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Sandzak: Still a Vulnerable Region

Sandzak covers a large area between Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is administratively divided by the two state-members of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia runs 6 Sandzak municipalities (Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Priboj, Prijepolje and Nova Varos), and Montenegro runs 5 (Bijelo Polje, Rozaje, Plav, Pljevlja and Berane). That administrative division was put in place after the end of the First Balkan War in 1912. Before that war Sandzak made part of the Ottoman Empire. That region did not have a special status or enjoyed any form of autonomy in former Yugoslavia, or after its administrative division. Nonetheless Bosniak population of Sandzak has a strong feeling of regionalism. Serbs living in that region tend to call it the Raska area and consider it a cradle of the Serb statehood. In the vicinity of Novi Pazar once existed Ras, the first Serb medieval state with its renowned monasteries of Sopocani and Djurdjevi stupovi.

Bosniaks account for 80% of Novi Pazar population, 97% of Tutin population, 85% of Sjenica denizens, 40% of Prijepolje denizens, 10% of Priboj population, 8% of Nova Varos population, 95% of Rozaje locals, 45% of Bijelo Polje denizens, 80% of Plav locals, 30% of Pljevlja population, and 30% of Berane locals. According to the 2002 census total population of the Serb part of Sandzak is 235,567, of whom 132,350, are Bosniak Muslims (a vast majority of members of that people at the census declared themselves as Bosniaks, while only a small number of them declared themselves as Muslims. The term Bosniak was adopted at the rally of Bosniak intellectuals in Sarajevo in 1993.), 89,396 are Serbs and other 5,000 are of other ethnicities. 136,087 Bosniaks and 19,503 Muslims living in Serbia account for about 2% of population of Serbia. In Montenegro Bosniaks are the third largest people. Of total population of that republic-672,656- 64% or 273,366 are Montenegrins, 30.01% or 201,892 are Serbs, 9.41% or 63,272 are Bosniaks, 7.09% or 47,682 are Albanians, and 4.27% or 28,714 are Muslims.

After the end of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and armed conflicts in Kosovo, most Western and local analysts predicted that Sandzak would become a new crisis area. Fortunately their predictions did not come true, for in Sandzak only sporadic incidents were reported. At the outset of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were several armed attacks on Bosniak villages and abductions of citizens of Bosniak nationality, mostly in border areas, Bukovica and Priboj. Most notorious were abductions and killings of 17 Bosniaks from village Sjeverin, in Priboj municipality, and 19 passengers from the train Belgrade-Bar at the station Strpci. For both crimes were accused members of the military formation headed by the Hague indictee, Milan Lukic from Republika Srpska. The legacy of the past was also the Novi Pazar trial of 24 Bosniaks, mostly members of SDA, who in 1993 were convicted of association with a view to committing hostile activities to undermine the FRY territorial integrity. In 1995 the Supreme Court of Serbia overturned the first instance court ruling and ordered a new trial. As in the meantime some indictees had left the country and others had died, the court in Novi Pazar kept deferring the new trial. Some indictees believe that the state bodies are intentionally delaying a new trial in order to shun admission that the first-instance one was stage-managed.

Since the end of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, no gross violations of human rights were reported in Sandzak. But in that region there were sporadic provocations. Since the 5 October 2000 political changeover, Sandzak Bosniaks became more involved in the political life of Serbia and the

new authorities in different ways tried to prove that a new and better policy towards members of ethnic minorities was being pursued. Thus Rasim Ljajic, one of political leaders of Sandzak Bosniaks was elected Minister for Human and Minorities Rights of Serbia and Montenegro, Dr. Mehmed Becovic was appointed the state union's ambassador to Morocco, Novi Pazar University was granted operational licence, and the state began to more actively assist in renovation of the Islamic community institutions and to bankroll various industrial projects in the region.

Recent Past, Islamic Fundamentalism and Wahabis

How difficult it is to forget recent past, notably Chauvinistic ideology marking a long rule of Slobodan Milosevic, was best demonstrated by the early January 2004 incident. Namely on the Orthodox Christmas day, emergence of leaflets with the message "Hey, Sjenica, the second Srebrenica" and "Hey, Novi Pazar, the new Vukovar", and the image of the two-headed eagle, deeply disturbed the locals. Police investigation produced no results, while nearly all local Serb parties failed to respond to that incident. Only the municipal committee of Democratic Party "condemned the phenomenon" and demanded a quick arrest of its masterminds. Sandzak intellectual circles and Sandzak Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Liberties in Novi Pazar responded by issuing a joint press release¹. Those two organizations, though bereft of the national hallmark, mostly rally Bosniaks.

