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***Short announcement***
*UDC 316.347:323.15(497.6)*
*DOI 10.7251/SOCEN2120085S*
*COBISS.RS-ID 133792513*
*Accepted: 04/04/2021*

# Ethnic identity(s) in post-Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Abstract

*The coexistence of the three majority ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) is a basic indicator of the ethnic plurality of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thus the identity of a divided society. What role ethnic identity plays in today's interethnic relations is the main topic of this paper, as well as the influence of stereotypes on the perception of other ethnic groups. The paper is based on the research of ethnic stereotypes in the Bosnian society by the method of surveys, and the results will show how ethnic stereotypes or already based attitudes affect the observation of "different" i.e. members of other ethnic groups living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and bearers of different ethnic identities.*

**Keywords:** *ethnic identity; Bosnia and Herzegovina; stereotypes*

## Introduction

Ethnic relations are represented in every society, it is impossible that ethnic groups, living in a common territory, do not have contacts, whether they are peaceful, or accompanied by misunderstandings or conflicts. With the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, invoking ethnic identity in ethnically plural societies mainly contributes to intolerance between peoples belonging to different religions, cultures, ethnic and national groups. Ethnically plural societies, such as the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the unfavorable socio-political situation throughout history, are often defined as unstable and conflicting societies. Mihailo Marković is of the opinion that the national issue in multinational socialist societies (Yugoslavia), although it has been

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claimed to be resolved, actually has not. "Old national conflicts appeared, at least temporarily, unresolved. Under the conditions of accelerated material growth and progressively improving standards of living, they assumed a latent form. They flared up soon after those societies entered a period of serious economic and political crisis."[2] Affirmation and emphasis on ethnic identities, during transition processes, can often be a cause of conflict with neighboring ethnic communities and cultures. This can be explained by citing the example of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the conflicts that erupted just at the time of the great transition process. Usually, by emphasizing one's own culture and ethnic community, the other is seen as less valuable and whose members feel intolerance and repulsion. "The difference between "us" and "them", between our culture and some other culture, is seen here as the difference between the only real and authentic culture and various forms of false, artificial culture or culture at a lower stage of development. In that situation, the task of "our" culture is not only to preserve and defend its identity among other cultures, but much more than that: to take on a messianic role, to enlighten, educate and save others from ruin."[3] Based on the above, the question arises, what factors are the main cause of disagreement between ethnic groups that share a common state, territory, language? Ethnocentrism, accompanied by the spread of nationalism, political and ideological differences, different religious teachings, conflicts throughout history, are fertile ground for widening distances and disagreements between ethnic groups, which is characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to Milosavljević and Jugović, prejudices and stereotypes are the basis for marginalization towards some social groups. Koković defines stereotypes as molded, typical and rigid representations, clichéd understandings of certain social objects (social class, ethnic, religious or racial group) which are very widespread and are acquired in the process of socialization and upbringing.[4] "Prejudices are types of attitudes that are not based on valid experience or rational arguments, but make tendentious generalizations that are affectively burdened and that are strongly resistant to change even when faced with new information."[5]

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[2] Mihailo Markovic, *Tragedy of national conflicts in "real socialism": The case of the Yugoslav Autonomous Province of Kosovo* (United Kingdom: PRAXIS International, 408-424, 1989/4), p. 408

[3] Ivan Čolović, *Balkan – teror kulture* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek. 2008), p. 13

[4] Dragan Koković, *Društvo i medijski izazovi: Uvod u sociologiju masovnih komunikacija* (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, Odsek za medijske studije, Novinarska biblioteka knj. 5, 2007)

[5] Milosav Milosavljević, Aleksandar Jugović, *Izvan granica društva: Savremeno društvo i marginalne grupe* (Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Fakultet za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju – Izdavački centar CIDD, 2009), p. 14

Identity means all those characteristics of an individual or social group that distinguish them from other individuals or social groups. These individuals or groups may possess multiple identities because they have multiple roles, they are members of different groups, and therefore possess different personal or group characteristics. There are many types of identities, and the main division is into personal and social. Personal identity refers to the personal characteristics of an individual that he acquires at birth, but also builds them in the family, relationship with the environment and others, and refers to sexuality, physical constitution, characteristics, personal characteristics that distinguish him from other individuals. Personal identity is built in stages, starting from birth and throughout life. Social identity is realized through an individual's belonging to a certain social group and by creating a sense of belonging or identification with its members, and based on that there is a local, regional, ethnic, national, religious, class, racial identity. "A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labeled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group."[6] According to the degree of closeness, identities could be divided into primary ones, which are closely related to a person, such as family and peer identity. Secondary identities can usually be chosen or left by oneself, and those identities include cultural, political, party, work identity.

