

The programme of reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina Cooperation or membership?

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Abstract

This paper problematizes the content and meaning of the document “BiH Reform Programme”, initially published for the period of November 2019 – November 2020, and later submitted under the same name for 2021 and 2022, and seeks to answer whether these documents are Annual National Programmes (ANP) which imply the activation of the NATO Membership Action Plan. The content of the document is analysed in relation to the prescribed form of NATO’s Annual National Programmes and compared to the documents of countries that were aspirants for NATO membership, such as Montenegro and North Macedonia, as well as the current aspirant Ukraine. Since the content and meaning of the document have been interpreted differently by politicians, military experts, and the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to define the status of the “BiH Reform Programme” document through the prism of real facts. After the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a coalition agreement was reached between political parties for the establishment of the government at the state level, entitled “Guidelines, Principles, and Objectives in the Executive and Legislative Authority at the BiH Level for the Period 2022 – 2026”. Since this agreement does not mention NATO cooperation or integration, the question of the real meaning of the “BiH Reform Programme” document and what we can expect in the future regarding relations with NATO is once again raised.

Keywords

Programme Reform, Annual National Programme, Membership Action Plan, cooperation, membership

Introduction

The adoption of the document “BiH Reform Programme” by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on 19 November 2019, ended the political deadlock that had lasted since the parliamentary elections held on 7 October, 2018. Former Minister of Finance of the RS, Zoran Tegeltija, was appointed as Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and instead of the Annual National Programme (ANP), the adopted document “BiH Reform Programme” was sent to NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

The subject of this research is the content and meaning of the document “BiH Reform Programme”, with the aim of answering the question: is the document “BiH Reform Programme” an Annual National Programme, and does sending the document to Brussels activate the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for NATO membership.

The research methods used include content analysis and comparative analysis. At the beginning of the paper, the Annual National Programmes of Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia (since 11 January 2019), and Ukraine were presented, as sending these documents to Brussels meant activating the Membership Action Plan for these countries. By examining these documents, we were able to position the document “BiH Reform Programme”. The paper also provides an overview of the history and manner of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO, as well as a detailed analysis of the content of the document “BiH Reform Programme”. The paper also presents the views of individual politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, military experts, and advisers, as well as media coverage of the document immediately after its adoption and publication. In the second part of the paper, the coalition agreement at the state level is analysed to determine the actual meaning of the document “BiH Reform Programme” with the passage of one calendar year.

Annual national programme of Montenegro (anp) 2010-2011

The first Annual National Programme (ANP) clearly defines priorities within the framework of democratic, institutional, and defence reforms in Montenegro in areas that are an integral part of society's democratization and achieving strategic priorities of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The introduction of the document emphasizes that NATO membership should represent the right model for achieving long-term stability, economic, and social prosperity. The content of the document is shaped by the content and principles of the Membership Action Plan and has five standard chapters: political and economic issues, military-defence issues, resources, security issues, and legal issues.

The textual part has nine pages, while the total content of the document with tables that explain and supplement the textual part is fifty-six pages. The tables precisely define goals, holders, activities with priorities, and deadlines for the implementation of activities. The document emphasizes intersectoral coordination of the competent state authorities and regular supervision by the Partnership for Peace Council. The need for stronger public support for Montenegro's integration into NATO is highlighted as a special feature.

Annual national programme of the Republic of North Macedonia for the period 2017-2018

The Annual National Programme of the Republic of Macedonia (ANP) for the period 2017-2018 contains five standard chapters, in the format of documents of the Annual National Programme of the countries that have activated the Membership Action Plan. The first chapter presents institutions, challenges, and integration processes, the second chapter deals with the issue of defence policy and military reforms, followed by chapters on defence resources, security issues, and legal issues. The document has seventy-three pages,

of which forty-three are written text. In the introductory part, as a special feature, there is a direct letter from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, Zoran Zaev, emphasizing that NATO membership is the highest priority of the country's foreign policy and that membership in NATO will mean strengthening the international position of the country, building institutions, democratic values, and the rule of law. The letter emphasizes readiness to continue participation in NATO-led missions and to reach the military budget according to NATO standards. The document also highlights the government's commitment to reforms and mentions the 3-6-9 PLAN roadmap, where priority areas for reforms are defined: justice, intelligence services, and public administration. It also emphasizes the establishment of a functional and cohesive multi-ethnic society that will ensure a quality life for all citizens and promote sustainable development. The importance of EU membership, along with NATO integration, as well as good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, are particularly emphasized.