Since Milosevic's ouster, inter-ethnic hostilities in Sandzak were down-scaled to minor incidents, notably fights between football fans, sporadic emergence of chauvinistic leaflets and graffiti, verbal assaults and stoning of priests. Fortunately those incidents produced no casualties. However the year 2004 in Sandzak was marked by violent inter-Bosniak political conflicts and escalation of Islamic fundamentalism.

Since February 2004 statement of Colonel Momir Stojanovic, the then head of the Military-Security Agency relating to the existence of militant Islamic organizations in Sandzak, alleged home-grown Sandzak fundamentalism was one of the most frequent topics covered by the Belgrade media. The Interior Secretary, Dragan Jovic, cautioned against the danger of Islamic extremism in Sandzak region. Namely in mid-March 2004 addressing the foreign MPs in the Serb-Montenegrin parliament, he pointed to the Wahabi presence in some Sandzak cities, and declared them "one of biggest security threats to Serbia." Jovic added that there were enough hard fact to prove that "a Wahabi group is being trained for something...hopefully, not a terrorist action."

In hyping of Wahabi danger, analyst Tomislav Kresovic went as far as to tell Belgrade daily *Internacional* that Islamic fundamentalists during the June presidential campaign and visit of presidential contender, Tomislav Nikolic of the Serb radical Party to Novi Pazar, would carry out a terrorist action, and subsequently accuse the Serb Radicals of staging it. Kresovic, one of principal advocates of the theory of the "green transversal" and Islamic threat to Serbia also asserted that the militant Bosniaks in Novi Pazar wanted a repeat of the "Markale market" scenario in order to internationalize the Sandzak issue. Tomislav Nikolic visit to Novi Pazar and his pre-election rally in a local church however were incident-free. No bomb exploded, no fight broke out during his stay in Novi Pazar. Association of citizens from Tutin called "Ruka" filed a criminal complaint against Kresovic for spreading misinformation and falsities, but the official bodies reaction to that complaint never ensued in any shape or form.

In the public spotlight was an interview by the then director of the Military-Security Agency, Colonel, Momir Stojanovic. Namely he cautioned that "according to intelligence gathered by domestic intelligence services and contacts with security agencies of other countries, in the forthcoming period we may expect a considerable advent of militant Islam and Islamic terrorism in the Western Balkans, including the territories of Serbia and Montenegro."

Colonel Stojanovic also underscored the following: "According to operational knowledge of the Military-Security Agency in Raska-Polimlje area, and in north of Montenegro (Sandzak) are active militant Islamic organizations 'Wahabi' and 'Red Rose', 'Taricat' is active in Macedonia, but in Kosmet and in North of Albania there are also active cells of 'Al Qaida'".

¹ *Danas*, 15 January 2004

- Our intelligence also points at strongholds of Al-Qaida in Kosovo and Metohija, in north of Albania, notably in localities Bajram Curi, Kruma and Tropoja and in Western Macedonia, that is, in Tetovo, Kicevo and Gostivar – said Stojanovic.²

The then Defence Secretary of Serbia and Montenegro, Boris Tadic, however assessed that "there is no dramatic threat posed by terrorist organizations... in fact is it of the same size like in recent years." In commenting the messages of Stojanovic's interview, Tadic maintained that "Colonel Stojanovic words were misinterpreted".³ But that claim about 'wrong interpretation' failed to satisfy many parties in Montenegro, notably, Democratic Party of Socialists, and some Albanian and Bosniak parties. In the Serb part of Sandzak there were however reactions of the Islamic community and all leading Bosniak parties. Namely they demanded either disclosure of evidence supporting Stojanovic's claims or his resignation. Stojanovic was in fact dismissed by the decision of the Supreme Council of Defence, several months later. But at the same session of that body Stojanovic was both dismissed and promoted to the rank of Colonel General.

All Bosniak parties, including citizens' associations, and the Islamic Community rejected claims about rampant Islamic extremism in Sandzak, but admitted existence of Wahabis. A growing sense of belonging to the Islamic religion among Sandzak Bosniaks is visible in the streets of Novi Pazar, the largest Sandzak city. Namely veiled girls are commonplace there, though that phenomenon several years ago was unimaginable in the regional cities. In streets of Novi Pazar boys with Muslim-style beard and donning folk costumes similar to those worn by Arabs can be frequently seen. Such manifestations of allegiance to Islam are due to social-psychological reasons, but also to political ones.

