender Equality Act.

The Law on the Protection of National Minorities stipulates that, for the purposes of this legislation, a national minority is defined as a segment of the citizenry of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina that does not identify with any of the three constituent peoples. Such minorities are characterised by a shared or closely related ethnic origin, as well as common or similar traditions, customs, beliefs, language, culture, spirituality, historical experience, and other distinctive attributes. The Federation is legally obliged to safeguard the status and ensure the equality of members of recognised minority groups, including Albanians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Italians, Jews, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Turks, Ukrainians, among others fulfilling the criteria outlined in paragraph 1 of the article.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified a range of international human rights instruments, most notably the European Convention on Human Rights, which

¹⁰ Office of the High Representative, *Ustav Bosne and Hercegovine*, 1995.

¹¹ European Court of Human Rights, *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, Council of Europe, 2010, https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_eng, access 12 VIII 2025.

¹² Institutcija ombudsmena za ljudska prava Bosne i Hercegovine, *Uloga i funkcija*, 2014.

directly influences the protection of immigrants' rights and their capacity to establish associations. Nonetheless, the effective implementation of these international standards remains subject to the constraints of local political conditions. The legal framework governing the registration of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is regulated at the entity level. Within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this process is codified in the Act on Associations and Foundations, which prescribes detailed procedural requirements, including the submission of an organisational statute, information concerning the founders, and the specification of the association's objectives and activities.¹³ Similar regulations are applied in Republika Srpska, but the procedural requirements show some differences.¹⁴

Immigrant organisations in BiH encounter a range of structural and legal obstacles. Foremost among these is legislative fragmentation, which is particularly pronounced due to the existence of divergent regulatory frameworks across entities and the absence of uniform national standards. This lack of harmonisation precludes the possibility of a single organisation, registered for instance in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, or Mostar, from operating seamlessly throughout the entire state. Moreover, the procedural diversity and complexity of registration requirements, combined with the extensive formal documentation demanded, substantially hinder the effective functioning of non-governmental organisations.

Regarding the access of national minorities to media in their respective mother tongues, several challenges can be identified. The first pertains to the legal framework itself. The current formulation, stipulating merely that "national minorities also have the right to media in their own language",¹⁵ has been subject to sustained criticism. Empirical research demonstrates that, while such a right is nominally guaranteed, its practical implementation remains negligible. Public broadcasters, which should serve as the primary arena for the realisation of this entitlement, lack clear policy guidelines, specialised staff, and adequate resources to ensure substantive access for minority communities. So, they show no interest in this problem.¹⁶

¹³ *Zakon o Udruženjima i Fondacijama Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine*, [in:] Službene novine Federacije BiH, 2002.

¹⁴ *Zakon o Udruženjima i Fondacijama Republike Srpske*, [in:] Šl. glasnik RS 52/2001 and 42/2005, 2005.

¹⁵ L. Mršić, T. Softić-Gasal, *The Rights of National Minorities to Information*, "Journal Human Research in Rehabilitation", 2018, vol. 8(1), <https://doi.org/10.21554/hrr.041807>.

¹⁶ R. Udovićić, *Mediji i nacionalne manjine u BiH*, [in:] *Informisanje na jezicima manjina na zapadnom Balkanu: sloboda, pristup, marginalizacija*, ed. D. Marko, Media plan institut, Sarajevo 2013.

The Act on the Protection of the Rights of Members of National Minorities, chapter V “Information” contains two articles. Article 15 states that members of national minorities have the right to set up their own media and public media to broadcast content in minority languages. In practice, however, no one uses it, especially since the allocation of frequencies and the nature of these programs have been left to the public media, whose interest in the subject is negligible.¹⁷

Nevertheless, there is a general opinion that there is a satisfactory legal framework for civil society organisations in BiH, which can be used by organisations of national minorities. The Associations and Foundations Act offers legal guidance and grants civil society organisations various rights. While the estimated number of civil society organisations in the FBiH and RS is around 27,000 (including both associations and foundations), it is assumed that only a third are active. Many CSOs are project-based and narrowly specialised, often with limited financial viability and strategic planning ability.¹⁸