Annual national programme of Ukraine (anp) 2019-2020

The Annual National Programme of Ukraine (ANP) 2019-2020 is shaped by the content and principles of the NATO Membership Action Plan and is structured into five chapters: political and economic issues, defence/military issues, resource issues, security issues, and legal issues (Government portal, 2020). The document was developed using the international results-based management (RBM) approach. The ANP of Ukraine envisages the reform of the security and defence sector, the alignment of the overall management system of the defence forces, strategic and operational management, intelligence work, communications, the establishment of democratic civilian control, and so on. It is crucial that the ANP-2020 is developed simultaneously with the state budget for 2020, so that all measures envisaged by the programme are financially supported. As the list of reforms included in the programme is wide-ranging and concerns bringing a range of areas of the country's activities in line with NATO standards, monitoring the implementation of the programme becomes a kind of country review in line with NATO criteria (Government portal, 2020).

For Ukraine, the ANP is a key instrument for integrating the country into NATO and a roadmap for reforms aimed at implementing the Alliance's standards and principles in reality. It was developed in 2008 when allies at the Bucharest Summit invited Ukraine to participate in NATO's Membership Action Plan. For 2020, the implementation of the ANP aimed to achieve Goal 17.2 of the Government of Ukraine's Action Programme, "Ukraine meets the principles and criteria required for acquiring membership in the North Atlantic Alliance" (Government portal, 2020).

Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO

Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO have a defined relationship based on key strategic documents, which include the Defence Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Security Policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Foreign Policy Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2018-2023.

Article 84 of the Defence Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina defines activities for NATO membership, stating that "the Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Presidency, and all defence entities, within their respective constitutional and legal competencies, shall undertake the necessary activities for Bosnia and Herzegovina to become a member of NATO." (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2005, p.21)

The Security Policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the section on Defence Policy under Chapter 4 - Elements of Security Policy, defines one of the principles as "Integration into Euro-Atlantic collective security structures." (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006, p.10)

The Foreign Policy Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2018-2023, in Chapter 2 - Foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Foreign Policy, under section a) Security and Stability in the paragraph on NATO, states that "Continuing activities related to NATO remains a priority for Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions. Priority activities will be primarily focused on activation and implementation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP). Activating the MAP, for which there is broad political consensus in Bosnia

and Herzegovina, will enable all defence entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (within their respective constitutional and legal competencies) to continue with activities related to NATO, as defined in the Defence Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Activating the MAP will further enhance Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions and effectiveness in defence and security, as well as promote Bosnia and Herzegovina as a safe and desirable country for foreign investment." (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018, p.7)

The mechanism and programmes of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO

The mechanism and programmes of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO began with Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Partnership for Peace at the NATO Summit in Riga in late 2006. Since then, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been cooperating with the Alliance through:

The Planning and Review Process (PARP). This mechanism enables the identification of the partner country's strengths and capabilities that can be made available in terms of exercises and capacities. It is also used as one of the main mechanisms for leading and evaluating defence and military progress in reforms, aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AF BiH) and their modernization. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been participating in the PARP process since May 2007. "BiH completed its first PARP questionnaire in the autumn of 2007, less than a year after joining the Partnership for Peace, and agreed on the first package of partnership goals in February 2008." (Maxwell, Olsen, 2013, p.100)

Individual Partnership Programme (IPP). The aim of this cooperation mechanism is to adapt the defence system of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO standards. The list of cooperation activities with NATO is created according to the needs and priorities that can contribute most to the adaptation of the defence system to NATO requirements. The Individual Partnership Programme was created immediately after the submission of the Presentation Document, approved by NATO, in 2008, and in 2020, 161 cooperation activities were planned through the programme. Today, IPP is called the Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP), and in

2022, 149 cooperation activities are planned through the programme.

