

BOSNIACS AND INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA: FROM HOPE AND LOYALTY TO BITTERNESS AND RESISTANCE

Abstract: *Bosniacs met the emergence of Independent State of Croatia with sympathy and hope that it would bring bigger rights for Bosniacs and Bosnia and Herzegovina than it had been the case during Kingdom of Yugoslavia. However, when they faced the real nature of the Ustasha regime, its intolerance towards non-Croats and brutality in politics of ethnic cleansing, especially the consequences of that politics for Bosniacs, they felt big disappointment and began to change their attitude towards the newly-proclaimed state. Their biggest concern became the necessity to defend themselves from rebels, mainly Chetniks, who considered Bosniacs responsible for crimes committed against Serbs. The political dimension of their new attitude was the claim for separation of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the territory of Independent State of Croatia. Slowly but surely Bosniacs were becoming aware that neither restoration of Yugoslav monarchy nor Croatian nationalistic state were the guarantee for their better and more peaceful future.*

Key words: *Bosniacs, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Independent State of Croatia, Ustasha regime, Muslim militia, anti-Ustasha 1941. resolutions, rais al-ulama, autonomy, resistance.*

Many relevant analyses regarding the attitude of Bosniacs towards Independent State of Croatia indicate that this issue has already got an appropriate treatment in historical science.¹ Nevertheless, considering the abundance of archival material elucidating our theme, as well as the multitude of historical factors shaping its content, there is no doubt that our knowledge about this issue can be enriched by new interesting and useful information. Especially since this topic still has not been the subject of integral historical analysis and treatment.

To understand the attitude of Bosniacs towards Independent State of Croatia it is of essential significance to explain the real nature of the attitude of the Ustasha regime towards Bosniacs. The essence of that attitude was not only the integration of Bosniacs into a Croatian state project and Croatian national ideology – the denial of particularity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and naming Bosniacs "the flowers of Croatian nationality". Immediately after the beginning of German invasion on Yugoslavia on 6th April 1941. Ante Pavelić sent a radio message to Croatian soldiers, *Catholics and Muslims*, inviting them into a decisive battle for establishment of an independent Croatian state, "stretching from Mura, Drava to Drina, and from Danube to the blue Adriatic Sea"². Four days later, after the proclamation of Independent State of Croatia, Slavko Kvaternik invited Bosniacs to line up under the Ustasha flag, advising them to obey the commander who would take power on behalf of Poglavnik, "as the most basic and most precious part of Croatian people"³. In both cases Bosniacs were treated as an object of political will, as a marginal group with no rights on their own political determination. From later reports of Croatian political and military officials on the mood of Bosniacs and the behaviour of their representatives, it was obvious that the new state mostly expected from Bosniacs only one: unconditional loyalty to the Croatian state and unquestionable obedience to the Ustasha authorities. *Sarajevski novi list* – a pro-Ustasha newspaper in Sarajevo, using the most visible spots, was explaining to Bosniacs that the right on carrying out politics and decision making belonged only to Poglavnik of Independent State of Croatia. Their right and obligation was to rely on his wise leadership and to follow the way he had chosen for them.

In Historical archive Sarajevo there is a letter of "forty intellectuals", with very unusual style and content, possibly the earliest Bosniac reaction to the establishment of Independent State of Croatia. The letter was written on 19th April 1941. and it was sent to rais al-ulama Fehim Spaho. In the letter the rais al-ulama was requested to, leading a deputation, along with other prominent Bosniacs, visit a commanding general of the German Reich in Sarajevo and express the wish and request of Bosnian Muslims "that the Führer, considering our majority in Bosnia, **should acknowledge the autonomy of Bosnia**, with a Muslim at the head"⁴. The initiative was justified by the necessity of preventing Bosniacs from being resigned observers peacefully watching their homeland being pulled out "in front of their noses" "and joined the newly established state of Croatia". "Every honor to our Croatian brothers, but Bosnia is ours!" The rais al-ulama was warned for the responsibility he had in front of all Bosniacs and history in case of passive attitude and silent watching of current events.

It is hard to say who could be the author of the quoted request. We do not know whether the mentioned group stood behind it. We do not know either whether they could be identified with the people who, according to Enver Redžić⁵, by the end of April 1941, along with a group of prominent Serbs from Sarajevo, requested from Hakija Hadžić the autonomous administration for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only certain facts are the absence of rais al-ulama Spaho in the initiative concerning autonomy, as well as the brutal reaction of Croatian authorities against the autonomists, especially the Serbian members of the deputation.⁶ This event seemed to have sown the seed of doubt among the Croatian state authorities in unconditional loyalty of Bosniacs towards Independent State of Croatia.

However, neither the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina nor the national ideology of Independent State of Croatia decisively determined the mood of Bosniacs towards the new state. The autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, even in later years, did not become the subject of wider Bosniac consensus. Proclaiming Bosniacs Croats was not even problematized at the collective and institutional level. The basic question involved religious and civil rights of Bosniacs and it was in these regions that hope appeared in development in relation to the former state.⁷ In this respect the Poglavnik's message to the rais al-ulama, delivered on 25th April 1941, seemed to have reached desired effect; after the rais al-ulama had informed district endowment commissions and local religious councils about the Poglavnik's wish that Muslims in ISC should feel comfortable, "free, equal and satisfied"⁸, a positive mood towards the new state appeared within the Islamic Community.⁹ Many believed that the time of anarchy and injustice towards Muslims had been definitely over.

