

ČASOPIS ZA POVIJEST
ZAPADNE HRVATSKE
WEST CROATIAN
HISTORY JOURNAL

Monografski broj / Special issue:

1989. U JUGOSLAVENSKOM
KALEIDOSKOPU
1989 THROUGH THE YUGOSLAV
KALEIDOSCOPE

Uredila / Edited by
MILA ORLIĆ

**THE ‘BOSNIAN SILENCE’?
REGIME DECLINE AND CIVIC ALTERNATIVES IN
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (1989-1990)**

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UDK: 32(497.6)“1989/1990”
329.71(497.6)“1989/1990”

Izvorni znanstveni rad

Primljeno: 15.01.2015.

Prihvaćeno: 13.02.2015.

Summary

The following article aims to analyse the alternative, pro-Yugoslav and pro-democratizing options in Bosnia-Herzegovina, from 1989 to mid-1990, until the beginning of the multi-party electoral campaign. The article focuses on three initiatives: the reformist wing of the League of Communists (SKBiH), the Alliance of Socialist Youth (SSOBiH) and the Association for the Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (UJDI). Particular attention is paid to their proposals on the main issues of the political crisis, as well as their conflicting relation with the declining communist regime in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The SKBiH, notwithstanding its non-national and pro-Yugoslav stance, had a different approach on other issues, especially on political pluralism. The article points out that, on the eve of the 1990 elections, the competition within the non-national camp decisively weakened a pro-Yugoslav integrative option.

Keywords: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, non-national movements, League of Communists, UJDI, SSOBiH, Bosnian Initiative

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“It is evident that a positive Bosnian-Herzegovinian program does not exist.

In any case, it shall not be national, but primarily economic and political.

In the Yugoslav space, the ‘Bosnian silence’ [*Bosanska šutnja*] gradually converts itself into an intolerable wait-and-see policy, [waiting for] how the events develop in the other republics”.²

In recent years, a new interest for exploring the alternatives to nationalist narratives and policies arouse in the literature dealing with the final stage of Yugoslavia.³ Three features distinguish those alternatives: *democratizing*, as they sought to introduce the full pre-conditions for political pluralism; *Yugoslavist*, as they aimed to preserve (and in some cases reinforce) the federal, supra-national framework, though combining it with the protection of sub-state autonomies and cultural specificities; *civic*, as they were based on the citizen as the founding element of the social and political system, hence preventing any ethno-national, religious or class exclusivism. The case of these alternatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina is still understudied and gives rise to some dilemmas of categorization due to its specificity in the Yugoslav scenario. While the most of the republican branches of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez Komunističke Jugoslavije*, hereafter SKJ) eventually adopted *de facto* nationalist policies, the League of Communists of Bosnia-Herzegovina (*Savez Komunističke Bosne i Hercegovine*, hereafter SKBiH) remained firmly pro-Yugoslav, owing to the ideological orthodoxy of its élite and to the national heterogeneity of the Bosnian republic. Until the late 1980s, anti-nationalism as a cohesive factor made the Bosnian Communists still able to co-opt many intellectuals, youth movements and other potentially alternative actors. On the other hand, the ruling party had a wavering position on other issues such as the economic and political transition, switching from conservatism to some degree of reformism. For all those reasons, the civic options developed both inside and outside the existing institutional framework.

The three examples provided in the following paper are acknowledged as the more significant civic and pro-Yugoslav projects surfacing in the 1989 Bosnian

2 Rasim Kadić, quoted in Zoran MILANOVIĆ, “Umjesto prednosti, sporenja”, *Nedjelja*, Sarajevo, September 10, 1989, 6. All translations from sources in Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian language are by the author.

3 See in particular Bojan BILIĆ, Vesna JANKOVIĆ (eds.), *Resisting the Evil: (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Contention*, Baden Baden: Nomos, 2012; Bojan BILIĆ, *We Were Gasping for Air: [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Activism and Its Legacy*, Baden Baden: Nomos, 2012; Mila ORLIĆ, “Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva. Udruženje za jugoslavensku demokratsku inicijativu”, *Politička misao*, 48, 4 (2011), 98-112; Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, “Vavilonski košmar. Jugoslovenstvo, antinacionalizam, alternative 1989-1991”, *Republika*, 532-535 (2012), URL: <http://www.republika.co.rs/532-535/20.html> (accessed December 12, 2014). See also the works of Ana Dević in the late 1990s, especially “Anti-War Initiatives and the Un-Making of Civic Identities in the Former Yugoslav Republics”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 10, 2 (1997), 127-156.

political space,⁴ representing three different status and kind of relationship *vis-à-vis* the ruling party: 1) the radical reformist wing of the SKBiH promoted a self-transformation of the party and the State; 2) the Alliance of the Socialist Youth (*Savez Socijalističke Omladine BiH*, hereafter SSOBiH), although being still an official organization, gradually converted itself into a separated political party after widening the “grey areas” of the regime’s control and flirting with opposition movements; 3) the Association for the Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (*Udruženje za Jugoslavensku Demokratsku Inicijativu*, hereafter UJDI), was created outside the official framework and was mainly composed of progressive intellectuals. All these actors shared a common struggle to reverse what the SSOBiH’s leader Rasim Kadić had once defined as the “Bosnian silence” (“*Bosanska šutnja*”), referring to the passive stance that the party and the institutions in Sarajevo took towards both the events in the Yugoslav space (the Slovene-Serbian tensions, the conflict in Kosovo, the Milošević’s policy, etc.) and the demands for constitutional reforms in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁵ The scope of this article is, then, to examine the strategies, practices, discourses and interconnections of these collective actors, besides their (mainly conflicting) interaction with the Bosnian Communist authorities. It must be considered that until June 1990 ethno-national parties remained illegal in Bosnia-Herzegovina, though they were *de facto* active since the beginning of that year and, for instance, already set in the rest of Yugoslavia even before. Henceforth, the competition in the Bosnian political spectrum was between an official Yugoslavism represented by the SKBiH, committed to the existing constitutional framework and the socialist symbolical references, and an alternative Yugoslavism advocated by party reformists, SSOBiH and UJDI, proposing a civic-based concept for the Bosnian and Yugoslavian institutions.⁶ The analysis of this polarization can help to understand how and why the non-national options failed so dramatically during Bosnia-Herzegovina’s transition.

The article draws on three types of sources. The first is a wide range of press reports coming from Bosnia-Herzegovina and the rest of Yugoslavia, mostly from *Oslobođenje* (Sarajevo), the main Bosnian daily newspaper at that time, as well as from the daily *Borba* (Belgrade), *Bosanski Glas* (Banja Luka), the weekly

4 The focus is placed on the first stage in the development of alternatives in the Bosnian political spectrum. This context is prior to the definitive introduction of a multi-party system, which formally took place in July 1990. Hence, this article does not contemplate the Ante Marković’s party, the Alliance of the Reformist Forces (*Savez Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije*, hereafter SRSJ), which was created in late July 1990. In 1989, there was also another civic-Yugoslav actor active in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Greens’ Movement (*Pokret Zelenih*), yet it did not gain enough visibility in the public sphere, nor envisaged concrete proposals for political reform as the three aforementioned actors did.

5 Zoran MILANOVIĆ, “Umjesto prednosti, sporenja”, *Nedjelja*, Sarajevo, September 10, 1989, 6.

6 For an in-depth conceptualization of the “institutional/socialist” vs. “the alternative/progressive” Yugoslav supra-nationalism in Yugoslavia, see Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, “Landscapes of Resistance, Hope and Loss: Yugoslav Supra-Nationalism and Anti-Nationalism”, in Bojan BILIĆ, Vesna JANKOVIĆ, (eds.), *Resisting the Evil*, 37-61.

magazines *Danas* (Croatia) and *Nedjelja* (Sarajevo), and the youth magazines *Naši Dani*, *Valter* (Sarajevo) and *Prelom* (Banja Luka). Such combination offers access to a broad coverage of socio-political events, statements, interviews, etc., as well as a plurality of qualitative points of view, enhancing a critical handling of the documentation. It must be taken into account that in that period *Oslobođenje*, still an organ of the official Bosnian Communist organizations, was gradually (though not steadily) shifting from a pro-regime discourse to a more pluralist tendency and to an attitude of respect of independence standards. On the other hand, the Bosnian youth press acted both as a vehicle of mobilization for youth social movements, and as a practice of pluralist attitude and professional accuracy. The second type of source is a range of original documents (session transcripts, programmatic documents, statements) issued by the SKBiH and the SSOBiH. Most of them come from the uncatalogued archive of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo. They contribute to retrace both the internal debate and the public positioning of these organizations, which would have been overlooked or misrepresented through an exclusive use of press sources. The third type of source is a set of selected interviews with former representatives of the organizations constituting the subject of the study. These interviews contribute to retrace concrete information and useful insights on the strategies, perceptions and interpretations of both individual and collective actors belonging to an alternative scene that still awaits thorough exploration.