Intensified Dialogue (ID). The aim of this cooperation mechanism is to enhance cooperation with NATO in areas related to political and economic issues, defence issues, resource issues, security issues, legal issues, and public diplomacy. Bosnia and Herzegovina was invited to improve cooperation with NATO at the level of the Intensified Dialogue at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008. (Foreign Policy Initiative BH, 2012, p.3)

Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). This cooperation programme allows Bosnia and Herzegovina to receive NATO assistance in accordance with common goals, interests, specific needs, and capabilities. IPAP is a two-year programme intended for partners, consisting of four chapters that cover: political and security issues, defence and military issues, public diplomacy, science, environmental protection, crisis management, and administrative and security issues and resources. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been using this programme since January 2008.

Membership Action Plan (MAP). This cooperation programme takes place through one-year cycles and through all parts of the state reform processes (politics, security aspects, economy, legal legislation). "MAP is a necessary step in the process of integration into the NATO alliance, but obtaining MAP status does not provide a guarantee to the aspirant state for eventual full membership in the alliance" (Duran, 2017, p.213). Unlike other mechanisms that are mostly of a technical nature, MAP is purely political, and that is one of the main reasons why Bosnia and Herzegovina has not been able to access MAP. Many political failures have arisen from political disagreements and a lack of cooperation among political elites (Preljević, 2017, p. 42). The period of participation in MAP lasts until NATO assesses that the aspiring country is ready for membership. Bosnia and Herzegovina was conditionally accepted into MAP at the NATO Summit in Tallinn in 2010 (conditioned on registering immovable prospective military property as state property used by the BiH Armed Forces). In December 2018, NATO invited Bosnia and Herzegovina to submit its first Annual National Programme, which would mean activating MAP. Instead of the ANP, a document called the "BH Reform Programme" was sent to Brussels at the end of 2019, which is interpreted differently.

The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AF BiH) in NATO-led peace support operations

The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AF BiH) participated in NATO-led peace support operations in Afghanistan. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established based on the Bonn Agreement of 25 December 2001, which provided for the transitional administration of the country and the future of post-Taliban Afghanistan with the help of the international community. The mission was authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386. The primary role of the ISAF mission was to support and assist the government of Afghanistan in securing and maintaining a safe environment that would enable the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the establishment of democratic structures and the expansion of the central Afghan government's influence. Involvement of the AF BiH involvement in this mission began with the deployment of two staff officers to the Danish battle group in late March 2009. From March 2009 to December 2014, close to five hundred members of the AF BiH were engaged in this mission. Participation of the AF BiH in the ISAF mission included staff officers, infantry units, military police instructors, and military police units.

The ISAF mission was later transformed into the Resolute Support Mission, and involvement of the AF BiH in the Resolute Support Mission began on 1 January 2015. By the beginning of 2021, over seven hundred and fifty members of the AF BiH were engaged in the mission. The Resolute Support Mission included staff officers, senior non-commissioned officers, infantry units, military police personnel, and explosive ordnance disposal units. The units and individuals of AF BiH in the missions in Afghanistan have demonstrated to be capable, trained, effective, and fully credible partners to NATO allies. There were no serious injuries, wounds, or deaths during the entire period of engagement. In line with conclusion of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2015, Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed its interest in participating in the Enhanced Enduring Partnership mission, a civilian-led mission that was to succeed the Resolute Support mission. Additionally, AF BiH is a desirable partner in a possible future NATO training mission in Iraq.

BiH Programme of Reforms

The initial document “BiH Reform Programme” is titled for the period of November 2019 to November 2020, confirming that it is an annual document. The document contains five chapters, namely: political and economic issues, defence and military issues, resource issues, security issues, and legal issues. The other two documents that were sent had the same content. The chapter on political and economic issues elaborates on foreign and security policy issues through relations with NATO, the EU, and neighbouring countries, as well as regional cooperation, international political organizations, financial institutions, arms control, demining, crisis management, and internal policy issues such as human rights, combating corruption and organized crime, border security, counterterrorism, civil society, science, democratic control in the defence and security sector, etc. The economic chapter provides general economic indicators and planned activities for economic development.

The chapter on defence and security issues elaborates on defence reform, planning, military effectiveness, military operations, personnel management, military infrastructure, and movable and immovable property. The resource chapter elaborates on planning, budgeting, and execution of the budget system, with a special section on the military budget. After the chapter on legal issues, tables with indicators and explanations of the textual part are created.

The fact that the “BiH Reform Programme 2019 - 2020” document contains a total of three hundred and thirty-three different activities or tasks that various ministries and institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to realize annually shows its comprehensiveness. One hundred and forty-four activities are permanent and will be included in future annual documents until complete implementation. Only the Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for seventy-one activities independently and for sixteen activities that need to be realized in cooperation with other ministries.