However, soon the Bosniac religious leader faced confusing information which seriously relativized the primary enthusiasm. As soon as on 24th May 1941. he had to write to the state secretary of Ministry of Justice Asim Ugljen, begging him to correct the injustice committed to Hamdija Karamehmedović, a land-registry clerk in Maglaj, who was deprived of his job only because he had declared himself a Serb.¹¹ A local imam in Ljubuški informed him on 18th September 1941. that, without any procedure, five fulltime workers in the Tobacco factory had been sacked from work - Abdulah Orman, Mustafa Kadragić, Hazim Čerić, Hasan Osmić and Reško Hrnjičević.¹² In his letter to the minister of traffic and public works Hilmija Bešlagić (27th November 1941) the rais al-ulama complained about the fact that since the establishment of Independent State of Croatia the relationship between Muslims and Catholics in Duvno had been very bad, for what he blamed the Ustasha activists and local Catholics who, according to his opinion, had been plotting against Muslims, especially public officials.¹³ From month to month there was less and less room for faith in equal treatment of Bosniacs in the new state. When the Bosniac leaders in Travnik asked the commander of the 9. infantry regiment to dislocate the Serbian peasants' hostages from the building of the Fayziya madrasa, they actually requested for the same amount of justice and respect as it had been shown to the Archbishopal gymnasium in Travnik.¹⁴

The Ustasha crimes against Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and other objectionable elements opened the new phase in the attitude of Bosniacs towards Independent State of Croatia. Many authors wrote about the 1941. Bosniac resolutions and their role in raising their awareness and

aloofness from the Ustasha regime. Surely there is no space for the evaluation that the resolutions were made by a certain number of prominent Bosniacs "in the framework of the occupiers' reserve towards the Ustasha national politics and their own autonomist feelings, essentially with no intention to put an end to cooperation with Ustashes"¹⁵. But at the same time there is no basis for interpreting these resolutions as "anti-Fascist".¹⁶ One cannot talk about anti-Fascism under the conditions of depending on Germany as a political force which could enable the separation of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the territory of Independent State of Croatia.¹⁷ Let us mention that during 1942. *Glasnik Islamske vjerske zajednice Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* – the official herald of the Islamic Community, was praising the war efforts of Germany as the struggle "against godless Bolshevism and their allies – false democracies"¹⁸. The resolutions were a vivid manifestation of the increasing anti-Ustasha mood of Bosniac citizens – to identify loyalty to an enforced state with cooperation with the Ustasha movement is as baseless as the claim that the 1941. resolutions were "the important turning point in raising political awareness of wider Muslim classes"¹⁹.

At the end of 1941. Bosniac loyalty to Independent State of Croatia was already very wobbly. The foundation of the Volunteer division of major Hadžiefendić's popular uprising on 22nd December 1941. was a form of prevention against the Chetniks' crimes in Tuzla region, but also a vivid manifestation of Bosniac lack of confidence in political and military structures of the new state.²⁰ In the report of the command of the 3. Home-Guard assembly from 23rd December 1941. concerning the mood of people on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina it was emphasized that the people, both Catholics and Muslims, had lost confidence in power, "since they realize that the power is not capable of restoring order and bringing a better state. Until now big hope has been laid down in our Home Guard and its leadership, but after the loss of six districts (Srebrenica, Vlasenica, Višegrad, Rogatica, Goražde and Foča) and nonpossession of ability from our side to regain them, the people has lost faith in our military force"²¹. It was further emphasized that particular hesitation had been felt among Muslims, and the reasons for that were the following: a) Muslims were mostly exposed to the Chetniks' revenge and they considered themselves unprotected; b) the Communists, very present among Muslims, were trying to separate them from the Croatian influence; c) some Italian commanders did not consider Muslims as Croats, but rather a specific national group, which served the idea of Muslim-Serb bringing together. As an additional cause of Muslims' disinclination it was mentioned that many Muslims thought there had not been enough understanding for the Orthodox Serbs' converts to Islam.

The rais al-ulama Fehim Spaho has been charged that his almost major concern in 1941. was the care for the status rights of Muslims who had converted from Orthodoxy and Judaism. "While Muslims all around Bosnia bleed, their religious leader is asking for the compensation of the killed Muslims by the number of the Orthodox Serbs' converts to Islam".²² According to historical facts, in 1941. a more possible cause for Spaho's attachment to the anti-Ustasha opposition, personified in the authors of Bosniac resolutions, was the attitude of the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs towards him as a rais al-ulama than the crimes perpetrated by the Ustasha movement over innocent civilians.²³ He remained loyal to Independent State of Croatia until the end of his life, but from his letter sent to Džaferbeg Kulenović on 5th February 1942. it is quite visible that during his last days he was overcome by heavy frustrations because of the incapability of the Croatian state to protect Bosniacs and restore order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the letter Spaho complained about numerous mistakes committed by the political and military authorities, from illogical burning of groceries after the conquest of Serbian villages to the misses of propaganda pouring oil on fire with lies about the liberation of Foča and Goražde. Kulenović was warned about the increasing Bosniac discontent by indolence of the Croatian authorities towards their troubles and sufferings:

"I will, together with Hadži Ali Effedi [Aganović], if possible today, intervene here at our military authorities as well as at the Germans, but I have considered it necessary to inform you as well about the whole thing, since I think that what we are dealing with here is a sabotage or even somebody's treason. I cannot believe that we are to this extent incapable of ruling ourselves and our independent state.

