

# **SERBIA'S SANDZAK: STILL FORGOTTEN**

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## SERBIA'S SANDZAK: STILL FORGOTTEN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whenever Balkan politicians discuss Kosovo's future status they warn of a "domino effect". One area frequently mentioned as vulnerable and a possible flashpoint of new violence is Serbia's Sandzak, an ethnically-mixed Muslim-Slav (Bosniak) majority region sandwiched between Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia. Its economy is underdeveloped and far poorer than many other regions in Serbia, partly because it was an Ottoman backwater until 1912, partly due to deliberate neglect by Serbian authorities between the world wars and under Milosevic. Belgrade should act against discrimination and otherwise show both Serbs and Bosniaks it is sensitive to their concerns in order to keep the region peaceful, as it presently is, but Sandzak's problems are mostly the same as those of the rest of Serbia and require national solutions.

Under the Milosevic regime, official state terror against the Bosniaks included ethnic cleansing of entire villages, kidnappings, murders, arbitrary arrests, beatings and dismissal from jobs. These actions increased tensions in Sandzak, and the successor Serbian governments have addressed them either half-heartedly or not at all. Given the recent history of Serbian behaviour, many Bosniaks fear for their welfare and existence, and even otherwise minor grievances often take on ethnic overtones.

Nevertheless, since Milosevic's ouster some halting and partial steps to integrate the Muslims into the Serbian political mainstream and treat them as equal citizens have been undertaken. Progress is slow -- it may take a generation for the way Serbia views its minorities truly to change -- but it is occurring. While Serbia is learning how to treat its Muslims without discrimination, the Bosniaks must make extra efforts to protect Serb rights in those areas where they form a majority and are acquiring political power.

The atmosphere in Sandzak is tense but peaceful. There are no indications of armed resistance groups or paramilitary formations among the Bosniaks, nor do there appear to be any fringe political elements capable or desirous of mobilising popular opinion to their cause. There does not appear to be a desire for interethnic

conflict among the leading Bosniak political parties. The overwhelming majority of Bosniaks do not seek independence from Serbia, nor do they wish to join Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Provided the Serbian government in Belgrade uses wisdom and good judgement in dealing with the region's problems and reins in nationalist forces that could foment trouble, the potential for ethnically-based violence or conflict is relatively small, and there should be no reason for it to increase, even in the event Kosovo becomes independent. Yet, in many ways the current government is deaf to the region's problems and continues to discriminate in both overt and subtle fashion against the majority Bosniak population.

A number of forces on both sides still attempt to destabilise Sandzak through their actions. These include extremist elements within the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Wahhabi movement, the police, state security (BIA) and army security, and nationalist forces associated with the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and the Bosniak Party for Democratic Action (SDA). All seem to have a vested interest in keeping ethnic tensions at a high level.

The Orthodox Church has launched an aggressive campaign aimed at reasserting Serbian presence in the region. Simultaneously the Bosniaks are asserting their sense of national identity: Islam and linguistic issues play a prominent part in this renaissance. The Bosniak National Council is taking actions which could create ethnic apartheid and alienate Serbs. Also on the Bosniak side, there are some small yet potentially troubling radical Wahhabi elements, and indications that some Bosniaks are beginning to discriminate against the Serb minority.

Sandzak suffers from significant economic decline and ongoing loss of population. It also has all the problems endemic to Serbia as a whole: organised crime, corruption, dysfunctional state structures, and official incompetence. Some of these could be resolved if Serbia would act to end discrimination and make its minorities feel that they have a place in the country. Many others will be resolved only when Belgrade decides to take decisive action to

reform the judiciary, police and economy on the national level and to decentralise. But Sandzak can and should remain peaceful provided both Serbs and Bosniaks keep a grip on their nationalist elements and make a good faith effort to find common ground.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To the Government of Serbia:**

1. Attack discrimination against Bosniaks on all levels, by amending laws as well as by careful review of employment practices in public institutions and enterprises, and by providing equality of access to government services.
2. Enforce the rule of law, first and foremost by creating a secure environment in Priboj municipality that will permit refugees to return to their homes, including by bringing to justice individuals guilty of murder, arson and ethnic cleansing during the violence of the 1990s, and by taking appropriate actions against police officers charged with criminal activities, including brutality and murder.

3. Rein in Serbian nationalist forces that could stir up trouble in the region, whether they are associated with political parties, the Serbian Orthodox Church, or state security services.

### **To Sandzak's Bosniak Community:**

4. Reduce tensions in the region by re-examining the insistence on teaching "Bosnian language" in the public school system and otherwise exercising care not to take actions that could make the Serb residents of Sandzak feel they are a threatened minority in their own country.

### **To Sandzak's Religious Leaders:**

5. The Islamic Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church should discourage hate speech by clerics and engage in increased dialogue with each other to reduce tensions among their adherents.

**Belgrade/Brussels, 8 April 2005**

## SERBIA'S SANDZAK: STILL FORGOTTEN

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Sandzak of Novi Pazar is chiefly remembered as one of the smaller pieces in the game played by the Great Powers before World War I, an obscure place which doomed those who got too closely involved with it.<sup>1</sup> Today's Sandzak<sup>2</sup> is a multi-ethnic region of 8,686 square kilometres straddling the mountainous border between the republics of Serbia and Montenegro. It borders on Bosnia & Herzegovina to the west and Kosovo to the southeast. Of its eleven municipalities, five (Bijelo Polje, Rozaje, Plave, Plevlje, Berane) are in Montenegro, six (Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Nova Varos, Prijepolje and Priboj) in Serbia.<sup>3</sup> This report concentrates primarily on the latter.<sup>4</sup>

Sandzak has the single largest Muslim Slav (Bosniak) community in the Balkans outside Bosnia & Herzegovina. According to the 2002 census, the six municipalities in the Serbian portion had 235,567 inhabitants, of whom 142,350 (60 per cent) declared themselves Bosniaks.<sup>5</sup> Of the remainder, 90,314 were Serbs or Montenegrins (38 per cent); the remaining 2 per cent were dispersed among

other ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> The three eastern municipalities have overwhelming Bosniak majorities (Novi Pazar 78 per cent, Tutin 94.9 per cent, and Sjenica 75 per cent), while in the west, Bosniaks are in the minority (Nova Varos 7 per cent, Priboj 23 per cent, and Prijepolje 41 per cent). Sandzak Muslims are often referred to pejoratively as Sandzaklija.

The term Sandzak to refer to this particular area became widespread during the second half of the nineteenth century as the Great Powers fought over the disintegrating territory of Ottoman Turkey. Its official use as an administrative designation ended in 1912, but the term is employed informally by Serbs, Montenegrins, Bosniaks, and the Serbian media to refer to the Muslim majority municipalities in the region. In the three Serbian majority municipalities of western Sandzak, Serbs prefer to refer to the whole region as "Old Rascia", but will sometimes use "Sandzak" for the Bosniak majority areas.

Geographically much of Sandzak -- particularly the Bosniak majority municipalities -- sits on the Pester mountain plateau that straddles the border between the two republics, while the northwestern municipalities are tucked against the slopes of Mt. Zlatibor. In the higher areas, particularly the municipalities of Sjenica and Tutin, climate and terrain are harsh. Winter can last eight months: Sjenica has freezing temperatures on average at least 150 days per year, and snow has been known to fall in July. During winter, access to the Pester highlands is often difficult. In November 2004 Sjenica was without electricity for more than four days due to heavy snow. The soil is poor, and many families in the mountain regions engage in subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry, primarily sheepherding. The lower lying areas sit along the banks of the Raska River, a tributary of the Ibar. The three Serbian majority municipalities are located along the valley of the Lim River, which flows northward into Bosnia and the Drina River. As a whole, Serbia's Sandzak forms a geographic cul-de-sac tucked against the Pester massif.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, "The Lost Sanjak", a short story by Saki (H.H. Munro) published in 1910, whose protagonist's failure to remember the location of Novibazar (Novi Pazar) proves fatal; and Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which a minor character, Lord Blatherard Osmo, "occupied the Novi Pazar desk at the Foreign Office ... for on this obscure sanjak had once hinged the entire fate of Europe", and similarly comes to a very sticky end.

<sup>2</sup> "Sandzak" is a Turkish word (*sancak*), originally meaning flag or banner, that referred to an administrative district in the Ottoman Empire. Today's Sandzak was once one of six sandzaks within Ottoman Turkey's Bosnian Pashalik and was known officially as the Sandzak of Novi Pazar.

<sup>3</sup> During the Ottoman period, the Sandzak of Novi Pazar extended west to Rudo, now in Bosnia, and east to Mitrovica, now in Kosovo.

<sup>4</sup> The Montenegrin government appears to have successfully integrated its Sandzak Muslim population into the day-to-day political life of that republic. Many of the issues and problems present in the Montenegrin areas of the Sandzak are being resolved through normal political processes.

<sup>5</sup> The number of Bosniaks may actually be much higher, as explained below.

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<sup>6</sup> Including Albanians, Bulgarians, Bunjevci, Croats, Vlachs, Hungarians, Macedonians, Roma, Ukrainians, Slovenes, Russians and Gorani, and others. Source: 2002 Census.

## II. SANDZAK'S TWO FACES: PAZAR AND RASCIA

### A. SEEKING SANDZAK

Novi Pazar (the name means "New Market" from the Turkish Yeni Pazar) is much the largest urban entity in Sandzak, with at least 86,000 residents and possibly as many as 100,000,<sup>7</sup> but for all intents and purposes this informal political, economic and cultural centre of the region does not exist on Belgrade state television: the evening news shows weather conditions for cities throughout Serbia, but not for Novi Pazar. Often its reporters send in stories from Djurdjevi Stupovi monastery in "Ras", ignoring the fact that there is no Ras, and that the monastery sits on a hill overlooking the centre of Novi Pazar. This is illustrative of the problems and discrimination Sandzak Bosniaks face and of the neglect of both Serbs and Bosniaks by Belgrade.

Although Novi Pazar is the largest city in Serbia along the Ibar watershed south of Kraljevo, drivers looking for it as they come from Belgrade and Kraljevo find that road signs point only to Raska, a small Serbian town of 10,000, twenty kilometres before it. Anyone leaving Kraljevo for Novi Pazar must know first where Raska is in relation to it and follow those directions. The first sign that actually points to Novi Pazar is twelve kilometres south of Kraljevo near Mataruska Banja. After that the majority of signs again point only to Raska. The road from Kraljevo south to Novi Pazar winds along the Ibar River canyon. Its narrow surface is rutted and potholed, and in some sections speed is restricted to 30 or 40 km per hour. Concrete retaining walls along the canyon display graffiti celebrating the leaders of Serbian paramilitary units that slaughtered Bosniaks in the wars of the 1990s; after Raska, the graffiti changes to that of Bosniak political parties.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The official figure of 85,996 may be misleading. The 2002 Census registered an increase of only 747 residents over 1991. Visitors to Pazar cannot help but notice a significant number of homes that have been newly constructed or enlarged over the past decade, as well as the significantly higher birth rate among Bosniaks. In addition, there has been rural-urban migration from the Pester highlands into Novi Pazar. Many Bosniaks claim Serbian census-takers deliberately undercounted Pazar residents in 2002, skipping entire Bosniak majority neighbourhoods, and that the actual population is closer to 100,000. There are also claims that census-takers deliberately undercounted Bosniaks in other municipalities so as to make the population appear smaller.

<sup>8</sup> Including Vojislav Seselj and Zeljko "Arkan" Raznjatovic.

Novi Pazar is home to the oldest standing Serbian Orthodox church in the republic, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul. According to a Serbian guidebook, it "is located sixteen kilometres southwest of Raska along the road to Novi Pazar".<sup>9</sup> Actually it is within Novi Pazar's city limits, a ten-minute walk from the old centre. One cannot help but gain the impression Belgrade is embarrassed by the presence of so many Bosniaks there.

Novi Pazar itself is a dusty market town whose narrow streets and infrastructure were designed for 10,000 people. The constant traffic jams limit speed in the city centre to ten km an hour. The streets are filthy and potholed, with garbage overflowing around trash containers. The few pavements are crowded with parked cars and kiosks. Architecture is an awkward mix of old Turkish-style Balkan homes, communist-era concrete monstrosities, and the large, gaudy homes of the new rich. Most city homes appear unfinished, bare brick waiting for a plaster facade.<sup>10</sup> Public spaces are rundown and covered with graffiti, revealing no apparent sense of urban planning. Until February 2005, Novi Pazar lacked a single secular bookshop, although it did have a Muslim shop carrying only religious literature.<sup>11</sup>

Serbs and Bosniaks, particularly in the urban centres, speak a common dialect of Serbo-Croatian; their physical appearance is essentially the same, they share many folk customs and practices, listen to the same music, go to the same schools, dress similarly, and prior to the 1990s often worked together at the same jobs. Both smoke tobacco and drink alcohol, and Bosniaks even occasionally eat pork.

Each Tuesday farmers and villagers of all nationalities from the surrounding countryside and mountains -- many in native peasant dress -- still descend on the city for the traditional market day, shutting much of the city centre to traffic. In the evenings, old and young crowd the main pedestrian thoroughfare for the evening stroll -- men with men, women with women, mixed with the occasional couple holding hands. The men typically sit in the Kafanas without women; a noticeable percentage of the Bosniak women wear head scarves, a sight that until five years ago was unusual. One can often distinguish Serbian and Bosniak neighbourhoods in Novi Pazar on the basis of the cars in front of the homes.

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<sup>9</sup> Jovan Janicevic, ed., *Kulturna Riznica Srbije* (Belgrade, 1998), p. 466.

<sup>10</sup> Serbian tax laws require home owners to pay property taxes on finished homes. Many people deliberately leave part of the exterior facade unfinished so as to avoid paying taxes.

<sup>11</sup> The new bookshop opened thanks in large part to international financial assistance.

Serbs tend to drive old Yugo's, Stojadins and Ficas,<sup>12</sup> Bosniaks newer German cars.<sup>13</sup>

Away from Novi Pazar, the few paved roads become worse: frequently unmarked, narrower, rutted and holed. In Sjenica, Tutin, Prijepolje and Priboj, one gains the feeling of passing through settlements that are on their way to becoming ghost towns. Homes and yards appear lifeless, as if there are fewer people than houses. Few homes have telephones. Some of the more remote villages are still without electricity or running water, particularly on Pester and along the border with Bosnia.

In the countryside it is easier to distinguish Bosniaks and Serbs from outward appearances. While both Serbian and Bosniak women typically wear head scarves, the latter tend to the traditional, colourful, baggy harem pants (*dimija*), while the former prefer dresses with dark aprons. Bosniak men often wear a skullcap or beret, while Serbian men favour the traditional *sajkaca* hat. Bosniak villages abound with children, while Serbian villages are haunted by elderly peasants and are marked by the presence of pigs, which Bosniaks do not raise. There is far less inter-ethnic marriage in Sandzak than in Bosnia or other parts of the former Yugoslavia, due primarily to the strong patriarchal conservatism both cultures share.

In such a small closed environment, where many people are related and everybody knows everybody, rumours often take on a life of their own, influence public perceptions and affect politics.

## B. OTTOMAN SANDZAK

Bosniak historians claim Novi Pazar was founded in 1461 by Isa-Beg Isakovic, the first Ottoman governor of Bosnia. During the medieval period, it was a trading centre on a main route that carried silver from the central Balkan mines to the Adriatic coast and was also an important stop for goods transiting between Central Bosnia and the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

Sandzak and Bosnia & Herzegovina have traditionally maintained close ties through trade and family connections. As traders from Pazar sent family members to cities throughout the Empire to set up offices, some settled down and married, particularly in Bosnia & Herzegovina

and Serbia proper. Following the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia in 1878, some Bosniak Slavs and Turks fled Bosnia for Sandzak, fearful of reprisals or lower status under Christian rule. Many of these left relatives behind in Bosnia. As a result, it is not uncommon to find Orthodox and Catholic Christian and Muslim branches of the same family scattered throughout Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia and Sandzak.

In 1809 during the First Serbian Uprising,<sup>14</sup> the Serbian leader, Karadjordje Petrovic, burned Novi Pazar and is said to have slaughtered approximately 3,000 Bosniaks in Sjenica. Retaliatory attacks between Serb and Bosniak villages throughout the region followed over the course of the next months. In 1878 the Treaty of Berlin gave Austria-Hungary military control over Bosnia & Herzegovina and Sandzak, although both nominally remained part of the Ottoman Empire. However, unlike Bosnia & Herzegovina, where Austria-Hungary assumed complete control of civilian administration, Ottoman administrators remained in Sandzak. Once trade with Bosnia and the coast was cut off by the Austrian occupation of Bosnia & Herzegovina, the region's economy began a rapid decline.

In 1908 Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia & Herzegovina while withdrawing its garrisons from Sandzak, permitting it to revert to full Turkish control. The annexation of Bosnia & Herzegovina by a Christian power produced a new wave of Bosniak refugees, some of whom settled in Sandzak while leaving relatives behind.

Sandzak remained part of Ottoman Turkey until the First Balkan War, in 1912, when the Serbian and Montenegrin armies entered from two sides and drove out the remaining Ottomans. Most, if not all Sandzak Bosniaks viewed those armies as foreign occupiers and treated them with suspicion. Many Muslims -- Bosniaks, Turks, and Albanians alike -- subsequently fled or emigrated to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, and many Bosniak families in Sandzak still recount stories of Serb and Montenegrin atrocities during the Balkan Wars, as well as tales of subsequent mistreatment and discrimination by Serbs.

The Islamic heritage is clearly visible in the numerous mosques dotting the region, as well as in secular architecture. In Novi Pazar itself the Lejlek Mosque dates to the 1460s, while other old mosques, such as Bor (1560) and Altun-Alem (sixteenth century) complement more than 30 newer mosques. A seventeenth century Caravanserai (*han*), two old Turkish baths (*hamam*)<sup>15</sup> --

<sup>12</sup> Ficas are vehicles manufactured in Kragujevac under license from Fiat.

<sup>13</sup> This is a relatively recent difference, caused in large part by the events of the 1990s. Under Milosevic many Muslims were forced out of their jobs and into the private sector. Some went abroad to work. As a result, they often had higher incomes than the Serbs, most of whom remained at lower paying jobs in the failing state sector and administration.

<sup>14</sup> 1804-1813.

<sup>15</sup> *Hamam* is the Serbo-Croatian variant of the Arabic *Hammam*.

one in the city centre, the other outside town on Roman foundations -- complement the old Turkish fortress in the town's centre.

### C. MEDIEVAL RASCIA

But Sandzak's history did not begin in 1461 with Isa-Beg Isakovic. The area was occupied during Illyrian and Roman times: remains of Roman mines are still visible, and the Roman thermal bath still functions. Sandzak -- not Kosovo to which Serbs demonstrate a more visceral attachment -- is the true heart of the medieval Serbian kingdom. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the area was known as Rascia, a Serbian state under Byzantine tutelage ruled by what became the Nemanja dynasty.<sup>16</sup> In 1217 Stefan Nemanjic received a crown from the Pope, by which time Rascia had already begun to expand. The centre of the Serbian state was Ras, a fortified town whose precise location is now uncertain. Possible candidates are all within a ten km radius of Novi Pazar, and include the city itself.

Serbia's oldest Orthodox churches and monasteries are in Sandzak. The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul dates to the ninth century, while the partially reconstructed monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi (1170) sits high atop a hill overlooking the Novi Pazar city centre. Some twelve km (as the crow flies) to the west is the monastery church of Sopocani (1260).<sup>17</sup> Further west in Bijelo Polje, the Church of St. Peter dates to 1195, while north west of Pazar near Prijepolje is the monastery church of Mileseva (1228).

Medieval Ras and today's Novi Pazar are close to the north-south Ibar River valley, once a main route between central Serbia and Kosovo, while modern Raska sits at the confluence of the Ibar and Raska rivers. Because of its location, the region's history is closely tied to the many wars between Ottomans and Habsburgs.

Under the Ottomans, the Orthodox Christian populations were mostly rural and agrarian, serfs who lived under discriminatory tax burdens and laws, the most notorious of which was the "blood tax", whereby Ottoman officials seized small boys from Christian families, converted them to Islam and trained them for the elite Janissary army corps. They chafed under Ottoman rule, and many took opportunities to revolt or join foreign armies campaigning

in the region. The level of Christian-Muslim antagonism is illustrated in *The Mountain Wreath*, the epic poem by the nineteenth century Montenegrin Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrovic Njegos glorifying a Montenegrin massacre of Slav converts to Islam.

Two wars played an important role in Sandzak's history. The first was the Ottoman-Habsburg conflict of 1683-1699, which saw Austrian troops under Eugene of Savoy occupy Kosovo and Novi Pazar in 1689. When the Austrians withdrew in 1690, many Serbs -- who had allied with the Austrians -- feared reprisals and, led by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Arsenije Carnojevic I, followed in the army's wake. In 1737, the Austrian army again entered Novi Pazar. When it withdrew a few months later, many Serbs again followed. These two mass migrations tipped the region's composition in favour of Islam. In addition, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Serbs left both Montenegrin and Serbian parts of Sandzak, primarily for the economic lure of Serbia's larger cities.

### D. SERBIAN SANDZAK

When the Serbian and Montenegrin armies entered Sandzak in 1912, the Orthodox population viewed them as liberators and embraced the two Orthodox Christian kingdoms of Montenegro and Serbia as their own. Popular memory holds that the Serbs behaved with decorum when they entered Novi Pazar. In contrast, the Montenegrin army and irregulars are said to have slaughtered civilians and forcibly baptised some 12,000 Bosniaks. Local historians say they behaved so badly that Bosniaks in Tutin successfully appealed for the Serbs to take over.<sup>18</sup>

Following the First Balkan War, Serbia abolished feudal relations and enfranchised the Orthodox Serb serf population. The measures included radical land reform and confiscation of lands from Muslim land-owners and their transfer to the Orthodox serfs working them. The Serbian state ended all feudal obligations to Muslim landowners and all taxes levied on Christians, which -- while favourable to the Serbs -- impoverished Muslim landholders and caused their resentment.

The abrupt removal of Sandzak from the Ottoman economic sphere, the chaos following the First Balkan War and the complete restructuring of the economy left the region more impoverished than ever. When the advancing Austro-Hungarian army entered Novi Pazar

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<sup>16</sup> The Nemanja dynasty eventually expanded to include large portions of Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, northern Albania, and northern Greece, as well as all of today's Serbia south of the Sava and Danube Rivers.

<sup>17</sup> The Sopocani monastery church is a UNESCO Culture Heritage site.

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<sup>18</sup> The information on local perceptions of Serbian and Montenegrin behaviour during the First Balkan War are derived from Crisis Group interviews with the local population.



in 1915, Muslims welcomed it as a liberator, and the Habsburgs -- finding an ally in an otherwise hostile environment -- returned most feudal privileges and lands to the Muslim landholders. But following the defeat of Austria-Hungary forces in 1918, Serbia again abolished feudal privileges and began an agrarian reform that redistributed land from the wealthiest Muslim landowners (Timar-holders) to the Serbian peasantry<sup>19</sup> but also took it from middle class Muslims. Many formerly prominent Muslim families became poor overnight, and some people turned to banditry.

Prior to the 1921 elections, Prime Minister Nikola Pasic, who needed the Bosniaks to form a parliamentary majority, struck a deal with the Muslim Dzemijat party, whereby all Muslims would receive compensation for seized property, have the right to Sharia (religious) courts for family matters<sup>20</sup> and to operate religious schools (*medresa*<sup>21</sup>), and be guaranteed that groups of Muslims serving together in the army would not be served pork.<sup>22</sup> The deal, however, rapidly fell apart, and Pasic sent Kosta Pecanac, a Cetnik leader, to intimidate Muslims prior to the elections in the hope of keeping turnout low.

A similar situation arose in the run-up to the 1925 elections, when Serbian nationalist forces roughed up Muslims, burned homes and sent thugs to polling places to discourage the Muslims from voting. Bosniaks were also unnerved in 1924 when the Montenegrins massacred 400 Bosniaks in Sahovice in a case of mistaken retribution, while in Bijelo Polje the Montenegrin administration maintained a reign of terror against all Muslims.

Overall the interwar period in Sandzak was characterised by bad administration and governance and deliberate state discrimination against the Bosniak population. The Serbs and Montenegrins referred to the Sandzak Muslims as "Turks", and the state administration of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) was usually hostile. During the interwar period, the Royal government reached an agreement with Turkey to resettle some 200,000 Muslim Slavs and Albanians from Sandzak and Kosovo. There were epidemics, including typhus; land reforms had disrupted the economy, and there was no industry. The low level of development may be seen in the fact that in 1939 the city of Novi Pazar used only

690 kilowatts of electricity. The result was high levels of migration.

The rapid Yugoslav capitulation following the 6 April 1941 German invasion meant that Sandzak was again subjected to war and occupation. Many Bosniaks saw the Germans as liberators, who armed them and permitted them to retake some of their land and renew some old privileges. They also recruited approximately 500 for the SS Skenderbeg Division.