War in Bosnia, international anti-Islamic campaign after 11 September 2001, and the US occupation of Iraq, have strengthened the Islamic feelings of Sandzak Bosniaks. Generally speaking in former Yugoslavia attempts to revive "traditional religious values" are on the rise, but faiths are not equitably treated. While only few Belgrade politicians see danger in re-embracing of the Orthodox Christianity by young Serbs, they tend to indiscriminately label similar attempts by young Bosniaks with respect to their religion, Islam, as manifestations of Islamic Fundamentalism. However the local police and the SIA are yet to come up with any data indicating existence of an organized militant Islamic group in Sandzak and the exact number of Wahabis. Top Sandzak cleric, Muamer Zukorlic said the following: "It is true that there are people who look and think differently, hence their experience and perception of faith may be also different."

He added: "The foregoing is best seen in the streets. Boys wear a longer beard and wider slacks. But do such stylistic innovations provide enough evidence for accusing several dozen individuals or even the whole people and their institutions of extremism and nationalism?"⁴ Zukorlic also stressed that only a negligible number of innocuous Wahabis live in Sandzak. Moreover, he thus commented Minister Jovic's wahabi-related statement: "It is not good that the highest authorities are making anew arbitrary statements. If they are really in possession of some information then they should take adequate actions. Such stories are particularly harmful after torching of mosques in Nis and Belgrade, and don't constitute an adequate and clear reply to the question which the Bosniak people posed to the highest officials of this state, namely, "Are Bosniaks and Muslims safe in this state?" Consequences of such statements are dire, for they come at the time still burdened by Kosovo developments, and the general anti-Islam campaign orchestrated by the media".⁵

Minister for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro, Rasim Ljajic, also thought that the media attached too much importance to Wahabis. Namely he noted: "Wahabis don't pose a threat to the state. They pose a much greater threat to the Islamic community and Islamic teachings, for their tenets have not been recognized by Islam. Media hyping of Wahabis is harmful for the state. Dealing with Wahabis is a job for the Islamic community and not for the state bodies."⁶

The March Kosovo violence shook up inter-ethnic relations in Central Serbia, and torching of mosques in Belgrade and Nis shocked local Bosniaks. During those days fear was palpable in the streets of Sandzak cities and many citizens anticipated the Serb-Bosniak conflict in the region. But no inter-ethnic incidents took place and the Bosniak parties and Islamic community responded by

² *Tanjug*, 1 February 2004

³ *Beta*, 2 February 2004

⁴ *Danas*, 6 February 2004

⁵ *Blic*, 8 May 2004

⁶ *Blic*, 8 May 2004

declarations and appeals for peace. All Bosniak parties condemned violence and desecration of Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo, and attacks on non-Serbs and torching of mosques in Central Serbia.

But government officials responded differently to those incidents. Minister for Human and Minority Rights of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and leader of the Sandzak Democratic Party, Rasim Ljajic thought that motives behind attacks on Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo and of attacks on mosques in Serbia were different, and that organized political groups were not accountable for the mosque-torching. In the aftermath of the mosque-torching campaign Ljajic met with ambassadors of Islamic countries in Belgrade to give them assurances that the state was condemning those incidents and ready to protect citizens of Muslim faith.

Other Sandzak politicians and Imam Muamer Zukorlic were not convinced of readiness of the state to protect Muslims, while Sulejman Ugljanin, leader of the Bosniak National Council of Sandzak (BNCS) believed that the top state officials were responsible for the incidents in Belgrade, Nis, Novi Sad and other cities of Serbia. At its session BNCS condemned violence in Kosovo, but also expressed its concern over "lack of readiness of the state bodies to preserve peace in the country." According to Ugljanin "torching of mosques was a culmination of anti-Islamic campaign in Serbia...and violence in Kosovo was had been a motive for escalation of that campaign."

