

**Paper Presented at the 2019 ASN World Convention, Columbia University, 2-4 May
2019**

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“Serbs! Please stay in Sarajevo!”

***The Flight of Serbs from Sarajevo: not the Dayton Agreement’s first failure, but its first
logical consequence***

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Abstract

This study analyzes circumstances tied to the implementation of the Dayton Agreement’s provision for the reunification of Sarajevo. Three months after the signing, Sarajevo was again a united city territorially, but up to one hundred thousand Serbs from these reincorporated territories had left the city after Dayton: only 5-10% of the Serbs stayed there. This article addresses the causes of the flight of the Serbs who had been living in Sarajevo’s suburbs before the start of the Bosnian war and stayed to defend their homes there during it. There is a fundamental question of whether anyone could have reasonably expected the Serbs to remain in Sarajevo in the postwar circumstances. I argue that in the Dayton framework the Serbs were very worried about their prospects under the Bosniak-Croat Federation, and thus their departure from Sarajevo was inevitable.

Key words: unification of Sarajevo; Dayton Agreement; Bosniak elite; Serbian elite; international community; Sarajevo Serbs; the flight

Introduction

In 1896, after the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia, Aleksa Šantić, the Hercegovinian Serb poet, wrote: “Stay here! The sun of a stranger’s sky won’t warm you like this one does”.² He was addressing Muslims who were leaving Bosnia for other Ottoman lands, notably Turkey. A century later, in 1996, the international High Representative, Carl Bildt, circulated these verses in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Serbs in Sarajevo to remain there

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² Aleksa Šantić, *O klasje moje: Izabrane pesme* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 2012).

following the transfer of authority over the areas controlled by Serbs to the Bosniak-dominated authorities.³ As Bildt stated in Paris, “We did not want to start the period of peace with destruction and a new exodus”.⁴ Yet Dayton’s plan to reunite the capital city, the first major political task of the Agreement,⁵ led to chaos. Although the unification of Sarajevo was formally over within three months after the signing, up to one hundred thousand Serbs from these reincorporated territories had left, leaving this ‘re-united city’ without most of what had been its second-largest population.

There had been many previous involuntary movements during the Bosnian war, but the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo was exceptional. The last phase of forced ethnic homogenization of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia) happened, paradoxically, *because of* the Dayton Agreement and in *peacetime*. This mass exodus of Serbs from Sarajevo, however, did fit the larger pattern of the conflict. During the war, most ethnic cleansings were not random events uniformly distributed in time and space. On the contrary, they were concentrated in several specific areas and took place during three main phases of the ethnic homogenization process. The first of these took place between April and September 1992, when Serb forces expelled Muslims (called Bosniaks since 1993). The second one occurred in 1993 when Bosniaks and Croats began to fight each other.⁶ The joint Bosniak-Croatian offensive in August and September 1995 marks the third stage of the process, when mainly Serbs were driven out of their homes. The fourth and last phase comprises events related to the departure of Serbs from Sarajevo in 1996.⁷ After the signing of the peace agreement, Sarajevo Serbs, who had successfully defended their homes during the war, realized that negotiators in Ohio had handed the suburbs where they lived over to the Federation, an entity ruled by their wartime enemies, and still political antagonists. Almost all of them decided to leave their homes before the formal termination of Sarajevo’s unification on March 19, 1996, and to move to the Republika Srpska (hereafter RS) or abroad, almost all to Serbia.

The most controversial issue in this type of migration (similar to movements in Palestine in 1947/1948, or Bengal in 1946/1947) is the degree to which it was ‘voluntary’. In comparison to other mass migrations occurring after conflicts (Greece/Turkey in 1923, various population

³ OHR, “You Can Stay in Your Homes! 14 Point You Should Know” (OHR, February 22, 1996), Archive of Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs.

⁴ Carl Bildt, *Peace Journey: The Struggle for Peace in Bosnia* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998).

⁵ Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Modern Library, 1999).

⁶ Erik Melander, “Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992–1995,” 2007, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252233515_Ethnic_Cleansing_in_Bosnia-Herzegovina_1992-1995.

⁷ Ondřej Žíla, “The War Conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Phenomenon of Ethnic Cleansing,” *Czech Journal of Contemporary History*, no. 3 (2015): 157–88.

movements after World War II), Sarajevo Serbs did not officially *have* to leave the city. On the contrary, they were urged to stay by international officers. This migration, seemingly voluntary but under conditions that made it both inevitable and immediate, has not been thoroughly analyzed, and scientific literature on this topic is almost non-existent. There are only two analytical studies of this process in Bosnia in Western and ex-Yugoslav journals. The first is an article by Louis Sell, a political adviser to the first High Representative Bildt.⁸ The second is focused on Serbs who fled from Sarajevo to Pale:⁹ their displacement, identities, and experiences in new places.¹⁰ These studies represent an important and balanced introduction to this issue.

Other authors who mention the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo relate it exclusively to nationalist politics of the main Serb political party. The SDS in their opinion bore most that was mainly responsible for the Serb flight from Sarajevo. They do not examine the situation on the ground in more detail or from a perspective that balances international opinions with those of locals in the territories to be reintegrated. They also do not analyze the consequences of actions taken by the Bosniak elite and their political party, the SDA.¹¹ They also neglect the role of the international community (IC).¹²

That the reasons for this exodus remain largely unstudied in Western academia, as well as by scholars from the former Yugoslavia, is surprising, especially if one takes Sell's statement that "the fate of areas around Sarajevo inhabited mainly by Serbs was crucial to Bosnia's future"¹³ as an indicator of the intentions of the IC actors. Richard Holbrooke, the chief architect of the Agreement, characterized Sarajevo's unification as the "first key civilian test of

⁸ Louis Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo: Dayton's First Failure," *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 1 (1999): 179–202.

⁹ Pale, a rural mountain settlement and one of ten municipalities of Sarajevo before the war, was the capital city of the RS from 1992 to 1998.

¹⁰ Ioannis Armakolas, "Sarajevo No More? Identity and the Experience of Place among Bosnian Serb Sarajevans in Republika Srpska," in *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, ed. Bougarel, Xavier, Helms, Elissa, and Duijzings, Ger (Routledge, 2007), 79–99.

¹¹ Bosniaks constitute one of the three Bosnian nations (along with Serbs and Croats). Bosnians on the other hand, are all inhabitants of Bosnia. Although Alija Izetbegović was a political leader of the main Muslim political party, the SDA, he was also de facto the president of Bosnia that was recognized internationally. Although he formally supported a multiethnic Bosnia, his politics were focused almost exclusively on the Muslim (Bosniak) nation.

¹² Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: A Biography* (University of Michigan Press, 2006); Gerard Toal and Carl T. Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and Its Reversal* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011); Radha Kumar, *Divide and Fall? Bosnia in the Annals of Partition* (London; New York: Verso, 1997). The term 'international community', or the 'Foreign Intervention Agencies' in Jansen's definition, refers to inter-governmental structures (such as the OHR, OSCE, UNHCR) and the armed forces (IFOR). This conglomerate of intervening actors is under the dominant US/Western-European umbrella. Stef Jansen, "The Privatisation of Home and Hope: Return, Reforms and the Foreign Intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Dialectical Anthropology* 30, no. 3–4 (2006): 177–199.

¹³ Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

Dayton”.¹⁴ Bildt considered the reintegration of Sarajevo “the first and crucial test, where the concept of a multi-ethnic Bosnia was going to face its first and most difficult task”.¹⁵ The message of all these proclamations was clear: if Serbs had remained after Izetbegović’s government took control over what had been Serbian Sarajevo, it could have been the first step toward recreating a form of multiethnicity that had largely ceased to exist during the war in the capital, and in other parts of Bosnia.

