

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN BH – SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Milošević Šošo Biljana, PhD¹
Šiljak Milica, assistant²

Abstract: *The paper is based on the research of interethnic relations in BH society, cold interethnic relations caused by ethnic distance. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a union of differences, a country where three majority, or constitutive, nations merge and interact is a suitable ground for emergence of social distance based on the negative ethnic and national characteristics and attitudes which are ascribed to other peoples and which develop due to negative opinion and antipathy towards other ethnic groups. The analysis includes members of three constitutive peoples, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, three different ethnic groups that share a common country and territory, but have different cultural heritage. The primary aim of the study was to show ethnic distance based on the level of kinship that the members of one ethnic group is ready to achieve with the members of other ethnic groups, multiethnic relations within this society, as well as the influence of ethnic and national prejudices on social distance or closeness. Today, stable ethnic relations are an important factor of stability and security in many countries and societies. Just like every ethnic group endeavors to achieve its individual and collective rights, especially minority groups, so the countries try to achieve stable interethnic relations within, as well as utmost security and stability. The countries from this region burdened with tumultuous past and ethnic conflicts are trying to achieve the greatest stability and security possible which is the reason they pay a special attention to the question of regulating their ethnic relations.*

Keywords: ethnic relations, ethnic distance, BH.

¹ University in East Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy Pale, Department of Sociology, Bosnia and Herzegovina, milosevic_biljana@yahoo.com

² University in East Sarajevo, Faculty of Philosophy Pale, Department of Sociology, Bosnia and Herzegovina, milica.siljak@ff.ues.rs.ba

Introduction

The greatest number of societies today is ethnically heterogeneous, divided into ethnic minorities and ethnic majorities, as is the case with the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which represents an example of plural or multiethnic society.

After the breakup of Yugoslavia, we witnessed unfavorable social and political situations and relations in the territory of BH society and other regions of the former state. This fact already indicates that interethnic relations in these territories were unfavorable as was later proved by ethnic conflict from 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The crucial reason for emergence of the conflicts was ethnic prosecution and ethnic discord among the three majority peoples of the region - Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. The cause of the discord was awakening of nationalism, different ideologies, religious and political orientations between conflicted parties, as well as certain social and cultural circumstances. The primary aim of this paper is to present unfavorable interethnic relations that lead toward ethnic distance in BH society. This is an important factor for understanding the turbulent history of BH society, as well as the present circumstances in the country. Apart from the social crisis, it also causes an awakening of nationalism, ethnic distance, prejudices, as well as negative attitudes about other ethnic groups.

“During the war, and not long after the war, the basic existential questions of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region were related to their belonging to a certain ethnic group. For most people, closeness with their own group meant security and being exposed to foreign group was seen as potential threat” (Haneš, 2012).

Surroundings plays an important role in adopting a system of values which comes with classifications among the members of a society (stereotypes and prejudices) throughout many different institutions such as a school system, schoolbooks, religious institutions, political system and so on. In such surroundings, different attitudes about others are established and it is these attitudes that influence the very behavior of the people and social groups. As this research shows, it is interesting to see what level of familiarity the members of one ethnic group are ready to reach with members of other ethnic groups and how prejudices and stereotypes influence their perception of the members of their own and other ethnic groups.

Multiethnic or multicultural societies are those societies which bring together two or more different cultural or ethnic groups, as is the case with BH society today. In the present world and the trends in globalizing, networking and harmonizing lifestyles, there are almost no societies that are ethnically or culturally homogenous. “In defining multiculturalism, many authors bring to front coexistence, that is living together, which is usually described as peaceful, calm, static and diversified society” (Miodragović, 2016). But the practice tells us that mutual relations in such societies are not always good. Žarko Obradović defines ethnic group as “members of the same or similar origin who share common dialect or language, customs, traditions and many particularities of material culture including other cultural and historical characteristics. Ethnic group represents, by rule but not necessarily, a grouped and territorial community” (Obradović, 2014).

1. Theoretical contextualization

1.1. *An influence of prejudices and stereotypes on ethnic distance*

The term social distance was introduced to sociology by an American sociologist R. E. Park. What he means by social distance is “a degree and measure of understanding and familiarity that characterizes pre-social and social relations in general” (Todorović, 2007). Kecmanović claims that cognitive dimension of prejudices is usually found in liaison with the term social distance, while stereotypes refer to cognitive dimension of prejudices (Kecmanović, 2014:114).