At the BNCS session, Sulejman Ugljanin established a linkage between attacks on Muslims and their mosques and statement of the then director of the Military-Security Agency, Momir Stojanovic, namely, that "in Sandzak, in Kosovo and Montenegro several militant Islamic organizations are priming for terrorist attacks." According to Ugljanin after that statement "a strong anti-Bosniak and in general, anti-Muslim campaign was orchestrated."⁷

In a response to violence in Kosovo and in central Serbia, Imam Zukorlic organized a meeting of Bosniak parties, NGOs and representatives of several municipalities. In the adopted Declaration violence in Kosovo and attacks on all religious institutions were sharply condemned. Zukorlic assessed that Muslims and Bosniaks did not consider torching of mosques in Serbia only as an ordinary attack and material loss. He added that "Bosniaks cannot accept the rhetoric of some Belgrade officials and their attempts to justify acts of violence against sacred Muslim institutions in Nis and Belgrade." In the text of declaration concerns and fear were also expressed with respect to re-emergence of "hate speech" in public statements and media coverage, and it was underscored that "the recent anti-Islam campaign which tends to equalize Islam and terrorism is impermissible."

The Serb Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community

Both in central Serbia and in Sandzak the Serb Orthodox Church is an institution in which Serbs have the greatest trust. For the SOC Sandzak is of primary importance because in its territory are located important monasteries *Djurdjevi stupovi* and *Sopocani*. Sandzak, which is called Raska area by the SOC and other Serb institutions, has two eparchies. Raska-Prizren eparchy is headed by Episcopo Artemije and the Milesevo one by Episcopo Filaret. Episcopo Filaret has repeatedly shown his political stance, notably by his appeal to citizens to vote for Slobodan Milosevic in September 2000 presidential elections and later participation in some rallies of the Serb Radical Party. Novi Pazar and Tutin belong to Raska-Prizren eparchy, while Sjenica, Nova Varos, Prijepolje and Priboj are under jurisdiction of Milesevo eparchy.

Monasteries are run by high SOC clerics: Sopocani by Mihailo (Tosic), Djurdjevi Stupovi by Petar (Ulemek), and Crna Reka near Ribarici- Nikolaj (Nikolic). Relations between high Serb Orthodox Church clerics and the Sandzak Islamic Community are reduced to the exchange of courtesy and reassuring statements, though those statements are sometimes tinged with critical tones. The SOC objects to tolerant stand of the Islamic Community on Wahabis and Islamic fundamentalism, while Muslim religious dignitaries take to task their Orthodox Christian counter-parts for not responding adequately to religious militancy and for hyping incidents targeting the SOC.

Representatives of both religious denominations took part in a meeting held in October 2002 in Novi Pazar. The meeting organized by the Foundation *Conrad Adenauer* and the *Sandzak Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms* "Contemporary Migrations" discussed the role of religious communities. On behalf of the SOC high cleric Artemije pointed out "the existence of a latent wish and

⁷ *Danas*, 20 March 2004

striving of some domestic and foreign factors to internationalize so-called Sandzak issue and to separate that issue from the the constitutional-legal framework of Serbia." Moreover Artemije likened those attempts with the beginning of crisis in Kosovo.

High SOC cleric also said that "of major concern is the fact that conditions of democratic and much improved life are misused by a smaller, but influential Muslim political group. It directly or indirectly piles pressure on the Orthodox part of population, thus causing unwanted responses on the other side and deepening confrontation between citizens of different ethnicities. Mush insistence on the Bosniak identity and language is no longer an issue of protection of cultural-religious identity, but rather an instrument of new political and territorial aspirations."⁸ Artemije also criticized the Islamic Community for failing to put enough resistance to the militant movement of Wahabi. Similar criticism is regularly rejected by Imam Muamer Zukorlic.

Founding assembly of the Islamic Community of Sandzak was held in Novi Pazar in October 1993. From its inception it was headed by Imam Zukorlic. Muamer Zukorlic was born in 1970, in village Orlje, near Tutin. He completed medrassa "Gazi Husrev-beg" in Sarajevo and Islamic Studies at an Algiers faculty. In parallel with discharging functions of imam and president of Meshihat (body of Elders) of the Sandzak Islamic Community, Zukorlic is also head of the Islamic Academy in Novi Pazar, rector of the Novi Pazar University and member of Riaset of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sandzak Muslims and the Sandzak Islamic Community recognize Riaset of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the central religious authority, and reis-ul-ulem Mustafa Ceric as the leader of local Muslims.

Imam Zukorlic maintains that his Islamic community is not a political organization. But he has repeatedly criticized some Sandzak politicians, notably Sulejman Ugljanina, President of SDA. Imam Zukorlic is becoming an important political factor, for he has been "promoted" to a regular interlocutor of Belgrade officials and diplomatic representatives. Such a high co-operation and inclusion policy towards the Islamic Community had been launched by the late Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic. Namely he had included Imam Zukorlic in the state delegation visiting the United Arab Emirates. Former Prime Minister of Serbia Zoran Zivkovic and the incumbent President Boris Tadic during their visits to Novi Pazar avoided meetings with the local administration headed by Sulejman Ugljanin, but had talks with Imam Zukorlic.

