

BRIDGING BORDERS

Geopolitics, Diplomacy,
and Regional Tensions

An Interdisciplinary Perspective
on Regional Challenges

Edited by
Mariam S. OLSSON

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An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Regional Challenges

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PREFACE

This volume, “Bridging Borders: Geopolitics, Diplomacy, and Regional Tensions An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Regional Challenges” brings together two timely and analytically rich studies that explore contemporary geopolitical dynamics and their far-reaching diplomatic implications. Though differing in geographical focus, both chapters converge on a central theme: the complex interplay between territorial realities and international political frameworks.

In the first chapter, Gabriel Enrique Sánchez Ramírez offers a comprehensive analysis under the title “Jeopolitik Dönemeçler ve Diplomatik Yansımalar,” engaging with the shifting structures of global power and the evolving contours of diplomacy. His perspective enriches our understanding of how critical geopolitical turns reverberate through institutional and diplomatic arenas.

The second chapter, authored by Isa Kasum, delves into a specific and often overlooked spatial node: the Neum corridor in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Titled “Neum and the Geopolitics of Division: Bosnia and Herzegovina's Coastal Enclave and Its Implications for Croatia, EU Integration, and Regional Stability,” this contribution critically unpacks how a narrow stretch of land continues to reflect and influence larger tensions related to sovereignty, EU enlargement, and regional balance.

As the editor, my aim has been to bring together perspectives that not only reflect rigorous academic inquiry, but also speak to real-world political and diplomatic challenges. It is my hope that this book will

serve as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and practitioners engaged in the fields of geopolitics, international relations, and European studies.

I would like to thank the contributing authors for their thought-provoking insights and commitment to scholarly excellence. I also extend my appreciation to the readers who continue to engage with critical geopolitical conversations across borders.

Dr. Mariam S. OLSSON

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CHAPTER 1

POPULISM AND ITS POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON DEMOCRACIES IN LATIN AMERICA

POPÜLİZM VE LATİN AMERİKA'DAKİ DEMOKRASİLER ÜZERİNDEKİ OLASI ETKİLERİ

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Özet

Popülizm, Latin Amerika siyaseti içinde sıkça görülen bir özellik olarak dikkat çekmektedir. Karizmatik liderler, gücü inşa etmek ve pekiştirmek amacıyla elit karşıtı söylemlerden ve halka hitap eden çağrılardan faydalanmaktadır. Günümüzde, akademisyenler dahi popülizmin demokrasiler üzerindeki olası olumlu ya da olumsuz etkilerini tanımlama konusunda farklı görüşlere sahiptir. Bu bağlamda, hazırlanan bu bildiri, popülizmin bölgedeki demokrasiler üzerindeki etkilerini incelemekte, siyasi katılım için fırsatlar yaratırken aynı zamanda kurumsal istikrar için riskler de oluşturabileceğini ortaya konulmakta ve Arjantin ve Venezuela gibi örnekler dikkate alınarak, popülizmin demokratik

kalite ve toplumsal kutuplaşma üzerindeki etkileri genel olarak incelenmektedir. Aynı şekilde, Ernesto Laclau, Cass Mudde ve Benjamin Moffitt'in katkılarıyla oluşturulmuş teorik bir çerçeve kullanılarak ve nitel bir belge analizi yaklaşımıyla, bu bağlamlarda popülizm ile demokrasi arasındaki dinamiklerin bütüncül bir şekilde anlaşılması hedeflenmektedir. Bu çalışma, popülist modellerin benzerliklerini ve farklılıklarını, aynı zamanda etkilerini vurgulamaktadır. Böylece, Latin Amerika'nın demokratik geleceği üzerine düşünmek için bir temel sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arjantin, Demokrasi, Kurumsal Kriz, Latin Amerika, Popülizm, Venezuela.