The Germans put Novi Pazar under the control of Acif "Bluta" Hadziahmetovic, who was a member of the Albanian nationalist Bali Kombetar movement, while Raska remained under local Cetniks.<sup>23</sup> The war saw constant fighting between the Muslims and Serbs in the narrow valley that separates the two towns.<sup>24</sup> Most homes and farm buildings between the towns were razed. This fighting largely ended in 1943, when the Germans returned to Novi Pazar. In the Montenegrin areas of the Sandzak, Cetnik forces are said to have killed 7,000 to 8,000 Muslim civilians, while Serbs tell similar stories of Muslim atrocities against them. Novi Pazar's 140 Jews were all deported and died in concentration camps.

## E. TITOISM

During the war the Third Proletarian "Sandzak" Brigade was active in Bosnia as one of Tito's Partisan units. Most of its multi-ethnic leadership, which supported an autonomous Sandzak region and pushed the idea among the communist elite, was killed under mysterious circumstances in Mrkonjic Grad in November 1942. In 1944 several hundred Bosniaks in Pazar joined a Partisan unit led by Peko Dapcevic.

As the Axis forces withdrew through Pazar in November 1944, Allied aircraft bombed the city centre, after which Serbian and Bulgarian Partisans entered and held public trials and executions of the more prominent leaders, including Hadziahmetovic. The Partisans declared equality of men, women and all nationalities, publicly forbade ethnic hatred, and began opening schools in the outlying villages.

Before the end of the war, between November 1944 and 29 March 1945, Sandzak had the status of an autonomous region (*oblast*) on the territory liberated by the Partisans. It was then divided between the republics

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<sup>19</sup> A Timar was a form of hereditary land holding during the Ottoman Empire, under which the landholder had feudal obligations to provide the Sultan with troops in time of war.

<sup>20</sup> Royal Yugoslavia had two Sharia courts, one in Sarajevo, the other in Skopje.

<sup>21</sup> *Medresa* is the Serbo-Croatian variant of the Arabic *Madrassa*.

<sup>22</sup> This applied to Albanians as well as Muslim Slavs.

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<sup>23</sup> During World War II, the term Cetnik was redefined to include Serbian royalist forces loyal to Draza Mihajlovic and Serbian nationalist non-communist forces.

<sup>24</sup> Ironically, this valley had been the location of the pre-1912 border between Turkey and Serbia.

of Serbia and Montenegro, and the six Serbian municipalities were grouped into the Novi Pazar district (*okrug*). The Partisan leadership in Sandzak consisted of Serbs and Bosniaks, all of whom pressed Belgrade to create an autonomous region. Immediately after the war, Muhamed Hadzismajlovic became the first and only president of this district.

The Novi Pazar *okrug* lasted until 1947, when the Serbian republic government abolished the *okrug* system and instituted regions (*oblast*). As part of these administrative rearrangements Sandzak was split between two Serbian majority *oblasts* with their administrative headquarters in the distant cities of Uzice and Kragujevac. The new boundaries made little geographical sense, and the obvious intent was to dilute Bosniak political clout and keep Serbs in charge of the state administration. Other boundary and administrative changes occurred later during the communist era, including replacement of the *oblast* system with the *srez* system, before the eventual return to *okrugs*.<sup>25</sup> The common factor in all these systems was the continued splitting of Sandzak among Serbian majority districts. Nonetheless, memories of the wartime autonomous Sandzak *oblast* remained to inspire a new generation of Muslim/Bosniak politicians in the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the war the communist authorities had to deal with armed groups and bandits who refused to submit to the new order. Both the Army and State Security (UDBA) were active in Sandzak, frequently raiding Bosniak as well as Serb villages and families. The UDBA was particularly excessive in Tutin. Following Tito's removal of the hard-line Serb nationalist vice president, Aleksandar Rankovic, as head of UDBA in 1966, the state security archives there were opened and showed that UDBA had deliberately exaggerated the number of outlaws and had sent false reports to Belgrade to justify harsh measures against Bosniaks.<sup>26</sup>

The communists kept church and state separate not by banning religion but by fully secularising the state. Religion and its rituals were confined to church buildings and the privacy of homes. However, to climb the social, political or economic ladder, it was necessary to become at least a formal member of the party.<sup>27</sup> This provided an entry for members of previously marginalised ethnic groups -- such as Sandzak's Bosniaks -- into the political, economic, cultural and social mainstream.

Tito's formula of "brotherhood and unity" between people and nationalities was imposed from the top down and enforced by the party and state security apparatus. This proved an effective way to keep the lid on centrifugal forces of nationalism. It also introduced ethnic tolerance as a cornerstone of the state. Politically this meant an ethnic division of spoils in post-war Novi Pazar, where Bosniaks typically held the position of mayor, Serbs held the post of Communist Party chief. After Rankovic's removal, Bosniaks and Serbs began to rotate through both posts, though Serbs were overrepresented in the police and state security and often provided the chief of police.

The post-war period saw the development of Sandzak's first industry, when in 1948 ground was broken for a textile factory, TK Raska. Due to financial difficulties caused by the split between Tito and Stalin, it only opened in 1956, when it employed approximately 600. Despite the region's high unemployment, the factory had difficulty recruiting workers. Few men wanted what they considered a woman's job, while the idea of a woman working in a factory was considered culturally close to prostitution.

Titoism brought other industry to Sandzak, including the Sloga brick and tile factory, the Ras shoe factory, the Minel factory for mining equipment, the Iskra battery factory, the Prva Petoletka metal factory, the FAP truck factory, and a Zastava factory that manufactured automobile parts and weapons components. Yet, the textile and shoe industries remained by far the largest employers.

Tito introduced mandatory eight-year elementary schooling. This was of particular importance, as prior to 1945, only five people from Novi Pazar -- two Serbs and three Bosniaks -- had any formal education beyond the fifth year of elementary school.<sup>28</sup> The communist authorities built new schools, including a gymnasium. Higher education was largely separate, though; most Serbs went to universities in Nis or Belgrade, while many Bosniaks attended those in Sarajevo and later Pristina.

The Muslim Slav population in Sandzak -- along with the Bosnian Muslims -- became particularly loyal to the Yugoslav communist system following the 1968 constitutional amendments, which recognised the category of "Muslim" as a constituent people of Yugoslavia. For the first time, Muslims were equal with Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Slovenes.

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<sup>25</sup> There is little difference between the terms "srez," "oblast" and "okrug." All refer to counties or districts that are comprised of more than one municipality.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews with former officials from the League of Communists.

<sup>27</sup> The party eventually changed its name to the League of Communists.

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<sup>28</sup> Those who wished to continue their education typically went to Mostar in Herzegovina (Bosniaks) or Kraljevo (Serbs).

Tito's foreign policy meant that Yugoslavia's Muslims were often shown off to the international community, especially for cultivating good relations with Islamic countries active in the non-aligned movement. Ironically, even though Muslims were defined as a constituent people on the basis of religious heritage, the majority led secular lives in which religion played a minor role. Muslims from both Sandzak and Bosnia rose to high positions in the state and party apparatus.

Most Muslim Slavs look back on the Tito era as a golden age of ethnic cooperation, when the region saw economic growth and industrialisation, and educational opportunities opened up. It marked the first time Muslims had been incorporated into Serbian governing structures on a meaningful basis. It also demonstrated that Muslim Slavs were willing to give their allegiance to a state that treated them as equal partners, not as an unwanted foreign organism. Even today some shops in Novi Pazar display Tito's picture.

### III. THE MILOSEVIC ERA

#### A. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The question of what to call oneself is a defining moment in the Balkans. The question of national identity in Sandzak surfaced in the early 1990s as Titoist Yugoslavia began to unravel along national, cultural, ethnic and religious fault lines.

Under the 1968 constitutional amendments, the ethnic identity of non-Croat and non-Serb inhabitants of Bosnia & Herzegovina<sup>29</sup> was officially designated as "Muslim". In Yugoslav Socialist terms "Muslim" with a capital "M" referred to ethnic heritage; "muslim" with a small "m", referred to one's religion. In the 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses, most Muslim Slavs in Sandzak, Bosnia, Serbia proper and Kosovo declared themselves as "Muslim".

But "Muslim" was also highly problematic. Under communism, many "Muslims" were atheists and had little or nothing to do with Islam other than an inherited cultural background. Many other "Muslims" -- although not atheists -- were not practicing "muslims", just as many Serbs and Croats were not practicing Orthodox or Catholics. For these "Muslims", the term indicated no more than an ethno-religious heritage. Many Serbs and Croats felt that Muslims were not a real ethnic group but simply Serbs or Croats who had converted to Islam, and that recognition of them as a national group in some way weakened their own national claims.

Even today there are few tangible distinctions among Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats: they speak the same language, albeit with regional dialectical variations and communicate easily without interpreters. They listen to the same pop musicians, use the local vernacular, and mostly celebrate similar holidays and festivals. Since the main distinction is religion, the question arose: if a "Muslim" converted to another faith, was he or she no longer a "Muslim"?

As the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes began their nationalist revivals in the late 1980s, the question of Muslim national identity was bound to arise, and the shortcomings of the term "Muslim" became rapidly apparent. Other options considered at various times included "Bosnian" (*Bosaniac, bosanski*) and "Bosniak" (*Bosnjak, bosnjacki*). Yet these, too, are problematic: Bosnian is almost entirely geographic and could refer to any person of any ethnic origin coming from Bosnia,

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<sup>29</sup> Apart from a small Sephardic Jewish community present in Bosnia since the late fifteenth century.

while "Bosniak" is also geographic, not ethnic, and is a common surname among Serbs, Croats and Muslims whose families originated in Bosnia. These terms also failed to take into account Muslim Slavs outside Bosnia & Herzegovina in places such as Kosovo, Sandzak and Serbia proper.

Following an internal debate, in 1993 Bosnia's "Muslims", decided on "Bosniak" as the most appropriate replacement for "Muslim". Within Bosnia, both Serbs and Croats sharply opposed this term because they felt it would strengthen the Muslims' ambition to portray themselves as the leading ethnic group in the republic.

The choice of "Bosniak" also raised significant problems for "Muslims" elsewhere, particularly in Sandzak, where a large "Muslim" population inhabited an ethnically compact area abutting the border of Bosnia & Herzegovina. If these non-Bosnian "Muslims" chose to redefine themselves as "Bosniaks", did this imply they were co-nationals of the ethnic majority group in a neighbouring country? And would use of the term imply they owed allegiance to that other country, with implications for a potential irredentist movement? If Sandzak Muslims define themselves as Bosniaks, in Serbian eyes this places them in a position similar to that of south Serbia's Albanians and Vojvodina's Hungarians, as potentially disloyal citizens. Name issues remain a significant stumbling block for the Sandzak Bosniaks, Serbs and the Serbian state.

## **B. COLLIDING NATIONALISMS**

In the late 1980s with communism fading, Serbia became the first Yugoslav republic to enter a phase of nationalism, followed shortly thereafter by Croatia and then Slovenia.

During the almost 400 years of Ottoman rule (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries), stewardship of Serbia's national and state identity was left primarily to the Serbian Orthodox Church, which preserved the sense of "Serbdom" until 1878, when statehood was regained. Nonetheless, traditional peasant conservatism and an occupation mentality remained deeply rooted. In spite of its successes, many Serbs -- particularly in the countryside -- had difficulty establishing loyalty to the expanding national state. This was particularly pronounced during the periods of Royal and Communist Yugoslavia, when Serbia's role in that state was uncertain. Communist antagonism towards the Church -- which for many was an integral part of Serbian statehood as well as their personal identity -- reinforced this occupation mentality and a sense of ambiguity that may be defined as follows: most Serbs were very loyal to the state, yet uncertain whether it was really theirs.

The demise of communist ideology gave the Church a new lease on life. Aware that communist rhetoric could neither save Yugoslavia nor strengthen his grip on power, Slobodan Milosevic embraced nationalism -- not so much as an ideology but as a governing tool.<sup>30</sup> He permitted the Serbian Orthodox Church unprecedented influence over public life and gave it financial support, but kept the real levers of power firmly in his hands.

But while the Serbs sought to redefine themselves as a people and country at the end of the twentieth century, their definitions left little room for non-Orthodox populations within Serbia. To make matters worse for Sandzak Muslims, Serbian nationalism rode on a wave of virulent anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic rhetoric that lumped together the fourteenth century Ottoman Turks, Yugoslav Muslims, and Kosovo Albanians as the age-old enemy of Christianity, traitors and a potential fifth column waiting to tear Serbia apart. The media spoke of all Muslims as "fundamentalists" or "Islamic extremists" and declared they sought a "green corridor" of Islam to connect Bosnia with Kosovo and the Middle East via Sandzak. It alleged that the Bosniaks had tens of thousands under arms and were openly preparing for war against Serbs.<sup>31</sup> It also attempted to link them with Islamic jihadi movements. This demonisation of Sandzak Bosniaks continues in some Serbian print and electronic media.

This nationalist rhetoric alienated most Sandzak Bosniaks from Serbian state institutions, such as the police, judiciary and schools. It also forced them to confront their own identity. In so doing, they turned towards Bosnia.<sup>32</sup> In its initial stages, Sandzak Bosniak nationalism was mild in comparison to Croat and Serb nationalism and concentrated primarily on defining a national identity. Unlike the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, most Bosniaks lacked a shared national ideology, program or vision. They liked Tito's "Brotherhood and Unity", and Yugoslavia was their natural home. They had difficulty comprehending its break-up and the rationale behind the emerging successor nation states. Two of their leading politicians -- Adil Zulfikarpasic and Fikret Abdic -- espoused rather moderate forms of Bosniak nationalism that focused primarily on defining the identity

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<sup>30</sup> This newly reascent Serbian nationalism collided not only with other emerging nationalist movements inside Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, but may to a certain extent have provoked them.

<sup>31</sup> This rhetoric is strikingly similar to Serbian media coverage of events in Kosovo and attitudes towards Kosovo Albanians.

<sup>32</sup> The Bosnian Muslims have always regarded the Sandzaklija as poor country cousins -- uneducated, primitive and unsophisticated.

and interests of Bosniaks within a common south Slav state.

Alija Izetbegovic, who later rose to the presidency of the leading Bosniak party in Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Party for Democratic Action (SDA), espoused a rather vague vision of Islam in his 1983 *Islamic Declaration*,<sup>33</sup> that included references to an ill-defined pan-Islamic state. These poorly elaborated ideas were aimed at the wider Islamic world rather than the Balkans or Bosnia. In practical terms, the SDA initially based its platform on Bosnia remaining inside a Yugoslav state. Izetbegovic's subsequent work, *Islam Between East and West* (1984), envisioned Muslims, Croats and Serbs coexisting peacefully within a joint state. Bosniak nationalism was never as well defined, exclusionist or vitriolic as Serbian or Croatian nationalism nor tied to creation of a new nation-state. Until the beginning of hostilities in Bosnia, the Bosniak leadership was woefully unprepared for the break-up. Even subsequently, many inside Bosnia and Sandzak hoped somehow for a return to the "good old days" of "Brotherhood and Unity" in a common Yugoslav home.

In 1990 Sandzak Bosniaks organised as a local branch of the SDA. The co-founders were Sulejman Ugljanin, a dentist and former boxer, and Rasim Ljajic, a medical doctor. At that time Ugljanin associated closely with a right-wing nationalist Islamic faction within the Bosnian SDA that included Hasim Cengic and Omar Behman, whose brand of Islamic Bosniak nationalism seemed to fit in with his vision for Sandzak.<sup>34</sup> Ugljanin's primary platform has remained the need for an autonomous Sandzak region based on this more right-wing Bosniak nationalism, while Ljajic has focused more on Bosniak participation in Serbia's political and cultural institutions as well as democratisation and development of civil society. The two leaders went their separate ways in the mid-1990's when Ljajic left the SDA to form his own party, the SDA-Rasim Ljajic.<sup>35</sup> They are now bitter rivals. In 1992, after Bosnian independence, the Sandzak SDA became a separate organisation. Similarly, the Sandzak Bosniaks formed the Mesihat Islamic Community (IZ), and Ugljanin used his influence to place a young cleric, Muamer Zukorlic, as mufti of Sandzak.

Ugljanin's brand of Bosniak nationalism was, however, tied to the concept of regional autonomy for Sandzak. On 11 May 1991, the SDA established the Muslim National Council of Sandzak (MNVS), which -- although illegal at the time -- followed the pattern of ethnic groups in other parts of the former Yugoslavia at that time.<sup>36</sup> From its creation, the council sought political and territorial autonomy for Sandzak and national and cultural emancipation for Bosniaks. In 1991, it adopted the "Memorandum on the Special Status of Sandzak", a document that elaborates the elements of statehood, autonomy, devolution and regional organisation Bosniaks sought. This document is still officially the platform of the MNVS, which in 1993 renamed itself the Bosniak National Council (BNVS).<sup>37</sup> The authorities in both Serbia and Montenegro reacted angrily, accusing the MNVS leadership of treason and secessionism. This led to the eventual prosecution of the top SDA leadership.<sup>38</sup>

The Muslim National Council of Sandzak organised a referendum, held between 25 and 27 October 1991, through which the people of Sandzak (Muslims/Bosniaks) were to voice their opinion on autonomy. Out of 264,156 registered voters, 187,547 (70.19 per cent) cast ballots, and 98.90 per cent supported political autonomy. To Belgrade, which was dealing with the break-up of Yugoslavia, this was like waving a red cape in front of a bull.

Sandzak's Serbs supported Milosevic and his populist/nationalistic policies, and many voted for his Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) or the more extremist Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS).<sup>39</sup> Many Serbs saw the emergence of a Bosniak nationalist party in Sandzak as proof that their own nationalistic rhetoric and policies were indeed justified.

During the 1990s, the budding Bosniak intellectual and political elite began to grasp and utilise concepts and values of human rights, regionalisation and democracy as effective discourses through which they could present their problems and defend themselves against the Serb-dominated state apparatus. At the same time, the Serbian

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<sup>33</sup> Alija Izetbegovic, *The Islamic Declaration* (Sarajevo, 1990, reprint).

<sup>34</sup> This more extremist form of Bosniak nationalism did not emerge fully until after the war in Bosnia had begun. Milovan Djilas and Nadezda Gace, *Bosnjak Adil Zulfikarpasic* (Zurich, 1994), pp. 162-163.

<sup>35</sup> Ljajic was the General Secretary of the SDA until his formal split with Ugljanin in 1995. They had fallen out a year earlier, when Ugljanin -- in exile in Turkey -- decided to disband the party's municipal councils.

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<sup>36</sup> The formal establishment of minority councils in Serbia did not come until 2002 with the adoption of the Federal Law on Ethnic and National Minorities.

<sup>37</sup> "Sandzak: Regija koja povezuje ili deli Srbiju i Crnu Goru?", report on Sandzak published by IFIMES, a Ljubljana based think-tank, January 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Harun Hadzic in Montenegro and Sulejman Ugljanin in Serbia.

<sup>39</sup> The SRS has been closely tied to Serbian State Security (DB) since its inception and has allegedly organised and operated a number of paramilitary formations inside Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Vojvodina and Sandzak. Its founder, Vojislav Seselj, is awaiting trial for war crimes at The Hague Tribunal.

population remained a prisoner of Milosevic's nationalist propaganda, holding to the belief that the Serbian state was the only defence against possible secession of Sandzak.

### C. STATE TERROR

Officially the wars in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Croatia and the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 had little effect on Sandzak. Yet for Sandzak Bosniaks, the 1990s were an era of state terror, marked by ethnic cleansing and discrimination that left them questioning their ability to survive as a people. By all accounts, they were disorganised, virtually unarmed, surrounded and closely monitored by the Serb-dominated army. Their problems, however, were primarily with the state, not their Serb neighbours.

During the Milosevic era, Serbian and Yugoslav security services undertook a series of actions inside Serbia that were clear violations of human rights and in some cases breaches of the Geneva Convention.<sup>40</sup> These included ethnic cleansing of entire villages, murders, kidnappings, attacks on non-Orthodox religious structures and graveyards, beatings, arson, and show trials based on false evidence. Some of these actions are the subject of court proceedings at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, while yet others are being prosecuted -- sometimes half-heartedly -- by Serbian courts. Many well-documented incidents and crimes have never been investigated or prosecuted and continue to be ignored or covered up by Serbian authorities. Sandzak did not escape this violence.

The Milosevic regime's violations of the human rights of Sandzak's Bosniaks occurred primarily between 1991 and 1995, the years of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia.<sup>41</sup> Already in 1991 there were indications of what was to come, with the first serious incidents in Montenegro, when 28 Bosniak army reservists were sentenced to prison for refusing to fight on the Dubrovnik front. In October and November murder, arson and bombing attacks occurred against Bosniaks in the Montenegrin Sandzak. Neither the Montenegrin nor rump Federal Yugoslav authorities acted to find and punish those responsible.

When war broke out in neighbouring Bosnia, the Yugoslav Army encircled Novi Pazar with troops and tanks, and its artillery on the hills was visible from the city centre. The message to the Bosniaks was clear: should they join their Bosnian brethren in fighting against Serb authority, the army would retaliate against the civilian population and turn Novi Pazar into another Vukovar.<sup>42</sup> These deployments continued until December 1993.

In 1992 and 1993 Yugoslav army forces, accompanied by Serbian and Montenegrin paramilitary and police, entered Bosniak-majority villages along the border with Bosnia and began a campaign of ethnic cleansing inside Serbia and Montenegro. The object was to remove potentially "hostile" Bosniak populations that might aid Bosnian Bosniaks across the border. This was supported by such politicians as Seselj, who proposed that all Bosniaks within 30 kilometres of the border be "cleansed". The campaign, which hit hardest the two Sandzak municipalities that border on Bosnia -- Pljevlja (Montenegro) and Priboj (Serbia) -- included murder, torture, kidnapping, bombing, beatings, arson, extortion and eventually the forced expulsion of Bosniaks from entire villages. Mosques and Muslim graveyards were attacked. In some instances individuals were taken into custody and transported to Bosnia, where they were killed.

In the Priboj municipality, approximately twenty villages were "cleansed" of all Bosniaks, during which 185 homes were burned or destroyed, and 23 Bosniaks murdered; in Pljevlja municipality, 29 villages were completely cleansed.<sup>43</sup> On 10 June 1992, two Bosniaks were kidnapped from their beds in the Priboj Health Centre, transported to Bosnia and murdered the same day. There were three other cases of kidnap/murder in the Priboj municipality,<sup>44</sup> and Bosniaks employed in state-owned companies were laid off.<sup>45</sup> On 18 February 1993, the army shelled the village of Kukurovici, killing three Bosniaks, wounding two and setting the village ablaze. Not only did local police and army units fail to prevent any of these actions, they were often the main perpetrators. Several paramilitary groups, including the "White Eagles" and "Sooty Alley", also participated,

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<sup>40</sup> These cases have been extensively documented by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak and the Sandzak Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedom.

<sup>41</sup> The Sandzak Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedom has published a multi-volume "Blue Library" detailing many human rights violations and crimes committed against Bosniaks during the 1990s.

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<sup>42</sup> The fact that a number of leading Bosnian politicians and generals -- such as Ejup Ganic and Sefer Halilovic -- came from Sandzak provided justification in the minds of many Serbs.

<sup>43</sup> Saopštenje za javnost, 23 February 2005, Odbor za zastitu ljudskih prava i humanitarnu djelatnost Priboj.