Every day our people lose faith in our Croatian state and ask openly to seek salvation in Berlin. In yesterday's local newspaper an interview appeared with our present enforced mayor about his last stay in Zagreb. There he was telling, among other things, about his meeting with Vojskovođa and about the salam Vojskovođa had sent to Muslims. Our people swear that salam, saying they should be sent the army instead of salam – the army to protect them."²⁴

In the second half of 1942. the high ulama still believed in willingness of the state to protect Bosniac population and relieve the sufferings of the civilians who had escaped the Chetniks' pogroms. In the beginning of September the deputation of 'El-Hidaje' asked from Pavelić to allow Bosniacs' self-defense from the Chetniks, to order the state authorities to help the refugees and orphans, to help solving the issue of feeding in passive areas.²⁵ On 30th October 1942. the member of Ulama-majlis Muhamed Effendi Pandža insisted from Pavelić to allow major Hadžiefendić to establish volunteer legions in those Bosniac places where they had not been established before.²⁶ Some religious officials, however, expressed serious doubts concerning the new state, especially from the beginning of Bosniac Golgotha in eastern Bosnia. In one Croatian characterization from January 1942. the Ulama majlis' member Ali Effendi Aganović was charged for open animosities towards Croationhood and the Croatian state, especially towards Hakija Hadžić, who, according to Aganović, "had brought here Croatia"²⁷. According to the author of the characterization, Aganović acrimoniously said to Abdulah Effendi Nezirović, a young hafis who had managed to escape from the Chetnik execution and come to Sarajevo, after ten days of wandering around the woods: "You fought for Croatia, you did not fight for Islam! Let Croats help you. There is no help here." He sent similar message to Tahir Avdić, a talented theology student Čamil Avdić's father, when he had asked for his help, after the Chetnik slaughter in Plane near Bileća.

In the work *Posebnost Bosne i Hercegovine i stradanja Muslimana* reliable facts were brought about the presence of Bosniacs in the authorities of Independent State of Croatia and their participation in the Ustasha movement.²⁸ From these facts it is quite obvious that Bosniacs constituted an extremely insignificant minority in administration of the new state. According to one schematic survey, there was not a single Bosniac in the Ustasha supervisory service.²⁹ Also among the Ustasha officers and noncommissioned officers in the camp of Jasenovac.³⁰ Another point is the fact that even the presence of some Bosniacs in the administration did not imply unquestionable loyalty to the politics and ideology of the new state. As soon as in the midst of July 1941. on the address of the Ustasha centre of Grand district of Usora and Soli several complaints arrived concerning anti-Ustasha behaviour of the head of the district Ragibaga Čaplijić, who had not restrained himself from swearing Ustashas and calling them criminals.³¹ In reports to the General Ustasha staff he was being described as a mentally unbalanced pro-Serb who was doing everything in order to wipe out the Ustashas' influence in south-east of Bosnia.³² Also several negative judgements were sent to the authorities concerning the Bijeljina mayor Muratbeg Pašić. In a report from 3rd March 1942. he was described as a political juggler and manipulator who had worked for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the establishment of Independent State of Croatia, who had disarmed with the help of Germans first Croation formations in Bijeljina, but then suddenly became an Ustasha camp officer becoming famous for his bestiality to local "Greek-easterners". This had brought to an almost general rebellion of the Orthodox population, so Pašić was enforced to initiate signing the anti-state Bijeljina resolution.³³ A year later, in front of Bijeljina mosque, according to another report, he declared that Croats had created discord between Bosniacs and Serbs, but "Drina was theirs and it would always be theirs, and as far as Bosnia and Herzegovina was concerned, Muslims would fight for it under protection of the German army"³⁴. Finally, in April 1942, the Ustasha authorities had to arrest a Home-Gaurd colonel Sulejman Filipović, since he was "linked with Svetozar Vukmanović – Tempo and Avdo Humo from the National Liberation Movement"³⁵. Later Ustasha literature was mentioning him as a traitor who had surrendered Tuzla to the Partisans in October 1943, after which the Partisans executed the commander of the Home-Guard volunteer regiment Muhamedaga Hadžiefendić.³⁶

From my previous discussion it can be concluded that the religious and civil inequality, the pogroms of the Ustasha regime over non-Croats, the incapability of the political and military authorities to protect them from Chetniks, represented the main reasons of the increasing disinclination and aloofness of Bosniacs from Independent State of Croatia. The Croatian state authorities expected unconditional loyalty of Bosniacs and because of that they were expressing extreme insensibility towards the consequences their politics had on Bosniac population. In that sense the frequent arrests of Bosniac youth suspected of Communism were constantly creating deeper and deeper gap in relationship between Bosniacs and the Croatian state. Already on 23rd August 1941. in Trebinje on the basis of district authorities' warrant 13 young Bosniacs were arrested for the alleged Communism.³⁷ According to Abdulahbeg Bukvica, in the first days of Independent State of Croatia the mood of Bosniacs in Brčko towards the Ustasha movement was good, but then it was ruined thanks to new district chief Montani, as well as the arresting of Bosniac youth suspected of Communism. According to Bukvica, who was very inclined to the Croatian state, the arrested youth was not in favour of Communism at all.³⁸ The activists of the Provincial committee of CPY for Bosnia and Herzegovina watchfully followed the Ustasha and German arrests of young Bosniacs trying to use those cases to win Bosniacs over for the Partisan movement.³⁹ In a proclamation "To Muslims, Croats and Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina" Bosniacs were warned that their best youth languished in Sarajevo police prison and their prominent citizens in different cities, objectionable in the eyes of the regime, were becoming victims of the Ustasha arrests, persecution and liquidations.⁴⁰ Boarding school residents and bursars of the Croatian Muslim cultural society 'Narodna uzdanica' had been arrested many times for the alleged Communist propaganda.⁴¹