Immigrant organisations in BiH could use various sources of funding, but many of them remain only theoretical sources of support for their activities. These organizations can receive help from government subsidies at the local and central level and international organizations. However, access to these funds is limited, due to the unresolved problem of the significant level of corruption in BiH.¹⁹

Formal and legal complexity makes it difficult for immigrant organisations to function effectively, and the lack of stable sources of funding limits the possibilities of implementing long-term projects. The area of today’s BiH became popular among Polish migrants at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. These migrations can be divided into two main waves, which had different causes and methods of implementation. The first wave was related to the unbelievably bad socio-economic situation of Polish peasants in Galicia, Bukovina, and Volhynia²⁰ and to the colonization policy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Political changes in the Balkans, especially after the Congress of Berlin (1878), opened new direc-

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ EBRD, *Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Strategy 2022–2027*, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2022, file:///C:/Users/48603/Downloads/BIH+Country+Strategy+-+final-1.pdf, access 15 VIII 2025.

¹⁹ K. Lea-Jones, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption*, U4 Anti-corruption Resource Center, 2018, <https://www.u4.no/publications/bosnia-and-herzegovina-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption.pdf>, access 15 VIII 2025.

²⁰ E. Dolata, *Troski i radości galicyjskiej rodziny chłopskiej przełomu XIX i XX wieku w świetle badań wspomnieniowych*, “*Wychowanie w Rodzinie*”, 2016, vol. 14(2), <https://doi.org/10.61905/wwr/170649>; R. Pelczar, *Rodzina chłopska w Galicji na przełomie XIX i XX wieku w świetle literatury pamiątkarskiej*, “*Społeczeństwo i Rodzina*”, 2027, vol. 51(2).

tions of migration in search of a better life. One of the targets was Bosnia, where the Austro-Hungarian government announced that it was giving land for free.²¹

In principle, the actions conducted by Austria-Hungary should be called pure occupation. The occupation of Bosnia was therefore a purely political move, and the programmatic colonization was to strengthen Vienna's position in the region.²² Colonization began in 1895 and lasted until 1905, although as early as 1879, the first settlers from Germany began to appear in the newly occupied areas.

The roots of the Polish diaspora in these areas should be looked for primarily in Eastern Galicia and Bukovina. In Volhynia, peasants, being Austro-Hungarian citizens, were deprived of the possibility of owning or leasing land,²³ the condition was to convert to Orthodoxy, which most of the Polish peasantry did not want to do. This migration included the resettlement of families within the monarchy, which was a chain migration, where close relations with compatriots played a key role.²⁴ The trip to Bosnia was voluntary. The colonists were tempted by privileges and land grants. As a result of this action, 12 Polish villages and about sixty settlements were set up in northern Bosnia.²⁵

In addition, the areas excluded from Turkish rule required efficient administration. That is why the Austro-Hungarian authorities tempted young and ambitious people of Slavic origin with various privileges – Czechs, Croats, and Poles. This part of the future civil servants, being the interests of the monarchy, was also to guarantee faster and fuller contact between the rulers and the local population. The influx of the Polish intelligentsia to Bosnia lasted with varying intensity continuously from 1878 until the outbreak of armed conflicts in the Balkans in 1912–1913.²⁶

Significant settlements took place in the districts of Banja Luka, Derventa, Bosanska Gradishka, Prnjavor, Tesanj and other. It is estimated that 822 families

²¹ T.J. Lis, *Polskie osadnictwo i duchowieństwo w Bośni i Hercegowinie od 1894 do 1920 roku*, "Pilar", 2014, vol. 10(19–20).

²² D. Drljača, *Kolonizacija i život Poljaka u jugoslovenskim zemljama od kraja XIX do polovine XX veka*, Srpska Akad. Nauka i Umetnosti, Beograd: 1985; idem, *Etnološki pogled na poljska i jugoslovenska ispitivanja posleratnih migracija*, "Etnološki Pregled", 1963, no. 5.

²³ T.J. Lis, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Z. Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva: nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, INIS, Beograd 2005.