The paper will later expose a review of theoretical discourses that are useful for understanding ethnic identity, present the results of research on ethnic stereotypes and opinions about members of other ethnic groups in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which affect the creation of ethnic distance.

## An overview of theoretical discourses on ethnic identity

Anthony Smith defines an ethnic group through six main attributes:

- Collective proper name,
- The myth of common origin,
- Common historical memories,
- One or more differentiating elements of a common culture,
- Connection with a particular homeland, and
- Sense of solidarity with significant sections of the population.[7]

[6] Peter Burke, Jan E. Stets, Identity theory and social identity theory, *Social Psychology Quarterly* Vol. 63, No. 3, American Sociological Association, 224-237, 2000, p. 225

[7] Antoni D. Smit, *Nacionalni identitet* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2010), p. 40

Guided by Smith's definition of an ethnic group, we conclude that ethnic identity is stronger and more stable if all its elements are more present and that all these elements have a historical category and are prone to change. Smith points out that belonging to an ethnic group is a matter of attitudes, perceptions and sentiments, which depend on the situation in which the individuals find themselves. And as the situation changes, so will their identification with the group. This allows ethnicity to be "instrumentally" used to advance individual or collective interests according to which ethnicity becomes a "useful tool". Based on Smith's definition, we define an ethnic group as a category of people made up of myths about a common origin, a common language, customs, history, tradition, religion. "Each ethnicity, which can have its equivalent in a people, nation or ethnic group, represents a relatively complete set of national and cultural characteristics, from linguistic, moral, customary, religious to aesthetic. On the basis of them, collective and group moods are formed which create a feeling of belonging and togetherness, which is subsumed under identity."[8]

By ethnic group, Žarko Obradović means "members of the same or similar origin, and the group has a common dialect or language, customs, tradition and many specifics in the elements of material culture, as well as several other cultural and historical features. An ethnic group is, as a rule, but not necessarily, a grouped and territorialized community in a certain way."[9]

Identification with members of an ethnic group with the creation of a sense of belonging is important for the formation of ethnic identity. The formation of identity is very much influenced by the value system that the individual has adopted as a member of society, where the process of socialization comes to the fore. Belonging of an individual to a certain social group also affects the further orientations of the individual, their interactions and the way of acting. By identifying with the members of the group, the individual creates, modifies and adjusts their identity, whether it is personal or social. Stuart Hall believes that identification is constituted by recognizing a common origin or common trait with another person or group, or with an ideal. It is a process that works through difference, it requires discursive work, connecting and marking symbolic boundaries, producing a "border effect", so that what is left out strengthens that process.[10] For one ethnic group to be aware of its ethnic identity, it must involve contact and relationship with other ethnic groups.

[8] Биљана Милошевић Шошо, *Мултиетничко друштво и девијантне појаве* (Источно Сарајево: Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 2013), p. 127

[9] Жарко Обрадовић, *Балкански етнички мозаик* (Београд: Чигоја штампа, 2014), p. 29

[10] Stuart Hall, "Kome treba 'identitet'?", Politika teorije, zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studija, (prir. Dean Duda) (Zagreb 2006, 357 - 374), p. 217

Fredrik Barth explains that ethnic identity is built and changed in interaction within social groups, thanks to processes of inclusion and exclusion that establish boundaries between these groups.[11] Thus, ethnic identity is built on the basis of the "other" and diversity, creating a sense of belonging to one ethnic group, as opposed to another. "Every identity requires another: someone else in relation to whom and through whom self-identity is actualized. By their actions, others can impose an unwanted identity on their own."[12]

Kecmanović explains the differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, language between ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia as "narcissism of small differences", since "enemies have a lot in common".

