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TERRORISM, VIOLENCE AND ORGANISED CRIME IN SANDZAK

During the last twelve years, the republics of Serbia and Montenegro gained a rich common experience with terrorism, violence and organised crime, whose emergence could be connected with radical nationalism there and with the wars of conquest in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. That fact undoubtedly determined the nature and character of terrorism and organised crime on their territories.

At the very beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, authorities in Serbia and Montenegro formed special police, military and paramilitary forces. They have been trained by secret police and military services, composed of people with a rich criminal background, in some cases people released from prison.

Following the example of State institutions, most national political parties formed paramilitary forces that have also performed with military and even civil authorities' structures.⁵ These forces have been used on foreign battlefields and in their countries as well, producing terror over the non-Serbian population with the aim of creating an homogeneous, ethnically clean space not only in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

⁵ The public knows of 4 political opposition parties who used to have strong and very well organized paramilitary forces. The first, so-called Serbian Guard, was formed by that Srpski Pokret Obnove Party (Serbian Movement of Restoration, or SPO), led by Vuk Draskovic. The second, White Eagles, was formed by the Serbian National Restoration Party (SNO), led by Mirko Jovic. Two paramilitary organizations bearing the names of their leaders but whose participation in politics is undeniable were the Seselj Men, an ethnic paramilitary formation created by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and Vjislav Seselj. The fourth paramilitary organization were the Tigers or Arkan's Guards, commanded by the leader of Serbian Unity Party (SSJ), Zeljko Arkan. Of the four, two were elected to Parliament (SNO and SSJ) while the two others had important roles in the structures of Serbian civil power. These are the most notorious of many other paramilitary organizaons, with the latter three infamous for their crims in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

where most of the action took place, but also in the areas where the population was non-Serbian.

In keeping with the aforementioned aims, the authorities tolerated and supported the formation of rival police, military and paramilitary forces. The main characteristics of terrorism, violence and organised crime in Serbia and Montenegro between 1991 and 1995 was ethnically and politically motivated. Most victims of terrorism and violence, including also organised crime, were members of non-Serbian nationalities, concretely Bosniaks in Sandzak, Croats in Vojvodina, and Albanians in Kosovo. There are many examples of all this.

According to the evidence and statistics of violations of human rights in Sandzak between 1991 and 1995 done by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sandzak, members of the police, army, paramilitary forces and organised groups of citizens of Serbian nationality committed 36 murders. The citizens were killed in their homes, working places and other public places. 51 were kidnapped from their homes, trains and buses, of whom 43 were killed. There were 18 conventional attacks on villages by members of the police, army and paramilitary forces. Those actions have been followed by the burning of houses, murders and expulsion of citizens. In separate attacks 52 domestic and commercial buildings and 11 religious sites were booby-trapped or burned, and many private and commercial vehicles were destroyed. 279 citizens were injured, 291 citizens were mistreated individually or in groups in public places or in the streets.⁶

There is evidence that those criminal acts were supported and sometimes organised by official authorities. At the trial of one of the perpetrators of the kidnapping of 19 Bosniaks from a train station in Strpce on the 27th of February 1993, documentation provided by the State railways undoubtedly confirm that the abduction required participation of State railway employees as well as high ranking police officers, the State Security of the Ministry of Defence and senior members of the security

⁶ The data refers only to the cases recorded and examined by the Helsinki Committee. In that sense they can't be considered correct, since they didn't involve all the cases. According to the information of political parties and their committees for human rights and other NGOs, we can say that the Helsinki Committee gives 40-50% of the total number of cases.

apparatus. Also, the trial of the perpetrators of another kidnapping of 17 Bosniaks which took place in Sjeverin on the 22nd of October 1992, showed that representatives of police, army and civil authorities were to blame, together with directors of public enterprises in Priboj. There are also some clues indicating that top State echelons were involved in abductions and other forms of violence, leading the president of the Helsinki Committee, Mr. Alomerovic, to press criminal charges against the president of the Serb Former Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), Dobrica Cosic. Mr. Alomerovic practically won the case, but Cosic wasn't sentenced.⁷

Besides individual and collective suffering, terrorism and violence in Sandzak consequently led to the emigration of great numbers of citizens. They, being afraid of violence, left their homes, moving to West European countries or Turkey. That way, the whole territory of Bukovica near Pljevlja (Montenegro) was ethnically cleansed. It used to have 28 villages with mainly Bosniak populations. The same happened to 31 villages of the region of Priboj (Serbia) and part of (30-80%) of the few hundreds of villages on the territory of Pester (Serbia) and Bihor (Montenegro).⁸ So the aim of those paramilitary and terrorist groups is obvious.

