
REGIONAL POLICY

THE REGIONAL COMPONENT AS THE INITIATOR OF THE SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERPSKA

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Abstract: Due to the specific appearance and natural and social characteristics of the Republic of Srpska (RS) as an obstacle to its uniform territorial development, it is noticed the absence of a middle level of management, ie. absence of regional territorial division. Obtaining the status of a candidate for membership in the European Union (EU) Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and therefore the Republic of Srpska (RS) they took on the obligation to fulfill certain conditions, among which is the harmonization of legislation and territorial organization in accordance with the rules of the EU Code of Conduct. One of those conditions is the establishment of NUTS regions, and the benefits are also reflected in the possibility of withdrawing funds from regional development funds. The trend of regionalization is obvious in Europe, which is also confirmed by the fact that at the EU level bodies have been formed that deal exclusively with regions. The goal of the paper is to point out the necessity of establishing NUTS regions in accordance with the EU Code of Conduct, as well as creating preconditions for withdrawing funds for own development that are available through regional cooperation funds. By establishing NUTS regions, it is possible to monitor statistical data that are unique for all EU countries and in this way, the assumption is created for a more objective monitoring of the development of BiH within the European space.

Keywords: territorial development, regions, regional policy, cohesion policy, NUTS, EU

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important issues of spatial planning, both in theory and in practice, is the question territorial organization of the space. The biggest challenge of the macroeconomic policy of every country is to find a way to ensure a balanced economic development in its entire territory.

Many countries have legal regulations that regulate issues of regional development, which indicates the complexity and importance of this term. The trend of regionalization is obvious in Europe, which is also confirmed by the fact that at the level of the European Union (EU), special departments dealing with regions have been formed. One of them is Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union. Eurostat's mission is to provide high-quality data and statistics about the EU (Eurostat, 2022), and in accordance with that, all EU members should have established legislative regions. It is precisely this fact that puts before BiH, and therefore the RS, the need to solve the issue of regionalization, given that it has received the status of a candidate for EU entry (European Council, 2022). The reason for writing this paper lies precisely in the newly created situation in which BiH found itself, and in connection with its status as an EU candidate.

Observing throughout history, the area of BiH/RS has undergone numerous changes, with many aspects, such as state organization, territorial organization, political, social circumstances, etc. The result of all this is a complex state arrangement and disharmony in spatial and functional arrangement. When it comes to the territorial organization of the RS, the problem is also manifested in the absence of an intermediate level of organization (eg districts, regions, cantons, etc.). In addition, this issue is not precisely regulated by legislation, and the absence of political will towards such forms of territorial organization is also noticeable.

The subject of the paper is focused on the issue of spatial and territorial organization of the RS from the regional aspect. The issue of regions and regional development did not find its place in the Constitution of the RS, and therefore not in the law and by-laws. The amendments and additions to the spatial plan of the RS until 2025 provided guidelines and recommendations for the functional and economic regionalization of the RS

(Amendments and additions of the Spatial Plan of the RS, 2015), which is conditioned by its shape and position, the layout of urban centers and traffic connections, as well as the condition and potentials of the economy in certain parts of its territory, administrative and political circumstances in the entity and legal regulations.

The aim of the paper is to point out that one of the limiting factors of sustainable and planned development is precisely the inadequate territorial organization of local self-government units and the absence of an adequate regional division of the RS. If one wants to continue on the path of acquiring EU member status, the issue of regionalization of BiH/RS will have to be resolved. In accordance with the aim of the paper, emphasis was placed on the need to establish the NUTS classification and the formation of regions.

The assumption is that through the establishment of a policy of balanced regional development, achieve a better use of natural potentials (territorial capital), economic capacities and population (human capital) throughout the territory. Rapid economic development of underdeveloped areas would reduce migration and increase people's quality of life.

2. THE BASIC DETERMINANTS OF REGIONALIZATION, REGIONALISM, REGIONAL PLANNING, REGIONAL POLICY AND REGIONAL MANAGEMENT

According to European experiences, it can be seen that the regions were a cohesive element in the even development and democratization of society. The regional level in the modern age represents the most important level of management and management of public affairs.