Social distance is usually referred to as the behavior of an individual or a social group in relation to others and it is presented through mutual familiarity, that is, readiness to accept certain social relations. Such distance can be manifested towards certain individuals or social groups. In sociology, the most frequent is the analysis of the distance between ethnic groups, nations, members of other religions, or towards minorities in a certain country. The largest number of analyses of social distance includes analyses of ethnic distance which use Bogardus scale for analyzing closeness or distance between the individuals or social groups.

Ethnic distance is perceived as a negative restraint or withdrawal from the members of other ethnic groups. The term was first used in the US and it derived from social distance. This term was introduced to sociology by Bogardus, with the help of a sociologist Park, and this was the first analysis that used Bogardus scale which is also used today but in a modified form.

Ethnic distance cannot always be based on attitudes, because sometimes there is a lack of knowledge about different groups or individuals to be distanced from. “By social distance, Bogardus means a level of understanding and psychological closeness (or remoteness) in relation to different individuals or groups. His scale of social distance (social distance scale) is composed of certain number of statements, which should provoke answers that would further be used as indicators for the level of acceptance which ever national group by the subject. The statements are distributed on a continuum that starts with the greatest level of closeness a person is ready to have towards an average person of a certain group (acceptance to enter into marriage) and ends with a hostile attitude (that an average member of a certain group should be banished from the country)” (Todorović, 2007).

During the study of ethnic distance, the task of the examinees was to choose a type of distance for every of the named ethnic groups.

“The research of interethnic relations shows that small distance in space does not necessarily mean closer contacts. For example, independently from spatial distance, some of the smaller ethnic groups live in monolithic homogenous settlements without significant intermingling with the members of other ethnic groups. Consequently, besides the size of the group a person belongs, the attention should be paid to the intensity and quality of the relations between its members and members of other

groups. Furthermore, smaller ethnic groups and national minorities do not threaten majorities, so they are much better accepted. The lack of “competition” can arouse positive emotions within the majority group and therefore smaller social distance. Opposite to the majority group, minority groups aware of the *consciousness about their powerlessness* can experience significantly greater social distance” (Vuksanović, 2004).

When talking about prejudices, we often refer to ethnic and racial prejudices which do not necessarily refer to negative opinion about other ethnic or racial groups, but can also be manifested through avoidance or even hatred and persecution. Such behavior often goes with the opinion about the members of other and different groups as less worthy, less intelligent, less moral and so on.

Ethnic prejudices are formed attitudes or opinions of one ethnic group about other or others. Ethnic prejudices can be positive or negative when other group is perceived as hostile. Ethnic prejudices are not inborn, but gained in a community.

Gordon Allport defines a prejudice as “repulsive or hostile attitude towards a person who belongs to a certain group and just because he/she belongs to that other group; based on the group affiliation, it can be concluded that a person has negative characteristics otherwise attributed to the given group (Allport 1958, according to Todorović 2007). In his opinion, there are passive and active prejudices. In line with that, ethnic stereotypes for Allport are the first degree of expressing prejudices about other nations; the second degree is manifested in avoiding any contact and expressing social distance; the third is reflected in discrimination; the fourth in physical attacks, and the fifth in genocide of the other nation.

Gordon Allport believes that prejudices are formed based on simplified generalizations in regard to another social group or individual. In his opinion, prejudices can be measured by Allport’s scale which is composed of:

- A) Antilocution;
- B) Avoidance;
- C) Discrimination;
- D) Physical attack;
- E) Extermination (Jovanović, 2008).

Opačić and Vujadinović think that there are many social and psychological factors which probably influence individual affinity to prejudices, such as:

- aggression, maladjustment, low self-esteem, the system of moral and political beliefs (Opačić and Vujadinović, 2005).

Stereotypes are products of national or ethnic prejudices and their main indicators. “Stereotypes are commonly defined as beliefs shared by members of one group about common characteristics of the members of their own or any other group” (Turjačanin, 2004).

“The term stereotypes refers to prejudices and also represents marginalization. In social sciences, a stereotype is used to represent schematic, simplified and hardly changeable relation towards other members and social groups” (Milosavljević, Jugović, 2009).

The term “stereotypes” was introduced by Walter Lippman in 1922 and it was defined as ideas and attitudes useful for easier settling and orientation. Opposed to his attitudes are those by other authors, such as Nikola Rot, Gordon Allport, Hans Jürgen Eysenck and others who understand stereotypes as “rationalization of existing prejudices” (Todorović, 2007).

