

SANDZAK:  
CALM FOR NOW

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## SANDZAK: CALM FOR NOW

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sandzak is an area within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that borders Serbia and Montenegro. It has a multicultural, multiethnic history and a majority population that is Muslim. Since the rise of Serbian strong-man Slobodan Milosevic to political power the majority Muslims have been the targets of coercion. For the time being, the major issue is Milosevic's continuing repression of human and political rights. Stating that, however, is not concluding that the area is entirely immune from the effects of a serious and full-blown military crisis.

To date, Belgrade's policy of oppression has served to pacify the population. While some observers may note this and conclude that the political culture is one of apathy, it appears more accurate to characterise the population as docile. Since 1991, local Muslim residents have been the targets of firebombings, kidnappings, beatings, murders, and torture. Even Yugoslav army forces have served as a tool of intimidation, periodically deploying men and materiel throughout the region to frighten residents. According to some estimates, perhaps as many as 80,000 Muslims have already responded by seeking refuge in western Europe.

In addition to crimes against the person, area residents have in recent years seen their political rights whittled away, with Belgrade pursuing unabashed policies that have resulted in the region's being placed under Milosevic's centralised control. Moreover, citizens have seen their livelihoods taken away, as Milosevic has secured state sector job for ethnic Serbs, forcing a number of local Muslims into pirate manufacturing industries where, perhaps even contrary to regime expectations, they have managed to prosper.

As long as Milosevic is preoccupied with events in Kosovo and an imploding domestic economy, he is unlikely to order anything along the lines of a full-scale military action in the Sandzak. Should, however, the Yugoslav dictator survive the current crises, which is by no means a foregone conclusion, he may at some future date decide that yet another bid to stay in power may hinge on the backing of hard-core Serbian nationalists. Thus he may dredge up the bogeyman of a Muslim threat from the Sandzak and react with military force.

For the time being, the international community must monitor human rights abuses in the Sandzak. Ongoing repression might yet lead to serious public support for a nationalist Muslim party which may give Belgrade a pretext for intensifying the clamp down.

# SANDZAK: CALM FOR NOW

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Sandzak is an area within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that borders Serbia and Montenegro. It has a multicultural, multiethnic history and a majority population that is Muslim. Since the rise of Serbian strong-man Slobodan Milosevic to political power the majority Muslims have been the targets of coercion. For the time being, the major issue is Milosevic's continuing repression of human and political rights. Stating that, however, is not concluding that the area is entirely immune from the effects of a serious and full-blown military crisis.

This report examines why it is important for the international community to monitor developments, particularly human rights abuses in the region. The report also explains why ongoing repression might yet lead to serious public support for a nationalist Muslim party which may give Belgrade a pretext for intensifying the clamp down.

## II. BACKGROUND

The Sandzak is a highland area that straddles the border between Serbia and Montenegro. Sectarian, ethnic, and clan warfare, infamous massacres, and forced expulsions of civilians have marred life in the Sandzak for generations. The Sandzak derives its name from the Turkish word "sançak" or "district," because it was once a territorial subdivision of the Ottoman Empire. The territory of the historical Sandzak is now divided by the political borders that separate Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Sandzak is no longer a politically defined area. It enjoys no autonomy in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). It has no overarching administration. The Serbian section of the Sandzak has been broken down among the districts of Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Nova Varos, Priboj, and Prijepolje; the Montenegrin section includes the districts of Plevlja, Kolasin, Mojkovac, Bijelo Polje, Berane, Andrijevisa, Plav, Gusinje, and Rozaje. The historical Ottoman Sandzak once included the district of Kosovska Mitrovica, which is now a part of Kosovo, and the district of Rudo, which is now in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>1</sup> The region today known as Sandzak first acquired its unique characteristic following Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878. It was then that Vienna took control of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the Sandzak serving as a cultural land-bridge to the Ottoman Empire, which continued to exercise de jure control.