Beyond vague promises of security, however, the IC did not suggest, much less try to create, any concrete institutional forms guaranteeing Serbs safety in the reunited Sarajevo. The Serbs were simply told to accept rule by authorities in the Federation, where at that time only Bosniaks and Croats were defined as constituent peoples, with corresponding institutional disadvantages for the Serbs. The Office of High Representative (OHR) required adding Serbs two years later.¹⁶ This article looks at several questions raised by the actions (or inactions) of the IC, the SDS, and the SDA. To wit:

- Did IC representatives really believe that getting Serbs to stay was essential? If so, what did they do to try to bring about that result, other than promise that everything would be fine for Serbs if they stayed?
- Did the SDS offer any conditions under which Serbs could stay? If so, what were they?
- Did the SDA share the IC view that Serbs should stay? If so, what did SDA leaders do to convince Serbs to stay – or, conversely, to induce them to leave?
- Finally, did the IC actually negotiate with Serbs, or did they only insist that Serbs be brought under the full authority of the Federation and local Sarajevo government?

I analyze the dynamics among these three key players (the IC, Bosniak, and Serbian leadership) in the crucial period of December 1995 to February 1996, before the beginning of the unification: how they acted, reacted, and interpreted the reasons for the flight. I do not analyze the narration of the flight by those who left Sarajevo at the beginning of 1996. Since Bosniak and Serbian media covered this event from different perspectives, there are plenty of contradictory explanations and ambiguities. We face different accounts of the ‘flight’ and of the factors that influenced Serbs to leave.

¹⁴ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

¹⁵ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹⁶ Robert M. Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999)

My argument is that this flight was not actually the “first failure” of the Dayton Agreement¹⁷ or a “setback”,¹⁸ but rather its first logical *consequence*, in that it strengthened the ethnic homogenization of the capital city. As scholars who focus on Bosnia paraphrase Clausewitz, the situation in Sarajevo (and in Bosnia generally) after the end of the war was ‘peace as a continuation of war by (relatively) peaceful means’.¹⁹ Between the signing of the Agreement in Paris (December 1995) and the conference in Rome (February 1996), events followed the logic that drove both the war and the Dayton Agreement itself: that Bosnia would be divided territorially into areas under the political domination of one of its three main peoples. Bildt marked the Sarajevo transition as “the pre-programmed disaster”.²⁰ General Bachelet, the French commander of U.N. troops in Sarajevo, bluntly stated on the eve of the ceremony in Paris, “Serbs had two alternatives: the suitcase or the coffin”.²¹

This transfer of control happened more than twenty years ago. Nevertheless, it remains a sore point for a majority of ex-*Sarajlije*. I argue that the Dayton decision to transfer Serbian neighborhoods of Sarajevo to the Federation, instead of creating an autonomous district from both parts of the city, was a fatal flaw in the potentially harmonious development of Bosnia. A district where Bosniaks and Serbs had their own governments might have restored the previous multiethnic character of Bosnia. Could the IC have imposed a reorganization of the city that gave Serbs local autonomy?

Empirical evidence was gathered during eleven months of fieldwork between 2016 and 2018. The first set of data was collected from a discourse analysis of written texts from the fragmented media scene in Bosnia (Federal media: *Oslobođenje*, *Dnevni Avaz*, *BH Dani*, *Slobodna Bosna*, and RS media: *SRNA agency*, *Glas Srpski*, *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, *Javnost*) published between November 1995 and February 1996. Other primary sources were also used, such as materials from Serbian association that helped people in need during that time (DISS); electronic media sources taken from multiple international organizations including IFOR and OHR; and memoirs of both local and the IC participants. To get a more detailed perspective, I engaged in an Oral History/Qualitative interviewing project. I used qualitative methods, including individual semi-structured interviews with authorities involved into the mass departure of Serbs from Sarajevo.

¹⁷ Sell, “The Serb Flight from Sarajevo.”

¹⁸ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

¹⁹ Donia, *Sarajevo*; David Chandler, *Peace Without Politics? Ten Years of International State-Building in Bosnia* (Psychology Press, 2006); Roberto Belloni, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁰ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

²¹ *Washington Post*, December 23, 1995.

The prevailing narrative about the Bosnian war and Sarajevo under siege

From the very beginning of the Bosnian conflict, there was a discourse built on a facile interpretation of Bosnian society and an insufficiently critical analysis of why the Bosnian war broke out. The essence of this narrative is that independent Bosnia defended itself against Serbian (and later Croatian) aggressors. These aggressors, Milošević's Yugoslavia and Tudjman's Croatia, aimed to tear Bosnia apart along its ethnic lines, those being Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. The image of a tolerant multiethnic, multicultural, and civic society had especially been represented by references to Bosnia's capital. According to the last Yugoslav census (1991), the Sarajevo canton was 49% Muslim, 30% Serb, 11% Yugoslav, 6.5% Croat, and 3.5% Other.²² In the historic center of the city stood mosques, churches (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant), and two synagogues. These sacred buildings were considered evidence of different religious communities tolerantly sharing one living space.²³ Through the lenses of Sarajevo's presumed mutual tolerance, common values, and community life, many scholars have chosen to visualize the whole of Bosnian society as more of the same.²⁴

The Serbian forces which surrounded and shelled the city ruined this tolerance. The situation in Sarajevo when the war broke out was chaotic. The Yugoslav army (JNA) had been transformed in Bosnia into a Bosnian Serb force, the Army of the Republika Srpska (Vojska Republike Srpske – VRS). The VRS, inheriting weapons from the retreating JNA, dominated the beginning of the war. However, the VRS was composed of Bosnian Serbs, not soldiers from Serbia. The JNA leadership decided to transfer almost all Bosnian Serb conscripts in the JNA into units located in Bosnia in 1991.²⁵ The JNA leaving Sarajevo was attacked by the newly formed Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Armija republike Bosne i Hercegovine – ARBiH), despite an agreement that it would not be.²⁶ Fighting occurred in other parts of Bosnia from April through September 1992, notably in Herzegovina, northern Bosnia, and eastern Bosnia, where the VRS attacked Muslim forces and civilians.²⁷

²² Marinko Grizelj and Andjelko Akrap, *Stanovništvo Bosne i Hercegovine: Narodnosni Sastav po naseljima* (Zagreb: Državni Zavod za Statistiku, 1995).

²³ Donia, *Sarajevo*.

²⁴ Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine, *Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Univ of California Press, 1996); Ivan Lovrenovic, *Bosnia: A Cultural History* (Saqi Books, 2001).

²⁵ CIA, *Balkan Battlegrounds: A Military History of the Yugoslav Conflict, 1990-1995* (Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Russian and European Analysis, 2002), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d022485215>; Veljko Kadijević, *Moje vidjenje raspada. Vojska bez države* (Beograd: Politika, 1993).

²⁶ Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin: BBC Books, 1996).

²⁷ Xavier Bougarel, *Bosnie: Anatomie d'un Conflit* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996).

Observers were shocked by the brutality of the Bosnian conflict, the atrocities, and the scope of ethnic cleansing in 1992 of non-Serbian residents.²⁸ This shaped international perception of the war. Accordingly, Serbian nationalism, its proponents, and its implementers bore most of the responsibility for the war.²⁹ During the 1990s, only a few scholars emphasized that the roots of the conflict were much more complex, being connected with the broader fragmentation of Socialist Yugoslavia and the specifics of an ethnically heterogeneous Bosnian society.³⁰ However, their work was largely obscured by the image of an aggressive Serbian nationalism as the sole cause of the conflict shaped media coverage. Western media focused extensively on horrific acts committed against non-Serbian populations, largely by the Serbian paramilitary units and to a lesser extent (until 1995) by the VRS.³¹ War crimes against Serbian civilians passed largely unnoticed.³²

The predominant understanding of the Bosnian conflict, represented by the besieged capital city, disregards other complicated facets of the war. Behind the scenes of Sarajevo in flames, besieged and shelled by the VRS, there was a part of Sarajevo's canton whose residents boycotted the referendum on Bosnian independence in March 1992. On the contrary, in a referendum which was organized in November 1991 by the Assembly of the Serb Nation of Bosnia, overwhelming majority Serbs voted in favor of remaining in Yugoslavia.³³ Amid growing ethno-nationalist tensions in the spring of 1992, Muslims living in the territory defined as Serbian Sarajevo had to run away. At the same time, hundreds of Serbs came to Sarajevo suburbs from areas controlled by the ARBiH.

