

BOSNIAKS IN SANDZAK AND INTERETHNIC TOLERANCE IN NOVI PAZAR

Safeta Biševac

1. The Bosniak-Muslim Minority in Sandzak

1.1. *Introduction to Sandzak*

Sandzak covers an area of 8,687 square kilometers. According to the 1991 census, the region is inhabited by 440,000 people, 253,000 (53%) Bosniak-Muslims and 187,000 (45%) Serbs and Montenegrins. The region is situated where the borders of Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina meet. Administratively, it falls into two separate Yugoslav federal districts. Six Sandzak towns are in Serbia (Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, Nova Varos, Prijepolje and Priboj) and five are in Montenegro (Bijelo Polje, Rozhaje, Plav, Pljevlja and Berane). Bosniak-Muslims constitute 2.7% of the population of Serbia, 14.6% of the population of Montenegro and 3.2% of the population of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The following shows the percentage of the Bosniak-Muslim population by municipality: Novi Pazar 80%, Tutin 97%, Sjenica 85%, Prijepolje 40%, Priboj 10%, Nova Varos 8%, Rozhaje 95%, Bijelo Polje 45%, Plav 80%, Pljevlja 30% and Berane 30%.

The former Yugoslavia and the last several years of the present Yugoslavia have been characterized the emigration of various ethnic communities. There has been no census in the new Yugoslav state, so, demographic figures for Sandzak as well as other parts of the former Yugoslavia are partly based on migration assessments made after 1991.

Until 1912 and the first Balkan war, Sandzak was a part of the Ottoman Empire. During the centuries of Turkish rule, the Sandzak of Novi Pazar, then larger than it is today, was a part of Bosnia before becoming its own administrative unit. In October 1912 Sandzak was overrun by Serbian and Montenegrin troops. The amount of land each army was able to take was included into the independent kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. Sandzak became an administrative part of both Serbia and Montenegro. After World War I, Sandzak was included into the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians.

The emigration of Sandzak Bosniak-Muslims, mostly to Turkey, started soon after the withdrawal of Turkish army and the establishment of Serbian and Montenegrin regional governments. The emigration was instigated both by authorities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia) and the Republic of Turkey, and continued even after the socialist government had been established in postwar Yugoslavia. Belgrade and Ankara signed a series of agreements aimed to facilitate the emigration of Sandzak residents to Turkey. Belgrade wanted to reduce the number of Bosniak-Muslims under its rule

because their loyalty to the state was doubtful and referred to as “bearable loyalty.” Meanwhile, Turkey needed a population to “fill” uninhabited areas. The last agreement of this kind was signed in 1954. It is supposed that over a million inhabitants of present-day Turkey are of Sandzak origin. Currently there are more Sandzak natives and descendants of Sandzak natives in Turkey than in Sandzak.

The Yugoslavia crisis and the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s once more brought about the emigration of the Bosniak-Muslim population. Political parties representing this ethnic community claim that sixty to eighty thousand Bosniak-Muslims have left Sandzak in the last couple of years, altering the ethnic make-up of the region. Unlike the previous emigrants who went mostly to Turkey, today’s tend to resettle in western countries and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1.2. Religion

Religion is a primary element in the national identity of Bosniak-Muslims. The religious institutions of Sandzak’s Islamic community wield a great amount of authority. When the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) disintegrated, its Islamic community did the same. Bosniak-Muslims from Sandzak founded a Meshihat to function as the highest body of their religious community. However, the Meshihat failed to receive recognition from Belgrade, probably due to the fact that the strongest Muslim political party, the Party of Democratic Action (PDA), was behind the Meshihat. However, the attitude of the Belgrade authorities has not affected the activities of Sandzak’s Islamic community. In the past several years, the Sandzak Meshihat has disassociated itself from the policies of PDA. The Sandzak Mufti, Muamer Effendi Zukorilic, did not hesitate to state, “Sandzak political parties misdirect their energies. The way they are, they do not take responsibility for their basic function, which is expressing and meeting the needs of Bosniaks in Sandzak, Serbia and Yugoslavia.”

