

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE

Faculty of Political Science

Belgrade, September 2025

At the meeting of the Department of International Studies, held on June 24, 2024, the Master Thesis Defense Commission (hereby the Commission) for the candidate Darko Sekulić was formed with the following members: prof. dr Goran Tepšić, assist. dr Tijana Rečević and prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović. The Council for the Second and Third Cycle of Studies has accepted the proposal made by the Department.

After reading the master thesis, the Commission is submitting the following report.

R E P O R T

The master thesis of Darko Sekulić entitled "Memory Politics as an Obstacle to Reconciliation Case Study – Bosnia and Herzegovina" is 76 pages long and comprised of four chapters, along with the Introduction, the Conclusion and accompanying list of references.

The thesis investigates the problem of the post-war peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the angle of the memorialisation practices. It looks into the specific examples of the culture of remembrance and analyses the ways in which it affects the public and individual spheres. The findings of the analysis, supported by the field survey results, confirms that the memory politics plays a critical role in the process of identity formation within the three ethnicities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, using memory to maintain and strengthen the division and the definition of the respective ethnic groups in the opposition to the other. Along with several other noted factors, it helps strengthening the animosity, deepen the ethnic divide, thus obstructing the process of reconciliation, and preventing Bosnia and Herzegovina from transition toward a more stable and peaceful society.

In the Introduction, the candidate notes the deterioration of inter-ethnic relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina over a longer period, which is in a state of a political and social crisis, resulting in disillusionment and hopelessness, which motivate especially younger people to leave the country. Memory politics is recognised as a tool to maintain and strengthen divisions, while commemorative events serve to homogenise ethnic groups, making the memory a new battlefield in post-war circumstances. The candidate uses the

public debate regarding the adoption of the UN Srebrenica Resolution in spring 2024 as an example of the potential that memory related issues have to deepen the divisions and damage the peace process and reconciliation. Memory politics plays a role in furthering divisions and animosities, and contributed to the raise of tensions and anxiety among the population. The candidate concludes this part by specifying the aim of the research, which is to identify and analyse how memory politics affects the process of reconciliation, followed by a brief chapter overview.

In the first chapter, the candidate first presents the ambiguities of the term ‘reconciliation’ as identified in theory and research, i.e. whether it applies to the process of the end result, offering different authors’ views. Follows a presentation of another type of differentiation of reconciliation according to the levels: political, social and economic, or individual, communal, and national, and their interdependence and mutual influence. The candidate goes on to present views on what reconciliation process includes and the issues that need to be addressed, such as truth, justice, forgiveness, and healing, as well as different practices employed to promote these goals. Transitional justice is recognised as taking the central place, and the candidate notes different justice mechanisms and other approaches to further establishment of truth, facing the past and achieving justice. This section concludes with remarks related to the other ways through which reconciliation process can progress, namely on individual level, independently of the main transitional justice approaches.

Also, the candidate notes the rise in the interest for the field of memory and memory politics after 1980s, leading to the increased interest and organisation of commemorative events. The candidate presents different authors’ views regarding this increase of interest in the field, which, among other things, lead to commercialisation of memory or even competing memorialisations and martyrologies, especially in the transitional societies. Memory is understood as key for creation of collective identity and group cohesion, and has both descriptive and normative qualities, including a degree of arbitrariness, and where memory is differentiated from history. The candidate explains the types of memory – individual and collective, as well as social, cultural and political. Views of a range of authors are provided to explain the ways in which memory is used and manipulated for group identity formation and control. The section proceeds with the presentation of critical approaches and possible alternatives, including forgetting, and ends with the presentation of the research that questioned the impact of the generally accepted imperative of moral remembrance, with examples where it strengthens the divisions instead of the proclaimed goals of preventing violence from repeating.

The second chapter outlines the key theoretical context of the research, noting the insufficient or even adversarial impact of traditional transitional justice approaches, and leaning on some more recent research that questions the earlier reliance on transitional justice. The candidate states that the analysis includes political and social reconciliation, and the impact that the actions from the political level within the field of memory have on the individual level. As transitional justice approaches showed inadequate results, the candidate looks into the critical culture of remembrance, as well as other alternative approaches, to analyse the impact of memorialisation practices on the process of reconciliation, and consequently on the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The third chapter is dedicated to the research methods where the candidate specifies the duration of the research, and using the qualitative approach. He notes two methods used to collect data. One approach is the content analyses of media reports, press releases and interviews, documents and reports produced by the international organisations, NGOs and local institutions, including the candidates personal experience through work for the Office of the High Representative for over 2 years. The other approach were the interviews conducted with the residents, political representatives and employees of international organisations active in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The candidate provides details on the interviewees, their age, professional background, ethnic group and geographic locations.

Fourth chapter is dedicated to the case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Firstly, the candidate provides a general overview of the results of his analysis, explaining the current context of building new opposing identities, where culture of remembrance plays an important role, as the new identities reflect the war memory and the sources of the original conflict. Conflict moved into the sphere of memory politics, and war memory appeared as the best field where antagonisms can be nurtured. Political agents recognised it as a powerful tool to make an appeal on their respective constituencies. In this overview, the candidate identifies the key topics, communities, as well as the ethnic conflict axes.

Sections 4.2 through to 4.6 are titled per individual locations, which the research identified as the key communities that reappear in the problematic context in relation to the culture of remembrance. They include sections on Srebrenica and Bratunac (as two communities that are entwined in this regard), Sarajevo and East Sarajevo, Mostar and Prijedor, where the candidate introduces and explains the commemorative practices and the conflicts that emerge or continue in relation to memory of 1992-95 war, as well as other examples related to other events from more distant past. The candidate notes the key events and the impact that the activities in relation to the culture of remembrance have on the level of

communal cohesion between the members of different ethnicities. He takes stock of contentious issues and practices, and the mutual reactions, as well as the political agents' role in the resulting divisions and animosities. This chapter concludes with a section where the candidate summarises additional conclusions based on the interviews that he had conducted during the process of working on this thesis.

This master paper ends with Conclusion, where the candidate sums up the negative impact that the memorialisation practices and the way the local agents manage memory politics have on the level of reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The candidate uses the term "shallow peace" to describe his overall impression of the current state of affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the year when it marks the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Based on this report, the Commission concludes that the master thesis " Memory Politics as an Obstacle to Reconciliation Case Study – Bosnia and Herzegovina " by Darko Sekulić fulfils all the formal criteria for the public defence.

The Commission:

prof. dr Goran Tepšić

assist. dr Tijana Rečević

prof. dr Nemanja Džuverović