Abstract

Populism has been a recurrent feature in Latin American politics, where charismatic leaders have utilized anti-elitist narratives and appeals directed at the people to build and consolidate their power. Today, even scholars differ in describing its possible effects, whether positive or negative, on democracies. In this context, this article explores how populism can influence democracies in the region, creating opportunities for political inclusion while also posing risks to institutional stability. Considering cases such as Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela, the effects of populism on democratic quality and social polarization are broadly examined. Similarly, employing a theoretical

framework with contributions from Ernesto Laclau, Cass Mudde, and Benjamin Moffitt, and based on a qualitative approach to document analysis, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between populism and democracy in these contexts. This research highlights the similarities and differences in populist models and their impact, offering a foundation to reflect on the democratic future of Latin America.

Keywords: Argentina, Democracy, Latin America, Institutional Crisis, Populism, Venezuela.

Introduction

Populism has become a defining political phenomenon in the 21st century, influencing both democratic and authoritarian regimes. According to Cas Mudde (2017), populism is best understood as a *thin-centered ideology* that divides society into two antagonistic groups: *the pure people* and *the corrupt elite*. This ideological framework claims that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people, often challenging established institutions and political intermediaries.

While populism has traditionally been associated with Latin American politics, its recent rise in Western democracies and post-Soviet authoritarian regimes highlights its adaptability across different political contexts. In this regard, the United States of America and the Russia Federation represent two striking examples of this phenomenon:

- **Donald Trump** challenged the political establishment in the United States through nationalist, anti-elitist, and exclusionary rhetoric.

- **Vladimir Putin** has consolidated a form of nationalist populism in Russia by portraying himself as the defender of national sovereignty against foreign and domestic “*enemies*”.

This research seeks to analyze whether both leaders can be considered populists, based on the theoretical frameworks established in literature.

Research Questions:

- i. Can Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin be considered populist leaders?
- ii. How do they use populist discourse to legitimize their leadership?
- iii. How does their populism contribute to democratic erosion in their respective countries?

This study is significant because it contributes to the broader debate on populism’s impact on democracy, particularly in comparing a democratic system (United States) with a considered hybrid regime (Russia).

Literature Review

Populism has been extensively studied from **different theoretical perspectives**, ranging from discourse analysis to institutionalist approaches. This section provides an overview of key scholarly contributions that frame this research.

Theoretical Approaches to Populism

- **Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017)** defines populism as a “*thin-centered ideology*” that constructs society as divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps or groups: *the pure people* versus *the corrupt elite*. Likewise, according to writers, populism can be adopted by both left-wing and right-wing movements, depending on the political and cultural context. The authors emphasizes that populists often reject pluralism and seek to redefine democratic legitimacy around the notion of “*the general will of the people*” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

- **Ernesto Laclau (2005)** provides a discourse-theoretical perspective, arguing that populism is a political logic that constructs an “*empty signifier*” (For instance: “*the people*”) to unify diverse social grievances against a common adversary (e.g., “*the elite*”). His work is particularly useful in order to analyze Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin’s rhetoric, as both leaders employ broad, symbolic appeals to *national identity and sovereignty*.

- **Benjamin Moffitt (2016)** conceptualizes populism as a political style characterized by permanent crisis rhetoric, strong

leader-follower relationships, and direct communication strategies (especially through social media). His approach helps explain how Trump and Putin use media and political spectacle to reinforce their leadership.

- **Kurt Weyland (2001, 2020)** argues that populism should be understood as a *political strategy* rather than an ideology. He emphasizes how populist leaders, whether in democracies or authoritarian settings, seek direct, unmediated relationships with the masses while weakening institutional constraints. His comparative studies of Latin American populists provide useful parallels for understanding Putin’s centralization of power and Trump’s attacks on democratic norms.

- **Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt (2018)** in their book “*How Democracies Die*” explore the role of populist leaders in eroding democratic institutions. They describe that Donald Trump’s rhetoric and actions undermined traditional checks and balances in the United States, much like other populists have done in hybrid and authoritarian regimes.