In professional literature, regionalization is mentioned as a process by which a unitary centralized state tries to implement decentralization in the form of certain administrative divisions. Regional planning has established itself as one form of regional management and national socio-economic and spatial planning, or development policy in the broadest sense ("Steuerung", "steering", etc.) (Vujošević, et al. 2014).

Regionalism is the development of political, economic, or social systems based on loyalty to a particular geographic region with a mostly ideologically and culturally homogeneous population (Longley, 2021). The term

regionalism contains, first, an important political characteristic in which the will to strengthen the political reach of regional units in the construction of the division of state power is manifested. Precisely because of this, the concept of regionalism is most easily observed in the existence of autonomous regional political organizations (Pavlić, 2021). Regionalism often leads to formally agreed arrangements between groups of states that aim to express a shared sense of identity while simultaneously achieving common goals and improving the quality of life (Longley, 2021).

The right to regional self-government implies the possibility and duty of regions to manage certain public affairs (substantial share of public affairs) of regional importance, with autonomous responsibility for their management, whereby they have to respect the principle of subsidiarity.

According to that regionalism as a political direction and regional self-government as its legitimate and political expression define political projects and a constant political conflict for power between the regions and the central government. The degree of democracy affects the possibility of carrying out this process at an acceptable level, without scales and conflicts.

Defining the term region and displaying different types of regions is difficult, primarily because facts that it is possible to put emphasis to very different characteristics (economic, political, constitutional, historical,...).

A region, within the social sciences, represents a cohesive area that is homogeneous in selected defining criteria and that differs from neighboring areas or regions according to those criteria (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). “Region, by definition, means an area, region, zone, neighborhood, surface, district, field, space, place” (Mirić, 2009, p.15). When looking at one specific country, regardless of its size, the region represents its territorially rounded whole. The region, on the one hand, has a set of characteristics that connect it to the entire country, and on the other hand, a set of (other) characteristics that make it specific. The functions of the region can be in the field of: health, education, infrastructure, industry, production, communal activities, urban planning, environment, etc., and they should be the starting point when it comes to establishing assumptions for regional planning, regional policy and regional management in the territory of the RS. According to the aforementioned definition, the role of local self-government units within the region can be clearly seen.

More complex approaches to regionalization also include the imperative to ensure significant political and broadest social legitimacy of decisions in decision-making, through the broad social mobilization of interested (and decision-affected) actors, starting from the definition of the development problem, through the widest communication and interaction during the preparation and decision-making, to the definition of much more complex implementation instruments, and thus a wider spectrum of necessary support for the implementation of decisions (logistics, IT, institutional, organizational and others) (Vujošević, et al. 2014).

Regional policy is characterized by a system of relations that direct and improve the economic development of the region, as well as interregional relations. "It also includes the realization that regional conditions and interregional relations are not predetermined, which emphasizes the aspect of regional politics" (Bogunović, 2011, p.58). One of the important regional policies of the EU is the Cohesion Policy. Cohesion policy is the main investment policy of the EU. It provides benefits for all regions and cities in the EU and supports economic growth, creation of jobs, business competitiveness, sustainable development and environmental protection (Official Gazette of the EU, 2022).

In the EU, several development processes of regional administration gradation can be distinguished. Parallel with the fundamental processes that strive for decentralization and the strengthening of democratic possibilities and the political legitimacy of the existence of autonomous units, as well as the complex process towards the territorial reorganization of the state and the turning of autonomous administrative units in the direction of democracy, in certain European countries it is possible to distinguish different and special tendencies inherent in the regional level of administration (Pavlič, 2021).