1. From the "Bosnian silence" to the "Bosnian initiative": the reformists inside the SKBiH

In 1989, when controversies on the framework of Yugoslavia led to a sharp polarization between the Serbian (centralism, hegemonism) and the Slovenian program (decentralization to secessionism, pluralism), the SKBiH did not take a clear side for two structural reasons. Firstly, unlike the other republics, in Bosnia-Herzegovina a strong ideological orthodoxy and adherence to Titoist routines had consolidated during the previous decades and persisted even after the abrupt change and rejuvenation of the leadership caused by the various financial, corruption and intra-élite affaires (especially the cases "Agrokomerc" and "Neum") in the late 1980s.⁷ Secondly, due to the peculiar and heterogeneous

7 Vladimir GOATI, "La vida política, 1989-1992", in Josep PALAU, Radha KUMAR (eds.), *Ex-Yugoslavia: de la guerra a la paz*, Valencia: MPDL, 1992, 243-255; Saša MRDULJAŠ, "Doprinos vladajućih bosansko-hercegovačkih stranaka izbijanju rata u Bosni i Hercegovini", *Suvremene Teme*, 4, 1 (2011), 47-48. On the affaires, see Neven ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina. The end of a legacy*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, 76-119 (chapt. 3, 4); Admir MULAOSMANOVIĆ, "O političkom kontekstu 'Afere Agrokomerc'", *Historijska traganja*, 1, (2008) 181-211.

national structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina, taking sides could seriously undermine the political and social stability. Hence, even when some relevant disputes arose within the SKBiH on sensitive issues such as the crisis in Kosovo, the policies of Slobodan Milošević or the interference of Belgrade's institutional, security and military circles in Bosnia-Herzegovina,⁸ the party élite still managed to reach some compromise. On the other hand, while no significant incidents on national grounds from below had happened until 1989,⁹ some mobilization with ethno-national symbols and demands did appear throughout the year.¹⁰ Still, they were concentrated in some particular areas, mostly originating from local factors, such as small-scale political struggles or the projection of an "anti-bureaucratic frame" from the events in Serbia, rather than a widespread discomfort with the condition of inter-ethnic relations. According to a poll held in October 1989 by the Institute for the Study of Inter-ethnic relation in Sarajevo, 90% of surveyed Bosnians positively assessed the inter-ethnic relations in the place they lived in, and 80,7% claimed the same about their workplace. The same poll also showed a strong commitment with Yugoslav unity, given that 87,26% favoured an identical or stronger integration in the federation and 94,54% related the existence and the progress of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the progress of the entire Yugoslav state.¹¹

While the SKBiH constantly endorsed the *status quo* on the framework of Yugoslavia, firmly defending the 1974 Constitution and rejecting both confederal and unionist claims, its orientation on political pluralism wavered in the course of 1989. In March, the Central Committee rejected any chance for multi-party system, reasserting the canonical formula of "*pluralism without parties*" within the socialist self-management system.¹² Besides ideological loyalty, the Bosnian Communists claimed that national parties would inevitably appear and bring inter-ethnic tensions, as it had been the case in the Interwar period (1919-1941). The narrative against nationalism, constantly depicting a "national threat" from outside the regime, had been for decades a factor for the homogenization of the Bosnian élite, putting aside eventual demands for reforming or re-discussing the ruling system.¹³

8 I refer here to the operation held in mid-1989 by the Serbian security services (SDB) in the Bosnian municipalities of Bratunac and Srebrenica, which significantly worsened the relations between Sarajevo and Belgrade. (ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 110; Sabina VELADŽIĆ, "Destabilizacija Bosne i Hercegovine krajem osamdesetih godina 20. stoljeća", *Historijska traganja*, 7 (2011), 208-209.

9 Neven ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 67.

10 I refer here to the Serbs' mobilizations in Nevesinje and Šipovo, the Serb-Muslim communitarian tensions in Gacko, Srebrenica and Vlasenica, and the Croats' mobilizations in Duvno and Western Herzegovina. See ANDJELIĆ, *ibidem*, 107-110; Sabina VELADŽIĆ, "Destabilizacija Bosne i Hercegovine", 220-223; Ivica LUČIĆ, "Duvno kao žarište 'hrvatskog nacionalizma i katoličkog klerikalizma' u zadnjem desetljeću komunističke vlasti", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 3 (2012), 571-602.

11 Ibrahim BAKIĆ, Ratko DUNDEROVIĆ, *Gradani Bosne i Hercegovine o međunacionalnim odnosima*, Sarajevo: Institut za proučavanje nacionalnih odnosa, 1990, 25-27, 32.

12 "Za šta se zalaže Savez Komunističke Bosne i Hercegovine", Sarajevo: SKBiH, 1989, 20.

13 I am grateful to Professor Husnija Kamberović for these insights.

A few prominent members of the SKBiH began to advocate for a legalization of the non-regime organizations. The most challenging voice among them was Zdravko Grebo, a relatively young newcomer in the party's Central Committee, who openly asked to abandon the monopoly of power and explicitly blamed the top-ranks of the party. Grebo quickly attracted a certain interest from the media and gained wide popularity in the urban and intellectual circles.¹⁴ Reform-minded demands were grounded on various assumptions. Rasim Kadić, the president of the SSOBiH, the youth wing of the party, was one of the first politicians in Bosnia-Herzegovina to advocate for a "civic", rather than national or classist, conception of the citizenship.¹⁵ Moreover, Desimir Međović claimed that economic reforms (which were already ongoing in Yugoslavia under the federal government of Ante Marković) should automatically lead to a multi-party system in order to permit the representation of multiple interests.¹⁶ By contrast, according to the SKBiH's officials, the opening up to market and private property could be implemented without any political change.¹⁷

None of these arguments found a major support in the party, since political homogeneity and resistance to change were (albeit nominally) strong. Yet, they gained force in the last months of 1989 for at least four reasons. First, the wave of events in the communist countries in Central-Eastern Europe, properly reported by the media in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, raised the expectations for political innovation. Second, the increasing political tensions within the SKJ weakened the ideological premises of Bosnian communists. Third, the progress of Marković's economic reforms undermined, too, the dogmatic devotion to self-management and socialism. Fourth, the consolidation of a *de-facto* (and soon to be legalized) multi-party system in Slovenia and Croatia eroded the confidence of the Bosnian leaders in keep a hold on power. Hence, in late 1989, the president of the SKBiH Nijaz Duraković began to envisage a detachment from power and the

introduction of some sort of multi-party system, though maintaining the ban on national parties.¹⁸

A potential stage for setting the premises to political reforms was the 10th Congress of the SKBiH, scheduled in December 1989.¹⁹ A pro-reform group of 14 delegates, led by the aforementioned Grebo and Međović, came up and challenged the ongoing impasse, by submitting a short and simple petition demanding the immediate and integral application of the 1944 "ZAVNOBiH Declaration" which called for free political association, for free elections by secret ballot and for the freedom of private economic initiative.²⁰ Such reference provided a strong historical-symbolical legitimation (Andjelić called it "a powerful attack on communist power")²¹ evidencing that the monopolistic praxis had distorted or suspended the original principles of the antifascist resistance and that new circumstances should lead to restore them.

However, the initiative did not find much support, except for the predictable endorsement of the SSOBiH and of some isolated reform-minded members.²² Almost the entire party leadership and the majority of the Congress' delegates were inclined instead to ease the internal differences and to keep an "in-between" position in every field, fearing that an alteration of *status quo* could open the "Pandora box" of the main underneath disputes potentially lethal for internal stability. Hence, the ZAVNOBiH initiative was approved at the end of the Congress only as a generic appeal to the institutions, but was neither a binding measure, nor it envisaged concrete terms and conditions for its formal adoption. The Parliament only set up an ineffective working group dealing with the proposal.²³ A first, partial and incomplete law on political association was issued on February 21, 1990, but it was immediately suspended and submitted to revision due to hesitations within the ruling party. The definitive law establishing the conditions for multi-party

18 A. ŠARAC, "Nijaz Duraković na tribini GK SSRN Sarajevo: nema demokratije bez reda", *Oslobođenje*, December 1, 1989, 2.

