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# 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 pre-war inhabitants of Sarajevo who identified themselves as Serbs were almost entirely absent from the reunited town under the control of the Federation government. 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, in their view, to defend their homes. I argue that the incentives that led a majority of Sarajevoan Serbs to leave the city and its surroundings were the result of actions not only of the Serb leadership but also of Bosniak leaders and the international community. Our analysis is complementary to the scholarship examining the impact of massive population migrations and displacement in the aftermath of conflicts. I analyze the dynamics of Sarajevo's unification within the Federation and its consequences, demonstrating that once a partition is accepted at a higher level, it is almost impossible to prevent its emergence on a local level.

**Keywords:** postwar Sarajevo; Dayton Agreement; population movements; postwar ethnic conflict; Bosnian Serbs

## Introduction

After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia, the Herzegovinian Serb poet Aleksa Šantić wrote in a poem in 1896: "Stay here! The sun of a stranger's sky won't warm you like this one does" (Šantić 2012). He was addressing his Muslim neighbors 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 following the transfer of Serb-controlled areas to the Federation government.<sup>1</sup> As Bildt stated in Paris, "We did not want to start the period of peace with destruction and a new exodus" (Bildt 1998, 169), yet Dayton's plan to reunite the capital city, the first major political task of the Agreement, led to just that (Holbrooke 1999). After the signing of the Dayton Agreement, Sarajevoan Serbs, who had defended their homes during the war in their view,<sup>2</sup> realized that negotiators in Ohio had handed the suburbs where they lived over to the Federation government ruled by their wartime enemies, who were still their political antagonists.<sup>3</sup> Almost all of them decided to leave their homes before the formal termination of Sarajevo's unification on March 19, 1996, moving to the Republika Srpska (hereafter RS), a Bosnian entity under the control of the Serb leadership, or to Serbia. When the unification of Sarajevo was complete, out of some 160,000 Serbs living in prewar Sarajevo (Federalni zavod za statistiku 1999), only an estimated 10,000 of those who identified as Serbs remained in reunited Sarajevo (Ahmetašević 1996). According to the first postwar census conducted in 2013,

there were officially 13,300 Serb residents in Federation Sarajevo Canton (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019).

Some scholars generally see the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo as a consequence of the nationalist policies of the SDS, the main Serb political party (Donia 2006; Kumar 1997; Toal and Dahlman 2011). In this reading, the SDS leadership bears most of the responsibility for orchestrating, manipulating, and forcing people to leave the city. As I demonstrate here, the situation on the ground was much more complex, and there were other circumstances and events that played a role in the decision of Sarajevo Serbs to depart the city. Based on my reading of historical evidence, I argue that to understand Sarajevo's unification and its aftermath, it is also necessary to examine the policies of the main Muslim political party, the SDA, and the role of the international community (IC).

Muslims (called Bosniaks since 1993) constitute one of the three constituent nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) along with Bosnian Serbs and Croats. On the other hand, Bosnians are all the inhabitants of BiH. Alija Izetbegović was a political leader of the SDA but also the president of BiH, which was recognized internationally. Although he formally supported a multi-ethnic BiH, his politics were focused almost exclusively on the Muslim (Bosniak) nation (Pehar 2019). Instead of speaking of Sarajevo's (re)unification, Bosniak representatives emphasized that Sarajevo was liberated by the Dayton Agreement (Hebib 2020; Mahmutović 2017). The term "international community" 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 (Jansen 2006).

This study analyses the dynamics of policies (political goals, decisions, orders) among the SDS leadership, the SDA leadership, and the IC in the initial postwar period. Although these players and their performances are approached as coherent bodies, it should be stated that the actors and their strategies were not completely unified. By looking at the diverse policies of these crucial protagonists and considering the personal narratives of Sarajevo Serbs, I trace how the SDS leadership, the SDA leadership, and the IC representatives acted, reacted, and interpreted Sarajevo's unification. At the forefront of these policies were local people identifying as Serbs, and they were completely shocked by Dayton's decision to reunite the capital city while also being afraid of the consequences of unification. These frightened and traumatized ordinary people found themselves in a dramatic situation in which ubiquitous manipulation and propaganda reigned supreme. Anxiety, distrust, collective psychoses, and feelings of betrayal were the prevailing denominators of their temper. Three months after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, the SDS leaders had already started highlighting these oppressed feelings by telling Serbs in Sarajevo to fear SDA rule. On the other hand, the SDA did not bother to create more suitable circumstances that would encourage Serbs to remain, nor did the IC do enough to reassure the Serbs to convince them to stay in Sarajevo.

One note about methodology is required here. I use the terms Sarajevo "Serb" and "Bosniak" in this article because this is how all of my interviewees identified themselves, how the Bosnian media conceptualized them, and how the IC, the SDS, and the SDA approached postwar BiH. However, any collective categorization of people who declared themselves Serbs in Sarajevo is precarious due to the multilayered interpretation of what constitutes this community. My interlocutors mostly identified as members of an ethno-nationally defined group of Serbs, which they understand as an integral component of the prewar Sarajevo fabric. By others, they were perceived either as political tools of the SDS' politics, as a group important for policies of the IC after the end of the war, or, in the academia-journalistic narrative, considered perpetrators of Sarajevo's siege and war crimes.

The majority of studies dealing with the aftermath of the Bosnian war have focused on the outcomes of forced migrations and ethnic cleansing, *id est*, on people who were expelled due to their different ethnicity from territories under the control of an ethno-nationally defined majority (Cox 1998; Donais 2005; Calic 2007; Toal and Dahlman 2011). This article instead offers a new avenue of research, analyzing the circumstances that caused the displacement of people from territories in

which they had been majorities and only became minorities after the decisions in Dayton. Although the Dayton Agreement highlights features of integration by restoring the pre-war multi-ethnic society, it is also a document of partition, as it institutionalized the ethnic division of BiH. These two paradoxical sides of Dayton need to be kept together in analysis of Sarajevo's unification and its consequences.<sup>4</sup> The process of ethnic homogenization that has continued in the postwar period despite Dayton's commitments represents one of the under-researched consequences of the Yugoslav wars. By addressing the question of why Serbs in transferred territories were not willing to remain in the Federation, the study demonstrates that once a partition is accepted at a higher level, it is almost impossible to prevent it on a local level.

