

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY. "ALBANIANNES" AND "CROATIANNES" OF THE MUSLIMS OF STARA RAŠKA DURING WORLD WAR II

Abstract: *The article examines the causes of Muslims' approaching the Croatian and Albanian national names during 1941-1945, indicates the consequences of those decisions and places this historical episode in the broader context of the genesis of Bosniak identity. The article was written on the basis of documentation found in: Military Archives, State Archives of Serbia, Historical Archives "Ras" in N. Pazar, Federal Archives of Germany, Archives of the Historical Department of the General Staff of the Republic of Italy and the Central State Archives of Albania.*

Keywords: Muslims, Croats, Albanians, Bosniaks, identity, Islam, Stara Raška (*Old Rascia*), Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Albania

Bosniak national identity went through several developmental stages during the 19th and 20th centuries. One of them coincided with the period of World War II. The Bosniaks of Stara Raška (*Old Rascia*), scattered between Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Albania, and the German and Italian occupiers, were fighting for self-determination on a religious basis, striving at the same time to, depending on the current situation, identify themselves nationally on the basis of short-term and long-term interests. Between these poles of action of their elites, several questions arise. In the first place, what is the cause of their attachment to the Croatian and Albanian identity? Were those steps on the way toward the Bosniak national name or a political strategy? If the answer is the latter, at what moments was national identification used instead of religious identification? Also, to what end? How did the authorities of the assimilating countries, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and the Kingdom of Albania, position themselves regarding the identity of Muslims? Finally, how did the Italians and Germans, i.e. the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and the Ravna Gora movement, view all this?

Introduction – The road to Bosniak identity

The genesis of the Bosniak nation, that is, the process of merging religious, over ethnic, into national identity, is one of the important questions from the past of the Yugoslav territories. There are several dates taken for its beginning. Some authors place it at the end of the 17th century, at the time of the Vienna War (1683–1699). At that time, the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire sided with the sultan, and their Christian neighbors sided with the armies of the European powers. Significant demographic changes occurred due to migration, but also increased Islamization of the local people. Barriers are also raised by the process of land seizure (*čitlučenje*) which primarily affected Christians.¹

After several decades, this situation led the Bosnian Muslims, in the words of a French diplomat from 1856, to a “sad isolation”. The Christian neighbors saw them as “apostates” and the Ottomans as “incomplete Turks”. At the same time, the religious hatred between Christians and Muslims was already producing “terrible consequences”. Such “double isolation” provided the basis for the “ethnic subjectivity” of Muslims.²

Other authors, however, see 1878 as a crucial turning point, the year of great changes within the historical phenomenon known as the “Eastern Question”. Muslims distance themselves from the Austro-Hungarian occupier, the westernization that its administration brought to Bosnia and part of Stara Raška, and from the national movements of Serbs and Croats who accept Western heritage. Also, for the first time, they found themselves separated from the sultan, as well as their religious brothers from other parts of the empire. Therefore, Islam appears as the pivot of their uniqueness, but religious identification prevents them from building their ethnic identity.³ Xavier Bugarel adds that the basis for the development of the identity of Bosniaks was laid by obtaining religious autonomy in 1909. And he concludes that this forced them to move politically and identity-wise within religious denominator.⁴

¹ Славенско Терзић, *Стара Србија (XIX–XX век). Драма једне цивилизације: Рашка, Косово и Метохија, Скопско-тетовска област*, (Нови Сад: Православна реч, 2012), 80.

² Muhamed Hadžijahić, *Od tradicije do identiteta. Geneza nacionalnog pitanja bosanskih muslimana*, (Zagreb: Muslimanska naklada „Putokaz“, 1990), 83–84.

³ *Ibid*, 100–101; Kasim Suljević, *Nacionalnost Muslimana: između teorije i politike*, (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1981), 88.

⁴ Xavier Bougarel, „Od „Muslimana“ do „Bošnjaka“: pitanje nacionalnog imena bosanskih Muslimana“, in: *Rasprave o nacionalnom identitetu Bošnjaka*, ed. Husnija Kamberović, (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2009), 120.

"There is no doubt that, above all, belonging to Islam is the basic fact that caused the ethnic differentiation" of Bosniaks, given that Islam is not only "religious and moral teaching" but "an entire system of behavior", concludes Muhamed Hadžijahić.⁵ In a similar context, the Serbian writer Meša Selimović observes "national indeterminacy, wandering between ethnic and religious identification, lack of collective direction and lack of historical perspective" among Muslims.⁶ The existing barriers were additionally strengthened during the Balkan and First World Wars.

During the interwar period, the religious factor was so strong that none of the Muslim parties in Yugoslavia even raised the national question. In order not to confuse voters, but also to keep them at a distance from Serbs and Croats.⁷ We can see this in the examples of the conduct of the Yugoslav Muslim community and the "Džemijet".⁸ On the other hand, the "nationalization of Muslims" intensified in Bosnia and Stara Raška, by offering them a place within the Serbian or Croatian ethnic corps. The Serbian Muslim society "Gajret", as well as the Great Madrasa in Skopje, worked on their "Serbization". Although some members of the intellectual elite accepted new identities, the results were "minimal".

Orientalist Darko Tanasković concludes that the majority of Muslims remained "between two national shores, aware of what they are not culturally and politically, but still insufficiently aware of what they are and what they would like to be".⁹ The national claims to Muslims continued during the Second World War, when the Albanian state was also involved in this process.

After the liberation of Yugoslavia, the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina gradually returned to the refuge of neutral religion-based self-determination. Although during the occupation it had experimented with their national determination, the communist regime, for several reasons, decided to slow down the emancipation of Muslims. This position would be maintained for almost two decades, although the communists even then left them room to show their uniqueness.¹⁰ Finally, in the 1961 state census, the war designation "Muslim" appears,

⁵ M. Hadžijahić, *op. cit.*, 102.

⁶ Darko Tanasković, *Islam i mi*, (Beograd: Partenon, 2010), 41.

⁷ Saša Mrduljaš, „Izjašnjavanje sandžačkih Bošnjaka o nacionalnoj pripadnosti u popisima stanovništva (1948–2011)“, *Migracijske i etničke teme*, 35, (2018), 10–11.

⁸ Milutin Živković, „Aćif Hadžiahmetović Bljuta. Prilozi za biografiju 1919–1941“, *Istorija 20. veka*, 3, (2012), 75.

⁹ M. Hadžijahić, *op. cit.*, 120; D. Tanasković, *op. cit.*, 156–157; A. Раковић, *op. cit.*, 173.

¹⁰ Safet Bandžović, *Ideja i iskustvo: jugoslovenski socijalizam i bošnjačka pozicija*, (Sarajevo: Samizdat, 2017), 539.

and seven years later, the League of Communists in B&H recognizes them as nationally distinct. In 1971, it was registered in the federal population census.¹¹

The period of “Muslimness” was another step in the construction of Bosniak identity, but not the last stop in that process. The reason is that this term was not “unreservedly accepted, especially by intellectuals, whether Muslims or others”, and there was doubt that it would be maintained, given that it distanced Muslims from the “concept of land and language”. In order to establish this identity, one should observe the instructions of the Islamic Community (IZ) of Bosnia and Herzegovina addressed to Muslims before the 1991 census (“Muslim as a nationality, Islamic religion, and Bosnian language”).¹²

We can see from the population census how the Muslims of Stara Raška reacted to these political changes in the motherland. Namely, in the 1991 census, similarly to their compatriots across the Drina, the majority of them declared themselves under the designation “Muslim” (as in the 1971 and 1981 censuses). In the area of Stara Raška, both in Serbia and in Montenegro, Muslims then made up 51.8% of the total population.¹³

In parallel to the beginning of the wars for the Yugoslav heritage, their search for a national identity also ended. Following the initial reticence of a part of the Bosnian Muslim political elite, a consensus was reached. In September 1993, the so-called “Bosniak Parliament” was convened, at which the “Bosniak national name” was adopted by acclamation. The new determination received its international recognition during the following year, with the signing of the “Washington Treaty”.¹⁴

The national designation “Bosniak” soon came into general use in Stara Raška as well. In the 2002/2003 censuses in Serbia, 74% of Muslims defined themselves this way, and 88% of them in Montenegro. However, the situation changed already in 2011. There were as many as 92% Bosniaks in Serbia, and only 8% were Muslims. On the other hand, in Montenegro, the decline of Bosniaks to 80% was recorded.¹⁵ The 2022 census in Serbia had the same result, although, for example, in N. Pazar, there were public instructions for Muslims related to their declaration (in favor of

¹¹ Александар Раковић, „Српски идентитет муслимана словенског порекла на постјугословенском простору у 21. веку (Са освртом на повесни идентитет Срба муслимана)“, *Култура полиса*, 31, (2016), 174.

¹² D. Tanasković, *op. cit.*, 160, 187.

¹³ Data for the following municipalities are included here: Priboj, N. Varoš, Prijepolje, Sjenica, N. Pazar, Tutin, Pljevlja, B. Polje, Berane, Rožaje, Andrijevica and Plav. S. Mrduljaš, *op. cit.*, 26–27, 29, 31.

¹⁴ Ibid, 12; D. Tanasković, *op. cit.*, 172–173.

¹⁵ S. Mrduljaš, *op. cit.*, 32, 34.

