



# Individual Advanced Research Opportunities (IARO) Program

## Research Report

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### **“Think” Future: Constructing Hope and Anti-Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina**

#### **Abstract:**

My ethnographic research among emergent activist groups demanding more governmental accountability in Sarajevo, the capitol of Bosnia-Herzegovina, suggests that citizens mobilize the newly available discourses on democratization, including the languages of representation, participation, transparency etc., but simultaneously assign them with specific local meanings and expectations. Their demands contain not only calls for more responsible governance, but also for institutions and officials that are concerned with the quality of life, security and future of citizens. The events which inspired the initial mobilization—the rise of youth crime and the government’s neglect of this problem-- indicate that the citizens seek not a disinterested, but an interventionist state. Such expectations, I argue, must be considered in light of recent socialist history, which influences the political imaginaries of all Bosnians in both concrete and indirect ways. Nevertheless, the rise of these new groups also indicates that important new political visions and projects are developing in Bosnia, which reject the logic of nationalist parties. While not yet forming a social movement, the recent campaigns of these groups of activists present a step in that direction.

#### **Relevance and Contribution to Field:**

My doctoral project proposes a departure from existing literature on Bosnia-Herzegovina in two main ways. It examines contemporary transformations in Bosnia-Herzegovina within the theoretical frameworks offered by studies of postsocialism, advocating closer scholarly attention

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to Yugoslav socialist experience and the ways in which its memories and traces shape present practices.<sup>1</sup> Over the last twenty years, scholars have compiled an impressive literature on the region which has tried to explain, document and render more complex the process of disintegration of former-Yugoslavia (e.g. Ramet 2002; Woodward 1995; Allock 2000; Gagnon 2004; Anđelić 2002). A significant portion of work on Bosnia focused on the difficult processes of reconstruction and reform in the post-war period, especially in relation to the international intervention (e.g. Campbell 1998; Chandler 1999; Bieber 2005; Coles 2002). While extremely important, this literature often privileged the view of Bosnia as a post-war environment, while unintentionally underplaying its significance as a unique post-socialist context. To this day, studies of postsocialist transformations in the ex-Yugoslav region remain rare (see Gilbert 2006, Greenberg 2006, 2008 for examples). Simultaneously, while the 1992-1995 war emerged as the key event, nationalism and the way in which it shaped lives of ordinary people became (and not without reason) the main object of social scientific, including anthropological research (e.g. Bringa 1995; Hayden 1992, 1996, 2007). In the most recent scholarship, however, researchers have begun to focus on other forms of social belonging arising in response, in contrast to or outside of ethno-national categories (e.g. Jansen 1999, 2005, 2007; Helms 2003; Bougarel, Helms and Duijzings, eds. 2007). The research I have conducted follows this recent pattern, targeting projects, organizations and initiatives located outside of dominant ethnonationalist narratives that are making possible new forms of sociality, community and ethics. I argue in part that these new forms of belonging and social practice refer back—in productive and complex ways—to shared socialist imaginaries and dispositions even when they appear to be “brand new” phenomena.

Since my work deals with informal (or more accurately formalizing) groups of nonprofessional activists working to create the first major post-war social movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, based on civic rather than nationalist politics, I expect my insights will offer contributions to literature in political anthropology, particularly in terms of debates on the emergence of publics, new forms of social imagination, and citizenship. The material I have gathered provides an opportunity to consider how new idioms of accountability, transparency, representation, participation etc. (which are a part of democratization discourses that have special resonances in postsocialist world), meet with expectations about the desired forms of a relationship between the state and the citizens, and specific understandings about morality, normalcy and social solidarity, all of which in both implicit and explicit ways refer back to past experience of Yugoslav socialism. Importantly, the ethnographic research I have conducted in this stage of

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At the same time, this approach recognizes the radical ruptures created by the fall of socialism and remains sensitive to the novelty of emergent objects and processes.

my dissertation fieldwork focuses on one site where I am tracing the emergence of new ways of imagining but also creating more livable futures for members of the local communities. Following the recent literature in anthropology of hope (and related topics), I consider these initiatives of citizens as a part of contemporary struggles in Bosnia-Herzegovina to come up new discursive frames and forge new forms of ethics for this complex, post-war society.

### **Research Methodology:**

As a socio-cultural anthropologist, I relied on participant observation, informal and in-depth interviews, and analysis of visual and printed media . I also did a fair amount of work over the internet, following online discussion forums, emailing lists, blogs and social networking sites used by people involved in organizing protests and other related political activities. In the four months during which I conducted ethnographic research in Sarajevo, I sought to accomplish the following two objectives: i) gain better understanding of the sudden and surprising surge in political mobilization of the residents of Sarajevo following the murder of 16-year-old Denis Mrnjavac in February 2008 ; and ii) trace and assess the effects of this “uprising” on local political dynamics, public discourse and the October 5 local elections.

Since I arrived in Sarajevo after the protests had come to a standstill, my first task was to locate and talk to individual and group actors<sup>2</sup> who participated in them. I conducted both in-depth and informal interviews with these protesters which helped me develop a much more nuanced perspective on the said series of events and the effects it had on Sarajevo as a whole. I used both my old and new contacts in the activist community in Sarajevo, in addition to the above-mentioned blogger and online forum sites, in order to make my way through these informal networks of protesters. At the beginning of August, activities of “Citizens of Sarajevo”<sup>3</sup> --the main group that organized the protests--resumed, which allowed me to continue ethnographic research through the means of participant observation of their organizing meetings, congresses, protest gatherings, street performances and various kinds of public appearances, day-trips to other towns, training workshops, logistical meetings where events and materials were being prepared, cultural events (like the by-now infamous Queer Festival) and last but not the least, various socializing activities among the group's members. During this time, I also conducted a series of interviews (mostly individual, but sometimes group) with the protesters, in an effort to learn more about their motives, aspiration and understandings of the work they were doing.