Combats took place within parts of the city under the control of the ARBiH as well as at its periphery, under the surveillance of the VRS. Front lines completely divided Sarajevo. In September of 1992, local inhabitants established Serbian Sarajevo as a part of the RS.³⁴ Beside

²⁸ Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

²⁹ Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milošević* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002); Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Indiana University Press, 2006); James Gow, *The Serbian Project and Its Adversaries: A Strategy of War Crimes* (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2003).

³⁰ Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1995); Xavier Bougarel, *Bosnie: Anatomie d'un conflit*; Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided*; Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention: Crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1990-93: Crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1990-93* (Routledge, 1999).

³¹ Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War* (Simon & Schuster, 1994); Roy Gutman, *A Witness to Genocide: The 1993 Pulitzer Prize-Winning Dispatches on the "Ethnic Cleansing" of Bosnia* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993); David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West* (Simon and Schuster, 1996).

³² Peter Brock, *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting: Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia* (BookBaby, 2006).

³³ Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*; Adis Maksić, *Ethnic Mobilization, Violence, and the Politics of Affect: The Serb Democratic Party and the Bosnian War* (Springer, 2017).

³⁴ Nenad Kecmanović and Čedomir Antić, *Istorija Republike Srpske* (NIP Nedeljnik, Beograd, 2016).

Ilijaš, Ilidža, Vogošća, Hadžići, and Grbavica, Serbian Sarajevo consisted of quarters (such as Lukavica, etc.) which are parts of today's Eastern Sarajevo in the RS. Life in this scattered settlement remained completely unnoticed and uncovered by Western media during the war. According to Dušan Šehovac, one of Serbian negotiators, Bosnian Serbs living in territories under the control of the VRS were considered not only separatists, but also aggressors, attacking the independent Bosnian state.³⁵ These locals on the other hand, had a completely different opinion of the war's beginning and its progress. They spent the war believing they *were defending their homes* against an enemy that surrounded and bombed them.³⁶ That enemy – ARBiH– did not succeed in breaking through local defenses until the end of the Bosnian war and failed to connect the central regions of Bosnia with Sarajevo.³⁷ War traumas among Serbian Sarajevo's residents were similar to those who lived in Sarajevo during the siege.³⁸ The crucial, yet unanswered question remains: did the international observers, diplomats, and peacemakers take into account the realities of what happened in Serbian Sarajevo as well as they did in the Bosniak-dominated part?

Back to Dayton

The Dayton Agreement, initialed in Ohio on November 21, 1995, and signed in Paris one month later, ended the protracted Bosnian conflict. During the war, the main goal of the warring sides was to expel minorities from territories under their control.³⁹ More than half of the Bosnians had to leave their homes between 1992 and 1995.⁴⁰ Ethnic cleansing became a new and ominous term in the international lexicon during the Yugoslav wars, although this was already a common practice during the twentieth century.⁴¹ Although the Dayton Agreement

³⁵ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016).

³⁶ *Oslobođenje*, February 26, 1996; *Nezavisne Novine*, January 24, 1996.

³⁷ Predrag Lozo, ed., *Republika Srpska u Odbrambeno-otadžbinskom ratu* (Banja Luka: Republički centar za istraživanje rata, ratnih zločina i traženje nestalih lica, 2017)

³⁸ I am aware of the fact that this argument might be understood as an effort to relativize or even belittle the suffering of the residents of the besieged parts of Sarajevo. This is emphatically not my intent. Obviously, there were differences between residents of central Sarajevo on the one hand and Serbian Sarajevo on the other. The municipalities included in Serbian Sarajevo had a predominantly rural character. Many locals thus had a chance to maintain their fields and graze cattle. Thanks to that, they could obtain basic foodstuffs, whereas urbanized parts of Sarajevo found food much more difficult or completely impossible to acquire Ivana Maček, *Sarajevo Under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Cornelia Sorabji, "Managing Memories in Post-War Sarajevo: Individuals, Bad Memories, and New Wars," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 1 (2006): 1–18.. The only quarter under the control of the VRS which was in the same situation as besieged central Sarajevo was Grbavica Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

³⁹ Burg and Shoup, *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*.

⁴⁰ Joanna Harvey, "Return Dynamics in Bosnia and Croatia: A Comparative Analysis," *International Migration* 44, no. 3 (August 1, 2006): 89–144.

⁴¹ Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (New York ;

itself is ambiguous and various parties had promoted various goals, one of the key intentions of its American architects was to restore the prewar multi-ethnic character of Bosnia.⁴² In doing so, the IC aimed to support the return of all forcibly expelled Bosnians back to their homes.⁴³ In contrast to a traditional definition of the repatriation of refugees, Dayton promised the repatriation of all refugees not to their *country* of origin, but to their *homes* of origin.⁴⁴ All IDP's were supposed to return to their homes of origin as well.

For several weeks, US mediators hosted representatives from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia (Bosnian president Izetbegović and his colleagues represented the Bosniak nation), in an effort to end the war.⁴⁵ The Bosnian Serb delegation (Momčilo Krajišnik, Nikola Koljević, Aleksa Buha) was permitted to attend only as a subordinate and passive part of the Serb delegation led by Serbian President Slobodan Milošević.⁴⁶ Croatian president Franjo Tuđman held talks on behalf of Bosnian Croats (who were also present) with the assistance of Gojko Šušak, who was originally from Western Herzegovina.⁴⁷ Western negotiators did not consider any solution of the Bosnian question other than keeping the ex-Yugoslav republic intact, formally indivisible, but in practice divided into two entities: the Federation, composed of ten cantons, and the RS. Although a central government was (and is) in place, it was weak by design. This lack of real power made the deal acceptable to both Croats and Serbs. It ensured that none of the three constitutional nations could be ignored or neglected.⁴⁸ The final agreement represented a compromise enforced by the IC without involvement of the people who would live under it.

One of the most disputed issues during the negotiations was the organization and geographic boundaries of postwar Sarajevo. The Bosnian Serb leadership was aware of the fact that the VRS controlled an area connecting Mostar with Zenica, a territory very important to Bosniaks.⁴⁹ The Serbian plan for a definitive partition of the city was rejected by Bosniak

Oxford: Berghahn, 2016); Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001); Robert M. Hayden, "Schindler's Fate: Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Population Transfers," *Slavic Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 727–748.

⁴² Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*.

⁴³ Annex 7, "General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina," 1995, http://www.ohr.int/?page_id=63261.

⁴⁴ Catherine Phuong, "'Freely to Return': Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13, no. 2 (2000): 165–183.

⁴⁵ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁴⁶ Pauline Neville-Jones, "Dayton, IFOR and Alliance Relations in Bosnia," *Survival* 38, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 45–65; Robert J. Donia, *Radovan Karadžić: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jelena Guskova, *Istorija Jugoslovenske Krize 1999-2000* (Beograd: Atelje M, 2003).

⁴⁷ Derek H. Chollet, *The Road to the Dayton Accords: A Study of American Statecraft* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁴⁸ Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided*.

⁴⁹ *Interview with Momčilo Krajišnik* (Pale, 2017).

politicians, who favored a special federal district of Sarajevo subject to international monitoring.⁵⁰ This the Bosnian Serbs refused. Finally, two solutions were considered: a federal model based on the District of Columbia, in which Sarajevo would be part of neither the Federation nor the RS, and a model in which Sarajevo would be an open and united city under the control of the Federation.⁵¹ The first solution was supported by Bosnian Serbs, who emphasized an *absolute political equality* among the three Bosnian nations;⁵² the second one was endorsed by Bosniaks, who, as well as American negotiators, rejected equality “because it would disadvantage the Muslims”.⁵³ Milošević ended protracted negotiations about the status of Sarajevo when he refused to support the D.C. model, supposedly because of its complexity. He set a condition that none of the negotiators would talk about this proposal with members of the Bosnian Serb delegation before the signing of the final accord.⁵⁴

According to Holbrooke and Bildt, the explanation of why Milošević decided to give Sarajevo to Izetbegović was that he was fed up with the Bosnian Serb leadership. He therefore aimed to weaken Pale as a base of Serbian nationalism and strengthen the Serbs in Banja Luka.⁵⁵ This argument further supported Holbrooke’s proposal to move the capital of the RS from Pale to Banja Luka, which Milošević also accepted.⁵⁶ Others supposed that Milošević had little to bargain with at the negotiating table. In an effort to moderate international sanctions, he accepted what was put in front of him, including the demand that he gives up any claim to the Serb suburbs of Sarajevo.⁵⁷

Vladimir Lukić, the former Prime Minister of the RS and a member of the Bosnian Serb delegation in Dayton, held a different view of Milošević’s decision: by accepting Sarajevo unification under the Federation, Milošević intended to maintain Bosnian division. Milošević believed that a capital city modeled on the D.C. would have weakened the chances of a potential secession of the RS in the future. A federal model of the Sarajevo district, shared by all the three nations, could have restored prewar multiethnic principles. Finally, establishing the Sarajevo district could have led to abolishing entities, especially the RS. Lukić recalls Milošević as saying, “if we (Serbs) got Sarajevo, we would not have the RS”.⁵⁸ Instead of giving a chance

⁵⁰ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

⁵¹ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁵² *Interview with Momčilo Krajišnik* (Pale, 2017); Nikola Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske: dnevnik 1993-1995* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2008).