Concept of European Union (EU) regional policy

Since the 80s of the 20th century, the EU has been paying special attention to regional development policy and encouraging the development of less developed regions in the EU member states. The regional development policy of the EU is based on the principles of solidarity and cohesion, and regional development projects are financed through the

corresponding structural funds. “Regional policy is aimed at the regions and cities of the EU, and its goal is to improve economic growth and improve the quality of life through strategic investments” (Directorate for European Integration, 2020, p. 145). This is one of the most important instruments for achieving economic and social cohesion of the EU. The main instruments for the implementation of regional policy are three main funds: the European Fund for Regional Development, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is one of the basic instruments of the European cohesion policy. Its purpose is to mitigate differences in the development of European regions and reduce the underdevelopment of regions in the most disadvantaged position (Directorate for European Integration, 2020). The European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the European structural and investment funds and is the EU’s main financial instrument for achieving the strategic goals of employment policy (Directorate for European Integration, 2020). With the New Cohesion Policy, local growth strategies are supported and the role of regional/local administration bodies for fund management continues to be strengthened (Erlić, 2021). The Cohesion Fund is intended for EU member states whose GDP per capita is less than 90% of the EU average. The Cohesion Fund’s purpose is to reduce economic and social differences, as well as to promote sustainable development (Directorate for European Integration, 2020). So, the cohesion policy implementation program for the period 2021 - 2027 is currently in force (Official Gazette of the EU, 2022).

The existence of EU regional policy and the process of European integration can be justified with the help of political economy. In this regard, integration is understood as a common good, but it is also recognized that different EU member states, developed and underdeveloped countries, have different political goals if their economic development differs. “An additional economic argument for the existence of EU regional policy is reflected in the existence of the European monetary union” (Tondl, 2004, p.11).

It is of crucial importance for every country that aspires to become a full member of the EU (such as BiH) to establish its national policy of regional development and cross-border cooperation, which would be an integral part of the EU regional development policy. The expectations and demands of the European Commission refer to the obligation

for candidate countries, i.e. countries on the way to acquiring that status, to harmonize the policies and goals of regional and spatial development with EU goals, as well as to incorporate certain mechanisms in national legislation and other documents for harmonizing their interests with the interests of the EU and the interests of other EU member states. The adoption and implementation of the national regional development policy, which is based on the principles of the EU regional policy, is actually a key prerequisite for access to EU structural funds.

The regional policy as the main investment policy of the European Union (EU)

In addition to the political reasons for the existence of EU regional policy, there are also reasons of an economic nature that need to be brought to the fore. Along with many practical solutions, institutional, political and economic reforms, the EU Treaty laid the planning foundations for a full economic and monetary union that was to be formed by the end of the 20th century. By setting such high, strategic goals, the EU member states gave qualitatively new importance to economic convergence in the Union. In Article 3, the EU promotes economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among EU member states (Official Gazette of the EU, C 202/13). It was clearly observed that the absence of economic and social cohesion would jeopardize the entire integration project in all its elements.

“Regional cooperation is an indispensable instrument for the economic and social stability of Europe” (Directorate for European Integration, 2020, p. 145). Regional cooperation should be seen as a factor of integration through the development of infrastructure and networks and the establishment of free trade between neighboring countries. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, regional cooperation is one of the key conditions for EU integration.

Through the design and development of the EU’s regional policy, key structural funds were created, which have grown into essential factors of economic development, but also of the process of integration in all areas of social life. For BiH, since it received the status of a candidate for EU membership, these funds can be significant for its future development.

The four structural funds do not form a single source of funding within the EU funding system. Each of these funds has specific goals for equalizing development at the level of European regions: European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF); European Social Fund (European Social Fund - ESF) - European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund - (EAGGF) and Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG). BiH does not currently have access to any of these funds, which also applies to RS.

Interreg, or European Territorial Cooperation, represents one of the two goals of cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and the exchange of practices and experiences among national, regional and local actors from different EU member states. “The main goal of European territorial cooperation is to promote the balanced economic, social and territorial development of the EU as a whole, in other words, solving problems that go beyond national borders and require a joint solution, as well as joint realization of the potential of various areas” (Directorate for European Integration, 2020, p. 50).

In addition to the basic structural funds, there are also four Community Initiatives, i.e. development programs through which support is provided to solve specific problems of EU regional development. These are: INTERREG, which includes cross-border cooperation, transnational cooperation and interregional cooperation, and was financed from the ERDF; LEADER, which includes rural development, and was financed from the EAGGF; URBAN, which includes the economic and social revitalization of urban areas, and was financed from the ERDF, and EQUAL, which includes the fight against discrimination and inequality in the labor market, and was financed from the ESF. Currently, only INTERREG is available for BiH.