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In terms of group actors, I dealt primarily with organizations such as “Zašto ne/Why not?” and “Center for Promotion of Civil Society,” and their associated, self-described movements DOSTA and GROZD which were falsely named by the government as initial organizers of citizen protests, as well as ACIPS, Open Society Fund and members of the coalition “Accountability”

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Part of this group's membership was later channeled into a formal and registered citizens' association “Akcija Građana” (Action of Citizens), but some of the original contingent of organizers choose to remain informal. In principle, there is a lot of overlap and still a lot of confusion about where the formal and the informal wings end, but basically, this is the same group of people.

The latter part of my fellowship tenure was especially dynamic in terms of data collection, not only because of the “reawakening” among the organizers following the summer lull, but also because of other events which shook up Sarajevo during the month of September and October that served as an occasion for further regrouping and mobilization (elections, resignation of the cantonal prime minister, violence prompted by the opening of the first Queer Festival, etc.). Although I continued to work most closely with this loose network of activists until the end of my IREX tenure, I also pursued ethnographic research among people who were not directly involved with their activities, including the formal NGO sector, journalists, local academics, and Sarajevans who watched these activities from the sidelines, at times supporting and at other times criticizing them. Lastly, I managed to build a massive multimedia archive of materials related to the protests and the group(s) who organized them (including photographs, amateur videos made by protesters, printed material, posters, etc.) but also of printed and broadcast media coverage, including commentary, reports and analysis of local experts.

### **Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions:**

Given the fact my research deals with emerging sites of political contestation, my material reflects both the excitement and chaos which I encountered on the ethnographic terrain which I investigated. In that sense, all my conclusions are preliminary and subject to change pending further reflection and research. Furthermore, because of the limitations of this report, I am presenting here only a selection of my findings, which I believe are the most important. When I set out to investigate the 2008 citizen protests in Sarajevo, I had in mind the following questions: 1) How did these protests emerge so suddenly in the context which has previously been described as politically apathetic? 2) To what problem were these protests responding? Were youth crime and worsening of public safety really the main issues, or was there something else going on? 3) Who were the people who organized these protests and what were their motivations? 4) How did the protesters manage to sideline ethnonationalist explanations for the violence and create a civic agenda for the protests? 5) How could we explain the mobilization of socialist era iconography at the protests? What if anything did these protests have to do with socialism? 6) Did the protests change anything? What effects did they have on the government officials and the citizens who organized them? 7) What if any effects would the protests have on October 5<sup>th</sup> local elections in Bosnia? 8) What did these events and protest activities reveal about the content of citizens' dreams and fears about the future? To what extent were they related to heightened anxieties about the future of Bosnia as a whole<sup>4</sup>? On the basis of these

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My original proposal which I submitted to IARO in November 2007, centered precisely on this last question. During my preliminary research trips in 2006 and 2007, I noticed an explosion of public discourses about not only the future of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also

numerous but specific questions, I hoped to learn whether these events were a singular aberration, or signs of larger transformation. I do not have the space to address all the issues, but the summary I provide below contains some of the answers.

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The event that moved the sudden avalanche of political protests in Sarajevo<sup>5</sup> was the tragic murder of a 16 year old boy, a high school student of the Catholic Educational Center, who was randomly attacked by three of his peers during a tram ride through center city. The murder shocked the Sarajevan public, partly because it presented a culmination in a series of recent cases of extreme violence perpetrated by local youth<sup>6</sup>. Soon after, citizens, journalists and public intellectuals started asking questions about activities of the government aimed at solving and preventing these problems, but learned that most of the institutions in charge of sanctioning and re-socialization of underage delinquents<sup>7</sup> that existed in the pre-war era had never been reopened. After investigative journalists uncovered that the Federal Strategy for Prevention and Sanctioning of Youth Delinquency, which passed in the Parliament in the summer of 2006, was never implemented because the cantonal government basically “forgot” about it, public outrage skyrocketed. This gross act of negligence was by many interpreted as a paradigmatic example of utter incapacity, laziness, and lack of any sense of accountability among governing officials. Calls to action began to circulate in the media, but also on the online discussion forum of popular local site Sarajevo-X.com<sup>8</sup> These forum users joined (and invited their friends to join) the murdered boy's classmates and teachers who decided to organize a February 9th gathering in front of the city's main cathedral to commemorate the death of their friend. According to the weekly “Dani” (Days), about five thousand people showed up for this gathering which soon turned into protest march. Emotions ran high during this meeting, and a second gathering was proposed for February 13, mere four days later, in front of the building of the cantonal

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about economic and political prospects at large, and the future opportunities offered to residents of Bosnia. Discourses ranged from nihilistic and fatalist (i.e. “There is no future here for anyone”) to downright euphoric. In the meantime, in winter and spring 2008, news and photographs of massive protests in Sarajevo reached me, giving new ethnographic traction and real-world resonance to my research questions. I decided to go ahead with my original research plan, and use the SSRC IDRF funds for that, and propose an amendment to IARO that would allow me to expand my project to include these new developments. My original proposal asked this question: How are contemporary anxieties and aspirations about the future in Bosnia related to the ways future was thought about in the socialist era? More precisely, how are new, anti-nationalist social imaginations being shaped by the lived experiences and political values of Yugoslav socialism, while simultaneously being transformed by Bosnia's post-socialist and post-war experiences?

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The first protest took place on February 9, with subsequent rallies on February 13, February 16, February 23, March 1, March 8, April 6, and May 9. Smaller gatherings took place in front of the main building of the Criminal Court where Mrnjavac's murderers were being tried. In September, activists resumed their activities through a series of street actions called “Alphabet of Democracy” created to re-educate the citizens so that they would “vote better” in the October 5<sup>th</sup> elections. They staged a petition submission parade and a street performance on October 2 and gathered once more to protest the violence at the opening of Queer Festival on October 4; and lastly, came together on November 14, to support journalists and police cracking down on organized crime.