⁵³ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁵⁴ Bildt, *Peace Journey*; Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁵⁷ David Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London: Pluto, 2001).

⁵⁸ *Interview with Vladimir Lukić* (Banja Luka, 2017).

to centralize Bosnia in the future, Milošević sacrificed Sarajevo.⁵⁹ Holbrooke indirectly confirmed this explanation by stating that Milošević was against the ‘D.C. model’ because it would involve a “degree of cooperation”.⁶⁰

The final design of the agreement, the transfer of Grbavica, Ilidža, Ilijaš, Vogošća and Hadžići to the Federation, shocked the delegation of Bosnian Serbs.⁶¹ Some of them had strong connections with Sarajevo. Krajišnik emphasized that, by favoring the united capital city, Holbrooke broke a previous deal with the Bosnian Serb delegation on creating a Sarajevo district.⁶² Frustrated Bosnian Serb delegates, who got to see the map of the Dayton proposal only ten minutes before the signing, had no chance to change the final accord.⁶³ The Dayton Agreement was officially signed by Izetbegović, Milošević, and Tudjman, who did so in the name of Bosnian Serbs and Croats.

“What were we fighting for?” Reactions to the plan for Sarajevo unification

After the signing of the agreement that formally ended the war, Bosnians at last felt relieved. Many problems remained, but at least the shelling had stopped, and people could take a walk without fear. The only place in Bosnia where relief wasn’t obvious was Serbian Sarajevo. After publishing the information about Sarajevo’s unification, the prevailing feelings among residents in Serbian Sarajevo were shock, unease, and resentment. Locals felt betrayed and they heavily criticized Milošević’s decision to accept a transfer of control to the Federation. Milošević was called a traitor who was completely uninterested in their destiny. In the transferred territories the widespread opinion was that local combatants had successfully defended their homes, but then lost them because of politics. “We managed to defend Sarajevo in the war; they took it away from us during peace negotiations”.⁶⁴ “We won’t give up ‘our’ Sarajevo”.⁶⁵ “The Dayton Agreement is an act of a treason”.⁶⁶ These slogans in Serbian media gave voice to the people’s grievances, denial, outrage, and sense of defeat.

Although Serbs also welcomed peace, they weren’t ready to accept it on whatever terms. In November/December 1992 thousands of protestors in Ilidža, Grbavica, and Vogošća proclaimed their willingness to remain in their homes in Sarajevo, but not under the rule of the

⁵⁹ *Oslobođenje*, November 30, 1995.

⁶⁰ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

⁶¹ Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske*.

⁶² *Interview with Momčilo Krajišnik* (Pale, 2017).

⁶³ *Interview with Vladimir Lukić* (Banja Luka, 2017).

⁶⁴ *Glas Srpski*, November 22, 1995.

⁶⁵ *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1995.

⁶⁶ *Glas Srpski*, December 6, 1995.

Federal government.⁶⁷ Demonstrators criticized Dayton's intention to impose on them the government which had been "killing them for almost four years" and demanded a "correction of Dayton's error".⁶⁸ Protestors of all ages passionately condemned the label of aggressors, or even occupiers, which were given to them in the Federation.⁶⁹ On December 2, there was a festival in which rock and roll bands from the transferred municipalities protested the unification. The festival's slogan was, "We will stay here forever, dead or alive".⁷⁰

A majority of the population of Serbian Sarajevo was longtime inhabitants, although Serbs also settled there after being expelled from elsewhere during the war. Protesters highlighted the most serious security threat: the absence of an amnesty. Izetbegović's statements about punishing men who had fought in the war made this sense of threat quite realistic.⁷¹ None of the men were guaranteed freedom from charges of participation in the war.⁷² In Ilidža mothers of dead VRS soldiers even threatened to commit suicide *en masse* if Serbian Sarajevo were integrated into the Federation.⁷³

While media in the Federation considered these protests a product of manipulation by the Serbian leadership,⁷⁴ the scale of the protests calls that into question. To be clear, Pale certainly used these protests in an effort to put pressure on the IC, but testimonies show that the protestors were first and foremost very frightened and anxious about the future.⁷⁵ Bosniak politicians warned the protesting Serb students that they would "have problems continuing their studies in the near future".⁷⁶ Demonstrations tried to convince people that something regarding Sarajevo would change at the upcoming conference in Paris.⁷⁷ Despite their fear, in November and December 1995 relatively few Sarajevo Serbs requested the transfer of property which would let them leave the city.⁷⁸ A referendum organized by the Pale government on December

⁶⁷ *SRNA*, November 29, 1995.

⁶⁸ DISS, "Poruka sa mitinga 'Za slobodu i mir,'" November 26, 1995, Archive of Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs.

⁶⁹ *SRNA*, November 29, 1995; *Slobodna Bosna*, December 1, 1995; *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1995; *Oslobođenje*, November 25, 1995.

⁷⁰ *SRNA*, December 2, 1995.

⁷¹ *Interview with Husein Mahmutović* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2017); *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016).

⁷² *BH Dani*, January 1996.

⁷³ *SRNA*, November 27, 1995.

⁷⁴ *Dnevni Avaz*, November 26, 1995; *Oslobođenje*, November 26, 1995.

⁷⁵ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016); *SRNA*, November 29, 1995; *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1995.

⁷⁶ *SRNA*, December 6, 1995.

⁷⁷ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

⁷⁸ *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1995.

13, 1995, confirmed Sarajevo Serbs' position: 99% of the voters 78,149 people (voter turnout was 92%) rejected the transfer of Serbian Sarajevo to the Federation.⁷⁹

Different interpretations of Sarajevo's unification: Did anyone actually want a multi-ethnic Sarajevo?

The international community in Bosnia after Dayton

The IC was split on how to solve the Bosnian conflict and begin building peace. Before the Dayton negotiations, the US envisioned having control of both military and civilian implementation of the peacebuilding process in Bosnia. To that end, Washington planned a powerful role for the OHR. However, after European pressure to yield managing the OHR to them, the US decided to reduce the High Representative's power.⁸⁰ In post-Dayton Bosnia, the US engaged intensively in carrying out the military provisions of Dayton by means of a NATO Implementation Force (IFOR).⁸¹ To avoid 'mission creep', the US insisted that IFOR not get involved in civilian implementation of Dayton.⁸² The commander of IFOR, Admiral Leighton Smith, was contemptuous of the OHR mission, and anything that smacked of "nation-building".⁸³ He considered the civilian aspects of the task beneath him and did everything he could to prevent US intervention in the first place.⁸⁴

Although the ceremonial speeches of the IC's representatives during the signing of the peace agreement included clear-cut goals and lofty promises, postwar reality in Bosnia turned out quite differently. The IC was divided into two forces that implemented military and civilian chapters of the agreement in Bosnia separately. International representatives of these unequal structures (IFOR and OHR) improvised in the ways they implemented the Dayton Agreement. Unclear leadership prevented an effective reaction to the chaotic postwar situation on the ground. The federal government in Sarajevo, as well as Serbian leadership in Pale, carefully followed the nuances of the tension between IFOR and OHR in an effort to promote their own political goals.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ SRNA, December 13, 1995; *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 15, 1995.

⁸⁰ David Chandler, "From Dayton to Europe," *International Peacekeeping* 12, no. 3 (2005): 336–349.