According to Islamic dignitaries, in recent years the Belgrade authorities have shown a certain tendency to initiate contact with local bodies of the Sandzak Islamic community. However, central authorities are unwilling to undertake a higher degree of cooperation and examine issues that are a concern to the Muslim clergy and followers of the faith, such as the dietary restrictions of Muslim soldiers serving in the Yugoslav Army and religious studies in state schools.

1.3. The Economic and Social Situation

Traditionally, Sandzak has been an extremely underdeveloped area of Yugoslavia. Of three towns with a Bosniak-Muslim majority in the Serbian part of Sandzak, two—Sjenica and Tutin—fall into the underdeveloped category, while Novi Pazar has, only recently, emerged from this status.

Tutin is the most underdeveloped municipality in central Serbia with an average income 15% below that of the republic. Novi Pazar has the second worst unemployment rate in Serbia at 89%. Because they cannot find legal jobs, officially unemployed citizens of Novi

Pazar have to accept any job in the well-developed “black market.” The GDP of Novi Pazar is 53% of the republic average. In Sjenica its 41%. The GDP in nearby and also underdeveloped towns with Serb majorities, Raska and Brus, amounts to 87% and 61% of the republic average, respectively. According to government statistics, economic underdevelopment is equally problematic for both ethnic groups.

In Sandzak, policies regarding ethnic equality are consistently carried out on the local level, which is the case in Novi Pazar as well. Novi Pazar, a town with over 80,000 inhabitants (80% Bosniak-Muslim, 20% Serb) has, according to the figures of the municipal committee of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), 18,230 employed people. 75% of them are Bosniak-Muslim and 25% are Serb. Bosniak-Muslims also have more directors at state-owned enterprises. As for private companies, Bosniak-Muslims own 95% of the total number of legally registered enterprises. According to SPS figures, there are 151 Bosniak-Muslims and 79 Serbs and Montenegrins in the management of manufacturing and service industries.

Muslim political parties, however, are in possession of different figures. They have pointed out that “ethnic cleansing” is most obvious in local police forces as no Bosniak-Muslims hold leading positions. Furthermore, they assert the managerial level of financial, media and social institutions is staffed only by Serbs and Montenegrins.

1.4. The Legal and Political Status of Sandzak

Sandzak has never had regional status in the Yugoslav constitutional and political system, and Bosniak-Muslims were not granted national status until the constitutional amendments of 1968-71, and then again in the 1974 SFRY Constitution. These constitutional reforms granted Bosniak-Muslims the equality and status of a Yugoslav nation under the official name of “Muslims.” The current constitutions of Serbia and the SFRY do not mention Bosniak-Muslims either as a nation or a national minority. In the Montenegrin Constitution, Muslims, as well as other national minorities, have the status of “national or ethnic group.” “Special rights” pertaining to members of a national or ethnic group are defined in the fifth section of the Montenegrin Constitution. They include, among other things, the right to display national symbols, to education in their mother tongue and contact with their homeland.

Neither Serbia nor SFRY have special legal regulations regarding national minorities. Certain opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations have drafted a law on national minorities, but it has always been rejected by the socialists. The particular status of the Serb majority and national minorities in Serbia—formally declared equal in the constitution—provides the authorities with a great amount of leeway to implement policies using different standards for different ethnic groups. Hence, the treatment of Sandzak Bosniak-Muslims has depended on Belgrade’s political needs and relations with neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Bosniak-Muslims in Serbia and SFRY do not have the status of a national minority, they are not guaranteed any minority rights.

The confusion regarding the recognition of the national status of Bosniak-Muslims was increased by their own political representatives and intelligencia who, for years, were unable to agree as to whether their group should be called “Muslims” or “Bosniaks.”