The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was established in 2002 as a response to the great floods that hit Europe that year, and it is a fund exclusively for EU regions. This Fund is intended for quick EU aid in cases of natural disasters. Since it was formed until now, over 7 billion dollars of the Fund’s resources have been used about 100 times in 28 countries (European Commission, 2023). EU member states have the right to use the Fund, as well as countries that have entered into negotiations on candidacy for EU membership.

Three additional instruments were also established: JASPERS (Joint Assistance in Supporting Projects in European Regions), a joint initiative of EIB and EBRD intended for the creation of large infrastructure projects (Romania and Poland used this instrument the most); JEREMIE (Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises), a joint initiative of the EIF and the EC, intended to support small and medium-sized enterprises in EU member states, and JESSICA (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas) – a joint initiative of the EIB and the Council of Europe Bank, intended for investments in urban areas. BiH does not have access to these funds.

Instrument for pre-accession assistance - the EU has developed a wide range of external assistance programs over time, which resulted in a complex set of over 30 different legal documents. In the context of the preparation of the new seven-year EU budget for the period from 2014 - 2020, and within the framework of the external aid instrument, the European Commission introduced a certain revision of the previous instrument of pre-accession aid IPA, i.e. it adopted the instrument of pre-accession aid IPA II for the period 2014-2020 and then IPA III 2021 – 2027. The most important novelty of IPA III is that funds will no longer be allocated to each beneficiary state (state envelope), but the principle of distributing funds according to the merits of the beneficiary states will be applied (Directorate for European Integration, 2021).

The goal of the IPA program is to provide concretely targeted assistance to countries that are candidates and potential candidates for EU membership (such as BiH). The IPA program is also designed to better adapt to the various goals and pace of progress of each beneficiary by providing focused and effective support according to real needs and evolutionary development. The IPA program is particularly focused on strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, public administration reform, implementing economic reform, improving respect for human rights and the rights of minorities and gender equality, supporting the development of civil society and strengthening regional cooperation and contribution to sustainable development and reduction of poverty. There is also an additional goal for the candidate countries for EU membership - the adoption and fulfillment of all conditions for EU

membership, while potential candidate countries for EU membership will be expected to approach these conditions.

BiH participates in six territorial cooperation programs in the financial period 2021-2027. Of these, there are three cross-border (Croatia-BiH-Montenegro, Serbia-BiH and BiH-Montenegro) and three transnational (Danube, ADRION, Euro-MED) (Directorate for European Integration, 2021) projects. All activities related to the implementation of cross-border/transnational cooperation programs in BiH are under the jurisdiction of the Directorate for European Integration/Department for Cross-Border Cooperation, International and Special EU Aid Programs within the EU Aid Coordination Sector.

3. NUTS - Statistical Classification of European Regions

The European Parliament and the Council of the EU are 26.05.2003. adopted the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) (FR: Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques), i.e. standards related to the administrative division of countries for the purposes of statistics, and for the purpose of enabling the collection, processing and publication of regional statistics of the European Community. The NUTS classification has been used by the European Community since 1988, but it was adopted only in 2003 after three years of preparation (Eurostat, 2007). The standard was developed by the EU and thus covers all member countries in detail, and the NUTS classification does not have to match the administrative division of the country into regions.

EU member states collect statistical data, which is analyzed by an authorized statistical body at the state level, after which these statistical data are sent to Eurostat. Eurostat systematizes, consolidates and publishes these statistical data. Data related to general statistics, economy and finance, demography and social conditions, industry, trade and services, agriculture and fisheries, foreign trade, transport, environment and energy, science and technology, etc. are continuously analyzed and monitored, and these analyzes and predictions are used by EU institutions to create and implement common policies.

