

THE EMERGENCE OF THE BOSNIAK IDENTITY POLITICS  
IN SANDZAK IN THE 1990s

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## Abstract

This thesis sets to examine the institutional and political context that influenced the change of identification of the Sandzak Bosniaks. By analyzing the role of the agents of identification, their identity politics, and mechanisms they implemented, I will reconstruct the context in which the Muslim identification was rejected as inadequate. My main argument is that the Bosniak identification was instead embraced by the Sandzak Bosniaks' agents of identification in order to legitimize political demands addressed to the Serbian authorities. The break-up of Yugoslavia had huge impact on the institutional arrangement of Serbia which was not favorable for the Sandzak Bosniaks. Therefore, different identification emphasizing ethnic distinctiveness was regarded by the Bosniaks' agents of identification as necessary.

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## Introduction

Following the break-up of Yugoslavia, many identity-related questions have been raised by state authorities, political elites, and intellectuals. The emergence of new nation states following the disintegration of Yugoslavia was accompanied by nation and identity building processes, which were integral parts of the nationalist politics pursued by political elites in the former Yugoslav republics. At that moment, differences became more important, and were even fabricated, while communal characteristics were completely sidelined. In such an atmosphere, the identity issue of the Sandzak Bosniaks, was once again in the limelight.

Sandzak is a multi-ethnic region in southwestern Serbia and northern Montenegro with a majority Muslim population. Following Montenegro's declaration of independence in 2006, the Sandzak municipalities have become divided between these two countries. While six municipalities are within Serbian borders (Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Nova Varos, Prijepolje, Priboj), five lie in Montenegro (Bijelo Polje, Rozaje, Plav, Pljevlja, Berane). Even though Sandzak has not existed as an administrative unit since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this name is largely used in public discourse when referring to this Muslim majority part of Serbia/Montenegro.

Bordering with Bosnia and Herzegovina on the west, multi-ethnic Sandzak is inhabited by the largest Muslim community whose identification has been always tightly connected with the Bosnian Muslims. According to the 2002 census, the population of the Serbian part of Sandzak was 235 567 inhabitants, out of which 60% declared

themselves as Bosniaks.<sup>1</sup> They constitute the majority in three municipalities (Novi Pazar 76,28%, Tutin 94,23%, Sjenica 73,34%), while the situation is somewhat different in the following ones (Nova Varos 7%, Priboj 23%, Prijepolje 41%).<sup>2</sup> Compared to the 1991 census, there was a decrease in the total number of the Sandzak population, as a result of the state repression and discriminatory policies towards the Sandzak Muslims in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Sandzak was established as the Novi Pazar sanjak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, once this region was conquered by the Ottomans in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it was incorporated in the Bosnian sanjak, later *vilayet*, where it remained in the next four centuries. During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims were identifying themselves as Bosniaks or Turks, thus making distinction between them and the Ottoman Turks who were categorized as Osmanli or Turkics. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire, established its own symbolic system of categorization that labeled the Bosnian and Sandzak Muslims as a separate group.

The occupation of Bosnia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878, and its military presence in Sandzak, marked the beginning of the new circumstances which influenced the identification of the Bosnian and Sandzak Muslims. The “Muslim” identity category became the dominant one, while certain actors were advocating for some other identity politics. Moreover, during this period the concept of “Bosnianhood” was introduced by

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will use interchangeably both Muslim and Bosniak term, depending on the time period and context I am dealing with. The difference between these two identity terms will be explained further in the thesis.

<sup>2</sup> The first available results of the 2011 census show that 229,382 people live in Sandzak. The percentage of Sandzak Bosniaks and Serbs is still not available. accessed May 21, 2012, [http://media.popis2011.stat.rs/2011/prvi\\_rezultati.pdf](http://media.popis2011.stat.rs/2011/prvi_rezultati.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> According to the 1991 census, 440,000 people lived in Sandzak. 53% declared themselves as Bosniaks and 45% as Serbs.

the Austro-Hungarian authorities, in order to achieve cohesion of the Bosnian multi-ethnic population.

The Sandzak district was eventually abolished in 1912 when it became the integral part of Serbia and Montenegro, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. During this period Muslims had the status of a religious community, what was accepted by the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, a political party representing the interests of Muslims. The fact that Muslims did not develop into distinct ethnic group was visible due to the existence of different identity politics pursued by the various factions.

Following the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, the critical issue was the political and legal status of the Bosnian and Sandzak Muslims. It was resolved by the 1968 and 1971 constitutional reforms, which officially introduced “Muslim” nation in Yugoslavia. From then on, the difference was made between “Muslims” with capital “m” that referred to national belonging of Muslims living in Bosnia and Sandzak, while Muslim with small “m” was related with someone’s religious affiliation (Albanians). This categorization was accepted by the main Muslim political actors. However, the fact that religious affiliation was accepted as the main marker in of the nominal identity, made the situation with the self-identification of the Muslims highly problematic, as many Muslims were atheists or were not practicing Islam.

As Yugoslavia was approaching its end, identity politics became a crucial issue. Political entrepreneurs were re-interpreting the meanings of being Serb or Croat in order to increase the homogenization of their nations and justify the collective actions they intended to undertake. The Sandzak and Bosnian political actors were not an exception.

Debates about the right name for the Muslim national group were initiated by the Muslim political representatives and intellectuals with the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia. Eventually, a Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals was held in Sarajevo in 1993, where it was agreed that the most acceptable replacement for the “Muslim” identification would be the “Bosniak” one. This decision was confirmed the same year by the Bosnian Assembly, while the Sandzak political parties officially embraced the new “Bosniak” identification in 1996.

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the reasons that lie behind the change of the identification of the Sandzak Muslims, now Sandzak Bosniaks. Why did this new identification become predominant among the Sandzak political actors at the beginning of the 1990s? What was the role of the Sandzak Bosniak political elite and the other relevant actors in this process? Which mechanisms did they implement in order to present this new identification as the most suitable for the Sandzak Bosniak community? And how much have the Belgrade and Sarajevo policies towards Sandzak contributed to this change? These are the questions that this thesis aims at answering.

I will argue in my analysis that the Bosniak identification was accepted by the Sandzak political actors in order to legitimize their demands addressed to the Serbian authorities. Once the change of the institutional and political setting occurred, the status of the Sandzak Bosniaks in the new Yugoslavia became crucial issue. Rejecting the idea of being under the control of the nationalist regime in Serbia, the Sandzak political actors had to base their requests for autonomy and “special status” on a different identification. The Bosniak option provided them with the opportunity to claim that the Sandzak

Bosniaks constitute a distinct ethnic and political group in the new Yugoslavian/Serbian institutional arrangement, and thus are entitled with certain rights.

In order to fully understand what led to this change in identification, the analysis of the context in which this shift occurred is of huge significance. The emergence of nationalism, disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian war influenced significantly the policies and decisions made by the Sandzak agents of identification. Also, while trying to answer the above-mentioned research questions, my focus will be on the role of political entrepreneurs in evoking certain identities and thus guiding the identity building process in a certain direction. Analyzing the relationship between the Sandzak politicians on the one side, and Sarajevo and Belgrade authorities on the other one, I will attempt to reconstruct the context in which the Sandzak political actors decided to embrace Bosniak identification. Additionally, the analysis of mechanisms (referendum on autonomy, the adoption of several documents, attempts to internationalize the Sandzak issue) that the Sandzak agents of identification (the SDA of Sandzak, the Muslim/Bosniak National Council, the Mesihat of Islamic Community of Sandzak) implemented in order to make “Bosniak” understanding, interpreting and framing of the experience dominant, will be necessary for understanding the way new identification took place.

In an attempt to prove my hypothesis, I decided to include the historical background that will indicate the importance of the context and the roles of different identifiers in the process of identification and boundary making. It will also provide an insight into the identity building of the Sandzak Muslims that is necessary for understanding the meanings of “Muslim” and “Bosniak” labels. Moreover, as the identification of the Sandzak Muslims is closely connected with the Bosnian Muslims, due to various



historical, cultural and political reasons, it will be necessary to incorporate, in many parts of the thesis, the Sandzak Muslim community into the Bosnian one.

As Sandzak has been mostly neglected in the scholarly literature so far, my aim is to provide an insight into the identity issue of the Sandzak Bosniaks by applying theoretical approaches of Rogers Brubaker, Frederic Barth and Richard Jenkins. Even though Sandzak stretches both Serbia and Montenegro, I will only focus on the Serbian part of Sandzak, while the Montenegrin one will not be analyzed for the purpose of this thesis.

The methodology used in this thesis includes the analysis of primary sources, such as legal documents, declarations or memorandums, NGO reports, and newspaper articles. Also, various books and scholarly articles dealing with the identity of the Bosnian and Sandzak Muslims, and the break up of Yugoslavia will be used in building up my main argument.

## Theoretical framework

The works of several authors will be helpful in answering my research questions. These are – Rogers Brubaker (*Beyond Identity, Ethnicity Without Groups*), Frederic Barth *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, and Richard Jenkins *Rethinking Ethnicity. Arguments and Explorations*.

While applying the theoretical approach of Rogers Brubaker regarding identity reification, I will not deal with identity as a “category of practice” that is “used by ‘lay’ actors in some everyday settings to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others.”<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, I will try to explain the “identity politics,” or how is identity “used by political entrepreneurs to persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) ‘identical’ with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines.”<sup>5</sup>

In order to analyze “identity politics,” emphasis should be put on “the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the “political fiction” of the “nation” – or of the “ethnic group,” “race,” or other putative “identity” – can become reality at one particular moment.<sup>6</sup> The focus on these processes and mechanisms can help us in reconstructing to whole process of identification and the shift that occurred in the case of the Sandzak Muslims/Bosniaks.

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<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederic Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000): 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 10.

Taking into account that ethnicity and identity are not fixed, but a process and dynamic, indicates the importance of the context. The chapter dealing with the historical background provides exactly an insight into the identification and categorization of the Sandzak Muslims that was changing over time depending on different political and institutional settings.

Also, it is necessary to determine who initiated this shift, and who the agents of identification and categorization are. In the beginning of the 1990s, Serbian authorities were obviously unsuccessful in creating a new system of categorization regarding the Sandzak Muslims that was supposed to be accepted on the ground. Therefore the process of governance did not provide satisfying results for the state authorities in this case.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Sandzak political elite was far more successful in “identity politics,” managing to legitimize this shift among the Sandzak Muslim population and, at last, make the Bosniak identification institutionalized with the adoption of the 2002 Minority Law.

The theoretical framework of Frederic Barth regarding boundary making can explain the acceptance of the Bosniak identification by the Sandzak Muslims, which included the assertion of certain differences with an aim of creating distinct political and ethnic group in relation to the Serbian nation. As Barth claims, these differences are not necessarily objective, but the ones that are regarded as the most important in the process of generating ethnic groups and the boundary creation. According to Tajfel, the characteristics of the group become important “in relation to the perceived differences

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<sup>7</sup> See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

from other groups and the value connotations of these differences.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, dichotomization “implies a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest.”<sup>9</sup>

Barth also indicates the importance of the context for identification by pointing out that identity might change with the change of circumstances, as “different circumstances favour different performances.” If the performance of the group, based on its identification, is inadequate in the new context, the change in identification is imminent. In order to measure the level of success of the group’s performance, two components must be taken into account - the performance of the others and the available alternatives.