“Muslim,” a slightly inconvenient term, primarily connoting religious affiliation, was replaced in 1993 with “Bosniak” (a word dating from the previous century) at a congress of Bosniak intelligencia in Sarajevo. The decisions of the congress were accepted by all Bosniak-Muslim parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandzak, but not by the Yugoslav authorities. Republic and federal authorities refuse to recognize and accept the term “Bosniak,” and continue to refer to the national minority as “Muslims,” often with a small “m,” thus denying their national status. Some members of the Serb political and intellectual elite use the term “Serbs of Islamic affiliation.” Due to the continuing terminological and political misunderstandings about naming the nation, the dual name “Bosniak-Muslims” is used in this report.

2. Political Crisis and the Bosniak-Muslim Minority

2.1. *Human Rights Violations*

The intensification of the political crisis within Yugoslavia worsened circumstances for the Sandzak Bosniak-Muslims. The outbreak of war in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina increased interethnic tension in Sandzak and complicated the position of Bosniak-Muslims. Suddenly, residents of Sandzak were labeled “jihad warriors” and “Islamic fundamentalists.” Special radio and television programs on Serbian national television, RTS, and articles in state-controlled newspapers added to this atmosphere by speaking about the “infernal separatist plans” of Sandzak parties and their alleged build-up of connections with Islamic terrorists from certain Arab countries.

The media climate, in addition to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributed to Bosniak-Muslims becoming the most hated nation in Serbia, after Albanians. According to public opinion polls conducted by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 54.5% of Serbs thought Bosniak-Muslims were a danger to the state. 58.5% disapproved of mixed Serb-Muslim marriages and 37.1% of Serbs would not have liked his or her superior at work to be a Bosniak-Muslim.

The situation for Sandzak Bosniak-Muslims was exacerbated by the most severe forms of human rights violations: killings, abductions and assaults. Although such incidents have not been recorded in the last few years, normalization of the position of Sandzak’s Bosniak-Muslims is still prevented by the “black spot” in its recent past, as well as by legal regulations which discriminate against the Bosniak-Muslim nationality. These regulations are stated in legislation such as the Real Estate Sales Law, the Undesirable Migrations Law, the Directive on the Ban against Returning Asylum Seekers, the Underdeveloped Regions Law and the Tract Planning Law. The Real Estate Sales Law complicates and, in some cases, prevents sales of real estate between ethnic Serbians and members of minority nations in places where the ethnic distribution is not favorable for Serbs.

The state prevents the return of young men who emigrated overseas in order to avoid enlisting in the reserve and regular forces of the Yugoslav Army during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in the last couple of months, noticeably fewer young Bosniak-Muslim men are refusing military service in the Yugoslav Army. In fact, the percentage of those avoiding military service in Sandzak is so low that it is negligible.

In border towns near Bosnia and Herzegovina, harassment, intimidation and violence directed at the local Bosniak-Muslim population were particularly extreme between 1992 and 1994. According to Helsinki Committee figures on human rights in Sandzak, six abductions were committed in Sandzak during this period, 34 Bosniak-Muslims were killed and 51 were kidnapped, 105 buildings owned by Bosniak-Muslims were destroyed and 27 villages were ethnically cleansed. Military units of Bosnian Serbs are believed to be responsible for the majority of these atrocities, particularly in the area of Sjeverin and Bukovica. Neither the Yugoslav Army nor the police forces did much to prevent such incidents. It could be said that Yugoslav authorities, if not supported, then, at least, stood aside and watched the atrocities, harassment and violent acts committed against Bosniak-Muslims.

For instance, before the war in Bosnia broke out, 186 Bosniak-Muslim families lived in Bukovica and its vicinity and in the municipality of Pljevlja. Now, the number of families in the area stands at 24. During the war the area was closed to Yugoslav and foreign journalists. In 1992 Yugoslav military reinforcements were sent to Bukovica in order to appease the situation, but their presence, as local residents assert, only aggravated it.

Assaults on the Bosniak-Muslim population in Pljevlja started in 1992 and culminated in killings. On October 22, 1992, in the village of Miocha near where the "Amfora" cafe had been before it was burned down, seventeen Bosniak-Muslims were abducted from a bus going from Priboj to Sjeverin. They were taken away in an unknown direction and, according to unofficial military sources, massacred near a Visegrad spa in eastern Bosnia.