<sup>44</sup> These occurred on 7 April 1992 in the village of Zaostro, 21 October 1992 in Sjeverin and 6 April 1993 in Sjeverin.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group correspondence with Odbor za zastitu ljudskih prava i humanitarnu djelatnost Priboj.

under command and control of the DB and army. One of the most notorious paramilitary commanders was SRS member and Federal parliamentary deputy Milika "Ceko" Dacevic.<sup>46</sup>

Three mass-kidnapping/murder cases attracted broad public attention and caused considerable concern among Sandzak Bosniaks. The security forces that conducted these actions operated under the command and control of either the Yugoslav Army General Staff in Belgrade or the Serbian Interior Ministry's Department of State Security (DB).<sup>47</sup>

The first occurred in Sandzak on 22 October 1992, when Serbian security forces stopped a bus travelling between Priboj and Sjeverin in the village of Mioce. They kidnapped sixteen men and one woman -- all Bosniaks and citizens of rump Yugoslavia -- and drove them into Bosnia & Herzegovina, where they were subsequently murdered in Visegrad.<sup>48</sup>

The second occurred in the course of the ethnic cleansing actions in the Bukovica region inside the Pljevlja municipality. On 16 February 1993, forces of the Army of Republika Srpska crossed into Montenegro and kidnapped twelve members of the Bungur family, including five older than 65 and an eight-month old baby, while torturing and killing a thirteenth member, a 90-year old Latif. They took the hostages into Bosnia but released them.<sup>49</sup>

The third and highest profile kidnapping/murder occurred on 27 February 1993 in the village of Strpci not far from Priboj, when Bosnian Serb forces stopped and boarded a train travelling between Belgrade and Bar and seized twenty Bosniaks, who were never seen again and are presumed murdered.<sup>50</sup>

Even though the forces that carried out these actions were under the direct control of Belgrade, the authorities

failed to act to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice. Only recently, ten years after the crimes, have Serbian courts begun to act -- albeit half-heartedly -- on the Sjeverin and Strpci cases.<sup>51</sup>

The Serbian and Montenegrin police subjected several thousand Bosniak men to brutal interrogations. Many acts of police violence occurred during sweeps that were ostensibly organised to search for illegal weapons. The tense atmosphere and general breakdown in law and order at the beginning of the 1990s caused many Sandzak residents to arm themselves for self protection. Both Serb and Bosniak interlocutors have told Crisis Group that during the decade the DB distributed arms to Serb villages. At the same time, it facilitated the illegal sale of weapons to Bosniaks, while recording who purchased which weapon. Later, this information was used against many Bosniaks who had otherwise committed no offence. Bosnian SDA co-founder Adil Zulfikarpasic claims that Ugljanin organised some of these sales in cooperation with a known Yugoslav army agent provocateur.<sup>52</sup> Occasionally death would result from the beatings, and serious injuries were common. By the end of 1996, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak had registered 1,082 cases in which the police searched homes looking for guns, 446 persons were taken into custody, and 422 were physically mistreated. Unregistered cases are thought to be equally numerous. Only nineteen persons were ever tried and found guilty of illegal possession of weapons.<sup>53</sup>

The Milosevic regime began two high-profile show trials against groups of Bosniaks in Serbia (24) and Montenegro (21) on charges of planning armed insurrection and attempting to join Sandzak to Bosnia. The charges were constructed not from evidence but from Milosevic's need to demonstrate he was protecting Serbs against "Islamic extremists". The Montenegrin court in Bijelo Polje subsequently dismissed one case for lack of evidence and ordered the Republic of Montenegro to pay financial damages to the accused, three of whom became members of the Montenegrin parliament. The original "guilty" verdict in the Serbian case was overturned by the Serbian Supreme Court in 1996 and sent back to a lower court. Since the overthrow of Milosevic, the Serbian government has shown no inclination to drop the charges, even though it lacks evidence to proceed.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Vreme*, 25 January 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Some forces involved were from the Bosnian Serb Army of Republika Srpska. Until as late as 2002, that force was effectively under command and control of the Yugoslav Army General Staff; its officers held ranks in both armies and received salaries and promotions from Belgrade.

<sup>48</sup> Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku, 1996.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> These were: Adem Alomerovic, Fehim Bakija, Ismet Babacic, Rifat Husovic, Samir Rastoder, Esad Kapetanovic, Iljaz Licina, Nihad Sahman, Senad Djecevic, Halil Zupcevic, Rasim Coric, Nijazim Kajevic, Fikret Memovic, Muhedin Hanic, Seco Softic, Dzafer Topuzovic, Safet Preljevic, Fevzija Zekovic, Fehim Sejfic, Zvezdan Zulicic and Toma Burzov. Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku, 1996.

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<sup>51</sup> See Section IV D 2 below.

<sup>52</sup> Djilas and Gace, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>53</sup> Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> The incoming DOS government indirectly admitted the case lacked merit when it returned the passport to the alleged

Many Bosniaks lost their jobs in the state bureaucracy and state-owned industries.<sup>55</sup> Some turned to the private sector while others emigrated. They continued to face official discrimination at all levels of society. Efforts to gain permits to open private businesses, shops or factories were met with resistance or demands for bribes by Serbian authorities.

The worst of the terror ended after the Dayton Peace Accords in November 1995. Yet random acts of violence against Bosniaks continued. The firebombing of homes lasted until at least 1998, and intimidation by the army and police ended only with Milosevic's fall.<sup>56</sup>

When Serbian security forces began aggressive actions accompanied by massive human rights violations against Kosovo's Albanian population in 1998, many Sandzak Bosniaks felt they were watching a repeat of the ethnic cleansing inside Bosnia and Sandzak. When NATO threatened to bomb Yugoslavia in 1998, the Yugoslav Army again placed artillery in the hills around Novi Pazar. Once the NATO bombing began in March 1999, the Yugoslav Army and Serbian police increased pressure on the Bosniaks, many of whom felt it was only a matter of time before these forces turned against them.

Hoping to escape what seemed an inevitable wave of ethnic cleansing, many Sandzak Bosniaks evacuated their entire families to foreign countries. Throughout the NATO bombing campaign, the Sarajevo bus station received approximately 30 busloads of Sandzak refugees daily. Although exact numbers are difficult to come by, Bosniak interlocutors in Sandzak and Bosnia estimate that the refugees may have numbered as high as 80,000.<sup>57</sup> In some instances, Sandzak businessmen shipped entire factories into Bosnia.<sup>58</sup> Upon leaving Yugoslavia, many had their valuables and cash stolen by customs officers and police. At this time, enterprising Yugoslav army officers extorted a lump sum of over 1 million German Marks from the Novi Pazar business community in exchange for a promise not to act against the Bosniak population.<sup>59</sup>

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ringleader, Tutin mayor Semsudin Kucevic, allowing him to travel.

<sup>55</sup> Serbia did not directly purge all Muslims. Rather, those whose loyalty was suspect were dismissed. "Loyal" Muslims were allowed to remain and had access to new positions.

<sup>56</sup> For example, in 1997 Yugoslav Army soldiers lobbed grenades at a Bosniak house in Tisovac, and in a separate incident soldiers fired an anti-tank rocket at a Bosniak house in Bisevo.

<sup>57</sup> The vast majority of these "refugees" returned following the cessation of hostilities with NATO in July 1999.

<sup>58</sup> The Dallas furniture manufacturing company is an example. Today it has production facilities in Tutin and Sarajevo.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Novi Pazar businessmen.

The regime also curtailed freedom of the press in Sandzak, jailing at least one journalist for describing the human rights abuses against the region's Bosniaks in 1992-1993 and shutting down the radio station in Sjenica and maintaining central control over Radio Novi Pazar.<sup>60</sup>

For Bosniaks the message of the 1990s with its state-sanctioned crimes and official legalised discrimination could not have been clearer: they were second-class citizens, who no longer enjoyed the protection of the state, an unwanted and harmful foreign organism whose life and property had no value before the law. Yet in spite of this, Sandzak had few inter-ethnic incidents, as the populations themselves managed to coexist.

#### D. POLITICS OF APATHY

Against the backdrop of state terror and repression, Sandzak politics were divisive and capricious, with Novi Pazar a bellwether for the entire area. Squabbling Bosniak politicians combined with overwhelming pressure from Belgrade to make most Bosniaks politically disinterested and apathetic, at least until the overthrow of Milosevic on 5 October 2000.

Since 1992, Ugljanin's SDA has been the largest Bosniak political party, with Ljajic's variously named parties the second. But during the 1990s the most powerful parties in Sandzak were Milosevic's SPS and the Yugoslav United Left (JUL) of his wife Mira Markovic. Despite the overwhelming Bosniak majority in Novi Pazar, these two parties controlled the local government and municipal assembly for most of the decade, during which they retained significant Bosniak membership. This was due to the loyalties many Bosniaks felt towards Titoist Yugoslavia and the Communist Party, which they transferred to the SPS and JUL, and also because they saw cooperation with the ruling couple as a lesser evil than having Milosevic unleash ultranationalist forces, such as the SRS. Many felt they could influence policy and their own destiny better by working within the system.

During the 1990s Ugljanin was clearly Sandzak's undisputed Bosniak political leader, and he remains a powerful political force. A founder of the MNVS in May 1991,<sup>61</sup> his public statements at the time indicated he foresaw a provincial authority that would control the police, courts, educational and cultural institutions, the mass media, use of energy and other natural resources, the social security system and welfare, commercial banks, roads and telecommunications infrastructure. Prior to the

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<sup>60</sup> See Beta, 25 June 1997 and 5 November 1997.

<sup>61</sup> Beta, 1 August 1997.



Bosnian war, Ugljanin stated a sovereign and territorially integral Bosnia and "special status" for Sandzak within the rump Yugoslavia would resolve the Muslim Slav national question in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>62</sup>

During 1993, the worst year of repression against the Bosniaks, Ugljanin was charged with attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and engineer Sandzak's secession, as well as terrorism. Nevertheless, the government permitted him to leave the country on 5 July of that year, and he spent most of the next three years in exile in Turkey and Bosnia.<sup>63</sup>

Following the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords and cessation of hostilities in Bosnia, the Milosevic government tried a more political, slightly less repressive approach towards Sandzak. The first sign was in December 1995, when Montenegrin President and Milosevic protégé Momir Bulatovic dropped all charges against the 21 Bosniak political prisoners incarcerated on insurrection charges.

In March 1996, the Serbian Republic government extended an olive branch to the Bosniaks, appointing a Tito-era Bosniak politician Ferid Hamidovic -- who had joined Mira Markovic's JUL -- as deputy minister of ecology. With their visibly multi-ethnic slate of candidates and an appeal to communist nostalgia, the JUL's collection of hard-line communist dinosaurs, opportunists and cronies of the ruling couple initially appealed to Bosniak voters in a way the die-hard ultranationalists in the SPS could not. Many Bosniaks in Sandzak initially hoped that Markovic -- with her Tito-era rhetoric of brotherhood and unity -- could provide a bulwark against Serbian nationalism and offer the Bosniaks a political home in Milosevic's rump Yugoslavia. It was clearly the lesser of two evils for them -- it was nearly impossible to hold a position of responsibility in state-owned enterprises or government without membership in the SPS or JUL -- but Bosniaks flocked to join JUL, so much so that in Novi Pazar it quickly gained a larger membership than Milosevic's SPS.

Ugljanin was permitted to return on 30 September 1996 and re-enter politics. Although the indictment against him remained in force, no arrest warrant was executed, and several weeks later he was elected to the federal parliament, thereby gaining immunity from prosecution. Candidates affiliated with him and the satellite parties of the BNVS captured two-thirds of the seats in Novi Pazar's municipal assembly.<sup>64</sup> They also won in Sandzak's other

two Bosniak majority municipalities. In Prijepolje the SPS retained power. The newly emergent JUL suffered a crushing defeat, with fewer votes than registered members, and was unable to gain a single seat in the municipal assembly.

Ugljanin and his allies soon implemented policies that alienated local Serbs and made them feel that they were the subject of discrimination.<sup>65</sup> On 16 December 1996, the president of Novi Pazar's municipal executive board, Izudin Susevic, announced that no Socialists would be among the board's six newly appointed members.<sup>66</sup> The same day, Ugljanin's coalition of Bosniak parties and the local municipal assembly nominated candidates for the school board. All were Bosniaks, and Serbian leaders complained bitterly.<sup>67</sup> In another show of insensitivity, they hung the BNVS flag -- which bears an Islamic symbol -- in the city government building.

In March 1997 Novi Pazar municipal authorities announced they would soon replace all directors of local public enterprises who were members of the SPS or were Serbs.<sup>68</sup> The SPS members on the municipal assembly began boycotting meetings in protest.<sup>69</sup> Several weeks later a Serb member of the assembly warned Serbs might establish a parallel government in Novi Pazar if "discrimination" continued.<sup>70</sup> Soon the SPS charged that Ugljanin and his protégés were working to make Sandzak an independent state.<sup>71</sup>

Tensions peaked after Ugljanin announced that the Bosniak National Council would hold a convention in Novi Pazar in mid-July 1997. At a press conference on 25 June, he said "the possibility could not be ruled out that the convention would pass a resolution on autonomy for the Sandzak". He recalled that the Bosniaks had voted for autonomy in a referendum six years earlier.<sup>72</sup> On 10 July, Belgrade reacted. Police entered the municipal building, threw out the assembly, and replaced it with an acting assembly comprised exclusively of SPS and JUL

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and the Serbian National Party and an independent candidate, one each. See Beta, 14, 19 and 22 November 1996.

<sup>62</sup> Many in Novi Pazar view the SDA/CLS leadership structures as outsiders, due to the fact that they include a significant number of individuals from Kosovska Mitrovica (Ugljanin, Bajram Omeragic) and Tutin (Esad Dzudzevic, Vasvija Gusinac).

<sup>63</sup> Ugljanin's brother, Sadik, and Susevic's brother, Sabahudin, did become members of the council. See Beta, 16 December 1996.

<sup>64</sup> Beta, 16 December 1996.

<sup>65</sup> Beta, 18 March 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Beta, 31 March 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Beta, 2 April 1997.

<sup>68</sup> Beta, 23 May 1997.

<sup>69</sup> Beta, 25 June 1997.

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<sup>62</sup> Beta, 9 September 1996 and 11 June 1997.

<sup>63</sup> Beta, 1 August 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Ugljanin and his allies took 33 of 47 seats. The Socialist Party of Serbia won ten seats; the Serbian Radical Party, two;

members, some of whom were Bosniaks. This new body expelled Ugljanin's followers from office for behaving in an "illegal and unconstitutional manner."<sup>73</sup> Ugljanin refused to recognise the new authorities<sup>74</sup> but Belgrade removed his parliamentary immunity,<sup>75</sup> and on 17 July the Novi Pazar prosecutor's office reactivated the 1993 indictment<sup>76</sup> though he was not arrested and soon contested the government's actions in court.

Serbia's rubber stamp constitutional court ruled on 14 May 1998 that the replacement of the municipal government was legal. In response, Ugljanin threatened public protests if the regime did not end the extraordinary administration,<sup>77</sup> but an attempt on the anniversary of the overthrow failed to attract much support. Most Bosniaks were intimidated and in no mood to test the police or army by demonstrating. The Milosevic-appointed municipal assembly remained in power until the 24 September 2000 elections.

Beginning in 1998, more moderate Bosniak leaders started attacking Ugljanin as too extreme. Many local Serbs and Bosniaks claim the Serbian police had compromised him even before he returned to Novi Pazar in 1996, and Milosevic would not have permitted him to return unless a deal was in place.<sup>78</sup> In retrospect it appears Ugljanin used an old Milosevic tactic when he diluted the voting clout of Sandzak's Bosniak population by creating an array of parties with similar names and platforms, including four bearing the name Party for Democratic Action (SDA).<sup>79</sup> The intolerant policies Ugljanin implemented once he gained control of the Novi Pazar municipality certainly paved the way for the ouster of the municipal government by Belgrade.

Following the dismissal of the municipal assembly, Ugljanin often made statements which favoured the Milosevic line. For example, in the spring of 1998, he called for Bosniak voters in Montenegro to boycott the presidential election between Bulatovic and Milo Djukanovic, who had broken with Milosevic in 1996.

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<sup>73</sup> Beta, 10 July 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Beta, 11 July 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Beta, 10 July 1997.

<sup>76</sup> Beta, 17 July 1997.

<sup>77</sup> Beta, 20 April 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Although much of this talk should be considered "marketplace gossip", it is noteworthy that Milosevic did indeed compromise a number of leading opposition politicians and political parties, by creating or financing them or placing State Security officials in their hierarchy. This maintained the outward appearance of democracy while in fact he controlled many "opposition" parties.

<sup>79</sup> These were Ugljanin's own SDA, the "True SDA", the SDA of Yugoslavia, and the SDA of Montenegro. See Beta, 4 and 22 October 1996.

Such a boycott would have favoured Milosevic's candidate, and the Bosniaks in Montenegro ignored Ugljanin.<sup>80</sup> They were rewarded by inclusion in the Montenegrin government. Nevertheless, Ugljanin remains a powerful political force in Sandzak.

## E. ECONOMIC BOOM AND BUST

The anti-Bosniak state terror of the Milosevic era coincided with an economic boom in Novi Pazar. The newly emerging post-communist Bosniak elite in Sandzak were very much aware that Milosevic and his apparatus neither intended to nor were capable of addressing their needs. Many either migrated to Bosnia and Turkey or remained defiantly in Sandzak on the margins of a hostile state. Although the state theoretically guaranteed jobs in the massive public sector, the collapse of the rump Yugoslav economy throughout the 1990's meant that those who remained in state factories and institutions were increasingly impoverished as their wages dropped in real terms. Those who were not in the state sector were forced to find jobs in the private sector or become entrepreneurs themselves.

In May 1992 the UN imposed trade sanctions against Milosevic's rump Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This completely changed the manner in which the Serbian state apparatus financed itself and approached revenue collection and expenditures. The traditional manner of collecting revenues through sales taxes and customs duties was rendered virtually useless by the state-generated hyperinflation (1991-1994) and the sanctions. As a result, the state had to turn to other means of raising revenues to support expensive wars and the failing state sector. These consisted primarily of state-assigned smuggling monopolies for importing high-tariff goods such as tobacco, petroleum products, coffee and alcohol, while assigning quasi-monopolies for Serbia's few viable exports, such as agricultural and mineral products, timber and weapons. State and "private" companies that broke UN sanctions were hailed as patriots. Those who ran these enterprises provided much needed social peace while amassing great personal wealth through illegal, yet state-approved activities. Much of Serbia's present-day economic elite gained its wealth in this manner. It also provided ample opportunities to Bosniaks, many of whom had relatives in Turkey, to establish both legal and illegal trading networks rapidly.

In Sandzak, largely disenfranchised Bosniaks either left their jobs or were fired from the state-owned textile and shoe factories but took their manufacturing expertise

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<sup>80</sup> Beta, 20 October 1997.

with them. They were able to draw on capital from extended families in Western Europe and Turkey, as well as at home, to set up vibrant manufacturing companies in textiles, leather and shoes, as well as trading and transport companies. They quickly capitalised on the region's relatively low labour costs and large pool of skilled but unemployed textile and shoe workers. The ability to import raw materials without paying high customs duties and to operate without paying taxes helped profitability.<sup>81</sup> They also used family connections to export finished goods to Western Europe, often illegally. Novi Pazar became something of a haven of free enterprise. New manufacturing capacities and small enterprises with advanced technology (mainly producing textiles, leather and footwear) sprouted up everywhere, providing jobs for Bosniaks, especially women.

By the late 1990s, Novi Pazar boasted about 500 apparel and shoe manufacturing workshops that employed several thousand seamstresses and shoemakers. These soaked up the local pool of skilled workers, and people desperate for work commuted by bus to Novi Pazar from as far away as Kraljevo, 100 kilometres to the north. Because most of the apparel trade in Novi Pazar took place outside legal channels and beyond the grasp of the taxman, no reliable figures are available for its workforce, output, or profits. Local and Western analysts, however, estimated that these workshops produced several hundred thousand pairs of jeans each year and other ready-to-wear items, and that gross output value was between \$50 million and \$100 million. Bosniak leaders in Sandzak boasted that Serbia's tax collectors had more success collecting revenue in Novi Pazar than in any other municipality in the republic. The actual amount, however, is unknown, as the Serbian government released no official figures. Overnight a new class of wealthy -- both Serb and Bosniak -- entrepreneurs sprang up, although many Serbs remained in low-paying state sector jobs. Slowly ethnic differences began to be mirrored by economic differences, as some Serbs reliant on the failing official economy became poor.

Novi Pazar during the Milosevic era was a vibrant and bustling town, where locally manufactured counterfeit Levis, Calvin Klein, Bugle Boy and Versace jeans jostled with other counterfeit brand name clothing, sunglasses and accessories. Although there were many unemployed men milling about the city centre, there was a feeling of economic progress and industriousness. Even before the break-up of Yugoslavia, Novi Pazar was notorious for manufacturing quality counterfeit

Italian shoes at a fraction of the cost of the originals. During the 1990s a pair of Levi 501 jeans of apparently identical quality to the original could be had for \$10. The workshops sold to buyers from Kosovo, Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Bosnia, Croatia and Western Europe. The outbreak of fighting in Kosovo in 1998 cut sales, and many businessmen lamented the loss of Albanian customers, who always paid on time and in cash.<sup>82</sup>

The Sandzak's garment and shoe industry thrived in a kind of symbiotic relationship with the Serbian authorities. Yugoslavia's pariah status worked to the advantage of the factory owners because it protected them from civil suits that would, in normal times, have been brought by trademark owners. They needed Milosevic, or someone like him, for protection from international commercial laws and regulations. The Milosevic regime, a patronage network propped up by payoffs, desperately needed all the money it could get from the factory owners through tax payments, protection money, and bribes of customs officials.

Yet outside Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, Prijepolje, Nova Varos and Priboj all experienced economic collapse. In Priboj, the once famous FAP Truck factory fell on hard times after losing its pre-war markets in the former Yugoslav republics and was forced to cut its 6,000-strong work force by more than two thirds.<sup>83</sup> Its close proximity to the Bosnian border and the 1992-1993 ethnic cleansing created an economic dead zone, inhabited primarily by smugglers and black-marketeers. Sjenica's once bustling livestock agro-business, SKP -- famous for producing some of Yugoslavia's best cheeses -- declined due to corrupt management, market loss, and the overall chaos gripping the country. Its herds of livestock dropped to 10 per cent of pre-war levels. The formerly thriving coal mine at Stavalj was reduced to producing 60,000 tons a year. The Pester highlands emptied of people and livestock, as an earlier trend of economic migration accelerated.<sup>84</sup> Bosniaks from these areas either emigrated or moved to Novi Pazar, while the Serbs generally went toward central Serbia.

At the same time, other more problematic forms of economic activity began to spring up. Given its proximity to the Bosnian border and later to an UNMIK-governed Kosovo, as well as Montenegro, and the tightening internal controls between Montenegro and Serbia, local

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<sup>81</sup> There were, of course, hidden "taxes" in bribes and kickbacks to corrupt officials in the tax and customs administrations.

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<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interviews. See Reuters, 21 and 23 July 1998.

<sup>83</sup> One of FAP's main customers was the Yugoslav Army, which was reduced in size and facing budget restrictions. FAP had also manufactured automotive parts for Western European auto companies.

<sup>84</sup> A comparison of the 2002 Census with the 1991 Census shows a net population outflow from the Pester plateau.

"businessmen", often in cooperation with Serbian State Security, began trafficking narcotics into the European Union, Bosnia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Other profitable items included weapons, human beings, alcohol, tobacco, and agricultural produce. Serb interlocutors have told Crisis Group that these criminal activities help finance persons indicted for war crimes, including the former Bosnian Serb general, Ratko Mladic.

## F. POPULATION MOVEMENTS

The Milosevic era policies of ethnic cleansing, state discrimination, terror, and economic neglect hurt Serbs and Bosniaks alike. According to the 2002 census, the Sandzak region had lost 8.64 per cent of its population since 1991. Only Novi Pazar registered a negligible official increase of 0.87 per cent.<sup>85</sup> In spite of its higher birth rate, the Bosniak population fell by 7.88 per cent.<sup>86</sup> Priboj -- the scene of ethnic cleansing -- lost approximately 50 per cent of its Bosniak population.<sup>87</sup> Prijepolje, Nova Varos, and Sjenica lost between 16 and 18 per cent of their Bosniaks, Tutin, 12.64 per cent. While many went to Bosnia, Turkey or Western Europe, a significant and probably uncounted number moved to Novi Pazar. This trend of rural to urban migration will probably continue.

The Serb population, whose birth rate is below replacement level, also dropped, by 6.43 per cent (6,150 people), most substantially in Sjenica (12.9 per cent) and Tutin (11.08 per cent). All other Sandzak municipalities had smaller losses: Novi Pazar 7.69 per cent, Nova Varos 6.65 per cent, Prijepolje 5.52 per cent, and Priboj 3.83 per cent. Most moved elsewhere in Serbia where economic opportunities were better.

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<sup>85</sup> This equals 22,282 residents. Nova Varos lost 8.38 per cent, Prijepolje 11.47 per cent, Tutin 13.21 per cent, Priboj 15.50 per cent, and Sjenica 16.95 per cent. All figures are taken from a comparison of the census in 1991 and 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Official population statistics for Novi Pazar may be highly unreliable due to possible deliberate undercounting of Bosniaks. Depopulation of the Pester highlands is not expected to stop in the near future. If Bosniaks maintain their birth rate and the rural-city migration trend continues, within twenty years Novi Pazar could overtake Kraljevo and Cacak and become the largest city in western Serbia.

<sup>87</sup> The census figures show a loss of 35.99 per cent. However, at the request of family members, the census-takers counted Bosniaks working abroad. Crisis Group correspondence with Odbor za zastitu ljudskih prava i humanitarnu djelatnost Priboj.

## IV. POST-MILOSEVIC SANDZAK

Since the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia began in 1991, Serbia has been deeply immersed in its own identity crisis and struggled to deal with areas that have an ethnically mixed population. Many problems in Sandzak -- a bad economy, low standard of living, inadequate educational and health care facilities, a dysfunctional, corrupt judiciary and civil administration, and an inept, corrupt and brutal police force -- are mirrored in nearly every other municipality in the republic. But in an ethnically mixed area, dysfunctional and corrupt government becomes distorted by an ethnic lens that transforms every failure or mistake into a deliberate attack by the ruling majority against the subject minority. Sandzak is a case in point.

