

A Serbian «common spiritual space» across the Drina river: the modalities of cooperation between Serbia and Republika Srpska since 1995

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Abstract – A Serbian «common spiritual space» across the Drina river: the modalities of cooperation between Serbia and Republika Srpska since 1995

Fragmented after the Yugoslav dissolution, the Serbs of Serbia and Republika Srpska are still claimed by their intellectual and political elites as members of a single national body that transcends the borders. This article will aim at tackling the framework, modalities and outcomes of cooperation between the Serbian Republic and the Bosnian Serb entity in order to preserve the representation of this common nation within a «common spiritual space», through the reading of paradiplomacy.

Key words: Republika Srpska, paradiplomacy, national identity, post-Yugoslav politics

Parole chiave: Republika serba, paradiplomazia, identità nazionale, politiche post-iugoslave

Unity holds a high symbolic, but also discursive and political value within the Serbian national system of representations. Actually, achieving unity embodies historically the ultimate political goal that followed the Serbian elites, from the granting of autonomy to the Principality of Serbia in 1836 to the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in November 1995. It constituted the core of the so-called «Serbian question», which aimed to unite all Serbs located on territories outside the national borders. The Serbian academic Jovan Ili defines it as such after the war of dissolution: «the aspirations, wishes, needs that the maximum possible number of the Serbs in the Balkans and the Danube valley live in one, their own state»¹. However, in 1995, a territorial unification of the Serbs was not an option anymore, since the Dayton Peace Agreement signed to put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina shattered Serbian irredentism. It buried the hopes of the Bosnian-Serb leadership to see Republika Srpska (RS) – their self-proclaimed independent Serbian Republic within Bosnia and Herzegovina – achieving secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina and being integrated within a Serbian-controlled third Yugoslavia.

As Myra Waterburry puts it, the entering of a «post-irredentist» paradigm for states that struggled throughout the 19th and 20th century to bring back into the fold of their national territories the totality of their national population implies the development of a brand new set of policies directed at maintaining close bonds with their nationals located in neighbouring states, without threatening the sovereignty or contesting the borders of those states. In the case of Serbia and RS, this set of policies is enriched by the fact that Republika-Srpka, as a sub-state entity, is able to promote its own interests in Serbia, and does not constitute only a receptacle

¹ J. Ilić, *The Serbian Questions in the Balkans*, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Geography, Belgrade 1995, p. 24.

of Serbia's kin-state policies. Instead of basing this article on a more traditional kin-state/kin-community literature, we chose to tackle a new approach through the prism of paradiplomacy. Defined, in the first occurrence of the term, as «the direct pursuit and on various degrees of an external policy by federated states», it relies on the development of parallel institutions and structures of foreign policy by sub-state entities². Stéphane Paquin goes deeper into the concept and talks of «identity paradiplomacy», that is a «sub-state foreign policy, one of the declared objectives of which is the strengthening of the minority nation within the framework of a federal state or with a decentralized structure»³. While the stakes of the academic debates lay more in assessing whether this paradiplomacy turned out to be a positive input in the foreign policy of the central state or on the contrary brings about destabilisation of the state's projection on the international scene and questions its sovereignty, this article intends to assess the specificity of paradiplomacy when directed toward a state considered as a kin-state. Since 2001 and the signing of the Special Parallel Relations Agreement between Kostunica and Šarović until nowadays, the government of Republika Srpska relied on state and non-state channels, actors and strategies of external action in order to carry out the inscription of the Bosnian-Serb entity within a supraterritorial national body. Therefore, it offers to focus on the identity paradiplomacy led by Republika Srpska in Serbia since the signing of the 2001 Special Parallel Relations Agreement and its most visible ambition: the preservation of a Serb common spiritual space independent of the borders established by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

This article will lean on three types of sources collected during different field-works between 2015 and 2017 in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Belgrade. First of all, it will analyse the institutional archives of the Representation of Republika Srpska in Belgrade, stored at the National Archives of Republika Srpska. Second, it will include the materials and literature produced by organisations close to the Representation and that play a significant part in alimending the so-called Serb common spiritual space, such as *Prosvjeta*. Those archives will be complemented by interviews with officials from those institutions or members of those associations, collected from 2015 to 2017 in Belgrade, Banja Luka and Sarajevo.

First and foremost, we will provide the reader with a critical analysis of the relations that have been developed between Serbia and Republika Srpska since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. It requires to demonstrate that they moved from Milošević's Serbia acting as a guardian for Srpska with the benediction of the international organisations involved in Bosnia, to a more regular form of partnership built around a specific clause of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which is the right for each Bosnian entity to bond Special Parallel relations with the country of its choice.

²P. Soltados, *An Explanatory Framework for the Study of Federated States as Foreign-Policy Actors*, in *Federalism and International Relations. The Role of Subnational Units*, a c. di H.J. Michelmann, P. Soltados, Oxford Press, Oxford 1990, p. 34.