The Sandzak is populated in the main by ethnic Muslim Slavs and has in recent years been the scene of widespread oppression. As long as Yugoslav strong-man President Slobodan Milosevic is at the helm of Belgrade politics, it is not inconceivable that he will continue with his reliance on policies of repression, aimed in part at the country's minorities. It is a tactic Milosevic has employed throughout his tenure in office: when it appears that his hold on power is being challenged, he resorts to violence and to stirring up ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> *Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku*, 1996, p. 1

hatred as means of winning over hard-core Serbian nationalist loyalists. All this means that the Sandzak remains a real and potential target of regime-sanctioned violence.

Scarcely more than a century ago, warriors from the area's Serb, Montenegrin, Muslim Slav, and Albanian clans took pride in displaying on stakes the severed heads of their defeated enemies. The recent war in Bosnia added another grim chapter to the Sandzak's legacy of violence. The Serbian police and army, together with paramilitary irregulars in their pay and under their command, kidnapped, held hostage, and murdered Muslim civilians; they abducted and killed Muslim Slav passengers on intercity buses and a train travelling from Belgrade to the Montenegrin coast; and they emptied and burned entire Muslim villages. Ignoring the provisions of the peace accord that ended the fighting in Bosnia, Milosevic still bars the original inhabitants of some villages from returning home.<sup>2</sup> Some estimates say that as many as 80,000 Muslims have fled the Sandzak since 1992, finding asylum in western Europe.<sup>3</sup>

### III. THE PUBLIC MOOD

It would stand to reason that today, as fighting tears through neighbouring Kosovo, the Sandzak would be a hotbed of unrest. Some Western political analysts have, from afar, described the area as a dry grassland that could carry the wildfire of violence in Kosovo roaring back into Bosnia.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Sandzak is quiet and one of the main purposes of this analysis is to suggest why. The majority of Muslims appear to be more politically apathetic than Serbia's overall population. Despite the Milosevic regime's miserable inventory of human-rights abuses in the Sandzak over the past eight years, the vast majority of the area's Muslim Slavs seem to be uninterested in pressing for "autonomy," "secession" and the other standard aspirations of minority groups living throughout Eurasia.

#### a. A Legacy of Social and Political Repression

There are clear reasons for this seeming apathy. First and foremost, nationalist slogans now ring hollow to the vast majority of the Sandzak's Muslim Slavs because they have felt Serbian oppression, and they know they would suffer severely if the Serbs struck in full force. In fact, past attempts to gain some political concessions from Belgrade have triggered waves of repression. In 1991 the Muslim National Council in Sandzak organised a referendum aimed at winning popular support for regional autonomy. Condemnation by authorities in both Serbia and Montenegro followed swiftly, and Belgrade at the very least tolerated and encouraged anti-Muslim violence throughout the region. When war broke out in neighbouring Bosnia in 1992, Belgrade stepped-up state-sponsored violence in Sandzak, suggesting the area was to be pacified. Belgrade

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<sup>2</sup> These villages include Sjeverin, Krajcinovici, Zabrnjica and Sastavci. See Beta, 5 September 1998 and 8 March 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Estimate contained in report of Special Rapporteur on human rights, Elisabeth Rehn, 25 October 1996.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "A Blueprint for Containing Kosovo's Mounting Crisis," Jane Holl, *International Herald Tribune*, 22 July 1998, p. 6.

encouraged paramilitary organisations whose terrorist repression quieted the local population. For his part, Milosevic followed up these actions by removing ethnic Muslims from key positions in the governmental and economic sectors. Among the hard-hit public institutions was the local police, which to this day remains staffed largely by ethnic Serbs, who account for a minority of the region's population but control an estimated 90% of the region's police and state security posts. Discrimination manifests itself at all levels. According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Right in Sandzak, for example, 11 of the region's 13 chief justices are either ethnic Serbs or Montenegrins, while the remaining two, though Muslims, are tightly controlled by Belgrade and have links to Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS).<sup>5</sup>

Tampering with citizens' political rights, although rarely done with anything but a heavy hand, has at times been relaxed and perhaps has enticed some observers into believing Milosevic is amenable to relaxing his iron-fisted rule. A review of developments in Sandzak reveals the contrary. Starting back in 1991 the Milosevic regime embarked on an aggressive campaign that effectively amounted to revoking the authority of locally elected governments, thrusting administrations into 'receivership,' ostensibly as the first step to reorganising local maladministration, but in fact as a gerrymandering technique of seizing municipal control for the ruling Belgrade authorities. Arguably the most famous case, dealt with at length below, was that of the local council of Novi Pazar, which came under the control of Bosniac parties, a development prompting Belgrade to nullify the political outcome, placing the government under a Belgrade-staffed authority. Novi Pazar remains under Milosevic's control.

