

# Helsinki *bulletin*



**HELSINKI COMMITTEE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA**  
address: Rige od Fere 20,  
Belgrade, Serbia  
tel. +381-11-3032-408; fax. 2639-437;  
e-mail: office@helsinki.org.rs  
http://www.helsinki.org.rs

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## **NATIONAL BOSNIAK COUNCIL ELECTION: TEST FOR SERBIAN GOVERNMENT**

For the past two decades, Sandžak has been a crisis point which could rapidly be activated and come to the forefront. Belgrade policies served to radicalize the Muslim population in Yugoslavia ahead of the wars of the nineties. One of the theses used to justify them is that radical Islam brought Yugoslavia down<sup>1</sup>. Nor did that policy change after October 2000, despite the fact that Sandžak Bosniacs contributed to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević (2000) and, later, to the establishment of a pro-European government (2008).

Democratic governments have not distanced themselves from the strategy which treats Bosniacs as a disruptive force, nor have they in any way or by any gesture showed regret for the events of the nineties. The trials for crimes in Štrpci and Sjeverin were superficial, and did not go into the responsibility of those who inspired the crimes.

Every attempt of the Bosniacs to formalise their status as a minority has been faced with a lack of capability as well as constant obstruction from Belgrade. The irresponsibility of local

<sup>1</sup> That thesis, which historian Milorad Ekmečić advocated and elaborated, has been widely exploited by all media, both then and now.

politicians has also contributed to the creation of a political vacuum which, with the support of the people of Sandžak, has been skillfully exploited by Mufti Muamer Zukorlić. He has built his legitimacy on the understandable dissatisfaction of the locals, Belgrade's obstructionism and the irresponsibility of Rasim Ljajić and Sulejman Ugljanin.

Zukorlić has become a legitimate political player in Sandžak. In the meantime he has succeeded in creating an infrastructure which includes various segments of society: from the university, the Bosniac cultural community, the National Council of Bosniacs and the Islamic community, which has the support of the Bosniac population. Now underway is the establishment of a new political party which should take the place of the SDA and the SDP.

The arrogance of Human and Minority Rights Minister Svetozar Čiplić in introducing new procedural rules for setting up the National Council of Bosniacs after elections were over has further contributed to the exacerbation of relations in Sandžak and revealed the attitude of the authorities to the Bosniac minority. This gesture was also partly prompted by the interests of the ministers from Sandžak who wield

the power of blackmail, given that the governing coalition has a slender majority in the parliament. This special engineering has an additional impact on the loss of legitimacy of both ministers in Sandžak.

## ELECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

Elections for the national councils of ethnic minorities generated great expectations among minority populations because the direct elections were an opportunity to democratically resolve the problem of legitimacy of the councils and contribute to better integration of minorities into the political society. There were conflicting evaluations of the elections. Representatives of the authorities claimed the election procedure was irreproachable while minority representatives claimed that the way they were organised lacked seriousness, that there were “a million practical problems”, that the elections had left a bitter taste and that all of this was to the detriment of the state, because the elections are not only a minority issue.

Candidates for the elections for the National Council of Bosniacs stood on three tickets: the Bosniac ticket, Bosniac Rebirth and the Bosniac Cultural Community (BKZ)<sup>2</sup>. The greatest media attention was paid to the Bosniac Cultural Community headed by Sandžak Mufti Muamer Zukorlić. Zukorlić’s candidacy was supported by the Council of the Islamic Community in Serbia.

Zukorlić explained his participation in the elections by his desire to help preserve the Bosniac identity, adding that this was his response to

<sup>2</sup> The largest number of seats was won by the Bosniac Cultural Community with 17, then the Bosniac ticket with 13, while the Bosniac Rebirth won 5.

the “injustice done to Bosniacs” and his desire to change Belgrade’s relationship with Bosniacs. He announced that he expected the state not to treat Bosniacs as a threat to the state, but to accept them as a positive resource, as a segment of Serbia’s wealth and a factor for stability<sup>3</sup>. Zukorlić pointed out in his statements that “the regime in Belgrade is conducting a silent war against Bosniacs”, and that the feeling of insecurity and mistrust had forced him to sharpen his rhetoric<sup>4</sup> and dramatize the position of the Bosniacs and the elections for the national council. He presented the campaign as a special referendum in which the Bosniacs should decide between two concepts – authentically Bosniac and “pro-Belgrade”: the first, he said led to preservation of Bosniac identity while the second offered assimilation<sup>5</sup>.

His entrance onto the political stage was made possible by the local leaders of the two strongest Bosniac parties – Sulejman Ugljanin and Rasim Ljajić. They, he declared, wanted to put the Islamic community under their control and use it for party interests<sup>6</sup>. He also underlined their loss of political legitimacy in Sandžak, claiming that they were more representatives of the government in Sandžak than representatives of the Bosniacs in Belgrade<sup>7</sup>. He also disputed their contribution to the improvement of the status of Bosniacs<sup>8</sup>.

Zukorlić’s candidacy has been condemned as unacceptable meddling by the Islamic community in politics and judged as a poor move.