³S. Paquin, *Paradiplomatie et relations internationales. Théorie des stratégies internationales des régions face à la mondialisation*, Peter Lang, New York 2004, p. 73.

Even though Serbia's modalities of action conserved some patron-state features, the relations with RS evolved more towards horizontal partnership in some precise fields of cooperation subsidiary to diplomacy. The core of it lays in the constitution and strengthening of a common Serbian spiritual space through diverse policies directed to maintain the sense of belonging to the same nation on both banks of the Drina River. Several associations and state-agencies dedicate themselves to that purpose, and take part in an intermingled network that sustains by its actions the viability of Serbdom as an imagined community. At last, a closer look at the making and publishing of the book *Istorija Republike Srpske* will be taken, since this case-study exemplifies all the mechanisms and dynamics that animate the will of intellectual and political elites to work hand in hand to build a national era that does not know any border.

The frameworks of the Bosnian-Serb paradiplomacy in Serbia

Up to 2001, Milošević's Yugoslavia exerted a strong guardianship over the Bosnian-Serb former statelet, since it had been invested in Dayton with a role of representing the Bosnian-Serbs. However, the fall of Milošević's regime dramatically contributed to the reconfiguration of the Yugoslav regional policy. The weakened Yugoslav Federation could not afford more displays of power and disruptive policies and subsequently had to normalise its relations with Republika Srpska, in order to honour its obligation to commit to peace in the region. The Agreement on Special Parallel relations would provide an initial frame for expanding bilateral cooperation while remaining respectful of Dayton, and would result in the establishment and sustaining of subsequent organs.

Normalising the RS-Yugoslavia relations within the frame of the Dayton Peace Agreement (2000-)

On the 5th of October 2000, several thousand protesters marched in Belgrade demanding the resignation of Slobodan Milošević. After having the electoral law modified in order to seek a second term, he refused to recognise the victory of his main opponent, Vojislav Kostunica, after the Yugoslav presidential elections of September 2000. On the 7th, he finally resigned and Kostunica became the head of the Yugoslav Federation. The post-Milošević transition led to many structural changes within Serbia's society, economics, and politics. It also led to many reconfigurations in the policy of Serbia toward Republika Srpska. Kostunica proved quite volatile on this question. In 2002, he declared during an official visit in Mali Travnik (RS) that Bosnian-Serbs are «part of the family, temporarily separated from the Serbian motherland»⁴. Moreover, his political party, the DSS (*Demokratska Stranka Srbije*), had been known for maintaining close links with Radovan Karadžić's SDS (*Srpska*

⁴M. Saponja-Hadzic, *Kostunica Remarks Frighten Bosnia*, in «Bosnian Reports», 8th of November 2002.

Demokratska Stranka), and used to praise armed struggle to defend the Serbs outside of Serbia⁵. His polemic declaration in Mali Travnik was denied almost immediately after the outburst it provoked among the Bosnian politicians, some of them having interpreted it as a threat to Bosnia's territorial integrity. However, it led to the thinking that Kostunica's position was rather proactive in that field.

The reality of his involvement proved different, and had even proved so before he pronounced those words. The beginning of his term saw for the first time since 1992 Yugoslavia and Bosnia resuming their bilateral relations, and opening their mutual embassies⁶. In February 2001, Kostunica met with the High Representative to discuss the modalities of Serbia's relations with Republika Srpska, in accordance with Dayton. The High Representative monitored the writing of the Agreement of the Special Parallel Relations, finally signed on the 5th of March 2001. According to a press release from the OHR, the meeting went smoothly, and Kostunica declared himself committed to respecting the peace agreement⁷. Indeed, the agreement contained nothing that might breach the dispositions of Dayton nor encourage the Bosnian Serbs to secession. If it is celebrated in Republika Srpska as «a step closer to the motherland for RS and a step further toward Dayton for BiH», it inscribed the cooperation within a very conventional frame of bilateral relations that did not really differ from what could be signed between two neighbouring countries. It did not differ much either from the 1997 Agreement signed between Milošević and Krajišnik, the first of its kind, which remained unenforced, given that Milošević's policy toward RS was more inclined towards patronising rather than establishing horizontal bilateral cooperation.

The Agreement stipulated that the fields of cooperation will extend to, and only to:

«economy and use of natural resources, planning legislature, privatisation and denationalisation, science and technology, education, culture and sport, health-care and social policy, tourism and environmental protection, information, the protection of freedoms and rights of the citizens in line with the highest standards, and in particular the standardisation and recognition of the right to dual citizenship to the citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republika Srpska, curbing all forms of crime, and defence (education, equipment, joint production etc.) to a degree that is in conformity with the Peace Agreement»⁸.