To be sure, there have been times when the political interference has not been as overtly ham-fisted, with Milosevic opting to dangle the carrot in place of the stick. It was in the wake of the Dayton peace agreement that Belgrade seemingly held out a hand of reconciliation. December 1995 proved a banner month, with Milosevic protégé and then President of Montenegro, Momir Bulatovic, pardoning 21 Muslim political prisoners. Serbia's supreme court followed up on Bulatovic's initiative, overturning the convictions of 24 members of Sandzak's Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) incarcerated on charges of fomenting separatism.<sup>6</sup> Milosevic followed up such actions by attempting to consolidate a political foothold in the region by appealing to local constituents. To do this, he relied on the Yugoslav United Left (JUL), headed by his wife Mirjana Markovic. In March 1996 Belgrade media reported<sup>7</sup> that Novi Pazar-based Tito-era politician Ferid Hamidovic had become a full-fledged member of Markovic's JUL and had been named deputy minister of ecology in Serbia's republican government. Analysts widely interpreted this development to mean that Markovic's party would be the stalking horse through which Belgrade would trawl for Sandzak votes.

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<sup>5</sup> Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak, *Report on Human Rights Violations in Sandzak During 1997 (Summary)*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Transition*, vol. 2, no. 14, 12 July 1996, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> *Transition*, *ibid.*, p. 71.

Nevertheless, Belgrade's appeasement gestures remain a far cry from the regime's renunciation of and reliance on terror to maintain regional control. Authorities continue to turn a blind eye to acts of violence perpetrated against the area's Muslim community, suggesting Belgrade's complicity. Reports of households being firebombed continue into 1998, as do acts of aggression against Muslims which often coincide with Orthodox holidays. In more than a few cases the Yugoslav army is present when harassment and assaults take place, and at times is directly responsible for the acts of terror and intimidation. For example, on 5 August 1997 members of the army, while on training exercises, lobbed grenades near Muslim households near Tisovac, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak reported. In another incident, on 19 March 1997, military special forces near the village of Bisevo fired a missile, apparently targeting but just missing a Muslim family home with children inside.<sup>8</sup> Such acts are by no means rare occurrences.

The Sandzak's Muslim Slavs have witnessed the destruction of the Muslims in neighbouring Bosnia, and they understand Bosnia's Muslims received scant outside support during the war even though Bosnia and Herzegovina was a recognised state and a member of the United Nations. The Sandzak's Muslims also witnessed the lack of international support for the Albanians' fight for Kosovo's independence. The Sandzak's Muslim Slavs are by all accounts unorganised, virtually unarmed, surrounded and closely monitored by the better armed Serbs, and cut off from possible sources of weaponry, all variables suggesting the Sandzak Muslim population is suffering in resignation.

Very recently, the Sandzak Muslims have seen a near repeat of events surrounding the start of the Bosnian conflict. As mentioned, Belgrade's response in 1992 was to beef up state security and its military presence in the Sandzak. According to international media accounts, NATO's recent threat to carry out strikes in Kosovo prompted Belgrade to have the Yugoslav army deploy artillery around the hills of Novi Pazar,<sup>9</sup> triggering widespread fears of repression in the Sandzak Muslim community and prompting hundreds of families to seek refuge in Bosnia.