Bosniakism). As we can see, the Bosniak national name is generally accepted in Serbia and Montenegro, although not to the full extent (in 2022, about 13,000 people declared themselves Muslims in Serbia). At the same time, the attachment of Muslims to Islam remained unshaken. This is evidenced by the fact that compared to 153,801 Bosniaks living in Serbia today, there are 159,516 Muslim citizens in the municipalities of N. Pazar, Tutin, Sjenica, N. Varoš, Priboj and Prijepolje.¹⁶

The Muslims of Stara Raška in the eyes of others (1941–1945)

Croatian territorial ambitions towards Stara Raška have their stronghold in the 19th century. This area was seen by those who provided the ideological basis for the NDH regime as part of the historical Croatian lands. Its control was necessary for a number of reasons – the rounding off Bosnia as a separate whole, the separation of Serbia from Montenegro, the common border with Albania, etc.¹⁷ One of the key arguments for the realization of these plans appears to be the alleged Croatian origin of the Stara Raška Muslims.¹⁸ This point of view permeated the entire Ustasha movement, although it seems not entirely.¹⁹

In any case, in 1941, Chief Pavelić referred to Bosnian and Stara Raška Muslims as "the blood of our (Croatian, M.Ž.) blood" and "the flower of the Croatian nation".²⁰ Military leader Slavko Kvaternik, the second most powerful man of the NDH, spoke in the same context.²¹ As expected, their views were adopted by state institutions. Thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw the Muslims in Stara Raška as "Croatian people" and already in September 1944 there was prevailing conviction that they "felt" Croats according to popular belief.²² The same

¹⁶ www.stat.gov.rs, приступљено 13.05.2024.

¹⁷ Милутин Живковић, *Независна држава Хрватска у Србији. Усташки режим у Прибоју, Пријеполју, Новој Вароши и Сјеници (април-септембар 1941)*, (Београд: Друштво историчара Србије „Стојан Новаковић“, 2018), 53–56.

¹⁸ М. Hadžijahić, *op. cit.*, 101.

¹⁹ In his recollections after the war, Eugen Kvaternik, the head of the Ustasha surveillance service among other things, criticized Pavelić for supposedly, all his life, "having some hodja from the vicinity of Pljevlje as his role model", primarily because he considered him "a typical representative of the decadent and chaotic Ottoman Empire". *Гласник Српског историјско-културног друштва „Његош“*, 42, (1979), 51.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 27, (1971), 16; „Uvodnik“, *Osvit*, 8.03.1942.

²¹ „Vojskovođa Slavko Kvaternik o novoj Hrvatskoj“, *Novi list*, 3.05.1941.

²² Историјски архив „Рас“ Нови Пазар (ИАРНИП), фонд 283, НОР, Унутарњо-политички преглед бр. 12 Политичког одјела – Опћи одсек, Министарства вањских послова НДХ, Загреб (обрађивач, прочелник Политичког одјела др. Ригер), под ознаком Врло тајно, достављен посланствима у Берлину, Будимпешти и Братислави, генералним конзулатима

attitude prevailed at the General Directorate for Order and Security.²³ In 1941, the Statistical Office, on the other hand, wrote that there were as many as “280,000 Croats” living in Serbia (without Vojvodina and Kosovo), which almost entirely referred to the Muslims of Stara Raška.²⁴

The perception of the Ustasha regime can also be registered through the writings of the press. Most of the papers followed an ideological line almost throughout the war. “There are a lot of Muslim Croats in Sandzak”, “we remember the Muslim Croatian blood in Sandzak”, “there is no dispute about the fact that Sandzak Muslims are of Croatian blood and origin”, “Croatian Muslim and Catholic population of Sandzak”, are just some of the constructions that we can read on the pages of “Hrvatski Glas”, “Novi Behar” or “Hrvatske krajine” (already in 1941).²⁵

The Sarajevo press wrote similarly. “Sarajevski novi list” and “Osvit” stand out, although the latter avoided this terminology in the later stages of the war. In June 1941, the author, signed with the initial “h”, wrote about the “Croatian element” in Stara Raška, i.e. about the local Muslims as “Sandzak Croats”. Identification such as “Sandzak Croats from the order of the Muslim faith” and “Sandzak Muslim Croats” was carried by this newspaper as early as May 1944, and even in February of the last war year.²⁶ “Osvit”, as a newspaper with a pan-Islamist character, also wrote at the beginning of 1942 about the Muslims of Stara Raška as “a part of the Croatian people”.²⁷ To be fair, the press also used terms like “Muslims”, “Muslims” and “Sandzakli”, although it is difficult to determine which of them were more common.²⁸

у Бечу и Минхену, конзулатима у Љубљани и Прагу, сталном трговинском представништву у Цириху, 15. рјуна 1944, 1, 8.

²³ Željko Karaula, „Prilog za biografiju vođe muslimanske milicije u Sandžaku Sulejmana Pačariza (1895–1945?)“, *ALMANAH – Časopis za proučavanje, prezentaciju i zaštitu kulturno-istorijske baštine Bošnjaka/Muslimana*, 91–92, (2023), 106.

²⁴ „Po broju stanovnika Hrvatska spada među srednje evropske države“, *Hrvatski narod*, 8.07.1941.

²⁵ „Zvijerstva Srba nad muslimanima u Sandžaku“, *Hrvatski glas*, 25.07.1941; „Hrvatski muslimani u svojoj nezavisnoj državi“, *Novi behar*, 15.05.1941; „Muslimani Hrvati Bosne i Hercegovine“, *Hrvatska krajina*, 7.05.1941; „Bosansko-hercegovački muslimani i Hrvatstvo“, *Hrvatska krajina*, 23.04.1941.

²⁶ „120.000 sandžačkih Hrvata traže pripojenje svojoj državi“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 13.06.1941; *Sarajevski novi list*, maj 1944, br. 887, 5; *Sarajevski novi list*, 27.02.1945, 1.

²⁷ „Uvodnik“, *Osvit*, 8.03.1942.

²⁸ „Hrvatsko obilježje u Sandžaku“, *Hrvatska krajina*, 26.04.1941; „Zvijerstva Srba nad muslimanima u Sandžaku“, *Hrvatski glas*, 25.07.1941; „Strašno stanje sandžačkih muslimana“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 16.05.1941.

From the other direction, the Kingdom of Albania reached out to the Muslims of Stara Raška. The foundations of its aspirations were laid during the 19th century. In particular, the League of Prizren convened in 1878, among other things, demarcated the territorial borders of Albanian nationalism. Thus, among its delegates we find representatives of Muslims from Pljevlje, Sjenica and N. Pazar.²⁹ Where the League had failed, the National Assembly in Vljora succeeded in 1912, when it proclaimed the country's independence. However, the Albanians were not satisfied with its borders because they were left without territories in what were then Serbia, Montenegro and Greece.³⁰ The San Stefano Peace (1878) and the London Conference (1912) were seen as tragic events in national history.³¹

The Second World War provided an opportunity for revision. When it comes to Stara Raška, one of the key arguments of Albanian politics was, similarly to the NDH, the theory of the same ethnic origin of the local Muslims. The position was widely accepted, from the supreme authorities in Tirana to those in Kosovo. For example, in the fall of 1942, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) wrote about the "Albanian population of Sjenica and B. Polje", and Albanian Prime Ministers Mustafa Kruja, Ekrem Ljibohova and Redžep Mitrovica used the same terminology. When, further on, they communicated with their superior, the Ministry for Liberated Territories (MOT), the mayors of Prizren and Peć talked about the "Albanians of Sjenica", that is, the "Albanian population" of Pljevlja, Priboj, Prijepolje, B. Polje and Berane.³² Kolj Biba Mirakaj, head of the Fascist Party of Albania, saw all Muslims in the Sjenica-B. Polje-Peć triangle as Albanians.³³

On the other hand, the Kosovo Committee, one of whose tasks was to conceptualize the legal and political mold by which Stara Raška would enter the borders of "Greater Albania", had a different opinion. Its distinguished members Bedri Pejani, Tafil Boljetini and Redžep Mitrovica signed a report from June 1941 in which they rejected the possibility that there were Islamized Slavs in Stara Raška. All those who spoke the Serbian language were therefore classified in the group of "Slavophone Albanians".³⁴

²⁹ Михајло Војводић, *Србија и Балканско питање (1875–1914)*, (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2000), 30, 42.

³⁰ Paskal Milo, "Greater Albania" *between fiction and reality*, (Tirana: Author, 2001), 15, 19, 21.

³¹ Arkivi Qëndror i Shtetit (AQSh), fond 167, v(iti) 1941, dos(ja) 171, dok(ument) 6.

³² AQSh, fondi 166, v. 1942, dos. 88, dok. 11; Ibid, fondi 152, v. 1942, dos. 387, dok. 11; Ibid, dos. 277, dok. 1.

³³ Ibid, fondi 149, v. 1943, I, dos. 632, dok. 27; Ibid, dok. 70.

³⁴ Ibid, fond 167, v. 1941, dos. 171, dok. 3; Ibid, dok. 4.