Consequently, there were several fields of cooperation in which RS and Serbia could strengthen their ties. The Agreement also called for the creation of a Council

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Beograd, *Biblioteka pravnog fakulteta*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Protokol o uspostavljanju diplomatskih odnosa između savezne republike jugoslavije i bosne i hercegovine*, 15th of december 2000.

⁷ Press Releases Archives, Office of the High Representative, High Representative meets FRY President Vojislav Kostunica, 21st of February 2001

⁸ Banja Luka, *Biblioteka pravnog fakulteta*, *Sluzbeni Glasnik Republike Srpske, Zakon of ratifikaciji sporazuma o uspostavljanju posebnih paralelnij odnosa između Zvezne Republike Jugoslavije i Republike Srpske*, 13 June 2001.

for Cooperation between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republika Srpska, in charge of monitoring the implementation of the cooperation.

Without a doubt, the dispositions of the Agreement were not much more concretised than those of the 1997 Agreement. From what we could see in the different type of archives we went through, the Council for Cooperation never properly functioned as such, and was soon replaced by *ad hoc* meetings between RS and Serbia's Prime Ministers or Presidents. The signing of another agreement in 2006 did not change the practice much, and the principle of holding a meeting every year between high dignitaries seems to be sufficient to substitute itself to a proper Council for Cooperation. From the analysis of one of the persons we interviewed, a former RS official who took part in the writing of the agreement, its frame had been conceived as «wide enough to allow several types of actions» and «the vagueness of the disposal was chosen on purpose, in order to let room for interpretation»⁹. As a matter of fact, many actions from Serbia toward RS entered conveniently within the frame of the Special Parallel Relations, even though there were more targeted and occasional rather than part of a long-run strategy of cooperation. Among them can be found some far-reaching operations such as the acquisition of Telekom Srpske by Telekom Srbije, the first telecom company in Serbia of which the State is the major shareholder (58,11%), bought for 646 million euros in 2006¹⁰. The initiative was of course praised in RS, as a proof of the value of the Serbian-Bosnian-Serb connections. In Serbia proper, it was celebrated as a sign of the good health of *Telekom Srbije* and a sign of the economic vitality of Serbia.

More permanent modalities of cooperation had also been institutionalised within the frame of the Special Parallel Relations, which included mostly preferential treatment of Bosnian Serb citizens in Serbia. For instance, Bosnian-Serb students are allowed to benefit from a certificate of equivalence for their high school diploma in order to pursue their academic degree in Serbia rather than in Bosnia. Also, the obtention of Serbian citizenship was facilitated in the first place for Bosnian Serbs, without obligation of residency on the territory of Serbia, and without having to pay registration fees. However, the vice-consul of Serbia in Banja Luka told us that, without implying restrictions in the acquisition of citizenship, it was dramatically delayed because of the amount of request that the consular services had to process. With about 200.000 requests since 2015, in 2017 the average processing time was almost two years for the procedure. However, it must be noted that the Bosnian Serbs do not hold any political rights in Serbia as long as they do not obtain citizenship. Unlike Bosnian Croats, who have seats reserved in the Croatian Parliament, a Bosnian Serb holding Bosnian citizenship cannot vote or be elected in Serbia. This particular point had been an object of debate for many years, and while RS-based political parties advocate for the granting of such rights, Serbian-based political parties do not favour it, except for the most radically nationalist ones (Ser-

⁹ Interview with a former legal expert of the Presidency of Republika Srpska, Banja Luka, 25th of May 2017.

¹⁰ Banja Luka, *Narodna Biblioteka Republike Srpske, Telekom Srbija uplatio prvu tranšu za Telekom Srpske, Danas*, 5th of July 1995.

bian Radical Party especially). Thus, if the Bosnian Serbs and Republika Srpska are recognised as part of Serbia's national community, their eponymous state proves reluctant to encompass them within its political community.

Republika Sprksa integration within Serbia's diaspora politics

Republika Srpska had also been integrated within Serbia's «Strategy for preserving and strengthening of the relations between the home state and the diaspora and the home state and the Serbs in the region»¹¹. The aim of this Strategy is to «seek to provide adequate material, social and political conditions for the successful development and preservation of the Serbian language, Cyrillic script, culture and identity of our citizens and compatriots who live and work outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia»¹².