When it comes to the performance of the other group, Tajfel also suggests that if the intergroup relationship in status or power is perceived as illegitimate, this comparison can be the basis for the change of the intergroup behaviour, in this case the change of the identification.<sup>10</sup>

As the performance of the group depends on the control over some material and symbolic resources, if this control is missing, change in identification is highly possible to occur. The rejection of the Muslim identification in the 1990s can be explained by Barth’s claim, “revision only takes place where the categorization is grossly inadequate – not merely because it is untrue in any objective sense, but because it is consistently unrewarding to act upon, within the domain where the actor makes it relevant.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Tajfel, “Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison,” in *Human Groups and Social Categories*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 258.

<sup>9</sup> Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*, (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Tajfel, “Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison,” 266.

<sup>11</sup> Barth, “Introduction,” 30.

Relying on Barth's theoretical framework, Richard Jenkins confirms that when talking about ethnicity emphasis should not be put on its content, but on the social processes that create and change the boundaries and identification of certain ethnic groups. Therefore, in my analysis I will not deal with the content of the Bosniak/Muslim identity ("What does it mean to be a Muslim or Bosniak"), but with the factors, processes, mechanisms, "the agents of change" that influence the redefinition of the boundary and consequently the identification.

Jenkins makes a useful distinction between the internal (self-identification) and external (imposed by others) definition. This is always a two-way process that occurs across the boundary, so "all collectivities can be characterized as, to some extent, defined, and thus socially constructed, in both ways."<sup>12</sup>

Also, Jenkins indicates that an identity has two forms: nominal (the name) and virtual (an experience), meaning that ethnic identities are more "practical accomplishments" than "static forms." Even if the name of an identity is not changed by categorization, external definition influences the meaning of the name, and thus the performance of the group. In the case of the Sandzak Muslims/Bosniaks, a different internal definition was supposed to change the experience of the group that resulted from the Muslim categorization in the new circumstances.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking ethnicity: arguments and explorations*, (London: Sage, 1997), 55.

# Chapter 1 – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Identification of the Sandzak Muslims under the Ottoman Empire

While considering identity politics of the Sandzak Bosniaks in the 1990s, a historical overview of their political and legal status in the Ottoman Empire is necessary for understanding the way institutional arrangements, in this case the system of millets, influenced the identification and categorization of the Sandzak Muslims in that particular context.

After the fall of the Serbian state in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Novi Pazar (in Turkish *Yenipazar*) became an integral part of the Bosnian sanjak in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> Its status changed in 1790, when the Ottoman authorities established the Novi Pazar sanjak as a separate administrative unit. However, in the 1860s it came again under the rule of the Bosnian vilayet (province)<sup>14</sup>, while retaining its administrative and territorial status as sanjak unit. The fact that the Novi Pazar sanjak was integrated into the Bosnian administrative unit for several centuries influenced the identification of the Sandzak Muslims, who perceived both themselves and the Bosnian Muslims as members of the same group.

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<sup>13</sup> Novi Pazar, meaning “new market” was founded in 1461, near the old Serbian town Ras.

<sup>14</sup> Bosnian vilayet (province) was divided into 7 sanjaks, and sanjaks into kazas (districts). These administrative units mostly had Slavic names thus reflecting the ethnic structure of the unit. On the other hand, some other towns or units were named in Turkish, such as Yenipazar. In Justin McCarthy, “Ottoman Bosnia, 1800 to 1878,” in *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Mark Pinson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 56.

Encompassing various religions, ethnicities and cultures, the Ottoman Empire was faced with the necessity of formulating a policy aimed at integrating religiously and ethnically diverse groups. The establishment of a framework that would deal with the Muslim and non-Muslim population living in the Ottoman Empire was an important element in strengthening sovereignty over its territories and implementing its governmental policies. This framework is considered to be a *millet system*, a self-governed legal-administrative unit based on religious affiliation. The existence of millets was supposed to enable peaceful coexistence of various religious and ethnic communities within the empire, so as the Ottoman's control over its multireligious and ethnically diverse society.

As Islam was the main source of legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire, it crucially shaped the Ottoman state policies. Jews and Christians were allowed to practice their religion as long as they recognized Islam as the supreme religion and accepted to live in a Muslim state.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities was regulated by pact called *dhimma*, which enabled non-Muslim communities to practice their religion under certain conditions, so as to enjoy a degree of communal autonomy. As Kemal Karpat says, "millet system emphasized the universality of the faith and superseded ethnic and linguistic differences without destroying them."<sup>16</sup>

With the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans, the process of mass conversion to Islam began. The islamization was particularly widespread in Bosnia, including Sandzak,

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<sup>15</sup> As "People of the Book" received God's message before Muhammad, this message was incomplete. Therefore, Jews and Christians were considered to be different and inferior to Muslims. In Donald Quateart, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 175.

<sup>16</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, "Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of the Plural Society*, eds. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York, London: Holmes and Meier, 1982), Vol. I, 143.

so as Albania. Three types of conversion could be distinguished during the five-century-long rule of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans: “voluntary,” forced conversion, and the system of devshirme.<sup>17</sup> The conversion was gradually implemented and was a large-scale phenomenon. The majority accepted Islam with an aim to improve its economic and social status which was not favourable for the non-Muslim population.<sup>18</sup> Some of the restrictions non-Muslims had to face were related to the clothes they could wear, locations available for building the place of worship, usage of public baths, they were not allowed to ride horses etc. Moreover, non-Muslims could not pursue a career in the Ottoman administration, submit lawsuits against Muslims, or testify against a Muslim in court. Enforcing these rules, the Ottomans “maintained difference and distinction,” “not only as instruments of discipline but useful markers of community boundaries.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the conversion to Islam enabled them to enjoy certain privileges that were available only to the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire - to be exempted from paying poll tax, to be allowed to own property, and pursue career in the Ottoman administration.

The structure of the millet system in the Ottoman Empire had its impact on the identification of Muslims living in Sandzak. First, by putting emphasis on the religious affiliation, the millet system made Islam the main identity marker of the Sandzak Muslims. Also, the fact that the millet administration was responsible for tax collection, maintenance of public order, monitoring of religious institutions, education, justice and social security, made this self-governing units “parallel institutions” in the Ottoman

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<sup>17</sup> See Florian Bieber, “Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2000): 21-24.

<sup>18</sup> See Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London: Papermac, 1994), 64-65.

<sup>19</sup> Quateart, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, 175.



Empire.<sup>20</sup> Every millet had leaders who, according to Karen Barkey, were “boundary managers who acted as intermediaries between the state and religious community.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) immensely changed the way the millet system was functioning. The introduction of the Ottoman citizenship, the establishment of secular courts, unification of the administration undermined the autonomy of millets and the importance of religious boundaries. The Sandzak Muslims felt endangered by the reforms Ottoman administration was implementing, as they were supposed to change the existing landowning system that entitled them with numerous privileges, and diminish their political influence on the local level. In this period, some type of “local patriotism”<sup>22</sup> emerged, not being linked to a religion, but to geography and shared language. The change of circumstances obviously influenced the way certain group was perceived from the inside and the outside. As Peter Mentzel wrote, the significance of Islam “varied significantly over time and among different groups.”<sup>23</sup>

The institutional settings in the Ottoman Empire influenced the identification of the Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims, who started perceiving themselves as a distinct group, differing from the rest of the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire. Nominal identification was Bosnjaci (Bosniaks) or Turci (*Turks*, meaning “adherents to Islam”), while the Ottoman Turks were called Osmanlija (*Osmanli*) or Turkusi (*Turkics*).<sup>24</sup> The language they spoke was called Bosnjacki (*Bosnian*), and was written in Arabic script or

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<sup>20</sup> Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule 1354-1804* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1977), 273.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Barkey, “Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol 19, No. ½, (2005), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Francine Friedman, “The Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (With Reference to the Sandzak of Novi Pazar): Islam as National Identity”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2000), 167

<sup>23</sup> Peter Mentzel, “Introduction: Identity, Confessionalism, and Nationalism”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2000), 9.

<sup>24</sup> See Francine Friedman, *The Muslim Slavs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (With Reference to the Sandzak of Novi Pazar): Islam as National Identity*, 168; Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 54.

in Bosancica (the Bosnian or Croatian recension of Cyrillic script).<sup>25</sup> The Ottoman authorities had their own categorization, which was not official but symbolic, and that regarded Bosnian Muslims as a separate group, differing from the Anatolians. According to Friedman, “the Ottoman period may have encouraged the consolidation of the Bosnian Muslim interests and decline of the Ottoman Empire may have fostered an understanding by Bosnian Muslim landowners that their best interests lay with local patriotism rather than with continued loyalty to the Porte.”<sup>26</sup>

Even though internal and external definition of the Bosnian Muslims existed during the Ottoman Empire, their identity politics did not result in some project of “national liberation” that was present in the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The boundary between different religious communities was transformed gradually into the one that separated distinctive ethno-religious communities. Cultural traits became “distinctive markers of group differentiation, a sort of ‘code’ to assert one’s allegiance and identity that carried great significance for the individuals who displayed them.”<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, while the increasing ethnic consciousness among Serbs and Croats was quickly politicized and mobilized in the nation identity building process, nationalist movements and programs were not articulated by the Bosnian Muslim elite under the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>25</sup> Ivo Banac, “Bosnian Muslims: From Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Post-Communist Statehood, 1918-1992,” in *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Mark Pinson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 133.

<sup>26</sup> Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: denial of a nation* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 46.

<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: a tradition betrayed* (London: C. Hurst, 1994), 83.

## 1.2 The impact of the Austro-Hungarian institutional arrangement on the identification of the Bosnian Muslims

In 1875, a peasant uprising started in Bosnia. Even though its initial platform dealt with the necessity of improving social conditions in the Empire, nationalist demands were quickly articulated by the uprising leaders. The rise of the Serbian political nationalism in the Bosnian Orthodox community was reflected in the final goal of the uprising – unity with Serbia. War activities soon expanded, as Serbia and Montenegro declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1876. With the help of the Russian troops, Serbia and Montenegro managed to achieve military progress. The war ended in 1878 at the Berlin Congress, when the Great Powers reached an agreement regarding the power redistribution on the Balkans. Serbia and Montenegro were granted independence, and Austro-Hungary was allowed to establish military control over Bosnia and Sandzak. However, the Sultan was still considered as the formal sovereign of Bosnia until its annexation by Austro-Hungary in 1908.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to Bosnia, which was not only under military, but also under civilian control of Austro-Hungary, Sandzak remained being administered by the Ottoman Empire as part of the province of Kosovo. Novi Pazar sanjak was of special strategical importance for Istanbul, as it connected directly Bosnia and the rest of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, being still controlled by both the Empire and Austria, meant that unification of Serbia and Montenegro would be prevented. Following the 1909 agreement between Austro-Hungarian and Turkish authorities, Austro-Hungary established full

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<sup>28</sup> After the occupation of Bosnia, many Muslims left Bosnia for Sandzak, as they feared the Christian rule.

control over Bosnia, and simultaneously withdrew from the Novi Pazar sanjak. Sandzak was again under the complete control of the Ottoman Empire, but only briefly, until the Balkan Wars. Even though Sandzak was not integrated in Bosnia any more, a short overview of this period is important for achieving a full picture of the development of the Muslim/Bosniak identification.

