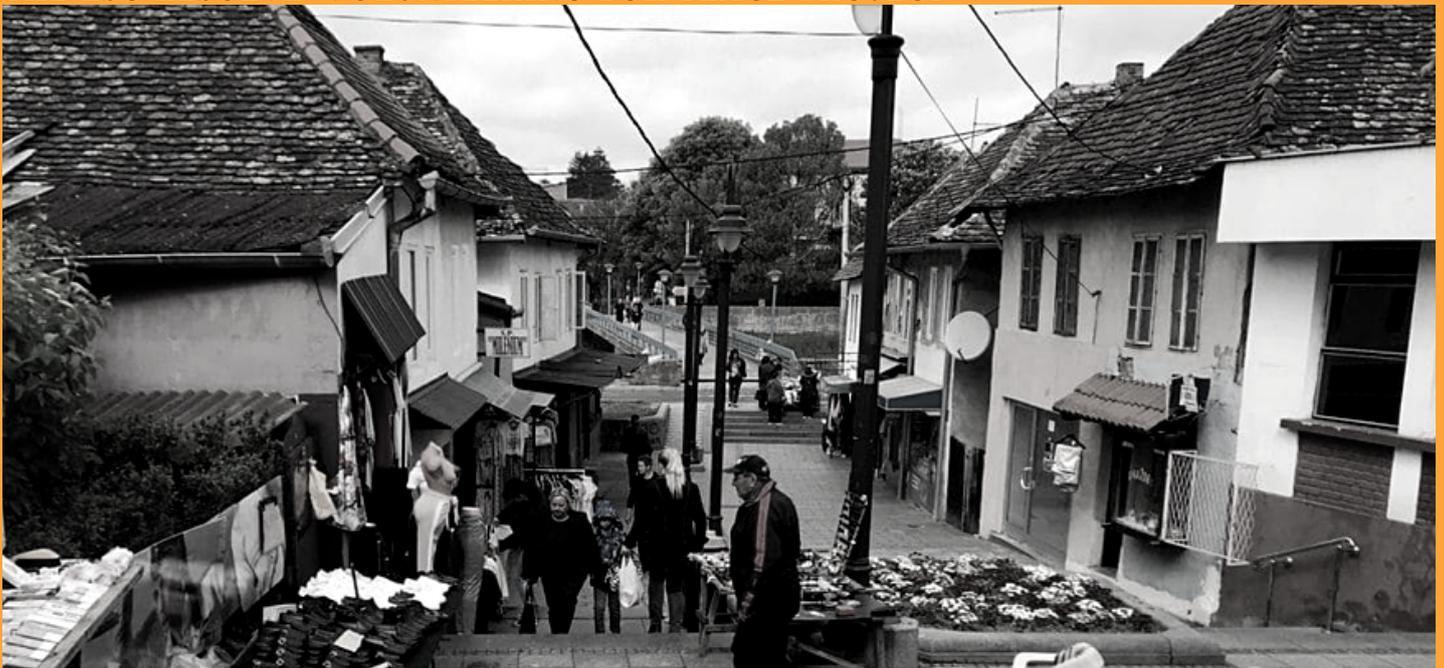




# REPRESENTATION IN LIMINAL SPACE

SOCIAL ACTION PROJECT UNDER  
THE ESC RESOLVE: VOLUNTEERING FOR PEACE PROJECT



## "BRČKO DISTRICT: EXISTING WITHIN BORDERS"

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The space that we typically define as "Europe" is punctuated by frontiers and disputed territories. Europe and its borders have historically been substantiated by these areas. Its Southeastern boundaries quantify the distinction between East and West, a division that is mostly cognitive and geopolitically fuelled. Whilst the geographical boundaries of 'the orient' has shifted over time, its definition and use of the word in defining 'the other' has remained unchanged. Today this framework is useful in describing the relationship between the European Union (EU) and those states that exist outside of this system.

In 1999, the EU instituted several policies concerning the stability of Southeastern Europe. These policies were established in the hope that they would eventually act as the necessary framework for the accession of the Western Balkans into the EU.

Whilst successful in theory, the EU's model of expansion can be argued to have worsened relations between Balkan states. Accession into the EU balances on the qualification of 'Europeanness'. Through this dichotomy, the Western Balkans has historically served as the embodiment of this opposition against which the definition of 'European' is judged. As such, the Southeastern frontier has become a basis for comparison and the maintenance of the space is vital to maintaining the narrative of European identity. Although when such divisions are conceived, what becomes of those spaces existing on and between these frontiers? Neither here nor there, these places exist in a dimension of liminality

Bosnia and Herzegovina has occupied its current territory since the medieval time. The borders that define the country today were largely set in the late Ottoman era. In 1995 the Dayton Accord imposed partitions within the country in an attempt to stabilise the region in the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars. As of 2022, this internal political division remains. Bosnia and Herzegovina is comprised of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), Republika Srpska (RS) and Brčko District.

Brčko District is enclosed by borders on all sides. It is nested in the North of Bosnia and Herzegovina and exists officially as a condominium of the RS and FBiH. The municipality's position on the River Sava also means that it also shares a border with the EU. In the most literal sense, Brčko personifies the archetypal notion of the Balkans as a crossroad between East and West. Yet, the region strives to overcome this trivial definition. Being a space demarcated by boundaries, the area is multi-ethnic. Brčko was the only part of the Dayton Agreement that was not finalised. Hence, the Accord gave special status to the region in acknowledgement of its pre-war boundaries.

Yet this amendment of physical borders has done little to erase the traces of their previous form. These pre-war borders remain in the minds of the population, serving as mental barriers between the people.

Identity construction in places such as Brčko District is of particular difficulty, especially for the younger generations. The entire region is faced with an emergence of groups that do not subscribe to one religion or ethnicity. These individuals find themselves outside of the existent, binary framework of their society which is inherently built on division. With the recent escalation in nationalist rhetoric, areas such as Brčko have become a particular focus. These provinces act as bellwethers, becoming political stages where the tendencies of the wider region are enacted.

This year's election will be particularly significant. Bosnia and Herzegovina is confronting its biggest political crisis since the Dayton Agreement. Talk of borders is rarely exclusive from conversations with nationalist intent. The future of Brčko District is now more uncertain than ever.

Further readings:

- **Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe**, 1999, available at: <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/1999koln/pact.htm>
- **Statute of the Brčko District of B&H:** <https://advokat-prnjavorac.com/legislation/Statute-of-the-Brcko-Distrikt-of-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.pdf>
- **Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia"**, *Slavic Review*, 54:4 (1995), 917-931.: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501399>