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Only a month earlier, another group of underage boys set on fire an elderly woman, Ljubica Spasojević, after previously drenching her in gasoline. Mrs. Spasojević died shortly after. These are some of the most dramatic and recent examples of youth crime; several people to whom I spoke, mostly older and mid-aged women, had themselves been victims of petty crime committed by teenage boys.

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Although the term “youth delinquency” sounds outdated in the American context, I will use it in this report to reflect the language of the local public and experts.

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Sarajevo.x.com is a commercial site which features a variety of content, including news. Its forum is a unique institution in the city, because it provides space for public discussion on all themes imaginable, and functions as a kind of a virtual public square. Each section of the forum is moderated, and posts deemed offensive are quickly removed. Notably, the protests were not the first time the forum has been used as an organizing platform; previously, it had been the venue for humanitarian work, food and clothing drives.

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government, where the Cabinet was having an emergency noon meeting (where the “forgotten strategy” was to be discussed). On the day of the protests, a group of about three hundred people gathered at the agreed-upon location, many of them high school students. Members of local informal activist group Dosta (Enough!) and the movement Grozd<sup>9</sup> who earlier sent invitations to Sarajevans to join them in protest provided logistical support, but fell short from admitting they were the main organizers. Two activists from Dosta also came up with the first set of formulated demands of the protesters, which contained calls for the resignation of the cantonal prime minister, Samir Silajdžić and the city's mayor, Semiha Borovac. However, the gathering soon turned violent when some of the protesters began throwing eggs, tangerines, bottles, pieces of clothing, and in the end, stones, on the cantonal building. My informants who went to this protest have frequently described to me this day as the most important of all, because the violence (which was, by all accounts, simply vandalism) really took officials by surprise and stirred up fear among them. Yet, for others, this occasion raised important questions about whether violence was necessary, desired or tolerable. What is significant is that namable organizers, such as Dosta and GROZD, at this particular moment withdrew from organizing activities, after they had previously condemned the violent behavior of the gathered mass. After a series of media appearances, some of the members of the movement DOSTA became stigmatized even among the general public, and from there on, the organizers become “the informal group of citizens” or “forumaši” (forum users) and blogeri (bloggers) as they are sometimes described.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the protest served as the occasion for a catastrophic public debut of a little known prime minister of the Canton of Sarajevo, Samir Silajdžić who made two crucial mistakes: i) he screamed in front of cameras at one of the members of Dosta, Demir Mahmutčehajić, who went inside of the building to talk to him as the gathered mass threw stones and ii) two days later, he paid commercial advertisement space in the two most important daily newspapers where he published a tactless, patronizing and demagogical statement (not my description) addressed to the citizens of Sarajevo, where he called the protesters (I paraphrase): a mob of external elements set out to destabilize the most successful local government in the country. This letter inspired dramatic reactions from the NGO sector, journalists, academics and citizens, all of whom were outraged and disgusted. One of the women I spoke to who works in the formal NGO sector told me that the letter reminded her of the worst of communist propaganda and made her stomach turn. Another interviewee pointed out that even previously disinterested

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Neither Dosta nor GROZD are registered organizations; they are self-proclaimed movements which grew out of NGOs “Why Not?” and “Center for Promotion of Civil Society”, but the people who work in them are basically the same.

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Throughout this report, I will refer to this group of activists either as “informal group”, citizen-activists, or “Citizens” (translating “Građani” as they are referred to by the media)

Sarajevans came out to the next protest because Samir Silajdžić, in his arrogance and shamelessness, made them so angry.<sup>11</sup> Demands for his resignation, which were posited at the beginning in an almost ambivalent fashion, gained sudden credibility and force (the logic was: not only was he not doing his job, he was also a jerk and an idiot). The mayor, Semiha Borovac, who was not directly responsible for the implementation of the strategy against youth delinquency, was nevertheless condemned for failing to become a people's leader, refusing to publicly name those officials responsible, not doing more to put pressure on relevant agencies, and last but not the least, for going to Dubai to give a speech (many believe she was going shopping) when the murder and the first protests happened<sup>12</sup>. Borovac later claimed the citizens were wrong to demand her resignation because dealing with the problem of youth crime was not in her job description, but this argument only further added oil to the fire as protesters pointed out they had based their demands not on political but moral responsibility.

This brings me to my first preliminary conclusion. Demands for “odgovornost” (closest translation is: accountability) contained not only requests for a functional, responsible and transparent government which the International Community in Bosnia has wanted to build for years, but also a government that had a sense of shame and solidarity with the people it claimed to represent. Protest signs carried by marchers often indexed this dimension of calls for accountability, frequently mentioning moral norms and “obraz” (one's honor; literal translation: cheek) which in the case of these politicians, had been tarnished and could not be washed off. A popular song by a reggae/political band called Dubioza Kolektiv, whose album “Firma Illegal came out in the midst of this mobilization, posed a rhetorical question to the politicians of similar content: “Do you know the feeling, it is called shame?” Interestingly, during the protest held on April 6, one of the women read a text written by another blogger to the gathered crowd which contained a “confession” about her sense of guilt for the murder of Denis Mrnjavac for not having done more to pressure the government to do a better job at prevention of youth crime. The text was a message to the mayor who said the murder was not her fault. Witnesses of this event tell me that this message had a powerful emotional impact, because this admission of personal responsibility, as figurative as it was (the blogger, if anything had little power to stop anything), was an expression of solidarity which stood in stark contrast to arrogance of the mayor and the prime minister (who despite being in powerful positions, felt no similar pull). At the earliest protests, some people carried signs which said “Oprosti nam,

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Silajdžić also became the but of all the jokes, and the inspiration for many new pop cultural interventions, including, songs, music videos and You-tube posts. Early on, he made an unfortunate mistake to share with the media that his son had called him to tell him “Daddy, I am afraid” when the stone throwing began in front of Cantonal Government. Protesters in turn addressed Silajdžić, saying “Daddy, we are afraid too!” From then on, the prime minister became the daddy, and the mayor, mommy.

