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editor

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BOSNIAN MUSLIMS AND THE YUGOSLAV IDEA

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Perhaps not unusually for Bosnia-Herzegovina, relationship between the Bosnian Muslims and Yugoslavism can be summarized by a paradox: Bosnian Muslims hardly contributed to the formulation of the Yugoslav idea, but they had probably been the last among the Yugoslav nations who sincerely held onto it. In 1990, this belated Yugoslavism of the Bosnian Muslim community led the Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Marković to launch his pro-Yugoslav Alliance of the Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in a last attempt to oppose the growing nationalism with a Yugoslav project. Yet, despite opinion polls predicting a victory for the Reformists, the nationalist parties won the Bosnian general elections of 18 November 1990, and about 70 per cent of Bosnian Muslims voted for the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). At that time, the position of the SDA leaders vis-à-vis the Yugoslav idea was still ambiguous, with the party president Alija Izetbegović declaring that ‘Yugoslavia is not our love, but it is in our interest’.

Attitude of Bosnian Muslims towards the Yugoslav idea has often been misunderstood, and their motives sometimes reduced by outside observers to simple political opportunism. Beyond tactical manoeuvring, it is nevertheless possible to discern some genuine identity cleavages and strategic dilemmas, some slow changes and violent ruptures. In order to identify such phenomena, it is first necessary to analyze the attitude of the Bosnian Muslim community and its main representatives towards the first and the second Yugoslavia. It is then

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important to take a closer look at the stance of the SDA leaders during the dissolution of the Yugoslav state, in order to establish whether they were for or against the preservation of Yugoslavia, and whether their actions represented continuity or discontinuity in relation to the Bosnian Muslim élites of the interwar and communist periods.

First Yugoslavia: a refuge or a threat for the Bosnian Muslims?

Before the First World War, the Bosnian Muslims did not seem to be attracted by the Yugoslav idea. Only a few individuals, often belonging to the nascent Muslim intelligentsia or educated youth, participated in movements that can be considered as pro-Yugoslav, such as the secret organisation Young Bosnia (Mlada Bosna). After the Congress of Berlin of 1878, Bosnian Muslim leaders had very quickly pledged allegiance to the new Austro-Hungarian authorities, concentrating on defending the religious identity and institutions of their community and, to this end, entering into shifting tactical alliances with both Serb and Croat political groups. This structuring of the Bosnian Muslim community into a kind of a post-Ottoman Muslim millet, a non-sovereign religious community renouncing any nationalist project of its own, is illustrated by the emergence of the community name ‘Muslims’ at the end of the nineteenth century, and by the achievement of the religious and cultural autonomy in 1909. At the same time, the strong desire of the tiny Muslim intelligentsia to be integrated into European political and cultural modernity, and its rejection of religious divisions inherited from the Ottoman Empire, led it to support the idea of bošnjaštvo (Bosnianism) launched by the Habsburg Governor Benjámin Kállay. The Muslim secular intelligentsia was divided into pro-Croat and pro-Serb factions, which both equally rejected the

2 For more on the Young Bosnia see Vladimir Dedijer, The Road to Sarajevo, London, 1966.
name ‘Muslims’, preferring to declare themselves Croats or Serbs ‘of Islamic faith’.5

The absence of Bosnian Muslims from the Yugoslav Committee, or their small number within the provisional institutions set up following the Yugoslav unification in 1918, can be explained as much by their own attitude as by the scant attention paid to them by other South Slavs. The hardships of the immediate post-war period (the land reform, anti-Muslim riots and resumption of emigration to Turkey) led the Bosnian Muslim élites to reproduce political strategies elaborated during the Austro-Hungarian period. In June 1921, the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (JMO) exchanged its support for the centralising Constitution of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, for the preservation of old Bosnian borders within the new administrative division of the country, the maintenance of the autonomy of Islamic religious institutions, and guarantees of financial compensation for properties affected by the land reform. Thereafter, the JMO oscillated between governments led by the National Radical Party (NRS) or by the Democratic Party (DS)—the two Serb-dominated parties—and opposition coalitions led by the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS).6

Allegiance to central power and frequent shifting between Serb and Croat political parties remained central to the Bosnian Muslim strategies during the interwar years. But, situated within different an institutional framework to the ones existing in the former Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, these could only lead to unprecedented constructions of identity. As its name indicates, the JMO supported the Yugoslav idea, and declared in its program that it regarded ‘Yugoslavism [jugoslovensko] as the most appropriate path towards rapprochement and unification [of the South Slavs]’.7 The JMO’s Yugoslavism did not only correspond to its strategic choices, but also its need to escape assimilating pressures of both Serbs and Croats. Yugoslavism of the JMO therefore represented a convenient refuge rather than a genuine political choice. Already in 1920, the JMO leaders proposed to change the name of the Kingdom of