> "At the heart of this phenomenon lies every ethnic group's need to establish and maintain its identity as permanently and firmly as possible. Painstaking skill is required to distinguish yourself from those who resemble you. This is accomplished by the members of one ethnic group projecting onto the members of another ethnic group all that is negative in themselves that they do not wish to acknowledge as part of themselves. The ideal object for this projection is not someone whose characteristics are quite different from ours, but someone who is similar to us – just like us, and yet different."[13]

According to Ronald Laing, the other is a "tool for identity." Complementarity in relationships where the other determines the "I" and vice versa is important for the creation of identity. In order to be aware of our ethnicity, we need to create boundaries with other ethnic groups, and thus distinguish the characteristics of "our" group from "other" groups. Others serve us to confirm our own identities by verifying them. If others do not react as we think they should and are in line with our identity and roles, then they are not verifying our identities. By interacting with others, we emphasize the importance of understanding behavior through the meanings we store in one's identity.

Each ethnic community has special characteristics that distinguish it from other ethnic communities. These characteristics and special characteristics make up ethnic identity, as a general characteristic, and these can be a common language, territory, religious affiliation, culture, development of awareness of common belonging.

> "By definition, ethnic groups are more or less isolated, but they are also aware that there are members of other ethnic groups

[11] Filip Putinja, *Teorije o etnicitetu* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1997), p. 7
[12] Ronald D. Leing, *Jastvo i drugi* (Novi Sad: Biblioteka Svetovi, Bratstvo-jedinstvo, 1989), p. 81
[13] Dusan Kecmanovic, *Ethnic Times: Exploring Ethnonationalism in the Former Yugoslavia* (London: Preager, 2002), p. 4

> somewhere, and they are always in some contact with them. Moreover, these groups or categories are, in a sense, created only by that touch. The identity of a group is always determined to some extent by what the group in question is not - in other words, by those who do not belong to the group."[14]

In this regard, it is concluded that the identity of ethnic groups develops in mutual contact, and not isolated from others, and that group identities influence the perceptions, attitudes, opinions, affects and behavior of its members. When explaining social identity and activating it, Jan Stets and Peter Burke used the term depersonalization, taken from theorist Turner in 1987, as a central cognitive process in which a person perceives the normative aspects of group membership in a prototype, then acts in accordance with those norms. "Depersonalization is a basic process underlying group phenomena such as social stereotypes, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion and collective action."[15]

According to Tatiana Panfilova, ethnic identity includes, in addition to unconscious aspirations and feelings, a person's self-awareness as a representative of this community, their conscious assessment of the ethnic group to which they belong, unlike other groups. Since socialization is the basis for the formation of identity, if a person is deprived of their usual basis of socialization, they perceive their condition as a loss of identity. According to her, globalization eliminates cultural differences, and thus the borders between cultural and ethnic groups, and creates conditions for the loss of identity. One compensates for this lack of identity by excessive affection for a national or religious group. "Under these circumstances some ethnic or religious groups exalt their distinctive traits and religious beliefs to assume the right to be the only representatives of the appropriate culture or religion."[16]

Stets and Burke from Hoggs and Abrams (1990) take up the terms self-categorization and social comparison, when explaining relationships among members belonging to the same group and possessing a common identity and relationships with members of other groups. Self-categorization is defined as emphasizing perceived similarities between oneself and other group members and emphasizing perceived differences between oneself and members outside the group. Such similarities and differences relate to attitudes, beliefs, and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, speech styles, and other traits believed to correlate with relevant intergroup categorization. Social comparison refers to accents that will result in self-improvement of

[14] Tomas Hilan Eriksen, *Etnicitet i nacionalizam* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2004), p. 28

[15] Peter Burke, Jan E. Stets, *op.cit.,* p. 232

[16] Panfilova, Tatiana, Identity as a problem of today, *FACTA UNIVERSITATIS,* Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History Vol. 9, No1, 37 – 44; 2010, p. 41

outcomes for oneself, leading to being evaluated positively in the group and negatively outside the group.[17]

> "Having a particular social identity means being like others in the group and seeing things from the group's perspective. It is assumed that individuals as group members think alike and act alike. Thus, there is uniformity in thought and action in being a group member. Individuals do not have to interact with other group members in order to think and act like the group."[18]

Such a statement can also be applied to ethnic identity, where there is uniformity in the actions and opinions of members of one nation, and especially when expressing opinions about members of others and different.