Apart from arresting Bosniac youth, also the state politics of agreement and cooperation with the Chetnik detachments, started at the end of April 1942, had significant impact on Bosniacs' attitude towards Independent State of Croatia. On the basis of this politics, yesterday's renegades and troublemakers became a legal army which was expected to help restoring order in the country. When the village of Lukavica near Gračanica, according to the agreement from 28th May 1942, had come under the Chetniks' influence, local Bosniac inhabitants sent a request to the authorities asking for separation of their village from the Chetniks' territory, and as an argument they mentioned constant Chetniks' violence against the peasants, including stealing their groceries they were trying to sell in the market. The disappointment in this agreement was even bigger considering the fact that those people, as they insisted, had proved their loyalty to Independent State of Croatia many times by regular reports to the military and volunteer participation in actions against rebels.⁴² In the monthly review of events according to the received reports in July 1943. a case of Rajko Čelonja was mentioned. He was described as a famous bloodsucker who had personally slaughtered hundreds of Muslims in the districts of Srebrenica and Vlasenica with his 120 bloody fellows. "Now he is part of the Chetnik detachment of Vojvoda Kovačević and it is through him that he cooperates with the Home-Guards who send him food. It is very hard for people to take the fact that these butchers find refuge under the protection of our military forces."⁴³ The Ustasha-Chetniks' agreements, generally speaking, intensified Bosniacs' discontent with their position in the new state, as well as the awareness of necessity of organizing their own military formations in order to protect Bosniac settlements in the country.⁴⁴

After 1942. Bosniac discontent more and more turned into bitterness by the regime which was not doing anything to improve its relationship with Bosniacs. Many Ustasha murders of Bosniac civilians, which the state authorities did not intend to sanction at all, highly contributed to this transformation.⁴⁵ These crimes, especially the attitude of the state towards their perpetrators, affected Bosniacs so badly that they even produced hesitation among some Bosniac members of the Ustasha movement. The Josip Korelac case – a massacre perpetrated by the mentioned Ustasha lieutenant in the midst of June 1943. against the Bosniac civilians in Srebrenica and surrounding villages⁴⁶ – initiated numerous protests and requests for justice in a crime in which neither women nor children were spared. The district chief Abdulah Bešliagić, a local businessman Jusuf Kravić, a township official Sulejman Mujezinović, all three from Tuzla, dissociated themselves from Korelac's crimes and resigned from the Ustasha movement. The superior Ustasha officer Stjepan Šuto warned them that their act was irrational, wrong and

against the Ustasha principles, that one could leave the Ustasha movement only by a discharge given by the General Ustasha staff on the basis of Poglavnik's order.⁴⁷ Korelac defended himself that he had only been "cleaning" Srebrenica from rebels, which was enough for his promotion into a rank of captain (*satnik*) and doing the duties of the deputy commander of the Ustasha unit in Sarajevo.

After the victory of the Allied forces on the battlefields in North Africa, as well as the defeat of the 6. German army in Stalingrad, Bosniacs had bigger and bigger doubts in the future of Independent State of Croatia. The Croatian authorities were aware of that fact, so they charged them for hesitation and cowardice. In a note from 13th May 1943. a speech of major Hadžiefendić was cited, on a farewell for officers recruited into SS troops, "in which he did not say a single word about the Croatian state, mentioning only the places where Muslims lived, as if they did not fight for Croatia, but only for their own homes. As if the Croatian state was a porch placed in nowhere"⁴⁸. Hadžiefendić's speech was characterized as a scandalous nonsense, and Hadžiefendić himself as a disloyal turncoat who would serve anyone for his ambitions. In the second part of the report following words were used to describe the political mood of Bosniacs in Tuzla:

"A significant feature of the majority of Muslims has been recently spotted, and that is the struggle for their religion, and not for Croatia. They are all occupied with the Mufti of Jerusalem and the Panislamic movement, and as for the national character, which they have never expressed frankly, it totally failed. The city of Tuzla is not good, the city of merchants, whose only ambition is money, how to get property to the detriment of other people. There are many Muslim Serbs in Tuzla, who have been whispering with Serbs, especially in recent time, since the German and Italian forces withdrew from Tunisia"⁴⁹.

There is no doubt that these "Serb-Muslims", as they were called, were giving more and more prominent members of the Partisan movement, among whom former members of the Hadžiefendić legion represented a significant number. Among them there were a teacher Salih Žilić, a high school professor Mehmed Meša Selimović, as well as the former Hadžiefendić's adjutant Omer Gluhić, who was considered in Croatian circles as a Greater Serbia supporter, then a Communist.⁵⁰ After a while they were joined by the colonel Sulejman Filipović as well as the deputy head of the district of Travnik Muhamed Sudžuka. After the fall of Tuzla in October 1943. and the First Session of ZAVNOBIH there were more and more Bosniacs in Partisan units. In Cazinska krajina Huska Miljković with his whole army joined the Partisans.⁵¹