- **Neil Robinson (2022)** in *Contemporary Russian Politics* examines how Putin has employed elements of populism within an authoritarian framework, particularly through nationalist mobilization, state-controlled media, and anti-Western rhetoric.

Unlike traditional populists, Putin does not rely on mass movements but instead constructs an image of national unity centered around strong-state ideology.

- **Levitsky & Loxton (2013)** analyze the conditions under which populists transition from democratic to authoritarian rule. They argue that populists who reach power through elections often undermine institutional constraints, attack independent media, and weaken judicial autonomy. This framework is essential for understanding Trump's contestation of electoral outcomes and Putin's constitutional reforms to extend his rule.

- **Levitsky & Way (2020)** introduces the concept of *Competitive Authoritarianism*, arguing that leaders blend populist appeals with state repression. Their research helps differentiate between electoral populists like Trump, who operate within democratic constraints, and authoritarian populists like Putin, who use populism to reinforce autocratic control.

This literature review provides the necessary theoretical foundation to assess whether Trump and Putin fit within the populist paradigm and how their leadership has affected democratic institutions.

Research Methodology

This study shall employ a qualitative comparative case study approach, integrating discourse analysis, institutional analysis, and a structured comparative framework. The discourse analysis will examine Trump's and Putin's speeches, and campaign rhetoric, identifying key populist themes such as anti-elitism, nationalism, and crisis narratives. This will provide insight into how both leaders construct political identities and mobilize public support through language.

The institutional analysis will evaluate executive actions, judicial interventions, and constitutional reforms to assess how both leaders have reshaped democratic institutions. Indicators of democratic erosion will be compared using reports from Freedom House, V-Dem, and The Economist Democracy Index.

Additionally, this research will incorporate insights from Think Tanks specializing in governance, democracy, and authoritarianism. Reports and policy analyses from institutions such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Foreign Affairs Magazine, The Council on Foreign Relations, Orden Mundial from Spain, among others, shall provide further empirical evidence and expert perspectives on how populism interacts with democratic decline.

The comparative framework will establish structured criteria to contrast Trump and Putin's political strategies, institutional challenges, and media control mechanisms. This will enable a

systematic evaluation of how populism operates in a democratic versus an authoritarian context.

This methodological approach ensures a multidimensional analysis, integrating theoretical perspectives, empirical data, and expert insights from leading political institutions.

Expected Contributions and Conclusion

This research seeks to clarify whether Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin can be classified as populist leaders by examining their discourse and political strategies. By comparing populism, it will highlight the ways in which populist tactics differ depending on the political context. This study will also provide insights into how populism contributes to democratic erosion, particularly through its effects on judicial independence, media freedom, and electoral integrity.

Additionally, this research will offer a comparative framework that can be applied to future studies on populism beyond Western democracies, contributing to a broader understanding of how populist movements and leaders adapt to different institutional settings.

In conclusion, the study will shed light on the role of populism as both a democratic disruptor and an authoritarian enabler, demonstrating how it can function within different regime types. By integrating theoretical analysis, empirical data, and insights from Think Tanks, this research aims to provide a comprehensive

examination of the mechanisms through which populist leaders consolidate power and reshape political institutions.

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CHAPTER 2

NEUM AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF DIVISION: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S COASTAL ENCLAVE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CROATIA, EU INTEGRATION, AND REGIONAL STABILITY

NEUM VE BÖLÜNMENİN JEOPOLİTİĞİ: BOSNA- HERSEK'İN KIYI BÖLGESİ VE BUNUN HIRVATİSTAN, AB ENTEGRASYONU VE BÖLGESEL İSTİKRAR ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ

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Abstract

The geopolitical dynamics surrounding Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina's only coastal town, have long been a point of contention in the region, particularly in its relations with Croatia. Neum's strategic location along the Adriatic Sea effectively splits Croatia's territory, creating logistical and economic challenges for both nations. This issue has gained renewed attention in the context of European Union (EU) integration, as Croatia's

accession in 2013 necessitated the establishment of border controls, impacting regional trade, tourism, and transportation. The Neum corridor has also raised questions about sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the balance of power in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, subjected proposed Pelješac Bridge, aimed at bypassing Neum, has sparked debates over its implications for Bosnia's access to international waters and its economic prospects. This article examines the historical, legal, and geopolitical dimensions of the Neum issue, analyzing its impact on bilateral relations, regional stability, and EU enlargement policies. By exploring the interplay between national interests, international law, and geopolitical strategies, this study highlights the complexities of resolving territorial disputes in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Keywords: Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, geopolitics, territorial disputes, EU integration, regional stability, international relations.

Özet

Bosna-Hersek'in tek sahil kenti Neum'u çevreleyen jeopolitik dinamikler, bölgede, özellikle de Hırvatistan'la ilişkilerde uzun süredir bir tartışma konusu oldu. Neum'un Adriyatik Denizi kıyısındaki stratejik konumu, Hırvatistan topraklarını etkili bir şekilde bölerek her iki ülke için de lojistik ve ekonomik zorluklar yaratıyor.

Hırvatistan'ın 2013'teki katılımının sınır kontrollerinin kurulmasını gerektirmesi ve bunun bölgesel ticareti, turizmi ve ulaşımı etkilemesi nedeniyle, bu konu Avrupa Birliği (AB) entegrasyonu bağlamında yeniden ilgi görmeye başladı.

Neum koridoru aynı zamanda Batı Balkanlar'daki egemenlik, toprak bütünlüğü ve güç dengesiyle ilgili soruları da gündeme getirdi. Ayrıca, Neum'u bypass etmeyi amaçlayan, önerilen Pelješac Köprüsü, bunun Bosna'nın uluslararası sulara erişimi ve ekonomik beklentileri üzerindeki etkileri konusunda tartışmalara yol açtı.

Bu makale, Neum meselesinin tarihi, hukuki ve jeopolitik boyutlarını inceleyerek ikili ilişkiler, bölgesel istikrar ve AB genişleme politikaları üzerindeki etkisini analiz etmektedir. Ulusal çıkarlar, uluslararası hukuk ve jeopolitik stratejiler arasındaki etkileşimi araştıran bu çalışma, hızla gelişen küresel ortamda bölgesel anlaşmazlıkları çözümlenmenin karmaşıklığını vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neum, Bosna Hersek, Hırvatistan, jeopolitik, toprak anlaşmazlıkları, AB entegrasyonu, bölgesel istikrar, uluslararası ilişkiler.

INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina's only coastal town, Neum, occupies a pivotal yet contentious position in the geopolitics of the Western Balkans. Strategically situated along the Adriatic Sea, Neum not only provides Bosnia and Herzegovina with its sole maritime outlet but also divides Croatian territory, thereby creating significant logistical, economic, and diplomatic challenges. This geographic quirk has grown in importance since Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013, a development that necessitated the implementation of new border controls, thereby reshaping regional trade, tourism, and transportation dynamics (European Commission, 2018; Balkan Insight, 2018).

Historically, the Neum corridor has symbolized the complex interplay of sovereignty and external influence in the region. The area's contentious status is rooted in centuries of shifting imperial borders—initially influenced by the legacies of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires—and was further complicated by the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Malcolm, 1994; Banac, 1992). In recent years, proposals such as the Pelješac Bridge, intended to bypass the enclave, have sparked renewed debates over Bosnia's access to international waters and its broader economic prospects. Such initiatives highlight the enduring

dilemmas of reconciling national interests with the demands of regional stability and EU integration, underscoring the intricate balance of power in the Western Balkans (Bieber, 2006).