This article shows that the departure of Serbs was not actually the "first failure" (Sell 1999, 179) or a "setback" (Holbrooke 1999, 335) of the Dayton Agreement but rather its first logical consequence, in that it strengthened the ethnic homogenization of the capital city. To paraphrase Clausewitz, the situation in Sarajevo (and in BiH generally) after the end of the war was "peace as a continuation of war by (relatively) peaceful means" (Belloni 2007, 78; Pehar 2019, 1). During the crucial period between the signing of the Agreement in Paris (December 1995) and the conference in Rome (February 1996), events in Sarajevo followed the logic that drove both the war and the Dayton Agreement itself—that BiH must be divided territorially into areas under the political domination of one of its three main peoples. The policies of all of the protagonists have followed this logic.

This event has not been thoroughly analyzed, and scientific literature on this topic is almost non-existent. The main reason why Sarajevo's unification and its consequences have been neglected in scholarship stems from its controversy and sensitivity. The Bosnian war was characterized by asymmetrical power relations among warring sides. The most horrific acts were committed against non-Serb populations, largely by the Serb paramilitary units and to a lesser extent by the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS) (Gutman 1993; Rieff 1996). People located in the territories that were supposed to be transferred into the Federation ("Serb Sarajevo")<sup>5</sup> were perceived by other Sarajevans as enemy members affiliated with the VRS that surrounded, bombarded, and held them under siege for almost four years. This asymmetry and the war crimes committed in the capital city in the name of Serb nationalism are important to keep at the forefront in explaining why the mass flight of Serbs from Sarajevo has been either disregarded or insufficiently analyzed by omitting individual anxieties, war experiences, and the suffering of ordinary Sarajevan Serbs.

There are only two analytical studies of this process representing an important and balanced introduction to this issue. The first is an article by Louis Sell, a political adviser to the High Representative Bildt (Sell 1999). The second is focused on Serbs who fled from Sarajevo to Pale<sup>6</sup> and their displacement, identities, and experiences in new places (Armakolas 2007). My argument is based on a critical historical analysis of empirical evidence that I gathered during twelve months of fieldwork between 2016 and 2019, both in Sarajevo and in other municipalities of the Republika Srpska (RS). The first set of data used for the reconstruction of developments between November 1995 and February 1996, was collected from the fragmented media scene in BiH (Federal media include *Oslobođenje*, *Dnevni Avaz*, *BH Dani*, and *Slobodna Bosna*; RS media include *SRNA agency*, *Glas Srpski*, *Srpsko Oslobođenje*, and *Javnost*). The analysis is based on a critical reading of the aforementioned newspapers published daily in the determined period of time. Other primary sources were also used, such as materials from an association that helped people in need during that time (Democratic Initiative of Sarajevan Serbs), sources taken from international organizations including IFOR and OHR, and memoirs of both local and IC participants. To get a more detailed perspective, I also conducted individual semi-structured interviews with authorities (politicians, negotiators, local leaders) involved in the mass departure of Serbs from Sarajevo, as well as with ordinary citizens who lived in "Serb Sarajevo" or who came there after Sarajevo's unification.<sup>7</sup>

### “Unmixing People:” Mass Migrations and Displacement as the Aftermath of Conflicts

The main outcome of the majority of involuntary mass migrations that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the ethnic unmixing of a population (Hayden 1996; Kaufmann 1996; Naimark 2001; Mann 2005; Ther 2016). The expulsion of minorities, population exchanges, transfers, exoduses, and ethnic cleansings are all different forms of forced migration. These migrations were generated by the reconfiguration of political space along national lines (Macartney 2002; Brubaker 1998). The 1923 Lausanne Conference arranged a massive, forced population movement between Turkey and Greece of people whose religions made them not fit the new national definition of Turks and Greeks, which served as an initial template (Clark 2006; Shields 2013). The Lausanne population exchange had crucial significance during World War II. Regarding ethnic Germans living in Central and Southeastern Europe, the Allies were in agreement that ethnic homogeneity in border areas was a prerequisite for international stability (Cattaruzza 2010). Forced migrations affected millions of people. They reached their peak in the years following 1945, when more than 12 million Germans were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia (Ther 1996).

Compulsory population transfers or exchanges were agreed to by the leaders of great powers over the heads of ordinary people. The temptation to use such methods was especially strong when a new nationalist power wanted to consolidate its authority by realigning national borders, creating a new strategic order in the aftermath of the war, or when the previous order was restored by confirmation of borders (Clark 2006). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “Lausanne-style” massive population exchanges became an attractive option for solving disputes over territories. Superpowers even endorsed the practices of forced transfers and relocations when trying to ensure and maintain stability in countries and regions affected by ethnic clashes (Mann 2005). Ethnic separation involved the removal of unwanted populations, often by means of violence and terror. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mass expulsions and population exchanges became a main concomitant tool of many conflicts and of their settlement. For example, the Romanians of northern Bukovina abandoned these lands *en masse* after Romania ceded it to the Soviet Union in 1940 (Deletant 2006). The Italians from Istria fled socialist Yugoslavia for Italy after 1945 (Ballinger 2003). Splitting up an area has always been accompanied by the forced removal of ethnic minorities (Lemberg 2000). The logic of creating a nation-state following the breakup of ethnically heterogeneous states endangers the existence of national minorities within it (Hayden 1996). The partition of India in 1948, the 1948–1949 Arab–Israeli war, and the division of Cyprus in 1974 were all followed by the emigration or expulsion of most of the minority populations on each side (Brass 2003; Nets-Zehngut 2011; Loizos 2008).

The idea of an ethnically homogeneous nation-state was so attractive that the minority protection embedded in the League of Nations was not adopted by the United Nations; leading politicians found ethnic minorities as a potential source of conflict (Lemberg 2000). This approach changed at the end of the bipolar world, when the United Nations published the Minorities Declaration in 1992 (United Nations Human Rights 2010). At that time, UNHCR began to consider voluntary repatriation as the most desirable solution for refugee situations besides integration and resettlement (Harrell-Bond 1989). The assumption that every refugee should have a right to return voluntarily was limited to his or her homeland, not to a place of origin (Phuong 2005).