### A. THE POLITICAL MAP

In their first post-Milosevic term (2000-2004), the municipal authorities in Sandzak failed to improve the quality of life and welfare to any great degree. Serbia remains an overly centralised state: most services on the municipal level (education, health care, policing) are controlled by ministries in distant Belgrade. Municipalities own no assets -- not even the buildings and chairs in which they sit. The republic government collects all revenues at the local level and decides how much to return. Local communities have little say in appointments of police chiefs, school headmasters, directors of medical institutions, judges, public prosecutors, or tax inspectors. The central government frequently appoints individuals along party lines, which can lead to conflict on the local level. These state officials are not held accountable to local bodies.

In between the republic government and the 186-plus municipalities in Serbia are 25 administrative districts (*okrug/okruzi*).<sup>88</sup> None has an assembly or elected officials; they have only a few centrally appointed administrators since they are envisioned primarily as interest-based economic associations of neighbouring municipalities. They fulfil no real purpose and only increase the gap between republic and municipal authorities.

In ethnically mixed areas, bad management and governance, corruption, theft and poor policy often appear to the local minorities as official discrimination. Because of Serbia's excessive centralism and electoral district gerrymandering, residents -- Serb and Bosniak

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<sup>88</sup> This includes municipalities in Kosovo. There are 24 regions in Serbia plus the city of Belgrade, not including Kosovo.

alike -- have no ready access to services. Bosniaks feel Belgrade discriminates against them, while local Serbs feel the Bosniak-dominated municipal governments are doing the discriminating. This aggravates tensions and creates fertile ground for ethnic intolerance; it also hastens the ongoing depopulation of the Pester highlands.

To further aggravate matters, the Bosniak-majority municipalities have been the subject of ethnically-based gerrymandering. In an effort to dilute Bosniak political clout, the Serbian authorities split these municipalities between two *okruzi*. Two eastern Sandzak municipalities, Novi Pazar and Tutin, have been assigned to Raska *okrug*, based in Kraljevo,<sup>89</sup> while the third, Sjenica, has been lumped together with Priboj, Prijepolje and Nova Varos in the Zlatibor *okrug*, based in Uzice.<sup>90</sup> Kraljevo is a 100 km journey from Novi Pazar, more from Tutin. Sjenica is 105 km from Uzice, and the winter roads on the Pester highlands and over Mt. Zlatibor are often impassable.<sup>91</sup>

From a geographic and governance perspective, it would have made more sense to have Novi Pazar as the centre of an administrative district including Sjenica, Tutin, Prijepolje and Raska, as Bosniaks wish. It has a larger population than some other district seats, including Uzice. This would, of course, create a Bosniak majority district; but the calls from Bosniaks to reorganise regional boundaries along geographic lines make administrative sense and are in line with European practice.

In 2001 a Council of Europe expert team working with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) helped the Serbian government draft a Law on Local Self-Governance that concentrated primarily on elections, distribution of seats in municipal governments and re-distribution of the already limited power of mayors and municipal assemblies, rather than giving municipalities more responsibilities and adequate financial resources. The experts did not address the structural problems of centre versus periphery or revenue collection and distribution but the legislation was rushed through under international pressure. At a conference in Belgrade in 2002 organised by the Standing Conference of Cities, Prime Minister Zoran

Djindjic admitted it was deeply flawed and invited mayors to work around its limitations rather than passively await its amendment or replacement.<sup>92</sup>

Before Serbia can effectively decentralise, it will have to change Milosevic's 1990 constitution. At present the government appears unable to form the political consensus necessary for any amendment. Indeed, in the present political climate, such a consensus could well produce a more centralised constitution.<sup>93</sup>

## 1. SDA ascendancy

Municipal elections were held at the same time as the September 2000 Yugoslav federal presidential and parliamentary elections which removed Milosevic from office. The Sandzak Bosniaks again voted overwhelmingly for Ugljanin, this time via his SDA-led Coalition List for Sandzak (CLS).<sup>94</sup> In the three Bosniak majority municipalities of Sjenica, Tutin and Novi Pazar the CLS won stable assembly majorities, with Ljajic's SDA-Rasim Ljajic in single digits. In Novi Pazar, Ugljanin won nearly 70 per cent, while Ljajic's 4.8 per cent meant his party did not get a single seat. Following this, Ljajic changed the name to the Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP).

The Serbian parties won municipal assembly seats corresponding to their percentage of the population, typically between 10 and 25 per cent. In two of the three Serb majority municipalities -- Prijepolje and Priboj -- the SPS won in coalition with JUL and support from the SRS, while the SDA was represented in the assemblies as an active opposition, again in numbers comparable to the Bosniak population. The Serb population of Sandzak traditionally votes SRS or SPS -- only in the last few years have democratically oriented parties made a substantial impact. The only example of a non-nationalist party winning among the Serbs in the 2000 election was in Nova Varos, where a DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) coalition headed by Djindjic's Democratic Party (DS) won the municipal assembly by a single seat. As a result, from 2000 to 2002 Nova Varos had Milojkovic

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<sup>89</sup> The Raska District consists of two Sandzak municipalities with predominantly Muslim populations, and another three predominantly Serb populated municipalities, Kraljevo, Vrnjačka Banja and Raska.

<sup>90</sup> The Zlatibor District consists of ten municipalities: the Muslim dominated Sjenica municipality; the three Serb-majority Sandzak municipalities of Nova Varos, Prijepolje and Priboj, and another six primarily Serb, Uzice, Arilje, Bajina Basta, Kosjeric, Pozega and Cajetina.

<sup>91</sup> Some Hungarian areas of Vojvodina have also been subject to ethnic gerrymandering.

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<sup>92</sup> Conference on the Law on Local Self-Governance, held on 15 March 2002 at Belgrade's Sava Centre, organised by the Standing Conference of Serbian Cities, Serbian Ministry of Local Self-Governance and the U.S. Agency for International Development's Serbia Local Government Reform Program (SLGRP).

<sup>93</sup> Approximately fifteen constitutional drafts are circulating in public, from various political parties, expert groups and NGO's. They range from conservative to liberal, and include one that would reinstate the monarchy.

<sup>94</sup> The coalition was comprised of the SDA, the Bosniak Democratic Party of Sandzak, the Reform Democratic Party of Sandzak, the Social-Liberal Party of Sandzak and the Social Democratic Party of Sandzak.

Sunjevaric, a Serb, as mayor and Leko Kolasinac, a Bosniak, as deputy, both young, capable, modern and democratically oriented. They attempted to turn the community away from ethnic differences and towards economic development. Although their mandates ran until September 2004, in 2002 the municipal coalition of former anti-Milosevic forces collapsed, and they were replaced by an SPS-led coalition with Branislav Dilparic as mayor.<sup>95</sup>

Between 2000 and 2004 the SPS controlled the Prijepolje municipal assembly with Stevo Puric serving a third term as mayor. The SPS also controlled the Priboj municipal assembly in coalition with JUL. Two thirds of the Priboj municipality is accessible only via a road through Bosnia & Herzegovina. This has caused significant difficulties for residents following the break-up of Yugoslavia and in part facilitated the kidnappings at Sjeverin and Strpci. In January 2000, Bosnia began requiring all foreign vehicles entering the country to have valid international insurance (a green card), which costs approximately €150, a significant burden that the primarily rural population of the isolated two thirds of the municipality could not afford. The Priboj municipality reached a gentleman's agreement with authorities in Republika Srpska to not ask for green cards from its residents but the Bosnian government insisted on taking the matter up with Belgrade. The Bosnian border guards, however, permit Priboj residents to pass pending a final settlement.

On 28 January 2002, minor protests broke out regarding the border crossing protocol, and twenty SPS members of the municipal assembly resigned in protest. In response the republic government appointed a nine-member care-taker multi-ethnic council of DOS party representatives, with Milenko Milicevic as mayor and SDP member Ferzo Celovic as deputy mayor.<sup>96</sup> Special municipal elections in September 2004 confirmed it in power.

Following the September 2000 federal presidential and parliamentary elections, the eighteen-member DOS coalition began preparing for the Serbian parliamentary elections scheduled for December. The winner would control the republic government, the real source of power in Serbia. In the run-up, Ugljanin sought to have his SDA join the coalition in return for five seats in the Serbian parliament. He offered Djindjic's DS a seat on

the Novi Pazar municipal assembly's Executive Board (intended for a Serb), as well as its second vice presidency. Ugljanin's main rival, Ljajic -- who still had relatively minor influence in Sandzak -- promised to deliver the Bosniak vote in exchange for a mere two parliamentary seats, as well as (more significantly) a ministerial post for himself. Djindjic chose Ljajic, which meant that Ugljanin's much larger SDA was left out of the parliament following the sweeping DOS victory.<sup>97</sup> Djindjic's choice and Ljajic's consequent national prominence as Federal Minister for Human Rights and Ethnic Communities made the rivalry between the Bosniak leaders even more bitter.

The September and December 2000 elections marked a significant turning point in relations between Belgrade and the Bosniaks. For the first time since the Tito era, Belgrade began to include Serbia's Bosniaks in mainstream politics, and for the first time they were present on the national political scene. Prime Minister Djindjic visited Novi Pazar several times, as did his successor, Zoran Zivkovic, and the Bosniaks won key concessions on education and language. Most importantly, state terror ceased.

In spite of the CLS/SDA's electoral victories, Ugljanin himself shunned the limelight. Although his mayoral candidates all won, he himself stayed in the shadows as head of the BNVS. A new Law on National Minorities in 2002 legalised the BNVS and made it the highest organ of the Bosniak national minority inside Serbia. It includes seventeen parties, all with the exception of the SDA existing primarily on paper. Its platform is still based on the 1992 declaration, and many Bosniaks in Sandzak view it as a front for the SDA. Following passage of the law, the SDA moved the BNVS president's office into the Novi Pazar municipal building.

In his rare public appearances, Ugljanin devoted most of his energies to promoting sports. Similar to the communist era, he preferred to control politics through party structures or family ties, and he ran the three municipalities along the lines of a single party system. Prior to the September 2004 municipal elections, he was president of the SDA, president of the List for Sandzak coalition, president of the BNVS, and a paid adviser to the Novi Pazar municipal assembly president. Although Vasvija Gusinac, an English teacher, was appointed mayor of Novi Pazar, she was a figurehead. Anyone seeking action from the city government had to go through Ugljanin's brother, Sadik, who was president of the municipal Executive Board.

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<sup>95</sup> When a city councilman from the Serbian Movement of Renewal (SPO) defected, the SPS gained control of the municipality.

<sup>96</sup> The DOS temporary council in Priboj consisted of five Serbs, two Bosniaks and two Montenegrins. Two were from the DS, and one each from DSS, SDP, DHSS, ND, GSS, and SD. *Sluzbeni List*, 11 February 2002.

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<sup>97</sup> The eighteen-party DOS coalition captured 176 of the 250 parliamentary seats.

## 2. Ugljanin's "historic Sandzak"

The SDA continued to advocate that Sandzak become a special autonomous region transcending the boundaries of Serbia and Montenegro. This implicitly favoured preservation of Yugoslavia (subsequently Serbia and Montenegro) as a unified country or political entity, and called for giving Sandzak extensive autonomy similar to that enjoyed by the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. SDA politicians, claiming to represent all Bosniaks in all eleven Montenegrin and Serbian municipalities, touted an "historic Sandzak".

The SDA's claim to represent all Bosniaks in Sandzak was problematic. First, it had substantial influence in only three of the eleven municipalities, limited influence in another three, and almost none in the five Montenegrin municipalities. Secondly, giving autonomous status to the entire Sandzak would impinge on the prerogatives of the Montenegrin and Serbian republic governments and could possibly affect republic borders, particularly tricky given Montenegro's desire for independence. Thirdly, in view of nationalist sentiment inside Serbia, there is little possibility that any major Serbian political party could have backed the idea. Fourthly, for many Bosniaks, who had watched with horror the results of separatist movements in the former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s and lived through nine years of state terror and intimidation under Milosevic, "autonomy" had negative connotations.

Serbs in the three western Serbian-majority Sandzak municipalities show little enthusiasm for cooperation with the eastern Bosniak-majority municipalities and vigorously oppose an autonomous Sandzak. All Serbian political parties, including democratically-oriented ones, are suspicious of calls for autonomy in ethnic minority regions. The experience of losing Kosovo is used as justification to oppose autonomy. Historically, Serbian state institutions have tended to become even more centralised in response to calls for increased decentralisation and autonomy.

In Montenegro, where five municipalities once belonged to "historic Sandzak", there is little evidence of a desire to establish cultural or economic ties with Bosniak-majority municipalities inside Serbia. It seems that the Bosniaks in Montenegro are looking towards Podgorica and have opted for inclusion in mainstream Montenegrin politics, rather than in ethnic or regional parties.

Rasim Ljajic's SDP has maintained a different approach to questions of identity, culture, education and economic development and has not insisted on the "historic Sandzak" promoted by the SDA. Because of this, he has always been considered a more appropriate partner for mainstream Serbian parties, and he retained his ministerial post both

when Yugoslavia was replaced by the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in December 2002 and after the December 2003 Serbian parliamentary elections that brought Vojislav Kostunica's nationalist DSS party to power.

The only institutionalised north-south, cross-border cooperation has been the Sandzak Games, athletic events heavily promoted by the SDA and held every summer in one of the eleven municipalities of "historic Sandzak." The SDA apparently used funds from the Novi Pazar municipal budget to finance these games, and it is uncertain whether they will continue following its loss of the Novi Pazar assembly in the 2004 elections.

Both Bosniak parties were included in the work of the Serbia-Montenegro Constitutional Commission in 2001/2002 that was tasked with drafting the state union arrangement. Both pushed for retaining a common state, as they felt that it would not be in the interest of Sandzak Bosniaks to be split between two independent states. At one point, Esad Dzudzevic, then a CLS federal parliamentary deputy,<sup>98</sup> withdrew from the Commission claiming the charter did not foresee the new union as a state and would leave Bosniaks divided by republic borders.

In spite of its call for an autonomous Sandzak within historical borders, the SDA appeared more committed to autonomy for the three municipalities where it actually held power. This was reflected in a map of Sandzak it distributed -- "Our Area" -- that showed the three eastern municipalities, while omitting the western ones.<sup>99</sup>

## 3. Bosniak dissatisfaction with Ugljanin

Although Ugljanin's SDA dominated the September 2000 municipal elections, many Bosniaks were becoming increasingly dissatisfied. Some felt he spent too much time on national questions -- including Sandzak autonomy -- at the expense of day-to-day governance. Others were disgusted by seemingly rampant corruption.<sup>100</sup> There was considerable illegal construction in SDA-controlled municipalities, often involving temporary building permits that officials

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<sup>98</sup> Since December 2003, Esad Dzudzevic has been one of two Coalition List for Sandzak members of the Serbian parliament on the DS party list. He represents the Bosniak Democratic Party of Sandzak. Since the September 2004 municipal elections when Ugljanin became mayor of Novi Pazar, Dzudzevic has been the acting president of the Bosniak National Council. He is also the president of the BNCS Executive Committee.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group researchers first saw this map in 2004.

<sup>100</sup> Every interlocutor with whom Crisis Group spoke volunteered official corruption as the single biggest problem in Sandzak.

manipulated to extract bribes.<sup>101</sup> One of the higher profile examples of the rot in the SDA was the Novi Pazar Executive Board's appointment of Nermin Bejtovic -- a party activist and former sports fan club organiser -- to manage the Cultural Centre. He rented out the premises to a private casino.<sup>102</sup> Ugljanin had famously said that "action in the field of culture would only confuse people".<sup>103</sup>

Many also disapproved of the relatively large municipal budget for sports while crucial public services went wanting. During 2002 and 2003 Novi Pazar budgeted not a dinar for health care.<sup>104</sup> Although this may have been because the director of the local hospital was a member of the SDP, it reflected on SDA priorities. At the same time the municipal budget financed construction of a sports stadium in the Montenegrin municipality of Rozaje to host the Sandzak Games. Ugljanin often used Islam for political purposes but the Islamic Community, led by Mufti Zukorlic, eventually turned against him. Questions arose about the seemingly reckless post-match activities of the Novi Pazar football team's fan club, Torcida, which Ugljanin allegedly controls and, in the minds of many Sandzak Bosniaks, is associated with hooliganism and protection rackets.

Mainstream Belgrade politicians generally shunned Ugljanin when they visited. Although Djindjic came four times, he preferred contact with Ljajic's SDP and Mufti Zukorlic. On the one occasion he did meet with Ugljanin, it was to attempt mediation between him and Ljajic. (Ugljanin is said to have agreed to meet with Ljajic, who refused.) In the run-up to the September 2003 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Zivkovic solicited Ugljanin's support for the DS-led coalition, giving two parliamentary seats on its list to Bajram Omeragic and Esad Dzudzevic, Ugljanin's key advisers.<sup>105</sup> However, during the campaign, then-DS party boss Boris Tadic embarrassed both Ugljanin and his own party by trying to distance himself from the Sandzak strongman, portraying Omeragic and Dzudzevic as leaders of their own parties, rather than Ugljanin's associates and members of the CLS. This, along with the poor DS result, did little to enhance Ugljanin's credibility among voters.

In addition to general dissatisfaction with Ugljanin and the SDA, many Bosniaks took notice of Ljajic's performance on the national scene. His high-profile position as federal minister enhanced his legitimacy in the eyes of many. No longer did they need look solely to the SDA to protect their interests. Bosniaks appreciated Ljajic's ability to work constructively with mainstream Serbian political parties and gain concessions from Belgrade, as well as his relatively positive image in Serbia's mainstream media. This undermined the more nationalistic message of Ugljanin and demonstrated that Bosniaks had something to gain by participating in Serbia's political life. The first real signs of popular dissatisfaction with Ugljanin appeared in 2003, when five supporters in the Novi Pazar municipal assembly defected to form their own Party for Sandzak (SzS). In the subsequent by-elections held to fill those seats, the SDP won three places in the assembly for the first time.

Growing popular disenchantment with Ugljanin and the SDA meant that for the first time the SDP also stood a chance of actually winning control of some Sandzak municipalities. The tight race saw a vicious campaign between the two parties that included shooting, physical altercations, threats and intimidation. The SDA was more popular among the traditionally conservative rural population, while Ljajic had more support in urban centres.<sup>106</sup> Although Ugljanin preferred to stay in the background, his party was so deeply discredited that he himself ran for mayor of Novi Pazar, as the only candidate with the credibility or profile to beat the SDP's mufti-backed candidate, Sait Kacapor, the vice-rector of the University of Novi Pazar.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4. Change in 2004

The September 2004 local elections were the first held under the new rules of the 2002 Law on Local Self-Governance, which introduced direct popular election of mayors with greater executive powers.<sup>108</sup> The mayor now appoints an Executive Board, which must be approved by the municipal assembly. Because the municipal assembly is elected by a proportional list system, the law fails to take into account the possibility that it might be hostile to the mayor, which has had significant repercussions for Novi Pazar and other cities in Serbia.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interviews with NGO activists, city councillors, Muslim and Orthodox clerics.

<sup>102</sup> Bejtovic is also president of the Main Board of the Coalition List for Sandzak.

<sup>103</sup> HAS - "list manjine u vecini slucajeva", Novi Pazar, 29 February 2000, VI, 88-89.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interview with city council member.

<sup>105</sup> Omeragic and Dzudzevic have their own miniature political parties, which are part of the CLS. Most Bosniaks view them as fronts for Ugljanin.

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<sup>106</sup> In Sandzak, villages often vote as a bloc, which can make campaigning outside one's safe area dangerous. This practice is also common in other parts of Serbia.

<sup>107</sup> Kacapor is related to Mufti Muamer Zukorlic; both are natives of the village of Orlje near Tutin.

<sup>108</sup> Mayors in Serbia were previously elected by the municipal assemblies.

<sup>109</sup> The most notable of these is Nis.



Ugljanin's CLS coalition, spearheaded by the SDA, lost its absolute domination among Bosniaks. In Novi Pazar, he won the mayoral race in a second round run-off by 2 per cent but his coalition failed to gain an absolute majority in the assembly. Although the SDA had 21 councillors, the SDP with seventeen put together a 26-vote multi-ethnic anti-SDA coalition including the SzS, the Serbian Democratic Alliance (SDS), and the SRS. By law, the new city council must convene within 60 days after certification of election results, but Ugljanin repeatedly delayed, fearing that he would not get his candidates for assembly leadership and the executive board through. Should the municipal assembly not meet, the Law on Self-Governance requires the republic government to dismiss it, essentially allowing the mayor to rule unopposed.

The SDP called for the city assembly to hold its constitutive session on 11 November 2004, while the outgoing mayor Vasvija Gusinac -- an Ugljanin loyalist -- called a session for 18 November, the last date legally possible. To prevent the assembly from meeting earlier, Ugljanin ordered the doors of the municipal building locked. However, the assembly convened across the street in the seventeenth century Amiragin Han, an old Caravansarai and voted for a multi-ethnic presidency of two Bosniaks and one Serb.<sup>110</sup> Although the new municipal government is truly multi-ethnic, the informal presence of the ultra-nationalist SRS -- associated with hate speech and ethnic cleansing -- is troubling; it demonstrates that Ljajic's victory among Bosniaks may have been more a protest vote against Ugljanin, not a clear mandate for the SDP.

Following formation of the new municipal assembly, Ugljanin refused to relinquish the informal powers he had accumulated over the previous ten years and worked actively to block its work. The executive board has still not been chosen, and the assembly has been prevented from adopting a municipal budget.<sup>111</sup> In such a situation the republic government is supposed to introduce extraordinary measures, dismiss the assembly, and call a new election. Both sides asked it to arbitrate, but it was slow to respond. When Minister of Public Administration and Local Self Government Zoran Loncar finally sent a letter with the ministry's non-binding view, it sided with the assembly. Because it was non-binding, Ugljanin

claimed he had not received an official ruling<sup>112</sup> and continued to block the municipal government.

Ugljanin prevented the transfer of power from the old municipal authorities to the new ones by posting armed guards around the municipal building and the offices of state enterprises controlled by his appointees so that newly-appointed directors could not take over their offices.<sup>113</sup> The SDP-led municipal assembly appealed for Belgrade's intervention, claiming the SDA was using the power vacuum to cover-up the plunder of municipal assets.<sup>114</sup> On 9 February 2005, the republic government moved to break the deadlock, sending police to escort the new directors to their offices. The old directors and Ugljanin -- forewarned -- were absent on holiday.

The municipal assembly has now formed a budgetary committee to examine expenditures between 2000 and 2004 and has announced that between €7 million and €10 million are missing.<sup>115</sup> It appears that all the new directors have been appointed on the basis of party loyalty, and already questions have arisen as to whether they will be any more competent and less corrupt than the old ones. Ugljanin has increased his profile as BNVS president and begun holding monthly press conferences in Belgrade in an effort to counter Ljajic's effective use of the mainstream media, and he remains on the third floor of the Novi Pazar municipal building, where the offices of the mayor and the BNVS president are located, surrounded by private armed guards.

In the meantime Ugljanin and Ljajic continue their struggle. In February and March 2005 public obituary notices appeared in Sandzak announcing the death of Ljajic, and wanted posters appeared that accused leading members of the SDP of betraying "Bosniak national interests". Ljajic publicly accused SDA supporters of wanting to kill him. He has chosen to try to take away Ugljanin's principal institutional stronghold by gathering six Bosniak parties to call for new elections to the electoral assembly of the BNVS. In response, on 28 March Ugljanin supporters threw a Molotov cocktail at the SDP party headquarters in Novi Pazar.

The election results in the remainder of Sandzak were quite different from Novi Pazar. The SDP's Esad Zornic won the mayoral race in Sjenica, and his party took

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<sup>110</sup> These are: from the SzS Azem Hajdarevic as assembly president; from the SDP Meho Mahmutovic as vice president; and from the SDS Predrag Pavlovic as secretary.

<sup>111</sup> Novi Pazar is not alone in this. Other cities in Serbia -- notably Nis -- have been faced with a similar problem, largely the result of the poorly written Law on Local Self-Governance.

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<sup>112</sup> Crisis Group conversation with Ugljanin, 15 December 2004.

<sup>113</sup> "Dupli direktori," *Politika*, 31 January 2005.

<sup>114</sup> "Ljajic: Ugljanin prikrija dokaze o pljacki u Novom Pazaru," *Balkan*, 10 January 2005.