They further state an interesting thing. That in the area of the right bank of the Lim (B. Polje, Sjenica, Tutin, Rožaje and N. Pazar) there were, in addition to Slavophones, about 60,000 “Albanians” who speak their mother tongue, and about 30,000 “Bosniaks”.³⁵ This is one of the few mentions of this term during the Second World War. An even rarer example is the separation of Muslims from their Serbian, Croatian and/or Albanian identity, through ethnic-linguistic-geographical determinant. During 1942, the inspector for Kosovo Kočo Tasi also used the name “Bosniak”, separating it from the name “Albanians”.³⁶

The views of the Kosovo Committee were not generally accepted, since the government in Tirana saw that the Stara Raška Muslims were rejecting the Albanian national name. Therefore, in order to reduce their choice, the term “Muslim (Bosniak)” was introduced in the 1942/1943 census of the population from the MOT area. It is a coined word whose goal was to place all today’s Bosniaks within the Albanian national corps. The reason is that within this definition, they could only declare themselves as persons of “Albanian origin – speaking Albanian” or “Albanian origin – speaking Slavic”.³⁷

The question arises as to how the local Serbs viewed their neighbors. With the exception of certain inscriptions in the Belgrade press,³⁸ the majority of Serbs see Muslims as a separate religious group. They do the same when they call them “Turks”, wanting to highlight their conversion.³⁹ For example, Tihomir Đorđević, a school inspector from Raška, wrote in his diary about the citizens of N. Pazar of the Islamic denomination, stating that they were “Muslims”, “Turks”, and even “Arnauts”.⁴⁰ Priest Selimir Popović from Štavlje near Sjenica used the first two terms for the same, as did his parishioners, Serbian peasants.⁴¹ Since they were the basis of their military power, these names also pre-

³⁵ Ibid, dok. 1.

³⁶ The leaders of the Kosovo Committee used this term to refer to Muslims who had moved to Stara Raška from Bosnia. They were settled in all its cities, as well as in the villages around Sjenica. Ibid, dok. 2; Ibid, fondi 166, v. 1942, dos. 86, dok. 3.

³⁷ The census was also conducted in the area of Rožaj, Tutin, Plava, Gusinje and in some villages on Pešter. Ibid, fondi 166, v. 1943, dos. 76, dok. 3.

³⁸ *Ново време*, 30.01.1944, 3; *Српски народ*, 25.12.1943, 5.

³⁹ Урош С. Шешум, *Србија и Стара Србија (1804–1839)*, (Београд: Филозофски факултет, 2017), 328–329.

⁴⁰ Историјски архив Краљево (ИАК), фонд 412, Тихомир Ђорђевић (ТЂ), кут. 4, 6.02.1944, 1; Исто, 14.02.1944, 2; Исто, 22.04.1944, 2.

⁴¹ Војни архив (ВА), Четничка архива (ЧА), кут(ија) 301, ф. 1, док. 1, 23; ИАРНП, фонд 76, Окружни суд Нови Пазар (ОСНП), инв(ентарски) бр(ој), 2, ф. НСК 5/46, док. Саслушање Павловића из Слатине, општине Сопотанске, 28.05.1945, 1.

vailed in the documentation created by the work of the local bodies of the Ravna Gora movement.⁴²

Although some Muslims undoubtedly still recognized themselves as "Turks" in the interwar period (while the ethnic ones were called "Ottomans"),⁴³ and the influence of Turkey on them during the occupation was significant, this kind of address was still perceived as "pejorative". The counter-term for Serbs, with the same negative connotation, was "Vlachs".⁴⁴ To be honest, we have examples of those Muslims who still saw themselves and their compatriots as "Turks", although the question here is whether it was a matter of national or religious definition.⁴⁵

As for the German and Italian occupiers, they took a practical approach. Due to military needs on the ground, they did not delve deeply into the identity combinatorics that revolved around Muslims. In May 1941, the command of the German 60th Division, for example, wrote that the Prijepolje-Priboj-N.Varoš area was populated "predominantly by Bosnian Muslims, mixed with Serbs", and that in the Sjenica area "there are predominantly Albanians" or, according to another version, "Albanian Muslims".⁴⁶ Essentially, the Germans accepted the information given to them by the local elites. We find a similar attitude in the Wehrmacht command for Serbia. Its representatives labeled the Islamic population in the Lim Valley as "Muslims" who spoke and wrote in the Serbian language and script, but considered those around N. Pazar "Albanians".⁴⁷ Wehrmacht continued to use the same address, i.e. "Albanians" and/or "Muslim Albanians", and even "Arnauts", until the end of the occupation.⁴⁸

The attitude of the SS, on the other hand, was more accurate. Seeking to include the Muslims of Stara Raška in the project of cooperation with Islam on a

⁴² Државни архив Србије (ДАС), Безбедносно информативна агенција (БИА), И, 36(ирка), 266, 532–533; ВА, ЧА, кут. 299, ф. 1, док. 17, деп(еша) 115; Милутин Живковић, *Стара Рашка под италијанском окупацијом 1941–1943*, књ. 2, (Београд: Catena Mundi, Институт за савремену историју, 2020), 24, 226, 239, 277, 371.

⁴³ Момчило Исић, *Селаштво у Србији 1918–1941*, II, (Београд: Службени гласник, Институт за новију историју Србије, 2009), 494.

⁴⁴ „Ubijanja i razni drugi progoni nisu mogli prisiliti sandžački muslimana Hrvata da napuste svoju djedovinu“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 26.06.1941; „Strašno stanje sandžačkih muslimana“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 16.05.1941.

⁴⁵ ИАРНП, фонд 76, ОСНП, инв. бр. 2, ф. НСК 5/46, док. Саслушање Митхада Ђатовића, 18.11.1945, 1.

⁴⁶ ВА, Немачка архива (НА), кут. 145, ф. 4, док. 1, 23–26.

⁴⁷ Ibid, кут. 44Е, ф. 1, док. 1, 97; Исто, кут. 9, ф. 6, док 42, 1.

⁴⁸ Bundesarchiv (BArch), R 40/40, Anl(age), 85, 148; Ibid, RW 40/81, Anl. 57, 1; Ibid, RW 40/85, Anl. 68, 1; ВА, НА, кут. 76, ф. 3, док. 50, 1.

global level, it kept them within the framework of the religious group, which also suited them as well. For example, in the spring of 1943, the main office of the SS said of all of them, including those from N. Pazar, that they were “Muslims from the Sandzak area”, clearly separating them from the “neighboring Arnaut people”.⁴⁹ In 1944, the local SS representatives even recognized them with a certain degree of religious and cultural autonomy, by founding the “Muslim People’s Community” with headquarters in Sjenica.⁵⁰

Since they had plans to gain territorial expansion in the German zone (in the “Trepča” region) with the help of Albanians, the Italian authorities in Tirana accepted Muslims as ethnic Albanians. We find this view in the correspondence of both the governor of Albania Jacomoni and the general Dalmazzo of the Italian forces there.⁵¹ Jacomoni spoke of Muslims from the area of B. Polje, Sjenica and Tutin as Albanians before the Italian authorities in Montenegro.⁵² However, they had a different approach. They treated Muslims strictly as a religious group (just like the Serbs), partly to separate them from Albanian and Croatian aspirations. At the same time, they saw them as a “static” and culturally “impoverished” part of the population compared to Christians.⁵³

The only party in the war that “consistently” worked on “recognizing the ethnic uniqueness” of Muslims was the KPJ.⁵⁴ In Stara Raška, the communists guided the Muslims in this direction, considering that they were inactive in this regard. The main goal of the KPJ was to separate as many of them as possible from the occupiers and attract them to its units. They did this primarily by using the term “Muslim” in the national sense, and by creating a local political representation (ZAVNOS).⁵⁵ Also, the KPJ had several educated Muslims from Stara Raška in its ranks, on whom it relied in its propaganda work. The results were still lacking, which may be one of the reasons for the weakening of this initiative after the liberation of Yugoslavia.

At the end of the war, this caused real confusion in the perception of Muslims by the administration of the new communist authorities. One gets the impression that each institution arbitrarily approached their identification. This re-

⁴⁹ *Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA)*, Mikrofilme R100998-25754, dok. 1, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Zagreb (DGZ), kut. 241, dok. 12, 1; BArch, RW 40/85, Anl. 85, 1.

⁵¹ Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico Dello Stato Maggiore (AUSSME), 9. Armata, N-6/1089, All(egato) 13, 1.

⁵² *Ibid*, All. 88, 4.

⁵³ *Ibid*, Div. “Taurinense”, bus. N-6/1003, Nr. 2986, 5.

⁵⁴ M. Hadžijahić, *op. cit.*, 101.

⁵⁵ M. Живковић, *Стара Рашка...*, књ. 1, 149.

sulted in an even stronger attachment of Muslims to Islam and an additional distance from national self-determination.

The Yugoslav State Commission for War Crimes (DKRZ) designated several Muslim war criminals from the vicinity of N. Pazar and Tutin as "Arnauts" in an official document. The District Court (OS) in Kragujevac acted in the same way. The DKRZ branch for Arandjelovac, on the other hand, christened them "Skipetars".⁵⁶ Another Muslim war criminal from the Novi Pazar area was further seen by the local DKRZ branch as a "Yugoslav Muslim". His war comrade from M. Zvornik at the same time passed as a "Turk".⁵⁷ For example, in 1950, the state security authorities registered a Muslim from Nova Varoš as a "Serbian of the Muslim faith", even though he had fled his homeland during the war because of them. His compatriot from Petnjica near Berane, who had been considered an Albanian during the occupation, was declared a "Montenegrin", etc.⁵⁸ At the same time, Muslim Roma were registered as "Gypsies".⁵⁹

Thus, the Muslims of Stara Raška came out of World War II at the same level of ethnic (un)definedness as they had been during the period before and during the war, and Islam remained as their main stronghold of self-determination.

"Za dom spremni"⁶⁰ or not?

Muslims as part of the Croatian national corps

World War II frustrated some nations' long-prepared plans, while to others, on the complete opposite, it gave a chance to achieve them. One piece in that global mosaic is represented by the Muslims of Stara Raška. With the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1941, an opportunity was presented to them to restart the political agendas from 1878, that is, 1917.