<sup>3</sup> “Belgrade regime conducting a silent war against Bosniacs”, [www.danas.rs](http://www.danas.rs)

<sup>4</sup> “Belgrade regime conducting a silent war against Bosniacs”, [www.danas.rs](http://www.danas.rs)

<sup>5</sup> “Bosniac referendum in Serbia”, [www.glas-javnosti.rs](http://www.glas-javnosti.rs)

<sup>6</sup> “Belgrade regime conducting a silent war against Bosniacs”, [www.danas.rs](http://www.danas.rs)

<sup>7</sup> “Patience has bounds”, Arena, June 21, 2010

<sup>8</sup> “Everything they have done,” said Zukorlić, “has been ineffective for these people”. “Belgrade regime conducting a silent war against Bosniacs”, [www.danas.rs](http://www.danas.rs)

Adem Zilkić, the grand mufti of the Islamic Community of Serbia (IZS) claims that the mufti (Zukorlić) has never been interested in religion<sup>9</sup>. Resad Hodžić, the president of the Sandžak Democratic Party (SDP), believes that the mufti's candidacy means that SDP could also found its own Islamic community<sup>10</sup>. Rasim Ljajić, leader of the SDPS, believes that this is not a good message and adds to the confusion, because it could occur to some politicians to put themselves forward for senior religious office<sup>11</sup>. However, according to Minister Čiplić, the candidacy of Mufti Zukorlić is a predictable and permissible activity<sup>12</sup>.

Zukorlić summed the elections up as "a great step forward for Bosniacs and the state of Serbia", because "in this campaign we were opposed by the machinery of two ministers, Sulejman Ugljanin and Rasim Ljajić, for whom Belgrade made all resources available. The closing stage of the campaign against us included even President Tadić who, during the pre-election media blackout, received a plaque from the Bosniac National Council for alleged contribution to the affirmation of the rights of Bosniacs<sup>13</sup>.

## CONSTITUTING THE COUNCIL

At the constitutive session (July 7) only BKZ representatives appeared, together with two representatives from the Bosniac Rebirth ticket. Mevludin Dudić was elected president and Samir Tandir chair of the Executive Board. The Minister of Human and Minority Rights, however, did not recognize the national council

thus established and announced the holding of a new constitutive session and, failing that, new elections. In response to this, Zukorlić announced that the BKZ would not stand in new elections because Bosniacs had a representative body and regarded the matter as closed. He branded Čiplić and Ljajić an organised gang and accused Ljajić of concocting fraud and falsification and Čiplić of implementing it all with the help of his people<sup>14</sup>.

The basic problem with establishment of the National Council of Bosniacs was that the Ministry of Human Rights was unhappy with the fact that Zukorlić's team won a majority at the elections. Because of this, the day before the council was constituted, the ministry changed some of the rules. The rules were changed, claimed the ministry, in order to clarify some provisions: because of the particular nature of the Bosniac minority, a regulation was added about a qualifying majority. Minister Čiplić, as a reason for the change in procedure, also expressed "suspicion that the ministry would succumb to pressure from the BKZ ticket to accept a simple majority vote as sufficient for constitution of a national council. This concern was based on the fact that pressure has been applied to two members of the Bosniac Rebirth ticket to cross over to the BKZ. Because of this suspicion, members from two tickets did not appear at the constitutive session"<sup>15</sup>. Petar Antić, the assistant minister for human and minority rights, said that the regulation requiring a two thirds minority to constitute a representative body came directly from the Serbian Constitution<sup>16</sup>.

The Ministry representatives left the meeting, claiming that the conditions for establishing

9 <http://www.vesti.rs/Vesti>

10 "SDP(S) in panic" <http://sandžakpress.net>

11 "Politics becomes a market", [www.novosti.rs](http://www.novosti.rs)

12 Čiplić: Mufti has the right to stand", <http://sandžakpress.net>. The "Hungarian Accord" included four clerics – two bishops, one Orthodox bishop and a priest.

13 Danas, June 8, 2010

14 "Zukorlić: brutal insult for Bosniacs", Danas, July 11, 2010

15 "Čiplić opens the doors to abuse", Blic, July 30, 2010

16 "Simmering today, tomorrow it could boil over", NIN, July 22, 2010



the national council had not been met, but the candidates present continued working and set up the new council. Faced with the breach of good democratic practice, the BKZ leaders described this move as yet more trickery by Belgrade<sup>17</sup> and said they would file criminal complaints against those responsible in the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights<sup>18</sup>.

Jelko Kacin, the European Parliament's rapporteur for the Balkans, also drew attention to the problems in constituting the Bosniac council since, as he underlined, it violates the legal state because of discrimination and attempts to introduce new rules which did not exist at all. He emphasised that "after intervention by the ombudsman and with the help of the OSCE, the

problems have begun to be solved, but that the job is not finished yet. Until it is resolved, until the Bosniac National Council is established, there simply must be warnings about it<sup>19</sup>".

Nevena Petrušić, the commissioner for the protection of the rights of minorities, and Ombudsman Saša Janković, have ascertained that only in the case of the Bosniac council did the ministry change the rules on minority councils. Saša Janković announced that he would launch proceedings to investigate the legality of these moves by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. In an opinion submitted to the Serbian Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, the commissioner for the defence of equality, Nevena Petrušić, said that it was unjustifiable that the conditions for constituting the National Council of Bosniacs were different from those for other councils of minorities and that this violated the principle of equal electoral rights for citizens. She added that the principle of equality had been violated by the adoption of new rules for the constitutive session of the

17 "Bosniac Council constituted anyway", <http://www.b92.net>

18 LDP MP Kenan Hajdarević also sharply criticised the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights. He claimed that the ministry, by changing the rules, had distorted the electoral will of the Bosniacs and created a Bosniac National Council to suit the party and personal desires of the two Bosniac ministers in the Serbian Government. "BKZ constitutes, ministry challenges", *Danas*, July 8, 2010

19 Radio Free Europe, October 10, 2010

national council of the Bosniac national minority on July 6, which stipulated that for constitution of the national council it is necessary to verify at least two thirds of the seats. She emphasised that “this rule is not in the procedures by which the national councils of all other national minorities are constituted. By introducing a special condition only for constituting the national council of the Bosniac national minority, discrimination was committed, which is prohibited by the Serbian Constitution, international agreements and legal regulations<sup>20</sup>”.