19 It was scheduled as preliminary to the famous XIV extraordinary Congress of the SKJ.

20 Archive of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina, SDP headquarters in Sarajevo (uncatalogued), "Inicijativa", Sarajevo: X Congress of the SKBiH, 1989. The 14 subscribers were Stijepo Andrijić, Mihajlo Bakić, Vjeko Domljan, Zdravko Grebo, Hidajeta Hamurović, Dragan Kragulj, Juraj Martinović, Desimir Međović, Mladenko Nikić, Stojko Pejić, Osman Pirija, Esad Salihbasić, Momo Ševarika, Ratko Vujović. The petition had been originally conceived, shortly before the Congress by a group of five Bosnian intellectuals, Tarik Haverić, Ivan Lovrenović, Miodrag Živanović and the Central Committee's members Grebo and Međović. The ZAVNOBiH had been the highest ruling organ of the Partisan anti-fascist movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1943 and 1945 and the main basis of republican statehood. The complete name of the aforementioned historical document is "Declaration on the citizens' rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina", issued in the 2nd ZAVNOBiH session held on July 1, 1944 in Sanski Most.

21 ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 93.

22 SDP Archive in Sarajevo (uncatalogued), Rasim Kadić in "Magnetofonski snimak desetog Kongresa SKBiH", 7., 8. i 9. Decembar 1989. godine", 233/2, 3.

23 SDP Archive in Sarajevo (uncatalogued), Ivan Cvitković in "Magnetofonski snimak...", 237; Miodrag ŽIVANOVIĆ, "Poruke ZAVNOBiH-a: Vratimo dostojanstvo", *Al Jazeera Balkans*, November 25, 2011, URL: <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/poruke-zavnobih-vratimo-dostojanstvo>, accessed July 30, 2013.

14 "Zdravko Grebo in "Jako ili nikako!", *Oslobođenje*, July 10, 1989, 3; "U borbu s partijskim drugovima, a ne partijskim rođacima", *Oslobođenje*, September 13 1989, 3. Grebo, born in 1947, was a Law Professor at the University of Sarajevo. He became a member of the SKBiH's Central Committee in late 1987. He was also a member of Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (SKJ), but resigned from it in July 1989, arguing that it had become the incubator for all the possible conflicts, from class to generational and national-based ones.

15 Moreover, demanding a civic concept of citizenship in the Bosnia-Herzegovina context could be interpreted (although it was not directly mentioned) as implying to overcome the principle of "national key" ("*nacionalni ključ*"), namely the proportional repartition of posts in institutional and professional domains according to national belonging, which was strictly applied under the Communist rule. On the "national key", see: Tatjana SEKULIĆ, *Violenza etnica. I Balcani tra etnonazionalismo e democrazia*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2002, 98; Xavier BOUGAREL, "Bosnie-Herzégovine: anatomie d'une poudrière", *Herodote*, 67 (1992), 137-138.

16 "Iz uvodnog izlaganja Desimira Međovića: Tržište najbolji mehanizam uređivanja ekonomije", *Oslobođenje*, February 17, 1989, 2; "SK ne želi monopol", *Nedelja*, September 9, 1989, 5. Desimir Međović, born in 1956, was then a professor at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Sarajevo.

17 See the speech of the then president of the Bosnian Parliament, Zlatan Karavdić: "Nema demokratije bez reda", in *Oslobođenje*, 26 June 1989.

system was ratified as late as in July 1990. The ZAVNOBiH initiative also failed in its broader purpose of opening an internal debate among the Bosnian Communists about political transformation. The fact that some ultra-conservative delegates suggested to arrest the petition's promoters reveals the unchanged extent of such suspicions and fears.²⁴

The hidden dispute between SKBiH's conservatives and reformers was moved into the arena of the XIV Congress of the SKJ, scheduled for January 20-22, 1990. While all the attention of the media (and, retrospectively, of scholars) was focused on the Slovene-Serb conflict, an unexpected (and, to this day, unexplored by literature) event had important consequences on the political history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On January 21, a document began to circulate among Congress' delegates, calling for a drastic solution to the Yugoslav crisis through a voluntary split of the SKJ within two parties: a "Communist Party of Yugoslavia", with an orthodox and dogmatic orientation; and a "Socialist Party of Yugoslavia", with a social-democrat and reformist orientation. The document claimed that the crucial differentiation within the SKJ was not national or cultural (although these factors were noticeable too), but ideological. Since the forced unity was the primary cause of the tensions within the regime, the recommended solution consisted in a "legalization of the political difference" for preventing the otherwise unavoidable schism along republican and/or national lines. Moreover, the creation of two separate parties would automatically create a multi-party system, bringing about a democratic transformation of Yugoslavia.²⁵ The original idea for the amendment emerged during an informal meeting gathered by a small group of liberal-oriented delegates coming from different republics, the majority of them from Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina.²⁶ At the very last moment, the Montenegrin delegates renounced to sign the amendment, probably because of pressures received by their pro- Milošević leaders,²⁷ while a group of liberal-wing Croatians converged on a very similar amendment headed by the influent economist Branko Horvat.²⁸ As the five remaining promoters were all from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Zdravko Grebo, Desimir Međović, Miloš Jelić, Dejan Mastilović and Zoran Perković) the

24 ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 93.

25 The text of the initiative was reported in "Amandman grupe delegata: jednu podeliti – na dve", *Borba*, Beograd, January 23, 1990, 2.

26 Zdravko Grebo claims that the then young Montenegrins (and future prominent politicians) Ljubiša Stanković and Srdan Darmanović played a leading role among the original supporters. According to Grebo, the fact that the first version of the document was written in 'ekavian' would be a further proof of the Montenegrins' influence in the group. "Podjela prava na legitimitet", *Oslobođenje* 31 January 1990; Zdravko Grebo, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 11, 2012.

27 Zdravko Grebo, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 11, 2012.

28 The Horvat motion also proposed the SKJ's split into a hard-line and a reformist wing. It was even more radical, recommending implementing the division instantly, whilst the "Bosnian Initiative" suggested a transition period of six months in which the two parties should elaborate their programs and celebrate their founding congresses. However, the Horvat motion had even less support, receiving only 16 votes in favour. "Nema povratka na stari sistem", *Borba*, January 23, 1990, 3.

amendment was quickly labelled, in the congress' circles and in the press jargon, as the "Bosnian Initiative" (*Bosanska inicijativa*).

However, this initiative failed dramatically. On January 22, the petition received only 58 votes in support, barely 3,5% of the 1655 total delegates. The Međović's speech addressing the petition to the Congress was interrupted by boos and whistles coming especially from conservative delegates who did not approve the intent to divide the party.²⁹ Yet, the most vehement and shocking reaction was that of the president of the SKBiH Nijaz Duraković who, immediately after Međović's intervention, said: "For those who want to leave the League of Communists, the doors are open and it would be more fair for everyone who is, maybe rightly, so drastically dissatisfied with this League of Communists, to display their own ambitions and their own political programmes out of our organization, and especially out of this Congress. Please, don't look for help from this Congress [...] We must look out for these foreign Danaans who only bring us discord".³⁰

At first, these words sounded ambiguous: as the Belgrade-Ljubljana dispute spread across the congress, the sentence "The doors are open" could have easily been referred to the Slovene delegates who were about to leave the party and, in other words, misinterpreted as a support for the Milošević's policy.³¹ Nonetheless, Duraković later convincingly clarified that his targets were the promoters of the "Bosnian Initiative" and not the Slovene delegates.³² Duraković and Grebo's stances were two irreconcilable conceptions of political representation and, at the same time, two opposite forms of Yugoslavism. Duraković, still loyal to some sort of democratic centralism, wanted to impose respect to the republican discipline and to seek an agreement within the existing consociational structures. He was troubled by the fact that the initiative could be misinterpreted as *the* position of *all* the Bosnian Communists, whereas he wanted the SKBiH to play a mediating and low-profile role. On the other side, Grebo and his fellows argued that every individual should have had the right to submit proposal without previous debate or authorizations, and that a Federal Yugoslavia should be rebuilt on a completely new basis.

These events had serious consequences for the future of the SKBiH. Although they were not followed by immediate sanctions nor expulsions,

29 "Nema povratka na stari sistem", *Borba*, January 23, 1990, 3.

30 "Odbijen Savez Saveza", *Oslobođenje*, January 23, 1990, 5. This was a metaphorical reference to the Latin phrase from the Virgil's Aeneid "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*" ("Beware of Greeks bearing gifts").

31 Some even speculated that Duraković's aggressive outburst had been generated by direct pressures from Milošević and the Serbian top-ranks, emphasizing the loud applause that Duraković's speech received from the Serbian and Montenegrin bloc. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that Duraković led the SKBiH to reject (together with the party delegations from Croatia, Macedonia and the Army) the Milošević's attempt to force the Congress' continuation. This indicates that Duraković was far from being subjugated by the Serbian leadership.