Specifically, it concerns the plan to annex Stara Raška within the territory of Bosnia, and through the entry within the borders of the NDH. The key arguments for this were the alleged inseparability of the two areas since ancient times and the Croatian origin of the population of Islamic faith.⁶¹ The intellectuals who had to provide an ideological-historical basis for this were the journalist Kasim

⁵⁶ Архив Југославије (АЈ), фонд 110, ДКРЗ, кут. 824, 1137; Ibid, кут. 443, 514; Ibid, ф. 24.271, 441.

⁵⁷ Ibid, кут. 743, 53; Ibid, кут. 730, 832.

⁵⁸ Ibid, ф. 9220, 468; ДАС, БИА, И, 36. 270, 49.

⁵⁹ ДАС, БИА, И, 36. 34, ф. 6, 223.

⁶⁰ "Ready for the Homeland".

⁶¹ „Novopazarski Sandžak u prošlosti“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 14.05.1941.

Hadžić and the lawyer Murat Bajrović from Priboj, and the writer Iljaz Dobardžić from B. Polje. They were supported from Sarajevo by Pavelić's trustees, philologist Hakija Hadžić and parish priest Božidar Bralo.⁶² A greater number of Muslims, especially those living on the left bank of the Lim, accepted this position, at least temporarily.

However, Muslims could not become Croats overnight. We can see this based on the appearance of the term "Bosniak" in the first days of the occupation. At the end of April, we read on the pages of "Hrvatska Krajina" that the Muslims of Stara Raška were considered "Bosnians".⁶³ A few days later, there was a confirmation of this opinion. In a letter to the NDH Deputy Prime Minister Osman Kulenović, 38 prominent Muslims who claimed to speak on behalf of all those from Stara Raška, wrote: "We from Sandzak feel like Bosniaks, we speak Bosniak and we are no different from the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina".⁶⁴ Among others, the text was signed by Kasim Hadžić, Iljaz Dobardžić and leading Muslim politician Hasan Zvizdić from Sjenica.⁶⁵

In mid-May, Hadžić also published one of his texts in the Ustasha press. In addition to the call for the annexation to Bosnia, it stated, in addition to the terms "Muslims" and "Sandžaklije", that they had "always considered themselves Bosniaks, and their language Bosniak".⁶⁶ A similar text also arrived from Pljevlja at the same time.⁶⁷ However, there are indications that not all Muslims on the other side of the Drina perceived them in this way.⁶⁸

The term "Bosniaks", however, soon disappeared, probably at the request of the NDH regime, and possibly Bosnian Muslims. Here, for the first time, we see the political self-interest of the Muslims of Stara Raška when it comes to their national declaration. When their representatives, led by Do-

⁶² „Prosvetne prilike Sandžackih muslimana“, *Osvit*, 19.12.1943; „Poglavnikovo povjereništvo u Sarajevu ukinuto“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 9.08.1941.

⁶³ „Pokolj muslimana u Sandžaku“, *Hrvatska krajina*, 29.04.1941.

⁶⁴ „Muslimani sandžaka ptpredsjedniku vlade dru Osmanu Kulenoviću“, *Novi list*, 2.05.1941.

⁶⁵ BA, Народноослободилачка војска Југославије (НОВЈ), кут. 1671, ф. 9, док. 1, 1.

⁶⁶ „Novopazarski Sandžak u prošlosti“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 14.05.1941.

⁶⁷ „Strašno satnje sandžacki muslimana“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 16.05.1941.

⁶⁸ According to 1808 data, we see that some Bosnian Muslims did not recognize those from Stara Raška as compatriots. Hadžić also wrote about this a century later. He says that during his studies in Sarajevo in 1937, local Muslims considered him an "Albanian". 38 representatives of Stara Raška wrote in the same context when they contacted Osman Kulenović. In particular, they criticized the Muslims from Bosnia for not caring about their brothers on the right side of the Drina. „Muslimana Sandžaka podpredsjedniku vlade dru Osmanu Kulenoviću“, *Novi list*, 2.05.1941; *Osvit*, 6.08.1941, 2; M. Hadžijahić, *op. cit.*, 118–119.

bardžić, at the same time addressed Pavelić directly, they described themselves as "Muslims of Sandzak".⁶⁹ Then, on May 17, Dobardžić wrote a letter addressed to Adolf Hitler. In it, he stated that there were "130,000 Muslim-Croats" in Stara Raška, who, according to him, belonged to the "Croatian nation by blood, language and morals". A week later, a group of his compatriots also addressed Mussolini. They "clarified" that there were "125,000 Muslim-Croats" in "Sandzak of Novi Pazar", i.e. that only residents of "Croatian nationality" lived there. According to the authors, during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, they were forbidden to "call themselves Croats", so the term 'Bosniaks' was used for that reason".⁷⁰

In the following months, as the NDH's power over the part of Stara Raška strengthened, the mass identification of Muslims as members of the Croatian nation continues, while the terms "Muslims" and "Sandzaklije" fade into the background. "Legitimate representatives of the wishes of the entire Muslim population of Sandzak" already informed Pavelić on May 15 that 97% of the local population was "of Slavic origin and Croat oriented", i.e. that all of them were "Muslim Croats".⁷¹ Further, on June 14, the Ustasha authorities in Zagreb received news that in Sjenica "Croats themselves", of whom there were "over 80 percent", had replaced the previous Albanian administration, declared Croatian rule and hung "Croatian flags and pictures of the Chief" around the city. The letter was also signed by the aforementioned Hasan Zvizdić.⁷²

When the NDH troops entered Sjenica a few days later, the "Croatian Muslims and Catholics" citizens greeted them with "Croatian tricolors". The entire town was decorated with them, while at the same time, all Cyrillic inscriptions were removed.⁷³ Here, once again, but not for the last time, we see the opportunism of Muslims. Just a month earlier, the German command in Sjenica reported that the town was mostly inhabited by "Albanian Muslims", who looked at the "Croatian influence" with disdain.⁷⁴

The pro-Croatian position soon spread to the easternmost edges of Stara Raška. Thus, at the beginning of July, a "deputation of 20 of the most respected citizens" of N. Pazar asked the Croatian authorities in Sarajevo that their home-

⁶⁹ „Brzjav muslimana iz Sandžaka Poglavniku“, *Novi list*, 3.05.1941; „Brzjav Sandžačkih muslimana Poglavniku“, *Hrvatska krajina*, 7.05.1941.

⁷⁰ BA, HДХ, кут. 236, ф. 1, док. 45, 2–12.

⁷¹ Ibid, ф. 4, док. 9, 1–3.

⁷² Ibid, кут. 237, ф. 1, док. 8, 2.

⁷³ „Svečani doček hrvatske vojske i oružništva u Sjenici“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 21.06.1941.

⁷⁴ BA, HA, кут. 415, ф. 4, док. 1, 25–26.

land also join the NDH.⁷⁵ In the context of bringing the Muslims of Novi Pazar closer to Bosnia and the Croatian state, the work of the political and educational society “Tarik” should also be observed. Although its work was banned, the ties of Muslims with Bosnia were not severed. In January 1943, two people from Novi Pazar were arrested in Belgrade because a letter addressed to the local “Croatian Club” had been found in their possession, the content of which spoke about Sandzak’s “joining” the NDH.⁷⁶

In Prijepolje and Sjenica, on the other hand, in June 1941, the name day of the “Father of the Homeland” and chief Ante Pavelić was celebrated.⁷⁷ From the balcony of the county headquarters in Prijepolje, Chief Tanović says that “the Croats of Sandzak will know how to appreciate (*Pavelić’s, M.Ž.*) the attention”. His deputy, Čengić, began his speech by exclaiming “Brothers, Croats”, after which he moved on to the topic of the “Croatian community” in the area of the Lim basin. From this ceremony, a greeting telegram was sent to Pavelić, Kvaternik and Hitler. It also stated this: “Muslims and Catholic Croats of the district of Prijepolje in Sandzak send you warm greetings and gratitude for the liberation”.⁷⁸ The telegram to Hitler was signed by the mayor of Prijepolje, Muhamed Hašimbegović, a former Yugoslav MP.⁷⁹

Then, at the beginning of July, the “Croatianness” of the Muslims of Stara Raška reached its peak. “Muslim and Catholic brotherhood” was supposed to reach its “full expression” on July 8, with the restoration of the Catholic place of worship of St. Cyril and Methodius on the bank of the Lim in Prijepolje.⁸⁰ Pastor Bralo from Sarajevo arrived in the city on the Lim for that occasion. “All the houses in Prijepolje were decorated with Croatian flags”, while at the municipality there was a triumphal arch with the inscription “Za dom spremni”.

Addressing the crowd, most of whom were Muslims, Bralo called for love and peace “between Muslims and Roman Catholic Croats of Sandzak”. The other speakers performed in a similar manner. The future mayor of Prijepolje, Alija Aginčić, on behalf of, as he saw it, “all Croats, Muslims and Catholics”, pledged

⁷⁵ Ibid, кут. 338, ф. 3, док. 5, 6.

⁷⁶ ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 34, 85.

⁷⁷ „Narodno slavlje u Sjenici“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 24.06.1941.

⁷⁸ „Proslava Poglavnikovog imendana u Sandžaku“, *Novi list*, 20.06.1941; „Sandžak je izrazio osobitu odanost i privrženost prigodom Poglavnikova imendana“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 17.06.1941.