This attitude became more entrenched during the Bosnian war as the warring sides expelled minorities from territories under their control (Burg and Shoup 1999). During the Yugoslav wars, ethnic cleansing became a re-established term in the international lexicon, although this was already common practice during the twentieth century (Hayden 1996; Mann 2005; Naimark 2001; Ther 2016). On the basis of a moral failure to prevent this heinous practice, the approach toward expellees underwent a radical change. The IC aimed at reversing the outcomes of the Bosnian war, during which more than fifty percent of Bosnians had to leave their homes (Harvey 2006). A trend to reassess previous attitudes and to declare all forms of forced ethnic changes inhuman and declaratively unlawful prevailed (Belloni 2007). One of the key stated intentions of the Dayton

Agreement was thus to restore the prewar multi-ethnic character of BiH (Toal and Dahlman 2011). To do so, the IC supported the return of all forcibly expelled Bosnians to their homes (OHR 1995). In contrast to a traditional definition of the return of refugees, Dayton promised the return of all refugees not to their country of origin but to their homes of origin (Phuong 2000). As this article demonstrates in the example of Sarajevo's unification, its consequences in the form of another migration wave were, however, completely opposite to the intentions stated in the Dayton Agreement. Instead of beginning to restore the pre-war multi-ethnic structure of Bosnian society, the first outcome of the peace treaty was a continuation of the ethnic unmixing process.

### Sarajevo Under Siege

The collapse of Socialist Yugoslavia culminated in a protracted conflict in BiH, during which the belligerents attempted to secure territories that they deemed their rightful possession. The pre-war ethnic structure of some regions thus played a key role in the legitimization of war gains, i.e., control of ethnically "cleansed" territories (Burg and Shoup 1999; Calic 2007). Most ethnic cleansing was not a random event 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 phase occurred between April and September 1992, when Serb forces expelled Muslims. The second one was in 1993 when Bosniaks and Croats began to fight each other. 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 (Melander 2007). The conflict meant that prewar BiH, which resembled a "leopard skin" (Bougarel 1992, 106) by virtue of its multi-ethnicity, was turned into separate, distinctive, and ethnically homogenous areas under the control of Bosniak, Serb, and Croat leaders (Pejanović 2017).

Within the Yugoslav dissolution, the leadership of the retreating Yugoslav army (JNA) left all those of Bosnian origin and the overwhelming bulk of the JNA's arsenal in BiH (CIA 2002). The JNA's command and control infrastructure transformed the JNA in BiH into a Bosnian Serb force, which then became the VRS. The VRS, inheriting weapons from the JNA, dominated the beginning of the war and aimed to secure the largest possible territories. Since the beginning of the war, the VRS unit surrounded and heavily shelled Sarajevo (Donia 2006). Fighting occurred in other parts of Bosnia as well, notably in Herzegovina, northern Bosnia, and eastern Bosnia, where the Serb paramilitary units and the VRS attacked the newly formed Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ARBiH) (Dulić 2018).

Since the beginning of the war, observers were shocked by the brutality of the fighting, the atrocities committed against non-Serb populations, and the scope of ethnic cleansing, especially in Podrinje and Bosanska Krajina (Glenny 1993). The blockade of Sarajevo, lasting from the beginning to the end of the war, caused acts of terror, massive shelling on a daily basis, sniper attacks, the destruction of infrastructure, and a lack of basic foodstuffs and water (Maček 2009; Sorabji 2006). The suffering of residents resulted in nearly 10,000 deaths, of whom 4,954 were civilians and 4,548 were military personnel (Tabeau, Bijak, and Lončarić 2003). Beside Sarajevo being in flames, having been massively bombarded by the VRS, there was a part of the city whose residents boycotted the referendum on Bosnian independence in March 1992.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, in a plebiscite which was organized in November 1991 by the Assembly of the Serb Nation of BiH, the overwhelming majority of Serbs in this part of Sarajevo voted in favor of remaining in Yugoslavia (Burg and Shoup 1999; Maksić 2017). Amid growing ethno-nationalist tensions in the spring of 1992, Muslims living in the territory of Sarajevo, controlled by the VRS afterwards, were forced to leave. At the same time, hundreds of Serbs came to the Sarajevo suburbs after leaving areas controlled by the ARBiH. Combat took place within parts of the city under the control of the ARBiH as well as its periphery under the surveillance of the VRS. Front lines completely divided Sarajevo. In September of 1992, the SDS leadership established "Serb Sarajevo" as a part of the RS with massive support from the local inhabitants (Kecmanović and Antić 2016). Besides the municipalities of Ilijaš, Ilidža, Vogošća,



Hadžići, and Grbavica, “Serb Sarajevo” consisted of quarters (such as Lukavica, etc.) which are parts of today’s Eastern Sarajevo in the RS.

Life in this scattered settlement during the war was not covered by international media to the same extent as was besieged Sarajevo (Bell 2012). According to Sarajevo media, Bosnian Serbs living in territories under the control of the VRS were considered not only separatists but also aggressors who were attacking the independent Bosnian state. Being collectively labelled as “četniks” or “mountain barbarians” by the press, these locals were equated with the VRS troops that shelled Sarajevo from Trebević. The Serbs in these localities, on the other hand, had completely different opinions 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. 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 BiH with Sarajevo (CIA 2002). However, these views and beliefs, which resonated in the statements of all of my interviewees, were at odds with the VRS’s encirclement, military dominance, and bombardment of Sarajevo. All these historical circumstances and their understandings matter for further detailed explanation of why the Serbs living in “Serb Sarajevo” were so hard to integrate into the city secured by the ARBiH after Dayton. Frightened but also aware of the atrocities committed by the VRS during the siege of Sarajevo, Serb participants did not want to become an unpopular ethnic minority collectively accused of committing war crimes in the capital city.

### Dayton’s Decision to Reintegrate Sarajevo

The Dayton Agreement, initialed in Ohio on November 21, 1995 and signed in Paris one month later, ended the Bosnian conflict. For the preceding several weeks, US mediators hosted representatives from Serbia, Croatia, and BiH—Bosnian president Izetbegović and his colleagues representing the Bosniak nation—in an effort to end the war (Holbrooke 1999). The Bosnian Serb delegation was permitted to attend only as a subordinate and passive part of the Serb delegation led by Serb President Slobodan Milošević (Donia 2006; Guskova 2003; Neville-Jones 1996). Croatian president Franjo Tuđman held talks on behalf of Bosnian Croats with the assistance of Gojko Šušak, minister of defense originally from Western Herzegovina (Chollet 2005).

Western negotiators did not consider any solution to 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 (Hayden 1999). The final agreement represented a compromise enforced by the IC without the involvement of the people who would live under it. Although the former belligerents had different issues with the agreement’s layout during negotiations, they formally respected its framework. Finally, they adjusted their policies to the reality created by those administrative divisions.