32 "Opštejugoslovenski karakter SKBiH", *Oslobođenje*, Sarajevo, January 26, 1990.

they brought many of the reform-oriented members either to leave the SKBiH (considering that there was no chance for innovating the party from within),³³ or to lessen the tone of their proposals. This polarization reinforced the stigma of dogmatism attributed to the Bosnian Communists, that “burden from the past” (“*hipoteka iz prošlosti*”) which would fill up the narratives of both nationalist and civic Bosnian parties prior to the 1990 elections. Paradoxically, the new Bosnian political élite led by Duraković was rather young, newcomer and not completely hostile to reforms. Yet, its lack of political experience, together with the inability to face the burden of the enormous pressures coming from Belgrade’s military and political circles, prevented the Bosnian leaders from accepting the instances of immediate change coming from the radical reformers. In spring 1990, the ultra-conservative JNA’s top ranks went as far as to threaten the SKBiH with a military intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to prevent any substantial reform of the political order, including the call of multi-party elections that Duraković was then considering.³⁴

On the other hand, that alternative *milieu* did not develop a convincing strategy to gain more influence. Even Desimir Međović later admitted that the proposal to split the SKJ was “too radical, surprising and unusual”, although justified as an attempt to provoke a radical shock within what he called “the centre of Yugoslav chaos”.³⁵ First, Grebo and Međović miscalculated the potential support from other delegation; although they had especially hoped to convince some Slovenes and prevent their walkout, the Ljubljana’s delegates showed absolutely no interest in the initiative, as they were solidly committed to a further confederalization of the country. Second, the Bosnian reformists overlooked that the creation of two separate parties, a hard-line conservative one and a hard-line liberal one, could have incited only further instability and polarization. Hence, although both the “ZAVNOBiH Initiative” and “Bosnian initiative” have been properly hailed as the “proof of the consolidation of civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina”,³⁶ they also revealed the marginalization of the civic alternatives in the political spectrum.

33 Among the active supporters of the “ZAVNOBiH” and “Bosnian” initiatives, only Zoran Perković actively remained in party leadership. Zdravko Grebo and Desimir Međović left the SKBiH and went back to their academic professions. After the 1990 elections, Grebo would return to active engagement in civic, non-parties-related initiatives. Rasim Kadić, too, left the SKBiH. Under his leadership, the SSOBiH departed from the Communist movement (see part 2 of this work).

34 Ivo KOMŠIĆ, *Preživljena zemlja*, Zagreb: Prometej, 2006, 47-49; Nijaz DURAKOVIĆ, Muhamed FILIPOVIĆ, *Tragedija Bosne*, Sarajevo: Vrtlog, 2002, 147, 167; Adil Kulenović, interview by author, Sarajevo, July 27, 2014.

35 Desimir Međović in Vlastimir MIJOVIĆ, “Strah od otvorenih vrata”, *Danas*, Zagreb, February 6, 1990.

36 ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 115-116.

2. Youth activism and liberal democracy: the SSOBiH

During the late 1980s, economic crisis and unemployment severely affected youth in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, fuelling a certain disillusion from the values and rituals of the socialist system. Alternative spaces for socio-cultural and artistic production (such as punk, rock and new wave groups, artistic performances, youth centres) were established in all the main cities in Yugoslavia since the early 1980s, involving especially a middle-class urban youth frustrated for the lack of social perspectives. Sarajevo, in particular, was a stronghold of a vibrant youth scene, ranging from the more conventional “New Partisan” rock to a more subversive and counter-cultural *milieu* (best represented by the “New Primitives” cultural movement) which expressed open criticism to the ruling ideology and social reality.³⁷ However, detachment from the socialist tradition did not mean a detachment from Yugoslavism; on the contrary, many of these cultural expressions meant to reanimate, re-elaborate and advocate the foundational values of Yugoslav unity.³⁸

Until the end of the decade, this scene did not articulate itself politically in the Bosnian public space, due to a still firm grasp of the Communist structures, which employed either soft co-optation or hard control of student activists.³⁹ The first significant protests took place in autumn 1987 at the University of Sarajevo, but were limited to concrete demands such as the relaxation of exam norms or better conditions at the students’ canteens. Protesters submitted no requests to the ruling Bosnian government about educational policies, let alone about broader socio-political changes. Several Bosnian youth organizations feared the potential accusations from the Communist structures which, at that time, still tagged any opposition movement as hostile or even as “nationalist”, even in absence of any ethnic-related content.⁴⁰

However, those mobilizations led to the creation of new students’ organizations and networks under the umbrella of the Alliance of Socialist Youth (SSOBiH), namely the youth wing of the ruling party. Besides social activism, youth organizations from Bosnia-Herzegovina got primarily involved in the media space. The magazines *Naši Dani* and *Valter* became one of the publications with

37 For some in-depth analysis of the youth artistic scene in 1980s Bosnia and Yugoslavia see in particular Dalibor MIŠINA, “‘Spit and Sing, My Yugoslavia’: New Partisans, social critique and Bosnian poetics of the patriotic”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 38:2 (2010) 265-289; Sabina RAMET, *Balkan Babel. The disintegration of Yugoslavia from the death of Tito to the fall of Milošević*, Boulder: Westview press, 1999, 126-148 (chapt. 7, “Rock Music”); Claudia MURESU, “Subversive Art as a Movement or Performance in Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina: Subversion of What?”, MA dissertation, Università di Bologna, 2012.

38 MIŠINA, “‘Spit and Sing, My Yugoslavia’”, 265-266.

39 Nerzuk Ćurak, interview by author, Sarajevo, June 11, 2012; Husnija Kamberović, interview by author, Sarajevo, June 28, 2012.

40 *Ibidem*; ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 78.

the widest circulation and biggest political influence in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴¹ They combined plural editorial styles, including in-depth political analysis and reports (sometimes hosting contributions of respected academics and intellectuals), interviews with high politicians from all the sides of the spectrum (Communist officials, nationalist leaders and civic activists), highly satirical columns, provocative titles, comic strips, images and photomontages usually mocking the political elite and the iconography of socialism. Another successful experience was the "Youth program" (*Omladinski Program*) broadcasted in the second channel of Radio Sarajevo. The program gave voice to social-political critique and satire, gaining growing autonomy from the control of the Communist party.⁴² Those media, in the words of Nerzuk Ćurak, became the first "oasis of pioneering elements of civil society" in late-socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴³ Due to their full coverage of the all-Yugoslav events, their interconnections with homologous youth medias and associations from the whole Federation, and their interest in the main global trends in politics, social engagement and culture, these media can be considered as a notable example of what Ana Dević defined "Yugo-cosmopolitan habitus" of Yugoslav youngsters in late 1980s.⁴⁴

Since 1987 the Bosnian Communists were experiencing a severe crisis of legitimacy after the wave of intra-élite resignations and replacement following the "Agrokomerc" and "Neum" affaires. This context allowed a broader space for public debates and criticism against the corruption and inefficiency of the political power. In 1988-1989, the SSOBiH vetoed, for the first time in history, the appointment of some old-guard candidates for the Presidency and Prime Minister's posts.⁴⁵ Then, the new leadership of the SSOBiH, composed by the president Rasim Kadić and his close collaborators Đorđe Latinović and Martin Raguž made a turning point in the policy of the organization. They sought to gradually quit being only a youth-centred movement, transforming the organization into a proper political party with a liberal-democratic and pro-individual stance and without age limits, reducing the ties with the Yugoslav coordination of the Alliances of Socialist Youth (the

41 According to Nerzuk Ćurak, then a member of the *Naši Dani*'s editors' committee, in the 1987-1990 period the circulation of both *Naši Dani* and *Valter* ranged among 25.000 and 60.000 copies (Nerzuk Ćurak, interview by author, Sarajevo, June 11, 2012). The two main (and official) newspapers in Sarajevo, *Večernje Novine* and *Oslobođenje*, respectively had a circulation of 66.911 and 47.690 copies in 1990 (source: RAMET, *Balkan Babel*, 41). Other youth magazines with critical attitudes also emerged in the rest of the country, such as *Prelom* in Banja Luka or *Lom* in Mostar, but they had much less public impact.

42 According to official figures, the *Omladinski Program* had about 800.000 daily listeners in 1988 ("Jugoslavenski omladinski radio", *Valter*, April 7, 1989). On the role of the program throughout the 1980s, see Neven ANDJELIĆ, "The evolution of civil society in pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina", in Stefano BIANCHINI and George SCHÖPLIN (eds.) *State Building in the Balkans: Dilemmas on the Eve of the 21st Century*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, 299-303; MURESU, "Subversive Art", 60-63.

43 Nerzuk Ćurak, interview by author, Sarajevo, June 11, 2012. See also chapter 3 in ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 76-95.

44 DEVIĆ, "Anti-War Initiatives", 150.

45 ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 70-71, 89-90.