²⁵ P.A. Wichniewicz, *Polskie miejsca pamięci w północnej Bośni*, "Adeptus", 2014, no. 4, <https://doi.org/10.11649/a.2014.016>.

²⁶ D. Gregorczyk, *Polscy urzędnicy w administracji Bośni i Hercegowiny w latach 1879–1914*, "Roczniki Administracji i Prawa", 2010, vol. 1(10).

with 4193 people settled in these areas, where Poles were mostly farmers.²⁷ The main motives for these migrations were economic. Individuals also moved to work in the civil and military administration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Representatives of science, as well as writers, travellers, students, and officials found their haven in BiH. In 1916, about 585 Poles were employed in Bosnia as clerks.²⁸ Representatives of the liberal professions also contributed to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These include, among others medicine doctors, lawyer, painters, Austrian army soldiers.²⁹ The process of settling the territory of the monarchy in the government areas in Bosnia lasted until 1905, when the National Parliament officially ended colonization.³⁰ Also, the purchase of land in Bosnia after this date required a permit from Sarajevo.

On December 1, 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (KSChS) was set up. Significant differences of opinion on the statehood of the KSChS and the role of the nation's forming them in governing the state led to the escalation of Croatian and Serbian nationalism. The government stopped supporting settlements. The new state treated Poles as a foreign element. Polish schools were liquidated, and in 1919 a project to resettle Poles to Kosovo appeared in government circles, which was not implemented.³¹ Various smaller and larger harassments of Polish colonists began to be seen. In the face of the deteriorating situation, the idea of returning to free Polish was born in Polish émigré circles. At that time, it was impossible, due to the tough situation in Poland. In addition, there was a hunger for land in Poland, and it was farmers who wanted to return to the country.³² Thus, Poles living in KSChS, including the territories of today's BiH, found themselves in a not comfortable situation.

The outbreak of World War II complicated the situation of Poles in Yugoslavia, especially in multi-ethnic BiH. The neutrality of the Polish ethnos was put to a great test. The Polish community, as a foreign ethnic element, experienced various acts of terror and persecution from both sides. The tense situation had

²⁷ J. Albin, *Polacy w Jugosławii*, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 1983.

²⁸ *Bericht über die Verwaltung von Bosnien und der Hercegovina für die Jahre 1914 bis 1916*, K.U.K. Gemeinsamen Finanzministerium, 1917, <https://archive.org/details/berichtuberdieve1914un-se/page/n3/mode/2up>, access 15 VIII 2025.

²⁹ M. Baczkowski, *Żołnierze narodowości polskiej w podboju i okupacji Bośni i Hercegowiny przez Austro-Węgry (1878–1914)*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego", 2000, no. 127.

³⁰ T.J. Lis, *op. cit.*

³¹ A. Baniecki, *Osadnictwo Polaków z byłej Jugosławii w powiecie bolesławieckim w latach 1946–1947*, *Odcienie Regionalizmu*, https://www.wroclaw.ap.gov.pl/odcienie-regionalizmu/b_repzjug.html, access 8 VIII 2024.

³² F. Kwaśniak, *Detlak, Kalendrovce, Miljevac: osady polskiej emigracji w Bośni*, Usługi Poligraficzne Bogdan Kokot, Bolesławiec 2018.

a negative impact on the internal relations of the Polish community, creating the risk of transferring the conflict to the Polish diaspora. The unstable situation revived the idea of returning to Poland. Repatriation to the country after World War II also took place in the context of the unbelievably bad economic situation in Yugoslavia and the complicated political relations of the SFRY with the other countries of the Eastern Bloc.³³

At the first post-war meeting of Polish delegates, which took place in Bosnian Prnjavor in July 1945, a decision was made to return Poles to their homeland, and the relevant declaration was signed in Belgrade in January 1946. The condition for repatriation was the renunciation of Yugoslav citizenship and real estate that the repatriate owned on the territory of former Yugoslavia, as well as the statement that moving to Poland was voluntary.³⁴ It is estimated that about 4,000 Poles remained in the SFRY, living in mixed marriages and assimilated with the natives.³⁵