⁸¹ Neville-Jones, "Dayton, IFOR and Alliance Relations in Bosnia."

⁸² Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

⁸³ Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*.

⁸⁴ Holbrooke, *To End a War*; Belloni, *State Building and International Intervention in Bosnia*.

⁸⁵ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016); *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016); *Interview with Husein Mahmutović* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2017); Louis Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

The main problem in Sarajevo's unification was the different interpretations of the reintegration timeline. The Dayton Agreement (Annex 1) laid down that the transfer of the suburbs would take place within forty-five days after the IFOR takeover of peacekeeping in Bosnia from UNPROFOR in December 1995.⁸⁶ During these forty-five days, RS authorities were responsible for withdrawing all forces, weapons, equipment, and explosive devices (D+45). The transfer of the suburbs to the Federation was supposed to be finished within ninety days (D+90). Ninety days *after* the IFOR takeover of the peacekeeping mission, Federation forces could enter this transferred area. In the meantime, IFOR "shall have the right to provide the military security for these transferred areas".⁸⁷ Annex 1 mentioned "all forces" in general without clearer instructions regarding the police force. As I demonstrate elsewhere in this article, OHR and IFOR's different interpretations of the unification timeline and, especially, the question of when the Serbian police would have to leave, made a deep impact on still-undecided Sarajevo Serbs to leave the city.

Serbian leadership and its search for a solution

Regarding the situation in Serbian Sarajevo, the political leadership in Pale had to take into consideration a key point: Serbs wanted to stay in Sarajevo, but it was extremely difficult for them to accept a Federal government under the control of Bosniaks.⁸⁸ Maksim Stanišić, who was the main Serbian negotiator, recalls that with respect to the final peace agreement, the Serbian delegation was looking for a political solution within the Federation.⁸⁹ SRNA press releases show that Serbian leaders considered three scenarios for the future. First, they wanted to secure Serbs a local government, police, court system, and education.⁹⁰ This would enable Serbs to govern in their own areas.⁹¹ Second, Serbian authorities demanded the postponement of the transfer of Serbian Sarajevo. Third, if the IC wouldn't specify the political framework under which Serbs could stay without fear of the Federal government, and wouldn't postpone the transfer, Pale would support the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo. After the signing, the Serbian elite complained primarily about the uncertainty caused by a lack of clear information on when

⁸⁶ N. Figa-Talamanca, "The Role of NATO in the Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina," *European Journal of International Law* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 1996): 164–75.

⁸⁷ The Dayton Agreement, "The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Annex 1A: Military Aspects of the Peace Settlement" (OHR, November 21, 1995), http://www.ohr.int/?page_id=63245.

⁸⁸ Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske*.

⁸⁹ Interview with Maksim Stanišić (Pale, 2016).

⁹⁰ SRNA, January 5, 1996.

⁹¹ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

and how the transfer of authority would take place.⁹² Bildt admitted that they were right on that point.⁹³

Obviously, these demands and threats were based on the divisions between Serbs and Bosniaks that brought on the war. The Serbian leadership led by Krajišnik⁹⁴ assumed that the IC wanted to unite Sarajevo to prove a multiethnic Bosnia was possible. This would have reduced the concept of a Serbian unitary state.⁹⁵ According to Krajišnik, the main reason why the Bosnian war broke out was the desire of Muslim representatives to rule over Serbs in Bosnia. It therefore made no sense to talk about an implementation of the peace agreement without blocking this desire.⁹⁶ Krajišnik believed that establishing Federal government control over the transferred territories without first assuring the rights of local Serbs wasn't congruent with the peacebuilding process.⁹⁷ Sarajevo Serbs broadly shared this opinion.⁹⁸

The Serbian leadership strove to change the process or the timeline of Sarajevo's transfer. Between the signing on December 15, 1995, and the deadline for the transfer on March 19, 1996, Serbs might be enticed to stay in Sarajevo by keeping their local government, educational system, etc., in a formally reunited Sarajevo. France supported the Serb's requirements. French President Chirac demanded President Clinton to give additional guarantees to Serbs living in Sarajevo.⁹⁹ Serbs' hopes for finding a compromise with the IC increased at the end of 1995, when Admiral Smith met Krajišnik in Pale. After Krajišnik urged Smith to postpone the transfer for twelve months, IFOR's commander declared there was a chance he would consider extending the deadline. However, after consulting Washington and also receiving harsh criticism from the Bosnian government,¹⁰⁰ he returned to his previous position and emphasized that, as the NATO chief commander, he was not authorized to approve any change. The schedule for the unification could not be modified.¹⁰¹

After Smith's answer, it was Bildt's team which began to address the question of how to convince local Serbs to accept the Federal government.¹⁰² High Representative Bildt created

⁹² Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske*.

⁹³ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

⁹⁴ The IC ignored Karadžić, who had already been indicted by the ICTY for war crimes. The most important political figure on the Serbian side thus became Momčilo Krajišnik, who had also been indicted recently and then found guilty of war crimes. Krajišnik was personally involved in looking for a solution for Sarajevo Serbs because his new house was located at Zabrđe, a Sarajevo suburb, that had also supposed to be united with the Federation.

⁹⁵ *SRNA*, January 8, 1996.

⁹⁶ *SRNA*, January 5, 1996.

⁹⁷ *Interview with Momčilo Krajišnik* (Pale, 2017).

⁹⁸ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016); *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

⁹⁹ *SRNA*, November 29, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ *Oslobođenje*, December 28, 1995.

¹⁰¹ *SRNA*, December 30, 1995; *Javnost*, January 6, 1996.

¹⁰² Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

a commission comprising both Bosniak and Serbian members that was supposed to find a mutually acceptable compromise.¹⁰³ However, Serbian delegates, led by Stanišić, were pessimistic. A lot of their neighbors had already left the city and others were packing their belongings, awaiting the next development.¹⁰⁴ Stanišić and his colleagues were chiefly interested in the real effects of Sarajevo's unification, especially in questions of security, respecting the amnesty, and establishment of the International Police Task Force (IPTF).¹⁰⁵ They also demanded a longer period in which to complete the transfer, that is, to the first postwar elections planned for September 1996.¹⁰⁶ Guarantees offered by the IC, such as police monitoring of the IPTF (whose number was very limited), did not satisfy Serbian delegates.¹⁰⁷ Whether the IC representatives tried to collaborate with the Serbian leadership sincerely or merely pretended to do so is difficult to say. As Stanišić and Husein Mahmutović (the Bosniak negotiator and prewar/postwar mayor of Ilidža) noted, negotiations between Bosniak and Serb delegates regarding Sarajevo unification were orchestrated by the IC. They had no chance to discuss or change any particular points.¹⁰⁸

Pale's position towards the unification of Sarajevo had been developing as well. The Serbian leadership was falsely convinced that they were important players in international politics and could change Dayton's decision about Sarajevo.¹⁰⁹ After a bitter realization that they weren't, their policy became more rigid. Its changes of opinion were pushed in state media. The Serbian leadership thereby manipulated masses of Serbs in Sarajevo. While the Serbian government banned departure from Sarajevo after the signing of the Agreement,¹¹⁰ Krajišnik emphasized in January that everyone who wanted to leave the city could do so.¹¹¹ After all negotiations with the IC failed, Pale decisively urged all Serbs to leave the city before Sarajevo's unification began. By highlighting threats, the Serbian government stoked existing fear, anxiety, and panic. This in turn pushed the majority of remaining Serbs toward a decision to escape.

In the period before the unification, there was an obvious difference between Pale's formal position and its real policy. The Serbian leadership took some steps that did not assure

¹⁰³ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹⁰⁴ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ *Oslobođenje*, January 11, 1996; *Glas Srpski*, November 1, 1996.

¹⁰⁶ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, January 20, 1996.

¹⁰⁸ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016); *Interview with Husein Mahmutović* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ Nikola Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske*; Biljana Plavšić, *Svedočim - Knjiga pisana u zatvoru* (Banja Luka: Trioprint, 2005).

¹¹⁰ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹¹¹ *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1995; *Nezavisne Novine*, February 21, 1996.