SSOJ) and with the SKBiH.⁴⁶ The Bosnian Communists, weakened by the loss in self-confidence and élite cohesion after the domestic scandals and the strains with Belgrade, did not take any action against their youth wing. "The reaction of the SKBiH was negative, but they did not have enough force to prevent it. For what I know, they submitted no action against me personally, to prevent me from doing my job",⁴⁷ recalls Rasim Kadić, who individually left the SKBiH in January 1990, shortly after the XIV Congress.⁴⁸

The SSOBiH's main claims included a civic and non-national concept of citizenship, multi-party pluralism, the "de-politicization" of the State and a market economy. All these principles were included in the "Political Manifesto" the SSOBiH issued in October 1989.⁴⁹ It was the first time ever that an official organization demanded such broad changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The SSO's support for a non-ethnic concept of citizenship mirrored not only the pro-civic stance of its élite, but also the dominant orientation among the overall Bosnia's youth. According to a survey held in October 1989 by the Institute for the Study of Inter-ethnic relations, people under 27 years of age were the most incline to abandon the "national key" as the criteria for selecting cadres at the administrative and political organs (72,45%, versus 51,28% in the 43-51 years' range and 45% in the 52+ years' range). Nevertheless, youngsters were generally the most sceptical about the actual state of inter-ethnic relations in Yugoslavia. Among the under-27, those who agreed that all the nations "have equal conditions for social promotion in education, hiring, and status" were 44%, whilst those older than 27 years ranged from 57% to 60%. Therefore, the survey's authors assumed that youth, as the most affected by the socio-economic situation, tended to project their discomfort onto the national question, even if national difference in itself did not significantly concern them. They seemed thus incline to see the "national key" criteria as an obstacle, rather than a facilitation, to their social ambitions.⁵⁰

A focal point in the SSOBiH's discourse about transition was the full legalization of the national parties. Apparently, this position contradicted the anti-nationalist stance of the organization. Nevertheless, it was also consistent with the liberal views of the leadership and, above all, with its criticism to the Communists' policy, interpreted as a mere tool to keep the power. Kadić comments: "I was really convinced that the society must be relieved and liberalized. In that moment, I underestimated the nationalist forces in Bosnia, and I admit it. I believed that nationalists would not be so strong and that we could politically organize ourselves. I believed that we could, as a so-called left

46 S. NUMANOVIĆ, "Pred Kongres Omladine BiH. Biti ili ne biti", *Oslobođenje*, July 25, 1989.

47 Rasim Kadić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 23, 2012.

48 Lj. GRKOVIĆ, "Prvi bh. Omladinac nije više član SK. Politički presedan", *Oslobođenje*, January 30, 1990.

49 "Rasim Kadić na sjednici GK SSO. Nek' dođu da i mene uhapsu", *Valter*, November 17, 1989, 2.

50 Ibrahim BAKIĆ, Ratko DUNĐEROVIĆ, *Gradani Bosne i Hercegovine o međunarodnim odnosima*, 104-105.

or centre, be the most stable part of Bosnia; still, the elections have showed that we were the most weak".⁵¹

However, the "new course" imposed by Kadić did not encounter unanimous support within the organization. A conservative-minded opposition came mainly from the Banja Luka section and from the Bosnian Krajina and Eastern Bosnia regions.⁵² Since those areas were mainly Serb-populated, this presence could be interpreted as a symptom of national divisions caused by conflicting assessments about the politics in Yugoslavia.⁵³ Although this was surely a leading reason, reducing these tensions to mere ethno-nationalism would be misleading. Other factors were also relevant, such as a standard competition for leadership (having a top post at the republican level of the organization granted attractive salaries and benefits) or a centre-periphery resentment between the "capital" Sarajevo and the "provincial" Banja Luka (this was, for instance, a quite common cleavage in the official organizations and institutions about the control of policies, investments, etc.). Moreover, the opposition to Kadić did not only come from hard-line conservatives. Some pro-liberal activists from the SSO in Sarajevo provocatively argued that the organization, being useless for young people, should be dissolved and reconstructed on a voluntary, youth-centred and non-political basis.⁵⁴ Such a rejection of the clique of salaried politicians and officers, and the search for new forms of social-political engagement claims, were consistent with the context of the 1989 "transition euphoria", stemming from the perception of an imminent detachment from the regime. This stance was diametrically opposite to the major strategic interest of the Kadić's leadership, consisting of keeping control over the huge infrastructure and property portfolio that a forty-five-years long status of "official organization" could guarantee (local sections, access to public funds, properties and human resources) in view of the electoral campaign.⁵⁵

The 12th Congress of the SSOBiH scheduled for April 19 and 20, 1990, was expected to be a turning point for the organization. Kadić's leadership planned it as a stage for the definitive transition into a liberal-democrat political party and presented an opening document envisaging a "radical reconstruction" of

51 Rasim Kadić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 23, 2012. See also Gordana BOŽIĆ, "Conversations with Bosnian Youth: From the Youth Relay Race to the Successor Generation Initiative", in *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 35:4 (2007), 743-772.

52 Mirsad HALILOVIĆ, "Nakon zborovanja banjalučkih studenata. 'Ovo je ludnica'", *Prelom*, Banja Luka, November 1989, 13; "Seminar o budućoj organizovanosti omladine BiH. Strah od burokratizacije", *Oslobođenje*, December 24, 1989; Rasim Kadić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 23, 2012.

53 ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 102.

54 A supporter of this "anti-party faction" was Neven Andjelić, who in 1989 ran as a candidate for the Presidency of the SSOBiH in Sarajevo. In 1990, he left the organization and joined the SRSJ. Neven Andjelić, interview by author, Sarajevo, June 21, 2014.

55 Kadić recalls: "We had an excellent campaign for those times, very modern, since we inherited money thanks to the fact that we were always included in the [state] budget. And that inherited budget, we spent it in the best way for those times, through the organization of posters, media events, and the recruitment of excellent candidates". Rasim Kadić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 23, 2012.

the Yugoslav economic system focused on the principle of efficiency, through an integrated market of capitals, labour and goods.⁵⁶ The document also proposed a complete constitutional reform of Yugoslavia as a federal, parliamentary multi-party democracy, ratifying the SSOBiH's pro-Yugoslav stance,⁵⁷ as well as a complete de-politicization of all institution (Army, justice, education, administration, etc.).⁵⁸ Finally, the document proudly asserted the cultural, historical and symbolical ties between Yugoslavia and Europe, demanding a quick integration into the European Community.⁵⁹

Yet, the Congress never adopted this document, as it failed to be ratified by a full majority of the delegates.⁶⁰ The clash inside the SSOBiH between the leadership and the conservatives, who still counted on the considerable support of the territorial representatives, led to the rejection of all the amendments that could have marked a radical break with the Communist symbolic universe, such as the request to remove the attribute "Socialist" from the official name of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, or the demand to revise the relations within the Yugoslav Socialist Youth (SSOJ).⁶¹ Surprisingly, the Congress did not approve the request to abolish the death penalty, traditionally a key point in the SSOBiH's discourse, nor the proposal to modify the name of the organization into "Socialdemocrat Alliance" (*Socijaldemokratski savez*).⁶² Beyond the scepticism towards the leadership, a generally widespread inertia seemed more influenced by the adherence to routine or manifest individual interests for maintaining the *status quo* and the ensuing privileges, rather than by true allegiance to socialist principles. A harsh article

56 Republička Konferencija SSOBiH, "Prijedlog – Politički manifest SSOBiH", Sarajevo: SSOBiH, 1990, 4, 8, 12.

57 The proposal argued that Yugoslavia would be a federal and parliamentary democracy, based on the "citizen as the founding element of the political system" and provided with "jurisdictions on its whole territory, as well as instruments for their implementation, but must also be the guarantor for the autonomy [*samobitnos*] of the republics". The parliamentary system would be bicameral, composed by an upper house, the Chamber of the Republics, with an equal representation of each republic; and a lower house, the Chamber of Citizens, based on the "one person-one vote" principle; instead, the republican parliaments would be mono-cameral, only based on regional (not ethno-national) representation. The Presidency would remain a collective organ composed by six members. Each republic shall suggest two or more candidates for its own seat and they shall be submitted to the vote of the whole Parliament. The elected members of the Presidency shall not be affiliated to any political party. Republička Konferencija SSOBiH, "Prijedlog – Politički manifest SSOBiH", 6. This plan for constitutional reform was very similar to the one presented by the UJDI in earlier months (see ORLIĆ, "Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva", 107).

58 "Prijedlog – Politički manifest SSOBiH", 8.

59 The paragraph concerned to this issue, significantly titled "We are Europe" [*Mi smo Evropa*], affirmed: "Yugoslavia is geographically, historically, traditionally, genealogically, and culturally in Europe. It is only economically and politically 'outside' Europe. [...] Yugoslavia needs a long-term economical, technological, market, financial cooperation and connection with the developed world, first of all with the Western Europe. In this course, the SSOBiH will support the inclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 'Alpe-Adria' Community and the inclusion of Yugoslavia in the EFTA and the European Community". *Ibidem*, 11.