The deterioration of relations resulted in the suspension of immigration and the breakdown of cooperation and diplomatic relations between Poland and former Yugoslavia in 1958.³⁶ The second wave of immigration from Poland to BiH began in the late 1960s. Increased economic cooperation, loosening restrictions on foreign tourist trips of Poles, resulted in ethnically mixed marriages and permanent resettlements.³⁷ Migration to the SFRY, including BiH, intensified especially in the 1960s and 1970s and concerned marriages between Polish women and residents of BiH. The basis for these marital migrations was the fact that Yugoslav socialism enabled on average a higher standard of living and greater civil liberties compared to Poland as a country of "real socialism".³⁸

³³ H. Kamberović, *Iseljavanje Poljak iz Bosne i Hercegovine 1946. godine*, "Časopis za suvremenu povijest", 1997, no. 2; J. Albin, *op. cit.*

³⁴ T. Bugaj, *Reemigracja ludności polskiej z Jugosławii i jej osiedlenie na Dolnym Śląsku. 1946–1947*, "Rocznik Jeleniogórski", 1983, vo.; 21.

³⁵ S. Kale, *Poles in Croatia – history and the present*, "Polonia Inter Gentes", 2023, no. 3, <https://doi.org/10.56583/pig.2079>.

³⁶ P. Wawryszuk, *Stosunki polsko-jugosłowiańskie w latach 1956–1971*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", 2015, vol. 47(4), <https://doi.org/10.12775/DN.2015.4.09>; D. Agić, *Kratka povijest Poljske Michala Tymovskog i hrvatsko-poljski nosi u povijesnoj perspektivi*, [in:] *Kratka povijest Poljske*, ed. M. Tymowski, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb 1999; M. Tymowski, *Kratka povijest Poljske*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb 1999.

³⁷ S. Kale, *Poljska manjina u Hrvatskoj 1945–2015*, [in:] *Nacionalne manjine u Hrvatskoj i Hrvati kao manjina*, Zagreb 2015; idem, *Poles in Croatia...*; F. Škiljan, *Polish emigration to Croatia from the second half of the twentieth century*, "Demografija", 2018, vol. 15(15), <https://doi.org/10.5937/demografija1815051S>.

³⁸ M. Bogusz et al. (eds.), *Polska i Jugosławia w XX wieku: polityka, społeczeństwo = Polska i Jugosławija u XX veku: politika, društvo, kultura*, Bydgoszcz 2018; J. Holzer, *Komunizam u Europi:*

To this day, only Ćelinovac is a town with a typical Polish character. Further concentrations of Poles in the cities of Prnjavor, Banja Luka, Mostar, Tuzla, and Sarajevo. The current state of the population of citizens of Polish origin in BiH is mainly related to the re-emigration of nearly eighteen thousand Poles to the Western Territories after World War II, the wave of economic emigration intensified since the 1960s, mainly to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the escape from the war in 1991–1995. An additional element is the process of assimilation of Poles in the areas of settlement. Especially since the Polish community was not homogeneous. Internally, groups of people from Bukovina, Eastern Galicia, and the Kingdom of Poland mixed. The above factors had an impact on the level of cultivation of Polishness and the adoption of the culture of the local population.

The population of BiH citizens of Polish nationality does not constitute a significant share in the total population of this country. An analysis of data on the population of Polish nationality in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the years 1961–2013 shows a systematic decline in both the absolute number and the percentage share of this group in the total population of the country (Table 2).

Table 2. Population of people of Polish nationality in BiH in 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2013

Year	Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Population of people of Polish nationality in BiH	
	total [people]	total [people]	Share [%]
1961	3,277,948	801	0.02
1971	3,746,111	757	0.02
1981	4,124,256	609	0.01
1991	4,377,033	526	0.01
2013	3,791,662	258	0.01

Source: Author's own study based on: Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine, *Popissta novništva u Bosni i Hercegovini 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2013*.