⁷⁹ „Sandžak je izrazio osobitu odanost i privrženost prigodom Poglavnikova imendan“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 17.06.1941.

⁸⁰ The church was built in 1887 by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. This event fit perfectly into the narrative of Muslim-Islamized Croats. „Manifestacija sloge muslimana i katolika“, *Hrvatski narod*, 12.07.1941.

his loyalty to Pavelić. The climax of the ceremony came when the Prijepolje merchant Manjo Džandžanović promised Bralo that he would buy a bell for the church. With this, he wanted to seal the "eternal brotherhood of Muslims and Catholic Croats in Sandzak".⁸¹ The intention was that Hakija Hadžić would also come to Prijepolje for the mounting of the bell, but that never happened.

On July 30, the so-called "Memorandum of Mayor of Sandzak" was sent to the address of reis-ul-ulema Fehim Spah, Hadžić and Croatian authorities in u Sarajevo. This important document from the history of Stara Raška, but also of Serbia and Montenegro, begins with the statement that "Sandzak Muslims are a branch of Bosnian Muslims", in fact "part of the Croatian nation".⁸² On the same day, Muhamed Mušović, head of the county in Sjenica, at the funeral of several dead Ustashas, asked the gathered "Croat-Muslims of Sandzak" to give their lives for "their motherland Croatia".⁸³ The Ustasha district leader for Sandzak, Murat Bajrović, was more explicit. He also stated at a funeral in Prijepolje, among other things: "Blood was spilled, the holy blood of Croats, Catholics and Muslims... We Muslims from Sandzak are Croats, that is how we declare, that's all we want and want to be and that's what we'll remain."⁸⁴

However, as the summer of 1941 drew to a close, Muslim enthusiasm for the Croats and the Ustasha regime began to wane. There are two reasons for this. The first is the pressure from Italy for the NDH to leave their occupation zone, which happened in the first days of September. It thus became clear to the Muslims that the Ustasha regime would not protect them from the revenge of the Serbs, let alone unite them with Bosnia. In addition, the Italians viewed the emphasizing of their Croatian origin with distrust. Already in the letter of recognition of the Prijepolje Muslims to the outgoing NDH authorities, they were therefore defined only as a constituent part of the "Bosnian Muslims" from a "national point of view".⁸⁵

Since the withdrawal of the NDH from Stara Raška, the drivers of Croatian identity became the Muslims who had fled to its territory. They mostly settled

⁸¹ „Manifestacija hrvatske ustaške misli u Sandžaku“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 15.07.1941; „Manifestacija bratstva Hrvata katolika i muslimana. Obnova katoličke crkve u Prijepolju“, *Novi list*, 12.07.1941.

⁸² Historijski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine (HMBH), fond NDH, kut. 1, dok. 19a, 1.

⁸³ „Pokop dvojice hrabrih ustaša“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 30.07.1941.

⁸⁴ These words were allegedly accompanied by thunderous applause from the citizens present. „Sandžački Hrvati odaju počast Poglavniku, njemačkoj i talijanskoj vojsci“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 3.09.1941.

⁸⁵ HMBH, fond UNS, kut. 1, dok. 35, 1.

in Sarajevo and were gathered around the newspaper “Osvit”. Kasim Hadžić became its editor. Thus, in the following years of occupation, this newspaper, as well as some other newspapers, became strongholds of the “Croatianess” of the Muslims of Stara Raška. Those who remained in their homeland, however, mostly abandoned this position and returned to the status of a religious group.

On the pages of “Osvit”, Hadžić tried to rekindle their mood, as well as to keep the Croatian government’s attention on Stara Raška, since it was slowly but surely slipping out of its focus.⁸⁶ He was assisted by Iljaz Dobardžić. Thus, in the text signed by Hadžić in April 1942, we read that the entire “Croatian people, especially Muslim Croats”, was ready to join the “fight against Bolshevism” at the invitation of the “genius Führer and the greatest fighter for the creation of the New Order – Adolf Hitler”. Hadžić concludes the article with the opinion that “Croatian Muslims” were still loyal to Hitler in the interwar period, and that at that moment there was no sacrifice “that a Croatian Muslim” would not bear for “Germany and Adolf Hitler”.⁸⁷

A month later, the same newspaper published a story about the inhabitants of the “heroic Croatian village” of Mioče, 12 km from Priboj. It had “42 Croatian Muslim” houses and allegedly kept a “Croatian guard on the Lim”.⁸⁸ In parallel with that, the former Ustasha inmate from Sjenica, Latif Prašo, talked about “Muslims of Croatian Sandzak”, although in 1946, as a civil school teacher, before the court in N. Pazar, he only declared himself a “Muslim” (and signed in Cyrillic).⁸⁹

Given that the NDH authorities introduced strict censorship on news from Stara Raška after the political and military debacle they had experienced there, they were becoming a rarity, even in “Osvit”. Namely, it was not until January 1943 that the editors published a text about the death of Home Guard lieutenant Mustafa Prašović from Prijepolje, who was said to have “put his forces at the disposal of the (Croatian, M.Ž.) homeland” since 1941.⁹⁰ A few days later, on the pages of the same newspaper, we read about the suffering of “Croat-Muslims” from Bjelo Polje, Priboj, Pljevlja and Čajniče county.⁹¹

⁸⁶ „Poglavnik govori“, *Osvit*, 15.03.1942.

⁸⁷ „Veliki Njemački Rajh i muslimani“, *Osvit*, 10.04.1942.

⁸⁸ „Junačko držanje Miočana“, *Osvit*, 31.05.1942.

⁸⁹ ИАРНП, фонд 283, НОР, док. Кратак преглед рада Хрватског ослободилачког покрета Усташа у катару Сјеничком у Санџаку, 1; Исто, фонд 76, ОСНП, кут. 8, док. Саслушање Праша Латифа, 13.08.1946, 1; Ibid, док. Записник састављен у Окружном суду у Новом Пазару, 23.10.1946, 2.

⁹⁰ „Poručnik Mustafa Pašanović hrabro je poginuo“, *Osvit*, 10.01.1943.

⁹¹ „Nova zločinstva nad golorukim hrvatskim muslimanskim življem“, *Osvit*, 14.02.1943.

The attack of the Chetniks on the Muslim armed forces in early 1943 ended with their defeat and a large number of civilians killed. The inability of the NDH to adequately help them in this calamity separated even the most persistent Muslims from their Croatian identity.⁹² When they complained to the German authorities about these events during March and April in Zagreb and Berlin, respectively, Dobardžić and Bajrović spoke only about the "Muslim people", "Muslim population" or simply, about the "Muslims" of Stara Raška (which they differentiated from the "Arnauts").⁹³ In June, "Osvit" comes out with the designation "Bosnian Muslims" when talking about the residents of Prijepolje and Čajniče of the Islam confession.⁹⁴ The editors continued in this manner afterwards, especially after the capitulation of Italy. The term "Muslim-Croats" was replaced by "Sandzak Muslims", "Sandzaklije" and/or, most often, just "Muslims", although the discourse on their inseparability from Bosnian Muslims was not abandoned. The practice was followed by other newspapers.⁹⁵

Therefore, in the last years of the war, only the members of the Ustashe movement persisted in their position of Croatian identity, and the former promoters used it only when they could not avoid it.⁹⁶ In July 1944, the editors of "Osvit" published the text of Dr. Teodor von Uzorinac-Kohari, a Nazi youth activist and owner of the publishing house "Evropa" in Zagreb. He still saw Muslims from B. Polje, Priboj and Pljevlje as "Muslim Croats".⁹⁷ The former Ustasha *logor-nik* in Prijepolje Mahmut Hadžagić, then a non-commissioned officer of the "Black Legion", believed the same. He stated in one report that "all Muslim Croats of Sandzak" demand that NDH forces re-enter the Lim basin.⁹⁸ The last mention of the "Croat Muslims of Sandzak" that we registered is on the pages of "Sarajevski novi list" in one of the February 1945 editions.⁹⁹

⁹² AUSSME, Div. "Taurinense", bus. N-7/1273, Nr. 996, 2-3, 6; Ibid, Nr. 999, 2

⁹³ PA AA, DGZ, box Gehaim 68D, dok. 6, 1; Ibid, Mikrofilme R 100998-25754, dok. 2, 1-3.

⁹⁴ „Mi i naši. U oslobođenom Čajničju“, *Osvit*, 6.06.1943.

⁹⁵ „Svečani pokop pljevaljskog muftije“, *Osvit*, 19.09.1943; „Jedna zaboravljena 25-godišnjica“, *Sarajevski novi list*, oktobar 1943; „U Sandžaku se i žene bore“, *Osvit*, 12.12.1943; „Upitnik Sandžak“, *Osvit*, 9.01.1944.

⁹⁶ In February 1944, the NDH authorities allowed the "Croatian-Albanian Society" to be formed in Sarajevo. The Secretary of the Management Board of this organization was Hadžić, and one of its members was Iljaz Dobardžić. „Osnivanje hrvatsko-albanskog društva u Sarajevu“, *Novi list*, 25.02.1944.

⁹⁷ „Metode ravnogoraca“, *Osvit*, 2.07.1944.

⁹⁸ ИАПНП, фонд 283, НОР, Извештај Махмута Хаџагића, усташког логорника логора у Пријепољу и водника у "Црној легији" о приликама у СС дивизији муслимана у Санџаку (достављено Министарству вањских послова НДХ), 6.06. 1944, 1-2.