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Between February and May, activists collected petitions for the resignation of both the prime minister and the mayor. 17,000 Sarajevans signed the petition against Samir Silajdžić and another 9,000 against Semiha Borovac.

Denise” (Forgive us Denis) and “Svi smo mi Denis” (We are all Denis), conveying solidarity in a similar way, claiming that citizens of Sarajevo identified with each other and the killed boy.

In contrast to these claims, one of my key informants spoke of “otuđenost” (alienation) of the inactive citizens and especially of politicians. He used the term “alienated centers of power” to refer to the elites, or more accurately six leading parties which hold power in the country. When I asked him to elaborate, he spoke about the fact that citizens alarmingly no longer pay attention to what's going on around them while most decisions in this country seem to be made at a restaurant table, outside of official frameworks and absolutely without any reference back to the real lives of people. Another friend commented that the encounters between citizens and government often take on a surreal character where the citizen is left dumbfounded that the government give him such ridiculous explanations for the way it does or fails to do its job. I find these ways of talking about the government extremely significant and illuminating when it comes to frustrations and demands of the citizens<sup>13</sup>. Because such a strong accent is placed on moral aspect of accountability, on shame, even alienation (surrealism may be one manifestation of it), I propose we analyze the idiom of “odgovornost” through the notion of “answerability” which Bakhtin (1919) used to analyze the relationship between art and life. Answerability, I find, is also a more helpful translation of this term because it carries a dialogical connotation (the idea that “odgovornost” is mutual and takes two willing sides), which points to a social relationship. For Bakhtin, answerable art (read politics in this case) entails “a certain guilt or a liability to blame”; following that line of argument, an answerable politics, if it is to be effectual, must be responsible towards life. A call to “odgovornost” is just one such demand: that the politicians start addressing real problems and recognizing that they serve real people, who expect that at some minimal level, the government will not try to make their lives harder, even if it can't make them better (minimal sense of shame).

Interestingly, concerns about corruption and embezzlement of governmental funds took a secondary place in citizens demands. Most people took for granted that the functionaries would steal “a little” behind closed doors, but what was frustrating was the fact they stole “a lot” and in public, without doing their jobs<sup>14</sup>. This summer, the whole of the country was outraged when the Parliamentarians, who do not exactly have the reputation of being efficient or hard workers,

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They are also important to think about in relation to documented late-socialist relations between ordinary people on the one hand, and official socialist ideology on the other. Alexei Yurchak has argued, through the notion of performative shift, that during this period, the function of authoritative communist discourse was not to provide meaning, but to move everyday rituals along which allowed the system to reproduce itself regardless of whether people believed in it or not. Spoken from a different theoretical position, such an attitude is a sign of a disjuncture between socialist ideology and practice of everyday life, in other words, of alienation. During the 1980s, many Yugoslavs hoped that democratization was going to make possible the bridging of this gap, once the government became elected by the people. Instead, nationalist parties took power, leading to more oppression and violence. What citizens seem to demand today is the realization of that broken promise of the 1990. This idealism, I am ready to argue, is a constitutive feature of Bosnian progressive, civic left, and part of its tragic romance.

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As a case in point, there is a graffiti sign in Sarajevo that reads “Tito stole from us, and then gave us some too. This government steals but does not give us anything.”

voted to increase their salaries to 7000 BAM per month, in a country where the average salary in the capitol is ten times smaller. The entire country knew about this; I heard people on the street curse for months. Many of my interlocutors pointed out that the paradox of post-war Bosnia is the fact citizens know about all the financial malversations and bad behavior of politicians, but that they feel powerless to react.<sup>15</sup> Time and time again, I heard comparisons between today's government and socialist era politicians; although my interlocutors admitted communists had serious flaws, they also argued that they built a more efficient system.<sup>16</sup> Even though they were sometimes romanticizing (saying things like "in those times, you could fall asleep on a park bench and no one would touch you"), they noted that in the prior system, no one felt the type of insecurity about their life, livelihood and future. It is significant that political mobilization started at the time when residents of Sarajevo began feeling like their personal safety, and the safety of their children had been compromised because of negligence of politicians (they made this connection very directly) .

This brings me to the question of how these protests managed to draw such large numbers of Sarajevans out of their houses, for the first time since the end of the war. From my interviews and observations, it is clear that the protests, their length, rigor and the commotion they caused surprised almost everybody, including the organizers themselves. My interlocutors often emphasized the decentralized, ad hoc, and spontaneous nature of the protests' realization, which stands in sharp contrast to conspiratorial explanations deployed by some governmental officials and a part of the public that opposed the protest. The protests were almost completely carried out by a group of people who were strangers to each other and had virtually no prior experience in political organizing of this sort. They espoused sometimes radically different political positions and favored a variety of strategies which were frequently at odds.<sup>17</sup> They linked together through online forums and often did not learn each other's real names for weeks after they had started planning rallies together. Because they were nameless and faceless, joined under an ambiguous name "Građani Sarajeva" (Citizens of Sarajevo, sometimes also referred to as "informal group of citizens of Sarajevo") they were frequently accused of being

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Popular show entitled 60 Minutes (modeled after the American version) which airs every Monday night after the news features exposes on corruption, fraud and lies not only of leading politicians, but also members of the private and nongovernmental sector. The show's host, Bakir Hadžimerović, has become somewhat of an icon; the gathering in Sarajevo on November 14 was in part organized to show support to him after he began receiving death threats.

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However, it is important to not see comments such as these, or mobilization of socialist-era iconography, like the use of images of Marshal Tito, as an indication of desire to go back in history and remake socialism. People to whom I spoke to said certain protesters brought images of Tito because they wanted to remind those around them that things could be better and also because they felt affective attachments to that time period and all the opportunities it provided them. Next to images of current politicians, Tito stood out as model leader not because he was flawless, but because he succeeded where current political elites failed (it gave the masses a better life) and because he always came out to address them, for example, during the student protests of 1968 in Belgrade (interesting to note: there was a sign during one of the protests: 'Tito did not hide from youth' presumably referring to this). Reference to the socialist period provides the material for re-imagining the future anew and is most often done to remind people that if a different way once existed, it is possible to find again.