Occupation of Bosnia was received with enormous disapproval by the Bosnian Muslims. Coming to Bosnia, the Austro-Hungarian troops were faced with military resistance that was crushed in the autumn of 1878. In order to avoid competing claims over Bosnian territory by Austria and Hungary, the Habsburg Emperor decided that Bosnia should have been ruled by the Joint Ministry of Finance, therefore placing it under the imperial institutional control.

Following the occupation, the Ottoman administrative system was changed slightly and gradually, as Austro-Hungary was satisfied with its governing results. Ottoman laws mostly remained in force, while sharia courts were still responsible for numerous civil cases. However, Bosnian Christians were immensely dissatisfied with the fact that the Austrian authorities decided not to change the social structure they had encountered in Bosnia. Taking into account the resistance of the Bosnian Muslims in 1878, the new authorities did not want to provoke another rebellion by implementing reforms that would undermine the privileged status of the Bosnian Muslim landowners.

Therefore, some minimal institutional changes were undertaken by the Austrian authorities, in order to reduce the influence of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup> One of them was

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<sup>29</sup> The critical issue was, how to deal with 3 religious communities living in Bosnia. According to Donia and Fine, the approach of the Austrian authorities had 3 phases. In the first one 1878-1903, the policy was the encouragement of the role of the religious authorities, and at the same time prevention of political activism. The idea of *bosnjastvo* will be initiated right in this period. The second phase 1903-1914, political

the establishment of the local religious authority, the Reis-ul-ulema, that was not under the control of Istanbul. However, this was not largely accepted by the Bosnian Muslims, who considered this move to be imposed by the Austrians. As Mark Pinson put it, debates over the transformation of the Ottoman/Muslim institutions “functioned as a kind of incubator for Bosnian Muslim national identity both in the discussions among the Muslims and their struggles over the role and scope of the old Muslim institutions or new ones that appeared in this period, such as political parties.”<sup>30</sup>

Once being a part of Austro-Hungary, the Bosnian Muslim elite raised certain issues, which were presented as highly important for their community. The respect of Muslim practices and institutions, sanctioning of conversion, the perseverance of the old landowning system were some of them. Military conscription in the Austrian army was strongly opposed by the Muslims, who still considered themselves as Ottoman subjects. Although under the Ottoman rule Bosnian Muslims made distinctions between them and the Ottomans, they had favourable position due to the Islamic religious affiliation. This was not the case in Austro-Hungary, meaning they had certain concerns regarding their status and privileges they had used to enjoy in the Ottoman Empire.

The change of context influenced internal definition of the Bosnian Muslims. As “Turk” identification was perceived as an expression of opposition by the new authorities, Muslim intellectual elite embraced a new identity category, Muslim one.<sup>31</sup>

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activism became more tolerated, while in the third one 1914-1918, covering the war period, was marked by the repression of the Bosnian Serbs because of they role in the Sarajevo assassination. See Donia and Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: a tradition betrayed*, 97-101.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Pinson, “The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian Rule, 1878-1918,” in *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Mark Pinson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>31</sup> Steven L. Burg and Paul Shoup, *The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina: ethnic conflict and international intervention* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E.Sharpe, 1999), 19; According to Banac, even though the majority of the Muslim intellectual elite considered themselves as members of the Croatian elite, they mainly avoided to

More importantly, having religious affiliation as the main identity marker turned to be insufficient for the Muslim elite in that period. While under the Ottoman rule, religion provided them with numerous privileges, this seemed not to be enough in the new circumstances, taking into account strong nationalist sentiments encouraged among Serbs and Croats. Both Serbian and Croatian nationalist movements regarded Muslims as members of their group, islamized Serbs or Croats, thus rejecting the claims that Bosnian Muslims form distinct ethnic group. Consequently, the transformation of the Muslim identity, from the mainly religious one to the one based on ethnicity, was inevitable. The period of the Austro-Hungarian rule over Bosnia was marked by the political awakening of the Bosnian Muslims.<sup>32</sup>

Some Muslim intellectuals decided to diminish the long-maintained religious boundaries and pursued different identity politics by introducing a new category – “Serbs of the Muslim faith” or “Muslim Serbs”. As both Serbian and Croatian nationalism was flourishing in that period, certain Muslim intellectuals thought that this identity politics would help them in uniting with the Serbian authorities and creating a strong bloc that would have been able to resist powerful Austro-Hungary. On the other hand, there were those who accepted “Croatian orientation”, as a result of the education system that was largely administered by Croats. However, these two tendencies had limited scope.

Also, the state attempted to impose its own system of categorization. Benjamin von Kallay, Finance Minister (1882-1908) and governor of Bosnia, introduced the concept of “Bosnianhood” (bosnjastvo). This policy represented the Austrian attempt to handle

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openly declare themselves as either Croats or Serbs, not wanting to undermine Muslim unity. See Banac, “Bosnian Muslims: From Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Post-Communist Statehood, 1918-1992,” 134.

<sup>32</sup> Pinson, “The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian Rule, 1878-1918,” 89.

religious and ethnic diversity in Bosnia, and prevent the emerging nationalist movements that might have challenged the Austrian authority in Bosnia. By encouraging Bosnian patriotism, this concept was supposed to embrace all three dominant communities in Bosnia. Although this regional identity was not accepted by the Bosnian inhabitants and their elites, due to already strong ethnic movements, the policy is important as it introduced again the term Bosniak.

### 1.3 The JMO as an agent of identification in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes /The Kingdom of Yugoslavia

In 1918, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established. Sandzak was incorporated into the new state and divided between Serbia and Montenegro. Nevertheless, long-awaited Serbian-Montenegrin common border and the access to the Adriatic Sea was finally achieved for the Serbian authorities.<sup>33</sup> The Sandzak political representatives were not satisfied with this outcome, as they clearly asked for unification with Bosnia or the establishment of the Sandzak autonomous province.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This was the result of the 1913 Treaty of Bucharest which ended the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). In 1913 approximately 80% of the Sandzak population were Muslims; However, between April and June 1914 approximately 16 500 Muslims emigrated from the Montenegrin part and around 40 000 from the Serbian part of Sandzak to Turkey. See The International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES), *Sandzak – A Region That is Connecting or Dividing Serbia and Montenegro*, October 2005, <http://www.ifimes.org/default.cfm?Jezik=En&Kat=10&ID=220&Find=sandzak&M=10&Y=2005> (accessed May 8, 2012); Altogether, between 1913 and 1941 around 300 000 Muslims emigrated to either Bosnia or Turkey due to policy of forced migration implemented by the Yugoslavian authorities. See Milan Andrejevich, “The Sandzak: A Perspective of Serb-Muslim relations,” in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, ed. Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki (London: C. Hurst, 1997), 173.

<sup>34</sup> See about the Conference in Sjenica in Muhedin Fijuljanin, “Sandzak i Sandzacki Bosnjaci” [Sandzak and the Sandzak Bosniaks] in *Sandzak multietnička regija: zbirka domacih i međunarodnih dokumenata o*

The management of national, religious and cultural diversity proved to be difficult task for the state authorities, leading to constant disagreements over the most suitable institutional arrangement. While the Serbian led government and the ruling Karadjordjevic dynasty were for the highly centralized state, Croatian and Slovenian politicians were advocating for decentralization and the introduction of a federal system. Therefore, this whole inter-war period was marked by instable parliamentary coalitions and objections to the Serbian political domination in the Kingdom.

Following the establishment of a South Slavic state, “peasant jacqueries” were widespread in Croatia and Bosnia, targeting wealthy landowners, including Bosnian Muslims. Therefore, in order to protect their interests, the Bosnian Muslims had to become more politically active in the new state and loudly voice their demands. This was possible with the formation of the “Yugoslav Muslim Organization” (JMO) in Sarajevo in February 1919. The party’s political platform was based on two main goals – protection of the Bosnian Muslims regarding the implementation of the agrarian reform and maintenance of the Bosnian autonomy and Muslim religious and cultural institutions.

The head of the party was Mehmed Spaho who mostly attracted the support of the middle class. The Bosnian Muslims were quite united in supporting JMO on the elections throughout the whole inter-war period indicating “the solid foundations of Bosnian Muslim identity and the stability of Muslim voting patterns.”<sup>35</sup> The JMO was considerably important for the Bosnian Muslims acting usually as a “swing group in coalition politics” and supporting “the centre against centrifugal tendencies.”<sup>36</sup>

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*regionalizmu* [Sandzak multiethnic region: collection of domestic and international documents about regionalism], ed. Esad Dzudzevic (Tutin: Centar za Bosnjacke studije, 2010), 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> Donia and Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: a tradition betrayed*, 124-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.



In 1921, the JMO decided to support the newly formed government and vote for the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution, after being convinced by the ruling party that their demands would be fulfilled. The government guaranteed the equality of Islam, the autonomy of Muslim religious and educational institutions, including sharia courts, not radical implementation of the agrarian reform, and the maintenance of Bosnia as a separate administrative unit and respect of its historical borders and territorial integrity.<sup>37</sup>

The issue of the agrarian reform (1919-1931) was extremely important for the state as it was supposed to end the institution of serfdom. The JMO agreed with the government about the compensation and the way of implementation of these reforms, in order to minimize negative economic and social consequences for the Muslim families. However, the transformation of the agrarian relations immensely affected small landowners reducing them to poverty. Therefore, this reform caused huge dissatisfaction among the JMO members.

Another problem the JMO had to face occurred in 1929, when the King Alexander suspended Parliament, annulled the constitution, banned all political parties and associations based on religious or ethnic grounds. The new name of the state was the “Kingdom of Yugoslavia”. With an aim of suppressing regional identities, the king abolished provinces and divided Yugoslavia into 9 banovinas - administrative units that were not based on ethnic boundaries, but geographical characteristics. Consequently, Bosnia disappeared as a province being divided among 4 banovinas, in which the Bosnian Muslims became minorities. Interestingly, the leader of the JMO, Mehmed

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<sup>37</sup> Banac, “Bosnian Muslims: From Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Post-Communist Statehood, 1918-1992,” 134.

Spaho, supported the introduction of this royal dictatorship. After the assassination of the king Alexander, the JMO supported every government till the beginning of the WWII.