## **b. Some Economic Opportunities**

Second, unlike much of Serbia, which has been economically ravaged by the collapse of Communist Yugoslavia's workers-self-management system and the mismanagement and malfeasance of the Milosevic regime, the Sandzak is home to a thriving private apparel and shoe manufacturing industry. To be sure, many of the entrepreneurs turned to such ventures as a consolation and upon being removed from or denied opportunities in sectors usurped by ethnic Serbs. Nevertheless, this Muslim-dominated industry has proved resilient and generates significant profits by churning out bogus designer clothing and shoes. The owners of these small businesses are exploiting the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's pariah status for their competitive advantage. Specifically, these businessmen

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<sup>8</sup> Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak, *Report on Human Rights Violations in Sandzak During 1997 (Summary)*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, 11 October 1998.

know the Serbian authorities will not crack down on them at the behest of fashion designers and government officials from Western countries who would drive these factories into bankruptcy for infringement of trade marks and licensing agreements. They also know that if Serbia ever rejoins the community of nations and begins respecting international commercial conventions, the profits generated by their garment and shoe factories would disappear. Thus, the Sandzak's wealthiest and most influential Muslim Slavs have reached a tenuous *modus vivendi* with the Milosevic authorities who monitor economic activity throughout the region but do not appear eager to close down profitable businesses.

### c. View from Belgrade

Third, there is room to speculate that Milosevic has no reason to loose his wrath upon the Muslim Slavs of the Sandzak at this time because he clearly knows they do not pose any serious threat to his personal power and the internal security of the Serbian state. If anything, Milosevic will, for the foreseeable future, be preoccupied with the status of Kosovo and the sorry state of the overall economy. Either of these problems could shake his grip on power, and will likely keep him from focusing on the Sandzak. This, however, does not mean Belgrade has any plans to forgo opportunities for low-key psychological and physical repression. For now, the Sandzak's Muslim Slav entrepreneurs supply the Milosevic regime with desperately needed infusions of tax and bribe money. Given Milosevic's craving for funds and the fact that the garment and shoe industries are labour intensive and manned predominantly by Muslims, it is unlikely he would foment trouble in the Sandzak because it would inevitably cut into his already depleted sources of revenue.

For these reasons, the Sandzak does not at present appear to pose an international security problem, although that may change. The immediate problem in the Sandzak seems to be one of human rights and democratic rights based upon an absence of the rule of law in Milosevic's Serbia. This International Crisis Group report briefly returns to this situation, recommends ways of addressing the human-rights problem in the Sandzak, and suggests how the international community may anticipate a broader regional crisis. Specifically, it recommends that the member nations of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe redouble their efforts to establish a permanent mission in Yugoslavia that will closely monitor the human-rights situation in the Sandzak.

## IV. DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the most-recent census figures available, in 1991 about 54 percent of the Sandzak's 420,000 people were Slavic Muslims who lived intermixed with Serbs and Montenegrins, fellow Slavs whose ethnic particularity has been defined by their identification with the Eastern Orthodox Church and its centuries-long struggle against the Ottoman Empire's domination of the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> These 1991 census figures, however, do not measure the dimensions of a reduction of the Muslim population as a result of

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<sup>10</sup> There were fractional numbers of Croats, Jews, Gypsies, Hungarians, and Albanians.



the killings, kidnappings, forced expulsions, and other acts of brutality and repression by the Serbian and Montenegrin police, the Yugoslav army and Serbian paramilitary gangs that occurred during Serbia's war against Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995. The number of Muslim Slavs who left the Sandzak during the war is very conservatively estimated to be at least 17,000.<sup>11</sup> The section of the Sandzak inside Montenegro has reportedly lost about eighty percent of its Muslim population.<sup>12</sup>

Even with the reduction in the Sandzak's Muslim population, the area remains a band of predominantly Muslim-populated territory separating Orthodox-dominated central Serbia to the north from the Orthodox-dominated lower half of Montenegro to the south. For centuries, as suggested above, the Sandzak also formed a demographic link between the predominantly Muslim-populated stretches of Bosnia to the west and, to the east, Kosovo, which has a 90 percent Albanian population dominated by Muslims. Tens of thousands of Muslims left the Sandzak for Bosnia and Turkey after the area came under Serbian rule after World War I; tens of thousands more Muslims migrated from the Sandzak to Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, and abroad after World War II. It took until 1992, however, for the Serbs to break the demographic link between the Sandzak's Muslim Slavs and the Muslim Slavs of Bosnia. This break was carried out by the Serbian police commandos, the Yugoslav army troops, and the Serb paramilitary gangs who uprooted the Muslim population from most of the Drina river valley. Animosities between the Sandzak's Muslims and the Albanians of Kosovo have made the Sandzak's Muslims even more isolated.<sup>13</sup>