⁷ Dobrica Cosic and the Minister of Interior brought criminal charges against Mr. Alomerovic in mid 1996, but the charges were dropped when they discovered that Mr. Alomerovic indeed had incriminating evidence.

⁸ According to the statements of the leader of the Bosniak National Party, 90 000 citizens from Sandzak emigrated. According to the rare statements of the authorities of the time, that number was never bigger than 40 000 and of course according to them, these people had not been pressured or expelled, they left on their own accord. The report of Elizabeth Rehn, special reporter on human rights, dated 25 October 1996, stated that as a result of violence 60 000 to 80 000 Muslims left the region of Sandzak since 1992, finding shelter in different countries of West Europe. The International Crisis Group (ICG) estimated that 80 000 Bosniaks left Sandzak because since the beginning of the war in 1992, until the end of 1993, the Milosevic regime performed an official policy of expulsion of Muslims in this region. Considering the total number of Bosniaks in Sandzak (244 446), whatever figure is right represents a big percentage of the population to emigrate. This very fact shows the dimensions and aims of terror and violence that has been used to trigger emigration. Anyway, there is a big number of people who experienced the tragedy of asylum seekers, beginning with losing members of their families, burning of property, the expulsion whether by escape or voluntary departure from their homes, to the problems faced as refugees, and the impossibility of returning home.

There is no doubt that the creation of those extremist groups had their political and national motives, but there was also the desire to get rich by robbing and plundering the conflict region including Sandzak. There are many such examples, beginning with robbery, confiscation by force to more subtle forms of pressure like ransom.

Those groups had been used by Serbian and Montenegrin authorities for illegal trading with foreign countries as means to overcome sanctions applied since 1991. That situation strengthened the connections between organised crime and State organs and politicians. Those connections still exist.

The Post Dayton Period

The separate and completely different experience with organised crime of Serbia and Montenegro could be related to the post-Dayton period, especially after the frictions and complete separation between Serbian and Montenegrin authorities in mid 1997. According to analysts there is a significant difference between organised crime in Serbia and in Montenegro. In Serbia, especially during the Milosevic regime, organised criminal groups were made of former “patriot” members of paramilitary formations, who were using the State as an instrument, but some individuals from the top echelons of the State participated in racketing with these groups (Milosevic did it through his son Marko who at the time was Prime Minister of Serbia).

However, in Montenegro, organised crime was a function of the State and it facilitated trading and other forms of organised crime, like contraband of cigarettes, laundering money, etc. From the profits of such business the Montenegrin State also took money from “taxes” for using the port of Bar.⁹

⁹ Forum, #2 and #3, Forum for Ethnical Relations, Belgrade

Bosnian organised crime in Sandzak

Sandzak differs from other regions in Serbia and Montenegro because of the ethnic structure organised crime. During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the population of Sandzak, or the majority of it, was victim of terrorism and police violence, as well as victim of military and paramilitary units and some militant citizens of Serbian or Montenegrin origin who were affiliated to structures of authority.¹⁰

There is other evidence confirming the link between this form of crime and official authorities. Besides, the institutional, systematic political, economic, social, cultural and other discrimination against Bosniaks could be taken as a proof. The Helsinki Committee did a detailed analysis of 4 laws, 1 regulation and 1 legal surrogate according to which discrimination is being performed at a national level in territories with major Bosniak populations.¹¹ Such a relation to authorities in Sandzak prevented the development of terrorism and organised crime in extreme forms. On the other hand, the difficult economic and social position caused by national discrimination of Bosniak citizens caused the development of some types of organised crime involving Bosniaks.