After World War II, a considerable number of Poles opted for repatriation to Poland, which reduced the Polish community in BiH. Over the subsequent decades, gradual assimilation into the local population further eroded the distinct national identity of Poles, leading to a decline in the number of individuals identifying as Polish. The war in BiH (1992–1995) was another major factor contributing to this decline, as it caused widespread migration and the dispersion

of national minorities, including Poles. According to data, the Polish population in 2013 represented only 49% of its size in 1991 and 36% of its size in 1961.

While the overall population of BiH increased until 1991, reaching a peak of 4,377,033 people, it dropped to 3,791,662 by 2013. In contrast, the number of Poles steadily declined throughout this period. Their share of the total population remained at 0.02% until 1971 but fell to 0.01% in the following decades. This consistent decline can be attributed to a combination of factors, including migration, assimilation, and the impacts of armed conflict. Although BiH experienced population growth until the early 1990s, the Polish minority faced both relative and absolute decreases, highlighting the unique challenges and processes that shaped the fate of this ethnic group.

The Polish population in BiH lived and still lives in the Srpska Republic and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2013, the population of people with Polish roots was small and had 258 persons (Table 3).

Table 3. Spatial differentiation of the population of Polish origin in BiH in 2013

Country/Region	Population	2013
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Together	258
	Men	109
	Women	149
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Together	58
	Men	14
	Women	44
Srpska Republic	Together	199
	Men	95
	Women	104
Brčko District	Together	1
	Men	0
	Women	1

Source: Author's own study based on: Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine, *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini 2013*.

In the total Polish population in BiH in 2013, women accounted for 57.8%, which shows a significant numerical advantage over men. Most Poles (77.1%) lived in Srpska Republic, while 22.5% of this population lived in the Federation of BiH. The Brčko district was inhabited by only one person of Polish nationality.

There is a significant gender disproportion in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – women account for 75.9% of the Polish population, while the

percentage of men is only 24.1%. In Srpska Republic, on the other hand, the difference is smaller, and the gender distribution is more balanced. The share of women in the total Polish population was 52.3% and that of men was 47.7%.

Discussion

Following the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the multi-ethnic composition of the newly established successor states, including BiH, necessitated a formal regulatory framework for the protection of national minorities. In BiH, minority rights are enshrined in several key legal instruments, most notably the Constitution, incorporated into the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Law on the Protection of National Minorities, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. These frameworks formally guarantee national minorities the right to preserve their language, traditions, and cultural heritage. However, the practical enforcement of these rights is impeded by persistent political obstacles and legislative fragmentation.

Civil society and immigrant organisations encounter significant legal and administrative barriers, particularly the existence of divergent registration procedures at the entity level, which obstruct the establishment of nation-wide structures. Although a variety of funding sources are theoretically available including international donor programmes and governmental grants. Access is often curtailed by systemic corruption and burdensome bureaucratic procedures.

In terms of access to media, minority rights remain symbolic. While legal provisions formally enable the broadcasting of content in minority languages, the absence of concrete guidelines and institutional mechanisms results in their near-complete neglect by public broadcasters. Thus, despite the ostensibly robust legal framework, the substantive implementation of minority protections and institutional support for NGOs in BiH continues to be fraught with challenges.

The historical trajectory of the Polish community in BiH illustrates the broader dynamics of minority presence in the region. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Polish migration to BiH was driven primarily by adverse socio-economic conditions in Galicia, Bukovina, and Volhynia, as well as by the colonisation policies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The initial wave of migration (1878–1905) was encouraged by Austro-Hungarian promises of land allocation as part of its strategy to consolidate authority in the province. Polish settlement concentrated predominantly in northern Bosnia, where twelve villages and approximately sixty smaller settlements were established.

A second wave of migration commenced in the 1960s, primarily shaped by mixed marriages and facilitated by the relative improvement of socio-economic conditions within the SFRY. Following the Second World War, however, large numbers of Poles opted for repatriation, and subsequent decades witnessed a steady decline of the Polish community due to assimilation, economic emigration, and the destructive impact of the 1992–1995 conflict.

Today, the Polish minority constitutes only a marginal demographic presence within BiH, concentrated mainly in the Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH. Historically, the Polish diaspora contributed significantly to administrative functions and the liberal professions, but its demographic base has eroded over time because of successive waves of migration and regional instability. According to the 2013 census, the number of persons declaring Polish nationality stood at just 258 what is a negligible proportion of the total population.