6 See Atif Purivatra, Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija u političkom životu Književne Srb, Hrvata i Slovenaca, Sarajevo, 1974.
7 ‘Program Jugoslovenske Muslimanske Organizacije (1920)’, reproduced in ibid., pp. 596-7.
Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. At the same time, however, they denounced the ‘Yugoslav nationalism’ of the Democrats allying themselves with the Radicals, who showed more respect for their communitarian practices. Tactical Yugoslavism and a lack of national determination were thus perceived as complementary for the preservation of a Bosnian Muslim identity still constituted in a pre-national way.  

The escalation of the Serbo-Croat political conflict directly affected Bosnia’s Muslims. Already in the mid-1920s, the divisions between the pro-Croat and pro-Serb Muslim intellectuals grew deeper, as was demonstrated by the existence of two rival Muslim cultural societies: Gajret (The Effort) and Narodna uzdanica (The People’s Hope). In 1929, the transformation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia took place in parallel with the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into four different banovinas, and the suppression of the religious autonomy obtained twenty years before. The JMO leaders first joined the protests of the united opposition, but agreed in 1935 to enter the government and to dissolve itself within the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ), in exchange for the restoration of some autonomy for the Islamic Religious Community (Islamska vjerska zajednica).

8 Scholars have noted that some JMO leaders declared themselves Serbs or Croats, questioning their reasons for doing so. None of them seems to have paid attention to the fact that Muslim leaders, whether they declared themselves as ‘Serbs’ or as ‘Croats’, by conviction or by tactic, never called upon all Bosnian Muslims to follow them and do the same.


10 At the same time, the different Islamic religious institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro were unified under one single Islamic Religious Community (IVZ) which covered the whole Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and was dominated by the Bosnian ulamas. The Yugoslav authorities unsuccessfully tried to use them to assimilate the non-Slav Muslim populations of Kosovo and Macedonia. See Aleksandar Popović, L’islam balkanique. Les musulmans du sud-est européen dans la période post-ottomane, Berlin-Wiesbaden, 1986, pp. 318–9; Ismail Ahmeti, ‘Institucionet e kulturës islamike në Kërçovë gjatë viteve 1939–1950’ in Masar Kodra (ed.), Shqiptarët e Maqedonisë, Skopje, 1994, pp. 457–64.

11 The JRZ was formed by fusion of the JMO, a majority faction of the Radical Party and the Slovene People’s Party (SLS). Its president was Milan Stojadinović,
Three years later, they suffered an unexpected electoral defeat against the candidates of the Muslim Organisation (Muslimanska organizacija), a small political party linked to the HSS.12

From a refuge, Yugoslavia increasingly turned during the 1930s into a threat for the Bosnian Muslim community. It is therefore not surprising that its political representatives tended more and more to reject it. United in their opposition to the Cvetković-Maček Agreement of August 1939, which granted Croat-populated regions of Bosnia to the newly-formed banovina of Croatia, the Muslim élites founded a Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which constituted the first organised manifestation of a nascent Muslim nationalism.13 Some intellectuals, denying their previous pro-Croat or pro-Serb loyalties, promoted a neo-bošnjaštvo, which applied the national name ‘Bosniak’ (Bošnjak) only to the Bosnian Muslims.14 Meanwhile, the educated Muslim youth was divided between various pan-Islamist groups, which dreamed of uniting all Balkan Muslims into one large state15, and the League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, which called for a new, Soviet Yugoslavia.16 The JMO, however, remained in the government.

This political evolution of the Bosnian Muslims explains why in April 1941 they did not really mourn the collapse of the first Yugoslavia. Whilst some of their leaders joined the government of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), many continued to seek

the Yugoslav Prime Minister, and vice-presidents Mehmed Spaho and Anton Korošec, leaders of the JMO and SLS, respectively.


autonomy for Bosnia. During the Second World War, however, the Autonomy Movement ran into some fatal contradictions. Hostile to the integration of Bosnia-Herzegovina into the NDH, it offered to collaborate with the Third Reich in exchange for the creation of an autonomous Bosnia under direct German tutelage. Despite the fact it had been created in opposition to the project of partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was ready to offer, in exchange for autonomy, Western Herzegovina to the NDH, and Eastern Herzegovina to Montenegro. But the NDH remained the closest ally of the Axis powers in the Western Balkans, and this proposal never came to fruition. On the ground, the Autonomy Movement did not even ensure the safety of the Bosnian Muslim population: the creation of the Bosnian Muslim SS division Handžar in 1943 only contributed to the cycle of violence. From 1943 onwards, it was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) which offered the best protection to Bosnia’s Muslims and which promised them political recognition in a future Yugoslavia. The KPJ thus succeeded in mobilizing the Muslims for its own Yugoslav project.