During the inter-war period, Bosnian Muslims still had many burning issues regarding their identification. Not only that both Serbian and Croatian political elites were still trying to persuade the Bosnian Muslims to declare themselves as either Serbs or Croats, but the Bosnian Muslims were still far from creating a distinct ethnically based group. Therefore, the Bosnian Muslims were regarded as a religious community in the Kingdom, and this categorization was accepted by the founders of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization, the party that was overwhelmingly supported by the Bosnian Muslims.

Even though the majority of the Bosnian Muslim elite accepted its religious denomination, there were those who insisted on its ethnically based identity and regarded the Bosnian Muslims as an ethnic group. This claim was rejected by the other elites, who considered the recognition of a Bosnian Muslim nation as contradiction with Islam.<sup>38</sup> Also, there were those, mostly urban and landowning classes, who embraced either “Muslim Croat” or “Muslim Serb” identification for political reasons.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, during this inter-war period, several factions advocated different identification options depending on their perception of the context. According to the leading Muslim party JMO, cooperation with the state authorities was the best way for the protection of the Muslim interests. Moreover, they obviously did not have any objections to the state categorization that classified them as religious community. On the other hand, Muslim term became secularized due to many changes happening in the Yugoslav Kingdom. The

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<sup>38</sup> Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: denial of a nation*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 165.

abolition of the caliphate in Turkey and the influence of secular tendencies in the society, affected its content, which stopped having exclusively religious connotations.<sup>40</sup>

Even though the initial goal of the JMO was to establish itself as the main representative of all the Muslims living in the kingdom, it did not happen, primarily affecting the Sandzak Muslims who still regarded themselves as closely connected with the Bosnian Muslims. Therefore, the JMO gradually focused only on those living in Bosnia, not being able to encompass interests of other Muslims outside this province. Also, as the state authorities considered the Sandzak Muslims as Serbs of muslim faith, the JMO was asked to limit its activities to only those Muslims living in Bosnia.<sup>41</sup> This limit was visible in the case of the establishment of the main religious authority. While the Muslims of Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia were administered by the Reis-ul-ulema in Sarajevo, the Serbian and Montenegrin Muslims fell under the jurisdiction of the Reis-ul-ulema of Belgrade.<sup>42</sup> However, in 1930 all the Yugoslav Muslims were under the authority of the Belgrade Reis-ul-ulema.

#### 1.4 Development of the system of categorization in the SFRY

During the WWII, Yugoslavia was divided into several zones. Bosnia was incorporated into “Independent State of Croatia” which had German and Italian zones of occupation, while Serbia was occupied by Germany. The Bosnian Muslims were regarded by the Croatian Ustasha regime as Croats, so they were not the object of the

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<sup>40</sup> Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: denial of a nation*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

ethnically motivated violence committed by the Croatian authorities during the war. Once again the state categorization concerning the Bosnian Muslims changed.<sup>43</sup>

As for the Sandzak region, it was occupied by both Germany and Italy, and divided into two zones. Even though it was granted an autonomy status from 1943 to 1945 by the Partisans, following the end of the WWII, Sandzak autonomy was abolished. Therefore, the remaining question was, what political and legal status the Sandzak Muslims would be entitled to.

Even though the 1946 constitution guaranteed the freedom of belief, religious institutions encountered numerous problems in the following 20 years, while certain religious practices were forbidden.<sup>44</sup> Repressive measures were frequently implemented in Sandzak in that period by the security chief, Aleksandar Rankovic. For this reason, many Sandzak Muslims immigrated to Turkey.<sup>45</sup>

The 1946 Constitution recognized 5 nationalities: Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. The Bosnian Muslims were not included, because the Communist Party regarded them as a separate group, which had no national identity. Therefore, on the first after-war census in 1948, Muslims could not declare themselves as Muslim nationality, but as Muslim Serb, Muslim Croat or “Muslim undetermined”.<sup>46</sup>

On the next census in 1953, instead of “Muslim undetermined”, a new category was introduced – “Yugoslav undetermined”. This was the outcome of the party’s strategy to slowly introduce new Yugoslav nationality, which was supposed to weaken the strength

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<sup>43</sup> See Marko Atilla Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: from the Middle Ages to the present day* (London: Saqi, 2007), 203.

<sup>44</sup> Wearing a veil was banned, courts of Islamic sacred law were not allowed to continue with their activities etc. See Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 195.

<sup>45</sup> Certain areas of Istanbul are still inhabited by the migrants from Sandzak.

<sup>46</sup> Donia and Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: a tradition betrayed*, 176.

of the Serbian and Croatian nationalism, and offer new category of identification for the Muslims.<sup>47</sup>

However, this policy of Yugoslavism was abandoned in the beginning of the 1960s, due to the Party's decision to support open expressions of national belonging. Consequently, on 1961 census, new category was added – “ethnic Muslim”. The process of recognition of Muslims as a separate nation started in 1968. According to the 1968 and 1971 constitutional amendments, the Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims were granted the status of a Yugoslav nation. These constitutional reforms were later confirmed in 1974 Yugoslav constitution that officially introduced “Muslim” nation in Yugoslavia.<sup>48</sup> From then on, difference was made between “Muslims” with capital “m” that referred to national belonging of Muslims living in Bosnia and Sandzak, while Muslim with small “m” was related with someone's religious affiliation (Albanians). Furthermore, the recognition of the Muslim nation made clear distinction between Muslims on the one side, and Serbs and Croats on the other one, who used to regard Muslims in Bosnia and Sandzak as members of their own nations. The reason that lies behind this Tito's decision to introduce new Yugoslav nation, could be found in his pragmatic foreign policy goals. In the 1960s Yugoslavia was one of the initiators of Non-Alignment Movement, which consisted of mainly Muslim countries, so the status of Muslims in Yugoslavia gained huge political importance.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>48</sup> The Constitution made distinction among – “Nations of Yugoslavia” who constituted a majority in one of the republics (Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims, Serbs and Slovenes); “Nationalities of Yugoslavia”, numerous national minorities (Albanians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Hungarians, Italians, Roma, Romanians, Slovaks and Turks); and “Other Nationalities and Ethnic Groups” (Austrians, Germans, Greeks, Jews, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Vlachs and Yugoslavs).

First census after this constitutional change was in 1971, when Muslims had for the first time opportunity to declare themselves as “Muslims in the sense of nationality”. In the 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses, the majority of Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims declared themselves as Muslims.<sup>49</sup> However, the term “Muslim” was extremely problematic. Even though, the emphasis in this term was not on the religious affiliation, which was nevertheless included, the very connotation with Islam made the situation with the identification of Muslims highly complicated. Many Muslims were atheists or were not practicing Islam, so there was a paradox existing in this term.

All in all, the official recognition of Muslim nation was a huge success for many Muslim intellectuals, who were insisting on the ethnic distinctiveness of the Bosnian Muslims. They were the leaders of the secular movement for the “Muslim nationalism”, which coexisted in that period with the Islamic one.<sup>50</sup> While the secular movement, led by Atif Purivatra, was primarily concerned with improving the political status of Muslims in the institutional structure of the Yugoslavia, Alija Izetbegovic and his supporters were dealing with the importance of Islam in the society. This second tendency will become dominant during the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia.

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<sup>49</sup> James Lyon, “Serbia’s Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival,” *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 9, No 1 (2008), 75.

<sup>50</sup> Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 200.

## Chapter 2 – THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM

Following the death of Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia was facing with huge economic problems and increasing inflation. It seemed that the existing system, multinational communist federation, had to go through some changes in order to deal with the upcoming economic crisis. However, political elites from the Yugoslav republics could not agree about the best solution for the growing economic problems that were threatening to deteriorate good inter-republic and inter-ethnic relations. Therefore, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, which operated at the level of federation, was becoming weaker, while the republic leagues of communists were getting more autonomous by advocating policies different from the federal ones.

The 1974 Constitution of Yugoslavia obviously could not provide a good basis for the policy that would have been supported by all of the republics. This constitution transformed Yugoslavia into an “ethnic confederation” based on six republics, each of them having one dominant nation (Bosnia was the exception). All of the republics were entitled with more power, what was not the case with the previous constitutions, while the federal authorities became weaker. This federal arrangement, accompanied with the dominant ethnic aspect of the republics, led to a “territorial competition over resources and power.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, all the economic issues had a potential to become easily politicized, and even ethnicized, what happened in the 1980s.

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<sup>51</sup> Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia: 1962-1991*, quoted in Florian Bieber, “Serbia in the 1990s: The Case of an Ethnic Semi-Democracy,” in *The Fate of Ethnic Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, ed. Sammy Smooha and Priit Jarve (European Center for Minority Issues, 2005), 171.

When the economic crisis started, control over resources became the critical issue. As not all of the six federal units were equally developed, republic elites were not willing to accept the same burden of the responsibility for the introduction of the austerity measures, that were highly necessary in that situation. Taking into account the existing institutional arrangement favouring republics, dominant political actors on the republic level easily transformed their policies into nationalist ones, that were, in their opinion, the most suitable for the competition over resources.

Therefore, new nationalist political strategies were developed by politicians and intellectuals who still belonged to the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, but not for long. Communism was not any more a sustainable tool for achieving greater economic and political power, as the preservation of this state ideology meant increased degree of centralization, what in the circumstances of the economic crisis was not looked with the approval by the republic political elites. In order to prevent the change of the institutional arrangement that would have led to centralization, so as the income redistribution advocated by the central authorities, nationalism was embraced by the political actors on the level of republics, and used to discredit the communism and the unified Yugoslav state.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, new dominant narrative had to be created by the political actors with an aim of justifying new political strategies, and the adoption of the new political and economic goals.

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<sup>52</sup> Robert M. Hayden, "Recounting the Dead. The Rediscovery and Redefinition of Wartime Massacres in Late and Post-Communist Yugoslavia," in *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson (Santa Fe:NM, 1994), 168.



## 2.1 The rise of nationalism in Serbia

Contrary to the nationalist political elites in Slovenia and Croatia, that saw decentralization, and later independence, as the only solution for the economic and political crisis, the Serbian nationalism was advocating for the increased centralization and the preservation of the common Yugoslav state. Anthony Oberschall would say that the reason for this policy was the fact that almost a quarter of Serbs did not live in Serbia, but in the other Yugoslav republics, making “a centralized Yugoslav state a guarantor of Serb security.”<sup>53</sup>

Apart from this, there were certain problems in the very functioning of the republic of Serbia that were immensely used in the nationalist rhetoric. While the other Yugoslav federal units received almost total powers republics were entitled to, Serbia had difficulties in decision-making process, due to its strong autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, for the nationalist elite in Serbia, more decentralization was out of question.

1987 was a turning point for the Serbian authorities and the Serbian Communist Party. Conservative political elite, led by Slobodan Milosevic, organized a putsch in the Serbian Communist Party, thus consolidating its power and transforming the party into a nationalist one. From that point, the Serbian leadership was completely relying on nationalist mobilization. According to Vesna Pesic, “the Serbian leadership’s new vision of state-building now relied on mass nationalist movements that coalesced around the

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<sup>53</sup> Anthony Oberschall, “The manipulation of ethnicity: from ethnic cooperation to violence in Yugoslavia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (2000), 987.