It intends to institutionalise channels of cooperation that do not rely initially on the state-cooperation, such as local Serbian associations. However, the local national communities are neither powerful nor structured enough to remedy the breakdown of the Serbian national body. Thus, Serbia as their «home state» has to support them. Republika Srpska occupies pride of place in this strategy, since it encompasses half of the «Serbs of the region», that is the Serbs of the former Yugoslav Republics. Moreover, when browsing the document, it is very visible that compared to Serbs from Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo, Bosnian Serbs in Republika Srpska constitute a more reachable audience for Serbia. Given the constitutional status of Republika Srpska within Bosnia and the numerous competencies the Bosnian federal system conferred to the entity, it proves much easier for Serbia to build bonds with Bosnian Serbs on its territory than with, for example, Serbs in Croatia, which are barely entitled to form local associations. The Strategy actually comes as an approbation of what had been done within the frame of the Special Parallel Relation Agreement, targets areas that need to be under even more scrutiny and encourages the responsible Ministries to accentuate their actions:

the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development should encourage investments in Republic of Srpska [...]; the Ministry of Education should continue the process of unifying the two educational system; the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports of Republika Srpska signed a Protocol on Cooperation in the field of sport and youth policy in February 2010 and should actively continue the implementation of this protocol; the Ministry of Culture should pay due attention to improving the culture of the Serbian people in the Republic of Srpska and its connection with the country of origin; the Ministry of Religion should continue to finance

¹¹ Hereafter, «the Strategy».

¹² Министарство вера и дијаспоре, *Стратегија очувања и јачања односа матичне државе и дијаспоре и матичне државе и Срба у региону*, р. 4.

and care for the clergy and monks for their spiritual mission in the function of preserving the national identity, providing assistance to religious, cultural and educational institutions[...] and the restoration of religious buildings¹³.

Putting the emphasis on those fields of cooperation thanks to the Special Parallel Relations Agreements and the Strategy turns out to be highly significant in regard to the presented history of the cooperation between Serbia and RS. It means that Serbia seeks to remain a patron-state for Republika Srpska, but at the same time does not want to concentrate its policies on strictly bilateral diplomatic cooperation with the government of the entity but to widen them to other sectors, with the common point of working for the preservation of a «common spiritual space» between Serbia and Republika Srpska, or to say otherwise, towards the affirmation of a common national identity that resisted the post-Yugoslav borders.

To put it in a nutshell, both the Agreements on Special Parallel Relations and the Strategy for the Serbs of the region offered a wide and facilitating framework for the development and expansion of a Bosnian-Serb paradiplomacy in Serbia, relying on state and non-state channels and networks, all interconnected with each other and aiming at the constitution of a «common spiritual space» among the Serbs on both banks of the Drina.

A Serb common spiritual space as the core of Republika Srpska's paradiplomacy in Serbia

The Bosnian-Serb paradiplomacy has aimed since the beginning in the preservation and strengthening of a «Serb geo-body», to borrow the words of Adis Maksić, and thus remedy the territorial fragmentation of the Serb nation following the breakup of Yugoslavia¹⁴. This explains why most of their initiative has been directed towards Yugoslavia (Serbia from 2006 onwards). We will tackle those paradiplomatic activities and networks first by defining what is at stake with the common spiritual space, and how it translated into dedicated organisations and projects, not always relying on state-channels.

A concept that transcends the borders

The Serbian common spiritual space is a concept that had been forcefully deepened since the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the consecutive territorial partition of Serbs into newly independent Republics. Indeed, it has helped to replace irredentism and territorial unification as the ultimate goals of Serbian nationalism,

¹³ Ivi, p. 36.

¹⁴ A. Maksić, *Ethnic Mobilization, Violence and the Politics of Affect. The Serb Democratic Party and the Bosnian War*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland 2017, p.179.

and to appease spirits regarding the issue of Serbian unity by promoting a borderless, supra territorial and resilient identity. As a matter of fact, the first occurrence of the term that we encountered was located in the proceedings of a conference held in Banja Luka in 2005, entitled «Republika Srpska: ten years of Dayton Peace Agreement»¹⁵. The proceedings shows that the conference was organised along two axes: one questioning the viability of the Bosnian central state, pointing at its weaknesses and intending to foresee what Republika Srpska's future might be within it; a second one focusing on the preservation of the Serbian identity of Republika Srpska within the frame of Dayton, with a special attention placed on how to secure and expand the use of Cyrillic, how to preserve and enhance the Serbian patrimony on its lands, and how to keep on cherishing the «spiritual homeland»¹⁶.

Those two themes are pretty much revealing, since they allow one to understand that the main concerns of the intellectual elites in post-Dayton Republika Srpska and Serbia: accommodating as much as possible with the reintegration of Republika Srpska within an unitary Bosnia and its current status, and its resolute inscription into Serbdom no matter what. According to the eminent Serbian historian Milorad Ekmečić: «it is on religion, language, history, literature, ethnography and all forms of art that the time profundity and territorial wideness of the Serbian spiritual space are resting»¹⁷. It has at all costs to be preserved despite «unfavourable foreign political position after the DPA signed in 1995, and with the impossibility to break the chain of crises that seem endless and that are imposed on us by the Western countries». The common spiritual space that sustains the idea of Serbdom as an imagined community is thus built upon an ethnocultural definition of the Serbian nation, with the advantage that belonging to Serbdom does not equal belonging to a political community. There is no mention of territorial or state unification as long as Serbdom is restricted solely to a common spiritual space based on a shared narratives, language, alphabet, culture, orthodoxy and patrimony. Consequently, it proves a very convenient way to answer the Serbian national question by those who worked so hard to reopen it right before Yugoslavia's breakdown.