⁹⁹ *Sarajevski novi list*, 27.02.1945, 1.

The “Albanianness” of the Stara Raška Muslims

While a part of the Islamic people identified with the Croats, the other, especially since the first option had proved unfeasible, declared themselves as Albanians in a national sense. Roughly speaking, the border was the Lim, or rather its right bank, which was also seen by the government in Tirana as the border of Albanian historical lands. N. Pazar, Tutin and Rožaje on the one hand, and Sjenica, Petnjica and B. Polje on the other, appear as strongholds of “Albanianness”.

It started with a conference in K. Mitrovica on 21 April 1941, where the “Albanian” deputies of Drenica, Peć, Istok, Podujevo, Pristina, Vučitrn, Sjenica, N. Pazar and K. Mitrovica asked the commander of the German 60th Division for self-government of this area.¹⁰⁰ Then, in the mentioned sections, Albanians took over the municipal and county government, assuming that they made up the majority of the population. Sjenica was represented in K. Mitrovica by Omer Čingić, and N. Pazar by “Aćif Hadži Ahmeti”. The latter's real name was Aćif Hadžiahmetović Bljuta, and he was still a current multiple MP of the Yugoslav parliament and a former prominent member of “Džemijet”.¹⁰¹

Under Bljuta's leadership, N. Pazar changed its appearance after occupation. The town was decorated with Albanian flags, maps of the Albanian state and pictures of Skanderbeg. Streets in the city bore the names of prominent figures from Albanian history, while bilingual seals and stamps were introduced into the administration that corresponded to the Albanian narrative (the head of the county, for example, signed himself as “prefect”).¹⁰² In mid-June 1941, Bljuta went to Belgrade for an interview with the German authorities in Serbia. He was accompanied by one of their leading politicians, Džafer Deva, in solving the “Albanian question”, i.e. the annexation of the Novi Pazar region to Albania.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ General Friedrich Eberhard “guaranteed them nine counties” and demanded that Albanians be appointed to all key positions in the administration. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was dissatisfied with Eberhart (“he concluded a true state treaty with the Albanian minority without any authorization”), so it rejected the decisions from this meeting. ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 36, ф. 6, 177; Исто, 36. 34, ф. 6, 143; ИАРНП, фонд 283, НОР, док. Делимичан запис разговора генерала Еберхарта са албанским вођама на Косову и Метохији од 21.04.1941, 3–4.

¹⁰¹ ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 34, 86; ИАРНП, фонд 283, НОР, док. Делимичан запис разговора генерала Еберхарта ..., 1.

¹⁰² Милутин Живковић, *Између 'Велике Албаније' и окупиране Србије. Нови Пазар, Тутин и Ибарски Колашин (1941–1944)*, (Лепосавић: Институт за српску културу, 2018), 44.

¹⁰³ AQSh, fondi 167, v. 1941, dos. 171, do. 5.

About the same time, a large display of unity with Albania was organized in N. Pazar, after the decision of the local administration was made to enter its framework. The city was festively decorated, and a triumphal arch was placed at the entrance. The gathering was attended by about 1,000 people, all wearing Albanian national symbols. According to contemporaries, one of the speakers apologized to the crowd for not addressing them in Albanian but in the "Serbian language".¹⁰⁴ A similar gathering, where people cheered for "free Albania", but also for King "Ahmed Zogu", was held in N. Pazar in April 1942.¹⁰⁵

The activity of the "Skenderbeg" society, whose president was Sulejman Daka from N. Pazar, the son of the county head and Bljuta's cousin, should also be seen as a reflection of the "Albanianness" of the local Muslims. The society was active in popularizing the Albanian people and the state through: lectures, language courses, visits by cultural societies, plays and sports events. "Skenderbeg" had about 50 members, some of whom, due to the need for the work of the society, traveled to Albania.¹⁰⁶ It was not uncommon for N. Pazar, at the invitation of the local authorities, to be visited by representatives of the government in Tirana in charge of propaganda activities. For example, in June 1942, Professor Avni Zajmi from the Physical Education Institute in Tirana came to organize sports and cultural events with an Albanian character.¹⁰⁷

A similar thing happened in Tutin, as this town, as well as neighboring Rožaje, had entered the borders of Albania (Prefecture of Peć). The Albanian language prevailed in the administration, and since many could not speak it, officials were brought in from old Albania. The names of companies and public institutions were also written in Albanian, streets changed names, maps of "Greater Albania" appeared, etc.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the "Albanian population" was also defined as the Muslim inhabitants of several villages from Pešter, which belonged to Tutin sub-prefecture or Sjenica county.¹⁰⁹ Considering that, like their compatriots from N. Pazar, they were located within or on the very border of the Albanian state, with which they cooperated militarily, politically and economically, the determination of some of them for the Albanian identity lasted until liberation.

¹⁰⁴ М. Живковић, *Између...*, 45.

¹⁰⁵ ДАС, Ж-28, НОР, кут. 1, ф. Влада Милана Недића, док. 10, 2.

¹⁰⁶ М. Живковић, *Између...*, 153.

¹⁰⁷ AQSh, fondi 196, v. 1942, dos. 252, dok. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Ејуп Мушовић, *Тутин и околина*, (Београд: Етнографски институт САНУ, 1985), 87.

¹⁰⁹ AQSh, fondi 166, v. 1942, dos. 88, dok. 12; Ibid, dos. 86, dok. 2; Ibid, dok. 3; Ibid, fondi 149, I, dos. 353, dok. 14.

It was different with the Muslims of Sjenica and Bjelo Polje. Those from Sjenica initially accepted the decisions from K. Mitrovica and installed Albanian authorities, thus becoming part of the Albanian ethnic milieu. However, that soon changed. Therefore, at this point, we should once again point out the fluidity of their identity, depending on current interests.

Thus, we stated that in May 1941, the German occupation authorities estimated that the majority of the Albanian population living in the Sjenica area was against the NDH. A similar conclusion was reached by the Kosovo Committee, with the assessment that the Muslim population unanimously supported Albania.¹¹⁰ This is supported by the statement of their chief, who was recorded as “Omer Čingi” at the meeting in K. Mitrovica.¹¹¹ But at the end of April, “Čingi” became Čingić and in contact with the Croatian authorities defined himself as a “Bosniak”. And then by mid-June 1941, he “became” a Croat and “cheered the most for the Croatian army and the Chief” when they entered Sjenica.¹¹²

That changing the national identification of Muslims was a legitimate way of political struggle in World War II, especially when, as noted by a prominent communist and a Ravna Gora follower from Montenegro, it was necessary to “side with the stronger one”,¹¹³ can be seen both from this and from the examples that follow. Savić Marković Štedimlija wrote in 1944 that “a large part of Muslims in Montenegro and Sandzak asked to be annexed to Albania”, as they saw in this “the only salvation for themselves and their property”.¹¹⁴ We can see what he specifically meant from a letter from the Ministry of the Interior of the Albanian government sent in September 1942 to the Muslims, i.e. the “Albanian population”, of the Bjelo Polje and Sjenica regions. Faced with the danger of an attack by the Chetniks from Montenegro, and unable to help them, the Ministry advised them to put “marks on their hands (*Montenegrin*, *M.Ž.*) and a Montenegrin cap on their heads”. Therefore, to change their identity.¹¹⁵

The fact that the Muslims used this tactic is evidenced by a document created by the activity of the Berane Chetnik detachment command from 1943. It is the ban on local Muslims to wear “*šajkača*, *šubara*, hats or caps”, because then no one could distinguish them from Serbs.¹¹⁶ Moreover, this practice continued

¹¹⁰ AQSh, fondi 149, I, dosja 353, dok. 14

¹¹¹ ИАРНП, фонд 283, НОР, док. Делимичан запис разговора генерала Еберхарта..., 1.

¹¹² „Svečani doček hrvatske vojske i oružništva u Sjenici“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 21.06.1941.

¹¹³ Ibid, HOBJ, кут. 1, ф. 2, док. 14, 1–2; BA, ЧА, кут. 143, ф. 2, док. 27, 1

¹¹⁴ „Problem crnogorskih muslimana“, *Osvit*, 13.02.1944.

¹¹⁵ AQSh, fondi 166, v. 1942, dos. 88, dok. 11.

¹¹⁶ BA, ЧА, кут. 139, ф. 3, док. 2, 1.

in the post-war years. In the 1948 census, 98% of the 310,779 persons in Stara Raška were Serbs and Montenegrins, and five years later 75% of them (out of 350,121 registered). The Muslims, we see, took a new turn and entered the Serbian national corps, although they had at their disposal designations such as "undecided Muslims" or "Yugoslavs-undecided". Also, since 1953, a larger number of "Turks" appeared, for whom local Muslims declared that it would be easier for them to move to that country.¹¹⁷ They also "disappeared" by the 1980s, since the rate of emigration had decreased.