The current NUTS 2021 classification is effective from 1 January 2021, which states that: 92 regions at NUTS 1 level, 242 regions at NUTS 2 level and 1,166 regions at NUTS 3 level are registered. NUTS classification is a hierarchical system: NUTS 1 - main socio-economic regions, NUTS 2 - basic regions for the application of regional policies and NUTS 3 - small regions for specific diagnoses (Eurostat, 2023). The NUTS system operates according to three basic principles: population thresholds (defines the minimum and maximum population thresholds for the size of the NUTS region), favors administrative divisions (supports data availability and policy implementation capacity) as well as regular and extraordinary changes (classification can change, but generally not more often than every three years).

Table 1: Regions according to NUTS standards in the EU in accordance with the population

Level	Minimum population	Maximum population
NUTS 1	3.000.000	7.000.000
NUTS 2	800.000	3.000.000
NUTS 3	150.000	800.000

Source: Eurostat 2023.

If there are no corresponding administrative units for a certain NUTS level, then the NUTS level is constituted by merging the necessary number of smaller territorial units, taking into account other relevant criteria such as geographic, socio-economic, historical and geopolitical circumstances, cultural and natural circumstances. In order to determine in which NUTS category to place a certain group of administrative units, the standard of the corresponding population is applied. It is important to note that NUTS II regions are designated as the main framework for the implementation of regional policy by the EU member states and from that aspect are relevant for the analysis of regional and national problems. The NUTS I level provides data used to analyze the relationship between regions within the EU, while NUTS III, as a

small region, does not offer data for more complex analyses, but it indicates areas where certain specific regional policies are needed (Jakšić, Rodić, Đekanović, 2006). The NUTS classification of territorial units represents an attempt to present standardized statistical data of geographical areas throughout the EU. It is not a practical proposition for every country within the EU to discard its locally acceptable territorial units, which may have deep historical roots and give the essential name of the organization of local authorities in favor of a centrally-imposed geographical hierarchy. The NUTS approach classifies the territorial units used by individual countries into a series of levels, each of which provides a broad degree of comparability across the EU (Commission of the European Communities, 2007).

4. DISCUSSION

EU rules require EU member states, and therefore candidate countries for EU membership, to be able to produce quality statistics in accordance with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice and statistics based on professional independence, impartiality, reliability, transparency and confidentiality. Common rules for the methodology, production and dissemination of statistical information are foreseen.

BiH is in the early stage of preparations in the field of statistics. There has been limited progress on this issue. It is necessary to work on completing the classification of regions that is equivalent to the NUTS classification. Referring to the statistical infrastructure, the law on statistics of BiH is still not harmonized with the principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice. “The equivalent of NUTS II regions is only temporarily defined and accepted by the European Commission until Bosnia and Herzegovina finalizes the entire classification and includes in it the definition of the equivalent of NUTS III level” (European Commission, 2022a).

In addition to the NUTS classification in some EU member states, municipalities and settlements are recognized as the lowest in the hierarchy of territorial levels, which are not distinguished according to the ESPON methodology, nor do they function on the same principles.

According to the Statistical Nomenclature of Territorial Units (NUTS) of the EU, municipalities and settlements are considered as parts of the region and have the character of LAU 1 and LAU 2, on the basis of which population data is used. However, these hierarchical levels will not be the subject of this paper's analysis.

In addition to non-compliance with the NUTS classification, RS has not established an intermediate level of management at the level of its entity, i.e. the regional level. The establishment of the functional-economic regionalization of the RS is additionally conditioned and complicated by its shape and position of the RS, the layout of urban centers and traffic connections, the weakened demographic potential, the development and potential of the economy in certain parts of the territory of the RS, as well as the administrative-political circumstances in the RS and legal regulations.

Through the work, a review was made of the statistical-planning regionalization of the RS, which was set in the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025 as the highest spatial-planning document of the RS. The Spatial Plan of the RS (2014) states that balanced (sustainable) regional economic and social development is in direct connection with the internal circumstances of the RS, and is based on possible positive and negative scenarios arising from such circumstances. Integral treatment of physical (ecological) and socio-economic development today on the territory of the RS has almost negligible features: strong social and economic imbalance and development disproportions prevail, as well as a lack of common actions and strategies, horizontal disconnection and lack of coordination of local self-government units, an extremely bad demographic picture in space, unfavorable distribution of the population, economic crisis in most of the territory, and others.