<sup>115</sup> Press conference by representatives of the Novi Pazar municipal assembly, Belgrade, 15 February 2005. Speakers: Azem Hajdarevic, president (SzS); Meho Mahmutovic, deputy president (SDP); Predrag Pavlovic, secretary (SPS).

eleven of the 39 municipal assembly seats, sufficient to attract other parties to an anti-Ugljanin majority.<sup>116</sup>

Even though the Serbs are the majority ethnic group in Prijepolje, a Bosniak SDP candidate, Nedžad Turković, won a second round mayoral race against another Bosniak, SDA candidate Aziz Hadžifežević.<sup>117</sup> This position was vacated by the three-term incumbent SPS mayor, Stevan Puric, who retired. Once again the SDP formed an anti-Ugljanin coalition in the assembly.<sup>118</sup> The reason a Bosniak could become mayor may be connected to the particularities of the municipality. Most Bosniaks live in the city centre and engage in relatively successful private businesses, while the rural areas are predominantly Serb. The municipality has approximately 8,000 people with full-time employment, primarily in the state-owned textile and footwear industry, while approximately 5,800 are unemployed. Mayor Puric had concentrated on promoting equality in health care, education, culture and sports, and as a result ethnic tensions were relatively low, and the primary focus was on the economy. The international community has also given substantial aid to Prijepolje since 2001, the bulk for refurbishing roads, water infrastructure and schools.<sup>119</sup> Municipal officials were perceived to distribute assistance evenly between ethnic areas. Due to the relatively good ethnic relations, the SDP had always outperformed the more nationalist SDA among Bosniaks in municipal elections.

Another reason a Bosniak could win is that in communities where the two ethnic groups have near parity -- as in Prijepolje -- they do not seem to be afraid to vote for a good candidate from the other community. The Socialist Serb mayor Puric could appeal to Bosniaks, and this holds in reverse with a Bosniak as mayor.

In Tutin, the poorest municipality in Sandzak, the incumbent SDA mayor, Semsudin Kucević, won easily, and his party retained a comfortable assembly margin with 22 of 37 seats.<sup>120</sup> In Nova Varos, the SPS mayor, Branislav Dilparić, hung on to power with a second round victory over his DS predecessor, Miloško Sunjević.

However, the municipal assembly is fragmented, and the mayor and city government face serious difficulties implementing any forward-looking or cohesive policy.<sup>121</sup>

In Priboj, a city hit by severe economic problems that has not yet shaken its 1990s' legacy of ethnic cleansing, the electorate endorsed the care-taker multi-ethnic government of former DOS members, giving acting Mayor Milenko Milicević an absolute majority in the first round.<sup>122</sup> This may have been due in part to the fact that since 2001 the local authorities have received substantial help to repair infrastructure from international agencies.<sup>123</sup> It was also due to the government's efforts to liberate the private sector and alleviate near 75 per cent unemployment.<sup>124</sup> The coalition had also expended significant energy on cultivating a climate of tolerance. Due to these efforts, the electorate did not blame it for the central government's failure to rescue the town's nearly collapsed main employer, FAP.

The formation of coalitions in Sjenica, Novi Pazar, Prijepolje and Priboj demonstrated that Serb and Bosniak politicians could find common ground on a series of issues, particularly when it came to opposing Ugljanin's nationalist SDA and its policies.

## B. THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR

As Serbia's government became increasingly dysfunctional during the wars of the 1990s, people looked towards institutions that continued to function and protect their interests. In Serbia the vacuum was filled by church and mosque. As a result, religious communities in Sandzak often wield far greater influence than democratically elected politicians or government institutions. An old Balkan folk saying accurately states that "where there is a sabre and cannon, there will be a hodža and priest".<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately for Sandzak, hodža

<sup>116</sup> Other parties in the assembly include the People's Movement for Sandzak with eight seats, the DSS with two seats, a Coalition of the Demo-Christian Party of Serbia (DHSS), SPO, NS and SPS with two, the SRS with two, and Ugljanin's CLS with fourteen.

<sup>117</sup> In the first round there were ten candidates.

<sup>118</sup> The assembly has eleven councillors each from SDP and CLS, seven from DSS, six from DS, four from SPS, three from Social Democracy and three from the Citizens Alliance.

<sup>119</sup> The primary donors were the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, Germany, U.S., and Italy.

<sup>120</sup> The other fifteen seats were held by SDP (eight), DS (two), People's Movement for Sandzak (two), G17+ (two) and the Movement for the Strength of Serbia (PSS) one.

<sup>121</sup> In the Nova Varos municipal assembly, the SPS has five seats, DS four, SRS three, SPO three, DSS two, NS two, G17+ one, and PSS one. In addition three independent lists of citizens captured six seats.

<sup>122</sup> The Priboj municipal assembly is made up as follows: a coalition comprised of the List of Democrats, Civic Alliance and Liberals has nine seats, SPS eight, SDP seven, SPO and New Serbia six, DSS five, SRS four and SDA two.

<sup>123</sup> In 2001 alone Priboj received over € 300,000 in foreign assistance.

<sup>124</sup> Over 8,000 people are unemployed, and approximately 1,500 have steady employment, most of these in the FAP truck factory.

<sup>125</sup> *Hodža* is the Serbo-Croatian variant of the Arabic *Khoja*, signifying an Islamic cleric.

and priest have little contact and often spread messages of intolerance or hatred about the other's religion.<sup>126</sup>

The importance of organised religion can be seen in the interaction between politicians and religious communities. When Prime Minister Djindjic visited Novi Pazar in 2002, he strolled around the city with the Abbot of Sopocani Monastery, Father Mihailo, and Islamic Community head Mufti Muamer Zukorlic. When Serbian President Tadic visited Novi Pazar on 23 November 2004, rather than meet politicians in an effort to resolve the municipal assembly controversy, he met leaders of the two main religious communities.<sup>127</sup> The perception that Djindjic preferred to meet only with the Mufti of Sandzak and Serbian religious leaders and never with Ugljanin or other political figures, strengthened the position of the religious community in many minds.<sup>128</sup>

### 1. Islam: modernity vs. tradition

Islam in Sandzak is traditional, conservative and patriarchal, but also relatively secular. Traditionally it has tended towards Sufi mysticism, similar to elsewhere in the Balkans, notably Bosnia. Many Muslims in Sandzak drink alcohol; some will occasionally eat pork. The majority of urban women tend not to wear a head covering, and most dress in modern fashions, while in the villages head coverings and traditional clothing are worn by Serb and Muslim women alike.

Generally Islam in Sandzak has been politically quietest, but Muslims were traumatised in the 1990s, when they felt their very existence was threatened. They gravitated towards the one institution that offered them a home and functioned effectively -- the mosque -- and many have developed a siege mentality.

The Mesihat Islamic Community of Sandzak (IZ), founded in 1992, is led by the ambitious, energetic and opportunistic Mufti of Sandzak, Muamer Zukorlic. In his late 30's, he has a rural background but was educated in Sarajevo and Algeria. Upon return to Sandzak in 1993, he was appointed mufti with active support from Ugljanin and the SDA and became one of the youngest Muftis in the world.<sup>129</sup> During the 1990s, mosque

attendance rose, giving Zukorlic greater influence. The mosque typically is more prominent in villages than cities, which means Zukorlic often comes into direct contact with Ugljanin's core electorate, typically through the *Ders*, the lecture following evening prayers, often in private homes.<sup>130</sup>

The IZ is not monolithic, and in spite of his position, Zukorlic does not control all mosques in Sandzak, where there are at least two other significant Islamic factions, one with loyalties to Ugljanin and the other leaning toward Wahhabism. Because local imams essentially control their own mosques, they are often able to play Ljjajic, Ugljanin and Zukorlic off against each other in an effort to gain favours. An example of this is the sixteenth century Altun Alema Mosque in downtown Novi Pazar, which is loyal to Ugljanin.

Zukorlic soon demonstrated he was also interested in politics and business.<sup>131</sup> Well educated and young, he was in many ways more progressive on social and political issues than Ugljanin and lacked much of the SDA ideological baggage. During this period it appears the IZ and SDA may both have received financial aid from the Refah party in Turkey.<sup>132</sup> Upon return in 1996, Ugljanin found that Zukorlic had partially stepped into the power vacuum created by his exile. Tensions quickly grew up between them over financing the *medresa* and were expressed through two newspapers, *Sandzacke novine* controlled by Ugljanin, and *Glas Islama* controlled by Zukorlic. These tensions and their competition for influence among the conservative Islamic population continue.

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<sup>126</sup> Bishop Artemije and Mufti Zukorlic have appeared together on TV *Jedinstvo*, as has the abbot of the Djurdjevi Stupovi Monastery, Father Petar, together with local hodzas. Nonetheless, outside of media appearances, contacts are rare.

<sup>127</sup> RTV B92 News service, 23 November 2004.

<sup>128</sup> In fact, as noted above, Djindjic met with Ugljanin at least once. Crisis Group interview with DS party member.

<sup>129</sup> Zukorlic enjoyed the support of Harun Hadzic, an SDA leader from Rozaje.

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<sup>130</sup> The *Ders* typically lasts two hours. It is intended as a religious lecture but is often used to convey political messages to the faithful. Crisis Group interlocutors indicate that *Ders* are well attended, even in cities, and appear to be growing in popularity.

<sup>131</sup> Zukorlic and his brothers control a private company, "Refref", that sells textiles and conservative Islamic clothing, furniture and Islamic books.

<sup>132</sup> Refah ("Welfare"), a Turkish Islamist party, became the largest party in Turkey's parliament in 1995. Its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, became prime minister at the head of a multi-party coalition in June 1996 that lasted for a year. Accused of challenging Turkey's secularist constitution, the party was dissolved in January 1998, but its deputies in parliament were allowed to form a new Islamist party, the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP). When this, too, was banned in June 2001, it split. The more modernist and pragmatic wing, headed by the former *Refah* mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, founded the Justice and Development Party (*Adalat ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP), which became the largest party in parliament in 2002 and formed the government.

Zukorlic's break with Ugljanin was a positive signal for the newly emerging Bosniak political parties.<sup>133</sup> Prior to this, Bosniak nationalism had rallied around the SDA and the mosque, and parties outside the former were suspected of being anti-Bosniak and non-Islamic. Once the Mufti broke with the party and Ugljanin, other parties and politicians such as Ljajic were no longer vulnerable to claims they were working against Islam or the people. The break was also reflected within the IZ, as some mosques have remained loyal to Ugljanin.

In contrast to the strong social conservatism of his followers, Zukorlic appears to be somewhat of a pragmatist and moderniser who wishes to use the mosque to move Sandzak into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He describes himself as religiously traditional yet modern.<sup>134</sup> The conservative nature of Sandzak society means that some of his policies are controversial, and his space for manoeuvre is limited. Some conservatives, such as the titular head of Bosnia's and Sandzak's Muslims in Sarajevo, the *Reis-el-Ulema*, see him as too progressive.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, he appears intent on modernising Sandzak via education and clearly believes the region's future depends on the ability of its youth to adapt and integrate into the modern world while retaining Islamic values.

Zukorlic accurately read the political situation in Serbia after Milosevic and found common ground with the late Prime Minister Djindjic, who embraced him as his main partner in Sandzak. Bosniak political parties -- the SDA in particular -- criticised this political engagement as inappropriate for a spiritual leader but it has paid dividends. In 2002 Djindjic gave a green light to Zukorlic to establish the first private university in Novi Pazar, and in 2003 the mufti accompanied a Serbian state delegation to the United Arab Emirates.<sup>136</sup> Whenever Serbian politicians visit Novi Pazar, they inevitably meet with Zukorlic, but often avoid Ugljanin and Ljajic.

Zukorlic has worked hard to enhance culture and education in Sandzak, and this has become a significant battleground with Ugljanin. In addition to founding Sandzak's first university, Zukorlic oversees a network of Islamic secondary schools and an Islamic publishing house. The two Islamic *medresas* in Novi Pazar include a

boarding school that takes in Bosniaks from throughout Sandzak.<sup>137</sup> They have better facilities than the secular schools, particularly in information technology, and a far lower teacher/pupil ratio. The educational activities are largely supported by diaspora Bosniaks, Middle-Eastern donors and nouveau riche local businessmen.

The inflow of foreign capital appears to have some strings attached. Perhaps the most significant is that Zukorlic has shown tolerance towards more radical forms of Islam not native to the Balkans, notably the Wahhabi movement.<sup>138</sup> Although many Bosniaks claim it, Zukorlic denies he is actively flirting with the Wahhabis but adherents of the movement are increasingly visible on the streets of Novi Pazar. The Wahhabis first appeared in 1997, when a new imam at a local mosque began requiring his congregation to pray in the Wahhabi manner.<sup>139</sup> They became more evident during 2000, when they distributed a radical pamphlet attributed to the Islamic Active Youth (IAO) of Bosnia. They have also engaged in civic activities, such as cleaning public spaces.

The Wahhabis appear to control several mosques in Sandzak over which the mufti has little influence. Crisis Group interlocutors claim there are approximately 300 Wahhabis in Sandzak, that they are loosely organised, and that only 50 are "active". Nonetheless their influence is clearly felt: five years ago, one rarely saw Bosniak women wearing head scarves in Novi Pazar: today a significantly larger number of women on the evening stroll (*Korzo*) display head scarves and other modest clothing associated with Wahhabi or at least conservative Islam.<sup>140</sup> Some interlocutors claim the Wahhabis are paying women to dress this way, which did happen in Bosnia. Since the ouster of Milosevic, some young men also have begun cultivating Wahhabi fashions, including the beards, high trousers and vests. During the *dzuma* (Friday prayers), Wahhabis typically disrupt services by standing up and leaving when the *Ders* begins. Wahhabis are especially evident in Bijelo Polje and Rozaje, both in Montenegro, where the IZ is relatively weak.

<sup>133</sup> Parties like Ljajic's Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP) and Party for Sandzak of Fevzija Muric, both former Ugljanin's allies.

<sup>134</sup> Crisis Group interview with Zukorlic.

<sup>135</sup> *Reis-el-Ulema*, the Serbo-Croatian variant of the Arabic *Ra'is al-'ulama*, means "the chief of the 'ulama". Traditionally his superior in the hierarchy of Ottoman Islam was the *Shaikh al-Islam* in Istanbul. Neither the *Reis-ul-Ulema* nor Zukorlic recognise the Belgrade Mufti, Hamdija Jusufspahic.

<sup>136</sup> Following the Djindjic assassination, Zukorlic named his widow, Ruzica, honorary president of the university.

<sup>137</sup> One is all male, the other all female. Both enjoy the status of a gymnasium. Their teachers receive higher salaries than teachers in the state schools.

<sup>138</sup> For background on the Wahhabi strain of Islam, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005, and Crisis Group Middle East Report N°31, *Saudi Arabia Background: Who are the Islamists?*, 21 September 2004.

<sup>139</sup> The members of the local congregation forced him out after five days.

<sup>140</sup> Several Bosniak interlocutors told Crisis Group that the Wahhabis pay women to wear head coverings. This occurred in Bosniak majority areas of Bosnia during the second half of the 1990s.

Numerous interlocutors told Crisis Group that the Wahhabis receive financing from Sarajevo, which in turn appears to come from Saudi charities that operate out of Vienna. There is also financial support for the Wahhabis from diaspora Bosniaks in Sweden, Austria, the UK and Switzerland, as well as Sarajevo. It appears that few Bosniaks who study in the Middle East adopt Wahhabi ways but many members were recruited among Sandzak Bosniaks, who experienced a religious awakening after they went to Western Europe in the 1990s.

There are some troubling indications of extremist activities. Two radical nationalist Islamic clerics from Sarajevo who frequently visit Sandzak -- Hafiz Sulejman Bugari, the Imam of the Vratnik White Mosque, and Muderiz Halilovic,<sup>141</sup> the Imam of the King Fahd Mosque -- use their *Ders* to preach hatred against Serbs and Jews and advocate separation from Serbs. Bugari is himself a Sufi Dervish but his home-grown brand of Islam is accommodating to Wahhabi doctrines. In Bosnia he has gone on record calling for violent jihad;<sup>142</sup> the Sarajevo television station *Alfa* was fined 50,000 Convertible Marks (€25,000) for broadcasting one of his radical lectures.<sup>143</sup> While Ugljanin's SDA held absolute power in Novi Pazar, *Regionalna TV* broadcast Bugari's *Ders* every Thursday, a show supported financially by a number of nouveau riche businessmen.

Bugari is associated with a program that sends Sandzak drug-addicts to a rehabilitation and treatment centre in Sarajevo. When the former addicts return, almost all sport Wahhabi beards and dress and appear to adhere to a fundamentalist form of Islam. Bugari and Zukorlic were seen together prominently in Sarajevo, and it appears that Bugari initially came to Sandzak at the mufti's invitation. Although the two appear subsequently to have had a falling out, and Zukorlic has distanced himself from Bugari, Bugari still visits and preaches in Sandzak, apparently with the support of Ugljanin's SDA. With the recent change of directorship in *Regionalna TV*, it appears, however, that his lectures will be replaced by IZ-approved and more mainstream broadcasts.

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<sup>141</sup> During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia, Halilovic commanded the Fourth Muslim Brigade in Konjic. Since the war, his mosque has become a gathering place for Wahhabis and other Islamic extremists, both political and religious, and he is reported to retain close ties to former members of war-time mujahideen units.

<sup>142</sup> Bugari has urged Bosniaks to boycott Serbian products, and has also instructed them not to offer Christmas or Easter greetings to Christians or drink Coca-Cola, which he claims is Jewish. "Bice dana za dzihada", *Vecernje Novosti*, 15 February 2005.

<sup>143</sup> Alfa was fined by Bosnia's Communications Regulatory Agency. See <http://www.cra.ba> for the text of the decision.

The Novi Pazar chief of police reports that the Wahhabis have not broken any laws.<sup>144</sup> Nonetheless, Crisis Group interviews throughout Sandzak found that most Bosniaks are disturbed by the emergence of Wahhabism, which they consider intolerant and too radical, not in keeping with Balkan Islamic tradition and custom.<sup>145</sup> Popular perceptions among Bosniaks hold that the Wahhabis gained their initial foothold thanks to funding from the IZ.<sup>146</sup> Zukorlic denies the IZ is funding the movement, and in the past two years, he has attempted to distance himself publicly from it. He told Crisis Group that as long as the IZ is strong, the Wahhabis pose no threat. However, there remains a widespread popular perception in Sandzak that he is still flirting with the Wahhabis and encouraging their activities.

The IZ-run Muslim Youth Club (MOK) is alleged to maintain ties to the Wahhabis, and many of its members sport Wahhabi fashions. It is another point of contention between Zukorlic and Ugljanin, who has his own youth organisation, the Bosniak Youth of Sandzak (BOS).

Until recently the mufti was rather hostile toward non-governmental organisations. In November 2002 the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media <sup>147</sup>Friemut Duve sent a project called the Mobile Culture container to Sandzak, intended to promote inter-ethnic tolerance and raise awareness of health issues, such as AIDS, through art and journalism workshops for youth. It came to Novi Pazar, following a controversial stay in nearby Kosovska Mitrovica, on a contract with the city's pro-Ugljanin authorities. The Mufti and Ljajic, however, were unhappy at the prospect that their main political rival might benefit from the project's popularity and erected a series of obstacles in its path. First the customs officials from Kraljevo showed up in Novi Pazar and ordered the Container to be closed, despite the fact that it had cleared all formalities on entrance from Kosovo. It took direct intervention from Duve's personal friend, PM Zoran Djindjic to rein-in the customs officials and enable the project to open. Then some Bosniak teachers in public schools sympathetic to the Mufti instructed their students not to visit the project or attend its lectures, and rumours were spread that immorality was being taught. Groups of bearded Wahhabis associated with Zukorlic's MOK appeared waving pistols and threatening those present. On one occasion rocks were also hurled. Attendance was affected, and the project

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<sup>144</sup> Crisis Group interview with Muamer Nicevic, Chief of Police of Novi Pazar.

<sup>145</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Zukorlic and numerous Bosniaks.

<sup>146</sup> Zukorlic claims that the IZ does not finance the Wahhabi movement.

<sup>147</sup> Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

closed down early due to lack of visitors, despite high number of participants and visitors in its opening days.

In February 2003, Zukorlic told the OSCE that "we [the Islamic Community] are the largest non-governmental organisation in Sandzak. Those who call themselves NGOs here do not represent anyone; most of them are failures in their lives and careers". Local activists say, however, that Zukorlic has been much more accommodating and cooperative since the NGO community launched a vigorous defense of the rights of Muslims in Serbia in the wake of the 17 March 2004 arson attacks against mosques in Belgrade and Nis that followed the outbreak of anti-Serb riots in Kosovo that same day.

There can be little doubt that IZ influence through the mosque is strong and growing in Sandzak. Zukorlic has matured into a sophisticated political power broker, whose influence is felt in many aspects of everyday life. To a large extent Sandzak's future depends as much on him as on the democratically elected politicians and Belgrade. In the meantime, the traditional Sufi mystic traditions common to Balkan Islam appear to be regaining popularity, in part due to fears about Wahhabism, and in part due to support from Turkey, private U.S. groups and moderate elements in Sarajevo.<sup>148</sup>

## 2. The Serbian Orthodox Church

Similar to Islam, the Serbian Orthodox Church is traditional, conservative and patriarchal. It forms an intrinsic element of the Greater Serbian national program, and its hierarchy openly sympathises with the nationalist aims of the Milosevic era. Although Milosevic used the Church for his own purposes, he never permitted it to become a serious political rival. The dysfunctional nature of Serbia's government subsequently provided an institutional vacuum into which the Serbian Orthodox Church gladly moved.

After DOS removed Milosevic from power, the Serbian Orthodox Church strengthened its position in society significantly, in large part due to the power struggle between Kostunica and Djindjic, whom it played off against each other. Because the latter's nationalist credentials were weaker, he typically took the lead in promoting the Church. Religious education was introduced in Serbia's schools, and the state donated large sums to help finish the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade and renew the Djurdjevi Stupovi Monastery. Djindjic never seemed to miss a photo opportunity with the Patriarch.

The Church frequently speaks on political and diplomatic questions, such as borders, the type of state Serbia should be, relations between the state and its citizens and the treatment of national minorities. It is often openly anti-Western, isolationist and defensive.<sup>149</sup> During the wars of the 1990s, it took positions that could only be categorised as extremist, while turning a blind eye to ethnic cleansing, or in some cases justifying it; it has never distanced itself from, let alone apologised for those statements.<sup>150</sup> Even today, priests are often associated with hate-speech about other nationalities.<sup>151</sup>

The Serbian Church is one of the most conservative and isolationist in the Orthodox world. It is tied to ultra-conservative and nationalist groups, particularly those with ideologies emanating from the period of Serbia's World War II collaborationist government.<sup>152</sup> Much of its current thinking derives from the writings of two right-wing anti-Semitic clerics active then: the recently canonised Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic, who was decorated by Adolf Hitler,<sup>153</sup> and Archimandrite Justin Popovic, who taught anti-European attitudes reminiscent of Russia's Slavophile movement.<sup>154</sup>

The Church, together with the Army counterintelligence service (KOS), has been closely linked to the anti-Semitic ultra-right wing nationalist youth group *Obraz*,<sup>155</sup> as well as the group *Dveri*.<sup>156</sup> The *Obraz* philosophy is

<sup>148</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Turkish embassy representative in Belgrade and with a U.S.-based Islamic activist.

<sup>149</sup> An example may be found in a public speech given by Bishop Atanasije Jevtic, who said that the West had come to the Balkans in tanks in 1914, 1941, and 1999, brought the world gas chambers and communism, and was treating the Serbs like Kurds and Iraqis. Serbia, he said, had fought for 200 years to free itself from Europe and was looking to the East for its future. "Duhovna akademija", povodom stogodisnjice Prvog srpskog ustanka, Radio B92, 14 February 2004.

<sup>150</sup> "Srpska pravoslavna crkva, patrijarha i rat", in *Zene za mir* (Belgrade, 2002), p. 199.

<sup>151</sup> Crisis Group interviews with civil rights activists. See also "Fasizm i neofasizm danas", in *Zene za mir* (Belgrade, 2002), p. 144. The Serbian Church categorises most other Christian religions as sects, including several mainstream Protestant denominations.

<sup>152</sup> "Karakter novog srpskog nacionalizma", Helsinski odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, January 2003.

<sup>153</sup> See Ljubica Stefan, *Fairy Tale to Holocaust* (Zagreb, 1993).

<sup>154</sup> "Dva lica Srbije: Cena otetih godina", *Vreme*, 13 December 2001. See also "Srpska pravoslavna crkva, patrijarha i rat", in *Zene za mir* (Belgrade, 2002), p. 199.

<sup>155</sup> Crisis Group interviews with leading human rights and military experts. See also "Serbian Orthodox Church iza Obraza i Krvi i casti", *Danas*, 20 September 2002. The full name of *Obraz* is "Otacastveni pokret *Obraz*".