60 Only 158 of the 367 convened delegates supported the document. "Juče u Sarajevu počeo Kongres SSOBiH", *Bosanski Glas*, Banja Luka, April 20, 1990.

61 "Novo ime Demokratski Savez", *Oslobođenje*, April 21, 1990.

62 A mere compromise was reached by adding the more neutral title "Democratic Alliance" (*Demokratski Savez*, DS) to the existing name. "Novo ime Demokratski Savez", *Oslobođenje*, April 21, 1990.

from the youth magazine *Naši Dani* commented: "We venture to say that students, young political officials in municipalities and professional activists are the most conservative stratum in the Yugoslav society who, in order to keep their social status and privileges, would defend egalitarianism in every possible way, including national-socialism if needed".⁶³

After the Congress, the leadership managed, albeit with difficulty, to avoid an open breakup of the organization in order to keep control over its infrastructure. The SSOBiH finally succeeded to run for the elections in November 1990 and later turned itself into the Liberal-democrat Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet, the SSOBiH entered the electoral campaign fragmented and incapable to take advantage of the small "political capital" that youth social movements in Bosnia had accumulated in the late 1980s. Although the SSOBiH had distanced itself from the Communists on ideological grounds, it was perceived as a part of the traditional political system and, especially, of the traditional political culture.⁶⁴ As Kadić later acknowledged, the youth in Bosnia-Herzegovina, discontented about the poor socio-economic performance of the state, blamed the SSOBiH as partially responsible for that situation for having "ceased to represent the interest of youth as a social group".⁶⁵ This contributes to explain why, while many youngsters from non-urban environments simply perceived the SSOBiH as something alien from their own material experience, a considerable section of the urban and skilled youth did not believe in the bureaucratic structure of the organization.

63 Nerzuk ĆURAK, "Bio je kongres omladine. Rasprava o novčanim strastima", *Naši Dani*, Sarajevo, April 27, 1990. These allegations referred to both the Kadić's leading group and its opposition. At that time *Naši Dani*, despite being a youth organ close to SSOBiH, did not abstain from critics to the leadership of the organization.

64 BOŽIĆ, "Conversations with Bosnian Youth", 749. The SSOBiH obtained less than 2% of votes and only two of 240 seats at the Bosnian legislative elections held in November 1990. The SSOBiH's poor score must be considered in the frame of the heavy defeat of non-ethnic forces, whereas the three national parties (the Muslim SDA, the Serb SDS and the Croat HDZ) together secured about 75% of votes and 85% of seats in parliament, besides all the seven members of the presidency. On the November 1990 elections, see in particular: Suad ARNAUTOVIĆ, *Izbori u Bosni i Hercegovini '90: analiza izbornog procesa*, Sarajevo: Promocult, 1996; Virtuts SAMBRÒ, *Anàlisi de les eleccions de 1990 a la R.S. de Bòsnia i Hercegovina*, Madrid: Editorial Acadèmia Espanòla, 2012; Damir KAPIDŽIĆ, "Democratic Transition and Electoral Design in Plural Societies: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina's 1990 Elections", *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, (2015), 1-16.; Nenad STOJANOVIĆ, "When non-nationalist voters support ethno-nationalist parties: the 1990 elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a prisoner's dilemma game", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 14:4 (2014), 607-625.

65 Rasim Kadić, interview in BOŽIĆ, *ibidem*, 750.

3. "A third way, there is no other". The UJDI in Bosnia-Herzegovina

The UJDI is widely considered as the first and main independent, non-regime and all-Yugoslav movement in the pre-multiparty Yugoslav environment.⁶⁶ It was created on February 2, 1989, by a group of intellectuals from all the Federation, many of whom coming from circles of humanist, liberal-democrat or left-wing opposition to the Yugoslav regime in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁷ The UJDI was grounded on two pillars. The first was the transformation of the state through the struggle for the "elementary preconditions" of democratization, namely the freedom of thought and expression, of political activity, of free multi-party elections. The second was the maintenance of Yugoslavia as a united, federal State, rejecting both centralist and separatist tendencies. In the course of 1989, the UJDI managed to establish branches all over the Federation, despite the hostility of the communist authorities. The central branch achieved formal recognition only on December 29, 1989 in Titograd (today Podgorica), Montenegro, after it had been denied both in Zagreb and Beograd.⁶⁸

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UJDI envisaged similar problems with the authorities. The first section was established in Mostar on May 27 and in Sarajevo on June 21, 1989, but neither of them obtained the registration.⁶⁹ Borislav Grahovac, one of the leaders of the Mostar branch, issued in 2009 an emphatic account of his experience: "We knew that for our activism we were risking our lives, but we did not know then to what extent. I later found out that we were included in a secret list for arrest or eventual execution. The communist government in Bosnia-Herzegovina was fully aware of our activity. Spies were everywhere. The government of the 'dark vilayet' went so far as to draft a list of thirty intellectuals who were marked as dangerous, because they had democratic orientation and, in case of emergency state, would need to be liquidated".⁷⁰

66 The focus is here placed on the UJDI's initiatives in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its interaction with the League of Communists and the opposition. On the UJDI's ideological premises, Yugoslav-wide political actions and consequences, see: Mila ORLIĆ, "Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva"; Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, "Vavilonski košmar"; Ljubica SPASKOVSKA, "Landscapes of Resistance, Hope and Loss: Yugoslav Supra-Nationalism and Anti-Nationalism", in Bojan BILIĆ, Vesna JANKOVIĆ, (eds.), *Resisting the Evil*, 37-61; Marco ABRAM, "L'UJDI. Un'esperienza alternativa nell'89 jugoslavo", *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, 1 (2009), url: http://www.studistorici.com/2009/10/19/abram_ujdi, accessed on November 29, 2014; Edin OMERČIĆ, "Alternativna politička scena u Bosni Hercegovini (Udruženje za Jugoslavensku Demokratsku Inicijativu, Pretparlament jugoslavije, Forum za etničke odnose)", *Historijska traganja*, 7 (2011), 231-239; Paul STUBBS, "Flex Actors and Philanthropy in (Post-)Conflict Arenas: Soros' Open Society Foundations in the Post-Yugoslav Space", *Croatian Political Science Review*, 50, 5 (2013) 114-138.

67 ORLIĆ, "Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva", 101; ABRAM, "L'UJDI. Un'esperienza alternativa nell'89 jugoslavo", 5.

68 ABRAM, "L'UJDI. Un'esperienza alternativa nell'89 jugoslavo", 4.

69 "UJDI. Bez partijskih ambicija", *Oslobođenje*, December 21, 1989. Later, UJDI branches were set in Tuzla, Konjic, Bijeljina, Živnice and Brčko.

70 Borislav GRAHOVAC, "UJDI u Mostaru, balkansko ogledalo (1). Odbacivanje komunizma", *Oslobođenje*, April 1, 2009.

The Bosnian official press mainly neglected the UJDI's activity. In 1989, the daily *Oslobođenje* was still focused on institutional discourse and intra-party debate about (the lack of) reforms.⁷¹ The split of the League of Communists after the XIV Congress, bringing the perspective of a more rapid regime change, would barely open some space for the political opposition. Abdullah Sidran, the well-known Bosnian writer and then a member of the Sarajevo UJDI, commented:⁷² "This Bosnian small embroidery [*bosanski sitni vez*], whose core is the fear for the unknown, the anachronism, inertia and routine, is the basic plague of our actual political leadership. Those who only react to a recognized melody cannot develop a musical listening at all; in the same way, those who do not recognize the spirit of times do not have a political talent. The spectre of Europe is haunting Communism!⁷³ [...] Nonetheless, our political leadership 'widely opens the doors',⁷⁴ sweeping away from its proximity all that is not old air. [...] Here, there is no salvation, nor help".⁷⁵

The confrontation between UJDI and SKBiH became even more intense in early 1990, since the ruling party initially called for elections (scheduled for March 25-27, 1990) without approving a new law on political association, and then passed a norm that still kept some restriction on opposition parties. The Bosnian UJDI interpreted these moves as a comfortable way to neutralize the opposition and demanded to postpone of the vote. Even when ethno-nationalist mobilization was already emerging, the Bosnian UJDI focused its critics on the Communist rule as the primary responsible for the "institutionalized nationalism" and the ethnic homogenization that led to the formation of chauvinist forces as its logic consequence.⁷⁶ For this reason, the UJDI, coherent with its liberal concept, did not support the choice of the SKBiH to maintain the ban on national parties.⁷⁷ Due to its democracy-first and anti-authoritarian approach, the UJDI did not take into consideration an eventual cooperation with the Bosnian Communists based on their common stance, namely a non-nationalist and pro-Yugoslav orientation. The UJDI's leaders, who still resented the hostility of state structures, simply did

71 As Edin Omerčić recalls, the press followed the "cosmetic changes in the then ruling party". Edin OMERČIĆ, "Alternativna politička scena", 232.