Sarajevo Serbs that Pale was interested in taking care of them after finishing the transfer process in mid-March. Whereas Pale formally called on Serbs to stay in Sarajevo, they were concurrently moving industrial factories, equipment, and other necessary infrastructure from the transferred territories to RS.¹¹² Krajišnik argued that the handover must be postponed until new dwellings for around 45,000 families could be built in the RS.¹¹³ The Serbian leadership presented an idealistic project of building a “new Sarajevo”.¹¹⁴ Serbian leaders even asked UN officials for three thousand coffins in order to exhume their dead and take them to the RS.¹¹⁵ It is difficult to determine whether the Serbian elite tried to solve the problem of Sarajevo Serbs by convincing masses of people to put pressure on the IC,¹¹⁶ or intentionally deceived the people and concealed their knowledge that without real institutional protections in the form of *de facto* autonomy, the future of Serbs in Federal Sarajevo was bleak.

Changes in Pale’s attitude towards Sarajevo Serbs also showed that Serbian leaders reacted to steps taken by the IC and the Federal government. It seems that Pale’s representatives based their policy toward Sarajevo’s unification on the belief that Serbs would not remain in a Sarajevo under Izetbegović’s control. From this perspective, they argued, it would be irresponsible to encourage people to endanger themselves by staying there. As Krajišnik admitted, he had known after returning back from Dayton that Serbs would move out of Sarajevo; he subordinated his policy to this conviction. The Serbian leadership could thus get involved, but people were not interested in staying.¹¹⁷

Sarajevo’s unification in Bosniak eyes

The High Representative asked rhetorically, on the day of the signing in Paris, whether anyone actually wanted a multi-ethnic Sarajevo. The Bosniak leadership paid lip service to this idea while the Serbian government in Pale talked about a *de facto* divided city.¹¹⁸ The potential flight of Serbs from Sarajevo did not bother most Bosniaks. After three and a half years of suffering, some of them felt a great distaste for Serbs, others didn’t trust them, and many Bosniaks felt satisfaction that Serbs would lose the ‘stolen’ part of Sarajevo. Although these feelings were completely understandable, they complicated Sarajevo’s unification.

¹¹² *Oslobođenje*, February 4, 1996; *SRNA*, January 31, 1996; Biljana Plavšić, *Svedočim*.

¹¹³ *Nezavisne Novine*, February 22, 1996.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹¹⁶ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016).

¹¹⁷ *Interview with Momčilo Krajišnik* (Pale, 2017).

¹¹⁸ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

Regarding the position of Serbs in a reunited Sarajevo, Izetbegović had given several contradictory statements since the end of the war. At the Dayton ceremony, he invited Serbs to stay and live in safety in the city.¹¹⁹ After returning home and facing sharp criticism from conservatives in Sarajevo, however, he became more reserved and rigid.¹²⁰ He openly opined that the Federation should prosecute Serbs who had served in the VRS and stated that only civilians could stay in a reunited Sarajevo.¹²¹ At the beginning of December, Izetbegović specified on Bosnian TV that the Federal government would spare women and children in the transferred territories, but men who had fought would be judged.¹²² His message in other statements was just as clear: “there could stay in Sarajevo only those Serbs, who in addition to respecting the federal government and its laws, would cooperate with police”,¹²³ “those who did not fight against the Bosnian government and did not commit war crimes could stay in Sarajevo”,¹²⁴ and “all men who carried a gun would be judged by the Army tribunal”.¹²⁵ In these press releases Izetbegović’s position towards Sarajevo Serbs was either leave or be arrested and prosecuted.

His government specified further that “men who were VRS conscripts would not be welcome in Sarajevo”.¹²⁶ Bildt reprimanded Izetbegović for statements in which the Bosnian president had criticized New Year celebrations in Sarajevo on the grounds that they were too merry and worldly.¹²⁷ Another important political figure, the Bosnian Prime Minister, Haris Silajdžić, announced that “Serbs do not need the protection of the Federal government. Instead we all need adequate protection from Serbian extremists”.¹²⁸ Even Holbrooke appealed to Izetbegović on January 19, 1996, during his visit to Sarajevo, to urge the Serbs who still lived in Sarajevo to remain there after the city was unified under federal control on March 19.¹²⁹ On the eve of the beginning of Sarajevo’s unification, Bildt complained to U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher that Izetbegović still did not offer a *clear* statement indicating Serbs were welcome to stay in Sarajevo.¹³⁰ All these statements demonstrated a strict position of the

¹¹⁹ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

¹²⁰ Sell, “The Serb Flight from Sarajevo.”

¹²¹ *SRNA*, November 29, 1995.

¹²² Koljević, *Stvaranje Republike Srpske*.

¹²³ *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, December 15, 1995.

¹²⁴ *Dnevni Avaz*, November 26, 1995.

¹²⁵ Kecmanović and Antić, *Istorija Republike Srpske*.

¹²⁶ *Oslobođenje*, December 6, 1996.

¹²⁷ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹²⁸ *Oslobođenje*, December 1, 1995.

¹²⁹ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

¹³⁰ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

Federal government that merely reinforced the atmosphere of mutual distrust and fear. Was there any reason to believe that Serbs would be treated equally or fairly in the reunited Sarajevo?

The biggest problem was the still unresolved issue of an amnesty. In its absence, nobody who carried a gun during the war could be sure his name wasn't on the list of "individuals who committed war crimes".¹³¹ A widespread rumor circulated among Serbs that the Federal government had already put together a list of all the VRS soldiers in this area.¹³² As one local Serb noted, "Izetbegović ordered that all men who carried a gun had to leave Sarajevo. Tell me, who the hell did not carry a weapon in this war?"¹³³ On the basis of these statements, nobody could be certain whether his participation in the war would lead to charges, judgments, bullying, attacks, or even death. The other serious issue was that men who did not fight in the ARBiH (or fought against it) could be punished for desertion. They could also be recruited for the ARBiH in the future, even if they avoided service by fleeing.¹³⁴ The Bosnian parliament accepted the law on amnesty on January 10, 1996, after immense international pressure. Although the declaration formally pardoned all combatants who weren't charged with war crimes, as well as men who avoided serving in the ARBiH,¹³⁵ the first amnesty law was very limited and did not include many specifics.¹³⁶

As for the planned implementation of Sarajevo's unification, the Federal government, maintained its position. They were strongly against any change in the plan or the timeline because they wanted to prevent the transport of economic capacities away. Izetbegović's government rejected a proposal offered by Bildt's team to establish a Bosniak-Serbian police force in the transferred territories. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the establishment of a joint police force wasn't a "way towards unification, but rather a freezing of the position at that time".¹³⁷ Izetbegović's rigorous stance against Sarajevo Serbs would not lead to the restoration of a multiethnic Bosnia¹³⁸ and, given his policy before and during the war,¹³⁹ it is hard to imagine that he was not himself aware of this. An influx of Bosniaks expelled from the Drina valley settled in abandoned Serb properties in Sarajevo during the unification, thereby strengthening the ethnic homogeneity of Sarajevo, as well as that of Bosnia.

¹³¹ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹³² *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016).

¹³³ *Oslobođenje*, February 2, 1996.

¹³⁴ *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016).

¹³⁵ *Oslobođenje*, February 27, 1996.

¹³⁶ "Zakon o Amnestiji" (Vlada Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine, 1996), <http://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/bosanski/zakoni/1996/zakoni/id%20o%20amnestiji.htm>.

¹³⁷ *SRNA*, January 29, 1996.

¹³⁸ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹³⁹ Dražen Pehar, *Alija Izetbegović: Rat u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Mostar: HKD Napredak, 2011).