## V. ECONOMY

Subsistence farming, characterised by rural poverty, continues to dominate most of the Sandzak. The state run enterprises and mines dotting its landscape are suffering from the same dysfunction that plagues the rest of the Serbian economy. Official unemployment rates reflect this.

The exception to this rule, however, is the district of Novi Pazar, which is home to the Muslim-dominated apparel and shoe industry. The town of Novi Pazar boasts about five hundred apparel and shoe manufacturing workshops that employ several thousand of seamstresses and shoemakers. These workshops have soaked up the local pool of skilled workers, and people desperate for work commute by bus to Novi Pazar even from as far afield as Kraljevo, a town 100 kilometres to the north. Because most of the apparel trade in Novi Pazar takes place outside of legal channels and beyond the grasp of the taxman, no reliable figures are available for the size of its workforce, output, or profitability. Western analysts, however, estimate that these workshops produce several hundred thousand pairs of jeans each year, in addition to other ready-to-wear items; these analysts guess that the gross output values between \$50 million and \$100 million. Muslim leaders in the Sandzak note that Serbia's tax officials have more success collecting in Novi Pazar than in any other district in the republic. The actual amount of revenues

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<sup>11</sup> Beta, 6 September 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Beta, 28 October 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Donia and Fine, *Bosnia & Herzegovina, A Tradition Betrayed*, pp. 88-91.

removed from the region are unknown probably even to the Serbian government, which, in any event, releases no official figures on tax payments.

Novi Pazar's private apparel and shoe manufacturing sector rose from the ashes of the state-run textile and shoe factories in the district in the early 1990s. The manufacturing of bogus jeans, including Levis, Versace, and Bugle Boy, as well as shoes that mimic famous-make Italian designs but sell for a fraction of the price, began in Novi Pazar even before socialist Yugoslavia's break-up. Owners of these workshops say they sell to buyers from Kosovo, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece. They say that the outbreak of fighting in Kosovo has cut their sales volume in half, and they lament the loss of their Albanian customers, observing the Albanians always paid on time and in cash.<sup>14</sup>

The Sandzak's garment and shoe industry thrives in a kind of symbiotic relationship with the Serbian authorities. On the one hand, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's pariah status shields the apparel and shoe factory owners, effectively protecting them from civil suits that would, in normal times, be brought by the owners of the trademarks of the products they copy. Ironically, and for the time being, the Milosevic regime is affording protection from prevailing international commercial laws and regulations. On the other hand, official Belgrade, which is nothing if it is not a patronage network propped up by payoffs, desperately needs all the money it can sponge from the prosperous factory owners it once sought to ruin by keeping from lucrative state-sponsored jobs and enterprises.

## VI. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

A summary of the political developments in the Sandzak -- and especially in the Novi Pazar district, which is the bellwether for the entire area -- clearly shows the divisions within the area's Muslim community, notably within its leadership, and the roots of the political docility prevalent amongst the public at large.

For most of the last century, the overriding political attitude in the Sandzak has been nationalism, and it is hardly surprising that with the collapse of Communist Party's monopoly on power in Yugoslavia in 1990, the political parties in the Sandzak coalesced mostly along national lines. Today, however, the area's most powerful political parties are Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia and Yugoslav United Left (JUL), which run the Novi Pazar district despite its overwhelming Muslim majority.

### a. Main Parties

Mirjana Markovic's JUL is, by and large, a collection of hard-line communist dinosaurs who support Milosevic at every turn, but who appeal to the electorate in a way that the die-hard ultranationalists within the SPS cannot; namely, by contesting elections using appeals to ethnic tolerance and unity, and thereby striving to come across as an alternative to nationalist parties. It is in this sense that the JUL is the carrot in

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<sup>14</sup> See Reuters, July 21 and July 23, 1998.