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 (Krajišnik 2017). After many discussed plans, two solutions were seriously 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 (Holbrooke 1999). The first solution was supported by Bosnian Serbs, who after rejecting an idea to divide Sarajevo called for political equality among the three Bosnian nations (Koljević 2008; Krajišnik 2017); the second one was endorsed by Bosniaks, who rejected an equal three-way power sharing arrangement in a demographic context where they were a majority constituting roughly 90% of the population of besieged Sarajevo. Bosniak representatives, along with the American negotiators, refused political equality “because it would disadvantage the Muslims, who would be

vulnerable to a Serb-Croat coalition or Serb obstructionism” (Holbrooke 1999, 259). Milošević ended protracted negotiations about the status of Sarajevo when he refused to support the D.C. model, supposedly because of its complexity (Bildt 1998; Holbrooke 1999).

There are various explanations of why Milošević decided to give Sarajevo to Izetbegović. According to Holbrooke, the chief architect of the Agreement, and Bildt, Milošević was fed up with the Bosnian Serb leadership. He therefore aimed to weaken Pale as a base of Serb nationalism and strengthen the Serbs in Banja Luka (Bildt 1998; Holbrooke 1999). According to Vladimir Lukić, the former Prime Minister of the RS and a member of the Bosnian Serb delegation in Dayton, Milošević intended to maintain Bosnian division by accepting Sarajevo unification under the Federation. Lukić recalls Milošević as saying, “If we (Serbs) got Sarajevo, we would not have the RS” (Lukić 2017). Nebojša Vujović, a member of the Serb delegation in Dayton, says that Milošević turned down the idea of a separate district for Sarajevo as he thought that with such a configuration, the Sarajevo district and the Federation could outvote the RS (Vujović 2018). Others supposed the fact that Milošević had little to bargain with at the negotiating table (Chandler 2005). In an effort to moderate international sanctions, he accepted what was put in front of him, including the demand that he should give up any claim to the Serb suburbs of Sarajevo.

The final design of the agreement, establishing the transfer of the territories, shocked the delegation of Bosnian Serbs (Koljević 2008). The majority of them had strong connections to Sarajevo. On the basis of various negotiated plans about the Sarajevo settlement in Dayton, we can state that Bosnian Serbs favored any option which would assure their control over a significant part of the city. The completely frenzied Bosnian Serb delegation, who got to see the map of the Dayton proposal only ten minutes before the signing, had no chance to change it (Lukić 2017). The Dayton Agreement was officially signed by Izetbegović in the name of Bosniaks and by 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 peace treaty, Bosnians at last felt relieved. The shelling had stopped, and people could take a walk without fear. The only place in BiH where relief was not obvious was “Serb Sarajevo.” After publishing the information about Sarajevo’s unification, the prevailing feeling among local residents was shock, unease, and resentment. My interlocutors felt betrayed, and they heavily criticized Milošević’s decision to accept the 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. Disputing the question of why Milošević decided to give up Sarajevo and the accusations of his betrayal were the key components in memories shared by my interlocutors regarding the aftermath of Sarajevo’s unification. These viewpoints were echoed by Serb media: “We managed to defend Sarajevo in the war; they took it away from us during peace negotiations” (*Glas Srpski* 1995a); “We won’t give up ‘our’ Sarajevo” (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995a); or “The Dayton Agreement is an act of treason” (*Glas Srpski* 1995b). These slogans that gave voice to the people’s grievances, denial, outrage, and sense of defeat was also mirrored in memories of all ex-Sarajevan interviewees I talked to.

After signing the Dayton Agreement, my interlocutors proclaimed their willingness to remain in their homes in the city, but not under the rule of the Federation government. Thousands of Sarajevan Serbs protested at meetings in Ilidža, Grbavica, and Vogošća, where they criticized Dayton’s intention to impose this government that had been ‘killing them for almost four years’ and demanded a “correction of Dayton’s error.”<sup>9</sup> Protestors of all ages sharply condemned the labels of aggressors and even occupiers that were given to them in the Federation (*Oslobođenje* 1995; *Slobodna Bosna* 1995; *Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995b).<sup>10</sup> They 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, as noted by Dušan Šehovac, the last mayor of “Serb”

Ilidža before the reunification, and Husein Mahmutović, the pre-war and postwar mayor of Ilidža and a prominent member of the SDA (Mahmutović 2017; Šehovac 2016). None of the men were guaranteed freedom from charges of participation in the war (*BH Dani* 1996b). Although Pale certainly orchestrated these protests in an effort to put pressure on the IC, my interlocutors emphasized that they were first and foremost very frightened and anxious about the future. Despite their fear, in November and December 1995, relatively few Sarajevo Serbs requested the transfer of property that would let them leave the city (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995a). A referendum organized by the Pale government on December 13, 1995 confirmed Sarajevo Serbs' position: 99% of the 78,149 voters (voter turnout was 92%) rejected the transfer of "Serb Sarajevo" to the Federation (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995c).<sup>11</sup>

## Different Interpretations of Sarajevo's Unification: Did Anyone Actually Want a Multi-Ethnic Sarajevo?

### *The International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina 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 the military and the civilian implementation of the peacebuilding process in BiH. 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 (Chandler 2005). In Dayton BiH, Europeans accepted US command on the military side that engaged intensively in carrying out the military provisions of Dayton by means of a NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) (Neville-Jones 1996). To avoid "mission creep," the US insisted that IFOR not get involved in civilian implementation of Dayton (Sell 1999, 191). The commander of IFOR, Admiral Leighton Smith, was contemptuous of the OHR mission and anything that smelled of "nation-building" (Toal and Dahlman 2011, 165). He considered the civilian aspects of the task beneath him and did everything he could to prevent US intervention in the first place (Belloni 2007; Holbrooke 1999).

Although the ceremonial speeches of the IC's representatives during the signing of the peace agreement included clear-cut goals and lofty promises, a postwar reality in BiH turned out quite differently. The IC was divided into two forces that implemented military (IFOR) and civilian (OHR) chapters of the agreement in BiH separately. International representatives improvised in the ways they carried out the Dayton Agreement. Unclear leadership prevented an effective reaction to the chaotic postwar situation on the ground. Maksim Stanišić, who was the main Serb negotiator in Bildt's unification commission, recollected that the Federation government in Sarajevo, as well as the SDS leadership in Pale, carefully followed the nuances of the tension between IFOR and OHR in an effort to promote their own political goals (Stanišić 2016). The same opinion is shared by Mahmutović (2017) and Šehovac (2016) as well.