Following the abduction, the majority of the Bosniak-Muslim population left Sjeverin, Medjurecje, Zabrdje, Zabrnjica, Krajcinovici, Zivinica, Sastavci, Kukurovici and other border villages of the Priboj municipality. Not a single indictment for any abduction was issued. The work of the state investigative commission, formed by Dobrica Cosic, was terminated by the president of SFRY with no results. In February 1993 twenty-one passengers were abducted from a Belgrade-Bar train in the village Shttrpci. The abducted were taken away in an unknown direction and, allegedly, executed. There were nineteen Bosniak-Muslims among the abducted, a Croat and a refugee from Bosnia born of a mixed Serb-Bosniak marriage.

Fortunately, such actions in Sandzak towns with a Serb majority did not lead to revenge in communities with a Bosniak-Muslim majority. Serious interethnic incidents were not recorded in Novi Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, Rozaje and Plav during this period.

2.2. *Political life in Sandzak*

The Serbian national-political homogenization in the late 1980s and early 1990s was followed by an identical process among members of other ethnic communities. The Party of Democratic Action was founded in May 1990 in Sarajevo, with the task of promoting the unity of all Bosniak-Muslims in the territory of the former SFRY. Soon after that, PDA set up branches in former Yugoslav republics. The branch in Serbia, acting as Sandzak's PDA, was founded on July 29, 1990, in Novi Pazar. Dr. Sulejman Ugljanin, a stomatologist from Novi Pazar, was elected as the chairman of PDA of Serbia. Rasim Ljajic, a doctor from Novi Pazar, became the secretary general, the number two man in the party. This

ambitiously envisaged organization failed to become the sort of informal Sandzak parliament it could have been. Despite coordinating several Sandzak parties and citizen associations, it became more of a vehicle for the agendas of the PDA chairman, Sulejman Ugljanin, the most influential politician in Sandzak.

Under the influence of Sandzak's PDA, the Muslim National Council of Sandzak (MNCS) was founded in May 1991 in Novi Pazar. (After 1996 this group was known as the Bosniak National Council of Sandzak.)

In October 1991 the PDA and Muslim National Council of Sandzak, in defiance of a police ban, held a referendum on regional autonomy. The organizers achieved the results they had expected: 98% of Bosniak-Muslims declared that they were for the "full political and territorial autonomy" of Sandzak and, in the event of SFRY disintegration, for the right to adjoin the region to any Yugoslav republic. In summer 1992 MNCS adopted the Memorandum on the Special Status of Sandzak, envisaging great political, economic and legislative autonomy for the region within Yugoslavia. The memorandum was presented to republic assemblies and federal Parliament, but all governmental bodies refused to consider the document, seeing it as a separatist act.

In July 1993 the Uzice District Court banned the printing and distribution of the Memorandum on the Special Status of Sandzak in order to avoid invoking ethnic and religious animosity and jeopardizing the territorial integrity of the country. The decision of the Uzice District Court was upheld by the Supreme Court of Serbia.

At the beginning of August 1991 the Bosniak National Council of Sandzak drafted measures set forth in the Declaration on Bosniaks' Right to Political and National Equality as well as the Memorandum on the Autonomy of Sandzak and Special Relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The documents were forwarded to the federal government for consideration but there has never been a reply. As the adopted documents do not differ substantially from the 1992 memorandum, it is believed that Belgrade will firmly refuse demands for such broad autonomy, if they even consider the documents at all.

In the first multiparty elections in Serbia, PDA won three seats in Serbia's Parliament, and their presidential candidate, Sulejman Ugljanin, came in fourth place, after Slobodan Milosevic, Vuk Draskovic and Ivan Djuric. Only a year later the PDA members in Parliament walked out in a protest against Yugoslav Army and Serbian police forces being placed on alert in Sandzak towns. PDA boycotted the next presidential and parliamentary elections.