The population of the RS is unevenly distributed, but with a relatively good distribution of urban centers at relatively short distance, however, this still did not make the overall development more certain. The largest population concentration is in the northern part of the RS, especially in the areas around the cities of Banja Luka and Prijedor, cities that have about half of the total population of the territory of RS. In addition, the eastern and southern parts of the RS have a small population and these parts of the RS are struggling with its population decline

and emptying of space. The transition that took place during the war years and immediately after the end of the war (90s of the 20th century) has slowed down and indicates that permanent resettlement has been completed in most cases. The level of urbanization in the RS is around 42%, which is among the lowest in Europe, while the overall level of development of the RS is extremely uneven (Popović, 2021). Underdeveloped and extremely underdeveloped local self-government units of the RS are mainly border rural municipalities of the RS (on the entity border of the RS), and the developed LGUs are located in the northern part of the RS, and they are: Banjaluka, Bijeljina, Gradiška, Doboj, Laktaši, Prijedor, Prnjavor, Derвента, with a few points in the eastern part: Zvornik, East Sarajevo and Trebinje.

According to the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, the main goal of the RS is the determination and interest-based organization of regions, i.e. the cooperation of functionally-economically organized and connected local self-government units in order to achieve balanced sustainable development and increase the territorial cohesion of the RS. According to the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, the main goal of the RS is the determination and interest-based organization of regions, i.e. the cooperation of functionally-economically organized and connected local self-government units in order to achieve balanced sustainable development and increase the territorial cohesion of the RS. This means defining regions as spatial entities that functionally and interestingly connect local self-government units among which traditional ties already exist, which will determine their spatial scope and real impact. “The territorial and economic organization of the RS in this spatial plan is conditionally made at the level of six regions (areas of possible interest, functional connections of municipalities with those units of local self-government that have the status of a city or that are organized around a larger urban center, i.e., that are the most economically developed). Within those regions, action areas can be formed for the better use of personnel, financial or institutional capacities” (IDPPRS, 2015, p.71).

Table 2. Regions and the system of centers of the RS according to the amendments to the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025

Region	System of inhabited places Local self-government units covered		Local self-government units covered
	Primary regional center Secondary regional center	Secondary regional center	
BANJALUKA – GRADISKA – MRKONJIC GRAD Estimated 2012 – about 400.000 Estimated 2021 - 385.666 inhabitants	Banja Luka	Gradiska Mrkonjic Grad	Banja Luka, Knezevo, Kotor Varos, Prnjavor, Celinac, Laktasi, Mrkonjic Grad, Jezero, Kupres, Ribnik, Istocni Drvar, Petrovac, Sipovo, Gradiska, Srbac
PRIJEDOR Estimated 2012 – about 160.450 Estimated 2021 - 127.181 inhabitants	Prijedor	Novi Grad	Prijedor, Novi Grad, Kozarska Dubica, Krupa na Uni, Kostajnica, Ostra Luka
DOBOJ-DERVENTA -BROD-SAMAC Estimated 2012 – about 238.000 Estimated 2021 - 195.574 inhabitants	Doboj	Brod, Samac, Derventa	Vukosavlje, Derventa, Doboj, Modrica, Petrovo, Brod, Teslic, Samac, Pelagicevo, Donji Zabar
BIJELJINA-ZVORNIK Estimated 2012 – about 287.000 Estimated 2021 - 242.758 inhabitants	Bijeljina	Zvornik	Bijeljina, Bratunac, Vlasenica, Zvornik, Lopare, Milici, Osmaci, Srebrenica, Ugljevik, Sekovici

