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The Bosniaks, both victims and actors in the Yugoslav crisis

Referred to as 'Muslims' (in the national meaning of the term) until 1993, the Bosniaks were the main victims of the breakup of Yugoslavia. During the war that raged in Bosnia-Herzegovina from April 1992 until December 1995, 97,000 people were killed: 65.9% of them were Bosniaks, 25.6% Serbs and 8.0% Croats. Of the 40,000 civilian victims, 83.3% were Bosniaks. Moreover, the Bosniaks represented the majority of the 2.1 million people displaced by wartime combat and by the 'ethnic cleansing' perpetrated by the 'Republika Srpska' ('Serb Republic') and, on a smaller scale, the 'Croat Republic of Herceg-Bosna'. The primary symbols of the martyrdom of the Bosniak nation are the Omarska and Keraterm camps, whose existence was revealed to the world in July 1992, and the Srebrenica massacre committed in July 1995, which the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) declared as a genocide in August 2001.

Yet it would be erroneous to view the Bosniaks as mere victims of the Yugoslav crisis. Through their political, military and religious leaders, the Bosniaks played an active role in this crisis, even though they often faced an unfavourable balance of powers. Between 1992 and 1995, the Bosniaks built a Bosnian state which, while defined as plurinational, chiefly served their national interests. The Bosnian Army, whose combatants were more than 90% Bosniaks, not only fought the Serb and Croat forces, but also helped shore up the Bosniak national identity against local parochialism and ideological cleavages. In September 1993, the national name 'Muslim' (*Musliman*) was set aside in favour of 'Bosniak' (*Bošnjak*); this change symbolised the emergence of the Bosniak nation as a sovereign political subject, and coincided with intense cultural production, notably in the linguistic and historiographic fields.

The Bosniaks' emergence as a sovereign political nation marked a major breaking point in the history of the Yugoslav space, as the Bosnian Muslims had been focused on their religious identity until they were recognised as a nation in 1968, and even later. Between 1878 and 1990, they had never failed in their allegiance to the prevailing central state – be it the Austro-Hungarian Empire or later Yugoslavia. However, the Bosniak political leaders – first and foremost the Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović – did not succeed in finding an institutional arrangement that would guarantee both the Bosniaks' physical security and the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On several occasions during the war, they hesitated between preserving Bosnia as a plurinational state and creating a small Bosniak nation-state. In December 1995, the Dayton Agreement finalised the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina into two separate entities: the Federation and the Republika Srpska. In the following years, the Bosniak leaders endeavoured to achieve a gradual reintegration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but the territorial divisions created by the war have persisted, and the number of Bosniak refugees to return to Republika Srpska has been limited.

The SDA, between pan-Islamist origins and 'nationalisation' of Islam

The strategic choices of the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) – the party in power in Bosniak-controlled territories from 1990 to 2000 – are partly attributable to the fact that a large number of its founders, including Izetbegović himself, belonged to a pan-Islamist current that had first appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1940s and had then been revived in the 1960s within the Islamic Community (*Islamska zajednica*). The pan-Islamist current's central role within the SDA and the Bosnian state apparatus throughout the 1990s makes the Bosniak case unique within the Yugoslav space. In the case of the Kosovo Albanians, for example, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) also represented a Muslim population, but it was led by former Communist cadres who were in favour of a strict secularism or harboured sympathies for the Catholic Church.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the pan-Islamist current's members were sometimes tempted to form a small Bosniak nation-state, and they developed close political and military ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, they had little influence on the war's outcome. Their influence was mainly felt in the political and cultural transformations within the Bosniak nation: firstly, they made Islam the core element of the new Bosniak national identity by relying on the Islamic Community and the Bosnian Army. A cult of *šehidi* (martyrs of the faith) developed in Bosnia-Herzegovina with no real equivalent in Kosovo, where respect for the fallen soldiers is a strictly patriotic and secular matter.

During the war, the attempts at re-Islamisation orchestrated by the SDA led to the rise of a new one-party state that used Islam as a new discriminating political ideology. Yet these authoritarian endeavours came up against strong resistance within the population, resulting in a paradoxical 'nationalisation' of Islam. The Islamic Community of Yugoslavia broke apart, giving rise, among others, to the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The main religious pilgrimages became patriotic events, and religious symbols lost part of their religious meaning as they gained visibility in the public space. There was no actual re-Islamisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and regular religious practice remains the reserve of a pious minority. This explains why, in the 2000s, the pan-Islamist current was gradually sidelined within the SDA, and the party's ties to religious institutions became more tenuous. Izetbegović's death in October 2003 only accelerated this process.

