

# MONTENEGRO

## Sandzak Muslims

Activity: 2006-2020

### General notes

NA

### Movement start and end dates

- With the secession of Montenegro from Serbia and Montenegro the Sandzak region became divided between Serbia and Montenegro. After the secession the Sandzak movement has remained active in both Serbia and Montenegro. In Montenegro, the primary organization representing the Sandzak interests is the Bosniak Party. There were claims for autonomy, and sporadically also for separate independence together with the Serbian Sandzak region. We code movement activity as of Montenegro's independence in 2006, but note that the movement was active and nonviolent before. There is continued evidence for autonomy claims, and the Bosniak party remains active in the parliament of Montenegro (Bugajski 2002; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; International Crisis Group 2005; Keesing's; Lexis Nexis; Marshall & Gurr 2003; Minahan 1996, 2002; MAR; Bosniak Party 2022). We code the movement as ongoing as of 2020. [start date: 1990; end date: ongoing]

### Dominant claim

- Several factors suggest an autonomy claim:
  - o The Bosniak Party, which represents the Sandzak Muslims in Montenegro's parliament, demands amongst other things a "new administrative-territorial organization of the state, regionalization, and the establishment of new municipalities, particularly the municipalities Petnjica and Gusinje; decentralization of the authority, in accordance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government; resolving the status of Sandžak as cross-border region" (Bošnjačka Stranka 2022).
  - o In 2010, Muamer Zukorlić (Chief Mufti of the Islamic Community in Serbia) stated that "the most appropriate model for Sandžak is the autonomy of South Tyrol because there is a trans-border, i.e. dual autonomy, while neither Italy nor Austria's identity are threatened" (B92 2010). Though not shared by all Sandzak Muslims in Montenegro, the idea of across-border autonomy is supported by other Muslims in Montenegro, such as Hazbija Kalac, leader of the party "Bosniak Democratic Community of Montenegro" (Balkan Inside 2013).
  - o In general, the basic demands of the Bosniaks are "regionalization, a balanced regional development and the promotion of the establishment of a cross-border region of Sandzak" (BKZ 2013). [2006-2020: autonomy claim]

### Independence claims

- Despite sporadic claims for independence, we found no evidence for a politically significant independence movement. [no independence claims]

## **Irredentist claims**

NA

## **Claimed territory**

- Sandzak Muslims in Montenegro have demanded more autonomy for the historical Sandzak region, which straddles the current borders of Serbia and Montenegro. Following SDM's coding rules, we only code those areas within Montenegro, which are made up of five municipalities; Rožaje, Plav, Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja and Berane, formerly known as Ivangrad (Rondic 2000: 131). We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database.

## **Sovereignty declarations**

NA

## **Separatist armed conflict**

- No separatist violence was found, hence a NVIOLSD coding. [NVIOLSD]

## **Historical context**

- The Sandzak became part of Serbia and Montenegro in 1912 after the First Balkan War. Before it had been under Ottoman rule (they had their own district, sançak means district in Turkish) (International Crisis Group 1998). During WWI, the Sandzak came under Italian rule. The Yugoslav partisan movement briefly entertained the idea of giving the Sandzak autonomy, but after the war the Sandzak was again divided between Serbia and Montenegro. Thus the Sandzak did not have an overarching administration (as it used to have under the Ottomans) (International Crisis Group 1998; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000). In 1968, the Muslims were recognized as a nationality of Yugoslavia equal to Serbs and Montenegrins (Bieber n.d.; Mitchell 2010: 311).
- Yugoslavia's 1992 constitution, adopted after the secessions of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia, did no longer recognize Muslims as a constitutive nationality (Bosnia and hence most Muslims had left the union). More importantly, Muslims were not even recognized as a national minority – contrary to Hungarians, Albanians, Ruthenians and Slovaks (International Crisis Group 1992: 11).
- The end of the war in BiH slightly changed Serbia's policies towards the Sandzak Muslim (Todorovic 2012: 53). For instance, Ugljanin, the leader of the SDA party, was allowed to return home from exile. However, no concession in the sense employed here could be identified.
- In 1997, Belgrade threw out a Sandzak municipality assembly and replaced it with an acting assembly comprised exclusively of SPS and JUL members, some of whom were Bosniaks (Lyon 2008: 88). We do not code an autonomy restriction since the Sandzaks had very limited autonomy to begin with (the action concerns municipal governments).
- Since the overthrow of Milošević on October 5, 2000, much has changed regarding Serbia's relationship with its Muslim minority in the Sandžak (Lyon 2008: 91). The Serbian government began investing in the region's infrastructure and economic development (Lyon 2008: 92). In 2000, Serbia started to change its discriminatory practices and passed appropriate laws for the protection of its minorities (Mirkovic 2002). The new Serbian regime attempted to integrate Sandzak Muslims into the system, rather than excluding them from it (Morrison 2008: 9). In March 2002, the Yugoslav parliament passed a law on national minorities. In particular, the law outlined the creation of a Federal Council of National Minorities, comprised of representatives of the National Councils of each minority group, including the Hungarians. The councils are designed to protect minority languages, education, media, and culture (Stroschein n.d.). In