<sup>156</sup> *Dveri* has held public meetings at which speakers called for the unification of Bosnia's Republika Srpska with Serbia

based on the writings of the Serbian World War Two Fascist politician Dimitrije Ljotic and draws upon Velimirovic and Popovic. Obraz broke up a gay rights parade in Belgrade on 30 June 2001<sup>157</sup> and covered Belgrade's centre with posters of Hague War Crimes Tribunal indictee Radovan Karadzic: "every Serb is Radovan". It may have been associated with a Christmas Eve 2002 incident directed at the UK Ambassador in front of the Patriarchy in Belgrade, as well as recent attacks on ethnic minorities throughout Serbia.<sup>158</sup> On the other hand some Church leaders have taken actions that contrast with this image, such as Bishop Amfilohije, who attempted -- albeit unsuccessfully -- to prevent a mob from torching the Belgrade mosque on 17 March 2004.

Administratively the Serbian Orthodox Church in Sandzak is part of the Raska-Prizren Eparchy, under Bishop Artemije, which includes all Kosovo and old Rascia (Sandzak). Artemije, who appoints local priests as well as members of the monastic communities, is known to be somewhat more liberal than the Church as a whole and is often openly at odds with the Church's Synod.<sup>159</sup> Some Orthodox clergy and monks in Sandzak previously served in Kosovo or Bosnia and left as war-time refugees, a traumatising experience that no doubt has influenced their view of Sandzak, another historic Serbian land from which many fear they may again be driven by a tide of Islam. Many consider the Bosniaks a hostile enemy population, suspect that Islamic Jihad and al Qaeda are omnipresent and view themselves as embattled crusaders charged with preserving Christianity, even as reliving the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje between the Serbs and Turks.<sup>160</sup>

Now living inside "Mother Serbia" and no longer in an autonomous province, they believe that state institutions should be used to strengthen Serbian cultural and religious domination -- something that was not entirely possible in Kosovo. They have received moral support from Serbia's highest politicians, such as President Boris Tadic, who recently stated that the Church has the right to become involved in all social issues.<sup>161</sup> Their deeply rooted prejudice about Islam often prevents them from understanding that the Bosniak population of Sandzak,

unlike the Kosovo Albanians, is not hostile to the Serbian state.

After Milosevic's fall, the Serbian Orthodox Church -- using Army helicopters -- erected three large crosses on prominent hilltops throughout Bosniak majority areas of Sandzak. The symbolism of this was not lost on the Bosniaks, who felt that it sent a clear message that the state stood fully behind the Orthodox Church, and the Bosniaks were a foreign organism.

A prominent Orthodox Church leader in Sandzak is Bishop Filaret, who during the early 1990s was abbot of the monastery in the Belgrade suburb Zemun. He often visited the battlefields in Bosnia and Croatia, outspokenly urging Serbs to fight against other ethnic groups. He frequently appeared in the media to support Milosevic's policies and was widely reported to have been involved in a scandal involving embezzlement of funds for refugees.<sup>162</sup> In 1999 the Serbian Orthodox Church gave him a post far from the media limelight as abbot of the Mileseva monastery near Prijepolje but his statements continue to inflame ethnic tensions.<sup>163</sup>

Occasionally Orthodox clergy make statements that get circulated and take on a life of their own. One in wide circulation among the Bosniaks -- that Muslims smell because they eat lard and attributed to Bishop Atanasije Jevtic -- prompted a letter of protest to the Patriarch from the IZ.<sup>164</sup> Other acts have also raised ethnic tensions. During the dedication of the St. Magdalene church in Tutin, Serbs sang songs glorifying Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic, both indicted at The Hague for war crimes against Bosniaks.<sup>165</sup>

It appears that some within the Orthodox clergy favour creating a new Serb majority municipality in Novi Pazar and advocate similar partition ideas for other Sandzak areas. Relations with the IZ depend largely on personalities. Zukorlic and Patriarch Pavle get along well but interaction on other levels is less harmonious.<sup>166</sup>

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in a common state "as God had commanded". "Dva veka za nauk", *Vecernje novosti*, 15 February 2004.

<sup>157</sup> See the Obraz account at its web site <http://www.srbaskio.org/>.

<sup>158</sup> "Novi govor mrznje", *Helsinki povelja*, January 2002, Nr. 48.

<sup>159</sup> "Potpis obnove ili razdora", *Nin*, 31 March 2005. During 2004 Artemije fell out with the Synod, which for a time suspended all funding for his diocese.

<sup>160</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Orthodox clergy.

<sup>161</sup> "Potpis obnove ili razdora", *Nin*, 31 March 2005.

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<sup>162</sup> "Drzava, crkva i episkop Filaret - Sestre po crkvi", *Vreme*, 23 October 1999.

<sup>163</sup> The most recent was in January 2005. Filaret claimed publicly that a priest from the Mileseva monastery had been attacked and stoned by a group of young Bosniaks. The Serb majority Prijepolje Municipal Assembly later issued a formal statement denying such an attack had occurred. *Sanapress*, 29 January 2005.

<sup>164</sup> "Pismo Mešihata Sandžaka patrijarhu Pavlu," *B92*, 22 April 2004.

<sup>165</sup> Crisis Group interview with Sandzak Board for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedom.

<sup>166</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Islamic and Orthodox clergy.

The Church's role in Sandzak is far from calming. One Orthodox cleric in the region told Crisis Group there was a possibility of an armed struggle with the Bosniaks. The majority of the Church's flock are politically unsophisticated and inclined to vote for the SRS or the SPS. They are often subjected to rhetoric from the clergy that reinforces a siege mentality, and the Church's stance tends to make it a generator of virulent nationalism. Not only does the Serbian Orthodox Church reflect deeper trends and views within society, but it also takes an active role in forming public opinion. It will certainly drive future election campaigns and politics and influence public opinion.

### C. EDUCATION, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Nowhere is the ground for alienation and antagonism better prepared than in culture and education. There are troubling indications Sandzak has started down a still avoidable path of artificial linguistic and ethnic divisions that could sow the seeds for intolerance and conflict.

Serbia's elementary and secondary educational system is still highly centralised. School headmasters and directors are appointed by the Education Ministry, often without local input. Salaries are paid from the republic's budget, as are the costs of building and equipping schools; municipalities bear the cost of utilities and maintenance. Although local school councils made up of parents exist in theory, they meet rarely and have no authority over the centrally appointed management.

Curriculum is set at the Republic level, with textbooks approved by the ministry and distributed by the state textbook publisher. Textbooks were reissued frequently to meet the changing political needs of the Milosevic regime and clearly favour Serb historical and social interpretations. Education in literature is also very problematic, as non-Serb authors writing in Serbo-Croatian are typically ignored, including Bosniaks. The first post-Milosevic government promised minority grievances would be taken seriously and the textbooks changed, but the curriculum is still ethno-centric, with offensive and blatantly propagandistic references to history, culture and minorities.<sup>167</sup>

The Orthodox Church strongly influences the Education Ministry. In January 2005 Deutsche Welle asked Professor Ljubisa Rajic to comment on Church interference in education. When he inquired about a poll

on how many parents and pupils favoured attendance at optional religious education in state schools, he said, the ministry's reply was, "We cannot give you such a figure without permission from the Orthodox Church".<sup>168</sup>

#### 1. Education in Sandzak<sup>169</sup>

The fact that Novi Pazar had no secular bookstore until February 2005 reflects the state of education in Sandzak, where illiteracy is 9.8 per cent.<sup>170</sup> In the Bosniak majority municipalities of the Pester highlands the rate is higher: Sjenica (12.1 per cent) and Tutin (11.6 per cent). The illiteracy rate is due largely to the region's underdevelopment, a legacy of both the Turkish era and twentieth century Yugoslav investment priorities. Illiteracy in Sandzak has little to do with ethnicity: Serb-majority Raska has a rate of 11.8 per cent.

Similar to other parts of Serbia, Sandzak schools suffer from poor maintenance, bad textbooks, and underpaid teachers but there are two differences. First, the level of investment per student appears far lower, due partially to overall low state budget expenditures. Secondly, classes are unusually large, due primarily to the higher birth-rate and lack of funding for new schools.<sup>171</sup> Since October 2000 the EU has conducted a major program of school renovation all over Serbia, and Sandzak has been high on the list of aid recipients.<sup>172</sup> Nonetheless, much remains to be done.

Novi Pazar must devote a significantly larger portion of its budget to education than other Serbian municipalities. It has nearly 19,000 students in public schools -- close to 22 per cent of the population.<sup>173</sup> Approximately 14,000 of these attend the twelve elementary schools,<sup>174</sup> with the remainder in the four high schools.<sup>175</sup> Average class size is 36, and by all accounts growing.

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<sup>168</sup> Deutsche Welle, 14 Jan 2005. Under Church pressure, the government tried to remove Darwin's theory of evolution from the schools in 2004.

<sup>169</sup> The information in this section was compiled from interviews with numerous teachers, as well as with Zekerije Dugopoljac, then a member of the Novi Pazar Municipal Assembly's Executive Board responsible for education.

<sup>170</sup> "Elaborat of osnivanju univerziteta u Novom Pazaru", 2002. The Serbia-wide figure is 7.1 per cent.

<sup>171</sup> Most of Serbia has a birth rate below replacement level, whereas in Sandzak large families are the rule.

<sup>172</sup> The EU's humanitarian aid arm, ECHO, has spent more than €200 million in modernising Serbian elementary and secondary schools since 2000.

<sup>173</sup> This number does not include students attending the two IZ-sponsored Medresas.

<sup>174</sup> One of these is a specialised music school.

<sup>175</sup> One gymnasium, and three technical schools: Leather-textile, Technical and Economic. There is in theory a fifth

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<sup>167</sup> The textbook "Knowing Nature and Society" (for nine year-olds) mentions Bosniaks in passing as "Muslim residents", not a national minority. The textbook for eight year-olds lists minorities in Serbia without mentioning Bosniaks.



Outside of Novi Pazar, classrooms are overcrowded, with ancient desks, chairs and blackboards, and often lacking central heating and adequate sanitary facilities. The school at Karajukica Bunari lacks even a telephone. Organised bussing to rural and suburban schools does not exist anywhere in Serbia but in rural and mountainous parts of the Pester Highlands, many children walk many kilometres to school, braving notoriously harsh weather. Due to overcrowding, Sandzak schools have three or four shifts per day; the typical school opens at 6:30 a.m. and closes at 7:30 p.m. Salaries are very low, and all teachers that Crisis Group spoke with said they held other jobs to make ends meet.

The first post-Milosevic Minister of Education, Gaso Knezevic, promised wide-ranging reforms. The Bosniaks asked him to replace the directors and headmasters most closely associated with the old regime but the response was mixed. Some appointments ignored local school council recommendations; some politically compromised individuals were picked, and in other instances, the old administrators were kept.

## 2. Duelling universities

Sandzak's fifteen high schools graduate approximately 2,900 students per year. For those who attend university, the choice has typically been to study in Belgrade, Sarajevo or Pristina. There are no two-year colleges (Visa Skola) in Sandzak, and until recently no universities.<sup>176</sup> In 2002, however, the University of Novi Pazar<sup>177</sup> -- known as the "White House of Knowledge" and more colloquially as the "Mufti's University" -- opened as the first institution of higher education in Sandzak. The permission to open a university was the price that Premier Djindjic paid for the Mufti's support. Located on the premises of the former state-run textile factory TK Raska in the industrial zone, it is run by the Islamic Community. Mufti Zukorlic is Rector and says the university takes a humanistic approach. It currently has close to 500 students in Novi Pazar, and an additional 150 -- almost all Serbs -- at a detached centre in Nis.<sup>178</sup> The admission criteria are uncertain but the ability to afford tuition (all students must pay) appears to be decisive. The university is more expensive than the more limited-enrolment state universities. It offers foreign languages, design, acting, political science,

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high school, which is run as a branch of the Medical High School from Kraljevo.

<sup>176</sup> A number of Serbian universities have sporadically offered temporary courses through remote learning centers.

<sup>177</sup> The university has recently changed its name to the International University in Novi Pazar.

<sup>178</sup> The university is now expanding to teach classes in Belgrade, Kraljevo and other cities.

pedagogy, law, and information technology, and the majority of its faculty is Serbian.<sup>179</sup> Because these disciplines are highly popular and state universities enrol only limited numbers, Zukorlic has put the university in a lucrative market niche.

Zukorlic has elitist ambitions for the school. Although he claims that Sandzak needs approximately 10,000 university places, he does not wish to expand beyond 1,200. He says the university is financed by a combination of tuition and private donations, some of which comes from abroad. Although his professors have higher salaries than their state school counterparts, the Ministry of Education is considering removing accreditation, as less than 40 per cent appear to be full-time.<sup>180</sup>

Ugljanin preferred to concentrate resources on sports and fan clubs, so the opening of the university exposed a weakness in the SDA program. The Novi Pazar municipality retaliated by opening a state "university" in direct competition. "Suljo's Faculty", as it is popularly known, is in the centre of Novi Pazar, inside the Building of Higher Schooling.<sup>181</sup> It is in fact not a university but rather a collection of detached learning departments opened by already established universities throughout Serbia, including those from Nis, Belgrade and Kragujevac. It cannot offer a consolidated degree, although the BNVS is trying to make this happen.<sup>182</sup>

The quality of education at both schools is considered to be far below that of other universities in Serbia but the new emphasis on culture and education cannot help but be beneficial. It will raise the overall level of literacy and education but it has also begun to change social values and mores, so that many cultural activities previously viewed as suspicious -- such as literature and drama -- are gaining gradual acceptance: in 2002 Novi Pazar established Sandzak's first professional theatre.<sup>183</sup> Many students who otherwise would not continue education after high school are now doing so.

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<sup>179</sup> Crisis Group interview with Zukorlic. Some claim Zukorlic is motivated by profit, and the university lacks qualified faculty. See Miroљub Radojkovic: "Shortcuts Cannot Supplement Educational Deficit", *Dosije* no.19, NUNS, January 2005.

<sup>180</sup> Crisis Group interview with Esad Dzudzevic and Bajram Omeragic.

<sup>181</sup> This building and the university project were originally begun by JUL and the SPS during the second half of the 1990s, but were discontinued due to a lack of funds. Ugljanin simply restarted the existing project.

<sup>182</sup> Given the fragmented nature of the state "university", it is unknown exactly how many students attend.

<sup>183</sup> The theatre is municipally funded. Crisis group interview with theatre director.

### 3. Religion in schools

Serbs and Bosniaks attend the same schools, speak the same language and learn from the same texts. The public schools are one of the few forums where the youth of the two ethnic groups can come in contact. Even though less than one quarter of parents surveyed indicated they wanted their children to receive religious education as an elective subject,<sup>184</sup> and it would take several years to prepare the curricula and textbooks, the government was under pressure from conservatives and Serbia's seven main religious communities to introduce religious education. As a result Prime Minister Djindjic introduced this as an elective only two months prior to the start of the 2001-2002 school year, without public debate and against the advice of the education ministry.<sup>185</sup> Despite the haphazard approach, this raised the government's stock among all the religious communities.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, the main proponent, was caught unprepared. It lacked text books, a curriculum, and most importantly, teachers. In contrast, the IZ -- which already operated private schools -- had textbooks and teachers ready to enter the public schools throughout Sandzak at the beginning of the school year.

Religious education remained optional for only one year. Although Crisis Group interlocutors said a majority of students signed up, as they were under tremendous pressure not to be "traitors" to their ethnic group, the Orthodox Church was dissatisfied with the numbers and pressed for the change. Since then it has become mandatory, primarily due to pressure from the Orthodox Church over the low number of students who volunteered.<sup>186</sup> Since its introduction, students who might otherwise find common ground in a public educational institution are increasingly separated from each other on the basis of religion, that is, ethnicity.

Although religion teachers receive an "honorarium" from the state, neither the Serbian government nor the municipalities review their credentials or supervise their selection and performance. The religious communities which appoint them are responsible. Crisis Group interlocutors say there are instances of teachers spreading messages of intolerance and hate. In addition there appear to be instances of religion creeping into public schools outside authorised channels: in 2004

teachers in the Novi Pazar public kindergarten led children in Islamic prayers during Ramadan without asking permission from parents.<sup>187</sup>

### 4. Linguistic apartheid

As part of the national awakenings of the late 1980s and early 1990s, language came to the fore. Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins all speak a common tongue with several dialects and numerous sub-dialects, which have always been regionally, not ethnically, based. Yet, as politicians began to instrumentalise nationalism for political purposes, language became a central part of national definition. Politicians in Zagreb and Belgrade -- supported by their academic stooges -- declared that Serbian and Croatian were different languages. During the 1990s, the newly-renamed Bosniaks announced the existence of a separate Bosnian language. The absurdity of these linguistic gymnastics has culminated in Podgorica's efforts to proclaim a separate Montenegrin language. Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins need no interpreters.

Perhaps the most dangerous political move in Sandzak since the overthrow of Milosevic, and the single issue that could do most to destroy good will among Bosniaks and Serbs, has been BNVS insistence on Bosnian "language" in the schools. Novi Pazar Serbs and Bosniaks speak a dialect of Serbo-Croatian similar to but different from mainstream Serbian "Ekavica". In Sjenica and elsewhere in the Pester Highlands, a Montenegrin "Ijekavica" dialect is spoken. These local dialects are based entirely on geography, not religion or ethnicity.

In 2004 the Bosniak National Council decided to develop curricula and textbooks for "Bosnian language with national culture" as an optional subject in the elementary schools of Sjenica, Novi Pazar and Tutin, as provided within the February 2002 law on the Protection and Rights of Minorities. The Serbian Ministry of Education was prepared to approve textbooks for use starting from September 2004 but problems occurred in writing and publishing. The BNVS was late in submitting the textbooks for approval in July 2004 and tried to improvise by submitting a combination of new texts and some imported from Bosnia & Herzegovina, such as *Our Father Alija [Izetbegovic]*.<sup>188</sup> The proposed

<sup>184</sup> Remarks made by former Deputy Minister of Education Zelimir Popov (2000-2004) at the public debate, "Church-Society-State", on 3 February 2005 at the Belgrade Media Centre.

<sup>185</sup> Crisis Group interview with a former high-ranking official in the Ministry of Education.

<sup>186</sup> Those students who did not wish to take religious education had to sign up for "Civic Education".

<sup>187</sup> This was done at the instruction of Zekerija Dugopoljac, at the time the member of the Executive Board of the Novi Pazar municipality in charge of education, who also is director of the kindergarten.

<sup>188</sup> This textbook refers to Serbs as enemies. Other Bosnian-published text books include: *Bosnian Language* (Tuzla, 2001) and *A School Dictionary of Bosnian Language* (Sarajevo, 1999).

texts are all written in the Sarajevo Bosnian dialect of Serbo-Croatian, which is spoken nowhere in Sandzak.

The efforts to introduce Bosnian textbooks caused outrage and were viewed in Serbian nationalist circles as proof Bosniaks were disloyal and a potential irredentist threat. This has further alienated the Serb minority in Sandzak from the Bosniak majority, as the Serbs now feel under threat in their medieval heartland and fear they will soon have difficulty learning in their own language (local dialect). Clumsy handling by government, Belgrade media and BNVS has almost destroyed four years of gradually improving inter-ethnic relations.

Education Minister Slobodan Vuksanovic, who replaced the ultra-conservative Ljiljana Colic in September 2004, has taken the matter seriously and found a compromise with the BNVS that enables Bosnian to be taught as an optional subject during the second term of the 2004/2005 school year. However, introduction of Bosnian language texts and instruction in the schools will cause students to divide further on the basis of religion and ethnicity. The result will be further polarisation and self-imposed ethnic apartheid, as Serbs attend one set of classes and Bosniaks another. Through insistence on introducing text books in a dialect none of them speak, the BNVS is rapidly undermining peaceful coexistence in Sandzak. The BNVS should find a different solution to the language question that is inclusive of both Bosniaks and Serbs.

To add further confusion, the BNVS asked Bosniaks to declare "Bosnian" (not "Bosniak") as their mother tongue when the state-wide census was conducted in 2002. Three eastern Sandzak municipalities -- Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica -- legislated "Bosnian" as their official language, in addition to Serbian, the republic's official language.

## **5. Civil society**

In spite of the overall low level of cultural development in Sandzak, a small but active civil society sector is organized around a series of NGO networks. They play an important role in the region's developing political and social consciousness and in channeling energies into productive alternatives to existing political parties.

The genesis of the NGO sector in Sandzak was in the early 1990's, when many educated persons became persuaded the nationalism of the regional and national political parties was a problem, particularly by fomenting ethnic tensions. While many with higher education emigrated or moved to larger cities, some remained in or returned to their home cities to help those otherwise unable to escape Sandzak's poverty and cultural narrow-mindedness.

Initially Sandzak NGOs primarily monitored human rights abuses against the Bosniak population. Two stand out: Sefko Alomerovic's Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak, and the Sandzak Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, founded by Safet Bandzovic and run by Semiha Kacar. Both have attracted international attention and have branched out to cover human rights abuses against all ethnic groups in Sandzak, including Serbs. They have extensively catalogued abuses and brought criminal and civil complaints on behalf of Bosniaks and Serbs alike.

As governing institutions became increasingly dysfunctional throughout the 1990s, a second wave of NGOs began to fill the vacuum. In Novi Pazar the most prominent NGOs working with civil society development are Urban-In, the Civic Forum, Sandzak Intellectual Circle, DamaD Cultural Centre, Society for Helping Mentally Underdeveloped Persons, Muslim Humanitarian Society Merhamet, Society of Mothers and Women and the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. Outside Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin and Priboj also have fledgling civil society NGOs, while Prijepolje's relatively even ethnic balance has encouraged a host of groups.<sup>189</sup> Education, multi-ethnic youth activities, emancipation of women and other vulnerable groups, youth activism, intellectual debates, professional and academic associations, literature, ecology, and computers are but some of the topics addressed. The grass-roots field-work not only contributes to the civic life of Sandzak but also serves as a meaningful alternative to the corrupt, self-centered, exploitative practices of many political parties and religious organisations. Unlike Belgrade-based NGOs, who operate in much better conditions and closer to donors and sponsors, Sandzak NGOs face financial difficulties: the local nouveau riche show little inclination to fund them, preferring Islamic activities. They also lack the knowledge and skills to write the grant proposals required by international donors.

In an ethnically-mixed environment, civil society development is crucial to sustainable long-term development. Unfortunately -- with a few exceptions, most notably the USAID sponsored Freedom House -- the donor community has paid scant attention to the civil society sector in Sandzak, devoting most of its efforts instead to infrastructure programs. In some instances where donors have funded civil society projects, they

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<sup>189</sup> Some of the civil society NGOs in Sandzak worth watching are Flores and Destinikon (Sjenica); Impuls (Tutin); Women's Centre, New Vision, Forum of Women, Cultural Club Theatre, Centre for Civic action Integra and the Ecological Society (Prijepolje); Initiative for Small Economy and Democracy, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights office, Women's Initiative and the Council for the Protection of Human Rights and Humanitarian Works (Priboj).

have exhibited remarkable naivety by supporting projects proposed by municipal authorities that favored specific political parties, most notably the SDA.<sup>190</sup>

International donors have also run into problems identifying appropriate projects. In one instance Mercy Corps funded a for profit organization that supports an Islamic choir.<sup>191</sup> Frequently donors repairing infrastructure require local governments to provide matching funds for the project to be completed. Often these donors fail to take into account whether or not the local government actually has funds available. In more than one instance local governments have accepted international assistance, begun projects and then failed to complete them, due to an unwillingness or inability to fund by the local municipality.<sup>192</sup>

#### **D. LAND WITHOUT JUSTICE: POLICE AND THE JUDICIARY**

Thorough reform of the police and judiciary were key pre-election promises of the anti-Milosevic coalition in 2000 but little has been done. Endemic inefficiency, corruption and political meddling remain key stumbling blocks in Serbia's political life. This directly affects all citizens but has particular impact on minorities, such as the Bosniaks.

Under the first post-Milosevic government, the OSCE began a program to improve policing in Serbia. Unfortunately there were limited results. The force is still full of notorious thugs from the Milosevic era, who resist change and cover up the past. Minister of the Interior Dragan Jovic, who has reappointed several old regime figures, seems intent on reversing even the limited achievements of his predecessor. Legislative efforts have been superficial and failed to impose mechanisms of parliamentary or civilian control and accountability.

The Humanitarian Law Center (HLC), a leading Belgrade human right organisation, gives a gloomy assessment of policing in Serbia:

Following the fall of Milosevic's regime, HLC has not recorded serious police actions against members

of minorities, which used to be customary, in regions like Kosovo and Sandzak, as well as against political opponents of the current authorities. However, HLC has recorded after the October 2000 changes an alarmingly frequent misuse of force. The breaking of the law during suspect identification, taking into custody, police detention, and interrogation is quite frequent in police practice. When it is not possible to deny torture accusations due to compelling evidence of police torture (medical documentation, photos and witness statements), police dignitaries assure the public that such cases will be investigated and the perpetrators punished. Yet it is a regular practice of internal police investigations to believe depositions of police members, rather than the valid evidence that repression had taken place.<sup>193</sup>

When torture victims file charges against officers, the police often respond by filing counter-charges.