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It is important to understand that many among the protesters are not liberals or progressives in a classical sense. They could be placed all along the political spectrum from anarchist libertarians to those favoring a "firm and direct hand of government"

affiliated with some oppositional political party (notably, the Social Democratic Party) or worse yet, of being paid stand ins, sponsored by some belligerent foreign entity. The truth was different: most of the money for the promotional materials was gathered through the personal donations of organizers and donations in kind by print shops and other firms whose owners were sympathetic to the cause. Between late February and May, the group invested substantive efforts to make their membership, their individual backgrounds and their demands public, by claiming media space on TV, in magazines, radio shows etc. In this way, on numerous occasions, they were given an opportunity to publicly confront the relevant politicians. During that time, a leadership of about twenty people emerged, most of whom continue to work as a part of a newly formed NGO.

I ought to point out that the arrival of this group on the political scene engendered complex reactions from the formal NGO sector and certain donor organizations such as Open Fund Society (Soros Foundation). Academic workers and local policy analysts quickly recognized that the “Citizens,” unlike the existent civil society sector which was established with the help of donor funds and was largely oriented towards their ever changing funding philosophies, were “authentic” in so far as they emerged out of real life anxieties and frustrations and without help or invitation from anyone. Open Society Fund quickly recognized the significance and the potential of this development and begin offering “behind the stage” monetary and planning support. In September, they staged weekend-long meetings between “Citizens” and the formal NGO sector gathered in coalition “Accountability.” During these meetings, Soros initiated talks about building a movement that would ride the wave of the protests, and bring together existing civil society organizations with representatives of citizens (these activists).<sup>18</sup> The plans to build this coalition between citizens and the formal NGO sector fell through (basically because of sour attitudes of the formal NGO sector, which seemed unwelcoming to “Citizens” treating them like amateurs). After this fiasco, Soros sought to help “Citizens” directly. However, everyone among “Citizens” had reservations about this, because they believed their legitimacy and credibility rested on being autonomous and outside of the official NGO sector. Sarajevans recognized them, or so the argument went, because they did not have such connections or deploy the “typical NGO speak”. The decision to formalize and become a registered organization which would take donations was a painful and contested one (to this day, some of the key actors are affiliated with “Akcija Građana” only informally, even though they work for the campaigns just like everyone else). Later this fall, the local Soros office organized pro bono training in strategy planning and lobbying, designed to enable “Citizens” to apply for donor funds and take a less of

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Notably, the director invited a few participants and experts on the Orange Revolution in Ukraine to share their experiences with “citizens”-- one of the women who attended on behalf of the group told me the similarities in the mistakes the Ukrainians made the first time around and Sarajevans made in the spring were extraordinary.

an ad hoc approach in their future campaigns.<sup>19</sup> Reactions to these training seminars were mixed: initially, several members were very frustrated with this pedagogical exercise, or as they saw it, an attempt to re-socialize them to look more like any other civil society organization, but by the end, many also admitted the usefulness of some strategies presented. From what I can tell so far, despite their best efforts, "Građani" still favor "work on their feet" or as they often like to call it, "napucane lopte" --"reacting to "balls coming their way" or organizing campaigns quickly, and in response to issues that come their way. This has led to some strange situations: whatever happens in Sarajevo and causes public outrage, 'Citizens' are expected to react, at the very least in a form of a public statement. Members of the group are themselves worried about this, not wanting to become "dežurni aktivisti" or always-on-duty-activists who will soon lose credibility because they protest against everything (or worse, spend all their time writing letters).

Through my interviews with this core group of people, I learned that for many of them, getting involved with these activities entailed a personal transformation of a profound order which was often described in terms of a break of consciousness, or even more frequently as a visceral overturn or breaking down ("puk'o sam"-I broke down; "sve mi se prevrnulo"-everything in me turned over). The murders of Mrnjavac and Spasojević were deeply traumatic to many of them--especially to those who are parents- in so far that they revealed something about "how far the society as a whole had sank." Others, especially the younger activists and students were less impressed upon by the murder, than cognizant of the fact this was an opportunity to do something on a larger scale about the issues that frustrated them. Many of the younger organizers who later fell off the radar espoused more radical positions on the means and ends of this work (signing posters with the mantra "Total Revolution", for example), but a few guys in their late twenties later emerged as the key strategists of the formalized group. One of them in particular was the origin of an argument which later became the core of the campaign: what citizens needed to do was not to bring down the system, but to force the government to do its job<sup>20</sup>. Interviewees with formal insight frequently assured me that most of the legal frameworks at hand were pretty good, but that officials (as unprincipled, idle and irresponsible they were)

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This spontaneity in the organization is both part of its virtue and strength (it oddly enough provides them with more flexibility and ability to act), but has always frustrated many in the formal nongovernmental sector as well as some members of the group, who wanted to see more structure and planning. Analysts in ACIPS, as well as some journalists I spoke to, argued that the protests failed because demands of citizens were poorly articulated, and more of an expression of accumulated anger than reflection and planning.