particular, the law stipulates that national minorities can use their language within their municipality or locality if they form 15 per cent of the local population, as well as have education in their native language (Petsinis 2003). The Sandzak Muslims (Bosniaks) were officially recognized as a national minority (Todorovic 2012: 55). Overall the (comprehensive yet flawed) 2002 minority law arguably improved the status of the Sandzak Muslims (Bieber n.d.). We (also) code an autonomy concession because the minority councils can be understood as a form of non-territorial autonomy (Korhecz n.d.).<sup>1</sup> [2002: cultural rights concession, autonomy concession]

## **Concessions and restrictions**

- In 1997, the political landscape in Montenegro fundamentally changed. The Muslim communities were no longer marginalized as in Serbia, became an important political factor and got representation in the Montenegrin parliament. Consequently, many Muslims supported Montenegro's independence in 2006 despite the fact that it divided the Sandzak territory. Ever since, they are relatively well represented in the government and the public administration compared to minorities in other Balkan countries (Bieber 2010: 943).
- In 2006, a proposed minority rights legislation that would have strengthened the Muslims' position was temporally abandoned. Montenegro's Muslims protested and began to organize themselves more along ethnic lines (Morrison 2008: 6). The law appears to have been adopted eventually but it does not seem that this law significantly improved the situation of Muslims in Montenegro (Minority Rights Group International).
- In 2012, the government signed an agreement with Montenegro's religious minorities, including the Muslims, that formalized their legal status within the country (U.S. Department of State 2014). Thanks to this agreement Islam has become one of Montenegro's official religions and the Sandzak Muslims in Montenegro have gained "important rights with regards to freedom of religion and worship" (Today's Zaman 2012). [2012: cultural rights concession]
- Overall, tensions in the Montenegrin Sandzak are lower compared to Serbia (Morrison 2008: 13), and the Muslims in Montenegro are relatively content with the government's approach towards them (Today's Zaman 2012). While the leaders of the Bosniaks/Muslim and Albanian minorities raise concerns from time to time, the overall climate between the different ethnic groups in Montenegro is better than in any other country in the Western Balkans (Bender 2009). Also, in the late 1990s, the Serbian Sandzak leaders, such as Suleyman Ugljanin, lost influence on the Montenegro Muslims, when Ugljanin called for Muslims to boycott the presidential elections in Montenegro, but this call was largely ignored (ICG 1998: 10).
- The Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms was amended in 2017, which criminalizes hate speeches based on nationalities and prohibits the discrimination against the measures aiming to address the inequalities and disadvantages experienced by national minorities. As the amendment does not directly involve cultural or autonomy rights as defined here, we do not code a concession (Council of Europe 2019).

## **Regional autonomy**

NA

## **De facto independence**

NA

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<sup>1</sup>Montenegro does not know similar minority councils. Nevertheless, we do not code a restriction in the context of the secession because the 2002 legislation was relatively limited and the real push towards non-territorial autonomy came only in 2009 (Korhecz n.d.).

## Major territorial changes

- Montenegro attained independence in 2006, implying a host change [2006: host change (new)].

## EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Sandzak Muslims
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Bosniak/Muslims
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	34103000

## Power access

- We follow EPR. [2006-2016: powerless]
- According to EPR, the Bosniak party was represented by three ministers in the cabinet as the result of the parliamentary elections in October 2016. [2017-2020: junior partner]

## Group size

- We follow EPR. [0.119]

## Regional concentration

- While the Sandzak Muslims in Yugoslavia cross the threshold for territorial concentration, the Sandzak Muslims in Montenegro do not. According to Montenegro's 2011 census, Muslims make up an absolute majority in two municipalities, Rozaje and Plav. They are non-contiguous; the municipality that is in-between (Berane) is ethnically mixed with only 18% Muslims. If we look at the contiguous area that results if we combine the three municipalities, only 42% of all Muslims in Montenegro reside there, and Muslims make up but 44% of the local population. [not concentrated]

## Kin

- EPR codes the following groups: Bosniaks in Bosnia, Serbia, Slovenia, Kosovo, and Croatia. The number of Bosniaks in Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Kosovo is below the 100,000 threshold; the others are above. [kin in neighboring country]

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