The main complication 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 BiH from UNPROFOR in December 1995 (Figa-Talamanca 1996). During these forty-five days (D+45), RS authorities were responsible for withdrawing all forces, weapons, equipment, and explosive devices. 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" (The Dayton Agreement 1995). Annex 1 mentioned "all forces" in general without clearer instructions regarding the police force. As I demonstrate further in this article, OHR and IFOR's different interpretations of the unification timeline and the question of when the Serb police would have to leave was contested by the SDA leaders, making a deep impact on the still-undecided Sarajevo Serbs to leave the city.



The international representatives who were concerned of endangering a fragile peace undermined the interventionism regarding Sarajevo's unification. Guarantees offered by the IC, such as police monitoring of the established International Police Task Force (IPTF), whose number was very limited, did not satisfy Serb leaders (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1996). Whether the IC representatives tried to collaborate with the SDS leadership sincerely or merely pretended to do so is difficult to say. As Stanišić and Mahmutović noted, negotiations between Bosniak and Serb delegates regarding Sarajevo's unification were completely orchestrated by the IC. They had no chance to discuss or change any particular points (Mahmutović 2017; Stanišić 2016).

### **The SDS Leadership and Its Search for a Solution**

Regarding the situation in "Serb Sarajevo," the SDS leaders had to consider a key point: Serbs wanted to stay in Sarajevo, but it was extremely difficult for them to accept a Federation government with the dominating SDA (Koljević 2008). With respect to the final peace agreement, they were looking for a political solution within the Federation (Stanišić 2016). SRNA press releases show that Serb leaders considered three scenarios for the future. First, they wanted to secure a local government, police, court system, and education for Serbs.<sup>12</sup> This would enable Serbs to govern in their own areas (Bildt 1998). Second, Serb authorities demanded the postponement of the transfer of "Serb Sarajevo" up to a year or to the first postwar elections. Third, if the IC would not specify the political framework under which Serbs could stay without fear or would not postpone the transfer, Pale would support the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo. After the signing, the SDS elite complained primarily about the uncertainty caused by a lack of clear information on when and how the transfer of authority would take place (Koljević 2008).

Obviously, these demands, threats, and grievances were based on the divisions between Serbs and Bosniaks that brought on the war. The Serb leadership led by Krajišnik<sup>13</sup> assumed that the IC wanted to prove a multi-ethnic BiH was possible by reuniting Sarajevo. Although the Federation government officially endorsed the restoration of multi-ethnicity, Sarajevo Serbs were very cautious (Stanišić 2016; Šehovac 2016). Only two Serb interviewees who decided to stay in Sarajevo considered it plausible that Izetbegović intended to restore multi-ethnic Sarajevo (Mladen 2016; Nemanja 2017). The rest of the respondents did not trust Izetbegović at all and thought his multi-ethnic policy was calculated and fake. Sarajevo Serbs' interlocutors broadly shared the RS government's opinion that establishing Federation control over the transferred territories without first assuring the rights of local Serbs and sufficiently guaranteeing their security and property was not congruent with the peacebuilding process.

The SDS leadership tried to negotiate some modifications. Especially, they strove to change the timeline of Sarajevo's transfer and insisted that the districts controlled by Serbs would have complete local autonomy, including control over their own police, educational system, and so forth (Sell 1999). France supported the Serbs' requirements. French President Chirac unsuccessfully demanded that President Clinton give additional guarantees to Serbs living in Sarajevo.<sup>14</sup> Washington, however, stuck to the previous agreement and declared that the schedule for the unification could not be modified (*Javnost* 1996).<sup>15</sup>

Although High Representative Bildt gave Serbs no hope that they could change the terms of agreement, he began to address more thoroughly the question of how to convince local Serbs to accept the Federation government (Sell 1999). At the end of 1995, Bildt created a commission comprising both Bosniak and Serb members that was supposed to find an acceptable compromise (Bildt 1998). However, Serb delegates, led by Maksim Stanišić, were pessimistic. Due to the unclear situation, a lot of their neighbors had already left the city, and others were packing their belongings, awaiting the next development (Stanišić 2016). Stanišić and his colleagues were chiefly interested in the real effects of Sarajevo's unification, especially in terms of security, the absence of amnesty law, and establishment of the IPTF (*Oslobođenje* 1996a; *Glas Srpski* 1996f). They also demanded a

longer interim period in which to complete the transfer, that is, to the first postwar elections planned for September 1996 (Stanišić 2016).

Pale's position towards the unification of Sarajevo had not been sincere. While the SDS leadership hoped that they could enforce some modification within the Dayton decision about Sarajevo by using threats (Koljević 2008), Mladić ordered the transfer of all military infrastructure and equipment from the transferred territories immediately after the signing of the peace treaty (Prica 2019). After a bitter realization that the IC was not going to adjust its position and the SDS could not enforce it—which was crystal clear at the Rome conference in February 1996, as I will show afterwards—their policy became much more rigid. Its changes of opinion were pushed in controlled media. While the SDS leadership had initially banned departure from Sarajevo (Stanišić 2016), in January they reversed course when Krajišnik emphasized that everyone who wanted to leave the city could do so (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995a; *Nezavisne Novine* 1996a).

Adjustments in Pale's attitude towards Sarajevo Serbs also showed that the SDS leaders reacted to steps taken by the IC and the SDA leadership. It seems that Pale's representatives based their policy toward Sarajevo's unification on the belief that Serbs eventually would not remain in Sarajevo under Izetbegović's control. As Krajišnik admitted, he had known after returning from Dayton that "Serbs would move out of the reunited Sarajevo" (Krajišnik 2017). From this perspective, the SDS leadership argued, it would be irresponsible to encourage people to endanger themselves by staying there. Finally, Pale completely subordinated its policy in pursuit of moving Sarajevo Serbs out of the city. Taking the rigorous stance that there was no other option than to depart, the SDS leadership compelled all Serbs to leave the city before Sarajevo's unification officially began. The Serb representatives urged everyone to move all industry, equipment, and other necessary infrastructure from the transferred territories to the RS (*Oslobođenje* 1996b; Plavšić 2005).<sup>16</sup> Serb leaders also presented a utopian project of building a "new Serb Sarajevo" between Pale and Eastern Sarajevo (*Nezavisne Novine* 1996b).