If all of the above is taken into account, it is not surprising that a Muslim delegation from 28 villages of the Sjenica, Bjelopolje and Berane county went to Tirana in early November 1941. Its 25 members submitted a petition there, only two months after the departure of the NDH from Stara Raška, allegedly on behalf of 50,000 Muslims, for the annexation of these regions to Albania. They pointed out that this population had always been about "Albanian feelings, blood, language, traditions, customs and habits". Due to their allegedly "pure Albanian" race, they wanted to unite with the "Albanian fatherland".¹¹⁸ They sought the opening of schools in the Albanian language and teachers from Albania who would teach them the language. This request is interesting considering that educated members of the delegation signed in Serbian Latin or Ottoman alphabet. However, their names were adapted to the Albanian pronunciation.¹¹⁹

Probably two months later, 15 representatives of the "Albanian population" from Petnjica approached the governor Jacomoni in Tirana with similar demands. In addition to the flag and seal of the Albanian state, they apparently received certain guarantees.¹²⁰ Already in February or early March 1942, the delegates of the "Albanian people" from Sjenica and Pešter approached the Prefect of Peć, Tafil Boletini, with the same request.¹²¹ Representatives of B. Polje and the municipalities of Korita, Lozna, Zaton, Rasovo and Bistrica (all from the right bank of the Lim), 19 of them, further asked Mustafa Kruja on March 31 to enter the borders of the country whose prime minister he was. They justified their request by saying that they were an "indivisible group of pure Albanians" and that they spoke the Albani-

¹¹⁷ S. Mrduljaš, *op. cit.*, 20–23.

¹¹⁸ AQSh, fondi 149, I, dos. 1184, dok. 19.

¹¹⁹ Among them was a certain "Đula Ago" from the Petnjica region. In 1943, in contacts with the Italians, but also with the Serbs, he appeared as "Muslim" "Đula Agović". Ibid, dok. 20; Ibid, dok. 21; AUSSME, Div. "Puglie", bus. N-7/1313, Nr. 1101, 1–2; BA, ЧА, кут. 19, ф. 5, док. 21, 1; Ibid, ф. 2, док. 8, 1.

¹²⁰ AQSh, fondi 149, I, dos. 353, dok. 1, Ibid, dok. 2.

¹²¹ Ibid, v. 1942, dos. 353, dok. 14; Ibid, dok. 15.

an language and had similar traditions and laws.¹²² They added that they wanted to return to “mother Albania” also because of constant conflicts with local Serbs.¹²³

For their part, the prominent people of Sjenica of Islam faith held a conference where they decided that in August 1942 they too would send representatives to Jacomoni. The Albanian delegates in Tirana were led by Bey Rasim Ćatović, a politically influential figure. They demanded that Sjenica, Petnjica and all of Pešter become part of “Greater Albania”. They returned from Tirana, with one flag and 12 seals for the municipalities of the Sjenica county, like a pledge.¹²⁴ Inspector for Kosovo Kočo Tasi recorded another similar contact at the end of September, this time with the Prefecture of Peć. Specifically, that Hasan Zvizdić came to ask “the government of Albania for instructions and protection”.¹²⁵ However, the Italian authorities in Stara Raška did not approve of the territorial expansion of Albania and soon removed it “from the agenda”.¹²⁶

The dismissive attitude of the Italians, and even more the inability of Albania to help them in the fight against the Serbs and remedy the consequences of the defeat they suffered in January 1943,¹²⁷ once again returned the local Muslims, as in the case of “Croatianess”, to religious self-determination. From that moment on, their elite got closer to the Germans, on whom they pinned their hopes until the end of the war. The capitulation of Italy further encouraged them in this, so the Albanian identity of the Muslims of the Sjenica, Bjelopolje, Tutina and Berane regions was rapidly melting. This is confirmed by the 1948 and 1953 census data, when the number of Albanians in Stara Raška, out of the aforementioned 50,000–70,000, fell to slightly more than 1% (3,000–4,000 people distributed in the Plav-Gusinje and Rožaje regions).¹²⁸

¹²² Ibid, dok. 29; Архив Југославије, фонд 103, Емигрантска влада, кут. 32, док. Шифровани телеграм отправљен из Цариграда, 4.06.1942, 1;

¹²³ “The union of our country with the Albanian homeland would be... an element of fundamental importance for the future of ethnic Albania itself - we would, without hesitation, be the iron avant-garde of the descendants of... Albania, in cooperation with our brothers, we would do miracles,” it says in the document. AQSh, fondi 149, v. 1942, dos. 353, dok. 30; Ibid, dok. 31.

¹²⁴ ИАРНП, фонд 76, ОСНП, инв. бр. 3, ф. КЗП 20/46, док. Саслушање Расима Ђатовића, 3.11.1945, 1; Ibid, док. Саслушање Расима Ђатовића, децембар 1945, 2; ВА, ЧА, кут. 19, ф. 1, док. 11, 1; Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania*, (Rocca San Casciano: Arti Grafiche „F. Cappelli“, 1965), 297, 299–300.

¹²⁵ AQSh, fondi 166, v. 1942, dos. 86, dok. 2.

¹²⁶ ВА, Недићева архива (НДА), кут. 67, ф. 25, док. 1, 1.

¹²⁷ AUSSME, Div. “Taurinense” bus. N-7/1273, 1; Ibid, Div. “Puglie”, bus. N-7/1313, Nr. 169, 1; Ibid, Nr. 558, 1; Ibid, Div. “Venezia”, bus. N-6/1006, Nr. 610, 3.

¹²⁸ S. Mrduljaš, *op. cit.*, 20–23.

However, not only these parts of Stara Raška and Montenegro "flirted" with Albanian identity. Although there were some reports that the Muslims of the Plav-Gusinje region called their language "Bosniak" in the interwar period, their representatives declared themselves Albanians as early as June 1941 and demanded to join "free Albania" (which they achieved). The same demands in the same period and with the same outcome, arrived in Tirana from the area of Ulcinj. It also remains recorded in the archives that there is a possibility that the "Albanian identity" managed to bridge the Lim. In August 1942, the Prefect of Peć Husni Peja complained about a "Sharia judge" and a "Montenegrin teacher" who, according to him, were dissuading, among others, the Muslims of Pljevlja, Priboj and Prijepolje from connecting with Albania.¹²⁹

NDH and "Greater Albania" in the roles of assimilators

Fluctuation between multiple identities was not viewed with approval in Zagreb and Tirana. Thus, the local authorities, especially the Albanian ones, tried to keep today's Bosniaks with various measures in the appropriate political options, moving into the domain of their assimilation.

Since, however, the NDH did not provide stronger strongholds in Stara Raška during the war, we can trace this process in its case only in the first months of the occupation in the Lim basin. At that time, the Croatian Latin alphabet was introduced as the official script in the administration in local towns, and the Cyrillic alphabet was banned.¹³⁰ *Šajkače* and *opanci* were publicly destroyed. The streets were decorated with Croatian flags, etc.

In addition to the field activity, assimilation also took place through the press. The Ustasha press repeated more or less throughout the entire war that "Sandzak is a centuries-old integral part of Herceg-Bosnia, which again (was, according to M.Ž.) the heartland of Croatia".¹³¹ The historical and cultural heritage of this area was also referenced. In several places we noticed claims that Mehmed Paša Sokolović, the Ottoman Grand Vizier from the 16th century, was an ethnic Croat.¹³² Let us mention the text signed by the engineer D. P. from May 1941, in which, on quasi-scientific grounds, he claimed that Stara Raška's belonging to historical Croatian lands was evidenced by "historical data, ethnography, language,

¹²⁹ AQSh, fondi 152, v. 1941, dos. 40, dok. 4; Ibid, v. 1942, dos. 387, dok. 11.

¹³⁰ „Svečani doček hrvatske vojske i oružništva u Sjenici“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 21.06.1941.

¹³¹ „Pitanje Sandžaka“, *Osvit*, 7.11.1943.

¹³² „Političko značenje Hrvata muslimana“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 20.05.1941; „Hrvatski muslimani u svojoj nezavisnoj državi“, *Novi behar*, 15.05.1941.

names, type of people...archaeology, i.e. the architecture of the oldest church buildings". The author states that the construction of Christian places of worship was "typical for the whole of Dalmatian Croatia", on the basis of which he concludes that Mileševa, Church of St. Peter and Paul and the Banja monastery, and all other places of worship on the territory of Stara Raška, "stemmed from the tree of the Croatian nation itself".¹³³

In the same period, only in other newspapers, we read that it is "certainly known" that this area was inhabited in the past by "Croatian population of the Catholic faith".¹³⁴ Considering the content of such magazines, it is not surprising that the Bosniak name was quickly removed from the press. At the same time, on the issue of identity, Stara Raška came into conflict with Albanian nationalism as well.¹³⁵

Unlike the NDH, Albania's assimilation capacities were significant. They were ongoing until 1944, although their intensity varied. The main reason for this was the decision of the Italians to include most of the Yugoslav territories inhabited by Albanians within its borders in August 1941. All pro-fascist and anti-fascist elements in Kosovo and in old Albania supported this decision.¹³⁶ Thus, the Albanian borders encompassed Rožaje, Tutin, Plav and Gusinje, with certain guarantees that N. Pazar, Sjenica, Petnjica and/or B. Polje could join them at some point.¹³⁷

The population of N. Pazar, more precisely the part that was not considered "Albanian", suffered the greatest pressure. The qeleshe became a desirable fashion detail in the town, surnames were shortened by removing the ending "ić", Albanian flags were hung on houses and shops, and company names were

¹³³ „Srednjovekovno crkveno graditeljstvo u Novopazarskom Sandžaku nosi karakteristike hrvatske primorske crkvene arhitekture“, *Hrvatski narod*, 18.05.1941.

¹³⁴ „120.000 sandžačkih Hrvata traže pripojenje svojoj državi“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 13.06.1941.