Region	System of inhabited places Local self-government units covered		Local self-govern-ment units covered
ISTOCNO SARAJEVO-VISEGRAD Estimated 2012 – about 101.000 Estimated 2021 - 88.932 inhabitants	Ist. Sarajevo	Visegrad	Visegrad, Pale, Rogatica, Rudo, Sokolac, Istocna Ilidza, Istocni Stari Grad, Istocno Novo Sarajevo, Han Pijesak, Trnovo
TREBINJE-FOCA Estimated 2012 – about 104.000 Estimated 2021 - 88.198 inhabitants	Trebinje	Foca	Berkovici, Bileca, Gacko, Ljubinje, Nevesinje, Istocni Mostar, Trebinje, Foca, Kalinovik, Novo Gorazde, Cajnice

Source: Regions and the system of centers of the RS according to the amendments to the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025 (IDPPRS, 2015). The number of inhabitants according to the estimate of the Republic Institute for Statistics of the RS for the year 2021.

It should be noted that after the creation and adoption of the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, the official results of the 2013 population census, which was conducted after more than two decades in BiH, were published. In addition, the number of inhabitants in each of the mentioned regions was significantly reduced in 2021. That is, the difference in the number of inhabitants between these two time periods (2013 and 2021) is about 160,000 fewer inhabitants in 2021. All the above-mentioned regions have a significantly lower number of inhabitants based on the estimate from the year 2021, than it was during the period when the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025. was being developed.

According to the Spatial Plan of RS until 2025, six regions are planned in the territory of RS:

- The region of the largest city - the region of Banjaluka - Gradiska - Mrkonjic Grad,
- Mining - industrial - tourist region - Prijedor,

- Transport - industrial polycentric region of Doboj - Derвента - Brod - Samac,
- Agro-industrial region of Bijeljina - Zvornik,
- Forestry - industrial region of Istocno Sarajevo,
- Energy - agro - tourist region of Trebinje - Foca.

Considering the criteria that must be respected and when it comes to the NUTS nomenclature, three regions out of the six mentioned do not meet the basic criteria according to the NUTS nomenclature, which is the number of inhabitants and it is necessary to look at them from a different aspect. These are the regions (Prijeđor, East Sarajevo-Visegrad and Trebinje-Foca. The regions Istocno Sarajevo-Visegrad and Trebinje-Foca, considering that they are also naturally and geographically connected, it is possible to observe them and statistically process them as one statistical NUTS region. Since the region of Prijeđor adjoins the region of Banja Luka - Gradiska, it should be considered together with that region. According to the estimate of the total number of inhabitants for the year 2021, RS can be seen as a NUTS2 region. The conducted analysis was done in order to create assumptions for the formation of the NUTS region, based on the already established spatial planning guidelines of the RS.

5. RESULTS

BiH has not yet established a legislative framework for the management of EU structural funds. In addition, BiH lacks strategies for the implementation of EU cohesion policy. An adequate regional development policy, with accompanying institutional structure and performance monitoring frameworks, has not been established in BiH. NUTS II regions are only temporarily defined in BiH and they are accepted by the European Commission until BiH finalizes and harmonizes the entire classification including the definition of the NUTS III level. (European Commission, 2022a). BiH, which also applies to the RS, needs to improve the statistical and analytical basis (including the definition of NUTS regions) in order to develop a healthy strategic framework for cohesion policy.

The current conception of the regional development of the RS excludes the existence of administrative regions with legal subjectivity and

administratively defined borders, i.e. it does not rely on the distribution of power and complete management mechanisms at the regional level. Bearing in mind the statistical nomenclature of territorial units at the European level (NUTS) where the area of the RS is in the NUTS 2 level, the regional division in this plan can be formally complementary to the European NUTS 3 level (level of the so-called district or area). Defining such regions is based on such an organization of space that contributes in the best way to the economic, ecological and social development of the territory of those regions, integrates the space between inhabited places, promotes a positive relationship between the countryside and the city and initiates the construction of infrastructure systems in order to increase the accessibility of the territory and better connectivity within and outside the region.