Stance on the Union of Serbia and Montenegro And Its Future

Sandzak Bosniaks are divided over the issue of independence of Montenegro. Those living in the Serb part of the region resolutely back preservation of the state union (according to the early 2005 Belgrade Social Research Institute, Bosniaks-80%- are most vocal supporters of survival of the state union), while the majority of their fellow-nationals in the Montenegro-administered part of Sandzak back the idea of independent Montenegro. What unites them is only one hope, notably that a possible state border between Serbia and Montenegro, halving the region, shall not exacerbate their communication and sever cultural and economic ties. Pime Minister of Serbia Vojislav Kostunica as one of the reasons for survival of the state union regularly quotes Sandzak, that is "the division of Bosniak people to be brought about by collapse of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro."

Such broad support of Bosniaks to the issue of Montenegrin independence may be explained by a successful, vote-attraction campaign conducted by Milo Djukanovic, Prime Minister of Montenegro. Frequent political intra-SDA conflicts in Montenegro also contributed to such an orientation of the majority of Bosniaks. Since eruption of an open conflict between the former President Slobodan Milosevic, Montenegrin Prime Minister Djukanovica, and leader of the Democratic Party of Socialists, Bosniak parties were nearly totally sidelined.

At the last parliamentary elections in that republic, coalition of the three Bosniak parties, the linchpin of which was SDA, met with a total rout, for it managed to win only 4,000 votes. Bosniak coalition thus failed to reach the necessary census and consequently have its national representatives in the new Montenegrin parliament. For example in the first parliamentary composition, SDA of Montenegro had 9 seats. Currently there are no Bosniak representatives in the Montenegrin

⁸ *Pravoslavlje*, 2002.

parliament, but Bosniaks tend to lean towards the "pro-sovereignty parties", DPS, SDP and the Liberal Alliance.

Most Bosniaks back Milo Djukanovic, not because they are ultra-satisfied with the policy of the ruling parties, but rather because Djukanovic had been the first top politician in Montenegro to oppose Slobodan Milosevic, whom Bosniaks hold responsible for the war in Bosnia and crimes against their fellow-nationals. Bosniak orientation towards coalition for independent Montenegro was also generated by sporadic anti-Bosniak statements of frontmen of the rival coalition. Added to that Djukanovic deftly exploited some historical examples of Montenegrin tolerance of Bosniaks, to build a high degree of identification of members of Bosniak ethnicity with Montenegro. On the other hand, he skillfully avoided to mention other examples, those of blatant intolerance, from the distant and recent past, notably, "investigation into actions by allies of Turks", massacre in Sahovica Polje, or attacks on or killings of Bosniaks in Plevlja, and Bukovica at the outset of Bosnian war. Serb politicians, on the other hand, failed to inspire among citizens of Bosniak descent feelings of identification with the Serb state. In fact Bosniaks are still strongly attached to the state-building projects related to Yugoslavia.

Majority of politicians in the Serb part of Sandzak are convinced that there are no differences between the Bosniak policies of official Belgrade and Podgorica. Sulejman Ugljanin, President of the Bosniak National Council, assesses that "Bosniaks don't enjoy a better status in Montenegro....and Djukanovic also ignores Sandzak." Sefko Alomerovic, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak, goes a step further by accusing Djukanovic of misusing and manipulating Bosniaks of Montenegro. He says: "Djukanovic knows that he has not done anything for Bosniaks, but he continues to pretend that he is a great protector of minority communities. Whenever he faces a political crisis, or calls elections for the which he needs support of the Bosniak electorate, Djukanovic schedules a trial to Nebojsa Ranisavljevic, charged with abduction and killings of Bosniaks in Strpci. By allegedly urging the resolution of that case, he wins over Bosniak votes....but in the aftermath of elections, he loses interest in criminal persecution of the Strpce indicttee."

Bosniak politicians in Serbia fear possibly victory of Djukanovic-promoted concept of independent Montenegro, for it could result in a massive scape-goating of Bosniaks. Majority of Serbs and a considerable percentage of Montenegrins would most certainly vote in favour of survival of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. Then the final status of Montenegro would hinge on votes of minorities, notably Bosniaks and Albanians. Since Bosniaks outnumber Albanians in Montenegro, the votes of former could be decisive in pertinent referendum. Hence the fear of possible scape-goating of Bosniaks. Statements predicting such a denouncement could be heard from leaders of pro-Serb parties in Montenegro, Bozidar Bojovic and Predrag Bulatovic, presidents of Democratic Serb Party and Socialist Popular Party.