Christian Giordano believes that stereotypes in relations between cultures and ethnic groups should document their own superiority and that each of them always feels like a "better kind of people". This is shown by Levi Strauss's claim that ethnocentrism in intercultural relations is one of the basic constants of the collective thought schemes of every society.[19]

Contacts between different groups can be influenced by various factors, among which the most significant are the demographic, political, capitalist mode of production, the development of modern technologies, as well as the globalization changes of modern society. This contact enables ethnic groups to cooperate with each other, have harmonious relations, or to distance themselves from each other, differentiate, and sometimes even conflict. Therefore, it is important to follow the relations of ethnic and national groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina throughout history, so that we can understand the current state of interethnic and transnational relations in this country. The history of the Balkan countries has been accompanied by differences in cultural and ethnic identity and the struggle of these peoples over the redistribution of territories. Wars and conflicts between ethnic groups in this area are the reason why even today we live a "divided" life of people of different religions and ethnicities, which led to ethnic distance, misunderstanding, and intolerance between peoples and creating negative stereotypes towards other ethnic groups and spreading antagonism.

Christian Giordano believes that the redefinition of identity came with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to the rebirth of nationalism in the Balkans, and that current nationalism in post-socialist Europe is a product of socio-economic and cultural crisis caused by system collapse and destruction of communist ideology.[20]

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[17] Peter Burke, Jan E. Stets, *op. cit.,* p. 228

[18] Burke, Peter, Stets, Jan E. *Identity theory* (Oxford: University Press. 2009), p. 118

[19] Kristijan Đordano, Ogledi o interkulturnoj komunikaciji (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2001), p. 10

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 171

Janković distinguishes between two types of nationalism, ethnic and political.

> "Nationalism as a negative social phenomenon, which is reflected in intolerance, hatred, often violence against members of other nations, is most often associated with the ethnic understanding of the nation, while political understanding is most often associated with "positive nationalism" (patriotism), which is directed towards respect for the state and its symbols, not a specific nation."[21]

That the issue of ethnic and national identity permeates the daily lives of ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina is evidenced by the very division of the warring parties in the past war, in which nationality and ethnicity were the main cause of the division. "During the war, as well as shortly after it, the basic existential issues of the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region were related to belonging to a certain ethnic group. For most, being close to their own group meant security, and being exposed to someone else's group meant potentially endangered."[22]

Branimir Stojković believes that identity is constructed using identifiers that are the basis for the emergence of stereotypes. "Identifiers are the basis for the emergence of stereotypes - simplified and value-colored notions that social groups establish about themselves and other groups."[23] Based on that, we conclude that differences are the basis for creating a feeling of antipathy towards others, rejection, or in the worst case, hatred and contempt. "The problem of a divided or blurred identity can be solved in a different way - by declaring one's own people a proto-nation, and everyone else more or less decadent historical derivatives, i.e. apostates."[24]

What characterizes the former Yugoslav peoples today is the emphasis on ethnic and cultural affiliation and the growing strengthening of their identities, along with religious and political identities, which stand out and are strengthened by the threat of authenticity and uniqueness by others. Ethnic and cultural identity is becoming more and more alive, as individuals are threatening to preserve their culture, language, tradition, and their own people through rapid changes. The revival of ethnic and cultural identities in the

[21] Aleksandar Janković, Nacionalizam kao strukturalna prepreka u demokratizaciji bosansko-hercegovačkog društva. *Sociologija*, Vol 61 – broj 1, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 87-112, 2019, p. 93 – 94

[22] O. Haneš, *Sociodemografske karakteristike socijalne distance i stereotipi kod studenata u Banjaluci.* Banja Luka: Univerzitet u Banjoj Luci, Filozofski fakultet, 59-79, 2012., p. 60

[23] Branimir Stojković, *Identitet i komunikacija* (Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka u Beogradu, Čigoja štampa, 2002), p. 15

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 18

former Yugoslavia is the cause of instability and social crises, accompanied by ethnic conflicts, inequalities, the spread of negative stereotypes and prejudices about members of others.