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Similar way of thinking existed when it came to political parties. This particular interlocutor insisted "we should work to make irrelevant which party is in power, because even if we get one party, let's say Social Democrats to do what we want them to do, another party may come tomorrow and erase all that." He likewise insisted that this was not a struggle against two politicians, because after them, there would be others doing their job. The important thing, he explained was that they, all of them, should learn that they must take citizens seriously. Whatever happened in the past was now not so important ( he referred here to a song by a band Zoster "Ko je jamio, jamio"--who stole, stole (and that's the end)); citizens needed to make sure it would be better in the future. During the Soros training seminars, this issue came up again, and the seminar leader used the example of HDZ in Croatia as it was once, and as it is today, in order to argue that even nationalist parties can be made to change their politics and attitude towards citizens if there is public pressure to do so.

did not enforce them. Oddly enough, almost everyone was very sympathetic towards the police, which they felt was doing its job professionally, but could do it better if the government created the basis for it.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, citizens turned activists often talked about their frustrations with the majority of their fellow citizens who would rather take a coffee break in one of Sarajevo's many coffeehouses than come out to protests with them<sup>22</sup>. They pointed out that Sarajevans liked to talk about doing things or criticize others' actions--"vole da palamude" (they like to bullshit, or talk nonsense)--but mostly fail to show up when it matters the most<sup>23</sup>. Among the group with which I worked, there was one important rule designed to counter this tendency: "If you do not have a better idea to offer, do not criticize." Furthermore, once the group decided to formalize and become an organization, many feared that too much time would be spent in meetings and discussion, and not enough on concrete actions. These fears turned out to be justified; for much of September and October, various members of the group who have different temperaments and ideas about how to proceed engaged in incredible verbal fights (which could have become physical on a few occasions). Such violent disagreements have happened before, so much so that those outside of the group, from the formal NGO sector and affiliated groups, expressed to me that their patience has been tried and that they no longer wanted to work with "forumaši" because they fight so much amongst themselves. This disunity and tendency to pick fights remains a serious problem and will most certainly lead to future regrouping in the new organization, if not to its weakening and demise. Most of the fights are instigated by men who are the most dominant contributors to the various campaigns; several women in the organization have confessed to me that these fights not only marginalize them as members of the group, but demoralize them on a deeply personal level. It is important to note, that for all of their disagreements, these citizen activists have formed a very strong bond. Even though they did not know each other before, they now socialize together despite their different backgrounds and generational gaps, and form a kind of a community. One of my mid-aged female informants noted that "even if all this fails, I will be glad to have met all of them, my people, normal people like me who understand me, with whom I click, and that to me is the

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The police were frequently commended for their work in the rapid capture of Denis Mrnjavac killers, while the local government was simultaneously condemned for not having created institutions, including prisons for underage inmates, to deal with the problem afterwards.

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On one occasion, I had a chance to watch the organizers discuss among themselves how the protests managed to draw so many people, because they needed to figure out how to repeat that scale of mobilization for future campaigns. One of organizers pointed out that it took one thing, which was relatively simple but profoundly emotional, that boiled the issues down for people and made them come out. This is an important point, whose validity I had a chance to check in conversations with other people: too much information about all the various things which were wrong or dysfunctional in Bosnia had a demobilizing and a demoralizing effect. Because everyone knows just how problematic the state and society are, they find it hard to come up with appropriate, effective reactions. Once a single issue was isolated and connected to the larger context, citizens were able to react, by answering the call to join the protests.

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I hosted a party for the US elections and invited my informants to come. During the party, I was asked to explain what is wrong with Bosnians and why they could not be more like the Americans who finally came to their senses and voted for Obama.

biggest award of all.” Indeed, this discovery of others “who think like me” and do not merely want to talk but are willing to work for change, creates a sense of opportunity, a sense that there is potential in this group which must not be wasted. It is my impression that this faith in this particular assemblage of individuals, given its prior success at organizing protests, keeps singular members committed to the cause despite the problematic group dynamics.<sup>24</sup>

Next, political idioms deployed by the group exist outside of the ubiquitous nationalist rhetoric which most members perceive as void in an almost dismissive way (because they are anti-nationalist in their political, moral and philosophical orientation, I get the sense they do not look at nationalism as serious or valid set of ideas). This attitude is partly the result of their setting—Sarajevans have a specific and not unproblematic way of dismissing ethnic difference. Nevertheless, they do have to justify their sidelining of ethnic tensions. For example, some critics argued that “Citizens” were wasting time struggling against Samir Silajdžić and Semiha Borovac, when the real problem was the corrupt, all-powerful leader of Bosnian Serbs, Milorad Dodik and his anti-Bosnian agenda. Yet most members of “Citizens” were adamant about one thing: it was important to start locally, with the level of government that had the most impact on one's daily life. “A shirt was closer than the jacket” (as one of my informants put it). Another female activist joked that the only thing she was interested in was the Canton of Sarajevo. In this way, activists tried to relativize nationalism, and return the political agenda to local problems, which in any case weren't ethnonational. They cleverly refused the grounds of political argumentation which was based in the rhetoric of “vital national interests” and went after something much more specific. A crucial moment for this reformulation of the basis for discourse, was the broadcasting of a reportage about Denis Mrnjavac's murder by on a private TV station from Croatia, NOVA TV, which framed the event it in terms of ethnically motivated crime (Muslim young delinquents killing a Croatian young man). Since this spin was completely falsified--the murder was random-- the story resulted in massive public outrage, critical statements by the leaders of Croatian and Catholic community in Sarajevo, articles by journalists, etc. Many Sarajevans felt it necessary to proclaim that this was not a problem of a national minority, but everyone who lived in the city (hence the parole “We are all Denis”). In a country where all political events get framed in terms of national interests, the rejection of this interpretation of the boy's murder was a major victory for anti-nationalist politics. The second

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This close-nit nature of their bond lead to some criticism from external observers. In September and October, “Citizens” started organizing street actions and performances, which were very theatrical, rich in props and relied on humor, irony and sarcasm. A number of people with whom I talked after these events took place, told me they felt much of their content seemed like “private jokes” shared among insiders, but had no greater relevance among other Sarajevo residents. Some critics went as far to say that humor and irony no longer worked in Bosnia as tools of political intervention, because “narod” did not get it. People, one of my interlocutors said, understood only the simplest messages. My own position on this question of strategy is not yet fully formed: on the one hand, I've observed that these performances can be very effective if their message is simple and short, but I've also seen that any complex scenarios easily get misunderstood.

accomplishment of the protest is the fact they managed to mobilize a significant portion of the population around the issue that was not of their immediate, private interest.<sup>25</sup>