Such opinions and attitudes are usually followed with glorification of one’s own ethnic group and depreciation of the significance of others and overall a negative outlook. The worst form of such ethnocentrism is ethnic conflict between at least two groups which ultimately leads to war. This was the case with BH society from the end of 20th century, when an ethnic conflict between three different ethnic groups occurred in this region.

Prejudices, negative attitudes or stereotypes are often succeeded by discrimination of the members of other ethnic or racial groups. “Discrimination is deliberate acting which leads to creating differences between people and it occurs when members of certain groups are denied resources or rights that other groups take for granted” (Milosavljević, Jugović, 2009). In short, to be discriminated against means to be excluded from community or social group. In this case, it is discrimination or exclusion due to ethnic affiliation.

2. Empirical indicators of quality in interethnic relations in BH

Understanding social and cultural circumstances in BH society has been attracting the attention of the scientific community for almost three decades, which endeavor to establish determinant for different forms of social conflicts and sporadic tensions of varying intensity. As a society in transition, apart from having many forms of deviant behavior, it abounds with unacceptable forms of behavior in the sphere of ethnic and political relations. An earlier research carried out by the author in the period 2008 – 2010 was based on studying the influences of certain social factors on causing conflicts in the dimension of ethnic and political relations in BH (Milošević Šošo, 2013). The starting point of the research was based on the claim that even after almost 30 years since the last war, there is a certain amount of intolerance among members of different ethnic groups. Bosnia and Herzegovina as a state is still a suitable ground for researching the determinants of potential conflict situations, given that there are still divisions among the population based on ethnic determinants. The research results revealed specific circumstances that are present in our society for a very long time. Namely, it was determined that typical cases (individuals), mainly war military leaders or renowned political figures, in one of the ethnic group are treated as felons and in others as positive examples and deserving national figures. Such cases are illustrative for understanding the practice where all means are available for achieving complete ethnic identification, so as to use individual engagement for promotion of ethnic groups (nation) to the fullest possible extent (Milošević Šošo, 2019: 207-215). Ethnic and political characteristics of deviancy are based on ethnic prejudices and stereotypes, which in the perspective of every society including BH can have far reaching consequences.

Other, more recent research about ethnic distance between constitutive peoples in BH conducted for scientific purposes in 2017 and also by the author points to an almost unchanged state of affairs in this region, even one decade after the mentioned research. The significance of this research is based on the assumption that ethnic question is present in everyday life of all ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that it still poses a problem in many ways. This refers especially to younger generation, born during and after the last war conflicts in BH region, for whom the ideology of nationalism represents a normal occurrence in the society.

The results of this recent research are presented in the following pages of the paper. The research sample is composed of 300 examinees from five municipalities in BH: Sarajevo, Banjaluka, Mostar, Trebinje and the Brčko District. The main method used for gathering data in this research is survey or more precisely Bogardus scale, which helped us to determine the degree of ethnic distance in this society. The software program SPSS was used to process the data. (Table 1)

Table 1. Social and demographic structure of the sample

Social and demographic structure of the sample		Number	%
Gender of examinee	Male	146	48.7
	Female	154	51.3
	Total	300	100
Age of examinee	Under 18	50	16.7
	18 – 35	123	41
	35 – 60	79	26.7
	Over 60	48	16
	Total	300	100
Cities where examinees live	Trebinje	60	20
	Banjaluka	60	20
	Mostar	60	20
	Brčko	60	20
	Sarajevo	60	20
	Total	300	100

Ethnic affiliation of examinee	Serb	116	38.7
	Bosniak	95	31.7
	Croat	76	25.3
	Roma	6	2
	Others	7	2.3
	Total	300	100
Size of the place of residence of examinee	City	170	56.7
	Suburb	41	13.7
	Village	87	29
	Hamlet	2	0.7
	Total	300	100