Non-governmental organisations have also pointed out that the change of election rules created problems after the elections. Aleksandar Popov from the Centre for Regionalism assessed the problems as being greater than they had been before the elections and said that dialogue was the only option for achieving a joint resolution of the problems<sup>21</sup>. The Centre for Development of the Civil Society warned that the situation “is becoming red hot” and that the problems were largely produced in Belgrade and not in the field, for which responsibility lay with those in power, the Government of Serbia and its relevant ministries<sup>22</sup>.

## REACTION IN SANDŽAK

The declaration adopted at the sitting of the Bosniac National Assembly (BNS) – held just days after the constitutive session of the National Council – “sharply condemns the legal and political barbarism of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights”, and demanded the urgent replacement of Minister Čiplić<sup>23</sup>, fur-

ther demanding the establishing of responsibility of those involved in the falsification of the electoral will of Bosniacs. The Assembly’s declaration called on candidates from the other two tickets to join the work of the Bosniac National Council. With the aim of affirming and resolving the status of Sandžak, the Assembly formed a Committee for the Restoration of the People’s Council of Sandžak, and a special Committee for the Internationalisation of the Issue of Discrimination against Bosniacs. The Declaration proclaimed the Bosniacs a constitutive nation in Serbia, and demanded urgent discussions with the president of the republic and the government in order to resolve the issue of the constitutional status of Bosniacs.

The declaration was an additional demonstration of how the problems connected with the Bosniac National Council election had been complicated and exacerbated, as well as being expanded to include other issues. Muamer Zukorlić contributed to that exacerbation himself when he declared that “playing with Sandžak means trifling with this part of Serbia. The state is like a building within which the residents can like each other or not. If the majority of residents decide to set fire to one apartment, they’re taking the risk of the whole building catching fire. Fire is not for playing with. Either things will be nice for all of us or there will be fires all the way up to the top. Only our house won’t burn<sup>24</sup>.”

Zukorlić’s statements did not fail to draw a response. It was noted that they were irresistibly reminiscent of the rhetoric which in its own

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because, he said, there was a danger that there would be abuse of this will by the Bosniac cultural community. “Zukorlić diverts the political will of Bosniacs”, Danas, August 23, 2010

24 “Zukorlić threatens Tadić with fire”, <http://srb.time.mk> If nothing else, Zukorlić remains consistent. In an interview with Novi Sad’s Arena, he said that he would always step up the rhetoric when confronted with injustice.

20 Kurir, August 14, 2010

21 “Authorities accused of providing ammunition to extremists”, Dnevnik, August 28, 2010

22 Ibid.

23 Minister Čiplić explained that the rule on a two thirds minority being necessary for constituting the National Council by the need to protect the electoral will of Bosniacs

day could be heard at meetings of Serbs from Kosovo<sup>25</sup>, that Zukorlić, as a man of dangerous intentions, pathological vanity and frightening personal ambition, was playing with the fate of all of us, that he was exploiting the poverty and lack of prospects of people in the Raška region to literally call for a jihad<sup>26</sup>, that he was contributing to an incendiary atmosphere and that his calculated statements could provide a motive for terrorists and violence<sup>27</sup>, that an atmosphere of chaos, incidents and the creation of parallel institutions would suit him<sup>28</sup>, that he was aiming to impose himself as an inviolable leader, a lord of life and death controlling work, education, hospital treatment, places in kindergartens and, in one word: survival<sup>29</sup>. In addition there were accusations that he was in breach of the Serbian Constitution, that he was attempting to usurp the Constitutional rights of Bosniacs and exploiting the national council as a body which would seek the federalisation of Serbia with Bosniacs as a constituent part<sup>30</sup>

## EXACERBATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY IN SERBIA

At the end of July, the Serbian Government brought a decision which further exacerbated relations with the Islamic Community in Serbia (IZuS) which is headed by Muamer Zukorlić.

25 "About the latest events in Sandžak", Statement of the Centre for the Development of the Civil Society (CRCD) [www.cdcs.org.rs](http://www.cdcs.org.rs)

26 See "Dangerous mufti and feeble state", [www.pressonline.rs](http://www.pressonline.rs)

27 "Zukorlić stirring up radical Islamism", [www.vesti-online.com](http://www.vesti-online.com)

28 Esad Džudžević, leader of the Bosniac ticket, "Džudžević: Atmosphere of chaos in Sandžak suits Zukorlić", *Politika*, September 5, 2010

29 "Zukorlić: Setting Bosniacs against brothers and neighbours", *Blic*, September 5, 2010

30 Minister Čiplić, "Zukorlić plays at divisions", *Politika*, August 20, 2010

By this decision, the government changed the membership of the Commission for Religious Instruction so that Muslims were now represented only by Grand Mufti Zilkić. Before this decision, both Islamic communities had their own representatives.