One of the most frequent forms of organised crime in Sandzak is informal trading, or in slang, the “grey economy”. The beginning of this form of organised crime in Sandzak can also be connected to the

¹⁰ According to incomplete statistics and partial evidence of human rights violations in Sandzak between 1991 and 1995, Serbian and Montenegrin nationals performed 98 acts of extreme violence in Serbia in general and in Sandzak. There were 9 murders and 17 wounded. The rest refers to booby-trapping and bombing of businesses or appartments owned by Bosniaks. The Helsinki Committee also has date on big number of other forms of violence (general mistreatment, ransoming and confiscation of property) committed by Serbian and Montenegrin nationals. Those forms of violations couldn't be examined because of the mistrust of the victims.

¹¹ Law on Territorial Organization of the Republic of Serbia pertaining to Local Autonomy, Law on Special Conditions of Real Estate Turnover, Law on Area Plans of Serbia until 2010, and the Law on naming Undeveloped Regions of Serbia until 2005, as well as the regulation Program of Tasks and Measures for Faster Development and Making Slow Migration Movements in the Towns of Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin and Prijepolje. See also instructions of the Federal Ministry for Traffic and Connections, which forbids return of refugees from asylum in a European country.

appearance of extreme nationalist policies of the Serbian and Montenegrin regimes.

The forms of organised crime involving Bosniaks in Sandzak

The first form of organised crime is informal trading and the counterfeiting of brand name clothing and footwear. Informal trading in Sandzak began to grow with the imposition of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Bosniaks organised a wide network to import all kinds of goods. They avoid paying taxes, customs duties and all other obligations. Another form of informal economy in Sandzak that spread quickly is the production of jeans, counterfeiting of brand names like Levi's, Diesel, Legend and Calvin Klein.

There is also a developed white slavery trade. Young girls are taken mainly from developed centres of Serbia or other Eastern European countries. Sandzak became a transit centre for white slave trading, but also the ultimate destination for owners of night clubs dealing with prostitution. There is a belief that young girls prostitute themselves willingly, but there is no doubt that some of them fall in the spider's web of white slave traders unwittingly. In Tutin and Novi Pazar, two girls had to murder their pimps to escape slavery.

The Sandzak population faced drug problems after the war in Bosnia. Informal traders began trafficking drugs, making connections with criminal groups in Belgrade, Kosovo and Podgorica, but it is a public secret that drugs come from Turkey, through Kosovo to Sandzak. However, the number of users is low, especially for strong drugs. So we can suppose that the drug is distributed further in great quantities. Unfortunately, policing in Sandzak towns is inefficient, which is a great advantage for organizing these groups better.

By definition, informal trade and manufacture as well as white slavery is followed by street corruption (of municipal service clerks, medical doctors, traffic police, etc.), commercial corruption (of customs officers, tax collectors, high ranking politicians and judges from lower and higher court) with the aim of maintaining illegal trading and avoiding sanctions.

Both forms of corruption are extremely well-developed in Sandzak among the Bosniak population.

Some analysts think there is a danger of terrorism by some Bosniak extremists to support secessionist trends, as well as from those who lean towards a radical interpretation of Islam. But we think there is no possibility of either of these two extremes developing.

First, among Bosniaks in Sandzak, secessionist trends do not exist. They are legal and legitimate demands for equal status and democratization of society. Second, there is indeed a group gathered around the Sandzak mufti who has a radical perception of Islam, but they perform this radicalism through the strict observance of Islamic rites and dress codes. Nevertheless, Serbian authorities tried to use the terrorist attack on New York on September 11th and the anti-terrorism campaign led by the USA against them.

11th September and the anti-terrorist campaign in Serbia was used for implementation of nationalistic aims directed against Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandzak and Albanians in Kosovo who are mainly of islamic faith. The authorities in Belgrade even tried to justify crimes committed by Milosevic against Bosniaks and Kosovo Albanians, finding connections between Bosniak authorities and Al-Qaida and the so-called presence of Al-Qaida in Bosnian and Albanian armies.

What differs organised crime in Sandzak from other regions is that no organised crime here practices violence, which is undoubtedly a structural part of terrorism and means of organised crime in Serbia and Montenegro. Regardless, organised crime in Sandzak, like elsewhere in the world, represents a serious threat to democracy and prosperity.

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