¹³⁵ The Kosovo Committee reacted already in June 1941. In the "Albanian-Croatian conflict", the Croats did not have any legal, historical or cultural strongholds for its members. The dispute also broke out in Janjevo in Kosovo over the Roman Catholic population, who were treated by the authorities in Zagreb as "Croats from Dalmatia", and those from Tirana, as Albanians of Catholic faith. However, the removal of the NDH from the area of Stara Raška seemed to have eased tensions. At the beginning of 1944, the "Croatian-Albanian Society" was founded in Sarajevo, while at the same time agreements were made regarding the division of Stara Raška along the Lim vertical. AQSh, fond 167, v. 1941, dos. 171, dok. 2; Ibid, fond 166, v. 1942, dos. 87, dok. 1; ИАРНП, фонд 283, НОР, док. Кратак преглед рада Хрватског ослободилачког покрета Усташа у катару Сјеничком у Санџаку, 1; „Prva sjednica Hrvatsko-albanskog društva“, *Novi list*, 7.03.1944.

¹³⁶ P. Milo, *op. cit.*, 26, 29–30.

¹³⁷ AQSh, fond 166, v. 1942, dos. 86, dok. 3.

written in the Albanian language. The local gendarmerie was given the prefix "Albanian".¹³⁸

The Kosovo Committee considered that, among others, the Muslims of Novi Pazar "will quickly be able to recover the (*Albanian*, M.Ž.) language", since they were in constant contact with the "Albanian provinces".¹³⁹ In line with these positions, an Albanian language course was organized for adult Muslims in N. Pazar. According to local chronicles, it was opened in August 1941 and lasted until February of the following year. Muslims, however, were poorly motivated, which slowed down the activity. A number of them wrote in Cyrillic¹⁴⁰ and did not want to change it. Allegedly, the course was canceled when the Albanian professor took off the fez of one of the Muslim participants and wiped the blackboard with it.¹⁴¹ However, other sources show that the course also existed during 1943.¹⁴² Similar courses were opened throughout Kosovo.¹⁴³

For the youngest, it was planned that they would attend classes in the Albanian language. The school was founded in July 1941 and worked only until the end of the year. Due to the prohibition of the German authorities to bring teachers from Albania to the territory of occupied Serbia, of which N. Pazar remained a part, this educational institution could not function efficiently due to personnel and financial difficulties. Its work was reduced to learning the Albanian language and taking children to rallies organized by the local authorities.¹⁴⁴ Several similar schools were opened in neighboring Tutin and the surrounding villages, which employed teachers from Albania. The response of Muslim children was poor.¹⁴⁵ Muslims of Slovenian origin in Macedonia (Torbeš) and in Kosovo (Gorani) were exposed to assimilation pressure through identical measures.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 34, ф. 6, 167; *Нови Пазар и околина*, 314–315.

¹³⁹ AQSh, fond 167, v. 1941, dos. 171, dok. 2.

¹⁴⁰ The presidents of the municipalities Junuz Mulahodović and Uzeir Ljajić, and soldiers of the SS divisions "Handžar" and "Skenderbeg" also use this alphabet when signing their names. ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 63, кут. 1, дос. бр. 5, 2; Ibid, дос. бр. 32, 7; Ibid, кут. 3, дос. бр. 254; Ibid, кут. 5, дос. бр. 362; Ibid, кут. 6, дос. бр. 521, 4.

¹⁴¹ ИАРНП, фонд 284, Збирка хроника, реферат Мија Радовића, *Хроника Новог Пазара у НОБ-у*, III, 168.

¹⁴² ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 63, кут. 7, дос. бр. 623, 4.

¹⁴³ AQSh, fond 166, v. 1942, dos. 156, dok. 3.

¹⁴⁴ ИАРНП, фонд 284, Збирка хроника, реферат Мија Радовића, *Хроника Новог Пазара у НОБ-у*, III, 164–167.

¹⁴⁵ Е. Мушовић, *op. cit.*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ AQSh, fond 166, v. 1942, dos. 156, dok. 7; М. Живковић, *Између...*, 44–45.

The abolition of the “Tarik” Society, according to contemporaries due to the nurturing of Bosnian Muslim traditions, and the work of the “Skenderbeg” Society, can be seen as forms of “Albanization” of Novi Pazar Muslims. There is also the activity of Professor Zajmi and similar propagandists. In mid-1942, he organized a football match between the teams of N. Pazar and K. Mitrovica and a gymnastics competition between the teams of N. Pazar, Vučitrn and Podujevo (where Albanian folk dances were also learned in addition to physical exercises).¹⁴⁷

The documentation created by the occupation authorities shows that the process of Albanization continued even during the last year of the war in Serbia. The Germans accused Bedrije Pejani, a prominent member of the Kosovo Committee, of using violence for this purpose.¹⁴⁸ In a similar context, in the spring of 1944, the Albanian government proposed to the top of the SS that, among other things, part of the newly formed SS division “Skenderbeg” should be deployed for garrison duty in N. Pazar. However, the German MIP rejected this proposal.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, the names of the Muslim soldiers of this division were changed to match the Albanian spelling. Moreover, this created a problem for the German administration, considering that the same persons had one name in “Handžar” and another in “Skenderbeg”. Thus, for example, Alija Mujović, Mahit Mavrić, Aćif Hodžić, Džemail Hadžiibrahimović (all from N. Pazar), Huso Murić and Smajo Zaimović (both from D. Poljana) were baptized as “Muja Salka, Mahita Mavrija, Aćifa Nasifa, Džemaila Hadži Ibrahimija, Redža Husa and Zaima Smaja”.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

Darko Tanasković writes that Muslims “emotionally, psychologically and politically, with few exceptions, are not and do not want to be Serbs”, just as “the majority are not and do not want to be Croats”.¹⁵¹ With the comment that they didn’t even want to be Albanians any more than that, we have to agree with this conclusion. Confirmations of all of this arrived in 1941 from Plje-

¹⁴⁷ AQSh, fond 196, v. 1942, dos. 242, dok. 13; М. Живковић, *Између...*, 159.

¹⁴⁸ BArch, RW 40/86, Anl. 123, 28.03.1944, 1.

¹⁴⁹ ДАС, БИА, II, 36. 34, ф. 6, 142.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 36. 63, кут. 1, дос. бр. 32; Ibid, кут. 3, дос. бр. 200, 12; Ibid, дос. бр. 254; Ibid, кут. 5, дос. бр. 419, 20; Ibid, дос. бр. 362, 10; Ibid, дос. бр. 408, 1–3; Ibid, кут. 6, дос. бр. 534, 1–3; Ibid, кут. 7, дос. бр. 648; Ibid, картица бр. 9.

¹⁵¹ D. Tanasković, *op. cit.*, 83.

vlje,¹⁵² Priboj,¹⁵³ Sjenica, Prijepolje, B. Polje, N. Pazar. The coup in Sjenica, the celebrations in honor of the NDH throughout the Lim basin, the petitions of Bijelo Polje Muslims to Pavelić and Kruja, the activity of the "Tarik" society in N. Pazar, the request of some of its citizens to join Croatia and the like, and we underline all this by the appearance of the term "Bosniak" in 1941 in the press.

The fluctuation of identity among Muslims is even more apparent on an individual level. Only during the period April 1941 – April 1942, their leading intellectuals and politicians, abandoning religious self-determination, changed their national identification several times. For example, Kasim Hadžić – Muslim, Bosniak, Croat; Iljaz Dobardžić – Muslim, Bosniak, Croat; Omer Čingić – Muslim, Albanian, Bosniak, Croat; Hasan Zvizdić – Muslim, Bosniak, Croat, Albanian, etc. Zvizdić, let us also mention that, spent the last decades of his life in Turkey, where according to the laws there he had to be registered as an ethnic Turk (possibly also under a changed surname). By the end of the war, however, all those mentioned returned to their religious stronghold, leaving the war in the same way they had entered it, as "Muslims" of Stara Raška.

To conclude, the acceptance or rejection of Croatian and Albanian identity was a reflection of political pragmatism depending on the current interests of Muslims. Even more so since both Albania and the NDH had proved to be powerless to keep them within the desired national molds through assimilation measures. The Muslims continued with the same practice in the post-war period, when once again it was necessary to "side with the stronger". For that reason they declared themselves Serbs, Montenegrins and/or Turks, until these positions were also abandoned like the war options of the Croats and Albanians. At the same time, there has always been a "channel" for expressing the uniqueness of Muslims, resulting from a deep attachment to Islam, which, as we have seen, has remained until today.

Thus, it appears that the "Croatianess" and "Albanianess" of the Muslims of Stara Raška during World War II were the highest stages in the development of their identity, and by no means the ultimate reach of that process. Also,

¹⁵² During June, a text arrives from Pljevlje which, among other things, reads: "The Muslims in Sandžak never tolerated the Serbs, and vice versa, and they never felt like brothers despite all the planned propaganda... All efforts at Serbianization of the Muslims remained without effect". „Ubijanja i razni drugi progoni nisu mogli prisiliti sandžačkih muslimana Hrvata da napuste svoju djedovinu“, *Sarajevski novi list*, 26.06.1941.

¹⁵³ Kasim Hadžić writes that a small number of educated Muslims in Stara Raška also contributed to the "fear of 'Vlachization'", i.e., Serbization in civic schools. „Prosvetne prilike Sandžačkih muslimana“, *Osvit*, 19.12.1943.

the positions taken in this way were a form of political opportunism of the elite, rather than a collective national classification. Islam remained a key factor in their self-determination, i.e. separation from neighboring ethnic-religious groups. Muslims would, therefore, wait for some time between the national shores, until the communist regime, gradually, transformed their uniqueness into a new term the ultimate reach of which would be today's Bosniak national name.