Mevludin Dudić<sup>31</sup> cites two factors in his replacement. First, in 2007, he refused to join the "para-religious formation" of the Islamic Community of Serbia (IZS, represented by Grand Mufti Zilkić) and, second, he had recently been elected president of the Bosniac National Council. In a letter to Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković, the Mesihat of the IZuS alleged that Dudić had been replaced without either informing or consulting IZuS. A letter was also sent to religious communities which have members in the commission in which it was underlined that the IZuS was not asked to propose one of its members, nor was it informed of the removal and the nomination of new members, but that everything was done without its knowledge. Dudić's dismissal also drew a response from the Association of Islamic Religious Teachers which asked for this decision to be revoked and for a meeting with the Education Ministry. The Association warned that, if these demands were not met, mass protests of Imams and religious teachers would be organised<sup>32</sup>, parents and students would be

31 M. Dudić was a member of the Commission for Religious Instruction from its founding (2004)

32 Members of both Islamic communities scheduled protests, but these were not held. Rešad Plojović, the mufti of Belgrade and Novi Sad, said that the protest in front of the Government building was cancelled because the Association of Religious Teachers of IZuS did not want to fall into the trap of the problem created by the replacement of the IZuS member on the Commission for Religious Instruction being presented as a conflict among Muslims. We have, he said, a problem with the regime in Belgrade, and it's not about a dispute among Muslims. "Government decision divides Muslims", *Danas*, September 1, 2010.

Mufti Muhamed Jusufspahić said that the protest of IZuS religious teachers was not held for quite opposite reasons

called to boycott instruction<sup>33</sup>, and members of the Islamic community to civil disobedience, together with the organisation of other forms of peaceful protest<sup>34</sup>.

Muamer Zukorlić described the replacement of Dudić as an “attack on Muslims because they dared to ask for their religious and national rights<sup>35</sup>. Zukorlić also criticised the Ser-

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– because it failed to draw sufficient numbers. Because their gathering was not held, the IZS counter-meeting was also postponed. Jusufspahić expressed readiness for the two communities to meet and look each other in the eye. He announced also that he agreed with Mufti Zukorlić on ninety per cent of issues because he spoke the truth. However, he said, with that truth he wants something untruthful. Because Zukorlić was trying to throw a basket where he shouldn't, we must be there, said Jusufspahić picturesquely, to throw him a banana. “ We have to throw Zukorlić a banana.” *www.vesti-online.com*

33 From the Bajram Academy in Prijepolje, Zukorlić invited parents and pupils to boycott religious instruction which would, he said, be conducted by unqualified instructors. The directors of certain schools in Novi Pazar were, according to the media, in a bind over which instructors to engage. By law they are obliged to employ those on a list provided by the Education Ministry, but the Islamic Community in Serbia (IZuS) was warning that – if they did not engage teachers from their list – this would result in a boycott of classes. Protests were held outside some schools. In the Selakovac Primary School, the director, according to Politika, was subject to unpleasantness. According to the media one of Mufti Zukorlić's bodyguards physically attacked him because he hired the “wrong” religious teacher. However the ISuZ Web site carried the information that no such incidents occurred at this meeting.

34 “Seeking change of Government decision”, *Danas*, August 23, 2010. The Ministry of Religion issued a statement describing as unacceptable that the government decision was a consequence of a discriminatory attitude to religious teaching, adding that religious instruction must not be endangered by personnel changes, that Dudić had not been replaced as a member of the commission but had left his position on his own initiative and that religious instruction could not be a test range for inciting divisions in the Islamic community and a place for the settling of any kind of political accounts. “Ministry claims Zukorlić refuses to cooperate”, *Danas*, August 31, 2010

35 “Ever clearer calls for autonomy”, *Danas*, August 20,

bian Orthodox Church (SPC) because it had failed to respond to the letter to other religious communities, thus, he said, “legitimizing our awareness that the Serbian Orthodox Church is very interested in seeing the Islamic Community weakened, in its development being halted and that state organs are an instrument of the Church in implementing its program<sup>36</sup>”. Orthodox Bishop Irinej Bulović described this accusation as untrue and maliciously contrived lies and said that Zukorlić “cares neither about religious instruction nor about presenting religious teaching in the media nor about any religious rights of Serbian Muslims. The stoning of buses, the burning of the Serbian flag, violence to a school director and many other acts point to his intentions being completely otherwise<sup>37</sup>.”

## ISLAMIC COMMUNITY PROPERTY

The problem of property belonging to the Islamic Community has also come to the surface after smouldering for some time. The trigger was construction of a kindergarten on a parcel in the Fifth Local Community in Novi Pazar which IZuS claims to be the property of Vakuf. The General Council of IZuS described this as the culmination of violence, discrimination and trampling on the fundamental rights of Muslims, while the Mesihat of the IZuS issued proclamation calling the faithful to a protest to be held on the disputed land. The protest was prevented by police, who were met by a barrage of stones, roofing tiles and foul language<sup>38</sup>. Because IZuS officials had not suc-

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36 “Church behind conflict in IZS”, *Danas*, August 20, 2010. (September 3, 2010) According to Zukorlić, the SPC is retaliating against the IZ because, when the Church and Religious Communities Act was adopted, they opposed the SPC having legal and formal favoured status.

37 “Irinej replies to Zukorlić”, *www.pressonline.rs*

38 Six police officers were injured in the incident.

ceeded in having the police allow access to the disputed land, a number of protesters blocked access roads to the town. That evening, Zukorlić called on the authorities to begin talks in order to maintain peace and stability in Sandžak. LDP leader Čedomir Jovanović<sup>39</sup> played an important role in mediating these discussions.