<sup>54</sup> During the 1967-1971 period, Vojvodina and Kosovo acquired significant powers, including the vote in federal and republican forums. Therefore, Serbia was unable to completely control its own territory, as it was frequently contradicted by the autonomous provinces in federal forums.

idea of re-dividing the Yugoslav space and creating a powerful, all-encompassing Serbian state.”<sup>55</sup> Newly proclaimed political aims had to be justified by the identity-building process that envisioned the homogenization of the Serbian nation, by making clear boundaries between Serbs and the other Yugoslav nations, primary Croats. Communist narrative was now being replaced by the strong nationalist one.

The creation of the new narrative included either fabrication or manipulation of the historical facts. Numerous references were especially made to the WWII, and ethnically motivated violence that occurred in those years, but that was later suppressed by the official communist history. The role of media appeared to be of huge importance for the nationalist regime in those years, as propaganda war was becoming immensely intensified in both Serbia and Croatia. As Milan Milosevic put “for the war to become thinkable, trust that had steadily grown since the WWII, despite some tensions between the ethnic groups, had to be rooted out first, and confusion, doubt and fear implanted instead (...) tv studios proved to be colossal laboratories of war engineering.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the establishment of control over main television and radio networks was one of the first political moves by Milosevic and his allies.

New nationalist political elite personalized in Milosevic became omnipresent. It seemed that they completely controlled the army, the police forces, juridical system, media. As coercive power was not enough, nationalist elites had to construct a cultural framework that would have spread the meaning of the social order and create and

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<sup>55</sup> Vesna Pestic, “Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis,” *Peaceworks* No.8. (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2005), 18. <http://www.usip.org/publications/serbian-nationalism-and-origins-yugoslav-crisis> (accessed April 27, 2012)

<sup>56</sup> Milan Milosevic, “The Media Wars: 1987-1997,” in *Burn This House. The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia*, ed. Jasmina Udovicki and James Ridgeway (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1997), 109.

maintain the status quo that suited the ruling elite. Consequently, a false picture of reality was created, by presenting the other nations and ethnicities as potential threats to the political system of Serbia and Yugoslavia, the identity of Serbs, and their very existence. By emphasizing differences and diminishing similarities, inter-ethnic cooperation was being discredited, thus strengthening boundaries among the Yugoslav nations.

## 2.2 Manipulation of “ethnic threat”

Manipulation of “ethnic threat” became the most useful political tool for Milosevic and his allies. Firstly, the new nationalist elites presented the Albanian majority living in the Kosovo autonomous province as an ethnic threat, claiming that their aim was to separate Kosovo from Serbia. This issue was also present in the nationalist rhetoric in 1989, when the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo was celebrated. Migration of Serbs from Kosovo was once again presented as the “ethnic cleansing” perpetrated by Albanians who were controlling most of the institutions in Kosovo due to its majority.

The rising tensions among the Yugoslav republics, resulting from the “permanent crisis”, influenced the replacement of target in the nationalist rhetoric of Milosevic and his supporters. As Yugoslavia was slowly disintegrating along its republican lines, the issue of the Serbs living in Croatia and Bosnia became increasingly important on the political agenda of Milosevic. The break-up of Yugoslavia would have meant that Serbs living in the newly formed countries would have had the status of minority, and would have been separated from its kin-state by the international border. Therefore, the

authorities of Slovenia, Croatia and later Bosnia, who were advocating for more decentralization and emphasizing the possibility of independence, were perceived as a threat to the Serbian population living together in one country.

Milica Bakic-Hayden would say that the Orientalist discourse became dominant in that period.<sup>57</sup> Re-establishment of some old boundaries and the creation of new identities was taking place. By evoking certain historical events, nationalist elites were presenting an “idealized history” that was supposed to legitimize the boundary-making process. Conceptions of other ethnicities were simplified, making generalizations dominant perception in public discourse – all Croats were Ustashas and all Serbs Chetniks.

When it comes to Muslims, they were regarded as fundamentalists, while a conversion issue was once again emphasized. As Bakic-Hyden put it, a “betrayal syndrome” was the basis that shaped the attitude of the Serbian nationalist elite towards Muslims.<sup>58</sup> The fact that Muslim agents of identification insisted on their ethnic distinctiveness, made both Serbian and Croatian nationalists determined to exclude Muslims from their national strategies.<sup>59</sup> However, according to Robert Hayden, this exclusion was not only motivated by the Islamic religious affiliation of Muslims. If their religion was Buddhism, “the Serb and Croat rhetoric of exclusion used against them would probably reveal the same Orientalism” that was used in portraying Muslims.<sup>60</sup> The process of homogenization of nations had to be realized.

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<sup>57</sup> See Milica Bakic-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No.4 (1995)

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 927.

<sup>59</sup> Robert M. Hayden, “Muslims as ‘Others’ in Serbian and Croatian Politics,” in *Neighbors at War: Anthropological Perspectives on Yugoslav Ethnicity, Culture, and History*, ed. Joel M. Halpern and David A. Kideckel (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 121.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 3 – BEING BOSNIAK OR MUSLIM IN THE 1990s

The first multi-party elections in all of the Yugoslav republics were held in 1990. Nationalist parties won majority as a result of the strong nationalist mobilization in all of the republics. Following the elections, Slovenia (November 1990) and Croatia (May 1991) organized referendums, on which the independence option was voted by the majority. On 25 June 1991 both republics adopted Declarations of Independence, while the European Community's official recognition of their independence came in January 1992.

On the other hand, the Serbian leadership was strongly against the secession of Slovenia and Croatia, emphasizing that their declarations of independence were not in accordance with the international law. Additionally, the state propaganda was reminding all the time that the WWII atrocities might have repeated once again, taking into account that the Serbian population would have remained helpless in the independent Croatia. Therefore, the legal status of the Serbian population in Croatia and later Bosnia was of huge importance for the Serbian authorities. At that moment, the future of Bosnia was still uncertain, due to its multinational structure.

With the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, huge institutional changes were taking place, influencing both internal and external definitions of ethnic and national groups. On the one hand, the newly formed states were trying to establish its authority through the implementation of various tactics and procedures. The Foucault's process of governmentality was taking place aimed at strengthening the power of the state. One of the tactics of the Serbian authorities was the system of categorization which was not

accepted by the Sandzak Muslims. On the contrary, the Sandzak political entrepreneurs adopted different identity politics which led to the change in identification of the Sandzak Bosniaks.

### 3.1 The Sandzak Muslims' agents of identification

#### 3.1.1 The formation of the SDA of Sandzak – the main agent of identification

With the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, a new party appeared in the Serbian political scene claiming to represent the interests of the Sandzak Muslim population. This was the Party of Democratic Action of Sandzak (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije Sandzaka – SDA Sandzaka*), which was originally established as branch of the Bosnian SDA. Obviously, the Bosnian and Sandzak Muslim political actors thought that Muslims in Bosnia, and the other Yugoslav republics, should have united in voicing their political claims.

Therefore on 26 May 1990 a Party of Democratic Action was formed in Sarajevo. The founder was Alija Izetbegovic who was previously known for his emphasis on the importance of Islam in public life, and who was regarded by the communist regime as “Islamic fundamentalist.”<sup>61</sup> However the SDA stated in its founding declaration that its interest is “the maintenance of Yugoslavia (...) a Federal state in its present Federal borders” and “the maintenance of Bosnia-Herzegovina as the common state of Muslims,

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<sup>61</sup> In these accusations references were usually made to the 1983 trial in Sarajevo, when 13 people, including Izetbegovic, were charged with “hostile and counter-revolutionary acts derived from Muslim nationalism.” Izetbegovic was sentenced to 14 years, but he was released in 1988. See Malcolm *Bosnia: A Short History*, 208.

Serbs and Croats.”<sup>62</sup> The declaration also stated that the SDA’s the main goal was to represent all the Bosnian Muslims in Yugoslavia, no matter in which Yugoslav republic they resided at that moment.

However, while advocating for the preservation of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Bosnia, the SDA was, at the same time, emphasizing religious distinctiveness of the Bosnian Muslims. The harmonization of both of these principles in practice seemed to be difficult, what caused certain inter-party tensions.<sup>63</sup> Disagreements appeared between the two main SDA figures – the SDA president Alija Izetbegovic and the SDA vice-president Adil Zulfikarpasic, who was not satisfied with “the party’s increasingly conservative and fundamentalist policies.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, Zulfikarpasic and Muhamed Filipovic decided to leave the SDA and found a new party – Muslim Bosniak Organization (*Muslimanska Bosnjacka Organizacija* – MBO).<sup>65</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the SDA formed branches in the other Yugoslav republics. On 27 July 1990 Sulejman Ugljanin and Rasim Ljajic established a Serbian branch of the SDA in Novi Pazar. The fact that the SDA of Sandzak was incorporated in the Bosnian political party from the beginning, shows the existence of many political, ideological and organizational connections that certainly influenced the functioning and the decision-making process of the SDA of Sandzak. As the collapse of Yugoslavia seemed to be

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<sup>62</sup> Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: from the Middle Ages to the present day*, 342.

<sup>63</sup> See Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 219.

<sup>64</sup> See *The Bosniak: Adil Zulfikarpasic in dialogue with Milovan Djilas and Nadezda Gace* (London: C. Hurst, 1998), 141.

<sup>65</sup> Although the “Muslim” term was included in the name of the party, the main aim of the Zulfikarpasic was to “lay foundations of a non-sectional politics, in which people would vote on their choice of political programmes (liberal, socialist or whatever) rather than voting simply to assert their national identity”. See Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 219; Lyon writes that Adil Zulfikarpasic and Fikret Abdic, were advocating for “moderate form of Bosniak nationalism that focused primarily on defining the identity and interests of Bosniaks within a common South Slav state.” See Lyon, “Serbia’s Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival,” 77.

inevitable, the Bosnian political actors thought that Muslims in Bosnia, and the other Yugoslav republics, should have united in voicing their political claims, what was confirmed by the Bosnian SDA founding declaration. However, following the Declaration of independence of Bosnia in 1992, the SDA of Sandzak was no longer a branch of the Bosnian party, but a separate political organization. Despite this fact, their mutual cooperation and coordination of political activities was visible in the next couple of years.