Milosevic's political arsenal, signalling to voters that perhaps every ballot cast for the party is one small step towards a political milieu in which aggressive state terror does not characterise the means of solving each and every outstanding political question. Beginning in March 1995, the time of JUL's founding, Markovic began making overtures within Sandzak, attempting to revive socialist themes of 'brotherhood and unity,' while at the same time performing the political function of denying that Sandzak was a target of organised state repression.

Meanwhile, the area's two main Muslim Slav parties remain at each others throats -- even to the point of fighting for a single name. They are the Party for Democratic Action led Sulejman Ugljanin and the Party for Democratic Action led by Rasim Ljajic.

#### **b. The Case of the Party for Democratic Action (Sulejman Ugljanin)**

Ugljanin is clearly the Sandzak's most salient political leader. In Novi Pazar on 11 May 1991, he helped found an overarching Muslim political and cultural organisation, known as the Muslim National Council.<sup>15</sup> Under Ugljanin's tutelage, the Muslim National Council pressed for a "special political status" for a Sandzak province that would include the districts of Serbia and Montenegro that were once a part of the historical Ottoman Sandzak. "Special political status" is clearly a euphemism for local autonomy. Ugljanin's public statements indicate that he foresaw a provincial authority that would control the police, courts, educational and cultural institutions, the mass media, use of the area's energy and other natural resources, social security system and welfare, commercial banks, roads and telecommunications infrastructure. Ugljanin stated before the Bosnian war that the creation of a sovereign and territorially integral Bosnia as well as a "special status" for the Sandzak within the rump Yugoslavia would resolve the Muslim Slav national question in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup>

In 1993, the darkest year of the Serbian police campaign of repression against the Sandzak's Muslims, the government charged Ugljanin with anti-state activities, alleging that he attempted to engineer the Sandzak's secession from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, attempted to overthrow the constitutional order, and engaged in "terrorism." Ugljanin left the country on 5 July of that year. He spent most of the next three years in Turkey and Bosnia.<sup>17</sup>

With no public explanation, on 30 September 1996 the Serbian government allowed Ugljanin to return to Novi Pazar and take up political life anew. The indictment against him remained in force, but no warrant for his arrest was executed. A few weeks later, he won election to Yugoslavia's federal parliament and thereby gained parliamentary immunity from prosecution. Candidates affiliated with Ugljanin and the satellite parties of the Muslim National Council captured two-thirds of the seats in Novi Pazar's district council.(12. Ugljanin and his allies took 33 of

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<sup>15</sup> Beta, 1 August 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Beta, 9 September 1996 and 11 June 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Beta, 1 August 1997.

47 seats. The Socialist Party of Serbia won 10 seats; the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party, 2 seats; and the Serbian National Party and an independent candidate, one seat each.<sup>18</sup> Ugljanin's party and its affiliates also won wide victories in the Sandzak's other districts, except Prijepolje where the Socialists took power.<sup>19</sup>

After taking office in Novi Pazar, Ugljanin and his allies implemented policies that alienated their rivals in the Milosevic camp. On December 16, the president of Novi Pazar's executive council, Izudin Susevic, announced that no Socialists would be among the council's six newly appointed members.<sup>20</sup> On the same day, Ugljanin's coalition of Muslim parties and the local district council nominated a list of candidates for the local school board. They were all Muslims, and Serbian leaders complained bitterly.<sup>21</sup> Ugljanin and his supporters immediately began firing lower-ranking Serbs in Novi Pazar's administration and in local state-run enterprises. They also hung the flag of the Muslim National Council -- which bears an Islamic symbol -- inside the town administration building.