Indeed, the fact that as soon as 1998, the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Republika Srpska (Anurs) organised a conference dealing with the Serbian spiritual area, in which well-known scholars of Serbian and Bosnian-Serb origins participated is not anecdotic. Anurs came into existence in 1996, when a founding assembly of scholars from Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia. Among the founding assembly, many members of the Serbian Assembly of Sciences and Arts (SANU) were to be counted. In its manifesto, Anurs proclaims itself as «a symbol of spiritual sovereignty of the Serbian people in Republika Srpska» and commits itself to the «mate-

¹⁵ *The Republic of Srpska, Tenth years of the Dayton Peace Agreement*, a c. di R. Kuzmanovic, D. Mirjanić, Academy of Sciences and Arts of the Republic of Srpska, Banja Luka 2005.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 303.

¹⁷ Ibid.

rial development of the Republic of Srpska, its spiritual enrichment and democratic affirmation»¹⁸.

The proximity between Anurs and its Serbian counterpart is quite visible from the start, especially because most of its founding members were also affiliated with Serbia's academy of Sciences and Arts. Even if this trend tends to diminish in the past few years, as the president of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts has informed us, this double positioning reinforced the hypothesis that Anurs was initially conceived to work on the shaping of the common spiritual space, since it was conceived by intellectuals who had a foot in Serbia and in RS. Some of the founding members of the Anurs, for instance Milorad Ekmečić, were, at the beginning of the 1980's a part of SANU, and thus part of the intellectuals who advocated for the reopening of the Serbian question while Yugoslavia was on the verge of collapsing. Indeed, in a Memorandum that leaked in the press in 1986, the Academicians warned that if Yugoslavia had to collapse, «there are 3.285.000 Serbs who live outside Serbia proper, accounting for 40.3% of their total number. In the general process of disintegration which is taking place in Yugoslavia, the Serbs are the most sorely affected». Consequently, they concluded that «the Serbs would have to look for their own national interest, that is the cultural and political unification»¹⁹. Given that the political, implying territorial, unification failed in Dayton, the cultural unification has to be safeguarded. The roots of the search for the preservation and strengthening of the common spiritual space have to be found here, in the necessity to reinvent a Serbdom that has been fragmented by new state-borders and to anchor it in an immutable and transcendental idea of a supraterritorial Serbian community built around the claims of Serbian national belonging²⁰.

From a intellectual construction to its paradiplomatic implementation

According to Ljubomir Zuković, in order to sustain as best as possible the common spiritual space between the Serbs of Serbia and Republika Srpska, «consciousness of the same national, cultural and religious and civilizational roots, consciousness of common aspirations, goals and interests, regardless of geographic areas in which the Serbs live, and ideological, political and party allegiance»²¹.

Even though belonging to the Serbian common spiritual space is presented as inherent to anyone identifying as a Serb, the consciousness Zuković mentions has to be impelled by a whole set of projects and policies in the relevant fields, such as religion, culture, and education. Behind those modalities of actions, powerful, solid and intermingled networks are at work, and need to be highlighted.

¹⁸ <http://www.gradjenjead.com/Eng/bannercontent.php?bannerID=104>.

¹⁹ Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, *Memorandum SANU*, 1986, p. 73.

²⁰ G. O'Toal, C.T Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 53.

²¹ *The Republic of Srpska, Tenth years of the Dayton Peace Agreement*, cit., p. 309.

Several state or non-state organisations contribute to this construction of a common spiritual space. The most visible of them, the Representation of Republika Srpska in Belgrade, benefits from the advantages of being a governmental organ, and thus has access to a wider range of resources to achieve its missions. Formerly the Bureau of Republika Srpska in Belgrade, it was initially founded in 1992, from what we saw in the archives we dealt with, with a double mission: lobbying to the governments of Federated Serbia and Yugoslavia for a more pro-active support in the context of the on-going conflict in Bosnia and providing a consular mission for the Bosnian Serbs who fled to Serbia. According to its final status decided by a 2002 decree, the aim of the Bureau is to «perform tasks for the needs of the Republic of Srpska in the field of economic, scientific, technical, cultural, social, informative, educational, sporting and other cooperation with subjects in the FR Yugoslavia, as well as the tasks related to the implementation of the Agreement on the establishment of special parallel relations between the Republic of Srpska and FR Yugoslavia»²². A report of activities from 2000 provides a more distinct idea about the organisation of effective work of the Representation in Belgrade. It structures itself around the Secretariat of the Bureau; a sector for business and economic issues; a sector for invalids and veterans; a commissariat for refugees and humanitarian help; a sector for medical supplies and cooperation with the medical organisations in FR Yugoslavia and abroad; Department of the Ministry of Defence; a sector for education, science and culture and a sector for pension and disability insurance²³.