According to available sources, the same readiness to join the Partisans was expressed by Hafis Muhamed Effendi Pandža, a man who stood behind many initiatives that were in support of Bosniac survival. The case of Pandža was a delicate one because of the fact that he was a highly esteemed member of the Ulama majlis, a famous preacher of the Beg's mosque, a hafis of Qur'an and a person who had written 26 sermons as a help for imams in making their own ones.⁵² After the agreement with Zaim Šarac, Mehmed Effendi Handžić, Husein Kadić and Mustafa Softić, on 20th October 1943. Pandža left Sarajevo and went into the wood.⁵³ The reasons of his departure, according to his own acknowledgement, were the following: a) gathering of Bosniacs and their information that they had to cut off every connection with the Ustasha Croat state and the occupier; b) activities providing establishment of interreligious peace and cooperation between different confessions; c) information of Bosniacs that they had to do their best in order to realize the autonomous Bosnia in a Yugoslav federation or a Balkan union; d) establishment of cooperation with all willing to help people, especially with the National Liberation Movement.⁵⁴ A record from his hearing in a Partisan division's staff, immediately after he was arrested by the Partisans in Kula near Ustikolina⁵⁵, explains to us how Pandža intended to realize the above objectives. There he emphasized that since the end of summer 1943. the armament of Bosniacs had been intensified and because of that Bosniacs in the districts of Stolac, Mostar, Čapljina, Nevesinje, Konjic, Sarajevo, Foča, Goražde, Visoko and Zenica were in the possession of 15.000 shotguns. According to Pandža, these forces were to be gathered, united and told that it was the last minute for Bosniacs to enter the common struggle whose

objective was to expel the enemy from Bosnia and Herzegovina. "Muslim Liberation units", according to Pandža's vision, would not be independent troops under separate command, but rather an integral part of National Liberation Movement. "I do not consider that it is possible to solve the issue of autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a specific Muslim issue but rather as a general national issue, which has to be solved by the free will of all peoples from Bosnia and Herzegovina"⁵⁶.

In the second part of the hearing Pandža described himself as a consistent anti-Ustasha who had been working, all the time, in favour of distance between Bosniacs and Independent State of Croatia, from initiating Sarajevo Ramadan resolution to an action on connecting Bosniac militia. He retired from the 'People's salvation' committee when he saw that "it had taken weak position and that its activity had been somehow fearful and led with extreme carefulness"⁵⁷. The 'People's salvation' committee was established in order to be conception of future political representation of Bosniacs.⁵⁸

There is no unique opinion in historiography concerning the real character of Pandža's military and political action. Especially regarding his attitude towards the Partisan movement.⁵⁹ We still do not possess decisively important information on his activities in the period november – december 1943, until he was arrested by the German army. At the end of his hearing Pandža mentioned that he had already had a meeting with the Mostar battalion's staff, where he had been suggested to link himself with the General staff in order to expose his ideas about the common struggle against the occupier. He had refused it not wanting to force himself "without previous trust"⁶⁰. There are no worthy reasons for doubt that Pandža really joined the Partisan movement. It could be also confirmed by his proclamation to the Bosniacs of Kalesija, Prnjavor, Vukovije and Jeginov Lug, also to the members of the Green cadre led by Nešad Topčić, in which he invited them to join the units of the Partisan army.⁶¹

In contrast to Pandža, Nešad Topčić did not express inclinations towards the Partisans, still contributing to the destruction of the Croatian state, making efforts to strengthen the fighting potential of Bosniacs. In his action, however, Topčić expressed certain tactfulness, manifesting his belonging to Croatianhood and the Croatian state and explaining his engagement as a necessity of defending Bosniacs from rebels. Nevertheless, the Croatian authorities had been watching his military and political activity with great suspicion, especially since they were informed that his 'Bosnian highlanders' were having contacts with the Partisans and Chetniks.⁶² The Partisan commanders, from the other side, were calling the Topčić's forces the green cadre bands that had to be liquidated as soon as possible.⁶³

Although the Ustasha leaders had been receiving reliable information concerning the mood of Bosniac population towards the Croatian state, they did not stop insisting, until the very end of Independent State of Croatia, on full loyalty and trust of Bosniacs in their leadership. That is why the famous *Promemorija* of Sarajevo Bosniac leaders at the end of April 1944, in which numerous examples of state violence against Bosniacs had been stated, was characterized in a special review as "one of the biggest assassination attempts of Muslims on sovereignty and integrity of ISC"⁶⁴. The above mentioned Bosniac warnings – typically for Croatian officials – were not interpreted as appeals for improvement of Bosniacs' human rights, but rather as a tool in the struggle for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the hand of Bosniac elite, which could be solved by the final solution of the problem of Muslims' religious and educational self-management. A year later, in the last days of Independent State of Croatia, the deputy rais al-*ulama* Muhamed Effendi Riđanović was asked to make a statement on behalf of the Islamic Community against the enemies of ISC, against Bolshevism and "the Partisan brutality on the territory of Independent State of Croatia". Riđanović returned to Sarajevo with the instructions, but because of the fall of Sarajevo into the Partisan hands, the arranged statement was never issued.⁶⁵ It was a vivid manifestation of the Croatian state's ambition to enjoy unquestionable support of Bosniacs, but also a confirmation of hesitation and disorientation of the Islamic Community leadership, which, with or without Spaho, was not capable of articulating a consistent attitude towards Independent State of Croatia and the wartime reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During the last months of Independent State of Croatia, Bosniac resistance to the Ustasha authorities' politics was increased, "especially regarding mobilization into the Ustasha and Home-Guard formations"⁶⁶. The Green cadre and the Partisan units were the main refuges, but also the main expressions of discontent and struggle against the existing order. The military authorities reacted with pressure and terror, with arrests and executions, trying to prevent the collapse of the state system. A significant number of Bosniacs met the end of the war in armies hostile to ISC, the majority of Bosniac population, however, in apathy towards the state which had been the cause of unprecedented suffering of their compatriots.