Economic Crisis And Increasing Narcotism

In 2004 Bosniak parties in Sandzak failed to raise anew the issue of status of the region and Bosniaks. In preceding years a host of memorandums, declarations and resolutions urging Belgrade to grant to Sandzak and Bosniaks various degrees of autonomy and to guarantee the Bosniak rights, had been adopted. Most prominent actions in that direction were Referendum on Autonomy and *Memorandum on Special Status of Sandzak* drawn up and proposed by the then SDA and the Muslim National Council of Sandzak. In October 1991 referendum a vast majority of Sandzak Bosniaks voted for autonomy and the right of that region to join one of the Yugoslav republics. In the ensuing Memorandum Sandzak however demanded the highest-degree autonomy, which in some segments bordered with statehood claim. But both Belgrade and Podgorica branded that document as separatism-minded and declined to discuss it.

National Council of Bosniak Community in Serbia and Montenegro was founded in September 2003 in Novi Pazar. Under the Federal Act on the Rights of Members of National Minorities, ethnic groups were granted the right to organize their councils to be primarily tasked with preservation of their cultural identity and education. In a manifest exercise of the rights stemming from that law, the Bosniak National Council in 2004 passed a decision on national holidays and symbols. Thus the official symbol of Bosniak minority became a flag with the coat of arms consisting of a shield and three crescents and three lilies on the white surface. That flag was officially hoisted on the Novi Pazar fortress, on 14 May 2004. The event was interpreted as provocation by part of the Serb public and media. The latter also unwillingly accepted introduction of Bosniak language into schools in Novi

Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin. Under the same federal law, pupils of ethnic descent were granted the right to study their mother tongue and culture in appropriate, minimum, once a week classes. The condition thereof was that in a local milieu a certain number of citizens declared themselves members of a minority and that minority language speakers.

Though Bosniaks in the three Bosniak majority- municipalities of the Serb part of Sandzak met those conditions, Bosniak language, partly due to passivity of the National Council, and partly to the blockade of the Education Ministry, has not been timely introduced as the official subject-matter. Competent institutions in Serbia reject the term Bosniak language, though Bosniak was officially recognized as mother tongue of Bosniaks at the rally of Bosniak intellectuals in Sarajevo. The first class of Bosniak language was held in the primary school "Ibrahim Bakic", in village Leskova near Tutin, on 22 October 2004. Former Education Minister Ljiljana Colic refused to sign the decision on introduction of Bosniak language in Sandzak school curriculum, but, her successor Slobodan Vuksanovic had signed the pertinent decision after recommendation of the National Council, a body of the government of Serbia rallying representatives of all national minorities. Angered by that development MPs of the Serb Radical Party demanded resignation of Vuksanovic, while introduction of the Bosniak language into the Sandzak school curriculum was also discussed by the parliamentary Education Committee.

In recent years citizens of Sandzak have faced a difficult economic crisis. Hence the sidelining of major political issues. In the 90's Novi Pazar was the commercial hub of Serbia which made a lot of money through production of jeans, footwear and furniture. In the meantime purchasing power of citizens of Serbia plummeted, UNMIK foiled all the regional attempts to effect trading with Kosovo, and unloyal competition weakened the momentum of the Novi Pazar economy.

Mirsad Zupljanin Jimmy, owner of the private company MBG in Novi Pazar and long-standing president of Association of Private Entrepreneurs and Craftsmen thus explained the reasons of the ongoing crisis: "Firstly there is this general political situation fueling insecurity and making investors tighten their belts and wait for better times. Secondly there is this unloyal competition caused by the Chinese. Invoiced value of goods imported from China is ten times lower than the real one, for example China-produced pair of jeans, on the paper, costs only 7 dinars. We are happy to receive assistance worth \$ 100 million, but Chinamen take out of the country billions of untaxed dollars, and no-one cares, no-one reacts." ⁹

Several protests against local Chinese merchants were staged in Novi Pazar and demands were made to the local and republican authorities to ban Chinese trade in Serbia and thus save home economy.