Currently, the issue of regional establishment and planning entails a series of questions that need to be answered. Only after extensive socio-economic analysis will it be possible to tackle this very complex problem. In the meantime, one should be guided by the proposal of the regions, which are given in the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, with certain corrections to the number of regions. In the meantime, one should be guided by the proposal of the regions, which are given in the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, with certain corrections to the number of regions, considering the changed socio-social picture and the number of inhabitants of the RS in relation to the period when this document was created. Some of the questions that need to be answered are:

- Could the formation of the NUTS region serve as a model for the establishment of the future regional territorial division of RS?
- Which institutions are in charge of defining the boundaries of the NUTS region in RS?
- Is one of the reasons for the establishment of regionalization in the RS to meet EU requirements, or the possibility of creating a more organized spatial and functional territory?
- What is the “new European regionalism”, in terms of its contextual determinants, and how well do they fit into the social context of RS society?
- What types of regionalism have a greater chance of contributing to the establishment of a new model of RS development? etc.

By sublimating all of the above, it can be stated that the definition of the new spatial-institutional model will depend on a number of factors. In the politicized environment in the RS, in which all reforms are tied into some general packages, the only support in the search for grounded and realistic solutions for the establishment of regional relations in the RS is in the analysis and transfer of experiences from countries that have successfully passed that path. Those experiences, especially those from neighboring countries, show that there are two ways to establish a regional division:

- administrative - by which the RS, with its legal regulations (spatial plan, law on spatial organization (the first steps have already been taken), law on local self-government, competences (functions), financing and other issues important for the functioning of the region or
- self-governing - according to which the municipalities (or citizens by municipality) of the RS would decide for themselves about the association of their municipalities into a region, the selection of regional functions, organization, financing, etc. However, the RS would have to regulate the decision-making process, organization, possible competences and financing in its own legal regulations.

Why is it important to mention the NUTS classification in particular? First of all, countries that want to join the EU (candidate countries) are obliged to determine the appropriate statistical spatial units according to the classification applied by the EU. After joining the EU, the statistical classification is officially accepted as the NUTS regions of the new member state, and the member states cannot change the existing classification for the next three years. One of the reasons for the emergence of this kind of classification is that the users of statistical reports at the EU level expressed the need for their harmonization for the purpose of data comparison. In this regard, statistical standards are required for the collection, processing and publication of both national and EU statistical reports. Regional statistics represent a very important element of the European statistical system and it is necessary that there should be at least three hierarchical levels of the NUTS classification. This does not limit EU member states, if they deem it necessary, to develop further regional sub-levels.

According to the conducted analysis, BiH can be divided into two NUTS 2 regions: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the RS. Based on the Spatial Plan of the RS until 2025, that is, on the proposed planning and statistical regionalization of the RS, 4 (four) NUTS 3 regions can be distinguished: the region of Prijedor-Banja Luka-Gradiska-Mrkonjic Grad, Doboj-Derventa-Brod-Samac, Bijeljina-Zvornik and Istocno Sarajevo - Visegrad-Trebinje-Foca. In addition to fulfilling the conditions regarding the number of inhabitants, the region set up in this way also represents a naturally rounded whole.

6. CONCLUSION

In post-communist/post-socialist countries as well as in transition countries, the status of regional autonomy has been neglected for a long time. The accession of transition countries to the EU and their ability to use structural funds also had a very strong influence on the trend of regionalization of transition countries. The regionalization trend of post-communist/post-socialist countries is not uniform at all, but rather a complex mechanism. However, the influence of accession and participation in the regional policy of the EU, which is aimed at strengthening the middle, i.e. of the regional level of government is a big and important element in transition countries.

The conclusion is that for now there is no general agreement regarding the key issues of the comprehensive solution of the regional problem at the level of BiH, that is, RS. The aforementioned issue of regionalization of BiH, that is, RS, needs to be resolved as soon as possible, but it should be noted that when we talk about the existence of political will, we do not get the impression of political commitment to the public interest in any field of development, including in this one. However, by obtaining the status of a candidate for EU membership, the circumstances changed and BiH, that is, the RS, is obliged to establish the NUTS division, that is, to define the administrative division of the country for the purposes of statistics. In addition, BiH and the RS need to establish mechanisms for the establishment of their national regional development policy and for the implementation of cohesion policy.

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