Summary

The Ustasha leadership of Independent State of Croatia expected unreserved loyalty and support of Bosniac population towards its politics. They were not short of promises concerning their rights and position in the newly-proclaimed state, but did nothing to fulfill them. The first reactions of Bosniacs were different; while the Islamic Community and pro-Croatian circles were expressing satisfaction with the emergence of Independent State of Croatia, some ex-JMO groups, including Uzeiraga Hadžihasanović, were making first steps in order to establish autonomy for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Soon the attitude of the Islamic Community and its leader rais al-ulama Fehim Spaho began to change, especially because of the inequality between Catholics and Muslims in the domain of civil and religious rights. The Bosniac resolutions in 1941. were the expressions of discontent with the Ustasha regime, its politics of genocide and ethnic cleansing perpetrated over Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, but still not the definite turning point in Bosniac attitude towards Independent State of Croatia. The major reason of Bosniac aloofness from Independent State of Croatia were the crimes perpetrated over Bosniacs by Chetniks – the crimes that the political and military authorities of the Ustasha state could not or did not want to prevent. The organization of Muslim militia, from the end of 1941, was the most reliable sign of Bosniac distrust in Independent State of Croatia. Even official reporters had to admit that the Bosniac population had lost faith in the Croatian state, thanks to its inability to protect them from the Chetniks.

There were many other reasons for Bosniac discontent and distance from Independent State of Croatia. The Ustasha arrests of Bosniac youth, suspected of Communism, deportations of objectionable Bosniacs, legalization of Chetniks' control over Bosniac villages as a consequence of the Ustasha-Chetniks' agreements – these were some of the additional causes of Bosniac opposition to the Ustasha regime. In 1943. the discontent grew into bitterness, thanks to several cases of unpunished murders of Bosniac civilians, committed by Ustasha officers. The Ustasha lieutenant Josip Korelac had murdered tens of Bosniac civilians including women and children in Srebrenica and yet got promotion into a captain.

After the military achievements of the Allies in the spring of 1943. Bosniacs played more active role in political and military developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina, making additional efforts to arm themselves as well as to strengthen the Partisan movement which intended to overthrow the Ustasha rule in their country. During the last months of Independent State of Croatia Bosniac resistance was becoming more intensified and manifested in avoiding mobilization in Ustasha and Home-Guard forces. Many joined Partisan military formations, while the majority felt indifference towards the state which had been the cause of numerous sufferings of their compatriots.

Notes

¹ See: Rasim Hurem, "Pokušaj nekih građanskih muslimanskih političara da Bosnu i Hercegovinu izdvoje iz okvira Nezavisne Države Hrvatske", *Godišnjak Društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine*, XVI/1965, pp. 191-221; Rasim Hurem, "Konceptije nekih muslimanskih građanskih političara o položaju Bosne i Hercegovine u vremenu od sredine 1943. do kraja 1944. godine", *Prilozi*, Institut za istoriju radničkog pokreta Sarajevo, IV/1968, no. 4, pp. 533-548; Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945*, Zagreb, 1977; Enver Redžić, *Muslimansko autonomaštvo i 13. SS divizija*, Sarajevo, 1987; Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Posebnost Bosne i Hercegovine i stradanja Muslimana*, Sarajevo, 1991; Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*, Sarajevo, 1998; Enver Redžić, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, Sarajevo, 1998.

² Mijo Bzik, *Ustaška pobjeda*, Zagreb, 1942, p. 73.

³ Mladen Colić, *Takozvana Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941*, Belgrade, 1973, p. 93.

⁴ Highly esteemed and dear Rais eff. SF-701, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', The Historical Archive Sarajevo (HAS).

⁵ *Muslimansko autonomaštvo i 13. SS divizija*, p. 15.

⁶ In historical works, in dependence of the sources that were used, we have found different, even opposite information about the April initiative for the autonomy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Rasim Hurem ("Pokušaj nekih građanskih muslimanskih političara da Bosnu i Hercegovinu izdvoje iz okvira Nezavisne Države Hrvatske", p. 198), it was a common resolution of Bosniac (Hadžihasanović, Kadić, Šeremet) and Serbian (Božić, Besarović, Jeftanović) politicians addressed to German military authorities – the resolution which was, the author supposed, expressing the disagreement of their authors with the inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina into Independent State of Croatia (without mentioning the autonomy). According to Šaćir Filandra, it was a proposal which involved the transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into a special unit ruled by the German army, by the German Reich (*Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*, p. 173). He did not mention the autonomy either, but did mention Luka Čabrajić and Vjekoslav Jelović as the Croatian members of the delegation. Academician Enver Redžić offered contradicting information first mentioning the request for autonomy expressed to Hakija Hadžić (note no. 5), later however, referring to his own study, that it was the initiative of representatives of Muslim movement for autonomy who had addressed the Germans "with a request for the establishment of autonomous status of Bosnia and Herzegovina under protectorate of the German Reich" (*Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 135).

⁷ *Bošnjačka politika u XX stoljeću*, pp. 159-160.

⁸ Mile Konjević, "O nekim pitanjima politike ustaša prema bosanskohercegovačkim Muslimanima 1941. godine", *1941. u istoriji naroda Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo, 1973, p. 267.