Due to its geographic position, Sandzak was an important crossroads for drug and human trafficking. But as money has become a scarce commodity in Novi Pazar, many night bars have closed down and many prostitutes left. But the city is increasingly facing a new problem-drug dependency.

In early 2004 the Novi Pazar police estimated that over 1,000 young boys and girls were hardened drug addicts, while there were five times more sporadic substance abusers. In early 2005, according to the unofficial data, those figures, at least, doubled. Dr Seljatin Kajkuz, neuro-psychiatrist with patients whose age ranges between 17 and 22, thinks that "Substance abusers in Novi Pazar have unfortunately chosen the drug against which the medicine faces the hardest combat-cocaine. What is characteristic of all of them is a quick passage from an early drug, marijuana to the hard ones, cocaine and heroine." Dr. Kajkuz underscored: "We are facing a growing number of very young drug addicts. Though I did not have patients from primary schools, I had many patients from secondary schools. Most of them were hard drugs users. But it is also evident that an ever-increasing number of extremely young denizens of Novi Pazar are stepping into the world of drugs." The police told us that all drug addicts in Novi Pazar bought their "stuff" from local dealers. According to them all the "stuff" was coming from Turkey, via Kosovo. Novi Pazar police also warned that the substance abuse phenomenon was spreading in Tutin and Sjenica.¹⁰

⁹ *Nedeljni telegraf*, 19 May 2004

¹⁰ *Fonet*, 8 January 2004

Sports and Political Incidents

Last year several sports-political incidents were reported in Sandzak too. In the past two or three years incidents were commonplace during the football matches of the club *Novi Pazar* or after successes of representations of Serbia and Montenegro. The first incident was the one which in early March 2004 involved fans of the local club and Belgrade club *Rad*. The latter, called *United forces*, rank among the most brutal hooligans and are seen as extremely incident-prone. If the rival of their club is of different nationality or religion, they go on the rampage.

After an organized journey to Novi Pazar, fans of *Rad* rushed into the stadium and started throwing stones and lit torches into the crowded stands. When the stands barriers collapsed, the fans of the two teams met in the middle of the ground. Stones, were thrown, curses were shouted and a heavy fight ensued. Recognizable political messages were chanted on: "Kill the Turk", "Kill the Serb", "I am hear to drink Turkish blood", "From Topola to Chetnic Ravna gora", "Serbia start crying, here is Hashim Tachi", "From Sandzak to Iran all the countries shall become Muslim ones"...Police arrested 60 hooligans, and gendarmerie, sent in as reinforcement, escorted Belgrade fans from the stadium to the police station and later to Belgrade. President of the football club *Novi Pazar* Bedzih Hodzic thought that those incidents were politically motivated. Hodzic underscored: " This is yet another attempt to introduce instability into the local sports grounds. The fans-related problems were "imported". It is obvious that they were masterminded by some political prime movers. Gendarmerie did not do their job well. Fans from northern Kosovska Mitrovica, and even from Gracanica and Raska swelled the ranks of those from Belgrade. That indicated that everything was carefully planned. However that incident shall not upset good relations between our clubs and ethnicities.¹¹" In Raska, during a May match between a local club, *Rad*, whose fans wore T-shirts with image of Radovan Karadzic and *Torcida* fans of a club from Novi Pazar (who have their own web stie and coat-of arms with crescent moon and lilies) there were some verbal incidents. In response to *Rad* fans slogan "Orthodox Christianity or Death", *Torcida* fans kept shouting "Islam shall rule the world.". During the football match with *Cukaricki* held on 5 May fans of Novi Pazar club hoisted that banner, and consequently their club was punished for that and other incidents by a 200, 000 dinar fine. However disciplinary bodies of the Football Association failed to fine fans of *Rad* for hoisting a banner "Orthodox religion or death".

Until mid-90' Sandzak Bosniaks had a monolithic political organizations composed of the Party for Democratic Action and Muslim (later Bosniak) National Council of Sandzak. Sulejman Ugljanin was president of both organizations and undisputed Sandzak leader. But by mid-90's a large number of party founders and Ugljanin's aides have broken away from that party. Among them was Rasim Ljajic, once the Secretary General of SDA, and now President of the Sandzak Democratic Party and Minister for Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Ugljanin-led party started losing not only its influence but also a large number of Bosniak votes. Thus after the September local elections it retained power only in Tutin. It bears mentioning that before the September elections coalition *List for Sandzak Dr. Sulejman Ugljanin* had absolute power in all three cities with the Bosniak majority population. Ugljanin himself emerged victorious only after the run-off elections for president of Novi Pazar municipality. His rival, Sait Kacapor from Ljajic's SDP called into question regularity of the second round, but the result was not reversed. However SDP candidates conquered the positions of municipal presidents of Sjenica and Prijepolje.