### **Sarajevo's Unification and the SDA Leadership**

The High Representative rhetorically asked on the day of the signing in Paris whether anyone actually wanted a multi-ethnic Sarajevo. Although many Sarajevo inhabitants still highlighted the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the capital city, the Bosniak leadership paid lip service to this idea while the Serb government in Pale talked about a de facto divided city (Bildt 1998). The potential flight of Serbs from Sarajevo did not bother the SDA leaders or those who voted for them. After three and a half years of suffering, some participants who identified as Bosniaks felt a great distaste for Serbs, whereas others did not trust them, and many of them on the basis of their experience of life in a besieged city felt satisfaction that inhabitants of "Serb Sarajevo" would lose the "stolen" part of Sarajevo. Although these feelings are completely understandable, they complicated Sarajevo's unification.

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 (Holbrooke 1999). After returning home and facing sharp criticism from conservatives in Sarajevo, however, he became more reserved and rigid (Sell 1999). 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.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of December, Izetbegović specified on Bosnian TV that the Federation government would spare women and children in the transferred territories, but men who had fought would be judged (Koljević 2008). His message in other statements was just as clear: "In Sarajevo could stay only those Serbs, who in addition to respecting the Federation government and its laws, would cooperate with police" (*Srpsko Oslobođenje* 1995c) and "those who did not fight against the Bosnian government and did not commit war crimes could stay in Sarajevo" (*Dnevni Avaz* 1996a). When Bildt insisted to Izetbegović to give Serbs the confidence they needed to stay, Izetbegović reiterated that the Bosnian authorities would not touch

civilians but “Serb soldiers who had been shelling Sarajevo would be another matter” (Sell 1999, 186). In the same context, my ex-Sarajevan respondents repeatedly emphasized Izetbegović’s statement on Bosnian TV that “all men who carried a gun would be judged by the Army tribunal.”<sup>18</sup> In these press releases, Izetbegović’s approach towards Sarajevan Serbs’ men was either leave or expect to be arrested and prosecuted. All these statements demonstrated a strict position of the Federation government that merely reinforced the atmosphere of mutual distrust and fear.

The biggest problem was the unresolved issue of amnesty. In its absence, nobody who carried a gun during the war could be sure his name was not on the list of “individuals who committed war crimes” (Stanišić 2016). The Sarajevo-Romanija Corps of the VRS had kept roughly 13,000–15,000 men during the war, even though there was a significant fluctuation due to death tolls, casualties, desertions, and other factors (CIA 2002). A widespread rumor circulated among my ex-Sarajevan respondents that Izetbegović’s people had already put together a list of all the VRS soldiers in the area. As one of my interlocutors 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” (Zoran 2017)? All the male respondents highlighted the stance of the Federation government by echoing the point that “men who were VRS conscripts would not be welcome in Sarajevo.”

On the basis of these statements, nobody could be certain in the tense postwar situation 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 (Šehovac 2016). After immense international pressure, the Federation parliament accepted the law on amnesty on January 10, 1996. Although the declaration formally pardoned all combatants who were not charged with war crimes, as well as men who avoided serving in the ARBiH (*Oslobođenje* 1996h), the first amnesty law was very limited and did not include many specifics (“Zakon o Amnestiji” 1996).

As for the planned implementation of Sarajevo’s unification, the SDA leadership was strongly against any changes to the plan or the timeline because they wanted to prevent the removal of economic capacities. They strictly aimed to reunite and liberate Sarajevo’s surroundings according to the timeline agreed upon in Dayton. Izetbegović’s rigorous stance would not lead to the restoration of a multi-ethnic BiH (Bildt 1998), and, given his policy before and during the war (Pehar 2011), it is hard to imagine that he was not himself aware of this. On the contrary, an influx of Bosniaks who were expelled from the Drina valley and settled in abandoned Serb properties in Sarajevo during the unification (*BH Dani* 1996a) strengthened the ethnic homogeneity of Sarajevo, as well as that of BiH.

### **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 Serb police. At the end of January 1996, it seemed that the Bosniak-Serb unification commission under the tutelage of OHR had reached a deal by establishing Sarajevo as a united city. Although Serb 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, or March 19.<sup>19</sup> On that date, Federation forces were allowed to enter these territories (Sell 1999; Stanišić 2016).

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 Serb police were invited to join Federation forces. Serbs had guaranteed that they could use their language and the Cyrillic alphabet in education curricula and in legislation (*Glas Srpski* 1996b; Sell 1999). Most importantly, the SDS and the SDA politicians seemed to be leaning toward this approval (Mahmutović 2017; Stanišić 2016). Even Krajišnik called on Serbs not to leave Sarajevo, and invited

those who did to return (*Oslobođenje* 1996c).<sup>20</sup> According to some UN observers, there might have been around 30,000 Serbs willing to remain in the city (Kumar 1997), while Serb sources estimated that at least half the total number of Sarajevo Serbs would stay (*Glas Srpski* 1996a).

Disagreements between the civilian and military representatives of Dayton's implementation, Bildt and Smith, undermined the deal even before it began (Sell 1999). The clash between OHR, which permitted Serb 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. IFOR commander Smith disagreed with the OHR agreement on allowing Serb police to remain in the areas until D+90 (Sell 1999). As a result, the SDA leadership promptly accused Bildt of violating the Dayton agreement.<sup>21</sup> Izetbegović demanded that IFOR ensure the Serb police disappeared immediately from "occupied" territories on D+45 because Federation forces would move in on that day (*Glas Srpski* 1996c; *Oslobođenje* 1996c). Mahmutović admitted that because the "unification was done," Izetbegović urged him not "to engage too much" in further negotiations with Serbs (Mahmutović 2017). Finally, the Federation government denied that they had previously accepted the deal mediated by OHR (Sell 1999). The atmosphere grew worse when two highly ranked members of the VRS and their driver were arrested in the Federation on February 2, 1996 and immediately accused of war crimes.<sup>22</sup> After delivering them to the Hague, they were held for months before the charges were dropped (Holbrooke 1999). Pale afterward forbade Stanišić and his team from continuing in any negotiations (*Glas Srpski* 1996d; *Oslobođenje* 1996e).

Serbs were afraid of future reintegration; nonetheless, a key factor and consideration for their stay would be the role of the Federation police controlled by the IPTF. International representatives evaluated the situation on the basis of two major presumptions. First, questions arose as to whether Serbs could trust the Federation police, and second, there was the possibility that the removal of their police force could lead to the likelihood of mass flight of the remaining population (Bildt 1998). In an effort to de-escalate the situation, Bildt and Smith found a compromise and established that the Federation police would take over full responsibility for transferred areas in Sarajevo on D+91 (March 20, 1996). They also agreed that the existing civilian authorities, including local (Serb) police, could remain there for the intervening period of time (OHR 1996a). 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 (OHR 1996a). IC representatives also 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 over at once (Kumar 1997).