Interior Minister Dačić said that they “don’t want conflicts,” but that no one could attack police and then expect them not to react to those attacks<sup>40</sup>. Tomo Zorić, the press representative for the Prosecutor’s Office of the republic, said that the prosecution was monitoring the situation and that, if elements of criminal responsibility were established, criminal proceedings would be launched<sup>41</sup>. DHSS leader Vladan Batić says everything Muamer Zukorlić has done to date has elements of disseminating national and religious hatred and division

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Protesters shouted “Rasim, you thief”, “Suljo, you thief”, “Rasim the Serb”, and “Suljo the Serb”. The police officers were branded Chetniks who had been slaughtering people in Kosovo. Imam Sead Šaćirović explained the insults he had hurled by saying that one police officer had shouted to him that “I wasn’t in Srebrenica and that he would kill us the same way he killed our fellows there”. “Seizing power with riots”, *Pravda*, September 6, 2010

39 “Jovanović is behaving like Zukorlić’s political branch and I believe that he is doing so because he wants to win votes in Sandžak. I don’t know what’s wrong with him,” said SDPA official Meho Omerović. “Omerović: Čeda is a spokesman for Zukorlić”, <http://www.Sandžaklive.rs>

40 “Dačić: Police can’t solve political and religious problems,” *Dnevnik*, September 6, 2010. Several protesters addressed threats to the Novi Pazar correspondent for *Danas*, Slađana Novosel. UNS, the Association of Serbian Journalists roundly condemned the threats.

41 “We are monitoring and analysing the situation closely. We are calling for tolerance,” said the Prosecutor’s Office, “and we are warning that there is a thin line between freedom of speech and the crime of inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance,” “Prosecution warns Zukorlić”, *Blic*, September 7, 2007

and says it is time for the state to react to this because tomorrow could be too late<sup>42</sup>. Darko Trifunović, an expert on international terrorism also says the state should react if Zukorlić crosses the line and breaks the law: “He is on the borderline, and that’s the space in which he is moving, while tension grows in Sandžak. His speeches do not constitute a crime but his words should be condemned because he is hiding behind a robe and a turban<sup>43</sup>”. Zukorlić’s activities are raising tensions, said military analyst Aleksandar Radić, adding that a security crisis is being contrived and will be followed by an attempt to internationalise the problem<sup>44</sup>. Radić believes that the government should show authority but that there should also be discussions with Zukorlić.

## INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY IN NOVI PAZAR

The Novi Pazar International University was founded in 2002 with the support of the then prime minister, Zoran Đinđić. Belgrade has persistently tried to damage the credibility of this university by stalling or failing to regularly issue accreditation to its constituent faculties or by favouring the state university in Sandžak. Meanwhile the International University has become one of the largest in Serbia. Čedomir Jovanović (LDP) emphasizes that it is “necessary to bring an immediate halt to the constant production of problems and to resolve the most important problems very quickly. These included finally recognizing the legitimate make-up of the Bosniac National Council, issuing all accreditations to which the faculties of the International University in Novi Pazar are entitled and finding a way, through dialogue, to begin solving all the other problems

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42 “Arrest Zukorlić”, *Pravda*, September 7, 2010

43 *Ibid.*

44 “Seizing power through riots”, *Pravda*, September 6, 2010



which cannot be reduced to technical or property and legal issues". He points out that "this university was supported by the government in 2002 because it wanted to help young people in Sandžak which, as the youngest region in Europe, was without a single opportunity for studying. Today this is one of the largest universities in the country and this is adequate proof that we were not wrong at the time. On the contrary, it is the incumbent authorities who are wrong, who are depriving this university of accreditation, exacerbating the problems and the lack of understanding in Sandžak<sup>45</sup>".

Jelko Kacin also commented on the International University, saying he believed that "Belgrade is conducting a policy which is totally counterproductive, which is based on conflict and which does not make any contribution to improving Serbia's image. On the contrary, even in the matter of the status of minorities, where some progress has been made, everything I have mentioned here is dragging Serbia backwards<sup>46</sup>".

## DIALOGUE OR INTERNATIONALIZATION

Zukorlić has repeatedly sought dialogue with Belgrade, but these requests have been ignored. Belgrade saw these requests as a desire first, by meetings with the most senior state officials, to weaken the authority of the two Bosniac leaders and ministers in the republic government and, second, to establish Zukorlić as a key figure in resolving problems. Problems in Sandžak have usually boiled down to squabbles among the Bosniacs and a struggle between Bosniac leaders for political supremacy<sup>47</sup>.

45 <http://www.islamskazajednica.org>

46 Radio Free Europe, October 19, 2010

47 In the opinion of Dejan Vuk Stanković, the issue here is a struggle for political supremacy between Bosniac parties. "Zukorlić would like to be the unassailable leader of the

Zukorlić repeatedly emphasized that they were ready for dialogue at all levels. "We want to talk. We want to solve the problems through dialogue and talks but we will not sit by with our arms folded. We still insist on internationalization. We shall present this tyranny to all international institutions and organizations, in both the West and the East<sup>48</sup>." The same tone appeared in a letter to EU Foreign Affairs and Security Commissioner Catherine Ashton, which demanded that "international observers be sent to the Sandžak region".