Campaign for September elections was much tougher than earlier ones. On 11 September in front of the Novi Pazar seat of SDP a fight broke out between Ljajic's and Ugljanin's followers. In the ensuing shooting spree two passers-by were wounded. This incident, of which firebrands of SDP and SDA accused each other, deeply shocked and exacerbated citizens of Novi Pazar and Serbia. Ljajic pointed the finger at Ugljanin, and vice versa. Ljajic maintained that the indicent was masterminded by Sulejman Ugljanin, who had announced the possibility of conflict at a Delimedja rally: "The incident was played out against a well-known scenario. Milosevic thought that he would stay in power thanks to use of armoured vehicles and tanks. In a similar way Ugljanin misused children to stay in power."¹²

¹¹ *Danas*, 8 March 2004

¹² *Vecernje novosti*, 13 September 2004

Ugljanin maintained: "A group of hooligans rallied around SDP tried to plunge this town into chaos. The police have not reacted though that was the eighth armed attack on us."¹³

Novi Pazar was then visited by the republican Justice Minister Zoran Stojkovic. He blamed the state bodies, notably the malfunctioning judicial ones for the incident. Stojkovic concluded : "In Novi Pazar naked force and gangs are trying to establish their rule, while citizens are unprotected in the face of such a dangerous development." Stojkovic announced major engagement of the state and putting some order into the local judiciary.¹⁴ Elections were followed by several week-long consultations. Since Ugljanin failed to garner enough MP votes for setting up municipal authorities, on 11 November in a restaurant *Amiragin han* gathered 26 MPs of other parties, notably of Ljajic's SDP, Party for Sandzak headed by Fevzija Muric and Serb parties. Having established their majority, they later held a constituent session at which municipal bodies were elected. Ugljanin-led coalition declined to recognize the legitimacy of that session, so in Novi Pazar a parallel municipal organization was put in place. Ugljanin refused to accept even the opinion of the Ministry for the State Management and Local Self-Rule which recognized the legitimacy of 11 September session. The Belgrade office of OSCE tried to contribute to resolution of that problem by calling on Ugljanin to respect the will of citizens and allowing the new local bodies to work normally. *List for Sandzak* in Sjenica formed the majority with the National Movement of Sandzak, headed by Dzemail Suljevic, but that coalition fell apart after several weeks. Then Suljevic accused Ugljanin of disrespecting the agreement. Fevzija Muric and Dzemail Suljevic used to be high officials of SDA. After a conflict with Ugljanin they abandoned the party.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Though inter-ethnic incidents reported mostly in Novi Pazar, were a low-intensity and casualty-free ones, they nonetheless demonstrated that Sandzak was still a vulnerable region. Vicinity of Kosovo and possibility of new Serb-Albanian conflicts or a repeat of „17 March " reflect badly on Sandzak developments, as does a continuing Belgrade propaganda about Islamic fundamentalism infecting the whole region and turning it into a flash-point.

State bodies are yet to engage themselves actively in clarification of crimes against Bosniaks and punishment of their perpetrators. But there is no likelihood of such a development since the prime suspect in the case of abductions in Sjeverin and Strpci is still at large.

In the near future further intra-Bosniak political disputes may be expected. Such a development shall harm Bosniaks proper, who after introduction of amendments to the election law, that is, of "the natural threshold" for minorities parties, were provided with an opportunity to elect a larger number of their representatives to the future parliament of Serbia.

Helsinki Committee deems the following necessary:

- the state bodies should take urgent actions in that area, and its high officials instead of spreading unverified stories about Islamic fundamentalism, should pursue the policy of inclusion of Sandzak locals into the state structures.

- Bosniaks should be also employed by the police, in order to fine tune the police set-up with ethnic structure of the area;

- the incumbent authorities could contribute to easing of tensions and enhancement of inter-ethnic relations by seriously embarking on clarification of the early 90's grave crimes against Sandzak Bosniaks and punishment of their perpetrators ;

the state must admit responsibility for crimes committed against Sandzak Bosniaks in 1992-1995 period, for that is the only road leading to building of confidence between the two communities.

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¹³ *Vecernje novosti*, 13 September 2004

¹⁴ *Vecernje novosti*, 15. September 2004