In the perspective of the article, it is interesting to focus on the education and cultural sections, which clearly implement the identity paradiplomacy in the sense that they might contribute to acquire resources that RS lacked in BiH to build its Serb identity²⁴. Indeed, the Sector for Cultural affairs had been in charge, since 2000, to promote Bosnian-Serb initiatives located in Republika Srpska, in order to offer them visibility in Serbia and encourage partnership with associations and institutions of Serbia in the relevant fields. For instance, «it provided assistance in revitalising the late work of the Association of Writers of Republika Srpska, providing assistance through a joint association in Belgrade and preparing the annual assembly after three years of misunderstanding», or «has established cooperation with the majority of managers of cultural institutions in the Republic of Srpska, their performances in Belgrade and cooperation with lower institutions in Serbia and Yugoslavia»²⁵.

As far as education is concerned, the Representation focused on the accreditation and recognition of certificates, diplomas and other documents acquired in educational institutions in Republika Srpska by educative and academic authori-

²² http://predstavnivstvorsbg.rs/predstavnivstvo_rs/.

²³ *Biro Republike Srpske u SRJ, Izvještaj o radu Republike Srpske u SR Jugoslaviju za 2000 godine*, Beograd, May 2000, Archives of the Biro Republike Srpske u SRJ, box 106, Narodne Ahive Republike Srpske, Banja Luka.

²⁴ S.Paquin, *La paradiplomatie identitaire: Le Québec, la Catalogne et la Flandre en relations internationales*, in «*Politique et Sociétés*», v. 23, n. 2-3, 2004, p. 203.

²⁵ *Biro Republike Srpske u SRJ*, cit.

ties in Serbia, in order to encourage students from RS to register in Serbia. More punctually, the project *Srpska's day* in Serbia has a vocation to «strengthen [...] the connections between the Serbian people on both sides of the Drina» by affirming the Serbianess of Bosnian-Serb culture and traditions through an «exchange and presentation of cultural achievements and cultural heritage». Such events intend to demonstrate the unity between the Serbs of Serbia and the Serbs of RS and to validate the claims that they belong to the same imagined community, while there are on the ground very different practices and more local feelings of identification to one or the other of the territories among their respective populations. While the objective of paradiplomacy lies in promoting a given nation whose state is not its national state on the international scene, in the case of Republika Srpska this objective is slightly different. Thanks to its activities in Belgrade, it intends to promote its Serb identity and thus claim its belonging to a supra-territorial Serb geo-body. On a more concrete point of view, it tries to integrate trough culture and education, constitutive of the common spiritual space, to tie its Bosnian Serb population to Belgrade by widening the panels of advantages and opportunity that they might benefit from, and making as such as they feel integrated within the imagined national community.

Around this Representation gravitate many other organisations dedicated to transborder cultural cooperations, which are not governmental organisations but which still benefit from governmental support through direct funding and/or from competent ministries or through funding and/or support from the Representation itself. Among them, the most eloquent example might be found in the cultural association *Prosvjeta*. With its name in English translating into «Enlightenment», it represents a historical organisation, founded in 1902, by Bosnian-Serb intellectuals in order to spread Serbian national consciousness on the territories occupied by the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, by providing the youth with a Serbian education that the occupiers had refused to offer²⁶. Interestingly enough, after having been dissolved under Tito, it reappeared during the Yugoslav dissolution, seemingly to serve the same goal as the one it pursued at its foundation: ensuring that the Serbian national consciousness would survive once again.

The association is very active on the local scale in Bosnia, especially in organising cultural events in Bosnia with other Croat and Muslim national associations in order to encourage exchanges and better mutual understanding between the constitutive peoples²⁷. Most related to our object, an annual Almanac is published each year, and is dedicated to the «literature, culture and social issues». Within are compiled essays and poems dealing with some themes of national interest. In the 2014 Almanac that has been offered to us, most of the papers refer to World War I and its implications for the Serbs as a whole people, and for those of BiH in particular, including the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, *Mlada Bosna* and the Serbian sol-

²⁶ Interview with a full active member of *Prosvjeta*, Sarajevo, 13 May 2016.

²⁷ Ibid.

diers during the war²⁸. While the association does not really have strong ties with the government of Srpska, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia counts it amongst one of its main funders, since it recognised its utility for the Serbs of the region²⁹. We could also notice, during the day we spent at the Belgrade International Book Fair in October 2016, the strong interpersonal bounds between members of *Prosvjeta* and members of the SANU and officials of the Representation of RS in Serbia, which leads us to think that they belong to the same networks active in preserving and promoting Serbian national culture in the post-Yugoslav area.