As shown in Table 1, the survey was conducted in 5 cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, two of which are in the Federation of BH (Sarajevo and Mostar), two in Republika Srpska (Trebinje and Banjaluka) and one in District Brčko. In each of these places, 60 surveys were conducted which amounts to the sample of 300 examinees. When gender of the sample is concerned, there were 154 (51.3%) female examinees and 146 (48.7%) male examinees. Looking at the years of age of the examinees, we can see that 123 (or 41%) are of younger age, from 18 to 35; there are less of the older examinees, 79 or 26.7% of mature age, from 35 to 60 and the fewest examinees belong to the group of the youngest, that is less than 18 years of age; there are 50 of them or in percentage 16.7%, which is also the case with the oldest group of the examines, over 60 years of age, with the total number of 48 or 16%. Variance is noticeable when the place of the residence is concerned, because the largest number comes from urban area (170 or 56.7%). Smaller number of the examinees come from rural areas (87 or 29%) and the smallest number from suburban areas (41 or 13.7%) and hamlets (2 or 0.7%). The ethnic structure of the sample is as follows: the largest number declared themselves as Serbs (116 or 38.7%), Bosniaks (95 or 31.7%), then Croats (76 or 25,3%) and finally Roma (6 or 2% of the examinees). There are 7 (or 2.3%) of those who declared themselves as “others”. Besides social and demographic characteristics, this research used a modified Bogardus scale for exploring social or, in this case, ethnic distance. The questions about ethnic closeness in BH are listed from the smallest ethnic closeness (greater distance) to the largest (the smallest distance). The answers are given based on accepting or not accepting certain claims. The following claims were offered for the members of majority groups in BH (Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks) and Roma, as the fourth smaller ethnic group:

I would have nothing against if the Serb/Croat/Bosniak/Roma:

- lived in my country;
- was my neighbor;
- was in my club;

- was my partner;
- was married to me.

Table 2. Level of closeness between Bosniaks and members of other ethnic groups in BH

The attitudes of Bosniak examinees towards members of other ethnic groups in BH				
I would have nothing against if:	Bosniak man/ woman	Serb man/ woman	Croat man/ woman	Rom man/ woman
lived in my country	14 (14,7%)	33 (34.7%)	34 (35.8%)	62 (66%)
was my neighbor	5 (5,3%)	19 (20%)	24 (25.3%)	12 (12.8%)
was in my club	3 (3,2)	14 (14.7%)	8 (8.4%)	9 (9.6%)
was my partner	12 (12,6)	16 (16.8%)	15 (15.8%)	4 (4.3%)
Was married to me	61 (64.2%)	13 (13.7%)	14 (14.7%)	7 (7.4%)
Total	95 (100%)	95 (100%)	95 (100%)	95 (100%)

From Table 2, we can notice that out of 95 of the examined Bosniaks, 61 of them (or 64.2%) are ready to achieve the utmost closeness with the members of their own people, that is, to be married to a Bosniak, which shows that the degree of distance for the members of their own people is minimal. The number of the examinees who accepted the claim grew together with the degree of closeness. The data also indicate an evident distance felt by Bosniaks towards the Serbs. It is visible in the answers by the examinees whose number diminishes with the growth of closeness. Out of 95 examinees, 33 (or 34.7%) of them gave positive answer to a question if they would mind living with Serbs in their country, 19 (or 20%) of the Bosniaks were ready to have neighborly relations with Serbs, 14 (or 14.7%) of the Bosniak examinees had nothing against socializing with the representatives of Serbian people in clubs, 16 (or 16.8%) of the same examinees believe that they could have a relationship with the members of Serbian ethnic group, while 13 (or 13.7%) of them said they would be ready to enter into marriage with a Serb, which at the same time represents the smallest degree of interaction between the examinees of these two ethnic groups.

When closeness between Bosniaks and Croats is concerned, the analysis shows similar results as with Serbs. The distance is also present, because a number of the examinees grew smaller as the closeness grew bigger. Out of 95 examinees, 34 (or 35.8%) of them agreed to live with Croats in their country, 24 (or 25.3%) were ready to have neighborly relations with the members of the Croat nation; 8 (or 8.4%) of Bosniak examinees were not against socializing with Croats in the clubs; 15 (or 15.8%) of Bosniak examinees were ready to have relationships with the members of Croatian ethnic group, and 14 (or 14.7%) of the examinees would enter a marriage with a Croat. The data show the distance between Bosniaks and Roma, as well. As closeness grows bigger, the number of the examinees who give a positive answer gets smaller. Out of 95 examinees,

1 refused to show any degree of closeness with Roma, 62 (or 66%) of the examinees did not mind to live with Roma in the same country, 12 (or 12.8%) are ready to have neighborly relations with Roma; 9 (or 9.6%) agree to be in the same club with Roma, 4 (or 4.3%) of the examinees are ready to have a relationship with a Roma member and 7 (or 7.4%) claim to be able to enter into marriage with a Roma member.