## Results of research on stereotypes and opinions about "other" ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The survey on ethnic stereotypes, conducted in March and April 2017, tried to answer the question about the quality of relations between ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the attribution of given characteristics and opinions about members of other ethnic groups. This sets the main hypothesis that ethnic identity, through the spirit of ethnonationalism, in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina plays a leading role in the perception and stereotypical attribution of the characteristics of their own and other ethnic groups. "Social stereotypes are most often defined as beliefs shared by members of one group about the common characteristics of members of their own or any other group of people."[25]

As the thesis of "narcissism of small differences" shows, small differences are glorified, in order to present one's own ethnic group as different and more valuable than others. The research was conducted on a sample of 300 respondents in 5 municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, using the survey method. Respondents were offered 22 characteristics (positive and negative) that could be attributed to certain ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The results will show how ethnic stereotypes, or already established attitudes, affect the observation of "different" i.e. members of other ethnic groups living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The environment is an important factor in which a value system is adopted that follows the classifications of members of society (stereotypes and prejudices) through various institutions such as the school system (textbooks, falsification of history, etc.), religious institutions, political system, etc. In such an environment, different attitudes about the other and the different are formed, which also affect the behavior of individuals or social groups. Through this research, it is interesting to see what attitudes and ways of thinking are present in society of Bosnia and Herzegovina and how they affect their perception of members of their own or other ethnic groups, i.e. the emergence of an autostereotype or a heterostereotype. The negative aspect of the stereotype is that it is the basis for attributing negative traits to others and different.

[25] Danijela Majstorović, Vladimir Turjačanin, (ur.). *Percepcija etničkih grupa u BiH: U okrilju nacije; Etnički i državni identitet kod mladih u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Banja Luka: Centar za kulturni i socijalni oporavak, 2011), p. 220

Respondents could attribute both positive and negative traits to ethnic groups, and for each ethnic group, whether it is their own or members of "others", one trait, which they consider to be distinctive. Respondents could attribute the following characteristics to ethnic groups: lazy - hardworking, cowards - brave, stupid - smart, cold - sensitive, insidious - honest, unfair - fair, impolite - polite, dirty - clean, insolent - kind, quarrelsome - peaceful, primitive - civilized.

**Table 1** *Socio-demographic structure of the sample*

| Socio-demographic structure of the sample | | **Number** | **%** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender of respondents | Male | 146 | 48.7 |
| | Female | 154 | 51.3 |
| | **Total** | **300** | **100** |
| Age of respondents | Less than 18 | 50 | 16.7 |
| | From 18 to 35 | 123 | 41 |
| | From 35 to 60 | 79 | 26.7 |
| | Over 60 | 48 | 16 |
| | **Total** | **300** | **100** |
| Cities where respondents live | Trebinje | 60 | 20 |
| | Banjaluka | 60 | 20 |
| | Mostar | 60 | 20 |
| | Brčko | 60 | 20 |
| | Sarajevo | 60 | 20 |
| | **Total** | **300** | **100** |
| Ethnicity of respondents | Serb | 116 | 38.7 |
| | Bosniak | 95 | 31.7 |
| | Croat | 76 | 25,3 |
| | Rom | 6 | 2 |
| | Other | 7 | 2.3 |
| | **Total** | **300** | **100** |

The given table shows that females (51.3%) were included in the survey in a higher proportion than males (48.7%), while the majority of respondents are members of the younger population aged 18 to 35 (41%). The survey was conducted in 5 cities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar, Brčko and Trebinje), and the survey mostly included Serbs (38.7%), Croats (25,3%) and Bosniaks (31.7%) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Table 2** *Opinion on certain characteristics in Bosniaks*[26]

| *Opinion on certain characteristics in Bosniaks* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **SERB** | **BOSNIAK** | **CROAT** |
| **LAZY** | 6.0% | 9.8% | 2.6% |
| **HARD-WORKING** | 5.2% | 8.7% | 2.6% |
| **COWARDS** | 17.2% | 1.1% | 9.2% |
| **BRAVE** | - | 22.8% | 2.6% |
| **STUPID** | 6.9% | - | 7.9% |
| **SMART** | 0.9% | 7.6% | - |
| **COLD** | 2.6% | - | 10.5% |
| **SENSITIVE** | - | 1.1% | - |
| **INSIDIOUS** | 6.9% | - | 7.9% |
| **HONEST** | - | 5.4% | 5.3% |
| **UNFAIR** | 1.7% | 1.1% | - |
| **FAIR** | 0.9% | 1.1% | 1.3% |
| **IMPOLITE** | 3.4% | 5.4% | 3.9% |
| **POLITE** | 1.7% | 3.3% | 3.9% |
| **DIRTY** | 0.9% | - | 1.3% |
| **CLEAN** | - | 2.2% | 1.3% |
| **INSOLENT** | 6.9% | - | 2.6% |
| **KIND** | 6.0% | 10.9% | 9.2% |
| **QUARRELSOME** | 16.4% | 3.3%% | 13.2% |
| **PEACEFUL** | 4.3% | 10.9% | 7.9% |
| **PRIMITIVE** | 9.5% | 1.1% | 5.3% |
| **CIVILIZED** | 2.6% | 4.3% | 1.3% |
| | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