In 1993 Sandzak police began the operation of confiscating illegal weapons from Bosniak-Muslims. Lawyers of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak claim that 1,082 searches of Bosniak-Muslim houses were recorded in 1993 and 1994, with weapons being found in less than five percent of the cases. Although the results of the campaign were quite modest, the media made a big story of it. It was also followed by trials, which certain human rights organizations claimed were rigged. Forty-five leaders and supporters of PDA in Novi Pazar and Bijelo Polje were charged with "conspiracy to commit hostile activities." All forty-five went to trial, were convicted and sentenced to a total of 168 years in prison.

One of the convicted was Harum Hadzic, the chairman of the Montenegrin branch of the PDA at the time and a member of Parliament of Montenegro. In 1996 the president of Montenegro, Momir Bulatovic, gave amnesty to the twenty-one people convicted in

the “Bijelo Polje trial,” while the Supreme Court of Serbia annulled twenty-four verdicts of the court in Novi Pazar concerning PDA members and the case was returned to the appropriate court for reconsideration.

The first accused in the Novi Pazar trial was Sulejman Ugljanin, the chairman of PDA and MNCS, who left the country for Turkey just before the indictment was issued. Ugljanin did not return to the country until September 1996. In the federal election of that year Ugljanin and Harum Hadzic became representatives in the federal Parliament of FRY.

During Ugljanin’s long absence, a faction gathered around Rasim Ljajic and set on a different political course. In summer 1995 Ugljanin’s supporters and Ljajic’s supporters held separate party assemblies to elect chairmen. The political conflict created an absurd situation; there were not less than five parties with similar names: PDA, PDA of Sandzak, PDA of Yugoslavia, Actual PDA and Real PDA. However, only two of them have real political importance. They are PDA and the Sandzak coalition led by the two opposing politicians, Ugljanin and Ljajic respectively.

The parties have a somewhat different approach to resolving Sandzak regional issues and problems of the Bosniak-Muslim minority. The Bosniak National Council of Sandzak and Sulejman Ugljanin’s PDA support a broad conception of autonomy that would secure the region’s right to its own assembly, government, police force and economic policy. The Sandzak coalition, led by Rasim Ljajic, supports a model of regional autonomy based on the “European recipe,” calling for a step-by-step achievement of goals with the consent of concerned parties. Of the two parties only Rasim Ljajic’s has shown any desire to cooperate with Serb parties. In 1999 his coalition became a member of the Democratic Parties Alliance and closely cooperated with the Alliance for Change. Both of these are opposition groups that declared their opposition to Slobodan Milosevic’s regime in summer 1999. The Sandzak coalition believes that the democratization of Serbia is the only possible way to resolve the problem of national minorities.

Rasim Ljajic has stated, “Serbia will eventually begin democratization and one day it will be a free, democratic and civil state. In such a state, requesting broad regional autonomy will be inappropriate and pointless. We will probably achieve all, or at least most, of our objectives by focusing our energies regionally.”

After a year-long hiatus, Sulejman Ugljanin, leading the PDA in coalition with the Reformist-Democratic Party of Sandzak and the Liberal-Bosniak Organization, ran for federal and local elections under the banner of “The Gathering for Sandzak, Dr. Sulejman Ugljanin” in November 1996 and for republic elections in Serbia and Montenegro in 1997.

“The List for Sandzak” won three seats in the parliaments of the Serbian and Montenegrin republics, respectively, two in federal Parliament and gained local representation in Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin. The success of Sulejman Ugljanin’s party in the elections was clouded by its defeat in the local elections in Montenegro, where the largest Bosniak-Muslim party was not even able to gain power in municipalities with a Bosniak-Muslim majority. They were soundly beaten everywhere by the Democratic Party of Socialists led by Montenegrin president Milo Djukanovic.

The reign of Bosniak-Muslim parties in Novi Pazar, the biggest town in Sandzak and the center of the region, did not last long since the Serbian government installed an emergency administration in the town at the beginning of July 1997. The government justified the replacement of the local authorities claiming that their electoral victory was

“undoubtedly an illegal action of municipal bodies violating the constitutional and legal rights of citizens.” Belgrade officially held that the alleged victory was to the detriment of Serb population, that the authorities in Novi Pazar had displayed unacceptable national symbols and had not financed educational institutions. The Serbian government appointed a nine-member municipal council, which is still governing Novi Pazar. The council consists of five Bosniak-Muslims and four Serbs, members of the “left coalition” of the Yugoslav Left and the Socialist Party of Serbia.