In March 1997, the local authorities in Novi Pazar announced that they would soon replace all directors of local public enterprises who were members of the Socialist Party of Serbia or of Serb nationality.<sup>22</sup> The Socialist Party members of the district council began boycotting meetings in protest.<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, a Serb member of the district council warned that the Serbs might establish a parallel government in Novi Pazar if "discrimination" against the Serb people continued.<sup>24</sup> Soon, the Socialist Party of Serbia was charging that Ugljanin and his protégés were working to make the Sandzak an independent state.<sup>25</sup>

Tensions reached a peak after Ugljanin announced that the Muslim National Council would hold a convention in Novi Pazar in mid-July 1997. At a press conference on 25 June, he said that "the possibility could not be ruled out that the convention would pass a resolution on the autonomy for the Sandzak." Ugljanin reminded the gathered journalists that the Sandzak's Muslim Slavs voted for autonomy in a referendum held five years earlier.<sup>26</sup> Predictably, on July 10 the Milosevic regime struck. Police marched into Novi Pazar's district seat, threw out the district government, and replaced it with a special council manned exclusively by members of the Socialist Party of Serbia and JUL. This new government, which includes some Muslims, announced immediately that Ugljanin's people had been expelled from office because they had behaved in an "illegal and unconstitutional manner."<sup>27</sup> Ugljanin announced immediately that he

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<sup>18</sup> Beta, 14, 19 and 22 November 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Beta, 5 January 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Ugljanin's brother, Sadik, and Susevic's brother, Sabahudin, did become members of the council. See Beta, 16 December 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Beta, 16 December 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Beta, 18 March 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Beta, 31 March 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Beta, 2 April 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Beta, 23 May 1997.

<sup>26</sup> Beta, 25 June 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Beta, 10 July 1997.

did not recognise the new authorities.<sup>28</sup> But the government had already quashed the immunity he had enjoyed as a member of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's parliament.<sup>29</sup> On July 17, the Novi Pazar prosecutor's office reactivated the 1993 indictment against Ugljanin.<sup>30</sup> He was not, however, arrested, and soon mounted a court battle to regain control of the government.

Serbia's constitutional court, a rubber stamp for the Milosevic regime, ruled on 14 May 1998 that the expulsion of the Novi Pazar government was legal and that the republican government has the power to name a special body to carry out the duties of a district government if the district government does not perform its duties in any three month period or if it threatens the constitutional and legal rights of the citizenry or causes injury to the general interest. After the court decision, Ugljanin threatened public protests if the regime did not end the extraordinary administration.<sup>31</sup> But a public protest on the anniversary of the government's overthrow failed to attract significant public support.

### c. Opposition to Ugljanin

Over the past year, more moderate Muslim Slav leaders have attacked Ugljanin for being too extreme. Many local Serbs and Muslims say they believe the Serbian police had compromised him even before he returned to Novi Pazar in 1996. These critics say Ugljanin undermined political opposition when he diluted the voting clout of the Sandzak's Muslim Slav population by nurturing the creation of a array of Muslim parties with similar names and platforms, including four different parties bearing the name Party for Democratic Action (SDA)-- Ugljanin's own SDA, the "True SDA," the SDA of Yugoslavia, and the SDA of Montenegro.<sup>32</sup> These critics also say the policies Ugljanin implemented once he got control of the Novi Pazar district paved the way for the ouster of district government and may have been intended to bring on the government's overthrow. Moreover, Ugljanin's opponents say the political positions he has taken since the downfall of the local government have consistently been opposed to the clear interests of the area's Muslims. For example, in the spring of 1998, Ugljanin called for Muslim Slav voters in Montenegro to boycott the presidential election between Momir Bulatovic, a Milosevic protégé, and Milo Djukanovic, a man who broke ranks with Milosevic during 1996. Such a boycott would have so clearly favoured Bulatovic that the Muslims in Montenegro ignored Ugljanin's call to stay away from the polls in droves.<sup>33</sup> Since then, Ugljanin's political influence has faded.<sup>34</sup>

Ugljanin's main opponent and most articulate critic remains Ljajic who, in addition to advancing his political career, has emerged as the guiding

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<sup>28</sup>Beta, 11 July 1998.

<sup>29</sup>Beta, 10 July 1997.

<sup>30</sup>Beta, 17 July 1997.