Despite considerable challenges, Polish organisations in BiH continue efforts to preserve cultural identity and traditions, although their membership has been in steady decline. Over the past five decades, the size of the Polish minority in BiH has contracted by approximately 70%. This decline can be attributed to the cumulative effects of geopolitical upheavals, armed conflicts, and shifting political orders in the region, which repeatedly compelled members of the diaspora to migrate, return, and resettle under altered circumstances. The 1991–1995 war had a profoundly negative impact on the demographic and institutional sustainability of the Polish minority in BiH.

Conclusion

1. The formal and legal complexity of BiH makes it difficult for national minority organisations to function in the field of preserving cultural heritage. The multitude of executive regulations and the important level of bureaucracy are not conducive to the functioning of national minority organizations.
2. National minority organizations have legally guaranteed free access to their own media or broadcasts in minority languages, but there is no interest in this area from central and local authorities. Legal and institutional regulations in BiH do not sufficiently support national minorities.
3. The roots of the significant migration of the Polish ethnos to the territory of today's BiH should be sought in the political and economic migration of the first half of the 19th century, as well as the 1960s and 1970s. The factor of the first wave of migration were the unsuccessful national liberation movements in Poland in 1830 and 1863, as well as the possibilities of professional realization for engineers, merchants, entrepreneurs, and the prospect of land

grants to peasants. On the other hand, the factor of the last wave was the unfreezing of bilateral relations between Poland and the SFRY and extensive economic, scientific, and cultural cooperation.

4. The number of Polish diaspora in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina is decreasing and its share in the total population of BiH is negligible. The small number of the Polish diaspora is an unfavourable factor from the point of view of the scope of support and organizational or financial aid of the Polish state for the national minority in BiH.

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyze the factors of migration of representatives of the Polish nation to the area of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, to present the main assumptions of Bosnia and Herzegovina's policy towards national minorities and to analyze the spatial distribution of the Polish diaspora. The adopted time limit covers the period from 1991 to 2021. Quantitative research methods were also used. The source of the statistics is the Statistical Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result of the research, it was clarified that the regulations adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the field of cooperation with national minorities correspond to European standards. However, their use is a problem. The current Polish diaspora in Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely migration from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, concentrated in six main regions gathering over 71% of the total population. This fact may contribu-

te to the formulation of a strategy to support the Polish diaspora and promote Polish in this area.

Keywords: Polish diaspora; national minority; Bosnia and Herzegovina; spatial diversity of population; migration policy

Uwarunkowania kształtowania się i aktualny stan polskiej mniejszości narodowej
w Bośni i Hercegowinie

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest analiza czynników migracji przedstawicieli narodu polskiego na obszar dzisiejszej Bośni i Hercegowiny, przedstawienie głównych założeń polityki Bośni i Hercegowiny wobec mniejszości narodowych oraz analiza przestrzennego rozmieszczenia diaspory polskiej. Przyjęte ramy czasowe obejmują lata 1991–2021. W badaniu zastosowano również ilościowe metody badawcze, a źródłem danych statystycznych był Urząd Statystyczny Bośni i Hercegowiny. W wyniku przeprowadzonych analiz ustalono, iż regulacje przyjęte w Bośni i Hercegowinie w zakresie współpracy z mniejszościami narodowymi są zgodne ze standardami europejskimi, jednakże ich praktyczne wdrażanie napotyka istotne trudności. Obecna diaspora polska w Bośni i Hercegowinie wywodzi się w dużej mierze z migracji zainicjowanych na początku drugiej połowy XX wieku i koncentruje się w sześciu głównych regionach, skupiających ponad 71% ogólnej liczby przedstawicieli tej grupy. Okoliczność ta może stanowić podstawę do sformułowania strategii wspierania diaspory polskiej oraz promocji języka polskiego na tym obszarze.

Słowa kluczowe: diaspora polska; mniejszość narodowa; Bośnia i Hercegowina; zróżnicowanie przestrzenne ludności; polityka migracyjna