One of the most important sentences in the document is that the submission of the “BiH Reform Programme” represents the beginning of the implementation of defence reform, i.e., the strategic document “Review of BiH Defence”

adopted in 2016. Additionally, the “Commission for NATO Integration (CNI) at the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina is responsible for coordinating between ministries and agencies in the implementation of defined activities that make up the document.” Furthermore, the document emphasizes that all defined activities are in accordance with previous decisions of the Presidency, Parliamentary Assembly, and Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to develop its defence institutions and Armed Forces by adapting them to NATO standards.

Differences in the content of the ANP and Reform Programme

Analysing the contents of the document Annual National Programme of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ANP) for the period of 2018-2019, which was never sent to Brussels due to political disagreements, and the content of the document “BiH Reform Programme 2019 - 2020” key differences were observed in their contents (Starčević, 2019). The sentence in the first paragraph 1.1.1 Relations with NATO in the ANP read: “Euro-Atlantic integration, along with EU integration and the development of good neighbourly relations and the enhancement of regional cooperation, is a priority of the foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at Bosnia and Herzegovina’s inclusion in contemporary European political, economic, and security integrations.” This sentence was removed from the content of the “BiH Reform Programme.”

Also, in the text of the ANP, the words “approximation,” “accession,” and “measures” were replaced in the “BiH Reform Programme” with the words “cooperation,” “association,” and “steps.” The part of the document referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s path towards accession to the Membership Action Plan (MAP) was also removed from the “Reform Programme,” which explains the Tallinn conditions when the MAP will be activated and the transfer of prospective military property to the state. Other paragraphs in both documents are almost identical, except that in the ANP, it is stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina has identified accession to Euro-Atlantic integration processes as one of the priorities of its foreign policy. In the “Reform Programme,” the word “priorities” in this same sentence was replaced by the word “goals.”

Politicians on the BiH Reform Programme

Milorad Dodik, a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time of sending the Reform Programme document, thought that the document did not have an integration process in terms of membership because the document itself stated that membership was not prejudged, and it was quite clear that integration processes were not part of that overall document (Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019).

Šefik Džaferović, also a member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time of sending the Reform Programme document, told the media: “Our friends from the world and NATO support the Reform Programme. It is enough to say that the document is acceptable to NATO, that it follows the principles of the rule of law and respects all decisions” (Huseinović, 2019).

Branislav Borenović, the leader of the political party PDP, said in a statement to the media that there is no difference between ANP and the Reform Programme and that Milorad Dodik privatized the process of adopting the Reform Programme document, hiding it from the people, political structures, and academic community. He added that Bosnia and Herzegovina’s path to NATO membership is an irreversible process and that Dodik, with his signature, placed the NATO border on the Drina River, annulled the institutions of RS, and trampled the voted military neutrality (Klix.ba, 2019).

Dragan Čović, President of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, when asked, “Is Bosnia and Herzegovina in the MAP?”, replied: “So what if it is, and what if it is not? We have to compete for our place on our Euro-Atlantic path. All relevant decisions made on the NATO path are valid. Whether we will ever join NATO depends on the institutions of Bosnia. The Croatian side has no doubts about it, the Serbian side does, and that will be respected” (Radio Sarajevo, 2019).

NATO on the Reform Programme of BiH

The Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Council, in a meeting held on 5 November 2018, welcomed progress in the registration of prospective military locations as state property and called on Bosnia and Herzegovina

to continue with reforms and expressed NATO's readiness to accept the first Annual National Programme of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This provided an opportunity and an open possibility for Bosnia and Herzegovina to further enhance its partnership with NATO, as the largest and most successful political-security alliance in human history under the Membership Action Plan (MAP). After the Reform Programme document of Bosnia and Herzegovina was handed over to NATO Headquarters on 24 December 2019, the document was analysed by NATO bodies and accepted by NATO. Although the Reform Programme is a document of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its implementation is the obligation of the state and its competent institutions, the acceptance of the document by NATO implies the availability of support and expert and material assistance from NATO Headquarters and member states in its implementation, which has already been confirmed in practice through a series of concrete programmes of sponsored education, training, and valuable donations of material resources, for example, in the defence sector. During the presentation of the accredited letters of the Head of Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO, Ambassador Mithat Kujundzic, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the submission of the Reform Programme document of Bosnia and Herzegovina and confirmed that the document represents a continuation of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO (Mondo, 2020).