The presented results show that there is an evident distance felt by Bosniaks toward the members of other ethnic groups living in BH. The biggest distance is felt toward Roma, then Serbs and Croats, and the smallest towards the members of their own people.

Table 3. Level of closeness between Serbs and members of other ethnic groups in BH

The attitudes of Serbian examinees towards members of other ethnic groups in BH				
I would have nothing against if:	Bosniak man/ woman	Serb man/ woman	Croat man/ woman	Roma man/ woman
lived in my country	67 (57.8%)	12 (10.3%)	61 (52.6%)	84 (72.4%)
was my neighbor	24 (20.7%)	9 (7.8%)	24 (20.7%)	18 (15.5%)
was in my club	12 (10.3%)	3 (2.6%)	10 (8.6%)	7 (6%)
was my partner	6 (5.2%)	11 (9.5%)	9 (7.8%)	2 (1.7%)
was married to me	7 (6%)	81 (69.8%)	12 (10.3%)	5 (4.3%)
Total	116 (100%)	116 (100%)	116 (100%)	116 (100%)

The data presented in Table 3 show the attitudes of the Serbian examinees toward the members of other ethnic groups in BH. Out of 116 examined Serbs, 81 (or 69.8%) of them share that the biggest closeness should be with the members of their own people (being married to a Serb), which reveals that the degree of distance towards the members of their own people is small. As the degree of closeness gets bigger, the number of the examinees who accepted the claim increases, as well. The data indicate the present distance of Serbs towards Bosniaks based on the answers of the examinees whose number grows smaller as the closeness grows bigger. Out of 116 examinees, 67 (or 57.8%) of them are ready to live with Bosniaks in the same country, 24 (or 20.7%) are willing to have neighborly relations with Bosniaks, 12 (or 10.3%) do not have anything against socializing with Bosniaks in the same clubs, 6 (or 5.2%) of them are ready to have a relationship with a Bosniak, while only 7 (or 6%) of them are ready to enter into marriage with a Bosniak.

As far as the closeness of Serbs with Croats is concerned, the analysis shows somewhat different results when compared to those with Bosniaks. There is a distance, because the number of the examinees grows smaller as the closeness grows bigger, but it is still smaller than with Bosniaks. Out of 116 examinees, 61 (or 52.3%) of them agree to live with Croats in their country; 24 (or 20.7%) of the examinees think that they could build neighborly relations with Croats; 10 (or 8.6%) of the examinees do not see any

obstacle for socializing with Croats in the same clubs; 9 (or 7.8%) of the examinees are ready to enter into a relationship with Croats, while 12 (or 10.3%) of the examinees are ready to enter into marriage with a Croat. In regard to the attitudes of Serbs towards Roma, the results show the following: out of 116 examinees, 84 (or 72.4%) are ready to live with Roma in the same country; 18 (or 15.5%) of the examinees do not mind building neighborly relations with Roma; 7 (or 6%) do not have anything against being in the same club with Roma; 2 (or 1.7%) examinees are ready to enter a relationship with Roma, while 5 (or 4.3%) of the Serbian examinees are ready to enter into marriage with the members of the Roma people.

We can conclude that there is a distance felt by Serbs towards the members of other ethnic groups. The biggest distance is felt towards Roma, then Bosniaks and Croats, and the smallest towards the members of their own Serbian people.

Table 4. Level of closeness between Croats and members of other ethnic groups in BH

The attitudes of Croatian examinees towards members of other ethnic groups in BH				
I would have nothing against if:	Bosniak man/ woman	Serb man/ woman	Croat man/ woman	Rom man/ woman
lived in my country	29 (38.2%)	26 (34.2%)	8 (10.5%)	54 (71.1%)
was my neighbor	19 (25%)	18 (23.7%)	7 (9.2%)	3 (3.9%)
was in my club	16 (21.1%)	8 (10.5%)	2 (2.6%)	13 (17.1%)
was my partner	5 (6.6%)	8 (10.5%)	9 (7.8%)	5 (6.6%)
was married to me	7 (9.2%)	16 (21.1%)	5 (6.6%)	1 (1.3%)
Total	76 (100%)	76 (100%)	76 (100%)	76 (100%)