⁹ The manifestation of this mood were the rais al-ulama's speech and thanksgiving prayer for the establishment of Independent State of Croatia, for luck and long rule of the Poglavnik, during the stay in Sarajevo of the state government vice-president Phd. Osman Kulenović ("Impozantna manifestacija sarajevskih Hrvata povodom boravka podpredsjednika vlade g. dra Osmana Kulenovića", *Sarajevski novi list*, I/1941, no. 2, p. 2). A welcoming dispatch to the power elite of the new state was sent by the Organization of Ulama in Independent State of Croatia 'El-Hidaje', consisting of prominent high ulama ("Muslimansko svećenstvo pozdravlja svoje Poglavnika i Nezavisnu Državu Hrvatsku", *Sarajevski novi list*, I/1941, no. 5, p. 5). Its president wrote with enthusiasm about the new state, interpreting it as the token of God's will and blessing towards Bosniacs in the turbulent wartime (Mehmed Handžić, "El-Hidaja u novim prilikama", *El-Hidaje*, IV/1941, no. 9-10, pp. 221-223). Greetings and best wishes were also sent by other Islamic societies, endowment commissions and local religious councils.

¹¹ SF-702, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS.

¹² SF-753, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS.

¹³ SF-778, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS. It was emphasized in the letter that during the first days of Independent State of Croatia the lives of the most prominent Bosniacs in Duvno had been endangered by the Ustashas, but the crimes were prevented by the arrival of the Italian army.

¹⁴ To the commander of 9th infantry regiment in Travnik. SF-737, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS. Date: 19th August 1941.

¹⁵ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1978*, Belgrade, 1980, p. 208. According to the same author, the authors of the resolutions, "excepting a part of more progressive among them, did not express the resistance of Muslims to Ustashas, continuing to serve them, but rather a kind of defence from Ustashas' attempts to link them with the crimes. It was an attempt to disassociate from crimes against Serbs in fear of future consequences" (Branko Petranović, *Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji (1941-1945)*, I, Belgrade, 1983, p. 96).

¹⁶ Mehmedalija Bojić, *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka (VII-XX vijek)*, Sarajevo, 2001, p. 190.

¹⁷ "Pokušaj nekih građanskih muslimanskih političara da Bosnu i Hercegovinu izdvoje iz okvira Nezavisne Države Hrvatske", pp. 202-205.

¹⁸ Uredništvo, "Prva godišnjica u svojoj državi", *Glasnik Islamske vjerske zajednice Nezavisne Države Hrvatske*, X/1942, no. 4, p. 98.

¹⁹ Enver Redžić noticed it very well in his *Muslimansko autonomaštvo i 13. SS divizija* (p. 16).

²⁰ Adnan Jahić, *Muslimanske formacije tuzlanskog kraja u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, Tuzla, 1995, pp. 39-40.

²¹ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [document no. 193], volume IV, book 2, Belgrade, 1951, pp. 538-539.

²² *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 320.

- ²³ In his letter to Asim Ugljen (10th November 1941) Spaho complains about the attitude of the state towards him as a rais al-ulama and states the following: "And I think your actions /I mean those of the Ministry/ towards me will make me join the resolution-makers." SF-777, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS.
- ²⁴ Dear Džafer! SF-800, 1942, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS.
- ²⁵ "Zapisnik VIII redovne glavne skupštine 'El-Hidaje', Organizacije ilmije Nezavisne Države Hrvatske", *El-Hidaje*, VII/1943, nos. 1-2, p. 46. Also: 'El-Hidaje' – The Organization of Ulama in Independent State of Croatia in Sarajevo. No. 302/42. To all units of 'El-Hidaje', all members of Sharia judges' societies, all imams, all units of mualims' societies. V-9-7, 1942, collection 'IVZ u NDH (1942)', The Archive of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The date: 26th October 1942.
- ²⁶ "Pokušaj nekih građanskih muslimanskih političara da Bosnu i Hercegovinu izdvoje iz okvira Nezavisne Države Hrvatske", p. 206.
- ²⁷ Hadži-Alija Aganović, the member of Ulama-majlis in Sarajevo: /around 35/. 5644/64, 1942, unit 'The Ustasha supervisory service' (further: USS), The Archive of Tuzla canton (further: ATC).
- ²⁸ *Posebnost Bosne i Hercegovine i stradanja Muslimana*, pp. 34-41.
- ²⁹ USS and its offices. The schematic survey. 755-770, Microfilmed documentation (further: MD), ATC.
- ³⁰ Ibidem.
- ³¹ Ustasha – the Croatian Liberation Movement. Class. no. 5/1941. To the Ustasha centre of Grand district of Usora and Soli, Tuzla. 431, 1941, MD, ATC. The date: 19th July 1941.
- ³² The Ustasha centre of Grand district of Usora and Soli, Tuzla. Class. no. 7/1941. To the General Ustasha staff in Zagreb. 5645/64, 1941, USS, ATC. The date: 19th July 1941.
- ³³ The centre of 5th unit of Vojna Krajina. No. 475 / class. To the commander of 6th infantry regiment. 754, 1942, MD, ATC.
- ³⁴ The Muslims' mood in Bijeljina. No. 122, date 21th April 1943. 5875/64, 1943, USS, ATC.
- ³⁵ *Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka (VII-XX vijek)*, p. 201.
- ³⁶ Ratimir Gadža, "Hrvati muslimani – viši časnici", *Odnos bosansko-hercegovačkih muslimana prema Hrvatskoj*, a separate print from "Republika Hrvatska", Buenos Aires, 1990, p. 29.
- ³⁷ SF-739, 1941, box 3, collection 'Fehim Spaho', HAS.
- ³⁸ The Croatian Ustasha camp Brčko. No. V. T. 103/42. To the Ustasha centre Posavje, Brod na Savi. 768, 1942, MD, ATC. Bukvica also stated that he was doing his best in order to make Bosniacs closer to the Ustasha movement, but it was very hard. He himself suggested to particular prominent Bosniacs to accept the duties of Ustasha officials, but they all answered him that because of the current situation in the country they could not accept any public duty.
- ³⁹ See: *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [document no. 65], volume IV, book 2, Belgrade, 1951, p. 157.
- ⁴⁰ "Muslimani, Hrvati i Srbi Bosne i Hercegovine". 659, 1942, MD, ATC. In a list from March 1943. among the objectionable for the order in Independent State of Croatia from Tuzla and its surroundings following Bosniacs were mentioned: Himzo Jamaković, Alija Bekrić, Pašaga Osmanović, Jusuf Agić, Sakib Agić, Salih Hadžihasanović, Himzo Bešlić, Mehmed Tabučić i Sefer Trumić. They were mainly mine workers and employees in the enterprise 'Croatia' (Krešimir 955. 5865/64, 1943, USS, ATC).
- ⁴¹ See more: Zlatko Hasanbegović, *Muslimani u Zagrebu 1878. – 1945.*, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 225-228.
- ⁴² Independent State of Croatia. The Ministry of Interior. The secretariat of the minister. T. No. 5354/1942.-I-A-. To the Ministry of Croatian Home Guard. To the Main centre Zagreb. 686, 1942, MD, ATC. The date: 4th July 1942.
- ⁴³ A monthly review of events according to the received reports in July 1943, No. 88, 1st August 1943 (the document within: Mensud Keleštura, *Četnički pokret u Bosni i Hercegovini 1941. – 1945.*, Zenica, 1999, p. 246).
- ⁴⁴ *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 151.
- ⁴⁵ *Posebnost Bosne i Hercegovine i stradanja Muslimana*, pp. 43-47.
- ⁴⁶ See: *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [document no. 242], volume IV, book 14, Belgrade, 1956, pp. 526-529.
- ⁴⁷ V.T. 105/43. 5944/64, 1943, USS, ATC. The date: 28th June 1943.
- ⁴⁸ Domagoj 951. 5896/64, 1943, USS, ATC.
- ⁴⁹ Ibidem. On the mood of Bosniacs in Tuzla in the late summer of 1943. see: *Muslimanske formacije tuzlanskog kraja u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, pp. 71-80.
- ⁵⁰ Domagoj 25th May 1943. 5905/64, 1943, USS, ATC.
- ⁵¹ *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 351.
- ⁵² Hfz. Mahmud Traljić, *Istaknuti Bošnjaci* [second extended edition], Sarajevo, 1998, p. 275.
- ⁵³ The staff of 17. N. L. U. Division. The hearing of Pandža Muhamed – Hafis, the member of Ulama Majlis from Sarajevo. 402-407, 1943, MD, ATC (further: The hearing). The date: 11th November 1943.
- ⁵⁴ The hearing.
- ⁵⁵ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [document no. 78], volume IV, book 20, Belgrade, 1960, p. 251.
- ⁵⁶ The hearing.
- ⁵⁷ The hearing.