Similarly, judicial reform has been partial and largely superficial. The first post-Milosevic Minister of Justice, Vladan Batic, was ineffective, and the present minister, Zoran Stojkovic, seems if anything worse. Changes in appointment of judges and court presidents were personality-driven, highly partisan and based on political loyalties not structural and professional criteria. In effect, one set of party-affiliated judges has been exchanged for another.

##### **1. Policing after 2000**

Following the ouster of Milosevic, Djindjic and his cabinet were willing to listen to complaints of abuse and mistreatment from the Bosniaks. Yet pressed by other problems, Djindjic never developed either a long-term strategy or institutional solutions for Sandzak problems. Instead, he relied on personal relations with local Bosniak politicians. Today the police force is disproportionately Serb. In Tutin -- a city 95 per cent Bosniak -- 57.4 per cent of the police force is Serb.<sup>194</sup> The situation appears similar throughout Bosniak majority regions.

After the OSCE success in creating a multi-ethnic police force in the three municipalities in the Presevo valley, Bosniak politicians asked if such program could be

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<sup>190</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Sandzak NGOs.

<sup>191</sup> Crisis Group interviews with Sandzak NGOs. For specifics related to the Islamic choir, see: [http://sada.usaid.org.yu/en/projects\\_details.cfm?ngo=MC&id=NPC102/NP-42](http://sada.usaid.org.yu/en/projects_details.cfm?ngo=MC&id=NPC102/NP-42).

<sup>192</sup> An example is the bridge at Lug, which was not seen as a high priority project by local residents or officials. See [http://sada.usaid.org.yu/en/projects\\_details.cfm?ngo=MC&id=NPC060/NP-30](http://sada.usaid.org.yu/en/projects_details.cfm?ngo=MC&id=NPC060/NP-30).

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<sup>193</sup> "Alternative Report on Implementation of Article 7 of the UN Pact on Civil and Political Rights in Serbia and Montenegro".

<sup>194</sup> Tutin has 146 police officers, 81 Serbs and 60 Bosniaks. Crisis Group interview with Novi Pazar Chief of Police Muamer Nicevic. Crisis Group interview with Rasim Ljajic.

introduced in Sandzak.<sup>195</sup> This was turned down both by the OSCE mission in Belgrade and the republic government. However, some efforts are being made to make the ethnic balance more representative. In the latest group of candidates accepted by the Novi Pazar police, ten were Bosniaks and three Serbs.<sup>196</sup> There also appear to be efforts to provide guaranteed quotas for Bosniaks at secondary police schools and academies.

The first noticeable change after October 2000 was the appointment of Suad Bulic -- a Bosniak -- as chief of police in Novi Pazar, also responsible for the other two Bosniak majority municipalities, Sjenica and Tutin.<sup>197</sup> His allegiance was to top officials of Djindjic's DS in Belgrade, rather than Ugljanin or Ljajic, which made him many local enemies. He also faced serious institutional obstacles that limited how much he could change the force and serve the local community.

Bulic reinstated 32 policemen (25 Bosniaks and seven Serbs) who had refused orders to fight in Kosovo in 1998, and he received relatively high marks in the fight against human trafficking in the triangle of Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. Supporters claim his biggest success was against drug smuggling -- that he confiscated unprecedented quantities of heroin during elaborate and highly synchronized sting operations that reached all the way to Turkey. When in 2002 sports hooligans in Novi Pazar engaged in several inter-ethnic incidents, Bulic's officers efficiently subdued them by putting cordons between the mobs.<sup>198</sup>

After a new government was formed in Belgrade in March 2004, Bulic was replaced by Muamer Nicevic, also a Bosniak, but who seems not to understand Sandzak's complexities. He has been criticised as slow to react to potentially dangerous situations, particularly to the violence surrounding the 2004 municipal elections. Results against narcotics trafficking appear negligible. Since DSS Vice President Jovic was appointed Interior Minister in March 2004, Nicevic -- under orders from

Belgrade -- has reinstated or promoted several policemen who were notorious for torturing Bosniaks in Milosevic's time. Dragan Prekic, notorious for his brutality then, was appointed chief of police in Tutin. Human rights groups accuse other infamous secret and regular policemen, such as Milic Karlicic (aka Charlemagne), Radoslav Stefanovic, Rade Ilic, Mirsad Rezdeporic (a Bosniak), Ljubinko Pendic and Mile Nedic, of having involvement in numerous acts of torture against Bosniaks. They remain on active duty, and the judiciary continues to block or delay criminal charges filed against them.<sup>199</sup>

The police often seem incapable or unwilling to combat criminal activity, particularly cross-border organised crime, much of which supports networks of indicted war criminals. The narcotics trade takes a particularly heavy toll in Sandzak but there is rarely news of drug seizures. The police also seem incapable or unwilling to resolve numerous politically motivated crimes, such as the recent firebombing of the SDP party headquarters.

## 2. The judicial farce

The judicial system in Serbia remains a major obstacle to the democratic transition. Sometimes it is not clear whether the prosecutors or judges are worse. Milosevic deliberately employed mostly Serbs as judges and prosecutors in Bosniak majority communities. This ethnic imbalance is difficult to address, as the judges essentially have protected tenure. The DOS government failed to agree on a comprehensive program of lustration to remove the more problematic jurists after 2000. Even the watered-down version of the lustration law has not been implemented properly.

Today the ethnic structure of prosecutors' offices and courts in Sandzak reflects long-standing discriminatory practices. Milosevic brought some judges from Kosovo to Novi Pazar. In the district (*okrug*) court there, three judges are Bosniaks, two are Serbs. The court administration has eleven Serbs, seven Bosniaks and a Russian. The district prosecutor's office employs five prosecutors -- three Serbs, two Bosniaks -- as does the municipal prosecutors office. The municipal court in Novi Pazar is a more balanced picture with eleven Bosniak and six Serb judges. In the municipal court administration 42 employees are Bosniaks, 26 are Serbs. Only two of five district prosecutors are Bosniaks, while the administrative staff of seven also has but two Bosniaks. There are two Bosniak and three Serb municipal prosecutors, with three Bosniaks and four Serbs on the administrative staff. Slightly better is the municipal court, with ten Bosniak judges out of

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<sup>195</sup> The politicians were primarily from the SDA, as well as Fevzija Muric of the Party for Sandzak (SzS). See also Crisis Group Europe Report N°152, *Southern Serbia's Fragile Peace*, 9 December 2003.

<sup>196</sup> Crisis Group interview with Novi Pazar Chief of Police Muamer Nicevic.

<sup>197</sup> Suad Bulic was the first Bosniak appointed chief of police in Novi Pazar for over fifteen years. During the Tito era, two Muslims held the post.

<sup>198</sup> During a volleyball match between the Yugoslav and Turkish junior teams, Bosniak fans in Novi Pazar cheered for Turkey, which irritated Serbs in attendance. Visiting Belgrade football hooligans, helped by Serbs from nearby Kosovska Mitrovica, caused trouble in downtown Novi Pazar and became the target of stone-throwing local fans.

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<sup>199</sup> Crisis Group interview with the Sandzak Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms.

seventeen and twelve Bosniak administrative employees out of 26. Sjenica's six municipal court employees are divided evenly but all six prosecutors are Serbs, with only a Bosniak trainee.<sup>200</sup>

Procedural regulations and laws are full of loopholes permitting prosecutors and judges to delay, postpone, derail or pervert trials without fear of consequences. Should a trial be completed, a judge can delay writing the verdict indefinitely. Judges can also arbitrarily dismiss defence witnesses. Corruption and perversion of justice is endemic among Sandzak judges of all ethnic groups. In an open letter to then Minister of Justice Batic in 2003, human rights activist Alomerovic demanded dismissal of corrupt, incompetent and compromised judges, such as the notorious Zlatan Kurtovic, a Bosniak.<sup>201</sup>

The ongoing Strpci and Sjeverin trials are doing much to undermine what little confidence Bosniaks may have in the Serbian judiciary.<sup>202</sup> The state commission that was formed to investigate the latter incident was unable to produce any results, and it was not until 2001 that an indictment was brought. Although the trial in the Belgrade District Court produced a guilty verdict, on 27 September 2004 the Supreme Court overturned it and sent the case back for retrial, which has been underway since 17 January 2005. The prosecution and judges refused to follow up on evidence and testimony that the direct perpetrators of the kidnappings and murders were carrying out orders of army or security service superiors.

The Strpci murders are probably the most prominent unresolved case. The man thought responsible, Milan Lukic, a Bosnian Serb and commander of a special forces unit of the Visegrad Brigade of the Army of Republika Srpska, was arrested in 1993 and charged with forgery and arms smuggling. An investigation for the Strpce abduction and massacre was begun but he was released after twenty days -- according to Serbian human rights organisations due to the influence of a relative, Sreten Lukic, a prominent Serbian Police general subsequently indicted by The Hague Tribunal for war crimes in Kosovo. In August 1996 an eyewitness gave a report to the Montenegrin police accusing Lukic and Nebojsa Ranisavljevic. The latter was arrested on 19 October 1996, and after prolonged jurisdictional wrangles, the District Court in Bijelo Polje (Montenegro) on 9 September 2002 found him guilty of war crimes against civilians for the kidnappings at Strpce as well as of one count of murder. In 2004 the Supreme Court of Montenegro

upheld a fifteen year sentence<sup>203</sup> but Lukic remains at large, with no efforts made to follow up evidence he and his unit acted under orders from Belgrade.

The case of Munir Sabotic is typical of what Bosniaks and Serbs face when they seek justice in the courts. In 1994 he filed charges in Novi Pazar alleging police torture. Sabotic may have been singled out because he helped an OSCE short-term Observation Mission to Sandzak. The trial was delayed by judges and prosecution until 2004, when the case was thrown out, because the statute of limitations had expired. Human rights activists say they have presented evidence to the police and courts of hundreds of cases of torture, kidnapping and murder by the police and paramilitary organisations. Almost always, the police, prosecutors and courts delay or refuse to take action. Many of these cases involve police torture of local Serbs throughout Sandzak. In terms of the government ignoring the rights of its citizens to legal redress for crimes committed by government officials, there appears to be little discrimination in Sandzak, or elsewhere in Serbia.

Because the police and judiciary in Sandzak reflect wider structural problems in Serbia as a whole, little will change there until Belgrade gets serious about republic-wide judicial and police reforms.

## E. STALLED ECONOMY

Sandzak is poorer than the rest of Serbia, with a noticeable gap also between Bosniak and Serbian majority municipalities. In Novi Pazar per capita annual income is 35 per cent of the Serbian average, in Sjenica 39 per cent, in Tutin 17 per cent. In Serb majority municipalities figures are still well below the national average: Prijepolje 55 per cent, Priboj 48 per cent, Nova Varos and Raska 67 per cent.<sup>204</sup> Infrastructure is too underdeveloped to support the population. Donors have invested in some infrastructure projects, and there has been some funding for small and medium-sized enterprises. Sandzak, however, has a relatively small capacity to absorb aid. Emigration continues, some to Novi Pazar, much abroad. A recent survey found that 60 per cent of its youth wished to leave Prijepolje.<sup>205</sup> Significant progress is apparent only in telecommunications.<sup>206</sup>

<sup>200</sup> All statistics are from a report presented by Semih Kacar, president of the Sandzak Committee for Human Rights and Freedom, at a seminar in Priboj, 22 February 2005.

<sup>201</sup> "Otvoreno pismo ministru Baticu", *Danas*, 24 June 2003.

<sup>202</sup> For background see Section III C above.

<sup>203</sup> Beta, 2 April 2004. Ranisavljevic claimed his pre-trial statement was extracted under torture.

<sup>204</sup> These statistics do not reflect that substantial economic activity -- at least 50 per cent -- takes place outside legal channels.

<sup>205</sup> "Prijepolje bi napustilo 60% mladih", *B92*, 6 June 2004.

<sup>206</sup> Since October 2000, Telekom Srbije has made intensive investments throughout Sandzak. It has installed a fibre-optic

As noted above, Sandzak's economy has fallen on hard times since Milosevic. Textile, footwear and leather industries have lost domestic and export markets and become less competitive, as seen most clearly in the many private factories and workshops that are idle or at reduced capacity. Novi Pazar has 19,000 unemployed, some 33 per cent of its work force. In the mid-1990s real estate prices -- a key indicator of growth -- in Novi Pazar centre began to approach Belgrade's, and by 2001 had surpassed the capital.<sup>207</sup> Since the middle of 2004, however, they have been falling below Belgrade levels again.

Following the 1999 NATO bombardment, Bosniaks resumed trading with Kosovo's Albanians -- almost all trucks at the northern crossing into Kosovo have Novi Pazar registration. In part this is because Albanians seem to trust their co-religionists more than Serbs. The trucking and export business received a boost in 2003 when Serbian Customs opened a terminal in Raska<sup>208</sup> but this traffic is insufficient to employ the entire region.

Many problems with Sandzak's economy are connected to overall economic development and reform in Serbia and will be nearly impossible to solve only regionally. In spite of Serbian economic reforms praised by the international community, little has changed structurally beyond the macro-financial sphere. Serbia's economy is still heavily biased against small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and in favour of large state-owned enterprises. Regulations, taxes and other bureaucratic obstacles are too burdensome for many SMEs. Often the law's unrealistic demands force a business to operate illegally in order to survive. The impact on Sandzak, which has many SMEs, is significant.<sup>209</sup>

Under Milosevic most officials were on the take, and business could bribe its way past much. Novi Pazar

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cable that runs to Novi Pazar and Tutin, installed ISDN lines in a number of municipalities, increased telephone lines and switches available in numerous villages, and begun two WLL (Wireless Local Loop) pilot projects in Novi Pazar and Nova Varos, with plans to extend that technology to the remainder of Sandzak. It has also invested intensively in mobile telephone coverage, so that by the end of 2004 almost the entire Sandzak was covered by the 064 mobile telephone system. Crisis Group interviews with Telekom Srbije.

<sup>207</sup> Crisis Group researchers compared real estate prices in the Belgrade *Krovni Oglasi* and *Oglasi* weekly advertising magazines.

<sup>208</sup> Some Bosniaks view the location of the customs terminal in the small Serbian majority town of Raska as yet another form of discrimination.

<sup>209</sup> See Alija Halilovic's "Private Entrepreneurship in Novi Pazar", in *How to Support SMEs in Yugoslavia*, published jointly in Belgrade in 1998 by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Institute of Economic Sciences and the European Movement in Serbia.

profited from this chaotic system. Since 2000, tax and customs regimes have begun to tighten, and the ability to import cheap raw materials and manufacture at low cost has gradually diminished, causing it to lose its competitive advantage. Significant competition has entered Serbia's market, primarily cheap, smuggled Chinese goods that have forced Novi Pazar products off the domestic market.

Nevertheless, Novi Pazar remains a hotbed of entrepreneurial skill that could play a valuable part in energizing Serbia's economy. But for this to happen, Belgrade will have to pass true reform laws that lessen burdens on SMEs and remove the advantages of state enterprises. It must also crack down on smuggled goods. Anything else, even infusions of foreign or domestic aid, would be a bandage on an arterial wound. One bright light is the 31 March 2005 agreement between the EU and Serbia that will permit Serbian goods to reach EU markets without customs duties. Given the strength of Novi Pazar's textile industry, this is expected to have a significant positive impact on the Sandzak economy.

## F. SOURCES OF ETHNIC TENSION

Throughout Sandzak most Serbs and Bosniaks interact peacefully and with few tensions on a daily basis. Since October 2000, Belgrade has made slow but steady progress in repairing relations with the Bosniaks, many of whom are slowly beginning to feel they may have a future based on participation in state institutions. Since Milosevic's overthrow, the state has also sent a clear message that it plans to treat Bosniaks and Serbs equally, as Prime Minister Zivkovic told Serbs at Sopocani Monastery in 2003.<sup>210</sup> But Bosniaks still have many legitimate grievances, and there are areas of friction that often heighten tensions. Some involve deliberate acts with a clear intent to provoke. Some are thoughtless incidents. Others are the result of deep prejudices. Some seem to reflect a state policy to marginalise Bosniaks or make life so uncomfortable as to drive them out. A number of forces still attempt to destabilise Sandzak, including: extremist elements within the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the police, state security (BIA) and army security (KOS), and nationalist political forces on the republic level associated with the Serbian Radical Party, DSS and SDA. All seem to have vested interests in keeping ethnic tensions high.

Refugee return is a key issue. The overwhelming majority of Bosniak refugees have still not returned to their homes in the Priboj municipality, and the Serbian government has done nothing to create a security

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<sup>210</sup> Crisis Group interview with meeting organiser.

environment conducive to return. In the entire municipality only three families are back in their pre-war homes, thanks almost entirely to UNHCR. In the village of Sjeverin, only nine of 80 pre-1991 Bosniak households remain, all elderly. The perpetrators of ethnic cleansing, murder and arson still walk the streets in Priboj, intimidating Bosniaks who wish to return. Belgrade has taken no action against them, and the municipal government -- notably the assembly president, Milenko Milicevic -- publicly denies the scope of the ethnic cleansing, claiming only four villages were partially affected.<sup>211</sup>

Serbian nationalist celebrations of the destruction of Bosniaks still occur. The most recent high profile incidents were the nights of 8-10 July 2004 in Priboj, prior to commemoration of the ninth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. Groups of Serbs walked the streets singing songs glorifying Karadzic and Mladic, shouting they would turn Novi Pazar into another Vukovar and Sjenica into another Srebrenica,<sup>212</sup> and painting graffiti: "Gypsies out", "Serbia to Serbs", "Death to Siptars [Albanians]", and "Every Serb is Radovan".<sup>213</sup>

Following the Albanian violence against Serbs in Kosovo on 17 March 2004, well-organised Serb mobs burned the mosques in Belgrade and Nis, as the police did little to stop them. This has caused consternation among Bosniaks, many of whom wonder whether the police are truly committed to protecting their rights.

The Belgrade tabloid press often publishes outrageous stories and sensational headlines about Sandzak and the Bosniaks. Most are wild exaggerations, some outright fabrications, including accounts of al-Qaeda terrorist cells and armed Islamic extremists. Often they appear to be orchestrated to raise ethnic tensions and sow fear among Serbs; these are usually published in papers that act as fronts for the state security apparatus.<sup>214</sup>

A common complaint among Bosniaks is the attitude of the traffic police between Kraljevo and Novi Pazar. Numerous interlocutors report being pulled over on spurious charges because their vehicles had Novi Pazar

registration plates. Islamic clergy have also been singled out for police harassment during traffic stops. Vehicles with Bosnian registration plates are almost certain to be stopped, a significant problem given the many Bosniaks with relatives in that country. By all accounts, the Kraljevo police are arrogant, corrupt and prejudiced. They are also known to seize and impound vehicles on the thinnest of pretexts.<sup>215</sup>

The ethnic imbalance in government institutions in Bosniak majority municipalities goes beyond the aforementioned examples of police and judiciary to include the municipal government, tax inspection, and PTT. As of September 2004, the tax collection administration in Sjenica employed nine Bosniaks and eight Serbs. The post office, directed by a Serb, employed seventeen Serbs, sixteen Bosniaks. In Prijepolje the staffs of the tax directorate and national savings are largely Serb; the municipal construction directorate has no Bosniaks and the cultural centre one among eighteen employees. Only two of the approximately 50 people hired to fill municipal positions in Prijepolje over the previous four years were Bosniaks (one of fifteen in 2004), and only ten of the approximately 90 people employed in the municipal administration are Bosniaks.<sup>216</sup>

In areas where Bosniaks are in the minority discrimination is worse. Fifteen of the 81-member Prijepolje area school boards are Bosniaks. In the Prijepolje village of Velika Zupa, the majority of elementary school pupils are Bosniaks, but no Bosniak is on the school board. Nor is a Bosniak on the school board in Seljasnica -- also near Prijepolje -- where the pupil ratio is 1:1.<sup>217</sup> In Priboj not one director of the nine public institutions and companies is a Bosniak and only eight of the 81 board members. Only four of the 72 members of Priboj's school boards are Bosniaks, and only fifteen of the municipal administration's 79 employees. The municipal and criminal courts have nine judges, two of whom are Bosniaks.<sup>218</sup> Until 1992 almost 40 per cent of the FAP truck factory workforce was Bosniak; today it is 5 per cent.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Press release, 23 February 2005, Odbor za zastitu ljudskih prava i humanitarnu djelatnost Priboj.

<sup>212</sup> Vukovar is a Croatian city heavily shelled by the Yugoslav Army in 1991; Srebrenica was the site of a Bosnian Serb massacre of over 7,000 Bosniaks in 1995. Anonymous leaflets with the same message were distributed in Sjenica at this time.

<sup>213</sup> "U Priboju ponovo jezive poruke bošnjacima," Odbor Za Zastitu Ljudskih Prava i Humanitarnu Djelatnost Priboj, 14 July 2004.

<sup>214</sup> "Sandžački vukovi prete Srbiji," *Vecernje novosti*, 14 October 2004; "Muslimanski verski fanatici uzburkali javnost - Vehabije u Srbiji," *Blic*, 13 February 2004.

<sup>215</sup> Crisis Group representatives were targets of corrupt police on several occasions.

<sup>216</sup> All statistics are from a report presented by Semiha Kacar, president of the Sandzak Committee for Human Rights and Freedom, at a seminar in Priboj on 22 February 2005.

<sup>217</sup> The school board phenomenon reflects the role political party membership plays in selection for these positions.

<sup>218</sup> All statistics are from a report by Semiha Kacar, president of the Sandzak Committee for Human Rights and Freedom, at a seminar in Priboj on 22 February 2005.

<sup>219</sup> Crisis Group correspondence with Odbor za zastitu ljudskih prava i humanitarnu djelatnost Priboj.



In 2000 Sandzak had the lowest telephone density (3 to 4 per cent) of any region in Serbia due in large part to its isolated geographic position and decades of possibly deliberate under-investment. Most telephone switches were located in or near Serb villages, thereby creating a built-in prejudice against Bosniaks in obtaining telephones, and clear price discrimination on the basis of ethnicity also existed. Even today the legacy of this past discrimination is evident: in Novi Pazar's 50-unit Hadzet apartment building in the town centre there are no phones. For those lucky enough to get one, the wait can take months or years, and bribes to local Telecom Srbija officials are commonplace. Discrimination -- both ethnic and political -- in obtaining service is common.<sup>220</sup> Politically outspoken individuals or organisations that opposed Ugljanin's SDA reported difficulty in obtaining service. Part of the problem is caused by local graft and corruption, part by underdevelopment, and part by the legacy of policies that favoured Serbs.

Nonetheless, the picture may be gradually changing. Over the past four years, Telecom Srbija has invested heavily in the region, and the overall density has risen to at least 10 per cent, with significant investment ongoing. On 17 March 2005 Telecom Srbija designated Novi Pazar as an "executive unit", making it the de facto regional hub, which should expand the quality and availability of services.

But Bosniaks are not entirely innocent. Since the CLS/SDA took power in Novi Pazar in 2000, there have been incidents that cause Serbs to feel that they too are an unwelcome organism in their own country. These include ill-considered use of Bosniak "national symbols" in public institutions and instances of Bosniak youth throwing snowballs and rocks at Orthodox clergy.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is particularly sensitive about what it views as Bosniak disregard for Serbian holy sites. The thirteenth century monastery church at Sopocani has unique frescoes and is on the UNESCO world heritage list, along with several neighbouring sites.<sup>221</sup> Development is not legally permitted on the

nearby land, yet during the last decade there has been unregulated development, primarily of week-end homes and restaurants erected by Novi Pazar's nouveau riche. Much of the land was purchased by Bosniaks from Serbs who left due to the bad economy. The Novi Pazar municipality has illegally permitted this construction, often as a result of bribery. The Church sees this as an affront to a holy site. The Djurdjevi Stupovi Monastery, on the hill above Novi Pazar, is similarly endangered, not only by weekend homes, but also by a brick factory. Often the structures were built without valid permits or with questionable temporary ones. Repeated attempts by Bosniaks to build a filling station near the ninth century Church of Saints Peter and Paul is also an ongoing irritation to the Serb community.

The case of the 24 Bosniaks accused of terrorism and anti-state acts under the Milosevic regime is another friction point. It has been dragging on in the courts since 1994, mainly because the SDA has done all it can to prevent it from being dismissed. Obstruction typically takes the form of instructing Bosniak defendants and witnesses to not appear in court.<sup>222</sup> In December 2004, the judge again decided to adjourn, due to the failure of defendants to appear.<sup>223</sup> When the case resumed in January 2005, two of the accused from Sjenica were brought in forcefully by the police. However, proceedings were delayed because the prosecutor failed to appear. As long as the trial continues the SDA can paint itself as a victim of Serb persecution. Dismissal would go a long way toward easing tensions.