The first disagreements in the SDA of Sandzak happened the same year, so as in the case of the Bosnian SDA. Kasim Zoranic, the vice president of the SDA of Sandzak, decided to leave the party and form the Liberal Bosniak Organization of Sandzak, while some of the SDA's founding members decided to join him. Also, the cooperation between Ugljanin and Ljajic was not smooth from the beginning, due to their different approaches to the resolution of the Sandzak question.<sup>66</sup> While Ugljanin was strongly advocating for the autonomy of Sandzak, refusing any dialogue and cooperation with the Serbian authorities, Ljajic was more for achieving autonomy through participation in the Serbian political institutions. Furthermore, Ugljanin's final aim was not only the autonomous Sandzak, but even independence of this region, or unification with Bosnia in the case of Bosnia's independence.<sup>67</sup>

However, those differences became evident only later when Ugljanin left Serbia. In 1993, Sulejman Ugljanin was charged for unconstitutional political activity and terrorism, as he, according to the state authorities, worked on the secession of Sandzak. In order to

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<sup>66</sup> See Lyon, "Serbia's Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival," 78.

<sup>67</sup> Ugljanin was associated with one right-wing nationalist Islamic faction of the Bosnian SDA – Hasim Cengic and Omar Behman.



avoid court proceeding, Ugljanin decided to leave the country immediately.<sup>68</sup> While being in exile, he spent most of his time either in Turkey or Bosnia. Obviously, during this period, Ugljanin and Ljajic could not agree on further activities of their party. The inter-party communication deteriorated after Ugljanin's decision to, while being in exile, disband the party's councils. Therefore, in 1995 Rasim Ljajic decided to leave the SDA of Sandzak and form his own party, the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP). Despite the cleavage that happened in the SDA of Sandzak, this political party remained the main political force, and Sulejman Ugljanin the most powerful political actor in Sandzak throughout the 1990s, making the SDA of Sandzak the leading agent of identification regarding the Sandzak Muslims.

### 3.1.2 The Muslim National Council of Sandzak (MNVS)

The SDA of Sandzak decided to establish the Muslim National Council of Sandzak (*Muslimansko nacionalno vijece Sandzaka – MNVS*) on 11 May 1991 in Novi Pazar. While Sulejman Ugljanin, the head of the SDA of Sandzak, was elected as its president, the council consisted of several other parties and organizations – the Muslim Bosnian Organization, the Renaissance Society, the Merhamed Association, the Reform Forces of Plav and Bijelo Polje, and the Association of Sandzak Writers.<sup>69</sup> The fact that this institution had the “Muslim” denomination in its name indicates that the Sandzak political actors were still not considering the possible change in nominal identification.

<sup>68</sup> Apparently, the state knew about the Ugljanin's plan to leave Serbia, as he had military police escort to the border. Lyon, “Serbia's Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival,” 87.

<sup>69</sup> Andrejevich, “The Sandzak: A Perspective of Serb-Muslim relations,” 175.

Due to political developments in Slovenia and Croatia, which led to their declarations of independence in June 1991, it was obvious that Yugoslavia would soon cease to exist. Therefore, the Sandzak political actors thought that it was the right moment to position themselves before the final collapse of Yugoslavia. One of the problems which appeared following the process of disintegration was the legal status of the Muslim population in Serbia. The break-up of the country meant that some new minorities would have appeared in the new states, which previously used to have the status of the constitutive nation. Consequently, this would have meant different power distribution, which would have not been favourable for the Sandzak Muslims.

The MNVS was one of the agents of identification that was supposed to, by claiming to represent all the Sandzak Muslims, put forward political requests regarding the status of the Muslim majority living in Sandzak. There was high probability that change in state categorization would occur, thus influencing the relationship between the state and the Muslim community. As this change was perceived as illegitimate by the SDA of Sandzak, requests for autonomy appeared immediately.

It was clear what was going to be a political platform of the MNVS with the publication of its first declaration. The MNVS stated that obviously “Greater Serbian ideologues” wanted “physical extermination” of the Sandzak Muslims.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, by presenting itself as the only legitimate representative of the Sandzak Muslims, the MNVS declared that autonomy would be proclaimed in the case of the break-up of Yugoslavia, while “in the case of civil war” “a headquarter(s) for defense” would be established,

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<sup>70</sup> Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, *Diplomacy on the Edge: Containment of Ethnic Conflict and the Minorities Working Group on the Conferences of Yugoslavia* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), 225.

annulling the authority of the federal institutions.<sup>71</sup> The adoption of this declaration indicated direction the SDA of Sandzak and the other organizations gathered in the MNVS intended to follow.

The 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the SDA of Sandzak, celebrated two months later, was an opportunity for confirmation of the proclaimed goals. However, Sulejman Ugljanin stated in his speech that in the case of the break-up of Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Sandzak would become new republics. Connotations with Kosovo and announcements of possible secession were quite frequent in further Ugljanin's statements, making unclear to the public what was the main political aim of the SDA of Sandzak. On the same occasion, Ugljanin stated that Sandzak Muslims speak Bosnian, not Serbo-Croatian language, and write in Latin, not in Cyrillic script, emphasizing cultural dividing line between the Serbs and the Sandzak Muslims. Clear boundaries were drawn in political, institutional and cultural spheres. Even though the nominal change in identification was not initiated either by the Serbian authorities or the Sandzak political entrepreneurs, new context was about to influence the performance of the Sandzak Muslim group. Therefore, from the SDA's point of view, status of the Sandzak Muslims had to be determined as soon as possible. The referendum on autonomy was just one of the mechanisms that was supposed to send the message to the Serbian authorities that no negotiations were possible regarding the status of the Sandzak Muslims, and thus their identification.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 225 -226.

### **3.1.3 The Mesihat of Islamic Community of Sandzak**

Before the break-up of Yugoslavia, only one Islamic Community existed on the federal level, with its seat in Sarajevo. This body was the main authority for all the Islamic communities functioning on the level of republics. However, once the federal units started declaring their independence, the federal Islamic community could not function any more. Bosnia and FYR Macedonia established their own supreme Islamic bodies on the national level, the Riyasets. However, for the Sandzak Muslims this turned to be not an easy task, as they could not agree whether Belgrade or Sarajevo should have been proclaimed as their main spiritual authority. Taking into account what was happening in the beginning of the 1990s on the relation Sandzak – Sarajevo, this connection immensely influenced the formation of the new Islamic community. Even though the Serbian Islamic community, led by Hamdija Jusufspahic, already existed with its seat in Belgrade, the Sandzak religious leadership did not want to come under the authority of this body. Once the Bosniak identification was officially embraced by the Sandzak political actors one month prior the establishment of the Mesihat, Sarajevo could have been regarded as the only spiritual center for the Sandzak Bosniaks.

Therefore, in October 1993, another important agent of identification, the Mesihat of Islamic Community of Sandzak was established in Novi Pazar by Sulejman Ugljanin. The Mesihat recognized the Riyaset of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the main Islamic authority, while the Reis-ul-Ulema Mustafa Cerić was recognized as reis of the Sandzak Bosniaks. By appointing Muamer Zukorlić as mufti of

the Islamic Community of Sandzak, Ugljanin aimed at establishing complete control over all Sandzak Bosniaks' institutions.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.2 Serbia's minority politics

The break-up of Yugoslavia led to creation of “new minorities” who used to have the status of constitutive nations in the institutional arrangement of the SFRY. This was the case with the Sandzak Muslims whose legal status changed with the collapse of Yugoslavia, thus influencing their performance as a group. Not only that their legal status changed in a new institutional setting, but the nationalist framework constructed and imposed by the Serbian authorities was little concerned with minority rights. Moreover, the authoritarian regime of Milosevic was generally marked by violation of the basic human rights and freedoms. Therefore, for the SDA of Sandzak, the regulation of the status of the Sandzak Muslims was a priority.

On 28 September 1990, Serbia adopted a new Constitution, which had several references to the minority rights.<sup>73</sup> However, neither 1990 Serbian constitution nor the 1992 Yugoslav one mentioned which are the recognized national minorities in Serbia and

<sup>72</sup> The relationship between Ugljanin and Zukorlic changed after the return of the SDA leader from exile in 1996. The fact was that Zukorlic became highly influential figure as mufti of the Islamic Community of Sandzak, what Ugljanin did not look with approval. As Kenneth Morrison put it “Zukorlic opposed Ugljanin's overtly political use of Islam as a political tool and Ugljanin objected to Zukorlic's growing political influence.” See Kenneth Morrison, “Political and Religious Conflict in the Sandzak,” (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Balkans Series: 2008), 9. [www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../08\(13\)KM.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/.../08(13)KM.pdf) (accessed December 12, 2011)

<sup>73</sup> This constitution guaranteed the right to public use of the national minorities' languages and alphabets, so as the right of the national minorities to education in their own language. See The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia of 1990 <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/untc/unpan019071.pdf>

the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. A law regulating the status of national minorities was not adopted throughout the 1990s, thus leaving the Sandzak Muslims, and the other national minorities, in certain legal vacuum. The main institutional change introduced by this constitution was related with the functioning of the 2 autonomous provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo. Their authorities were substantially reduced by this constitution, thus concentrating the power in the government. These centralization tendencies were not a good basis for the realization of the SDA's autonomy plans.

Although the Sandzak Muslims had representatives in the parliament in that period, such as Mahmut Memic<sup>74</sup>, their participation in the decision-making processes was minimal. Political parties were not willing to co-operate with them, as it was thought that the coalition with the minority party would deter certain number of the Serbian voters.<sup>75</sup> However, Milosevic's readiness to cooperate with the minorities' representatives varied from time to time.

### 3.2.1 State violence

When the war in Bosnia broke out in 1992, there was a possibility that war activities might have crossed the border and spread into Sandzak. The fact that Sandzak was inhabited by the Muslim majority whose main political leaders gathered in SDA of Sandzak were actively advocating for autonomy, and even secession and unification with Bosnia, increased the possibility of wide-scale violence initiated by the Serbian

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<sup>74</sup> Mahmut Memic was a deputy in the Serbian parliament and Assistant Minister for Human Rights and Minorities in a federal government. He did not support the SDA's autonomy requests by pointing out that without the agreement of Serbs, any autonomy would not be possible.

<sup>75</sup> Bieber, "Serbia in the 1990s: The Case of an Ethnic Semi-Democracy," 178.

authorities. Moreover, the easiest way for the Serbian paramilitaries to cross the Serbian/Bosnian border was actually in Sandzak. The fact that their bases were located in this part of Serbia, and tolerated by the Serbian police and army, increased the possibility of ethnic cleansing in this region.

Even though Sandzak was considerably affected by the situation in the neighboring Bosnia, “mass displacement, looting, or large-scale killings” were not eventually encouraged by the state authorities.<sup>76</sup> As James Ron explained, the responsibility of the state is higher in the center (Sandzak) than on the periphery (Bosnia), what prevented the authorities from using excessive force in the case of Sandzak. Milosevic knew that the implementation of the policy of ethnic cleansing in Sandzak would definitely be harshly sanctioned from the international community. However, ethnic harassment and intimidation became the common level of the state-tolerated violence. Most of the crimes happened in towns and villages close to the Bosnian border during the searches for illegal weapons, while other places, including the largest town Novi Pazar, were quite peaceful during the war.<sup>77</sup>

However, 3 mass kidnapping/murder cases did occur in that period – Sjeverin, Strpci and Pljevlja (in Montenegro). It was thought that these crimes were committed by the Bosnian Serb troops, as the abducted were later killed on the territory of Bosnia. Obviously, this could not be done without the help of the Serbian police or army, who allowed paramilitaries and Bosnian Serb soldiers, to move freely across the Serbian/Bosnian border during the war.