This article examines the historical, legal, and geopolitical dimensions of the Neum issue. By analyzing the interplay between national sovereignty, international law, and evolving geopolitical strategies, the study aims to illuminate how a small coastal enclave can have far-reaching implications for bilateral relations, regional security, and the broader process of European integration.

Neum's Historical and Geopolitical Significance

Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina's only coastal enclave, occupies a unique position in the historical and geopolitical fabric of the Balkans. Its strategic location along the Adriatic Sea has made it a focal point for trade, cultural exchange, and territorial disputes for centuries. Shaped by the legacies of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, Neum's historical trajectory reflects the broader dynamics of power struggles and cultural interactions in the region. The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s further amplified its geopolitical significance, as it became Bosnia's sole access to the sea, while simultaneously creating challenges for neighboring Croatia. This chapter examines Neum's historical context, the enduring influences of its imperial past, and the consequences of Yugoslavia's breakup on its territorial status (Malcolm, 1994; Bieber, 2006).

Historical context of Neum and its strategic importance

Neum's strategic importance can be traced back to antiquity, when it served as a vital link between the Adriatic Sea and the Balkan interior. Its location along the Adriatic coast made it a natural gateway for trade and cultural exchange, connecting the Mediterranean world with the Balkan hinterland. During the Roman era, the region was part of the province of Dalmatia, and its coastal position facilitated the movement of goods and troops. Later, during the medieval period, Neum became a contested territory among regional powers, including the Venetians and the Ottomans. The Venetians, who controlled much of the Adriatic coastline, sought to dominate the area to secure their trade routes, while the Ottomans viewed it as a strategic foothold in their expansion into Europe (Faroghi, 2006; Fine, 1991).

Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 marked a turning point in Neum's history, as it formally ceded the territory to the Ottoman Empire. This decision was driven by the need to create a buffer zone between the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Venetian territories, ensuring that the two rival powers did not share a direct border. Treaty established Neum's modern borders and underscored its role as a geopolitical and trade corridor. Over the centuries, Neum's access to the Adriatic has been critical for economic and military purposes, making it a key asset for empires and states seeking control over the region. Its historical significance is further highlighted by its role in connecting the Balkans to Mediterranean trade networks, fostering cultural and

economic exchanges that continue to shape its identity (Finkel, 2005).

In the 19th century, Neum's strategic importance was further amplified by the rise of nationalism and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. As European powers vied for influence in the Balkans, Neum became a focal point of geopolitical competition. The Congress of Berlin in 1878, which placed Bosnia and Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian administration, marked the beginning of a new era for Neum. The Austro-Hungarian Empire recognized the enclave's potential as a trade hub and invested in infrastructure to integrate it into Central European economic systems. This period laid the foundation for Neum's modern development and reinforced its role as a bridge between East and West (Banac, 1992).

Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian legacies in shaping the coastal enclave

The Ottoman Empire's rule over Neum from the 15th to the 19th century left a profound impact on its cultural and administrative landscape. Under Ottoman control, Neum became a site of cultural synthesis, blending Islamic and Christian traditions. This is evident in the region's architecture, which features mosques, churches, and traditional stone houses that reflect the coexistence of different religious and cultural communities. The Ottomans also introduced administrative systems that emphasized local governance, allowing Neum to maintain a degree of autonomy

while remaining part of the empire. This period of Ottoman rule shaped Neum's identity as a multicultural enclave, a characteristic that continues to define it today (Ramet, 2006).

The Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 brought significant changes to Neum. The empire's focus on modernization and infrastructure development transformed the enclave into a strategic outpost. Roads, railways, and ports were constructed to improve connectivity and facilitate trade, integrating Neum into the broader Central European economic system. The Austro-Hungarian period also saw the introduction of new administrative practices, including the establishment of local councils and the implementation of land reforms. These changes not only enhanced Neum's economic potential but also reinforced its role as a link between the Balkans and Central Europe (Bieber, 2006; European Commission, 2018).