The Second Yugoslavia and the Muslim ‘national affirmation’

Initially, the Partisan Movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina recruited its fighters mainly among the Serb population. But in order to expand its base, it was always careful to take into account the multi-ethnic character of the Bosnian society. The Partisans promised ‘full equality of rights between all Serbs, Muslims and Croats’ and foresaw Bosnia-Herzegovina as a republic of the future Yugoslav Federation. The Partisans also allowed the creation of separate ‘Muslim brigades’,

19 ‘Resolution of the first session of the Provincial Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH), held on 25 and 26 Nov. 1943 in Mrkonjić Grad, quoted in Dubravko Lovrenović, Istina o Bosni i Herzegovina—ćinjenice iz istorije BiH, Sarajevo, 1991, p. 76.
where the main principles of Islam were respected, and integrated some former leaders of the JMO and the Autonomy Movement into the Anti-Fascist Councils for the National Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ZAVNOBiH) and of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), created on 25 and 29 November 1943, respectively.20

During the Second World War, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had thus recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina as a separate territorial entity, and recognised the existence of the Bosnian Muslim community, although without specifying its exact nature (religious or national). But this recognition was soon called into question after the war: the Communist Party first suppressed the Muslim Committee (Muslimanski Odbor) existing within the National Liberation Front21, and then carried out a campaign against the IVZ. In 1947, the abolition of Islamic courts, the nationalisation of the vaqufs (religious-charitable foundations and the closure of the madrasas (religious schools) led to the disappearance of the very institutions which had formed the backbone of the Bosnian Muslim community. Finally, in 1949, the Muslim cultural society Preporod (Revival) was dissolved, only three years after its foundation. After having instrumentalized the communitarian modes of the Bosnian Muslims to its own advantage, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia set about dismantling them.

In the medium term, however, these decisions of the Yugoslav authorities facilitated the transformation of the Bosnian Muslim community into a modern nation. By making Bosnia-Herzegovina one of the six constitutive republics of Yugoslavia, the Communist Party had put a brake on Serb and Croat nationalist claims, and created the necessary space for the crystallization of Muslim national identity. The ‘identity void’ which appeared at that time is shown by the census of 1953, in which 93.8 per cent of the Bosnian Muslims


21 The National Liberation Front was created during the war by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. It became the National Front in 1945, and the Socialist Alliance of the Working People in 1953.
declared themselves as 'nationally undetermined Yugoslavs', only 3.8 per cent declared themselves as Serbs, and 1.7 per cent as Croats. At the same time, rapid modernisation of the Bosnian society and the formation of new political and intellectual Muslim elites strengthened the position of the Bosnian Muslims within the Communist Party (League of Communists since 1952). In the context of growing 'ethnicisation' of the political system, the League of Communists of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared on 17 May 1968 that:

The practice has shown the harmfulness, in the past period, of the different forms of pressure and injunction aiming to make Muslims declare themselves nationally as Serbs or Croats, since it has appeared in the past, and it is confirmed by the present socialist practice, that Muslims form a distinct nation.

The 'national affirmation' of the Bosnian Muslims, endorsed at the federal level by the Constitution of 1974, represented a turning point of their political evolution and was followed by the (re)discovery of their own past and culture. The strong attachment they demonstrated at that time to the Yugoslav idea has to be examined in this context, and can be related to two distinct phenomena. On the one hand, the socio-economic and cultural modernisation of Bosnian society resulted in the partial disappearance of traditional communitarianism, manifested by a rapid increase in the number of mixed marriages. Amongst the educated middle class and certain parts of the working class, it was therefore not uncommon for the Yugoslav identity to become stronger than Muslim, Serb or Croat national identities.