The status of Bosniacs in Sandžak was also discussed at the annual meeting of the Muslim World League (Rabita) in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. At that meeting, Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić asked that Muslims in Serbia who followed Zukorlić be protected from the violation of human and religious rights. Zukorlić himself spoke at this meeting about the endangering of the religious and national rights of Muslims. The conference also saw an initiative launched for the Islamic Community to be Sandžak's link with the Islamic world for investments in the region.

A Committee for Support for Sandžak was set up in Sarajevo in September with the aim of giving "full and multi-layered support to the struggle of Bosniacs in Sandžak on their path to securing full freedom and all individual and collective rights, against the ever more frequent discrimination against Bosniacs on religious and ethnic grounds<sup>49</sup>". Avdo Hebib, a fighter for human rights and the rights of Bosniacs, former Interior Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the incumbent president of the Patriotic League Association, was elected chairman of the committee.

Bosniacs. "Seizing power through riots", Pravda, September 6, 2010

48 "Chief mufti again calls authorities to dialogue", [www.islamskazajednica.org](http://www.islamskazajednica.org)

49 <http://www.islamskazajednica.org>

Serbian officials say there is no need at all for the presence of foreign observers<sup>50</sup>, while opponents of Zukorlić in Sandžak believe that observers should see that “there is a man in Europe, a religious leader, who has his own television station, university and a motor pool bigger than that of the municipal council and who is announcing the establishment of a political party<sup>51</sup>”.

## SANDŽAK: NEW HOTBED OF CRISIS

In Belgrade there is a different official and unofficial explanation of Muamer Zukorlić’s activities. Events involved in the setting up of the Bosniac National Council have inspired some commentators to describe Sandžak as a new hotbed of crisis which could destabilize the country and the region. Darko Tanasković, a professor at the Faculty for Security Studies, claims that “we are not far off having suicide terrorists because we already have everything else: from Wahabbism to the glorification of Al Qaeda and Mujahideen on various Web sites<sup>52</sup>”. Ninoslav Krstić sees these events as a consequence of incendiary statements on the establishment of Sandžak’s autonomy while, for Zukorlić, they are a consequence of hopelessness and the increase in tensions. He says these incidents deserve to be condemned but cannot be seen as more significant than violation of the Constitution, discrimination against

50 “There is not a single objective reason for Serbia to need European and other observers,” said Minister Čiplić, adding: “If anyone thinks that foreign observers should support someone who opposes the construction of a kindergarten, then that someone has strayed into politics.” “Mufti appealing in vain”, *www.novosti.rs*

51 Ibid.

52 *www.vesti-online.com*

Bosniacs and the endangering of the Islamic community.

Momir Stojanović, the former director of the Military Security Agency, interprets events in Sandžak as a message from the West: “Here’s what we can do if you don’t soften your position on Kosovo. What’s being said here is this – if you don’t do what you are asked to do, we will set Sandžak ablaze.” He is of the opinion that Zukorlić has close connections with leaders in BiH and Kosovo and that he enjoys the strong support of radical Islamic centres in Iran and Saudi Arabia, from whose foundations he also receives funding<sup>53</sup>. DSS spokesman Petar Petković also expressed the suspicion that some foreign countries are behind events in Sandžak. He called on state bodies to investigate whether the Friends of Sandžak club, which includes the ambassadors to Belgrade of some of the most influential countries, is behind Zukorlić’s behaviour<sup>54</sup>.

Dževad Galijašević, an expert in terrorism, says that Zukorlić “is a clone of Grand Mufti Cerić and has bagged for himself the role of a Balkan ayatollah. What they have in common”, he adds, “is major Arab capital, a taste for the Wahabbi and a wink from America for everything they do<sup>55</sup>”. He points out that it is Mustafa Cerić who advocates the thesis that all issues in Serbia should be resolved by dialogue between

53 “West setting Sandžak ablaze over Kosovo”, *Alo*, September 7, 2010. Stojanović asserted that the authorities are responsible for what he described as the dizzying rise of Zukorlić. For the sake of Muslim votes from Sandžak, the authorities openly flirted with Zukorlić and helped him become what he is now. Both the late Prime Minister Đindić and President Tadić had collaborated with Zukorlić and supported him, said Stojanović.

54 Ibid.

55 “Zukorlić playing for America”, *Alo*, September 10, 2010. In mid-September information appeared in the media that Zukorlić is attempting to split Sandžak from Serbia with the assistance of the US Congress. “US congressman lobbying for secession of Sandžak”, *Pravda*, September 15, 2010

the two constituent peoples, Serbs and Bosniacs, and that Zukorlić's ultimate aim is not the territorial autonomy of Sandžak but the fueling of instability and the destruction of Serbia as an important regional factor, because the strengthening of Serbia is not conducive to US interests in the region.

Ninoslav Krstić is of the opinion that instability in the Raška region is emerging according to the same scenario as that in Kosovo. Krstić claims to have information from foreign intelligence services that this instability has already been in preparation for two years and that Muamer Zukorlić has been selected to implement it. "We are now in the phase in which attacks on police will begin and become increasingly frequent and the Serbian side will be blamed for everything". Krstić describes the situation in Sandžak as very dangerous and adds that "the call for autonomy is a call for the creation of a state and the call for the creation of a state is secession and annexation – and we know to whom<sup>56</sup>."

Darko Tanasković believes that the activities of Mufti Zukorlić and Grand Mufti Cerić are part of the same project. "It is indicative that their accusations against Belgrade are being stepped up at exactly the time the opinion of the International Court of Justice on the self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo is expected... Apparently it is necessary to contribute to the creation of an impression that Serbia is still a problematic state which does not respect the rights of its citizens of Muslim denomination. If this results in at least a few cases of Muslim countries recognizing Kosovo's independence the job will have been done<sup>57</sup>."