A paradigmatic outcome: the case of the book Istorija Republike Srpske

A paradigmatic case study of the implementation of a common spiritual space for Serbs on both banks of the Drina is the redaction and publication of *Istorija Republike Srpske*³⁰. This monographic work is the outcome of the cooperation between two scholars of the Universities of Belgrade and Sarajevo, Nenad Kecmanović and Čedomir Antić. The Presidency of RS directly funded the co-authors, and *Službeni Glasnik*, the public publishing house responsible for the Office, printed it. Widely promoted in Republika Srpska by several organs of the government, the promotion of the book in Serbia was operated by the Representation of Republika Srpska in Belgrade. According to all those characteristics, we think that *Istorija Republike Srpske* perfectly exemplifies our point about how the notion of common spiritual space has been translated into concrete actions monitored more or less directly by the government through non-strictly diplomatic channels.

Istorija Republike Srpske hit bookstores on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the creation of RS. The President of *Srpska* Milorad Dodik personally requested the two authors to write an exhaustive history of the entity, and the support of the institutions was not limited to financial support. Indeed, Milorad Dodik, present during the press conference for the launching of the book, declared that the monographs resulted from «a common project carried out by the institutions of Republika Srpska and the two authors»³¹. The extent of the institutional involvement remains unclear to us, since neither the archives we have been through or the interviews we led could not provide us with precise information. However, no matter what, the book has been promoted as a crucial asset for the institutions of the entity as well as a source of pride. Interestingly enough, the project of the book has been impulsed by the Presidency of RS on one hand, but implemented by the government of Serbia. Indeed, the Publishing house *Službeni Glasnik* is a state-owned company that has been publishing since the 19th century the Official Gazette of Serbia. As of recently, it has also published scientific literature that might prove «necessary or of

²⁸ Prosvjeta, *Almanah Prosvjete: godisnjak za književnost, kulturu i društvena pitanja*, SPKD Prosvjeta, Sarajevo 2014.

²⁹ Interview with a full active member of *Prosvjeta*, Sarajevo, 13 May 2016.

³⁰ N. Kecmanović, C. Antić, *Istorija Republike Srpske*, Službeni Glasnik, Belgrade 2016.

³¹ M. Filipovic, *Predstavljena knjiga «Istorija Republike Srpske»*, in «*Novosti*», 5 october 2015.

interest for the work of the leading republic authorities». *Istorija Republike Srpske* then counts amongst them. From the institutional order to the final issuance of the book, its realisation has been state-monitored. Moreover, the Representation of RS in Belgrade was very active in promoting it, making it one of the special events of the Belgrade Book Fair of 2016. The Director of the Representation also took part in several ceremonies dedicated to introduce the book to different high officials or personalities of Serbia. For instance, the bulletin of the Representation of November 2015 reports a visit to the Patriarch Irenej, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to officially offer him a copy of the work³².

The biography and trajectory of the co-authors also represent a quite revealing element for understanding why the publication of *Istorija Republike Srpske* illustrates the dynamics under the construction of a common spiritual space for the Serbs. Indeed, Čedomir Antić and Nenad Kecmanović are close to the spheres of power both in Serbia and Republika Srpska. Kecmanović, born in 1947 in Sarajevo, serves as Dean of the University of Banja Luka and as a Professor of Political Sciences at the University of Istočno Sarajevo. What is worth noting is that he had also served since 1996 as a Senator in the RS Parliament, and has been confirmed in his office in 2009. However, in RS, the senators are not elected, but instead appointed by the President himself, who in 2009 it turns out was Milorad Dodik.

Kecmanović has also been very vocal about his absence of belief in the survival of Bosnia as a unitary country, to the point of entitling his newest book, in which he relates the allegedly structural conflicting dynamics that have weakened Bosnia since Dayton, *Nemoguća Država*, or the *Impossible Country*. Čedomir Antić, on the other hand, is not from a Bosnian Serb background, since he was born and still lives in Belgrade. Nevertheless, he is not any less committed regarding the RS-Serbia relations issue, since he presides *Napredni Klub*, a group of intellectuals and public personalities who claim to follow the steps of the 19th Century Serbian Progressive Party working on the reformation and modernisation of the Principality of Serbia. Every year, the *Napredni Klub* publishes a report on the situation of the Serbs in the region, with the objective of lobbying for a greater investment of the Serbian government into policies directed toward them. While the reports acknowledge that the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those living in RS, hold the most secured position in the whole former Yugoslavia, they also advocate for not easing up Serbia's efforts to guarantee a literal implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and prevent any centralisation that would damage RS³³. Therefore, it becomes visible that there exist strong interconnections between the political power and the people who think and work to materialise this common spiritual space. The porosity between those two spheres leads to assume that such a construction appears on the political agenda of Serbia and Srpska's

³² Representation of Republika Srpska in Belgrade, *Svečano uručenje knjige «Istorija Republike Srpske» Njegovoj svetosti patrijarhu srpskom Ireneju*, 12 November 2015.