The difference between this OHR-IFOR compromise and the previous proposal consisted of the timing (i.e., a gradual transition) of the arrival of Federation forces, beginning in 10 days (*Oslobođenje* 1996d). The other important issue of the previous deal (the structure of local government, education, etc.) remained unsolved. It was obvious that after retaking power, it would be the Federation forces that would decide whether Serbs could stay in service or not (*Oslobođenje* 1996f). The announcement of the new schedule on the eve of D+45 had a catastrophic psychological impact on the Serb community (Sell 1999; Stanišić 2016; Šehovac 2016).

The situation gradually escalated into calamity. 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. This is a crucial point because it seems as though the date of the first municipality transfer was formally announced after the Declaration on Sarajevo in Rome on February 18 (OHR 1996c). The UN stated one day later, 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 (Kumar 1997). Inhabitants of Vogošća realized that their municipality would be reunited with Sarajevo within five days. Stanišić heavily criticized this plan of sequential transfer for not being a "plan of implementation, but a plan of evacuation" (Stanišić 2016).

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, and other key areas. The police force would include local Serbs and operate under the auspices of the IPTF with IFOR's support (OHR 1996b). Nevertheless, as long as the IC was offering assurances without concrete legislation that would prevent the Federation government 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" (OHR 1996b). At that moment, an atmosphere of collective paranoia about the transfer of territories was whipped up by propaganda and manipulations orchestrated by Serb media.

The result of the Rome conference, which was supposed to ensure that Serbs would stay in Sarajevo, was the exact opposite. Chaos set in immediately after the 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 (Kličković 2018). IC authorities, then Prime Minister of the RS Rajko Kasagić, and Stanišić heavily criticized Kličković's appeal as "intentionally spreading panic" (*Oslobođenje* 1996g; Stanišić 2016).

The hysteria with which Pale urged Serbs to leave succeeded thoroughly. In extremely low temperatures and dense snow during that harsh winter of 1996, the remaining Serbs hastily packed their belongings and left Vogošća. The Federation police triumphantly entered Vogošća on February 23 in the way that was understood not only as the beginning of Sarajevo's unification but as a definitive liberation of the capital city. 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 (Sell 1999). The number of IPTF members who were supposed to control the situation was very low, too small to prevent bullying, looting, and arson effectively (*Dnevni Avaz* 1996b; *Glas Srpski* 1996e). The same scenario took place subsequently in Ilijaš, Hadžići, Ilidža, and Grbavica, where the remaining Serbs left within next weeks.

## Conclusion

According to Holbrooke, Sarajevo's unification was the "first key civilian test of Dayton" (Holbrooke 1999, 335). Sell stated that "the fate of areas around Sarajevo inhabited mainly by Serbs was crucial to Bosnia's future" (Sell 1999, 179). Bildt considered the reintegration of Sarajevo "the first and crucial test, where the concept of multi-ethnic BiH was going to face its first and most difficult task" (Bildt 1998, 164). The message of all these proclamations was clear: if Serbs had remained after the Federation government took control over what had been "Serb Sarajevo," it could have been the first step toward Dayton's commitment to recreate a form of multi-ethnicity that had largely ceased to exist during the war in the capital and in other parts of BiH.

Based on the "anti-Lausanne" consensus, the Dayton Agreement insisted that everybody who was violently uprooted must be allowed to return. International officers appealed to Sarajevo Serbs to stay in the city; they did not officially have to leave. Why was the first large-scale movement of people after the signing the very opposite to the declared goals in Dayton? The Serb departure, seemingly voluntary but under conditions that made it both inevitable and immediate, fits the larger pattern of the conflict, which aimed at unmixing an ethnically heterogeneous population and controlling ethnically homogenous territories. In reality, 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, matching those with governmental structures that empowered each nation to govern in its own territory, with weak governmental power in the supposed central authorities (Hayden 1999). Thus, the Serb leadership, the Federation government,



and even the IC evidently respected Dayton's ethno-national division of BiH in the peacebuilding process. Neither the SDS leadership nor the SDA leadership wanted to incorporate large numbers of Serbs into the Federation because it would have violated this logic of controlling the defined territories. There were also other minorities in both entities that were leaving after the end of the Bosnian war due to fear of persecution and revenge. Croats left Mrkonjić Grad before it joined the RS, and Bosniaks were expelled from the Croat sector of Mostar (Albert 1997). The goals of the nationalist leaders were not mutually exclusive but rather mutually supportive. The more ethnically homogenous a territory was, the more effectively this area was controlled. It was impossible to prevent the policy of homogenization at the local level when it was assured by nationalist leaderships at the larger level. Despite the glorified goals defined in the Dayton Agreement and a strategy based on a commitment to a multi-ethnic society, the first outcome of the Dayton Agreement thus unwound the Lausanne schema in the form of the continuation of ethnic unmixing. The results of Sarajevo's unification prove that once a partition is accepted at the larger level, it is almost impossible to prevent it on local levels. That accounts for the movement of people in Cyprus and BiH, which both explicitly rejected the Lausanne convention, even as the consequence of their respective treaties resembled it.

After the signing, Pale based its policy on the assumption that without securing local control, a Serb departure from Sarajevo was inevitable. Ex-Sarajevo interlocutors shared with me the opinion that they and their families were not forced away by the Serb leadership but rather were driven away by a threat to their security. By contrast, respondents who stayed in Sarajevo were much more critical of the SDS policy and their political propaganda. Those Serbs who stayed blamed the Serb government that stoked existing fear, anxiety, and panic. Depending on who you ask, this in turn pushed the majority of remaining Serbs toward a decision to flee. In this dynamic period, it is also important to capture how SDS-controlled media began to plant the seeds of panic even before the Rome conference. The media campaign may not have been telling Serbs to leave Sarajevo right after the signing, but they were attempting to alert them that staying in a Bosniak-controlled Sarajevo would demote them to second-class citizenship. This type of misinformation served a purpose, strengthening the notion that life under the Federation government would be intolerable, and making the ultimate post-Rome media campaign even more effective. The asymmetrical nature of warfare that was carried out by the VRS, with its superior artillery and shelling of Sarajevo, compelled Sarajevo Serbs to flee their homes in fear of retaliation. It was not only because they would be minorities under the Federation government under Bosniak control, but because the total crimes their "side" committed were objectively more severe than the total crimes committed by the Muslim/Bosniak side.<sup>23</sup> Pale also clearly worsened living conditions in the transferred territories by moving whole industrial factories (e.g., Pretis, Orao, etc.) under the pretense of saving them. The SDS leadership then played a crucial role in orchestrating the departure of Serbs from Vogošća and from other municipalities, which was accompanied by looting and burning (Donia 2006).