In spite of announcements that the Serbian government would dismiss local authorities in Sjenica and Tutin, which also had a Bosniak-Muslim majority, this has not yet happened.

3. Interethnic Tolerance in Novi Pazar

3.1. *Novi Pazar as a Multicultural Community*

In the eyes of many people, Novi Pazar, the biggest Sandzak town, is synonymous with the whole region. It was founded in the second half of the fifteenth century by the Turks. The main architect of the town center was Isah-bey Isakovich, who planned Sarajevo as well. Even today, the town is adorned with monuments designed in the Islamic architectural style. Important Serbian historical sites such as the remains of Ras, the capital of the first Serbian medieval state, and the monasteries of Sopocani and Djurdjevi stupovi are located near the town. Novi Pazar was situated on busy trade routes, which enabled its swift economic expansion, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was one of the most important centers of trade and commerce in the Balkans and more developed than Belgrade, Zagreb or Sarajevo.

When the routes lost their importance, the town began to stagnate. Between the two world wars, Novi Pazar was inhabited by only 12,000 people. By 1945 the number had decreased to 10,000. Today, the town has 80,000 inhabitants and the Novi Pazar municipality, which includes dozens of villages and the town itself, is inhabited by more than 100,000 people. As mentioned earlier, Bosniak-Muslims are 80% and Serbs 20% of the town population.

Economically, Novi Pazar is relatively less developed compared to the rest of Serbia. The strengths of the local economy—outgrowths of the socialist economic infrastructure—collapsed. This affected not only Novi Pazar, but Tutin and Sjenica, which had branch factories of Novi Pazar’s industry.

Due to the economic collapse, residents of Sandzak, and Novi Pazar in particular, turned to private business. In the early 1990s, Novi Pazar once more became an important commercial area as well as a textile and shoe production center. Instead of supporting this economic restructuring, the state has done everything to crush the private sector in Novi Pazar in the name of a struggle against “gray economy” and the “black market.” One of its strategies is to impose taxes and duties that are several times higher than in other parts of Serbia.

The enterprising spirit of residents of Novi Pazar has influenced interethnic relations as well. In the early 1990s national and nationalistic feelings and movements increased all over FRY. Sandzak was not exempted from this, but the nationalist trend did not last

long. Residents of Novi Pazar, being practical and traditionally inclined to trade, gave economy priority over politics. It has several successful ethnically mixed companies in which Bosniak-Muslims and Serbs have jointly invested capital.

This, in addition to the centuries long heritage of Sandzak tolerance, which is not based on an ideological, communist concept of “brotherhood and unity,” but on the authentic respect of diversity, has enabled the avoidance of serious interethnic incidents in the community. While Serbs and Bosniak-Muslims were warring in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosniak-Muslim population in other parts of Sandzak was subject to various forms of endangerment, there was no serious interethnic conflict in Novi Pazar.

The local population also has not allowed their relatively good relations to be spoiled by “intruders.” For example, in 1991 the Serbian Renewal Movement (SRM) held a rally near Peter’s Church in the vicinity of Novi Pazar and in 1994 there was a visit by Vojislav Seselj, leader of Serb radicals. Vuk Draskovic, who was in his nationalistic phase at the time of the SRM rally, warned Bosniak-Muslims that if they carried a Turkish or any other non-Serbian flag “on Serbian land,” they would “lose both their flags and hands,” which enraged Bosniak-Muslims. Fortunately, the conflict ended with no more than fisticuffs between supporters of PDA and SRM.

Bosniak-Muslims “welcomed” Vojislav Seselj’s visit to Novi Pazar with whistles, and the majority of local Serbs asked, “Why do you come from Belgrade and try to set us against each other?”