In the given table it is noticed that Bosniaks have pretty picture of themselves. 22.8% of Bosniaks see their people as brave, 10.9% as kind and peaceful, but also 9.8% as lazy, 5.4% as impolite. In any case, a higher percentage show positive characteristics. Serbs think of Bosniaks as 17.2% cowards, 16.4% quarrelsome, 9.5% primitive, and as for the positive qualities they attribute to them that 6% are kind, 5.2% hard-working. Croats see Bosniaks as 13.2% quarrelsome, 10.5% cold, 7.9% peaceful and 5.3% honest. We see that Croats also have different opinions about Bosniaks.

[26] The questions about the properties are taken, and modified, from the paper: Srđan Puhalo, *Kako opažamo druge etničke grupe i njihove članove: Socijalna percepcija i etnička pripadnost kod srednjoškolaca u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013).

**Table 3** *Opinions on the possession of certain traits among Serbs*

| ***Opinion on certain characteristics in Serbs*** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **SERB** | **BOSNIAK** | **CROAT** |
| **LAZY** | 5.2% | 5.4% | 2.6% |
| **HARD-WORKING** | 5.2% | 4.3% | 2.6% |
| **COWARDS** | 0.9% | 14.1% | 3.9% |
| **BRAVE** | 16.4% | 1.1% | 6.6% |
| **STUPID** | - | 4.3% | 1.3% |
| **SMART** | 8.6% | 1.1% | - |
| **COLD** | - | 5.4% | 6.6% |
| **SENSITIVE** | 0.9% | 1.1% | 5.3% |
| **INSIDIOUS** | 1.7% | 6.5% | 3.9% |
| **HONEST** | 8.6% | 6.5% | 5.3% |
| **UNFAIR** | 0.9% | 4.3% | 3.9% |
| **FAIR** | 2.6% | 1,1% | 1.3% |
| **IMPOLITE** | 1.7% | 6.5% | 5.3% |
| **POLITE** | 4.3% | 2.2% | 5.3% |
| **DIRTY** | | 0.4% | 0.4% |
| **CLEAN** | 2.6% | 3.3% | 5.3% |
| **INSOLENT** | 3.4% | 5.4% | 7.9% |
| **KIND** | 12.1% | 8.7% | 11.8% |
| **QUARRELSOME** | 4.3% | 7.6% | 3.9% |
| **PEACEFUL** | 12.1% | 2.2% | 11.8% |
| **PRIMITIVE** | - | 4.3% | 2.5% |
| **CIVILIZED** | 8.6% | 4.3% | 2.5% |
| | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

In the given table, it is noticed that Serbs have pretty picture of themselves. 16.4% of Serbs see their people as brave, 12.1% that they are kind and peaceful, 8.6% that they are honest, but also 5.2% that they are lazy, 4.3% that they are quarrelsome. In any case, a higher percentage have characteristics that are positive. Bosniaks think of Serbs as 14.1% cowards, 7.6% quarrelsome, 4.3% primitive, and as for the positive characteristics they attribute to them that 8.7% are kind, 6.5% honest, 4.3% hardworking. We see that there are different opinions, but there is a higher percentage of negative characteristcs. Croats see Serbs as 11.8% calm and kind, 7.9% insolent, 6.6% cold and brave. We see that Croats also have different opinions about Serbs, but it is important to point out that a larger percentage of characteristics are rated as positive.