On the other hand, Yugoslav federalism represented not

22 On the other hand, 61.5 per cent of the Muslim communist leaders mentioned in the 1956 edition of Yugoslavia's Who's Who declared themselves as Serbs, 16.6 per cent as Croats, and only 8.6 per cent as 'nationally undetermined Yugoslavs'. See David Dyker, 'The Ethnic Muslims of Bosnia—Some Basic Socio-Economic Data', Slavonic and East European Review, vol. 50, no. 119, Apr. 1972, pp. 238-56.


only a protection against Serb and Croat nationalisms, but also a favourable framework for the affirmation of the specific identity and interests of the young Muslim nation. It is therefore no surprise that in addition to the Muslim political leaders within the League of Communists and Marxist intellectuals linked to the process of ‘national affirmation’ (such as Atif Purivatra or Muhamed Filipović), the Muslim population at large and even the ulamas of the IVZ became strongly committed to Tito’s Yugoslavia.25

This attachment should certainly not be perceived as an unconditional one. The Bosnian Muslim communist leaders were actively involved in the ‘clientelistic’ conflicts opposing the different communities and nations of Yugoslavia, as shown by the ‘Agrokomerc affair’ in 1987.26 The intellectuals worked fervently for the promotion of Bosnian Muslim history and literature, and even occasionally called even for the recognition of a separate Bosnian language. They also discreetly denounced the fact that the Muslim nation had neither its own national institutions nor its own republic, since Bosnia-Herzegovina had three constitutive nations: the Muslims, the Serbs and the Croats. The ulamas, for their part, took advantage of the increasingly important role of the Islamic Community (IZ), which was de facto a substitute national institution.27 However, none of them put into question the existing Yugoslav political and institutional framework. At that time, to use the words of Alija Izetbegović, ‘Yugoslavia embodied not only the interest, but also the love of a large majority of Bosnian Muslims’.


26 The ‘Agrokomerc affair’ began as a financial scandal involving Fikret Abdić, the director of a powerful agricultural and food production conglomerate in Cazinska Krajina (the area surrounding Bihac). But this scandal took quickly a political dimension after Abdić was accused of having created a wide nepotistic and clientelistic system, thanks to the protection of Hamdija Pozderac, an important communist leader originating also from Cazinska Krajina, who was then the representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Yugoslav collective presidency.

The main exception to this rule was the Bosnian pan-Islamist movement, which was reorganized in the 1970s within the Islamic Community, and whose informal leader was Izetbegović himself.\textsuperscript{28} In 1983, with twelve other persons, he was accused of 'endangering the fraternity and unity of the Yugoslav nations', and of advocating the creation of an 'ethnically pure' Bosnia-Herzegovina. He retorted that his \textit{Islamic Declaration} contained only general opinions on the Muslim world, and did not concern Yugoslavia itself.\textsuperscript{29} Strictly speaking this was true, since the \textit{Islamic Declaration} was a mere summary of the themes present in Islamic literature all over the world.\textsuperscript{30} However, the fact that the \textit{Islamic Declaration} proposed as a political model the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, a country which was born out of the violent partition of a larger multiethnic country, and which national identity is based on Islam, was an indirect, but clear message to all Yugoslav Muslims. Therefore, the Communists' accusation that the members of the Bosnian pan-Islamic movement argued for 'the creation of a united Islamic state that would incorporate the territories of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Sandžak and the Autonomous Province of Kosovo'\textsuperscript{31} was not completely absurd. What remains unclear is how much this episode had contributed to the transformation of Izetbegović and his collaborators as leaders of Bosnian Muslims several years later.

\textbf{The SDA and the break-up of Yugoslavia}

The Party of Democratic Action (SDA) was founded on 27 March 1990. Several of its founders were linked to the Bosnian pan-Islamic movement, but it soon expanded to incorporate a number of former Communists. Amongst the three SDA representatives elected on 18 November 1990 to the collective Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, only Alija Izetbegović belonged to the pan-Islamic movement, while Fikret Abdić and Ejup Ganić used to be the members of the League of Communists. Similarly, out of eighty six

\textsuperscript{28} Bougarel, 'From "Young Muslims" to the Party of Democratic Action', op. cit.
\textsuperscript{29} Abid Prguda, \textit{Sarajevski proces. Sudjenje muslimanskim intelektualcima 1983. g.}, Sarajevo, 1990.
\textsuperscript{30} Alija Izetbegović, \textit{Islamska deklaracija}, Sarajevo, 1990.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Oslobodjenje}, 22 July 1983.
SDA deputies elected to the Bosnian Parliament, only a dozen can be regarded as close to the pan-Islamic movement. But the pan-Islamists kept hold of the party apparatus itself, as shown by the exclusion of Adil Zulfikarpašić and the promoters of neo-‘bošnjaštvo’ in September 1990, or the election of Izetbegović as President of the Bosnian Presidency three months later, despite the fact that he had received a much smaller number of votes than Fikret Abdić. In the next few years, most political decisions made by the SDA were strongly influenced by its pan-Islamic hard core, which had of course to take into account the balance of power within the SDA, the Bosnian Muslim community, but also in the wider Bosnian and Yugoslav context.