Miša Đurković of the Centre for Conservative

56 "West preparing Sandžak secession", *Politika*, September 5, 2010

57 "Zukorlić's clamour must not drown out other Bosniac voices", *Politika*, July 25, 2010

Studies believes that the aim of the Balkan transition is to reduce Serbia to the pre-Kumanovo borders and that it is only a matter of days before the issue of Sandžak will be activated. Đurković believes that a large part of the Serbian political elite share responsibility for Zukorlić's rise to prominence. As the spiritual child of Mustafa Cerić, Zukorlić established a strong university which became the main recruitment and training centre for his future disciples. Control of the university secured Zukorlić a key tool for shaping and directing the future Sandžak intelligentsia, young and determined people. This gave him a vital mechanism for long-term ascendancy over the administrative sectors and, thus, of real power in the region. Đurković also described the measures taken by Minister Čiplić as detrimental to the state, saying that they have only added fuel to the flames and contributed to Zukorlić's popularity.

Dušan Janjić, the director of the Forum for Ethnic Relations, is of the opinion that talks with Zukorlić are in order. He believes that the meeting between a Sandžak delegation and US Congressman Keith Ellison was "yet another warning for Boris Tadić that he must sit down and talk to Zukorlić<sup>58</sup>". Janjić also expressed doubts about Serbia's capability of finding, on its own, a successful model for the integration of minorities, saying that it will need outside help for this. In his opinion, the situation in Sandžak testifies to the collapse of the government's policy on minorities<sup>59</sup>.

Boris Tadić said that a stable society in Serbia requires greater dedication to resolving the issue of the status of religious communities and national minorities. He emphasized, however, that it is not usual European practice for political discussions to be conducted by the

58 "US congressman lobbying for Sandžak secession", *Pravda*, September 15, 2010

59 "Collapse of state policy on Sandžak", [www.dw-world.de](http://www.dw-world.de)

representatives of religious communities. National and religious issues must be separated and discussions should be held with anyone who has legitimacy in their own field<sup>60</sup>. With this statement, Tadić backed Ljajić and Ugljanin, whom he sees as the political representatives of the Bosniac national community.

Rasim Ljajić, however, claims that Sandžak will not be a hotbed for crisis because it does not have the potential for that<sup>61</sup>. Meho Omerović, a member of the Serbian Parliament Security Committee, shares his opinion. He believes that the grave economic situation provides fertile ground for provoking incidents, but that the Bosniacs are not a security threat to the state of Serbia, nor that the state of Serbia treats Bosniacs in any way but as equal citizens. Omerović did, however, admit that there had been some errors in the behaviour of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, mostly concerning the change of the “famous rules”<sup>62</sup>.

However Zukorlić believes that neither Ljajić nor Ugljanin have legitimacy to act as representatives of the Bosniacs but may, he says, take part in discussions as representatives of

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60 “Tadić rejects dialogue with Bosniacs”, *www.sandzak-press.net*

61 “Sandžak will not erupt in flames”, *www.novosti.rs*

62 “Sandžak is not Kosovo”, August 23, 2010. On the subject of errors, Ombudsman Saša Janković said that he would institute proceedings against the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights in order to establish the errors in its work. It should also be noted that the commissioner for information of public importance, Rodoljub Sabić, has filed twelve criminal complaints against persons unknown for unauthorized collection, use and falsification of information when compiling special voter rolls. Finally, Nevena Petrušić, the commission for the protection of equality, asked the ministry to change the rules for constituting the Bosniac National Council because the requirement for verification of two thirds of the seats had violated the principle of equality. The ministry, said Petrušić, “has acted on the recommendation and, with the removal of this discriminatory provision, my work is completed.” “Ombudsman announces charges”, *www.e-novine.com*

the government<sup>63</sup>. He also challenges the legitimacy of the two largest parties which, in his opinion, do not conduct either a Bosniac or a Sandžak policy but a pro-Belgrade one. Both the Party of Democratic Action of Sandžak and the Sandžak Democratic Party have, according to Zukorlić, lost the purpose of their existence, they have drifted away from the people, distanced themselves from their platforms and become hostages of their positions in Belgrade. For years they had fed on their mutual hostility and this has created a political space for the emergence of a third political option.

The Bosniac Democratic Union (BDZ) is a new party now being established under the leadership of Emir Elfić. He has said that BDZ will be a party of the democratic centre which will focus primarily on the interests of Bosniacs and on Sandžak’s economic recovery. It could become an important factor in calming the situation, as well as an interesting partner for the opposition parties in Belgrade<sup>64</sup>. The grave economic situation in Sandžak – Novi Pazar has been described as the economic equivalent of a fire-gutted building – works to the advantage of the new party.

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63 “Because Ljajić and Ugljanin are representatives of the government in Sandžak, we have absolutely no problem with them taking part in talks as government representatives, on the other side,” said Zukorlić. “Muamer Zukorlić: we want negotiations with the Serbian Government”, *Danas*, September 7, 2010

64 Zukorlić also supported the founding of the party and it could, among other things, also contribute to Zukorlić ridding himself of some of the pressure he has long been subject to over entering politics without doffing his clerical turban.

## INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

The approach of Human and Minority Rights Minister Svetozar Ciplić and Religious Communities Minister Bogoljub Šijaković to the performance of their functions comes from a starting position based on power and discrimination rather than on a dialogue with the representatives of minorities. This indicates that the state lacks inclusive policies and political will to resolve the minorities issue in Serbia. The resignation of Marko Karadžić, the secretary of state with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, has underlined the feebleness of this ministry. State Secretary Karadžić was one of the few representatives of the authorities who spoke clearly and unambiguously of the state's responsibility to honour human rights, especially in concrete cases of violence and discrimination.

Discussions between the representatives of election tickets, which had been scheduled for October 1, were not held, and a meeting held earlier in Belgrade had made it obvious that agreement was well nigh impossible. This was also hinted at by a representative of the Bosnian ticket, Esad Džudžević, who finds it unacceptable for Zukorlić's people to occupy senior positions in the national council "because he has crossed the line and has triggered violence". Bosnian Rebirth are also intractable, demanding five seats on the council, the number they won in the election. Nor will the Bosnian Cultural Community give up on their demands, however they are not against elections "provided that there are OSCE representatives at each and every polling station". Mevludin Dudić said that they have no intention of taking part in any election organized by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights.

Jelko Kacin, the European Parliament's rapporteur for Serbia, said that responsibility for the

success of dialogue on the establishment of the Bosniac National Council, launched under the auspices of the OSCE, is borne particularly by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. He emphasized that the reasons for this conflict, as he described it, are deeper and stem from the grave economic situation in Sandžak, one of the most underdeveloped regions of Serbia, as well as from the divisions in the Islamic community which date back to the government of Vojislav Koštunica. He also said that dialogue with Zukorlić cannot be avoided although he is not only a citizen but also a mufti. "He has his rights, while many in the region perceive in him the personification of their attitude to the minority community. This is a measure of the degree of collateral damage being done on both sides<sup>65</sup>.

The demands for new elections from the executive authorities will further undermine their already low credibility. The demands for autonomy and restoration of the People's Council of Sandžak testify to this. Some Bosniacs see this as a way to protect their identity and their minority rights. Zukorlić has said that autonomy is inevitable and that the most desirable model is the autonomy of South Tyrol because it includes cross-border, dual autonomy which does not jeopardise the identity of either Italy or Austria<sup>66</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Tanjug, October 3, 2010

<sup>66</sup> The idea of autonomy did not get a positive reception. It was seen as politically unserious (Mirsad Jusufović, SDP) and an idea which is bound to fail (Branko Ružič, SPS). SNS MP Branislav Pelević said that the idea came as no surprise, that Zukorlić's aim is not autonomy but unification with BiH, that he advocates war and that state bodies must react. In Čedomir Antić's opinion, advocacy for autonomy is way to weaken Serbia and Muslim nationalism in the Novi Pazar area seeks to create a foundation for political emancipation and secession from the Republic of Serbia. "Mufti revives idea of partisan movement", Politika, July 16, 2010. Serbian Government Minister Rasim Ljajić says that the idea of autonomy was launched to satisfy the passions of young people living there who do not know the meaning of

By relying on ministers from the ranks of the Bosniac community (Ugljanin and Ljajić) and by ignoring Zukorlić, the government will face ever stronger demands as time goes by and will have less and less space to find a compromise solution. By trying to reduce the problem to

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the word. ("IZuS calls for speedy restoration of autonomy", Blic, September 4, 2010), in other words that it is a hoax, launched for marketing and political reasons. Dnevnik, August 30, 2010.

the ambition and lust for power of one man, the government is missing an opportunity to realize that the problems in Sandžak are turning more and more into the Bosniac minority's problem with the state<sup>67</sup>.

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67 "Our message is clear," said Zukorlić, "In order for us to accept the state of Serbia and see it as our own, the state must see us as its citizens, rather than as second-class beings. We will not let up on this, no matter how it jars in their ears. If they regard us as second-class citizens, we will not perceive the state of Serbia as our homeland." "Bosniacs have fraction of state", [www.islamskazajednica.org](http://www.islamskazajednica.org)

## SUMMARY

The situation in Sandžak is evidence of the collapse of the government's policy on minorities. The resolution of the minorities issue cannot be based solely on the passage of legislation: that legislation must also be consistently and responsibly implemented. A change in the social ambience is also needed, something for which both the authorities and the media are responsible. Belgrade bears additional responsibility for resolving the current situation because to date this problem has never been resolved in a responsible manner. Some actions of the responsible minister have been inappropriate and wrong, and serious effort is required to achieve success and progress as soon as possible.

The authorities in Serbia have shown by their behaviour in the Sandžak case that they are not capable of finding a successful model for the integration of minorities on their own and they will need some outside help.

The constitution of the Bosniac National Council was a trigger which activated all the other unresolved problems of Sandžak. These problems, economic problems in particular, would be more easily and rapidly solved if at least some of the outstanding issues were to be successfully resolved, primarily the establishment of the national council.

The International University in Novi Pazar has become an important institution for the region and the state must take a constructive attitude to this, starting by regularly issuing accreditation to the university.

Belgrade's political interference in relations within the Islamic community and the taking of sides with one of the communities has resulted in divisions in Sandžak and destabilization of the situation. The authorities cannot avoid dialogue with Mufti Zukorlić as this would mean that they are not accepting reality.

Given the irreconcilable positions taken by participants in the election, everything points to new elections for the national council being organized for members of the Bosniac minority. If that happens, it is essential that the elections are organized by the OSCE in order to avoid conflict and further radicalization.