72 Paradoxically, in the pages of the same *Oslobođenje*, where he wrote as a columnist.

73 This phrase, obviously a gig on the well-known preamble of Marx's *Manifesto*, was a quote from the Zagreb writer Josip Sever (1938-1989), a Sidran's friend. Abdulah SIDRAN, "Jugoslavenski savez i bosanski sitni vez", *Oslobođenje*, March 11, 1990.

74 This is a reference to the famous phrase pronounced by Duraković during the XIV Congress against the supporters of the "Bosnian Initiative" (see part 1 of this work).

75 Abdulah SIDRAN, "Jugoslavenski savez i bosanski sitni vez", *Oslobođenje*, March 11, 1990. Interestingly, the Sidran's animosity towards the Bosnian Communists echoed (though from a different perspective) the typical labels of "tamni vilajet", dogmatism, conformism, etc., traditionally attributed to the SKBiH in previous years by different actors, such as non-party intellectuals or political leaders from the other republics.

76 Željko REBAC, "Nacionalizam ne treba da čudi", in *Oslobođenje*, March 14, 1990.

77 "Tribina UJDI-ja u Mostaru. BiH nije ničiji trofej", *Oslobođenje*, April 14, 1990; Gajo Sekulić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 15, 2014.

not trust a Communists' self-reform. As Gajo Sekulić affirmed, "with them [the Communists] there was no chance to cooperate. [...] We have made a third way between nationalists and old communists. This is a liberal-democratic way, there is no other".⁷⁸

This positioning does not imply that the UJDI embraced a radical anti-communist line, a label that, for instance, its members generally rejected, as they did not want to be associated with the emerging nationalist movements who were exploiting anti-socialist aversion to reinforce their discourse.⁷⁹ Moreover, most of the UJDI's prominent members had a left-wing background and individually identified themselves with progressive socialist or social-democratic ideas. On the other hand, the Association avoided taking position on socio-economic issues, not only to safeguard its internal heterogeneity, but also to respect the deliberate choice of focusing on the pre-conditions of democracy as the central goal of the organization.

Another cornerstone of the Bosnian UJDI, particularly in the course of 1990 when political polarization on national lines was rising, was the defence of Bosnia-Herzegovina's integrity and autonomy. The Association denounced the "paternalistic" interferences of some nationalist movements from other Yugoslav republics, particularly from Croatia and Serbia, which were constantly making unfounded references to the alleged discrimination that either Croats, Serbs or Muslims were suffering in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "We affirm that the Bosnian-Herzegovinian citizens, in the forms that they can elaborate and establish by themselves, are able to carry out all the tasks that the adoption of parliamentary democracy has assigned them in this republic and in Yugoslavia", said a statement of the Bosnian UJDI issued on May 20, 1990. Its far-sighted assessment was that such claims from nationalist movements were driven by domestic political opportunism and represented an unacceptable justification for territorial pretensions that, besides violating the democratizing process in the republic, could contribute to the break-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of the whole country.⁸⁰

Although the Yugoslav UJDI had, initially, firmly rejected to take the shape of a political party, its Bosnian branch constantly debated whether they should take part in the electoral competition or not. At one point, the Bosnian

78 Gajo Sekulić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 15, 2014.

79 Abdulah KOVAČEVIĆ, "Proizvođač antikomunizma", *Naši Dani*, April 27, 1990. Kovačević was a member of the UJDI branch in Bijeljina.

80 The statement was reported in "Protest UJDI-a – Zajednica podružnica BiH. Protiv pokliča 'očinskih stratega' ", *Borba*, May 21, 1990. It specifically alluded to some statements from the Croatian HDZ, the League of Communists of Serbia and the SNO (Serbian National Renewal, the far-right movement founded by Vuk Drašković and Vojislav Šešelj) which had called into question the autonomy and integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In that period, outrage among non-national Bosnian political circles was spreading after a comment of Šime Đodan, a prominent member of the Croatian HDZ, claiming that Bosnia-Herzegovina was "Croatian from ancient times" and that a Croatian flag would have flown on the top of Mount Romanija (i.e. over Sarajevo) within a few years. ANDJELIĆ, *Bosnia-Herzegovina*, 165.

UJDI even announced its will to run for elections,⁸¹ but finally withdrew and directed its efforts in inspiring and coordinating a united, democratic and non-national opposition, together with movements and personalities from the cultural and intellectual world.⁸² The result was the creation of the Democratic Forum (*Demokratski Forum*, DF), composed of the UJDI, the Alliance of Socialist Youth (SSOBiH), the Democratic Party (DP), and the Socialdemocrat Alliance (SS).⁸³ The Forum's principles coincided with those promoted by the UJDI, namely the foundation of an "authentic democracy", where the sovereignty would be entrusted to the individual citizens of the Republics and the Federation. Those concepts, as it was stated in the presentation, "imply safeness, freedom and all the rights of the Serbs in Croatia, of the Croats in Vojvodina, of the Muslims in Serbia, of the Montenegrins in Slovenia etc. Since our peoples are so intersected and mixed, a totalitarian concept of narrow-mindedness and self-sufficiency, wherever it is applied, cannot be a democratic solution for the existence, the prosperity and the happiness of the citizens of Yugoslavia as a whole".⁸⁴ The Forum stated its opposition to the "ruling doctrine of the sovereignty of the peoples and the nation", rejecting any "ideological and political totalitarianism", which also included the emerging movements with "negative mono-national sign". The Forum promoted a third-way, "democratic-alternative" option, equally distant from both the "bolshevik" and the "strictly national" movements.⁸⁵ However, the Forum failed almost immediately to represent an aggregating factor, due to the lack of material and financial resources, the enormous difficulties to pierce into the public space because of the very unstable conditions for political pluralism in Bosnia, and some internal discrepancies. The Forum *de facto* ceased to exist soon and each of its founding movements continued to act separately.

Another main issue on which the Bosnian UJDI focused its attention was the conflict in Kosovo. The Mostar branch, under the decisive initiative of its leader Željko Rebac, organized and hosted some of the round tables (attended by representatives from all the sides involved in the issue) that the Yugoslav UJDI promoted in order to set the stage for dialogue. These initiatives reveal the strong pro-Yugoslav commitment of the UJDI, which recognized the Kosovo issue as the trigger of the social-political crisis in the whole Federation, suggesting that

81 "UJDI ide na izbore", *Borba*, June 26, 1990.

82 Gajo Sekulić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 15, 2014. Sekulić claims that, among others, the famous film director Emir Kusturica attended the project in its first phase, but he abandoned it for individual conflicts and lack of interest. Kusturica later joined the Alliance of Reformist Forces (SRSJ).

83 The two leaders of DP (*Demokratska Partija*) and SS (*Socijaldemokratski Savez*) were respectively Petar Milić and Borislav Grahovac, also leading members of the UJDI branch in Mostar. Both these parties would be completely marginal in the Bosnian political spectrum, being active practically only in Mostar, relying on a low number of members.

84 M. KARABEG, "Nakon formiranja Demokratskog Foruma BiH. Mjesto pod suncem pluralizma", *Oslobodjenje*, May 14, 1990.

85 *Ibidem*.

no democratic progress in Yugoslavia, not even in each single republic, would have been achieved without reaching a solution for the province. Once more, the promoters attracted the attention of the security services⁸⁶ and had some quarrels with the press.⁸⁷ Despite these obstacles, and although some inevitable polemics arising during the meetings, the UJDI succeeded to complete the cycle of round tables and to attract a certain interest from the public.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, such efforts mostly remained a dead letter, as they did not encourage a further engagement from other organizations, let alone by the official institutions. Moreover, the fact that the electoral competition was to be played at the republican level, rather than at the Yugoslav one, implied that domestic issues in each federal unity would be primarily relevant in the campaign, besides the influence of socio-economic effects or the perception of inter-ethnic relations in workplaces and everyday life of the citizens.

In conclusion, the UJDI in Bosnia-Herzegovina did not achieve the goal of encouraging the pre-conditions of pluralism. The (slow) progress of Bosnian transition was determined more by factors occurring *outside* Bosnia-Herzegovina itself and *inside* the narrow élite of the republican rule, rather than by civic pushes from below. The Bosnian Communists remained indifferent to the UJDI's demands. Their first source of concern always remained the emergence of national parties, while the democratic alternatives were seen as too weak to be considered either a counterpart or a serious opponent. The UJDI's deliberate choice to remain a cultural-intellectual organization, with a "vanguard" political content rejecting the party form, would have needed more time to consolidate itself. The UJDI's focus on democratization, consciously leaving the socio-economic and the national question aside as a sub-product of the political impasse, limited its sphere of action and the potential interest of wider segments of the population. This was particularly true in the Bosnian context, upset by strikes and unrest stemming from the economic crisis, besides mutual fears of resurging national mobilizations.