NATO Sarajevo spokesperson Ines Kuburović commented on the Reform Programme document of Bosnia and Herzegovina: "NATO looks forward to supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina as the authorities begin implementing the reforms contained in the Programme and Defence Review of 2016, and in this regard, the NATO Sarajevo Headquarters is available to the BH authorities for further support of defence and security sector reforms" (Radio Sarajevo, 2020).

Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina about the Programme of Reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The adoption of the "BH Reform Programme" by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina has attracted great media attention, as it meant unblocking the government and opening the possibility of establishing the Council

of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Almost all mass media in Bosnia and Herzegovina (television, internet portals, newspapers) informed the public about the content of the document. Some of them, such as *Večernji list*, *Srpska info*, and *Klix.ba*, published the original content of the “BH Reform Programme” immediately after its adoption. Most of the media fulfilled their role of informing the public by publishing the content of the document, quoting politicians, and emphasizing the messages of the ruling and opposition parties, using words such as victory or betrayal. They also quoted various military analysts and experts who confirmed, depending on their proximity to some political lobbies, that sending the “BH Reform Programme” is a way towards NATO membership, or just a continuation of cooperation with NATO. With this type of communication with the public, the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed that they do not have journalists-analysers who would define their position on the issue of the importance of NATO integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its position on that path. Since the media informed the public based on the opinions of politicians, selected military analysts, and only by publishing the original content of the document, the real function of educating the public is questionable. (Kunczik, Zipfel, 2006, p.38)

Military experts on the BiH Reform Programme

Former military representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO, Alija Kožljak, told Radio Free Europe that “I can responsibly claim that what Bosnia and Herzegovina was asked for, has been forwarded to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, and that is the Annual National Programme (ANP), with a different name - ‘Reform Programme.’” He based his opinion on the structure of the document, which, according to him, completely matches the structure of the Annual National Programme that other countries had sent to NATO before Bosnia and Herzegovina. He noted that “in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it may happen that two chapters are condensed into one, political and economic aspects, but everything is covered through content” (Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2019). Later, in a study published in 2021, Mr. Kožljak pointed out that “BH Reform Programme” is structured precisely as ANP by applying the same methodology and claims that it enables Bosnia

and Herzegovina to fully utilize the benefits of MAP. However, Kožljak is cautious and concludes that due to the strong influence of national interests and political factors, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that the successful implementation of ANP does not necessarily guarantee NATO membership (Kožljak, Šehović, 2021, p. 12).

University professor from Banja Luka, Miloš Šolaja, believes that the “BiH Reform Programme,” which was sent to Brussels, is significant due to the anticipated reforms. According to him, the programme of changes, transformation, and reforms, which includes the Membership Action Plan, pertains to the areas of economy, finance, politics, law, justice, defence, and security, and is something that certainly needs to be changed on the path to the European Union. In a statement for Radio Free Europe, Professor Šolaja said, “Therefore, the fact is that reforms are more necessary for Bosnia and Herzegovina to participate in security, that it is much more important than the status of the document. At this point, it cannot be said that this is the status of MAP and the path to NATO. Simply put, this is a broader framework of partnership and cooperation that has existed for thirteen years” (Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2019).

For Denis Hadžović from the Centre for Security Studies, the “BiH Reform Programme” has all the characteristics of ANP. He believes that the document was modified compared to what other countries had sent and that NATO leaders will decide whether the conditions have been met for the activation of the Membership Action Plan. For him, the activation of MAP would mean implementation of the Defence Review, i.e., the implementation of the equipment modernization plan so that the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina could be operational and meet the standards (Sandić-Hadžihasanović, 2019).

Assistant Minister of Defence for International Cooperation, Zoran Šajinović, emphasizes: “The Annual National Programme (ANP) is a conceptual framework and a link to the processes that we as a country should undertake in terms of further building a democratic society through institutional reforms, improving the overall security and economic environment that will provide better opportunities and brighter prospects for everyone in Bosnia

and Herzegovina. By adopting the document “BiH Reform Programme” and its acceptance by NATO, continuity and improved intensity of partnership cooperation have been ensured, as well as real foundations for the availability of assistance and support from NATO Headquarters and member states in its implementation. (Mr. Šajinović, 2021, perscomm February 26, 2021.)