To understand the attitude of the SDA leaders towards the breakdown of Yugoslavia, it is first necessary to distinguish between Yugoslavism as a national identification and Yugoslavism as an institutional framework, or, as Izetbegović put it, between Yugoslavia as a ‘love-object’ and Yugoslavia as an ‘interest’. In 1990, it was already clear that the SDA leaders, or at least those linked to the pan-Islamic movement, were hostile to Yugoslavism, certainly its first form. During the electoral campaign, their most virulent attacks were directed at the Alliance of the Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ), founded by the Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Marković. A few months later, during the new population census, they described Yugoslavism as an ‘artificial national creation’. On the other hand,

32 Adil Zulfikarpašić, a former member of the Communist Party, who fled to Western Europe in the late 1940s, advocated the adoption of the national name Bosniaks (Bošnjak) by the Bosnian Muslims since the 1960s. He was also a member of the Democratic Alternative, a pro-Yugoslav group of eminent Yugoslavs in exile, found in the early 1960s. Zulfikarpašić joined the SDA in 1990, but soon came into conflict with the pan-Islamic faction and was expelled from the party in Sept. 1990, together with his supporters. He then founded the Bosniak Muslim Organisation (MBO), which only received 1.1 per cent of the vote in the Nov. 1990 general elections.

33 In the election to the Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Fikret Abdić received 1,040,307 votes, and Alija Izetbegović only 874,213. But, the SDA leaders decided that the latter should be nevertheless elected as President of the Bosnian Presidency. Izetbegović’s election was eventually also approved by the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and the Croat Democratic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina (HDZ), the parties of Bosnian Serbs and Croats, respectively.

their attitude towards the Yugoslav Federation as an institutional framework remained much more complex and fluid.

During the electoral campaign, the SDA leaders remained elusive on the subject. They stated their attachment to Yugoslavia but, at the same time, insisted on the sovereignty of Bosnia-Herzegovina, occasionally mentioning Bosnian independence. They also refused to take clear sides in the debate that took place at that time between the 'federalist' republics (Serbia and Montenegro) and the 'confederalist' ones (Slovenia and Croatia). There were two main reasons for this ambiguous attitude of the SDA. Firstly, it was a traditional position of Bosnian Muslims vis-à-vis Serbo-Croat arguments, and the SDA was to a degree following the path of the JMO during the interwar period. But, more importantly, the SDA leaders had to reckon with the strong attachment of Bosnian Muslims to Yugoslavia: in an opinion poll in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the end of 1989, 62.2 per cent of Muslims supported the strengthening of federal institutions, while only 9.5 per cent wanted further autonomy for the republics. Therefore, the second reason for the SDA position was the fear that it might lose popular support if it clearly sided with the 'confederalist' bloc.

Shortly after the elections of November 1990, the SDA declared itself in favour of a confederal solution, and submitted to the Bosnian Parliament a 'Declaration on the sovereignty and indivisibility of Bosnia-Herzegovina', which did not even mention Yugoslavia. It is thus too simplistic to pretend that the SDA leaders have abandoned the Yugoslav idea only under the pressure of circumstances of the early 1990s, after the collapse of Yugoslavia. What is certainly true of the Bosnian Muslims at large is not necessarily so of their political leaders. Perhaps paradoxically, but it was above all the vehement reaction of Radovan Karadžić's Serb Democratic Party (SDS), mounting tensions between Croatia and Serbia, and the first talks between Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tudjman about the

partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which led the SDA to withdraw its proposition to declare Bosnia-Herzegovina a sovereign republic, and to fall back onto the proposition of an ‘asymmetrical [Yugoslav] confederation’, presented by Alija Izetbegović and Kiro Gligorov of Macedonia in May 1991.