**Table 4** *Opinion on certain characteristics in Croats*

| *Opinion on certain characteristics in Croats* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **SERB** | **BOSNIAK** | **CROAT** |
| **LAZY** | 1.7% | 4.3% | 2.6% |
| **HARD-WORKING** | 5.2% | 4.3% | 5.3% |
| **COWARDS** | 9.5% | 6.5% | 2.6% |
| **BRAVE** | | 1.1% | 5.3% |
| **STUPID** | | 2.2% | |
| **SMART** | 3.4% | 2.2% | 13.2% |
| **COLD** | 12.1% | 10.8% | 1.3% |
| **SENSITIVE** | | 1.1% | 1.3% |
| **INSIDIOUS** | 6.0% | 7.5% | |
| **HONEST** | 1.7% | 3.2% | 2.6% |
| **UNFAIR** | | 1.1% | 1.3% |
| **FAIR** | | 1.1% | 2.6% |
| **IMPOLITE** | 1.7% | 6.5% | |
| **POLITE** | 9.5% | 10.8% | 18.4% |
| **DIRTY** | 0.9% | | |
| **CLEAN** | 5.2% | 4.3% | 7.9% |
| **INSOLENT** | 7.8% | 8.6% | 1.3% |
| **KIND** | 6.9% | 8.6% | 10.5% |
| **QUARRELSOME** | 8.6% | 6.5% | 1.3% |
| **PEACEFUL** | 2.6% | 3.2% | 9.2% |
| **PRIMITIVE** | 2.6% | 1,1% | 2.6% |
| **CIVILIZED** | 14.7% | 5.4% | 10.5% |
| | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

In the given table it is noticed that Croats have a pretty picture of themselves. 18.4% of Croats see their people as polite, 13.2% as smart, 10.5% as kind and civilized, but also 2.6% as lazy, cowards and primitive. A higher percentage have characteristics that are positive. Bosniaks think that Croats are 10.8% polite and cold, 8.6% kind and arrogant. We see that there are different opinions, but that the same percentage has positive and negative characteristics. Serbs see Croats as 14.7% civilized, 12.1% cold, 9.5% polite, but also as cowards. We see that Serbs also have different opinions about Croats, but it is important to point out that a higher percentage of characteristics are assessed as positive.

## Discussion on research results and concluding remarks

Under the influence of ethnic identity, individuals possess opinions, and thus direct their activities towards others. We define "others" as members of other ethnic groups. Research on stereotypes in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the hypothesis that ethnic identity influences the stereotypical attribution of traits to "others and different", the results showed that opinions about members of their own ethnic groups are usually based on positive traits and glorification of the groups to which they belong. By attributing negative traits to members of others, the results show that in ethnically plural societies, such as the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, exclusion or inclusion often happen based on ethnicity or nationality. Maintaining negative stereotypes during the war, but also in post-Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the main indicator that Bosnian society is still in a phase of trans-conflict.

An individual is aware of their personal identity only in contact with others, just as members of one ethnic group are aware of their ethnicity and ethnic characteristics in comparison and perception with other ethnic groups. The ethnic groups of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina have historically come a long way together, followed by different relations, both mutual conflicts and hatred, and coexistence in peaceful epochs.

Attributing negative or positive traits to members of a different identity, at the same time affects the quality of relationships and mutual rapprochement.

> "A group contributes to the self-esteem of its members only if it manages to strengthen and maintain a positively valued diversity in relation to other groups. Through the process of comparing one's own and other groups, negative stereotyping of another's group contributes to the increased evaluation of one's own group, and thus of the individual himself."[27]

The property of ethnicity is a category of distinguishing between those who belong to a given group and those who do not belong, with a division into "ours" and "theirs", "us" and "them". Such a phenomenon is especially present in the Bosnian society, which the research showed. Emphasizing the quality of one's own group to which they belong, attributing negative traits to members of other ethnic groups, is an indicator that ethnic distance is still present in this society, as well as the spread of prejudice. In order to overcome such a situation, it is necessary to find factors that would reduce the negative consequences of social disintegration.

[27] Danijela Majstorović, Vladimir Turjačanin, (ur.), *op. cit.,* p. 223

Peaceful coexistence, good relations, cooperation between minorities and the majority in one country are a well-known factor in the development of democracy, progress and stability. If, in addition, the state and society take measures to protect minority rights, it is possible to preserve traditional values in such a community.

> "Ethnic distance and ethnic tolerance are important indicators of both the democratic and conflict potential of a society. The smaller the distance and the greater the tolerance, the greater the democratic and lower the conflict potential, and vice versa, the greater the distance and the lower the tolerance, the lower the democratic and higher the conflict potential of the observed society."[28]

Lack of information is one of the main sources of spreading negative information about others, in this case members of other ethnic groups. It is important to form the knowledge that intolerance, antagonism and conflict situations only bring harm to everyone in the community.

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[28] Слободан Миладиновић, *Етнички односи и идентитети* (Београд: Народна библиотека Србије. 2009), p. 87

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