Several of the people I talked to commented that protests as massive and powerful as these would not have been possible even a year ago, given the combined demoralizing and demobilizing effects of the difficult postwar atmosphere and the recently reinvigorated rhetorical wars between leading nationalist politicians. Whatever the virtues and the shortcomings of this mobilization were, the protests inaugurated a different phase for post-war politics in the capitol. As one of my informants said (notably before the resignation of the prime minister of the Canton of Sarajevo): "The protests changed nothing, and they changed everything. The demands were no met, yet no politician today feels like they can any longer do everything they please." My informants likewise remembered that these protests were the largest, most organized political gatherings of citizens in Bosnia's capitol since the peace marches of 1992. All of them took great pride in the fact they managed through their work to bring together such diverse layers of the city's population, crossing generational, professional, class and political divides. One of the women with whom I conducted an interview, a highly educated, mid-aged, self-described libertarian described the psychological and emotional work she had to do to finally come to terms with the fact she was going out to protest with people with whom she essentially did not agree on any political issues, "except the fact everything was wrong". Eventually, she realized that she will have to accept this, if this critical mass is to be turned into a social movement.

The effects of protests can also be assessed through the results of local elections on October 5, as well as through the eventual resignation of the prime minister Samir Silajdžić. The overall results of the elections were at the same time disappointing and hopeful. On the one hand, the anticipated victory of the nationalist parties such as the SDA (oldest nationalist party of Bosnian Muslims) and SNSD (the dominant Serb party in Republika Srpska, League of Independent Social Democrats, which is now more nationalist than social-democratic) did not surprise anyone<sup>26</sup>. But the catastrophic loss of Haris Silajdžić's Stranka za BiH <sup>27</sup>(Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina) which won a landslide victory in 2006 among Bosnian Muslims, and was also responsible for the subsequent rise of tensions with the leaders of Bosnian Serbs, proved that even Bosnian Muslims were no longer impressed with Silajdžić's aggressive and

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The murder also provoked a series of public debates about youth delinquency, where professional social workers, legislators, members of the executive and juridical branches came together to discuss the problem. This was very significant because it proved wrong those who have expressed doubts that something like the public sphere in a Deweyan sense actually exists in Bosnia. More research and reflection is needed to make sense of this issue.

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Professor Asim Mujkić notes that parties have multiplied, but that this has not led to further pluralization of political options, because we are merely seeing an increase in numbers of nationalist parties which are now struggling for domination within their respective ethnonational block. The principles remain the same while the faces and names change.

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It won mere 85,000 votes, more than three times less than SDA and lost a percentage of mandates across the Federation.

uncompromising politics. When I first arrived in Sarajevo, I asked one of my former informants, a veteran Sarajevo activists, whether the elections would matter. He told me then that “unless Hare (Haris Silajdžić) falls, and on a steep slope, we (meaning the protesters) will have been doing all this for nothing.” Another woman, a director of an organization in Sarajevo, said that her hope for change will continue, only if the elections show that the grip of SNSD and SzaBiH is not as strong as it seems. Since SNSD also did not do as well as they were announcing (although they notably did much, much better than SzaBiH, taking the second largest block of votes), one could say that these activists still have reasons for hope. However, when it comes to Sarajevo, electoral results remain more ambiguous. The four municipalities of Sarajevo had some of the lowest turn out rates in the country (hovering around 30%, against the national average of 56%), a trend which was also present in other urban centers, such as Tuzla. Commentators as well as random people I talked to seemed to believe this was not an accident: that citizens, by not voting, were sending a message to the politicians about what they thought of them and their work. Significantly, throughout Bosnia and in Sarajevo in particular, smaller non nationalist parties like Betterment through Work Party, Bosnian Patriotic Party<sup>28</sup>, and Nasa Stranka (Our Party)<sup>29</sup> won more representation at all levels of government, which was seen as a positive trend. The real shock happened when on October 9, Prime Minister Samir Silajdžić resigned, stepping down from his position as the head of government in the Canton of Sarajevo. Although residents of Sarajevo and citizen-activists recognized his resignation as a result of internal pressure in his party (SzaBiH)<sup>30</sup>, they did not hide their amazement and happiness over this course of development. “Citizens” were very realistic about the causes of this resignation and tried to remain skeptical of their power to influence this decision in private conversations. However, publicly, they took every opportunity to claim a part of the responsibility for this, as they saw it, major victory of their movement. They hoped the rest of the citizens would take this event as a sign that they can change things, and will join them in the future. One of the members of the group told me she received many telephone calls after the resignation from random friends and acquaintances who were initially not supportive of her protesting activities, but wanted to now congratulate her and her fellow activists “kicking the jerk out.”

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BPS is an odd party; it is populist, sometimes aligning itself with the left, and sometimes with the right. Its slogan for the election campaign this year was “Honesty and Justice”

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The recent appearance of Our Party on the Bosnian political scenes constituted a major event, both for the media but also for the local political scene. The party grew out of local, Sarajevo frustrations with Social Democrats, and particularly their leader Zlatko Lagumdžija who is seen as a very smart man but a tone-deaf politician in love with being in charge. The idea emerged among Sarajevo creme-de-la-creme intelligencia and cultural workers, including film directors Danis Tanović and Dino Mustafić, even before the protest fever shook up Sarajevo. Most of those involved felt that the moment was ripe for a creation of a “true alternative” to nationalists and the SDP alike. According to insiders into the processes, the whole thing fell apart when leadership of GROZD or Center for Promotion of Civil Society, headed by Fahir Šero, took over the idea and placed themselves in decision making positions. ACIPS, magazine “Dani”, various other organizations and individuals involved in the original initiative, pulled out. After initial troubles with fundraising, the party kicked off its campaign in full swing (especially in Sarajevo) to in the end win about 18, 000 votes and one municipal director’s office.

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Samir Silajdžić’s unpopularity was probably interpreted as one of the many reasons for the Party’s debacle at the elections.