<sup>31</sup>Beta, 20 April 1998.

<sup>32</sup>See Beta, 4 and 22 October 1996.

<sup>33</sup>Beta, 20 October 1997.

<sup>34</sup>Reuters, 21 July 21 1998. See also Beta, 16 February 1998, where it was reported that the Reform-Democratic Party of the Sandzak charged Ugljanin's Muslim National Council with "siding directly with the Serbian regime."

force behind the regional journal *Parlament*. It was during the 1996 election campaigns that Ljajic advocated a broad coalition of Muslim parties, noting divisiveness and electoral boycotts would not serve community interests and suggested such continued actions would amount to complicity in Belgrade's redistricting and gerrymandering of the Sandzak. Ljajic also emerged as the spokesman for Belgrade-Sarajevo reconciliation, noting that advocacy of bilateral Belgrade-Sarajevo talks "under no circumstances implicate the expression of territorial claims [by Sarajevo] against its neighbour...[Although] we are emotionally much nearer to Sarajevo than to Belgrade, due to the political realities we must build our political future in the other state."<sup>35</sup>

## VII. HUMAN AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

The Milosevic regime's violations of the human rights of the Sandzak's Muslim Slavs are well documented and date primarily from 1991 to 1995, the years of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Sandzak, from 1991 to 1995, 34 persons were murdered, 131 were kidnapped, 29 were wounded, and 291 were physically attacked. Serbs carried out 18 attacks on area villages and burned 57 houses.<sup>36</sup> Many of these acts of police violence occurred during sweeps that were ostensibly organised to search for illegal weapons. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Sandzak registered 1,082 cases in which the police searched homes looking for guns; 446 persons were taken into custody, and 422 were physically mistreated. Only 19 persons were tried and found guilty of illegal possession of weapons.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to acts of police violence, the Milosevic regime denied the status of the country's Muslims as an ethnic minority within the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia -- therefore doing to its Muslims exactly what it accused Croatia and Bosnia of doing to their Serb minorities. While Hungarians, Albanians, Ruthenians and Slovaks are recognised as national minorities; the Yugoslav constitution does not acknowledge the existence of Muslims or Croats. The regime has also curtailed freedom of the press in the Sandzak, intensifying its perennial attacks against the media during elections. At least one journalist has been jailed for describing the human rights abuses against the region's Muslims during 1992 and 1993, and one local radio station in the town of Sjenica was closed down and central control over radio Novi Pazar maintained.<sup>38</sup>

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The nation-members of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe must apply more pressure on the Milosevic regime to allow for the establishment of an observer mission in Novi Pazar to monitor human-rights abuses in the entire Sandzak region. This is a preventive measure whose success would help ensure that widespread violations of human rights do not

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in *Transition*, vol. 2, no. 14, 12 July 1996, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> *Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku*, 1996, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Informacije o Sandzaku, Helsinski Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Sandzaku*, 1996, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> See Beta, 25 June 1997 and 5 November 1997.

spawn a militant Muslim Slav national movement that could prompt the Milosevic regime to crack down violently as it has done in Kosovo.

The nation members of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe must apply more pressure on the Milosevic regime to recognise the Muslim Slavs of the Sandzak as a national minority with all the constitutional guarantees such a status provides.

Insofar as the situation in the Sandzak is multi-dimensional and more than a human rights question, the members of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation must carefully monitor Milosevic's rhetoric vis-à-vis the Sandzak in order to ascertain whether or not the Belgrade regime may at some point exacerbate a regional crisis, triggered ostensibly by a Muslim menace to state security, but in fact amounting to a last-ditch effort at whipping up ultranationalist Serb support for the Milosevic dictatorship. In such a scenario, politicians such as Ugljanin may be useful to the Yugoslav president by serving, perhaps unwittingly, as Muslim nationalist stalking horses. An understanding of this will help the international community foresee and forestall crises.

The governments of the United States, Germany, France and other European nations should advise Turkey and the Arabic countries of the Middle East and elsewhere not to fund or in any other way support the political activities of Sulejman Ugljanin.