The Reform Programme for 2021 and 2022

After the difficult birth of the Reform Programme for 2019-2020, Bosnia and Herzegovina sent two more such documents to Brussels, the Reform Programme for 2021 and the Reform Programme for 2022. The content of all three documents is similar, with the significant difference that in the last two documents, the name of the Commission for NATO integration has changed to the Commission for Cooperation with NATO. This Commission is tasked with determining priorities in implementing the obligations arising from Bosnia and Herzegovina’s participation in the Partnership for Peace programme and the Reform Programme of Bosnia and Herzegovina document. Additionally, the Commission’s mandate is to organize and manage the development of annual documents of the Reform Programme in the framework of cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO, and to submit them to the Council of Ministers for consideration and adoption (Radio Free Europe, 2021). Regarding the renaming of the Commission, most of the so-called pro-Bosnian political parties do not see a significant difference and remain convinced that the path towards NATO membership continues. On the other hand, the ruling parties in Republika Srpska believe they have successfully stopped that path, agreeing only to cooperation with NATO, following the example of Serbia (Cero, 2021).

Unlike the initial document, the Reform Programme for 2021 and 2022 is available to the public through the eConsultations platform. The page explicitly states: “This document is submitted without prejudice to the final decision on membership. By adopting the Reform Programme for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022, the continuous work of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s institutions in determining priorities in implementing Bosnia and Herzegovina’s obligations arising from participation in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme will be enabled” (eConsultations, 2022).

Programme reforms in post-election agreements 2022

General elections were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 October, 2022. They decided the composition of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the state, entity, and cantonal assemblies. In the context of this work, the election results for the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the state parliament are of particular importance, as they are the two bodies with authority over Bosnia and Herzegovina's foreign policy.

According to the official results of the 2022 Bosnian and Herzegovinian Presidency elections, released by the Central Election Commission (CEC), Denis Becirovic (SDP) from the Bosniak voters, Zeljka Cvijanovic (SNSD) from the Serbian voters, and Zeljko Komsic (DF) from the Croatian voters were elected to the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Radio Sarajevo, 2022).

In the parliamentary elections, SDA (8), SNSD (6), SDP (5), and HDZ BiH - HNS (4) were the political parties that won the most votes and thus the most seats (Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2022). Shortly after the elections, the SDP started forming a coalition with SNSD and HDZ BiH - HNS to secure enough seats to establish the government. Thus, the coalition of parties called "The Octet" was formed: Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Our Party, People and Justice, Bosnian-Herzegovinian Initiative - Fuad Kasumovic, For New Generations, Party of Democratic Action, Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and People's European Union. This created conditions for negotiations on the establishment of the government at the state level.

The power-sharing structure, where parties in power represent all three constituent ethnic groups, is designed to prevent tyranny of the majority and ensure commitment of all three groups to the central state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in essence, it has resulted in permanent political blockade and paralysis in the last twenty years. Since each ethnic group must be represented in almost every government structure, reaching consensus on anything is difficult (Whitsell, 2022, p. 4).

In a relatively short time for Bosnia and Herzegovina, after several meetings of the leaders of these political parties, an agreement on the establishment of

the government was finalized. After signing a document called “Guidelines, Principles, and Goals in Executive and Legislative Power at the BiH level for the period 2022-2026” with Milorad Dodik (SNSD) and Nermin Nikšić (SDP), the leader of the HDZ Dragan Čović stated that after a long time, a partnership had been made that was “put on paper,” unlike previous forced coalitions (Dnevni.ba, 2022).

The process of drafting the agreement document was quite similar to the process of drafting the “Reform Programme of BiH”. Initially, Dragan Čović and Nermin Nikšić signed an agreement with almost the same name: “Guidelines, Principles and Objectives of Action in Executive and Legislative Authority for the Period 2022-2026.” The text of this document is slightly longer than the final document signed with Milorad Dodik to form the government. What is particularly noticeable is the chapter on Euro-Atlantic integration. The original document signed by leaders from the Federation of BiH on Euro-Atlantic integration in the first chapter, among other things, states:

- “Respect for commitments undertaken and continuation of further activities in the implementation of the reform programme and cooperation with the NATO Alliance and its members;
- Modernization of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with international obligations and the needs of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Implementation of all elements of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) and timely adoption and implementation of the annual reform programmes;
- Implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the registration of military property” (NES BiH, 2022).