Perhaps a bit paradoxically, the preservation of good relations did not require the assistance of cultural institutions. As the center of a region important to both the Serb and Bosniak-Muslim nations, Novi Pazar was the seat of several multiethnic institutions. Political crises and national homogenization in the early 1990s caused an almost total marginalization of multiethnic cultural institutions and associations, such as the writers’ clubs “*Sandzak’s iskra*” and “*Rascia*.” Ethnic, as opposed to multiethnic, cultural associations were founded instead. One such association was “*Stari Ras*,” which brought together Serbian nationalist intellectuals. The only multiethnic cultural society of any importance that remained was “*Sopchanska vidjenja*,” a group of painters and sculptors.

Under the auspices of Sulejman Ugljanin’s PDA, Bosniak-Muslims have founded artistic associations of various kinds, but their activities are irrelevant. Newly founded associations such as “*Preporod*,” a Sandzak cultural society of Bosniak-Muslims and writers, have more often been objects of political manipulation than societies working toward the preservation and dissemination of culture.

Novi Pazar is the seat of several Sandzak media companies as well. Public-owned media in Novi Pazar is under full state control. The local radio station and TV station belong to RTS. As viewers were “sentenced” for a long time to two or three state television channels, satellite dishes have become very popular merchandise in the 1990s. With satellite dishes residents of Novi Pazar can bypass RTS and watch preferred programming from Bosnia, Croatia, Turkey, Germany and other countries.

There is also an assortment of private radio and TV stations in Novi Pazar that started broadcasting somewhat later than such stations in other parts of Serbia. The late start-ups were due to difficulties in obtaining licenses for frequencies, which was a problem particular to the region. Characteristic of all private TV and radio stations is their “flight from politics” and orientation towards entertainment programming.

The town is also the center of Sandzak publishing, with *Has*, an independent magazine; *Parliament*, an independent biweekly; *Mak*, a literary magazine; and *Glas Islama*, a journal of the Islamic community, which has just begun publication.

Interethnic relations in Novi Pazar and Sandzak are grounded in the region's atmosphere of tolerance. Nevertheless, interethnic marriages are rare. However, interethnic friendships and businesses are not. Unlike some heterogeneous settlements in Yugoslavia, an ethnically divided promenade or separate ethnic café-bars never existed here. Members of certain nationalities do visit, although rarely, certain sparse café's or bars, but those are the exceptions that confirm the rule.

Positive examples of the struggle to preserve good interethnic relations are a youth club. "*Urban in*," founded last year, promotes tolerance through regular meetings of young people and contact between parties of different ethnic groups. The contact of the parties has intensified during moments of crisis, namely, in 1991, when the Yugoslav Army was placed on the highest level of alert and during the recent NATO air strikes on FRY. At these times, the parties gathered into one conglomerate, activating what is known as Interparty.

3.2. *Interparty*

In spring 1991, on orders from Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, police and military forces in Novi Pazar were placed on alert. Such an action would normally be imposed in response to a mild form of a state of emergency, but in this case there was no concrete cause. However, when President Milosevic announced the move in a rare public address immediately following the fierce anti-regime demonstration in Belgrade on March 9, 1991, he claimed there were motives of domestic policy behind it. Milosevic needed to turn the public's attention away from political to national issues; for this purpose he used the alleged separatist demands of PDA, their frequent party rallies and a clash between PDA and Serbian Renewal Party supporters.

Milosevic was referring to a fight between PDA and SRM supporters in front of Peter's Church near Novi Pazar at the pre-election rally of Vuk Draskovic's party, which led to the arrest of several Bosniak-Muslim activists. Believing the police had reacted improperly in using force only against Bosniak-Muslims and detaining solely PDA members, groups of enraged, mostly young residents of Novi Pazar went to the police station. From outside they demanded the police release their compatriots and threatened to break into the police station. A more serious incident was avoided due to the efforts of local politicians and the police.

Certain state media covered the incident almost as a Muslim rebellion "in the heart of the Serbian state." Belgrade used this several months later as one of the arguments for sending additional police forces to Novi Pazar and placing the Yugoslav Army on alert. Citizens panicked at the positioning of Yugoslav Army tanks at the entrances of the town and on the surrounding hills. Some fled the town as quickly as they were able and those who stayed expected there would be an attack. A group of Bosniak-Muslim and Serb politicians reacted more soberly and formed Interparty.