Similar changes at work throughout Southeastern Europe

The Bosnian pan-Islamist current has no equivalent in other Southeast European countries, where, since 1990, Islamist parties have played only a marginal role. However, the emergence of Balkan Muslims as political actors is obvious throughout the region, and is one of the major transformations of the post-Communist period. After 1990, parties have been created to represent the Albanians of Kosovo, Macedonia and South Serbia, the Turks of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania, the Bosniaks of the Sandžak (Serbia-Montenegro) and Croatia, and the Roma of various countries. Even the Muslim minority in Greece briefly formed its own political party, and the only exception to this general trend is Albania, where the Albanian national identity encompasses four religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic) and parties formed on a confessional basis are forbidden.

The various parties representing the Muslim populations of Southeastern Europe have put forward a wide array of demands, from simply asking for cultural rights to claiming territorial autonomy or independence, depending on the demographic weight of each population and the political fragility of the states in question. In the Yugoslav case, the political mobilisation of the Albanian and Bosniak populations have resulted in the foundation of two new Muslim-majority states: Kosovo, where individuals belonging to the Muslim faith represent around 90% of the population, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where they represent around 50%. It is too early to predict the geopolitical and political consequences of this new majority status for the Albanians of Kosovo and the Bosniaks of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but alarmist statements about the appearance of 'Islamic republics' or a 'Green Corridor' in Southeastern Europe have no grounding in reality: the geopolitical interests of the Albanians and the Bosniaks do not coincide, the three Muslim-majority states of Southeastern Europe (i.e. Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina) are also the only ones with no official state religion, and effects of the authoritarian secularisation of the Communist period have not been seriously undermined by the post-1990 'religious revival'.

Furthermore, we must investigate the reality of this 'revival'. The tighter ties between national and religious identity is flagrant for the Bosniaks and also noticeable for the Albanians, with certain clerics and intellectuals attempting to present Islam as a bulwark against Serb and Greek expansionism. Yet the cleavage between secularists and Islamo-nationalists remains strong in Albania and Kosovo, as does the divide between Kemalists and anti-Kemalists in Bulgaria and Greece. Everywhere, the Islamic religious institutions have seen renewed activity and visibility, as shown by the opening of new madrasas (religious secondary schools) and the inauguration of numerous mosques. However, nowhere have these institutions recovered their pre-1945 status: nobody has called for Sharia tribunals to be reopened and deal with family matters, and the restoration of waqfs (religious foundations) has come up against numerous legal and practical hurdles. Lastly, as already noted with regard to Bosnia-Herzegovina, there has been no actual re-Islamisation of the Muslims of Southeastern Europe. Islam's return to the public sphere has often come hand in hand with its 'nationalisation', and regular religious practice is limited to a minority of pious believers.

On the European fringes of the Ummah

The end of Communism also led to renewed exchanges between the Muslims of Southeastern Europe and the Ummah (community of believers). Beginning in the 1990s, many Islamic humanitarian organisations, Sufi or Neo-Sufi brotherhoods and proselyte movements arrived in the region, while Albanian, Bosniak and Turkish students went to study in the Islamic universities of the Arabic peninsula, Egypt and Turkey. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to a lesser extent Kosovo, foreign fighters came to wage jihad and formed separate military units, such as the 'el-mudžahid' unit in the Bosnian Army. Since the turn of the century, these religious actors – coming mainly from the Arab world – have been in competition with various Turkish players, such as the Turkish State's Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), the *fethullahcı* Neo-Sufi brotherhood, or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP.

Balkan Islam's return into global Islam is the reason behind the appearance in Southeastern Europe of neo-Salafist currents, with their particularly strict view of Islam. Organised around

various itinerant preachers (*daiya*s), undeclared prayer rooms and rural communities with little contact with the outside world, the neo-Salafists have often come into conflict with the official religious institutions and have drawn the attention of local and international media. Yet their recruitment has been limited to fringes of the young generation, and they have divided into a jihadi sub-current in overt opposition to its social environment, and a pietist sub-current that obeys the law and respects the authority of the Islamic religious institutions. Through the controversies that these neo-Salafist currents sparked, they contributed paradoxically to the pluralisation and individualisation of Islam in Southeastern Europe, forcing the official religious institutions to redefine their roles and their teachings.

The Muslims of Southeastern Europe are unanimous in emphasising the fact that they are Europeans. Despite their criticism of the major Western powers in the 1990s, they view the European Union and NATO as the best guarantors of their security. In addition, just like other Europeans, they have a largely secularised lifestyle – the result of a half-century of Communist modernisation, which three decades of post-Communist uncertainties have not fundamentally challenged. Yet this de facto secularisation is not yet reflected in major institutional or doctrinal innovations: there is no real 'Balkan model' to be studied, emulated or criticised elsewhere in the world. The material dependence on Turkey and the Muslim world, the still modest level of religious schools founded in the 1990s, the ongoing strong divide between secular and religious forces – these are all obstacles to the production of original and innovative ideas. However, such innovations now appear indispensable, at a time when the Muslims of Southeastern Europe must face the challenges of globalised Islam, the pluralisation and individualisation of religious faith and – last but not least – increased geopolitical tensions and renewed signs of religious intolerance in Europe.