Turning point: the OHR–IFOR conflict and its aftermath

The most crucial issue in the period before the unification was the establishment of local power-sharing arrangements and the question of the disposition of the Serbian police. At the end of January 1996, it seemed that negotiators had reached a deal establishing Sarajevo as a united city. Although Serbian forces were supposed to leave the transferred areas by D+45 – that is, forty-five days after IFOR control began (February 3, 1996), this new deal offered that authorities in the Serb-controlled areas, *including* police, could remain in place *until* D+90, i.e. March 19.¹⁴⁰ On that date, Federal forces were allowed to enter these territories.¹⁴¹

Both sides agreed on a principle of sharing power in the transferred territories that would last until the first postwar elections. After the unification was complete, members of the Serbian police were invited to join federal forces. Serbs had guaranteed that they could use their language and the Cyrillic alphabet in education curricula and in legislation.¹⁴² Most importantly, Serbian and Bosniak politicians seemed to be leaning toward this approval. Even Krajišnik called on Serbs not to leave Sarajevo, and those who did he invited to return.¹⁴³ Many Serb men who moved their property and families out returned to Sarajevo later and waited for the next development.¹⁴⁴ A lot of prewar Serbian inhabitants stated they were ready to stay in Sarajevo.¹⁴⁵ According to some UN observers, there might be around 30,000 Serbs willing to remain in the city;¹⁴⁶ others estimated that at least half the total number of Sarajevo Serbs would stay.¹⁴⁷

Unfortunately, disagreements between the civilian and military representatives of Dayton's implementation, i.e. Bildt and Smith, undermined the deal even before it got started.¹⁴⁸ The clash between OHR, which permitted Serbian police to stay until D+90, and IFOR, which ruled they must leave in accordance with the Dayton agreement on D+45, came to a head. The Bosniak leadership promptly accused Bildt of violating Dayton's agreement.¹⁴⁹ Izetbegović demanded that IFOR ensure the Serbian police disappeared immediately from

¹⁴⁰ *SRNA*, February 4, 1996.

¹⁴¹ Louis Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo;" Bildt, *Peace Journey; Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁴² *Glas Srpski*, February 1, 1996.

¹⁴³ *SRNA*, January 22, 1996; *Oslobođenje*, February 4, 1996.

¹⁴⁴ *SRNA*, January 31, 1996; *Glas Srpski*, February 1, 1996.

¹⁴⁵ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁴⁶ Kumar, *Divide and Fall?*

¹⁴⁷ *Glas Srpski*, January 18, 1996.

¹⁴⁸ Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

¹⁴⁹ *SRNA*, February 4, 1996.

‘occupied’ territories on D+45, because on that day federal forces moved in.¹⁵⁰ Mahmutović admitted that, because the “unification was done”, Izetbegović urged him not “to engage too much” in negotiations with Serbs.¹⁵¹ Finally, the Federal government denied that they had previously accepted the deal mediated by OHR.¹⁵²

The atmosphere got worse when three members of the VRS, General Đorđe Đukić, Colonel Aleksa Krsmanović, and their driver, were arrested in the Federation on February 2, 1996, and immediately accused of war crimes.¹⁵³ The first chief prosecutor of The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Richard Goldstone, issued a warrant for these two men, even though they had not been indicted. After delivering them to the Hague, they were held for months before the charges against Krsmanović were dropped and Đukić, close to death from cancer, was released.¹⁵⁴ Serbian media concluded that this was an obvious provocation.¹⁵⁵ Pale afterwards forbade Stanišić and his team to continue in any negotiations.¹⁵⁶

The deal between the parties establishing Serbian respect for the Federal police under the control of the IPTF was absolutely necessary. If Serbs got the impression that their police were to be driven out by military force, the probability of mass flight would be higher.¹⁵⁷ In an effort to calm the situation down, Bildt and Smith found a compromise and established that the Federation police would take over *full* responsibility for those areas in Sarajevo to be transferred to the Federation on D+91 (March 20, 1996) and that the existing civilian authorities, including local (Serbian) police could remain there for that period of time.¹⁵⁸ This arrangement provided a leading role for the IPTF, which would oversee a *gradual* transition to an integrated Federation police force in these areas in the period D+45 to D+90.¹⁵⁹ Bildt and Smith agreed to an accelerated district-by-district introduction of the Federal police that would be completed by D+90. IC representatives decided that the transfer of territories would be implemented municipality by municipality because the UN had great difficulty assembling an IPTF large enough to transfer all municipalities at once.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁰ *Oslobođenje*, February 4, 1996; *Glas Srpski*, February 5, 1996.

¹⁵¹ *Interview with Husein Mahmutović* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2017).

¹⁵² Sell, “The Serb Flight from Sarajevo.”

¹⁵³ *SRNA*, February 6, 1996.

¹⁵⁴ Holbrooke, *To End a War*.

¹⁵⁵ *Glas Srpski*, February 13, 1996; *Glas Srpski*, February 27, 1996; *Javnost*, February 10, 1996; *Glas Srpski*, February 27, 1996.

¹⁵⁶ *Glas Srpski*, February 8, 1996; *Oslobođenje*, February 7, 1996.

¹⁵⁷ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹⁵⁸ OHR, “Joint Statement by the High Representative and Commander IFOR” (OHR, 1996).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Kumar, *Divide and Fall?*

The difference between this OHR-IFOR compromise and the previous proposal consisted of the timing (i.e. gradual transition) of Federation force arrival.¹⁶¹ The other important issues of the previous deal (structure of local government, education, etc.) remained unsolved. It was obvious that, after retaking power, it would be the Federation force which would decide whether Serbs could stay in service or not.¹⁶² The announcement of the new schedule on the eve of D+45 had a catastrophic psychological impact on the Serbian community.¹⁶³

After publishing the proposed deal on February 4, 1996, the situation gradually escalated into calamity. The sequence of events is very difficult to establish because statements about it were ambiguous and the situation itself was highly dynamic. Statements made by IFOR, OHR reports, Bosnia media, documents of local Serbian initiatives, and interviewed authorities are contradictory. First and foremost, it is not clear when the dates specified for the transfer of power in Vogošća (February 23), Ilijaš (February 29), Hadžići (March 6), Ilidža (March 12), and Grbavica (March 19) were made known to the public. The IFOR transcripts of press briefings only mentioned the first integration of the Federal police into the municipality Vogošća on February 19.¹⁶⁴ SRNA published a press release about this schedule on the same day as IFOR.¹⁶⁵ Sell states that after announcing the OHR-IFOR compromise (February 4), the Serbian emergency committee for the evacuation began its activity.¹⁶⁶ However, Pale established this board by February 19.¹⁶⁷ According to Bildt, they presented a plan for a gradual take-over to the Federal government one week before the Rome meeting,¹⁶⁸ but there is no evidence of this timeline in the media.

This is a crucial point because it looks like the date of the first municipality transfer was formally announced after the Declaration on Sarajevo in Rome on February 18.¹⁶⁹ The UN stated one day after, on February 19, that the Federation police would begin to move into the suburbs on February 23 and proceed every seven days in five phases.¹⁷⁰ Inhabitants of Vogošća realized that their municipality would be reunited with Sarajevo within five days. Stanišić, who

¹⁶¹ *Oslobođenje*, February 5, 1996.

¹⁶² *Oslobođenje*, February 19, 1996.

¹⁶³ Louis Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo;" *Interview with Dušan Šehovac* (Sarajevo, Ilidža, 2016); *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁶⁴ IFOR, "Transcript of Press Briefing Held on 19th Feb 1996 (IFOR, February 19, 1996).

¹⁶⁵ *SRNA*, February 23, 1996.

¹⁶⁶ Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

¹⁶⁷ *Glas Srpski*, February 19, 1996; *Oslobođenje*, February 22, 1996.

¹⁶⁸ Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

¹⁶⁹ OHR, "Statement by the High Representative, Carl Bildt, for TVBiH" (OHR, February 19, 1996), <http://www.ohr.int/?p=51981>.