In Table 4, we can find the attitudes of 76 Croatian examinees towards the members of other ethnic groups in BH. Namely, the results show the following state when this ethnic group is concerned. 54 (or 71.1%) of them show the biggest degree of closeness to the members of their own people (being ready to enter into marriage with a Croat), which shows that the degree of distance toward the members of their own people is small. As the degree of closeness gets bigger, the number of the examinees who accepted the claim increases, as well. The distance felt by Croats toward Bosniaks is visible. This is proven by the answers of the examinees whose number grows smaller as the closeness grows bigger. Out of 76 of the Croatian examinees, 29 (or 38.2%) of them agree to live with Bosniaks in their country; 19 (or 25%) of the examinees are ready to have neighborly relations with Bosniaks; 16 (or 21.1%) of the examinees have nothing against sharing the club with Bosniaks; 5 (or 6.6%) of the examinees are ready to have a relationship with Bosniaks while 7 (or 9.2%) of them are ready to enter a marriage with a Bosniak.

The analysis of the relationship between Croats and Serbs shows somewhat different results, when compared to Bosniaks. There is a distance, because the number of the examinees gets smaller as the closeness grows, but it is still smaller than with Bosniaks. Out of 76 Croatian examinees, 26 (or 34.2%) agree to live with Serbs in their country, 18 (or 23.7%) of the examinees are ready to have neighborly relations with Serbs; 8 (or 10.5%) of the examinees within this category agree to mingle with Serbs in the same club; 8 (or 10.5%) of the examinees would be willing to have a relationship with members of Serbian people, and 16 (or 21.1%) would be willing to enter into marriage with a Serb, which is double the number in comparison to the case with the members of the Bosniak ethnic community. When Croatian relation with Roma is concerned, the data show that there is a distance. As the closeness grows bigger, the number of the examinees who gave a confirmative answer gets smaller. Out of 76 examinees, 54 (or 71.1%) agree to live with Roma in the same country, 3 (or 3.9%) of the examinees are ready for neighborly relations with Roma; 13 (or 17.1%) of the examinees are ready to socialize with Roma in the same club; 5 (or 6.6%) of the examinees have nothing against entering a relationship with Roma, while only 1 (or 1.3%) of the examinees are ready to form a marriage communion with a Roma member.

We can notice that there is a distance felt by Croats towards the members of other ethnic groups. The biggest distance is towards Roma, then Bosniaks and Serbs, and the smallest towards the members of their own people.

Our research results are comparable to the research results that have been done in our country in recent years. Here is an example a comparative study conducted in 2001 on a sample of 148 psychology students from the University of Banja Luka and Sarajevo (Turjačanin et al., 2002). It showed that Bosniak (from Sarajevo) and Serbian (from Banja Luka) respondents do not differ significantly in distances to third nations; they accept relations with the Italians, the English, the Portuguese, and the Germans equally well. However, the greatest distances were shown between Bosniak and Serb respondents, on both sides, so, unfortunately, the fact remains that the mutual distances of the closest neighbors are the greatest. The research (Turjačanin, 2004) of the national attitudes of high school students in Banja Luka and Sarajevo showed that the distance towards members of other nations is more pronounced in the Banja Luka sample, than in the Sarajevo sample. Sarajevo respondents mostly accept relations with Italians. They are followed by Germans and Croats, then Serbs and finally Roma. The Banja Luka respondents distance themselves the least from the Italians. Croats follow, then Germans, Bosniaks and Roma. Research from our countries with the same topic shows similar results to our results. In September 2002, the GfK market research agency in Zagreb examined the ethnic distance of Croatian citizens towards members of four nations: Serbs, Bosniaks-Muslims, Montenegrins and Slovenes. The research was done on a thousand adult citizens of the Republic of Croatia. The results show that the citizens of Croatia have the greatest distance towards Serbs, then Bosniaks-Muslims and Montenegrins, while the smallest distance, but not a small one, is towards the citizens of Slovenia.