⁵⁸ According to Pandža, the members of the committee were authorized by 21 districts with relative Bosniac majority (over 2/3 of Bosniacs), "but this committee from various reasons did not use the given authorizations to spread the organization" (The hearing).

⁵⁹ In two *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* (volume IV, book 20, p. 251, note 3 and volume IV, book 21, p. 579, note 30) there are different evaluations regarding Pandža's attitude towards the Partisans. While in the book 20 we find a colonel Idriz Čejvan's statement according to which Pandža worked actively for the Partisan movement after 10th November 1943, in the book 21 Pandža was claimed to be recruited for the Gestapo, to work on gathering and arming his supporters preparing them to fight against the Partisans, but that he only "was in NLA" after 10th November 1943. In "Konceptije nekih muslimanskih građanskih političara o položaju Bosne i Hercegovine u vremenu od sredine 1943. do kraja 1944. godine" (pp. 541-542) Rasim Hurem prefers interpretation which suggests that Pandža was just adapting to a new reality after the Allies' predominance over the Axis, but without readiness for direct confrontation with the occupier. According to Enver Redžić (*Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 351), Pandža was ready to join the Partisans to send a proclamation to Bosniacs, but his intention was not welcomed by the staff of the Third corps of NLAY, with the explanation that Pandža was "keeping better than all Muslim leaders ... and that he was more competent than others". A totally opposite information was offered by Mehmedalija Bojić (*Historija Bosne i Bošnjaka [VII-XX vijek]*, p. 216). It was exactly on the suggestion of the Third corps' staff that Tito decided "Muhamed Pandžo should enter NLM and should be used for attracting Muslims".

⁶⁰ The hearing.

⁶¹ "To the Muslim brothers of Kalesija, Prnjavor, Vukovije, Jeginov Lug and to brother Nešad Topčić". 400-401, 1943, MD, ATC.

⁶² "According to a statement of a Partisan messenger with high school education we have found out that those Topčić's Bosnian highlanders are linked to the Partisans as well as to the Chetniks [...]" (Notes on the Chetniks and the 'Green cadre' around Tuzla. 10th April 1944. 5882/64, 1944, USS, ATC). In the same report Topčić was described as an ambitious civil school teacher who was trying to start "a political movement of Muslims in eastern Bosnia as well". People have called him colonel, he has regularly received runaway Bosniacs from the Partisans into his formations, without denouncing them to the Croatian authorities at all. He has been underestimating the Croatian army. His highlanders salute with *all for one, one for all*.

⁶³ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [document no. 32], volume IV, book 23, Belgrade, 1962, pp. 126-128.

⁶⁴ *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 359.

⁶⁵ Bogdan Krizman, *Ustaše i Treći Reich*, 2, Belgrade, 1983, p. 267.

⁶⁶ *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, p. 360.