¹⁷⁰ Kumar, *Divide and Fall?*

returned to the negotiating table with Bildt's team in the meantime, heavily criticized this plan of sequential transfer for not being a "plan of implementation, but a plan of evacuation".¹⁷¹ This is a sad paradox because the Declaration on Sarajevo proclaimed in Rome copied the original OHR deal from the beginning of February. The IC announced guidelines for Serb participation in local self-rule in accordance with the Federation constitution. These would afford them opportunities in education, healthcare, etc. The police force would include local Serbs and operate under the auspices of the IPTF with IFOR's support.¹⁷² Nevertheless, as long as the IC was offering assurances without concrete legislation that would prevent Bosniaks from dominating Sarajevo, the Serbs had no reason to believe these assurances. After all, the Rome declaration stated that the details of the future organization of the unified Sarajevo were "yet to be decided".¹⁷³

The result of the Rome conference that was supposed to ensure Serbs would stay in Sarajevo was the exact opposite. Chaos set in immediately after presentation of the timeline. Pale intensified its media campaign to push all remaining and still undecided Serbs to leave the suburbs before the transfer of authority began. Gojko Kličković, who was responsible for the 'evacuation of Sarajevo', declared that all Serbs should leave Vogošća within three days.¹⁷⁴ IC authorities, then Prime Minister of the RS Rajko Kasagić, and Stanišić heavily criticized Kličković's appeal as "intentionally spreading panic".¹⁷⁵

The hysteria with which Pale urged Serbs to leave succeeded thoroughly. In extremely low temperatures and dense snow during that harsh winter of 1996, Serbs hastily packed their belongings and prepared to leave Vogošća. Pictures of desperate, frozen people leaving Sarajevo and heading in convoys to unknown destinations were absolutely grim. This was an exodus in the purest sense. The way the Federal police triumphantly entered Vogošća on February 23 ensured the flight of Serbs from the rest of the municipalities. With TV cameras rolling, the Federation police cut down the flag of the RS on the Vogošća town hall and began to search for weapons. Only direct intervention by the IC prevented the police from forcibly evicting and possibly arresting the Serb mayor of Vogošća.¹⁷⁶ The number of IPTF members who were supposed to control the situation was very low, too small to prevent violence

¹⁷¹ *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁷² OHR, "Rome Statement on Sarajevo. Reflecting the Work of the Joint Civilian Commission Sarajevo" (OHR, February 18, 1996), http://www.ohr.int/?ohr_archive=statement-on-sarajevo-rome-18296-2.

¹⁷³ OHR, "Rome Statement on Sarajevo."

¹⁷⁴ *Interview with Gojko Kličković* (Banja Luka, 2018).

¹⁷⁵ *Oslobođenje*, February 22, 1996; *Interview with Maksim Stanišić* (Pale, 2016).

¹⁷⁶ Sell, "The Serb Flight from Sarajevo."

effectively.¹⁷⁷ Bildt criticized the Federal government and its police for deliberately heightening tensions.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

Facing solutions first offered and then modified by the IC, the irreconcilable attitude of Izetbegović's Federal government, and constant changes of position on the part of the SDS, Sarajevo Serbs were between a rock and a hard place. Although the OHR formally promised in Rome to guarantee security and appealed to Serbs not to leave their homes before the arrival of the Federation police,¹⁷⁹ they did not offer Serbs any kind of constitutional/legal political structure that would protect them from being treated as a minority. It was just a pro forma statement when many Serbs from Sarajevo were leaving or already gone.

This article demonstrates that although Bosniak and Western media hold the Serbian leadership responsible for Serbian flight from Sarajevo, developments immediately after the war show us something else. I have documented that a majority of Sarajevo Serbs would have been willing to stay under the Federal government if a mechanism had been proposed that would enable them to avoid being ruled by the Bosniaks. No such mechanism was proposed. Toal and Dahlman highlight the IC's "conceptual failure" by saying it did not provide the conditions necessary for Serbs to stay.¹⁸⁰ Neville-Jones believed the chances of persuading the Serbs to stay in the Sarajevo suburbs under Federation rule might have been improved if a consultation mechanism had been in place for Smith and Bildt to rely on.¹⁸¹ According to Bildt, Smith had the chance to exercise his mandated powers and that would have given the IC time to manage the transfers more orderly.¹⁸² The OHR-IFOR conflict about the timing of the transfer and the unexpectedly early date of Vogošća's transfer created hysteria and caused undecided Serbs to abandon their properties. After that, any other considerations about postponing the transfer were pointless.

After the signing Pale respected the willingness of Serbs to stay and tried to find a compromise for them. However, without securing the local control which Smith said he was powerless to give the Serbs, their departure from Sarajevo was inevitable. The SDS based its policy on this assumption. Serbs formerly from Sarajevo shared with me the opinion that the

¹⁷⁷ *Glas Srpski*, February 27, 1996.

¹⁷⁸ *Glas Srpski*, February 28, 1996.

¹⁷⁹ OHR, "U laži su kratke noge. Ne verujte raznim pričama." (OHR, February 22, 1996), Archive of Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs.

¹⁸⁰ Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*.

¹⁸¹ Neville-Jones, "Dayton, IFOR and Alliance Relations in Bosnia."

¹⁸² Bildt, *Peace Journey*.

Serbian elite wanted a compromise. They also maintained that Pale formed its policies largely as reactions to unfavorable developments. By contrast, Serbs who stayed in Sarajevo were much more critical of the SDS policy and their political propaganda. Nevertheless, my interviewees stated that they and their families weren't forced away by the Serbian elite, but rather were driven away by the geopolitical circumstances and a threat to their security.

The advantage of Dayton, from the Serb perspective, was that it made the RS a *de facto* state without being controlled by Sarajevo. By the same token, however, there was no mechanism in the Federal constitutional system, nor in the central governing authority that would empower RS leaders to be involved in Federation affairs. No matter what the intention of the SDS leadership might have been in December 1995, ninety days later the situation was such that there was no reason to expect Serbs would stay in Sarajevo. By moving whole industrial factories from the transferred territories, under the pretense of saving them, Pale worsened living conditions there. The Serbian leadership also played a crucial role in orchestrating the departure of Serbs from Vogošća and then from other municipalities, which was chaotic and accompanied by looting and burning. After completing the unification of Sarajevo in mid-March 1996, only a few thousand Serbs remained there.

The unsuccess to re-integrate the populations of Sarajevo was only the latest stage in the failure by Bosnians and foreigners to find a way to structure a workable state composed of Self- and Other-identifying nations in Bosnia. Dayton institutionalized the political partitioning of the population that had occurred before the war and the territorial separation of these peoples that had occurred during the war,¹⁸³ matching those with governmental structures that empowered each nation to govern in its own territory, with weak governmental power in the supposed central authorities.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the Serbian leadership, as well as the Federal government, and even the IC evidently respected Dayton's ethno-national division of Bosnia in the peacebuilding process. Although the IC aimed to support incorporating large numbers of Serbs in the Federation, *neither* Serbs nor Bosniaks wanted that because it would have violated this logic. Furthermore, the movement of populations was not a unidirectional phenomenon. Whereas Serbs who left Sarajevo located in the RS, Bosniaks displaced from the RS settled in abandoned Serbian houses, even though the OHR stated that expelled Bosniaks wouldn't be accommodated in the Serbian properties that Izetbegović's government promised to protect.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Robert M. Hayden, *The Partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1990-93* (National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1993).

¹⁸⁴ Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided*.

¹⁸⁵ OHR, "U laži su kratke noge".

To argue that Serbs left Sarajevo *en masse* exclusively because of manipulations or force on the part of the Serbian leadership is incorrect. On the contrary, Pale couldn't prevent the Serbs from leaving. IC representatives were unable to change the provisions of Dayton that made Serbs subject to the governance of the very people they had been fighting for almost four years, and whose leadership demonstrated an unwillingness to accept them as equal citizens. That is why, as the title of this article states, the departure of the Serbs from Sarajevo was the first logical consequence of Dayton.

High Representative Carl Bildt may well have been sincere when he addressed Aleksa Šantić's poetic call to "Stay here" to the Serbs of Sarajevo, but there was a crucial difference between Bildt's and Šantić's use of this plea. In 1896, Šantić, as a South Slav himself, was urging other South Slavs – the Bosnian Muslims, to stay and oppose rule by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1996, however, it was not fellow South Slavs urging the Serbs to stay, but rather foreigners, in pursuit of their own agendas. The Bosniaks who would rule over any Serbs who stayed were not quoting Šantić or urging the Serbs to stay, but rather threatening them if they did so. Thus, if the Western diplomats and IC personnel believed that keeping Serbs in Sarajevo was the first step in an effort to restore multiethnic Bosnia, this primary goal of the peacebuilding process was doomed from the start. On the contrary, the departure of Sarajevo Serbs was the first demonstration of how accurately the Dayton Agreement reflected the self-partitioning of the Bosnian population into different nations, each rightly fearing being subjected to the rule of the others.