Conclusion

Stable ethnic relations are important factor of stability and security in many countries and societies. As every ethnic group strives to attain its individual and collective rights, especially minority groups, so the countries as a whole try to make interethnic relations stable in order to achieve the greatest security and stability possible. Distancing or abstaining from other ethnic groups can be influenced by various social and psychological factors. These factors are very important for researching ethnic distance in BiH society for several reasons. We are witnessing the turbulent history of this country, which has been accompanied by centuries of conflicts and discord between the three constituent peoples. One of the reasons for researching the factors that lead to this social situation is just overcoming it that is, finding basic solutions to reduce social distance, and thus negative interethnic relations, which in the past of this country were most often accompanied by wars. We are convinced that among the most prominent social factors that precede the emergence of ethnic prejudices and stereotypes, and thus ethnic distance, is socialization as a process of adopting values that affect the formation of opinions, basic judgments about social values, social consciousness. The influence of family and upbringing is considered as the initial phase of socialization of a person, as well as his/her antisocial behavior (the emergence of conflict and deviant behavior).

The question of ethnic relations and their influence on security is especially important for Balkan countries, especially post-Yugoslav countries. "The Balkans is located at the crossroads of great importance, where many ideas come to surface and intertwine, just like customs, cultures, traditions and religions of the Hellenic world and Roman Empire, Byzantium, Ottoman empire, Orthodox East, modern West and so on. Balkan cultural space should be included into the world cultural model by stressing its diversity and wealth. In the process of adjusting their social systems to the European structure and democratic norms and values, only dialogue presents itself as a valid instrument of mutual communication among Balkan nations. In line with the presented, we could say that modern Balkan society faces a transformation from *multicultural into intercultural*, which means *expanding and adopting the idea and practice of interculturalism in the multicultural community*. To be more precise, its task is to develop the concept of cultural and educational policy that should respect cultural diversity and lead towards creating a society in which different cultures intertwine" (Todorović, 2007).

Countries from this region burdened with turbulent past and ethnic conflicts are trying to achieve the greatest security and stability as possible, so they pay utmost attention to the issue of regulating ethnic relations. This is why it is so important to study ethnic relations and ethnic distance in BH society, which represents a junction of diversities and multiculturalism. According to the Constitution, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a democratic country functioning in accordance with the law and based on free and democratic elections. Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs live here, as three constitutive peoples, together with other minority groups. However, many studies show that the relations between these nations have been cold and tensed throughout history.

“The relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, generally, are founded on cultures and traditions of the three major nations living in this territory, which allows one to refer to this region as multicultural, multiethnic and multiconfessional. The study on mutual relationships between peoples living in BH region is inevitably bound with the study and reference to their cultural, ethnic and regional identities” (Milošević, 2013).

In this paper, our primary aim was to show the relations between the ethnic groups in BH society. Apart from this, we tried to figure out whether the individuals attribute positive or negative features to other peoples, then to identify the factors that influence the emergence of cold interethnic relations in BH society and finally to determine the ways of overcoming these tensions. The present social situation is not suitable for building trust between ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina and reducing ethnic distance and stereotypes between them.

Based on the research of ethnic distance, we can notice that the distance in BH society is still present. Among members of all three nations, ethnic distance from other nations grows with the closeness of the relationships offered. The distance between Bosniaks and other people is still present. The biggest distance that Bosniaks show is towards Roma, then Serbs and Croats; the smallest distance is towards the members of their own people. Serbs and Croats show similar results. The biggest distance that Serbs show is towards Roma, then Bosniaks and Croats, and the smallest is towards the members of their own Serbian people. The biggest distance that Croats show is also toward Roma, then Bosniaks and Serbs, and the smallest is towards the members of their own people. The research of stereotypes showed that members of all three nations perceive themselves uncritically, that is, they idealize the image of their people. Everyone thinks that they are honest, sincere, and brave, love other nations, etc. It is interesting that the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina usually draw conclusions about certain nations based on their experiences in the past war.

Many authors posed a question about the best possible way for reducing the number of such social situations, that is, the number of negative prejudices or stereotypes about other ethnic groups. The answer to that question was often recognized in education, general awareness and availability of information about diversity and other ethnic groups. To facilitate ethnic interaction, ethnic groups should acknowledge each other through attachment and tolerance. “Ethnic relations are present in literally every society in the world and, regardless to what people generally think about them, they could be steady and peaceful, just the same as unstable and violent” (Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 2004).

Interethnic communication among the citizens of this country seems to be very weak. The question remains whether an increase in mutual communication between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks would result in a reduction in ethnic distance and stereotypes, if we keep in mind the political tension and instability that currently prevails in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Stereotypes about ethnic groups show that we do not trust each other, which should worry all those who lead and care for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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