The dual legacies of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian rule have endowed Neum with a unique cultural and historical identity. The Ottoman influence is evident in the region's religious diversity and architectural heritage, while the Austro-Hungarian period left a mark on its infrastructure and administrative systems. Together, these legacies have positioned Neum as a bridge between Eastern and Western influences, making it a microcosm of the broader cultural and geopolitical dynamics of the Balkans. (Balkan Insight, 2018).

Impact of Yugoslavia's dissolution on Neum's territorial status

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s had profound implications for Neum's territorial status and geopolitical role. As Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence in 1992, Neum became the country's only access point to the Adriatic Sea. This was a critical asset for the newly independent state, providing a gateway for trade and maritime activities. However, Neum's location also created logistical challenges, as it physically separates the southern part of Croatia's Dalmatian coast from the rest of the country. This geographical peculiarity has led to ongoing disputes between Bosnia and Croatia, particularly regarding transit rights and infrastructure development (Balkan Insight, 2018).

One of the most contentious issues has been Croatia's construction of the Pelješac Bridge, which aims to connect the southern Dalmatian coast with the rest of Croatia while bypassing Neum. While the bridge is intended to improve connectivity within Croatia, it has raised concerns about Bosnia's access to the sea and its territorial integrity. The European Union has played a mediating role in the dispute, emphasizing the need to balance Croatia's infrastructure goals with Bosnia's sovereign rights. The Pelješac Bridge project highlights the complexities of Neum's geopolitical position and its enduring significance in the post-Yugoslav era (Balkan Insight, 2018).

Breakup of Yugoslavia thus transformed Neum into a symbol of both connectivity and division. On one hand, it represents Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspirations for economic independence and access to global markets. On the other hand, it underscores the challenges of navigating territorial disputes in a region marked by historical tensions and competing national interests. Neum's story is a testament to the enduring impact of historical legacies and geopolitical dynamics on small but strategically significant territories.

Neum's Role in Croatia's Connectivity and EU Integration

Pelješac Bridge: A solution to territorial discontinuity

The Pelješac Bridge project has been a cornerstone of Croatia's efforts to align with EU infrastructure standards and strengthen its territorial connectivity. Funded in part by the EU, the bridge symbolizes Croatia's commitment to European integration and its aspirations to become a regional hub for trade and transportation. The project has also been seen as a test of Croatia's ability to navigate complex geopolitical issues while adhering to EU principles of cooperation and respect for neighboring states sovereignty rights (Bieber, 2006; Ramet, 2006).

From Bosnia and Herzegovina's perspective, the bridge has been a source of contention. While Croatia has assured that the bridge will not impede Bosnia's access to the Adriatic, concerns remain about potential restrictions on maritime traffic and the long-term

implications for Bosnia's territorial integrity. The EU has played a mediating role in addressing these concerns, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and mutual agreement between the two countries. The resolution of this issue has been viewed as a critical step in fostering regional stability and advancing the EU's broader goals of integration in the Western Balkans (Ramet, 2006).

Neum's role in Croatia's connectivity and EU integration reflects the broader challenges and opportunities facing the Western Balkans as the region seeks closer ties with the EU. The Pelješac Bridge project exemplifies the interplay between infrastructure development, geopolitical considerations, and EU integration. It also highlights the importance of regional cooperation in addressing shared challenges and advancing common goals (Bieber, 2006; Ramet, 2006).

For the EU, the Western Balkans represent a strategically important region, both economically and politically. The integration of countries like Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and others into the EU framework is seen as essential for promoting stability, prosperity, and democratic governance in the region. However, the process of integration is fraught with complexities, including unresolved territorial disputes, historical tensions, and varying levels of economic development. Neum's unique position as a geopolitical flashpoint underscores the need for innovative solutions and sustained dialogue to overcome these challenges.