In spite of all Sandzak's problems, at present the only real potential for serious violence comes from the violent behaviour of sport club members during and after events. In Milosevic's time, such clubs were often the recruiting grounds for paramilitary formations, and the tradition of rowdy fans carries on. Several Sandzak clubs are associated with political parties: Ugljanin's SDA has Torcida, Ljajic's SDP Ultra-Azzuro. Other clubs include Sandzak Extremists, Horde of Evil, and Hadzetani. These clubs are aggressive and seem to be looking for trouble. There is always a risk of trouble when the sports clubs of Novi Pazar and those of the neighbouring Serb town, Raska, play each other. Every

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<sup>220</sup> While Bosniaks in Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica complain that the €500 connection fee is higher than in other parts of Serbia, there is no standardised telephone hook-up fee. Crisis Group found that the fee varies from municipality to municipality and ranges from €75 to as high as €500, depending on the state of the local infrastructure. Municipalities also often add on high additional fees. For example, Prime Minister Kostunica's home town of Kostunici charges €700 for a telephone hook-up.

<sup>221</sup> The complete UNESCO listing includes the town of Stari Ras, Sopocani Monastery, St. Peter's Church and necropolis, the Monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi, and the Fortress of Gradina with lower town of Trgoviste.

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<sup>222</sup> Crisis Group interviews with defendants in the trial.

<sup>223</sup> Sanapress News Agency, 24 December 2004. The evidence which prompted the prosecutor in 1993 to start these proceedings was manufactured by Milosevic's secret police in order to terrify the Bosniaks and their leaders. According to Sefko Alomerovic, the evidence consists of no more than diaries, with logs of meetings between friends who were concerned about the welfare of their families and neighbourhood.

time there is a match between Bosniak and Serb teams, fans on both sides hurl ethnic insults.<sup>224</sup>

A number of matches have nearly turned violent, including a football game between Novi Pazar and the Belgrade club Rad,<sup>225</sup> and a women's volleyball contest between the Turkish and Yugoslav junior national teams. Following the Turkish victory over Yugoslavia's basketball team in the 2002 European basketball championships, Bosniak fans drove around Novi Pazar honking horns. In September 2002 Serbs from Kosovska Mitrovica and Raska drove into downtown Novi Pazar, following the Yugoslav national team's victory over the U.S. in the World Basketball Championship in Indianapolis. They honked their horns and shouted provocations at the Bosniaks, who threw stones at them. During a 19 March 2005 football match in Nis, the visiting Torcida fans yelled "Kill Serbs", "Hashim Thaci", and "Never Serbia", while waving Turkish flags and pelting police and other spectators with bricks, rocks, cigarette lighters and anything else that came to hand. While football hooliganism is often the norm throughout Serbia, in Sandzak it takes on ethnic connotations that could lead to a rapid outbreak of interethnic violence.

Any type of ethnically motivated graffiti or propaganda in the region makes all residents tense. On 22 and 23 March 2005, anti-Semitic graffiti and posters sprouted overnight throughout Serbia, including Sandzak, in a well-orchestrated campaign.

Obviously there is a long way to go before Serbia's ethnic minorities live in an environment free from discrimination and the threat of renewed violence, and few inside the Serbian parliament seem to appreciate this. On 5 April 2005, Esad Džudžević was voted out of the chairmanship of the Serbian parliament's Inter-ethnic Committee by deputies representing Seselj's SRS, Milosević's SPS and Kostunica's DSS, all of whom had taken offense during a committee session held in Novi Pazar at which local NGOs voiced their concerns about human rights violations against Bosniaks. As the Bosniaks in Sandzak extend their clout within the slowly democratising political structures of post-Milosević Serbia, they must take special care not to do to the Serbs what the Serbs have done to them for many years and discriminate against local minorities.

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<sup>224</sup> Serb fans are known to shout "this is Serbia", "death to Turks" and other similar insults, while Bosniak fans respond with "this is Turkey" and "Allahu Akbar" and wave Islamic flags.

<sup>225</sup> The supporters of this minor Belgrade team are notorious for being primitive and aggressive. They actively seek and engage in clashes with all other football clubs' supporters, regardless of their ethnicity.

## G. THE MEDIA

Since the demise of Titoist Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the media scene in Serbia has changed dramatically, from domination by state-owned and state-controlled outlets towards fragmentation, accompanied by the growth of the private media sector. The media structure in Sandzak reflects that of local media in Serbia in general.<sup>226</sup> There are municipal-owned outlets, which have acted as state propaganda but also private outlets that sprung to life during and after the Milosević era. According to the 2002 Broadcasting Act and Public Information Act, Radio Television Serbia (RTS) should have been transformed into a public broadcasting corporation, and the state should have divested itself of ownership in print and electronic media through privatisation. The state should also have completed the regulation and allocation of electronic broadcast frequencies by now. In reality little has been done, leaving media in essentially the same unregulated grey zone as under Milosević.

The large number of new media outlets has not meant better quality nor necessarily improved the political climate. The Serbian and Sandzak political elite and parties continue to use the old propaganda media model of the communist era.<sup>227</sup> Those who once protested vociferously against the misuse of media by the communist authorities find this convenient and effective.

There are numerous obstacles to the development of professional and independent media. The first is a weak sense of democratic values and practices among the political elites. They spent their formative years under a single-party political system where media control equalled power, and they wish to continue this practice to enhance their own standing. The second obstacle is the difficulty in making a media outlet commercially viable. As a result most owners or editors are influenced or controlled by political parties and the economic elite, who manipulate the media and keep it on a short funding leash. This creates a third obstacle, lack of an independent editorial policy. The result is that readers and viewers often lack accurate information. Reporters in the Sandzak face an additional obstacle: the highly polarised political

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<sup>226</sup> There are more than 1,300 electronic broadcasters operating in Serbia, some illegally. The ministries responsible for media and telecommunication do not have a complete list so it is impossible to discuss all electronic media in Sandzak. This report's focus is on those with the highest profile and largest audience.

<sup>227</sup> This model has been extensively described by E. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent -- Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Vintage Books). See also, Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions - Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Pluto Classics).

climate caused by the conflict between the two main Bosniak parties. Ugljanin and Ljajic urge journalists to take sides and put strong pressure on independent journalists.<sup>228</sup>

Numerous international programs and grants are available to help develop an independent media. Unfortunately, few in the Sandzak media possess sufficient skill to prepare the necessary project proposals.

Sandzak has one press agency, Sanapress, which is closely connected with the NGO Civic Alliance. Its stories are distributed daily by e-mail to over 1,000 subscribers in Serbia and abroad. Novi Pazar has no daily newspaper. There are, however, four relevant print publications in Sandzak. The first, *Sandzacke novine*, is a privately owned Novi Pazar weekly. It focuses primarily on Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin and reflects primarily Ugljanin and SDA.<sup>229</sup> The Islamic Community of Sandzak publishes *Glas Islama* (Voice of Islam), a monthly review. It is a competent product that appeals primarily to the more devout and enjoys significant political influence, particularly since its message is often transmitted through the Ders lectures after evening prayers. Prijepolje owns and publishes *Glas Polimlja* but due to budget restrictions its bi-weekly schedule has become irregular and the number of pages have been reduced. Coverage is largely limited to Prijepolje and Priboj. *Parlament*, published sporadically, is influenced heavily and sometimes financed by Ljajic's SDP. The lack of proper funding and a sound business strategy prevent it from having a regular publishing schedule and loyal readership; though its last issue was over two years ago, it still appears to be active, depending on SDP political needs. From 1993 until 2001 Sandzak's first and only true independent publication was HAS, a journal published by the NGO and independent publishing house, Damad.<sup>230</sup>

None of these publications earn sufficient advertising revenue to be self-sustaining, and all rely on subsidies. Their political patrons operate on the premise that it is better to keep the journals on a shoe-string budget and exercise complete editorial control than allow them to be privatised and acquire financial independence, which could eventually produce critical journalism. There is a real need for a quality independent daily in Novi Pazar

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<sup>228</sup> An example occurred on 4 October 2004 when Ugljanin's bodyguard prevented prominent Novi Pazar journalist Ivana Milic from attending Ugljanin's first press conference as mayor. The bodyguard told her that she was "persona non grata", because her TV station -- *Jedinstvo* -- is viewed by the SDA leadership as pro-Ljajic.

<sup>229</sup> The paper has received financial support from the municipal budgets of the three municipalities.

<sup>230</sup> Saban Sarenkapic -- a poet and journalist -- runs Damad. He also heads the Sandzak chapter of the Independent Journalist Association of Serbia (NUNS).

and the broader Sandzak region. It would not compete with the national dailies from Belgrade, but if it covered local news objectively, it could provide a meaningful platform for competing political options.

Following the rapid expansion of the private broadcast media in the 1990s,<sup>231</sup> virtually every village and small town in Serbia -- including Sandzak -- had several "broadcasters". Often this meant that any amateur with a basic home stereo system could erect a small transmitter and own a radio station. If the person had a VHS player and a small video camera, he could start a TV station. These stations frequently offered no real benefit to their communities, and had little relevance in political and social life. Most operated by playing music and videos paid for and requested by neighbours and relatives.

Sandzak's electronic media are either private or municipally owned. Several important local television stations broadcast from there. *Regional TV*, funded from the municipal budgets of the three Bosniak majority municipalities, was until recently controlled by Ugljanin and catered primarily to Bosniak tastes, providing mostly local programming with a heavy pro-SDA slant and news of the activities of Sandzak's deputies in the Serbian Parliament, Bajram Omeragic and Esad Dzudzevic. Due to local SDA nationalist and religious sensibilities, it would not show such popular Balkan entertainers as Ceca, Jelena Karleusa and Aca Lukas, and it censored kissing and swimsuit scenes from the myriad Latin American soap operas it broadcast.<sup>232</sup> As noted, it aired weekly the Ders address of the radical Sarajevo preacher Bugari.<sup>233</sup> It also carried direct transmissions of the Bosniak nationalist *Hayat TV* from Sarajevo. During Ramadan and other Islamic holidays, religious content has been high. Often editorial content is slanted against Serbs, few of whom watch it.<sup>234</sup> Since Ugljanin's directors were forced out in February 2005, the new director, Elijas Rebronja, has announced it will drop Bugari and begin programming that reflects the more mainstream official IZ views. He also announced it would begin broadcasting programs

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<sup>231</sup> When Milosevic was ousted in October 2000, there were approximately 1,000 active broadcasters. Since then growth has continued, due to inefficient regulation and poor implementation of legislation. There are now probably 1,300 electronic broadcasting outlets in Serbia.

<sup>232</sup> This is expected to change. Following the September 2004 municipal election, the Novi Pazar assembly appointed Elijas Rebronja, the editor of *Parliament*, as director of *Regionalna TV*. Ugljanin has publicly expressed displeasure at losing control of this important media outlet.

<sup>233</sup> See Section IV B 1 above.

<sup>234</sup> *Hayat* is a conservative and Muslim-nationalist TV station in Sarajevo. Its coverage of wartime events in Bosnia could leave many Serbs feeling uncomfortable.

created by the Orthodox Church and proclaimed an end to censorship.

*Jedinstvo* (unity) television is privately owned and controlled by Dane Belic, a Serb and former JUL supporter. Its tone is more ethnically neutral than *Regional TV*; it favours Ljajic editorially -- many observers credit the station with playing an important role in Ljajic's 2004 electoral results -- and often transmits programs from Belgrade's independent *B92*. It has an audience among both Serbs and Bosniaks. Watching *Regional* and *Jedinstvo* cover news in Novi Pazar prior to February 2005, one could easily get the impression they were speaking of two completely separate cities. With an SDP loyalist now at *Regional*, Ljajic controls Novi Pazar's two main television stations.

The neighbouring Serb-majority town of Raska has a TV station that largely transmits programming from Serbia's national networks, along with modest local content, most of which has a strong pro-Serb slant. Its transmitter has been attacked and damaged on several occasions by Bosniaks, and local police have been unable to apprehend the culprits.

The main municipal radio outlets (*Radio Novi Pazar*, *Radio Glas Polimlja*, *Radio Priboj*) are politically controlled, under-funded and technically backward. When *Glas Polimlja* criticised Prijepolje's SPS mayor, Stevan Puric, in 2001, he froze funding, and OSCE mediation was needed. An OSCE media expert later suggested municipal governments privatise media outlets, forcing them to survive in the market. The proposed model for Prijepolje (and other municipalities) was an employee/management buy-out. The broadcasting law that stipulated mandatory sale of municipal media was passed in 2002 but implementation has not begun, so most in Serbia, including Sandzak, remain politically controlled.

*Radio 100+* in Novi Pazar is private, co-founded by local journalists and the Belgrade-based news agency Beta. It has distinguished itself by largely not choosing sides among ethnic groups and politicians. It has a multi-ethnic and professional staff that produces politically balanced programs appealing to both communities. But it is partially dependent on international aid and would be hard-pressed to survive on advertising.<sup>235</sup>

Although Novi Pazar's Radio and TV *San* appears to be a good example of commercial initiative, it too received substantial start-up financing from the SDA.<sup>236</sup> Officially completely private and independent, it was established in

the late 1990's by the poet Ruzdija Sabotic out of his home. The core staff was comprised of young and enthusiastic beginners from both ethnic communities. Content largely avoided politics and was entertainment-oriented, aside from efforts to organise local humanitarian campaigns. However, *San* began to criticise SDA municipal authorities mildly, and even benign criticism proved unwelcome: the party cut off funding, and businesses avoided purchasing advertisements for fear of antagonising it. *San* could not attract sufficient revenue and ceased operation in 2003, following failure to secure permits to broadcast across the borders to Kosovo and Montenegro.

Media development in Sandzak is the flip side of democracy development in general, and should be carefully monitored. To create a truly independent media, it is necessary first to privatise the remaining state-owned outlets. Special attention should be given to the four Sandzak municipalities with municipal media outlets (Nova Varos, Prijepolje, Priboj, Novi Pazar). The law requires them to relinquish ownership by July 2006.

Thus far the Sandzak media has been forced to balance between political pressure and the need to serve the community, with mixed results at best. It is unrealistic to expect great advances before the general level of education, political culture and consciousness is raised. This requires time and patience. Meanwhile, economic reality will force many media outlets to close or seek commercial revenue.

## H. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL OBSTACLES

The problems Serbia faces with its minorities are not necessarily due to its constitution, adopted in 1990 under Milosevic but when Titoist Yugoslavia (SFRY) still existed. It defines Serbia as a state of its citizens and not a national [Serbian] state. The Federal constitution recognised Muslims as a constituent people throughout the country. In the 1992 constitution of Milosevic's rump-Yugoslavia (FRY) and the 2003 constitutional charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, neither Bosniaks, Muslims nor any other minority are mentioned. Nonetheless, they are included in political life on the level of the state union, where two ministers are Bosniaks: Human and Minority Rights (Rasim Ljajic from Serbia) and Internal Economic Relations (Amir Nurkovic from Montenegro).

The need to improve the standards and mechanisms for minority protection in Serbia was one of the few issues not disputed internally by DOS following the overthrow of Milosevic, and the government gladly accepted foreign technical assistance. The Law on Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities came into force on

<sup>235</sup> The French government has provided funding.

<sup>236</sup> Crisis Group interview with former SDA finance officer.

27 February 2002, with language derived from key European conventions, charters and declarations on minorities, many closely linked to Council of Europe standards on human rights.

A key provision in that law permitted creation of elected councils for national minorities but was ambiguous in defining election procedures and did not specify how they would be funded. The law created something of a backlash against the BNVS and other minority councils: many Bosniaks could not believe the BNVS lacked a budget to finance the work of Bosniak majority municipal assemblies, and for the first time they began questioning it.<sup>237</sup> It was not until 2004 that the Serbian republic budget provided funding.

However, the law on minority protection was passed on the federal level. Serbia and Montenegro had insisted human rights should be an area in which, whatever their future relations, they shared responsibility; the international community, believing federal laws would take precedence, bought into this. Federal jurisdiction disappeared in 2003, when Yugoslavia was transformed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, whose joint judicial institutions still do not function. For minority rights to be protected, the republic parliaments must pass republic laws. New legislation is being drafted in Montenegro; in Serbia, the Federal law on minority protection is still considered valid though it has not been formally adopted at republic level.

Discrimination against minorities often occurs due to an intolerant and nationalistic political culture and ambiguous laws that allow ample room for discriminatory interpretation. A number of these laws and regulations were introduced under Milosevic to provide a legal basis for discriminating against minorities; some remain on the books. They are not discriminatory on their face, but purposely vague language has enabled bureaucrats to implement them in a discriminatory manner. Most were originally meant to give the authorities the upper hand over Kosovo Albanians but they have also proven handy against other ethnic minorities, including Bosniaks. Under Milosevic there were four such problematic laws, two of which are still on the books.

The first was the Regulation on Special Conditions for the Sale of Real Estate, which was meant to prevent

Serbs from selling to Albanians.<sup>238</sup> In some cases it has been used to prevent Bosniaks from purchasing property from Serbs. The regulation was valid in Serbia for eleven years and expired at the time of Milosevic's fall but it remains in force in Kosovo, where Serbian authorities still use it to prevent Kosovo Serbs from selling to Albanians. The unofficial government term for this is "to prevent leakage of Serbian property".

The second was the Law on Limiting Undesirable Migratory Movements, Program of Tasks and Measures for Faster Development and Slowing Down of Unfavourable Migration Movements in Municipalities of Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica and Prijepolje from 1987 until 1990.<sup>239</sup> It was aimed at preventing internal migration that could upset ethnic balances. It prevented Bosniaks from Bosnia and other areas from flooding into Sandzak as refugees and also Sandzak Bosniaks from leaving for other parts of Serbia. Although it did not prevent physical relocation, it made it impossible to register at the new location and receive government services.<sup>240</sup> This law is no longer in force.

The third is the Law on the Proclamation of Undeveloped Areas of Serbia until 2005,<sup>241</sup> which enables regions designated as underdeveloped to be eligible for special funding. It clearly lists all underdeveloped municipalities of Serbia -- including the six in Sandzak -- and enumerates seemingly objective criteria. However, "priority status" is given to the Serbian villages between Novi Pazar and Tutin, Sjenica and Prijepolje, all categorised as underdeveloped. A look at the ethnic map of Sandzak makes evident that a village's category depends entirely on its ethnic makeup: if Serb, it is underdeveloped, while neighbouring Bosniak villages are not. According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Belgrade, the municipality of Priboj is the only part of Sandzak where ethnic criteria were not used.<sup>242</sup> Although on paper this law discriminates against Bosniaks, there has been little investment since it was passed in 1995 even in Serb-majority areas of Sandzak.

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<sup>237</sup> This is taken from the conclusion of "Minorities - Facing Realities", a three-day panel discussion of experts and representatives of national councils, held at Palic in February 2004. The panel was organised by the Belgrade-based think tank Fund for Social Democratic Initiatives (FoSDI) and sponsored by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro.

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<sup>238</sup> Official Gazette of Serbia, no. 33, 22 July 1989, with amendments in Official Gazette of Serbia no. 42, 28 September 1989, and further additions to the act published in Official Gazette of Serbia no. 22, 18 April 1991.

<sup>239</sup> Official Gazette of Serbia, no. 28, 25 July 1987.

<sup>240</sup> Its discriminatory nature was hidden deep in its text: "... In the realisation of the project of development, the priority shall be given to areas, i.e. communities, with the most obvious migration, i.e., the dislocation of the Serbian population," p. 1685.

<sup>241</sup> Official Gazette of Serbia, no. 53, 28 December 1995.

<sup>242</sup> *Helsinki sveske*, #15, Helsinki Committee For Human Rights in Serbia, "Nacionalne manjine i pravo".

The fourth is the Law on Space Environmental Planning until 2010,<sup>243</sup> which does not foresee major state investments in Sandzak. Although this affects Bosniaks the most, it also hurts Sandzak Serbs. It follows a similar Milosevic law, which produced almost no investment in Sandzak. Such a planning strategy suggests the government foresees Sandzak remaining a backwater.

Until Serbia abandons or amends such discriminatory laws and regulations and prevents their selective and arbitrary implementation, Bosniaks and other minorities will at the least continue to feel like second-class citizens. Although there has been much talk of an Ombudsman's office for Serbia, no republic legislative action has been taken. The Vojvodina Provincial Assembly has created a similar institution -- the "People's Advocate" -- but it is not applicable to Sandzak. Creation of an Ombudsman's office for minority questions that operates on the entire territory of Serbia would do much to make national minorities feel they belong and are protected by the law.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although it is peaceful and shows no signs of violence -- ethnic or otherwise -- Serbia's Sandzak is still largely forgotten, marginalised and ignored both internationally and by Serbian politicians. As a result, it is relatively isolated from Serbia's political, economic and social mainstream. Nevertheless, the region as a whole has made some progress since the ouster of Milosevic in October 2000, thanks in large part to the outreach of the late Prime Minister Djindjic and his efforts to include Bosniaks in his governing coalition, as well as the work of Rasim Ljajic at the national level.

The Serbian government takes halting, partial steps to integrate Bosniaks into the political mainstream and treat them as equal citizens. Progress is slow but is ongoing, and there should be no reason for the prospect of violence to increase even in the event Kosovo becomes independent -- provided Belgrade uses wisdom and good judgement in dealing with the region's problems. Yet, few Belgrade politicians -- most of whom have never even visited -- understand those problems. Many continue to view Sandzak through distorting ethnic glasses, while some still exhibit prejudice towards non-Serbs and are quick to point out Bosniak errors while ignoring the more institutionalised Serbian biases. The lack of understanding and the institutionalised biases mean the region as a whole is usually ignored to the detriment of both its populations, and the over-centralised government often appears deaf to local issues.

Some of Sandzak's problems could be resolved if Belgrade were to take steps to make its minorities feel they have a place in Serbia. First and foremost, it needs to undo the negative legacy of the Milosevic era. Public institutions should stop discriminating against Bosniaks. Ideally this would involve amendment of certain laws, a careful review of employment practices in public institutions and enterprises, as well as equality of access to government services. The Serbian government needs to enforce the rule of law throughout Sandzak, starting by having the Ministry of the Interior remove bad elements from predominantly Serb local police, including not only those involved in criminal activities, but also those with records of human rights violations.

Belgrade needs to create a secure environment in the Priboj municipality that will permit refugees to return to their pre-1993 homes. The Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, should bring to justice individuals guilty of crimes against Bosniaks, including murder, arson and ethnic cleansing. The Serbian authorities, state security services, political parties and the Serbian Orthodox Church need to rein in

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<sup>243</sup> Passed by the Serbian parliament in January 1996, after several years of consultations.

nationalist forces that may see their interests served in again raising tensions in the region, including through sensational and irresponsible journalism.

The language question will pose a problem until such time as the Ministry of Education rewrites textbooks, particularly those dealing with literature and history. A common South Slavic literature should be re-developed and re-introduced to the schools.

The Islamic Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church need to engage each other frequently on an official and unofficial basis. They have shared moral values that provide ample basis for finding common ground. The residents of Sandzak need to see priests and Hodzas meeting and working together and striving for the common good. Most importantly, leaders of both faiths should monitor closely the public statements of their clerics, taking particular care to stop hate speech.

The Bosniaks should re-examine their own attitudes towards Serbs, particularly those that are taught at home, and take particular care that their actions do not make the Serb residents of Sandzak feel they are a threatened minority within their own country. As a local interlocutor told Crisis Group, the region has the potential to send a message to Serbia's other minorities that tolerance and democracy are achievable.

But much of what plagues Sandzak -- corruption, dysfunctional state structures, organised crime, and official incompetence -- is a microcosm of Serbia as a whole. Many changes necessary to restart the region's economy, halt the population outflow, and undo decades of institutionalised discrimination will come only when Belgrade passes laws that affect the entire country. In the meantime, Serbia needs to make its Bosniak citizens feel they are truly at home. It must show them the benefits of being loyal citizens, while letting them know their future is inside Serbia. Until these changes are made, Sandzak's problems will fester, grievances will go unaddressed and the region will remain mostly forgotten.

**Belgrade/Brussels, 8 April 2005**



**APPENDIX A**  
**MAP OF SERBIA**





## APPENDIX B

### MAP OF SANDZAK REGION



## APPENDIX C

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, multinational organisation, with over 100 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board -- which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media -- is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by Leslie H. Gelb, former President of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates nineteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Cairo, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Osh, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Pristina, Quito, Sarajevo, Seoul, Skopje and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda,

Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

Crisis Group raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governmental departments and agencies currently provide funding: Agence Intergouvernementale de la francophonie, Australian Agency for International Development, Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian International Development Agency, Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German Foreign Office, Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Agency for International Development, Republic of China (Taiwan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom Department for International Development, U.S. Agency for International Development.

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**April 2005**

## APPENDIX D

### CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON EUROPE SINCE 2002

*EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited*, Europe Report N°160, 17 January 2005

#### BALKANS

*A Kosovo Roadmap: I. Addressing Final Status*, Europe Report N°124, 28 February 2002 (also available in Albanian and Serbian)

*A Kosovo Roadmap: II. Internal Benchmarks*, Europe Report N°125, 1 March 2002 (also available in Albanian and Serbian)

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