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<sup>76</sup> See James Ron, *Frontiers and ghettos: state violence in Serbia and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

<sup>77</sup> See Safeta Bisevac, “Bosniaks in Sandzak and Interethnic Tolerance in Novi Pazar,” in *Managing Multiethnic Local Communities in the Countries of Former Yugoslavia*, ed. Nenad Dimitrijevic (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2000), 387-398.

The first serious crime committed in Sandzak, and which attracted wide public attention, happened in Sjeverin. On 22 October 1992 16 passengers were abducted from the Priboj-Rudo bus line, by the Serbian paramilitary formation “Avengers.” All of the abducted passengers were Sandzak Muslims, who were taken afterwards to Visegrad (Bosnia), where they were physically abused, and then killed at the bank of the Drina river.

Another serious crime happened in February 1993, when the same paramilitary formation abducted 18 Muslims and 1 Croat at the Strpci railway station on the Belgrade-Bar line. The pattern that followed was the same one like in the Sjeverin case – the abducted were taken to Visegrad, tortured and killed.

One month later, the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, visited Sandzak promising that state authorities would do everything in their power to find and return the abducted passengers. According to Milosevic, the crime in Strpci was “politically motivated,” as the aim was obviously to transfer the war from Bosnia to Serbia, and ruin good inter-ethnic relations between Muslims and Serbs who “had until yesterday lived together in peace.”<sup>78</sup>

Two serious crimes on the territory of Serbia in just five months were threatening to worsen inter-ethnic relations in Sandzak and substantially increased the feeling of insecurity among the Sandzak Muslims. On the other hand, Serbian authorities tried to pacify the situation by constantly promising that the responsible for the crimes would be prosecuted and that the Serbian forces were not involved in these abductions.<sup>79</sup> However,

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<sup>78</sup> War Crimes in Serbia, Sandzak Case (Belgrade: *Youth Initiative for Human Rights*, 2010), 4. <http://www.yihr.org/en> (accessed February 27, 2012)

<sup>79</sup> Belgrade’s District Court started an investigation in 1993. However, the crime was qualified as an illegal deprivation of freedom, not as a war crime. The investigation lasted only 20 days.



many clues were pointing that the high state authorities were knowledgeable about the plans for these abductions

### 3.3 The Sandzak autonomy – a failed project

#### 3.3.1 Referendum on the Sandzak autonomy

A referendum on the Sandzak autonomy was organized on 25-27 October 1991 by the MNVS. The turnout was around 70%, out of which 98% of the Sandzak Muslims declared themselves for the “complete political and territorial autonomy with the right to join one of the republics.”<sup>80</sup> The final results were announced on the conference in Sarajevo, indicating the involvement of the Bosnian SDA in the organization of this referendum.<sup>81</sup> These results were not accepted by the Serbian authorities who claimed that there were irregularities regarding the number of the eligible voters.<sup>82</sup> Another reason for dismissal of these results was the accusation of the Serbian government that the referendum was contrary to the Helsinki Accords, as it did not respect the principle of the inviolability of borders. The Serbian Parliament even adopted a resolution, before the referendum was held, which stated that Sandzak did not constitute a “legal territorial

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<sup>80</sup> Sonja Biserko, *Minorities in Serbia* (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2000), 100.

<sup>81</sup> “Leaders of SDA for Serbia give further details of Sandzak referendum,” Radio Belgrade (October 30, 1991) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 2, 2012)

<sup>82</sup> Also, polling stations were set up in mosques in Croatia and Bosnia, where Sandzak Muslims could have voted. See Andrejevich, “The Sandzak: A Perspective of Serb-Muslim relations,” 175; Rasim Ljajic stated later that votes were even not counted. See “Kako sam od ministarstva napravio brend,” *Vreme*, January 13, 2005, 732. <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=402759> (accessed November 25, 2011)

entity”, and that no autonomy status could have been granted to this region.<sup>83</sup> Apart from the fact that the Serbian police closed several polling stations, confiscated election documents in Bijelo Polje and arrested a few organizers, no major incidents occurred during the referendum.<sup>84</sup>

Nest step for the SDA of Sandzak was the establishment of shadow government in November 1991. As Rasim Ljajic put it in an interview, its establishment did not mean the abolition of the republican authorities, but its primary activity was supposed to be related to the Sandzak economy.<sup>85</sup> However, the shadow government became more active only in 1992, when Ugljanin participated on several meetings regarding the future of Yugoslavia and its federal units. The fact that Ljajic put emphasis on the economy, and Ugljanin focused on the internationalization of the Sandzak issue indicated that the SDA obviously did not speak with one voice.

Nevertheless, by organizing the referendum the SDA of Sandzak clearly stated that the status of Sandzak, thus the status of the Sandzak Muslims, could be resolved only through the establishment of the autonomy. As Rasim Ljajic later said in an interview, the main reason for the organization of the referendum was taking good positions before the negotiations concerning the resolution of the Yugoslav crises would have started.<sup>86</sup> The Serbian authorities were, on the other hand, completely unwilling to accept further decentralization, after the issues of Kosovo and Vojvodina were resolved with the 1990 constitution.

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<sup>83</sup> Andrejevich, “The Sandzak: A Perspective of Serb-Muslim relations,” 176.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> “Sandzak Muslims seek to avoid economic sanctions,” Radio Belgrade (November 7, 1991) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 2, 2012)

<sup>86</sup> See “Kako sam od ministarstva napravio brend”

Moreover, the Serbian authorities condemned frequent Ugljanin's statements in which secession was mentioned as an option. The fact was that the Sandzak Muslim political elite insisted on emphasizing political, economic, cultural and family connections between the Sandzak and Bosnian Muslims. Being recognized as Muslim nation in the former Yugoslavia meant that, in the moment of collapse of this country, the maintenance of those relations was of huge importance for the Sandzak elites. Therefore, the SDA of Sandzak was not satisfied with the fact that border separating Sandzak and Bosnia might have soon turned from inter-republic to international one. Bosnia was perceived as their "motherland" with whom they have strong cultural and historical links. The SDA leaders were usually using the word "reunification", highlighting the fact that Sandzak was once part of Bosnia under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the referendum question left as possibility future convergence with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Actually, the SDA followed the pattern implemented by the Croatian Serbs earlier that year.<sup>88</sup> The break-up of Yugoslavia along the republic lines meant that numerous Serbian community in Croatia would be separated from Belgrade, and under the authority of the new neighboring country. In both cases, the referendum was supposed to be only one step in the process of possible secession and unification with Serbia/Bosnia. As Andrejevich put it the referendum on autonomy was an attempt of the SDA of Sandzak to "counterbalance the Bosnian Serbs' similar declarations and deter Belgrade from

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<sup>87</sup> Andrejevich, "The Sandzak: A Perspective of Serb-Muslim relations," 176.

<sup>88</sup> The Serbs in Croatia organized a self-determination referendum in May 1991, while the Serbs in Bosnia organized it in November the same year.

annexing the Serbian autonomous regions in Bosnia.”<sup>89</sup> The reaction of the state authorities was potential ban on the SDA activities, proposed by the Yugoslav public prosecutor who accused the SDA of anti-state activity.<sup>90</sup> However, the ban was never imposed. All in all, it seems cooperation between the Serbian authorities and the SDA leadership regarding the status of the Sandzak Muslims was completely missing.

### 3.3.2 Attempts to internationalize the Sandzak question – change of rhetoric

Following the referendum, the SDA of Sandzak decided to address to the international community, who was mediating in the process of resolution of the Yugoslav crisis, and to highlight the problems the Sandzak Muslims were facing in that period. In November 1991, Ugljanin called the international community to send peace-keeping forces in Sandzak and to disarm the Yugoslav army, which he accused of being “occupational force”.<sup>91</sup> Presence of the army, which was visible in Sandzak during the war in Bosnia, was regarded as necessary for the Serbian authorities. According to them, this was the only way outburst of violence could have been prevented.<sup>92</sup> Apart from the peace-keeping forces, Ugljanin asked the European Community to send the observers to the region, as Sandzak Muslims’ human and citizen rights were violated.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Branislava Stanisic, “Tanjug analyzes Sandzak referendum ‘A ticket for the Hague’,” Tanjug (October 29, 1991) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 1, 2012)

<sup>90</sup> Biserko, *Minorities in Serbia*, 99-100.

<sup>91</sup> “Leader of Sandzak Muslims calls for peace-keeping troops in region.” Yugoslav News Agency, (November 21, 1991) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 1, 2012)

<sup>92</sup> “Uzice corps commander reassures Sandzak population over army’s presence.” Belgrade TV (June 12, 1992) available from LexisNexis Academic (May 1, 2012)

<sup>93</sup> “Muslim leader demands European observers in Sandzak.” Yugoslav News Agency (October 29, 1991) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 1, 2012)

In 1992, following the Bosnian self-determination referendum on which the majority declared for independence, the leader of the SDA announced possible secession on a conference in Vienna: “We will not reconcile ourselves to the formation of a 'New Yugoslavia' (...) in this case we will fight for the annexation of Sandzak to Bosnia-Hercegovina or to Kosovo.”<sup>94</sup> According to Ugljanin, this would have been the only way to “halt the genocide” against the Sandzak Muslims.<sup>95</sup> In August 1992, the SDA participated on the London Conference dealing with the Yugoslav crisis, where they submitted a report regarding the situation in Sandzak.

The Bosniak political and intellectual elite decided to use “the concepts of human rights, regionalization, democracy as effective discourses” in presenting the problems they are facing with.<sup>96</sup> However, the focus of the international community was completely on Bosnia and Croatia, making the internationalization of the Sandzak issue extremely difficult.

### 3.3.3 The 1993 Memorandum of the Muslim National Council of Sandzak

On 6 June 1993, the MNVS adopted “Memorandum on the Institutionalization of the Special Status for Sandzak.”<sup>97</sup> This document was supposed to provide the framework for further SDA activities by indicating the main aims regarding the Sandzak status and the status of the Sandzak Muslims. Even though Sulejman Ugljanin emphasized on

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<sup>94</sup> “Sandzak SDA leader demands withdrawal of ‘army of occupation’,” Yugoslav News Agency (March 27, 1992) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 2, 2012)

<sup>95</sup> “Sandzak Muslim National Council appeals to UN over military build-up in region.” Yugoslav News Agency (April 15, 1992) available from LexisNexis Academic (accessed May 1, 2012)

<sup>96</sup> Lyon, “Serbia’s Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival,” 79.