³³ Napredni Klub, *ИЗВЕШТАЈ О ПОЛИТИЧКИМ ПРАВИМА СРПСКОГ НАРОДА У РЕГИОНУ*, МСТ Гајић, Belgrade 2012, pp. 10-29.

governments, and might fulfil some precise political goals that might be achieved by classical diplomatic channels.

Istorija Republike Srpske is part of this scientific production that helps in building an official narrative of the Serbs as a people, and of Serbia and RS as a state or a state-to-be. The introductory chapter took the side to present RS as holding statehood from the beginning of its existence in 1992, as to make its statehood predominant to Bosnian statehood. It refers to Republika Srpska as a fully-fledged state, whose status is however not «precisely determined» and whose sovereignty had been armed «by the decisions from USA and EU, for they have to share it with Muslims and Croats». It confers historical legitimacy for a polity who had no existence before 1992, whose territory does not recall any form of political organisation, and held no historical symbolics. For instance, the chronological frame of the book is quite surprising, since we can read the history of RS since the Antiquity, which contributes to inscribe Republika Srpska both in time and space and then disguise the actually *ad hoc* proclamation of the entity, initially encompassing the oblasts that pronounced themselves in favour of Bosnia remaining within Yugoslavia. It also reaffirms the state-like character of RS, of which it has been deprived by Dayton. *Istorija Republike Srpske* also exemplifies the program of serbisation at work in the Bosnian-Serb entity, by conveying the thesis that nowadays RS territory would be historically Serbian.

The work consists in an apologetic narrative of the presence of the Serbs on those lands and intends to demonstrate that, by virtue of the fact, it barely shares strings with the rest of Bosnia. What we consider as a voluntary confusion between the history of Republika Srpska as a polity and the history of the Serbs on its territory aims to maintain itself within an imagined Serbdom. For Serbia, working to implement and promote this type of writing amounts to sustaining its position as the rallying point for the populations who identify themselves and the territories on which they live as Serbian. The sharing of a common identity, the imagined belonging to a common spiritual space for Serbs outside Serbia grants the homeland with several more concrete resources such as privileged trading partners, opportunities for investments, and partnerships in several fields – mostly those identified in the Special Parallel Relations agreements with Republika Srpska³⁴. Furthermore, the promotion of a common spiritual space that resisted the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the subsequent fragmentation of the Serbs allows Serbia to use the populations who adhere to this referential as a political tool, in order to keep an eye on the internal politics of former Yugoslav states by advocating for the rights of local Serbs.

The impossibility to achieve territorial unification after the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the commitment to respect sovereignty and integrity of Bosnia has forced the government of the Serbs in Republika Srpska and Serbia to develop new modalities of cooperation and to rethink their relations into a new frame. The main challenge was to renounce to a territorial and political answer to the Serbian question, and compensate its irresolution through the maintaining of an imagined com-

³⁴ See above.

munity. Its resilience is such as the common core of the Serbian nation, that is culture, language and religion as defined by those who absolutely try to preserve it, had remained intact despite state-fragmentation. What at stake is, as Benedict Anderson puts it, the «image of the communion»³⁵ of all of those who identify themselves as Serbs. Of course, the starting point of such an undertaking is the postulation that no other logic of identification than the national one prevails for the Serbs on both banks of the Drina River, which is something that has to be worked on. This explains why such institutions and organisations, those we quoted in the paper and many others very active in that field but that we did not have time to focus on, operate hand in hand to actually implement the Serbian common spiritual space, which would otherwise remain a theoretical ideal in the writings and discourses of its thinkers.

Our article aims at contributing to the literature on paradiplomacy, and at enriching this new field of diplomatic history by focusing on the specificity of a sub-state entity's paradiplomatic activities toward what it considers as its national state. This state of fact transforms considerably the relations between the entity and its national state. The construction of a common spiritual space becomes thus easier between Serbia and RS, given that politically, the latest enjoys all the resources necessary to implement such a joint project. Indeed, in comparison to the Serbs of Croatia, of Montenegro, of Kosovo or even of the rest of Bosnia, Serbia and Srpska have strengthened through time a more equal form of relations since the entity has had the possibility to present itself more like a partner than a minority to be defended and protected. This particularity constitutes, according to us, a valid reason to contribute by our research to the literature not only on paradiplomacy, but also on states and their co-nationals abroad.

³⁵ B. Anderson, *L'imaginaire national. Réflexion sur l'origine et l'essor du nationalisme*, La Découverte, Paris 1996 p.19