Whether this small and mixed success of the protests in obtaining a resignation of the prime minister will make way for new activist campaigns remains to be seen. But the protests show there is interest and will among one significant portion of Sarajevans to take to both democratic and undemocratic means of exerting pressure on the government to solve their immediate problems. I would refrain from making predictions about a possible “citizen revolution” and remain wary of interpreting these events in relation to other “color revolutions” in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (which are very much a part of popular discourse in Bosnia too, particularly when it comes to Soros). What is important to consider is that new ways of understanding and doing politics are developing, that challenge the limits imposed by nationalist ideologies. “Action of Citizens” and affiliated groups and individuals are only a social movement in potentia, and much of their success depends on their ability to resolve internal differences and to direct their limited capacities towards the right and most achievable goals. They must also do more to reach and mobilize other followers, who do not yet harbor sympathies toward them, and push their supporters to themselves take a more active part in their activities. “Citizens” are children of the current, slippery political moment in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is for now confined to Sarajevo. They are a part of a political contingent which has always existed, but which was rendered invisible with the arrival of war.

#### **Suggestions for Future Research:**

Four months is a grossly inadequate period of time to engage in an ethnographic study of processes and groups that are so flexible, dispersed, disorganized, and heterogeneous as the ones I had the opportunity to study. As I prepare to submit this report, a month after the official end of my IREX tenure, I am watching a new protest campaign begin in Sarajevo, which has as its goal showcasing citizen and non-governmental sector support to journalists and police cracking down on organized crime. The events of the past year have stirred up local politics and fundamentally changed attitudes of one sector of the city's population which has become permanently politically agitated. It is too early to tell whether this atmosphere will remain and whether it will engender more organizing and more campaigns, and finally whether all this activity will bear fruit, in terms of actual reforms these groups demand. Further ethnographic research is needed to trace the evolution (or demise) of these political mobilizations and the effects they will have on Bosnian politics as a whole. It is especially important to begin studying forms of political engagement existent and developing in smaller towns and villages across Bosnia-Herzegovina, and especially in Republika Srpska.

Because post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is perceived to be so dysfunctional in terms of its political (dis)organization, large and multilayered administrative apparatus, lack of economic coordination and planning, widespread corruption and ethnic tensions, majority of analyses, from those provided by researchers and policy experts, to those made by people on the street, begins a priori with the conclusion that all of this needs to be changed. While this is probably true, it is also important to pay attention to practices, discourses, processes and objects of interests that are emerging amidst this fragmentation and disorganization, which fulfill certain functions and carry very specific meanings in the local context. Even if those practices fall short from desired or normative ones (particularly when it comes to epistemologically and ideologically loaded categories such as democratization, market economy, civil society), they are not aberrations, failures or inadequate realizations of the ideal, but ethnographic facts and reflections of different social, economic and political histories. Much work remains on understanding what kinds of social forms Dayton Agreement not prevented from emerging, but actually enabled (and they are not all socially destructive). In my view, both scholars and policy makers should consider this, particularly when it comes to understanding local political transformations and processes of democratization and reform in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### **Recommendations for the US Policy Community:**

In recent years, a number of new political claims and groups organized around them have been appearing in Bosnian-Herzegovina including wartime veterans, workers of newly privatized firms stripped off their rights, citizens demanding the return of their foreign currency savings, etc. This is the first time a group of citizens of such heterogeneous backgrounds came together not to pursue some immediate, private interest but to address an issue considered to be of public importance, such as the rise of youth crime and delinquency. While the murders that prompted the protests did inspire citizen outcry (especially in terms of concerns for public safety), the causes of political mobilization were much more complex and multilayered, and are a product of multiple frustrations with the work of government, behavior of politicians, perceived deterioration of the quality of life, the destructiveness of nationalist rhetoric and lack of substantive political programs, and the general atmosphere in society. The newly “awoken” Bosnian citizens, want not only democratization and more governmental accountability, but also a government concerned with their safety, security and quality of life. Their expectations are very high, in part because they remember much better lives during the socialist era, but also because they see themselves as Europeans<sup>31</sup>.

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Oddly enough, although most Bosnians strongly support EU integration, as of yet, no one among citizen groups has done enough to begin “owning this agenda.” During one of the Soros initiated meetings, an American consultant suggested to organizational representatives that they pick Bosnia’s EU membership as the central concern in the future lobbying activities. This suggestion fell on deaf ears.

Latest policy reports, as well as recent articles by Holbrook and Ashdown, seem to suggest that Bosnia is at a brink of a partition or worse, a new war. Considering what I have learned in the field, I would say such prognoses are alarmist and do not reflect the actual political atmosphere on local levels. After over two years of rhetorical blitzkrieg between Dodik and Haris Silajdžić, most of residents of Bosnia I have come to know, have began ignoring all media coverage of their exchanges. At this stage, post-war tensions are giving way to a new pragmatism, where social practice is becoming reoriented to present exigencies and the demands of the future. This is perhaps best seen in the increased marginalization of Haris Silajdžić and his Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina, which hold an aggressive stance on centralization and dissolution of entities (the Federation and Republika Srpska). Latest meeting in the town of Odžak, where the leaders of SDA, SNSD and HDZ managed to come to an agreement on constitutional reform without the presence of SzaBiH, further proves that point. Whether similar trends –citizen approval of disavowal of national exclusivism in favor of political compromise--exist in Republika Srpska is difficult to say without close ethnographic investigation (media reports indicate otherwise). Despite their seeming violent opposition to each other, nationalist parties nevertheless exist in a symbiotic relationship (they need each other in order to get votes, and maintain national difference as a basis for politics). Future political battles will be fought between parties fighting for dominance within their respective nationalist blocks (for example, SNSD against SDS in RS). Meanwhile, unless something dramatic happens, Bosnians will hang in permanent state of suspension and deferral.<sup>32</sup>

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Zdravko Grebo, a prominent Sarajevan professor and intellectual figure, is known to say "We (Bosnia) will not fall apart, but there will be no progress either." I believe his assessment to be right and to the point.