On the other hand, the document signed with Milorad Dodik does not mention cooperation with NATO or the Armed Forces of BiH at all. After the signing, the protagonists were asked about relations with NATO. “There is no doubt that there is cooperation with NATO, it is indisputable that it was stated in the document that this does not prejudice the expansion and it

is indisputable that the decision on accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO will be made in Bosnia and Herzegovina. HDZ has its positions on NATO and thinks it should, the Octet thinks it should, we think it should not and we have not added or subtracted anything from the reform programme," said Dodik about the path to NATO. "Of course, we can emphasize the differences that are evidently present in our views, but we have decided to focus on what we can agree on and try to restore hope to the citizens," Nikšić said. Čović was also satisfied with the agreement reached and only commented on the EU status, expressing confidence that "the way will be open with partners from outside for financial transactions with the EU and for the candidacy status for BiH" (Dnevni.ba, 2022).

Through the prism of agreeing on establishment of the government for the period 2022-2026, we can consider the real meaning of the "Reform Programme of BiH" document. It is clear that the parties from RS currently have no intention of making a move towards NATO membership, so agreeing on the annual Reform Programme of BiH will likely be in the tone of what has already been seen, which is masking the content and carefully choosing words to define relations. With the lack of goals of the ruling coalition regarding NATO cooperation for the period 2022-2026, we can expect a continuation of the discussion on the intensity of cooperation with NATO. Although the Octet stated "NATO is implied so it does not need to be included in the agreement", the question of the character of the document sent to Brussels under the name "BH Reform Programme" arises again (Latif, 2022).

Final discussion

In researching the content and meaning of the document "BH Reform Programme," primarily content analysis and comparative methods were applied, which included the following variables in the document "BH Reform Programme," documents of Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine:

- Period and name of the document
- Size of the document
- Structure of the document
- Official country position
- Key messages

The “BH Reform Programme” is an annual document titled for the period November 2019 – November 2020 and later titled for the year for which it provides an overview. In Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine, the name of the document is identical, Annual National Programme. All documents, national programmes of these countries are annual.

The size of the “BH Reform Programme” is fifty-three pages (2019 – November 2020), sixty-eight (2021), and seventy-three (2022), while the analysed document of Montenegro is fifty-six pages. The document of North Macedonia has seventy-three pages, and the Ukrainian document has one hundred and eight pages.

The “BH Reform Programme” document has a structure that is formally the content of the annual national programmes of Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine, which activated the Action Plan for Membership. It concerns political and economic issues, defence and military issues, resource issues, security issues, and legal issues. Also, all compared documents have a part of written text and a part with tables that supplement the written text. In the first part of the “BH Reform Programme” document, there is no official commitment to NATO membership, unlike all three compared documents, where the country’s intention for full membership in NATO is unambiguously expressed.

In the “BH Reform Programme” document, it is stated that the document is submitted without prejudging the final decision on membership. The document from Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasizes the word “partnership,” while in the compared documents, it is “membership.”

The key message of the “BH Reform Programme” document is that Bosnia and Herzegovina will raise the level of cooperation with NATO, participate in joint exercises, crisis response exercises, and peace support operations, develop a military structure compatible with NATO, but without prejudging membership. All planned activities are in line with previous decisions of the Presidency, Council of Ministers, and the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which means that regardless of not prejudging membership in NATO, the obligation from Art. 84 of the Defence Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains regarding the activities of the Parliamentary

Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and all defence subjects on the necessary activities for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to NATO. (PA BiH, 2005, p.21)

The key message of the document in Montenegro is that membership in NATO is a model for achieving social and economic prosperity, with a focus on the need for strong public support for the country's integration into NATO. NATO membership will mean strengthening the country's international position and building institutions, democratic values, and the rule of law - the key message of the document from the Republic of Macedonia. The Ukrainian document emphasizes that the content of the document is a guide for reforms, and that all reforms are financially supported and fully aligned with NATO standards. Ukraine's ANP is shaped as closely as possible to the content and principles of the Action Plan for NATO membership. Looking at the current situation where Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it is evident that Ukraine's membership in the MAP does not guarantee activation of the Alliance in defence of Ukraine, but it is a fact that Alliance members have significantly helped Ukraine defend its sovereignty.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research carried out according to the defined variables, using the content analysis and comparison method, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the meaning of the document "BH Reform Programme".