Regional Stability and the Future of Neum

Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina's only coastal enclave, occupies a unique position in the geopolitical landscape of the Western Balkans. Its strategic location along the Adriatic Sea has made it a focal point for discussions on regional stability, economic development, and political cooperation. However, Neum's significance extends beyond its geographical attributes; it is deeply intertwined with Bosnia and Herzegovina's internal political divisions, the economic and security dynamics of the Western Balkans, and the broader prospects for regional cooperation or conflict. This chapter examines Neum's role in the context of Bosnia's political framework, its economic and security implications for the Western Balkans, and the potential for cooperation or conflict in managing this critical corridor. (European Commission, 2018).

Neum in the Context of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Political Divisions

Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex political structure, established by the Dayton Agreement in 1995, has created a fragmented governance system divided between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. Neum, located within the Federation, is part of a country where political power is deeply divided along ethnic lines, often hindering effective decision-making and development. This political fragmentation has implications for Neum's development, as

competing interests and bureaucratic inefficiencies can delay infrastructure projects and economic initiatives. For example, the lack of a unified approach to managing Neum's coastal resources has limited its potential as a tourist destination and economic hub. (Balkan Insight, 2018)

Moreover, Neum's status as Bosnia's only access to the Adriatic Sea makes it a symbol of national sovereignty, yet its management is often caught in the crossfire of political disputes between the Federation and Republika Srpska. These divisions are further exacerbated by external pressures, such as Croatia's construction of the Pelješac Bridge, which has raised concerns about Bosnia's territorial integrity and access to international waters. The internal political divisions within Bosnia and Herzegovina thus complicate efforts to leverage Neum's strategic potential, highlighting the need for greater political cohesion and cooperation (Balkan Insight, 2018).

Economic and Security Implications for the Western Balkans

Neum's strategic location has significant economic and security implications for the Western Balkans. Economically, the enclave serves as a potential gateway for trade and tourism, offering Bosnia and Herzegovina access to the Adriatic Sea and, by extension, Mediterranean and global markets. However, the lack of infrastructure development and political coordination has limited its economic potential. The Pelješac Bridge, while improving Croatia's connectivity, has also raised concerns about

Neum's isolation and its ability to compete as a regional trade hub. These challenges underscore the need for regional cooperation to ensure that Neum's economic benefits are maximized for both Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbors (European Commission, 2018).

From a security perspective, Neum's location makes it a critical point of interest in the Western Balkans. The region has historically been a flashpoint for ethnic tensions and geopolitical rivalries, and Neum's status as a border area between Bosnia and Croatia adds another layer of complexity. The enclave's proximity to Croatia, a member of the EU and NATO, further highlights its strategic importance in the context of regional security architecture. Ensuring stability in Neum is therefore essential for preventing conflicts and fostering a secure environment for economic development in the Western Balkans.

Prospects for Cooperation or Conflict in Managing the Corridor

The future of Neum will largely depend on the ability of regional actors to balance competing interests and foster cooperation. The Pelješac Bridge project, while a source of tension, also presents an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. By addressing concerns about maritime access and territorial integrity, the two countries can work toward a mutually beneficial arrangement that enhances regional connectivity and stability. The EU's role as a mediator

and facilitator of dialogue will be crucial in this process, as it seeks to promote integration and cooperation in the Western Balkans (Ramet, 2006).

However, the potential for conflict remains if political divisions and historical grievances are not adequately addressed. Neum's strategic importance makes it a potential flashpoint for disputes over sovereignty, resource management, and infrastructure development. The enclave's future will therefore depend on the willingness of regional actors to prioritize cooperation over competition and to address the underlying political and economic challenges that hinder its development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Neum's role in regional stability and the future of the Western Balkans is multifaceted, reflecting the interplay of political, economic, and security dynamics. As a symbol of Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and a potential hub for regional cooperation, Neum represents both the challenges and opportunities facing the Western Balkans. By fostering dialogue, addressing political divisions, and investing in infrastructure, regional actors can unlock Neum's potential and contribute to a more stable and prosperous future for the region.

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