86 Gajo Sekulić, interview by author, Sarajevo, May 15, 2014.

87 The Sarajevo daily *Oslobodjenje* gave little visibility to the events and covered them with varying degrees of criticism. Some articles were balanced, other implicitly undermined the UJDI's activism labelling it as biased and "pretentious", allegedly favouring the Albanian side (See, for example, M. KARABEG, A. BEHRAM, "UJDI-ev skup o Kosovu: novi korak I stari raskolarci", *Oslobodjenje*, March 2, 1990; from same authors, "UJDI-eva tribina o Kosovu pred Mostarcima. Dijalog potvrdio nepomirljivost", *Oslobodjenje*, March 3, 1990). Other newspapers were even sharper. The Belgrade-based *Večernje Novosti* defined the initiative a "farce of democracy" and accused the association for supporting Kosovo's secession from Serbia and Yugoslavia, although the UJDI was firmly opposing any change to the existing borders. Such coverage was the cause of a public controversy between Željko Rebac (the leader of the Mostar UJDI) and Radivoje Gutić (the *Večernje Novosti*'s correspondent from Mostar), through letters issued in the daily *Oslobodjenje*. Rebac liquidated Gutić as a "pub-talk informer" [*denuncijant kafanskog tipa*] and a "local regime slave". Radivoje GUTIĆ, "UJDI-Olimp and novinar-vratar", *Oslobodjenje*, March 19, 1990; Željko REBAC, "Reagovanja. Vodič u prošlost", *Oslobodjenje*, March 23, 1990.

88 The UJDI's round tables also brought to the issue of a report titled *Kosovski čvor. Drešiti ili seći* ("The Kosovo Knot. Untie or cut?"). URL available here: <http://pescanik.net/wp-content/PDF/Srdja/kosovskicvordresitiiliseci.pdf>, accessed December 9, 2014), grounded on a solid quantitative and qualitative research aiming to demystify the typical propagandistic arguments on the Kosovo question.

Epilogue

Civic-oriented initiatives inspired by the SKBiH's reformist wing, the SSOBiH and the UJDI shared a sharp focus on the struggle for political reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Yugoslavia. All the three options openly challenged the resistance to change of the ruling Bosnian elite, as well as the exclusivist narratives of the nationalist-oriented movements. Their firm commitment for the integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the unity of a federal Yugoslavia was materialized into the articulation of concrete and far-sighted proposals, such as the almost identical proposals submitted by the SSOBiH and the UJDI for a constitutional reform of Yugoslavia as a federal, parliamentary bicameral democracy.

On the other hand, the three initiatives differed in their practices, strategies and communicative approaches. The party reformers led by Grebo used all their political capital and media exposition in an intra-elite struggle against the Bosnian leadership, but they ended up completely marginalized. The SSOBiH strived to defend its own official infrastructure in order to become a political party, which would produce poor results. The UJDI on the contrary, remained practically confined to the intellectual-cultural ground and barely appeared in the public space, not only because of restraints from media and institutions, but also because of their staunch refusal of engaging themselves as a political party. Attempts to create broad cross-cut platforms, such as the ZAVNOBiH Initiative or the Democratic Forum, failed because of lack of material resources, combined with uncertainties and disagreements over the practical steps that could be taken, in a context of extremely volatile circumstances and expectations in the political spectrum. None of these initiatives managed to build a social consensus around their projects, both inside the official structures and in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society at large.

The existential insecurity that poor socio-economic performance and *perceptions* of worsening inter-ethnic relations originated, finally brought many people to cast their vote for national parties (SDA, SDS and HDZ)⁸⁹ in the November 1990 elections. Moreover, the slow and hesitant progress of a multi-party system in Bosnia-Herzegovina (constitutional reforms were completed only in July 1990, due to attempts from Communists to keep the ban on national parties) reduced the chances for civic-alternative options, which would need more stable conditions in order to consolidate themselves. Conversely, national parties bypassed easily the ban even before they were legalized, thanks to the significant help offered by their respective clergies, influential intellectual circles (and, in case of Serb and Croat parties, from the neighbour republics), besides gradually enjoying some undeniable

89 Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*, i.e. Muslim); Serb Democratic Party (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka*); Croat Democratic Community (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*).

territorial support in some regions. The electoral campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina began once the triumph of national parties in Slovenia and Croatia had already brought a severe escalation of the political conflict along the Ljubljana-Zagreb-Belgrade axis, hindering the chance to revive a federal, supra-national dimension. Combining a pro-Yugoslav discourse with an intra-republican sphere of action became increasingly problematic for any civic-alternative platform. Finally, the appearance in July 1990 of the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ), the Ante Marković's party, paradoxically installed further polarization in the non-national field instead of acting as a cohesive force.⁹⁰

The stigma of dogmatism left by the "burden of the past" ("*hipoteka iz prošlosti*") still haunted the SKBiH despite its advances in self-reform and its gradual switch to social-democracy. Hence, any chance for a huge anti-nationalist coalition between pro-Yugoslav parties was immediately discarded and led to a heavily fragmented scenario, paradoxically confronting a pragmatic synergy from the three ethnic parties. Besides being unable to break the silence of an inert and declining regime, the civic alternatives failed also to reduce the loudness of nationalist narratives. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the Bosnian anti-war activism taking shape since 1991 rested upon the political, organizational and personal networks that those same intellectuals, youth movements, affinity groups, etc., had been establishing in previous years. They set the bases for a continuum of civic resistance that, despite the destructive war and post-war events, has lasted until today.

90 For more details on the SRSJ, see Alfredo SASSO, "The defeat of the democratic Yugoslavism in Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (SRSJ)", in Antonello BIAGINI, Giovanna MOTTA (eds.), *Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century. Vol. 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014, 563-575.

SAŽETAK

‘BOSANSKA ŠUTNJA’? PAD REŽIMA I GRAĐANSKE ALTERNATIVE U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI (1989.-1990.)

Alfredo SASSO

Članak teži analizirati građansku, pro-jugoslavensku i pro-demokratizacijsku opciju u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1989. do sredine 90-tih. Te platforme pružile su alternative nacionalnim narativima i politici i, istovremeno, „službenom jugoslavizmu“ kojeg je predstavljao Savez komunista Bosne i Hercegovine (SKBiH). Vladajuća partija zadržala je ne-nacionalan i pro-jugoslavenski stav zbog ideološkog pravovjerja svoje elite te zbog nacionalne heterogenosti Bosne i Hercegovine. Međutim, ona je imala kolebljiv pristup na putu prema političkom pluralizmu te višestranačkim izborima.

Članak se usmjerava na tri najznačajnija građansko-alternativna projekta u bosanskom političkom miljeu 1989. Prvi je radikalno reformno krilo Saveza komunista koje je tražilo auto-transformaciju partije i države, potičući tzv. ZAVNOBiH inicijativu te Balkansku inicijativu na posljednjem kongresu Saveza. Ti su prijedlozi zahtijevali trenutno ispunjenje preduvjeta za pluralizam i uvođenje višestranačkog sustava. Drugi, Savez socijalističke omladine Bosne i Hercegovine (SSOBiH), koji je iznikao iz rastućih gradskih omladinskih socijalističkih pokreta kasnih 80-tih, snažno je preispitivao režimsku kontrolu i ideologiju. Prije nego što se pretvorio u zasebnu partiju i, dok je još uvijek bio službeni dio Saveza komunista, Savez socijalističke omladine razvio je nezavisnu politiku i zamislio “radikalnu rekonstrukciju” jugoslavenske federacije temeljenu na liberalno-demokratskim principima. Treći, Udruženje za jugoslavensku demokratsku inicijativu (UJDI), za razliku od prethodna dva projekta, stvoren je izvan službenih okvira te je većinom sastavljen od progresivnih intelektualaca. Dok se borio za “osnovne preduvjete” demokratizacije te za unifikaciju građanske opozicije, UJDI je čitavo vrijeme bio suočen s neprijateljskim pristupom bosanskih komunističkih vlasti.

Sve te građanske-alternativne inicijative nisu uspjele izgraditi društveni konsenzus oko svojih platformi. Odnosi između njih i SKBiH ostao je izrazito konfliktan jer je otpor promjenama dolazio iz raznih sektora unutar Saveza te posljedično zbog “stigme dogmatizma” koja se asocijala uz vladajuću partiju. Spor i oprezan napredak političkih reformi u Bosni i Hercegovini umanjivao je šanse građansko-alternativnim opcijama dok su nacionalne stranke zaobilazile postojeće zabrane te iskoristile rastuću eskalaciju tenzija u jugoslavenskom scenariju.