This organization, coordinating six Serb and Bosniak-Muslim parties (New Democracy, Congregational People's Party, Sandzak Coalition, Reformist-Democratic Party of Sandzak, Liberal Bosniak Organization and Social Democratic Worker's Party), reduced the spread of panic and rumors about interethnic conflict by way of appeals and activities to help maintain unity. SRM had the status of an observer and its representatives attended Interparty meetings regularly.

Interparty representatives followed the situation minute by minute, establishing contact with the army and police, meeting almost every day and then speaking first with members of their own communities and with those other nationalities, thus managing to prevent interethnic conflict.

Interparty is an informal organization, whose members gather voluntarily and maintain a flexible structure of connections. It organized a series of meetings on various problems, ranging from meetings devoted to problems of security to meetings aimed at disseminating accurate information. One of the meetings was attended by the present chief of staff of the Yugoslav Army, General Dragoljub Ojdanic, then the commander of the Uzice corps. General Ojdanic stated then that the army was in place as a "stabilizing element" and "had no intention to disturb relations in the town."

3.3. *Interparty: Results and Problems*

When Serbia was overburdened with interethnic passions, multiethnic organizations like Interparty were rare. Interparty's preservation of interethnic peace—its most important achievement—shows that provincial communities, lagging behind Belgrade in many respects, can serve as an example to the Serbian political center.

Interparty has dealt with numerous problems in achieving its objectives. The media blackout imposed on the only existing state media of that time aroused mistrust and suspicion among the local population, certainly obstructing Interparty's ability to react to emerging problems flexibly and without predisposition. For instance, on several occasions local radio refused to broadcast Interparty appeals to civilians and the army for restraint and calm. In such cases Interparty members would organize a *posedke*—a local custom of gathering in the evening—with prominent members of their ethnic community and inform them about the various conclusions and proposals of Interparty.

Following the easing of tensions in Novi Pazar and the departure of the army, Interparty suspended its work. From 1993 until the NATO air strikes in 1999, Interparty functioned only to hold rare meetings on special occasions. The NATO air strikes on FRY proved that the initial activity of Interparty was useful in other situations as well. The onset of NATO intervention aroused fears in Novi Pazar that the Kosovo crisis could spread and cause interethnic conflict in Sandzak. Local Bosniak-Muslims feared possible operations of the Yugoslav Army or Serbian paramilitary troops, while Serbs feared an Albanian-Muslim alliance supported by NATO, as well as armed attacks from Sandzak Muslims. Interparty began work again, making appeals for people to keep their presence of mind, not to succumb to fear and panic and, particularly, not to allow interethnic animosity to get out of control.

4. Conclusions

The example of Novi Pazar and Interparty shows that even in a situation involving extremely passionate nationalistic feelings, oases of reason and tolerance can be preserved. Following a brief nationalistic fervor, Novi Pazar “sobered up,” its citizens realizing they did not have to love each other to live with each other.

With the exception of local branches of the three-member coalition—the Socialist Party of Serbia, the Serb Radical Party and Yugoslav Left—and of Sulejman Ugljanin’s Bosniak National Council, Interparty has gathered representatives of all the other significant parties. The participation in the work of Interparty by some Serb parties has occasionally not been in line with the policy of party headquarters in Belgrade, but all branches have remained with Interparty, proving that their interests are local and not necessarily geared toward satisfying central party leadership.

Interparty has assisted Bosniak-Muslim parties in gaining access to official government institutions. Interparty meetings have also been attended by municipal, district, military and police representatives who otherwise would not have been willing to talk with “suspicious Muslim” politicians. However, it is a pity that Interparty never seriously tried to extend its operations to peaceful times as well. Between the cessation of NATO intervention and the time of the writing of this text in September 1999, not a single meeting was held. Nevertheless, in view of previous experience, if there is a need, Interparty is bound to reactivate.