Some of my interlocutors (ex-Sarajevo Serbs, and Serbs who stayed in Sarajevo) believed that the decision to transfer Sarajevo's neighborhoods controlled by the SDS to the Federation was a fatal flaw. According to them and some Bosniak participants as well, a capital city modeled as an autonomous district composed of both parts of Sarajevo and shared by all three nations might have restored the prewar multi-ethnic composition. They suppose that Sarajevo Serbs could have stayed in the city if this model had been implemented.

To sum up, this article demonstrates that although the prevailing discourse holds the Serb leadership solely responsible for the flight of Serbs from Sarajevo, developments immediately after the war show something else. I have documented that many Sarajevo Serbs would have been willing to stay in Sarajevo if a mechanism had been proposed that would have enabled them to avoid being ruled by the Federation government and thus reduce their anxieties. Beyond vague promises of security, the IC did not suggest, much less try to create, any concrete or credible constitutional/legal political structure that would guarantee Serbs' safety in a reunited Sarajevo nor protect them from being treated as a minority. International representatives were unable to change the provisions

of Dayton that made Serbs subject to the governance of the very people they had been fighting, in a context where their side had been holding the other under siege for almost four years, and whose leadership demonstrated an unwillingness to accept them as equal citizens.

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 Serbs (Hayden 1999). Toal and Dahlman highlight that the IC's "conceptual failure" did not provide the conditions necessary for Serbs to stay (Toal and Dahlman 2011, 375). 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 (Neville-Jones 1996). Facing solutions first offered and then modified by the IC, the irreconcilable attitude of the Federation government, and the constant changes of position and manipulation on the part of the SDS, Sarajevo Serbs were between a rock and a hard place.

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 Serbs to stay but rather foreigners officially pursuing the Dayton settings focused on the restoration of a multi-ethnic BiH. The Federation government, under the control of the SDA, 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. This brings us to another important difference, that is whether the group fleeing is considered to be complicit or not. While Šantić addressed leaving Bosnian Muslims as non-complicit neighbors sharing the same homeland, Serbs who departed Sarajevo were treated as complicit and co-responsible for their plight.

Thus, if the Western diplomats and IC personnel believed that keeping the Serbs in Sarajevo was the first step in an effort to restore a multi-ethnic BiH, 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 effective the Dayton Agreement was in reflecting the division of the Bosnian population into territories controlled by ethno-nationalist leaders. This arose out of the fear of being subjected to the rule of the other respective governments.

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## Notes

- 1 DISS, OHR. 1996, "You Can Stay in Your Homes! 14 Point You Should Know." (Any other information for locating the item in the archive, if any).
- 2 This statement does not mean to diminish the crimes that were committed by the VRS, including the siege and bombardment of Sarajevo, with which the Serbs in armed units in those areas were associated and of which they were inevitably aware.
- 3 BiH is a single state, formally indivisible but in practice divided into two entities: the Republika Srpska (RS), with a unitary government, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, composed of ten cantons, each nearly completely autonomous from the Federation government (Holbrooke 1999).
- 4 I am grateful for this argument to one of anonymous reviewers.

- 5 “Serb Sarajevo” was a name used for an area consisting of urban and suburban settlements under the control of the SDS between 1992 and 1996. This name was also used for the part of Sarajevo’s area appertained to the RS after 1996. This settlement has been called Eastern Sarajevo since 2005.
- 6 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.
- 7 Empirical data was gathered from interviews conducted, yet the interviews are not entirely representative of the core analysis of this article. The names of all individuals have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.
- 8 Within the break-up of Yugoslavia, there was no consensus on independence in Socialist republic BiH among the leading three ethno-national Muslim (SDA), Serb (SDS), and Croat (HDZ) parties. Finally, the international Badinter Committee decided that the will of the Bosnian people to constitute the republic as an independent state could be established by a referendum of all of the citizens of the republic. However, this plebiscite was in contradiction to the Bosnian constitution because it ignored the condition of consensus among the three constituent nations. The results of referendum in which Muslims and Croats massively voted for the independence and the overwhelming majority of Serbs boycotted to vote were used by the IC as proof of the willingness of Bosnian people to separate themselves from Yugoslavia (Bougarel 2004; Burg and Shoup 1999; Hayden 1999).
- 9 DISS, 1995, “Poruka sa mitinga ‘Za slobodu i mir.’” (any other information for locating the item in the archive)
- 10 See also SRNA, “Je li Dejtonsko mastilo skuplje od srpske krvlju?” November 29, 1995, 74285.
- 11 See also SRNA, “‘Protiv’ dejtonskih odredbi 98,78 odsto glasača,” December 13, 1995, 75106.
- 12 SRNA, “Želimo brz i jasan odgovor po pitanju Srpskog Sarajeva,” January 5, 1996, 76230.
- 13 The IC ignored Karadžić, who had already been indicted by the ICTY for war crimes. Momčilo Krajišnik was also indicted and then found guilty of war crimes.
- 14 SRNA, “Širak preneo Klintonu zabrinutost zbog situacije u Sarajevu,” November 29, 1995, 74283.
- 15 See also SRNA, “Smit nema ovlaštenje da odloži implementaciju sporazuma,” December 30, 1995, 75974.
- 16 See also SRNA, 1996c, “Medjunarodna zajednica garant bezbjednosti Srba u Sarajevu,” January 31, 1996, 77464.
- 17 SRNA, “Bilt u muslimanskom delu Sarajeva,” November 29, 1995, 74266.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 SRNA, “Novi rok od 45 dana za povlačenje Srpske policije,” February 4, 1996, 77652.
- 20 See also SRNA, “Predsjednik Krajišnik apelovao na Srbe da se ne iseljavaju,” January 22, 1996, 77004.
- 21 SRNA, “Novi rok od 45 dana za povlačenje Srpske policije,” February 4, 1996, 77652.
- 22 SRNA, “Đukić i Krsmanović čekaju odluku Haškog suda,” February 6, 1996, 77767.
- 23 I am grateful for sharpening these thoughts to an anonymous reviewer.

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