The adoption and submission of the document "BH Reform Programme" was a positive response from the state institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the offer and invitation of the foreign ministers of NATO member states on 5 December 2018. By adopting the document "BH Reform Programme" and its acceptance by NATO, continuity and an enhanced intensity of the partnership cooperation were ensured, and real foundations were created for the availability of assistance and support from NATO Headquarters and member states in its implementation.

Although the ANP form is defined, this is a document whose content is not prescribed by NATO but represents what the state, as a MAP partner,

determines as its own goals and priorities to be implemented over a period of one year, as well as the modalities and means for achieving the set goals. The document "BH Reform Programme" has a content fully aligned with the ANP form and defines key objectives and priorities for the period it covers.

Although it is stated on the NATO alliance's official website in the "Membership Action Plan" (MAP) section that Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in MAP and although the content of the document "BH Reform Programme" fully corresponds to the prescribed form of the Annual National Programme (ANP), the document "BH Reform Programme" formally does not represent the Annual National Programme (ANP) of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The key fact for this conclusion is that Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the document "BH Reform Programme", is not seeking or prejudging NATO membership but emphasizing that the final decision will be made by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The document also emphasizes that all activities are in accordance with previous decisions of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which implies that the obligation under Article 84 of the Defence Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains, i.e., activities on accession to NATO. This opens up the possibility that some future annual programmes, regardless of their name, will define membership instead of cooperation and clearly define Bosnia and Herzegovina as an official aspirant for NATO. Taking into account the agreement on the establishment of power for the period 2022-2026, it is difficult to expect such a scenario in the near future.

In any case, the documents "BH Reform Programme" represent an additional step forward in cooperation with NATO, especially in the defence part, implying the growth and expansion of the various programmes and mechanisms of cooperation. And most importantly, submitting the document "BH Reform Programme" meant the beginning of the implementation of the defence reform, i.e., the beginning of a new chapter in the development and modernization of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

If all planned activities from the documents "BH Reform Programme" were implemented, it would mean the reform and standardization of institutions and the entire society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same

time, it would mean the readiness of the state to access not only NATO but also the European Union, which would be much more important than the formal perception that the document “BH Reform Programme” represents a continuation of the path towards NATO membership or just the highest degree of cooperation with NATO.

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Program reformi BiH – suradnja ili članstvo?

Sažetak

U ovom se radu problematizira sadržaj i značenje dokumenta „Program reformi BiH”, koji je inicijalno objavljen za razdoblje studeni 2019. – studeni 2020., a poslije pod istim imenom poslan za 2021. i 2022. godinu. Traži se odgovor jesu li ovi dokumenti Godišnji nacionalni programi (ANP) koji znače aktiviranje Akcijskog plana za članstvo u NATO savezu. Sadržaj dokumenta analiziran je s obzirom na propisanu formu Godišnjih nacionalnih programa NATO-a i uspoređen je s dokumentima zemalja koje su bile aspirantice za članstvo u NATO-u: Crne Gore i Republike Sjeverne Makedonije te sadašnje aspirantice Ukrajine. Budući da je inicijalno od strane političara, vojnih stručnjaka i medija u Bosni i Hercegovini na različit način protumačen sadržaj i značenje dokumenta, potrebno je kroz prizmu stvarnih činjenica definirati status dokumenta „Program reformi BiH”. Nakon provedenih općih izbora u BiH, sklopljen je koalicijski sporazum između političkih stranaka za uspostavu vlasti na državnoj razini pod nazivom „Smjernice, načela i ciljevi u izvršnoj i zakonodavnoj vlasti na nivou BiH za razdoblje 2022. – 2026. godina”. Budući da ovaj sporazum ne spominje NATO suradnju ili integraciju, ponovno se nameće pitanje

stvarnog značenja dokumenta „Program reformi BiH” i pitanje što možemo očekivati u budućnosti kada su u pitanju odnosi s NATO-om.

Ključne riječi

Program reformi, Godišnji nacionalni program, Akcijski plan za članstvo, suradnja, članstvo