After the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia on 25 June 1991, however, the essential question was no longer how to reorganise the dying Yugoslav federation, but whether Bosnia-Herzegovina should remain in a rump Yugoslavia, reduced to Serbia and Montenegro, or should it declare independence, too. In August 1991, the SDS and the Muslim Bosniak Organisation (MBO), led by Zulfikarpašić, made public a Serb-Muslim ‘historical agreement’ (*historijski sporazum*), which, implicitly, exchanged the maintenance of Bosnia-Herzegovina in a rump Yugoslavia for the preservation of its territorial integrity.38 After a few days of hesitation and confusion, the SDA leaders rejected the proposal, and set themselves irreversibly on the road towards independence. They continued for some months to advocate a ‘Yugoslav community’ which would include both Serbia and Croatia but, in the context of a Serbo-Croat war going on in Croatia, this position was just meant to ease Bosnia’s exit from Yugoslavia, by securing the support of the European Community and of the non-nationalists at home for Bosnian independence. As soon as European diplomats started to consider recognition of the secessionist republics, the SDA passed on 15 October 1991 a ‘Memorandum on sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina’ through the Bosnian Parliament, and on 20 December demanded the international recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, despite Fikret Abdić’s strong opposition.

The controversies that still surround the Serb-Muslim ‘historical agreement’ testify to its importance. Was the agreement originally

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38 The agreement stated that ‘Yugoslavia is historically fully legitimate as a common state of republics and nations, completely equal in rights, and we engage ourselves to preserve and develop this community’. Concerning Bosnia-Herzegovina, it declared that ‘the basis [of the agreement] is the mutual recognition of each nation’s sovereignty and the full preservation of the territorial integrity and political subjectivity of our republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina’. At the end it added that, ‘whatever the situation of the Republic of Croatia, inside or outside Yugoslavia, the Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina constitute a nation [of Bosnia-Herzegovina] with equal rights [with Muslims and Serbs]’, and were therefore called to join this agreement. See ‘Sporazum MBO-SDS’, *Oslobodjenje*, 2 Aug. 1991.
supported by Izetbegović and/or by Abđić. Was its final rejection by the SDA due to pressures of a pro-Croat faction within the SDA, or to a ‘friendly advice’ of the American diplomacy? Could it have protected Bosnian Muslims from war or would it have handed them over to Serb hegemony? Whatever the answers, the rejection of the ‘historical agreement’ by the SDA marks the definitive break of the Bosnian Muslim political élites, not only with the Yugoslav idea, but also with all the strategies which had been elaborated after 1878. Until then, in order to facilitate tactical alliances, Muslim political élites had always avoided any direct confrontation with either Serb or Croat political groups, occupying an intermediate space between them. By opting for independence, the SDA leaders made a clear stand against the SDS, and had therefore to rely on the support of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). It was the turn of the Croat nationalist party to occupy an intermediate position: close to the SDA because it was supportive of the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also close to the SDS because it favoured division of Bosnia into several ethnic territories. Moreover, when risking and ultimately failing to secure Bosnia’s territorial integrity, the SDA broke with another tradition of their predecessors among Bosnian Muslim leaders. The SDA clearly gave priority to the Muslim nation’s own sovereignty, at the risk of a territorial partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. From this point of view, it is revealing that the MBO justified the Serb-Muslim ‘historical agreement’ on the grounds that it would lessen ‘the risk of civil war and territorial partition [of Bosnia] between Croatia and Serbia’, whereas the SDA rejected it because it argued that it implied Bosnia joining a ‘rump Yugoslavia in which the Serbs would be number one, and the Muslims number two.

The consequences of such political choices were felt very quickly. In September 1991, the SDS began proclaiming ‘Serb autonomous regions’ throughout Serb-populated regions of Bosnia, and the HDZ.

41 MBO, Uz prijedlog srpsko-muslimanskog sporazuma, Sarajevo, 1991, p. 2.
did the same two months later. Of course, this does not mean that the SDA leaders at that time favoured a partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the spring of 1991, Alija Izetbegović rejected propositions to divide the republic from Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tudjman and, from the autumn of 1991, the SDA and the non-nationalist forces gathered around the principle of Bosnia’s territorial integrity. However, partition was not totally absent from the minds of the SDA leaders, as shown by their lasting fascination with the Pakistani experience or, more concretely, by their support to the demand for the ‘political and territorial autonomy of the Sandžak [region of Serbia], with a right to attach itself to one of the sovereign republics [of the Yugoslav federation]’. But the partition envisaged by the SDA leaders was that of Yugoslavia, not of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It just remains unclear to what extent they were aware that, due to the demographic, political and military balance of power within Yugoslavia, the former was very likely to lead to the latter.