<sup>97</sup> Document can be found in Goran Basic, *Polozaj Bosnjaka u Sandzaku* [The Status of the Sandzak Bosniaks] (Belgrade: Centar za antiratnu akciju, 2002)

numerous occasions that Sandzak would not remain in new Yugoslavia, but would secede and join Bosnia, this Memorandum was dealing with the “special status” of Sandzak as part of Yugoslavia, formed by Serbia and Montenegro on 27 April 1992. The fact that no secession was mentioned in this referendum can be explained by the lack of support from the international community, who rejected any idea of the change of the republic borders during the process of Yugoslavia. Therefore, the leadership of the SDA realized that broad autonomy was the only option that could have been supported by the international community, and that could have led to distribution of power satisfying for the Sandzak Muslim entrepreneurs.

This special status envisioned the establishment of the Sandzak government, parliament and the institution of governor. The Sandzak authorities were supposed to have exclusive jurisdiction in the area of police, judiciary, taxation, system of education and culture, while the power sharing would exist regarding the environmental protection, road transport, postal service and electricity. The Memorandum was then submitted to the Serbian and Montenegrin Parliaments, which denounced any idea of providing Sandzak authorities with broader institutional powers.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, in August 1993 the Uzice municipal court banned distribution of the Memorandum for instigating hatred, and national and religious intolerance.<sup>99</sup>

On the same secession, the MNVS finally adopted a Statut<sup>100</sup>, almost two years after its establishment. In this document, Muslim-Bosniak denomination was mentioned for the first time since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis. This change announced a shift in identification that occurred several months later.

<sup>98</sup> Biserko, *Minorities in Serbia*, 100.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> In Goran Basic, *Polozaj Bosnjaka u Sandzaku* [The Status of the Sandzak Bosniaks].

### 3.4 The acceptance of the Bosniak identification – the response of the state

On 27 September 1993, a Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals was organized in Sarajevo by Izetbegovic, with an aim of deciding whether the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan<sup>101</sup> should have been adopted.<sup>102</sup> After the majority voted for the rejection of the plan, the following discussion dealt with the possibility of the change in nominal identification. Finally, it was agreed that “Muslim” denomination should have been replaced by the “Bosniak” one.<sup>103</sup> By emphasizing the connection of the Bosnian Muslims with the land of Bosnia, this nominal identification was supposed to incorporate both religious and ethnical element. However, the change in identification encountered disapproval on both Serbian and Croatian side, who perceived this new identification as the way of the Bosnian Muslims to present themselves “as the leading ethnic group in the republic.”<sup>104</sup> This decision was confirmed the same year by the Bosnian Assembly. The Sandzak political parties also embraced the new “Bosniak” identification, while the name of the MNVS was changed into the Bosniac National Council of Sandzak (BNVS).

The decision of the Sandzak Muslims’ agents of identification obviously implied the aim of portraying the Sandzak Muslims, now Bosniaks, as national minority whose kin-state is Bosnia. This was the continuation of the identity politics pursued by the SDA of Sandzak, who was emphasizing that Muslims in Sandzak and Bosnia are the members

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<sup>101</sup> This was one of the international peace plans for the resolution of the Bosnian crisis that suggested the establishment of 3 constituent entities in Bosnia. The Bosnian Serbs were granted 54% of the Bosnian territory, the Muslims 30%, and the Bosnian Croats 16%.

<sup>102</sup> See Hoare, *The History of Bosnia: from the Middle Ages to the present day*, 381-382.

<sup>103</sup> There were 4 identity options that have been discussed prior the congress: “Muslims with capital M,” “Bosnian,” “Bosniak inclusive,” and “Bosniak exclusive.” The “Bosniak exclusive” option was supported by the majority at the end. See Jovana Mihajlovic Trbovc, “Forging identity through negotiation: the case of a contemporary Bosniak nation” (MA thesis, CEU, 2008)

<sup>104</sup> Lyon, “Serbia’s Sandzak under Milosevic: Identity, Nationalism and Survival,” 75.

of the same nation. Once the nominal change in identification occurred regarding the Bosnian Muslims, the Sandzak agents of identification had to accept this shift in order to maintain the connection with the Bosnian Muslims. Otherwise, their emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness of the Sandzak Bosniaks would be questioned by the state categorization.

### **3.4.1 The end of war – cooperation possible?**

When the Bosnian war ended in 1995 and the Dayton Agreement was signed, Milosevic decided to slightly change its policy towards Sandzak with an aim of stabilizing the region. The end of the war activities meant that any change of borders and new secessions would not be accepted by the international community. Therefore, in order to prevent any further destabilization of Sandzak, Milosevic had to cooperate with the SDA of Sandzak, the most powerful political party that was representing the Sandzak Bosniaks.

Milosevic's decision to allow the return of Sulejman Ugljanin from exile indicated the beginning of different state policy towards the Sandzak Bosniaks. Following the return to Serbia in September 1996, Ugljanin immediately continued with his political activities as the leader of the SDA, even though the indictment against him, raised in 1993, was still in force. Moreover, shortly afterwards he was elected as a deputy in the federal parliament after participating on the 1997 elections. Obviously this would not be possible without certain agreement between Ugljanin and Milosevic. This move by the Serbian president can be perceived as his attempt to find common language with Ugljanin and pacify the situation in Sandzak.



1996 and 1997 were marked by the Ugljanin's attempt to achieve complete control in the municipalities that were under the power of the SDA. The announcement of the SDA that directors of the Sandzak's public enterprises would be replaced if they were Serbs or members of the Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) caused huge outrage among the Serbian politicians in Sandzak.

Also, in June 1997 Ugljanin announced a possibility for the BNVS to adopt resolution that would have declared Sandzak as an autonomous province. The reaction of the Serbian authorities was dissolution of the municipal government. The SDA was replaced with the SPS and the Yugoslav United Left (JUL), due to the SDA's "unconstitutional and illegal behaviour." As Ugljanin did not recognize the new authorities, the 1993 indictment was reactivated. However, he was not arrested either this time. This municipal assembly and government remained in power until the 2000 change of regime. On the other hand, the SDA of Sandzak headed by Sulejman Ugljanin remained a powerful player during the second half of the 1990s. According to Lyon, Ugljanin was actually implementing Milosevic's tactic by founding several parties with similar political programmes and names (The True SDA, The SDA of Yugoslavia, the SDA of Montenegro), what diluted the voting clout.<sup>105</sup>

On 19 July 1999 the BNVS adopted "Declaration on Bosniaks' right to political and national equality," which stated that the Sandzak Bosniaks constitute distinct national entity. It was stated in a declaration that any further disintegration of Yugoslavia was unacceptable, but the establishment of the autonomy status remained the main goal of the BNVS. Also, the Council emphasized the right of the Sandzak Bosniaks to develop

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 89

special relations with the Bosniak people from Bosnia, as they all belong to one Bosniak nation.

The fall of Milosevic in 2000, provided an opportunity for the final resolution of the Sandzak question. The new pro-democratic authorities were aware that the status of the national minorities had to be regulated in accordance with the international standards as soon as possible. Therefore, a Law for the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities was adopted in 2002 guaranteeing the public use of minority languages, education in a language of minorities, and the establishment of the National Minorities' Council. The Bosniaks were officially recognized as national minority.

## Conclusion

As the economic crisis in Yugoslavia was becoming serious, and slowly transforming into political one, nationalism appeared as useful tool for achieving greater political power on the level of republics and inside the very federal units. New political elites, which emerged in the 1980s, decided to dismiss the communist ideology and embrace nationalism as guiding principle in their political activities. In order to make this new nationalist narrative acceptable to the wider population, identity and nation building policies had to be pursued by the political, intellectual and religious actors.

Following the Slobodan Milosevic's rise to power in 1986/7, the resurgence of nationalism became more visible in Serbia. By establishing complete control of the state institutions, new Serbian authorities, led by Milosevic, had all the necessary material and symbolic resources for the implementation of their policies. One of the first major steps was the adoption of the new Serbian Constitution in 1990, which introduced highly centralized system by reducing the powers of the two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo.

While Serbia was becoming more centralized, calls for decentralization and independence were being constantly repeated by the authorities of the other Yugoslav republics. Impossibility to reach any agreement on the federal level, led to the Slovenian and Croatian Declarations of Independence in June 1991, which indicated the end of the multinational Yugoslavia. The fact that former inter-republic borders became the ones separating internationally recognized countries caused the appearance of "new minorities" in the newly established states. This was the case with the Sandzak Bosniaks

who lost the status of the constitutive Muslim nation due to these far-reaching institutional changes.

The SDA of Sandzak, the main agent of identification of the Sandzak Bosniaks, was not willing to accept the change in power distribution resulting from the new institutional and political settings. The loss of the nation status and the emerging centralization tendencies in Serbia, influenced the performance of the Sandzak Bosniaks, whose leaders perceived this new relationship with the state authorities as completely illegitimate. Even though a law regulating the status of the minorities was missing, the Sandzak Muslims were categorized by the state authorities as one of the minorities.

All the questions regarding the internal and external definition of the Sandzak Bosniaks were strongly connected with the legal status of this community in a new state that was supposed to be formed by Serbia and Montenegro. However, the minority status was not enough for the SDA leadership who immediately requested broad autonomy for the Sandzak region. These requests had immense support of the Bosnian SDA, whom being the founder of the SDA of Sandzak, substantially influenced their decision-making processes. Numerous ideological and organizational links between these two parties affected the identity politics pursued by the Sandzak agents of identification, what became visible in 1993.

In the meantime, the 1991 referendum on autonomy was supposed to mobilize the Sandzak Bosniaks by increasing the level of groupness, and creating boundary between the Sandzak Bosniaks and the Serbian authorities. The fact that Milosevic was not willing to negotiate the Sandzak status, and even allowed small-scale violence in this region, made the SDA determined in internationalizing the Sandzak issue. The participation on

several conferences dealing with the Yugoslav wars and contacts with influential diplomats and statesmen were mechanisms supposed to draw attention of the international community. Also, the aim was to send the message to Milosevic that revision of his policy towards the Sandzak Bosniaks was necessary. By adopting several documents, the Muslim (Bosniak) National Council of Sandzak, the main representative of the Sandzak Bosniaks, articulated the idea of special status and created political platform for further activities of the Sandzak political elite.

As no improvement was visible in Belgrade – Novi Pazar relationship, the SDA decided to support the shift in identification, from Muslim to Bosniak one, which was agreed on the 1993 Congress of the Bosniak Intellectuals. By accepting the Bosniak identification as primary for the Muslim majority living in Sandzak, the SDA chose to maintain the connections with the Bosnian Muslims, now Bosniaks. This was visible with the establishment of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community of Sandzak, which accepted Sarajevo, not Belgrade, as its superior religious authority. Moreover, the fact that religion was not any more the main marker of their identity, made clear distinction between the Serbs and the Bosniak ethnicity having its Bosniak language and culture. As for the Serbian authorities, they did not recognize the existence of Bosniak, but Muslim minority, what made a huge gap between the state categorization and the identification of the Sandzak Bosniaks. However, following the 2000 change of institutional and political context in Serbia, Bosniak identification became institutionalized with the adoption of the new official system of categorization.

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