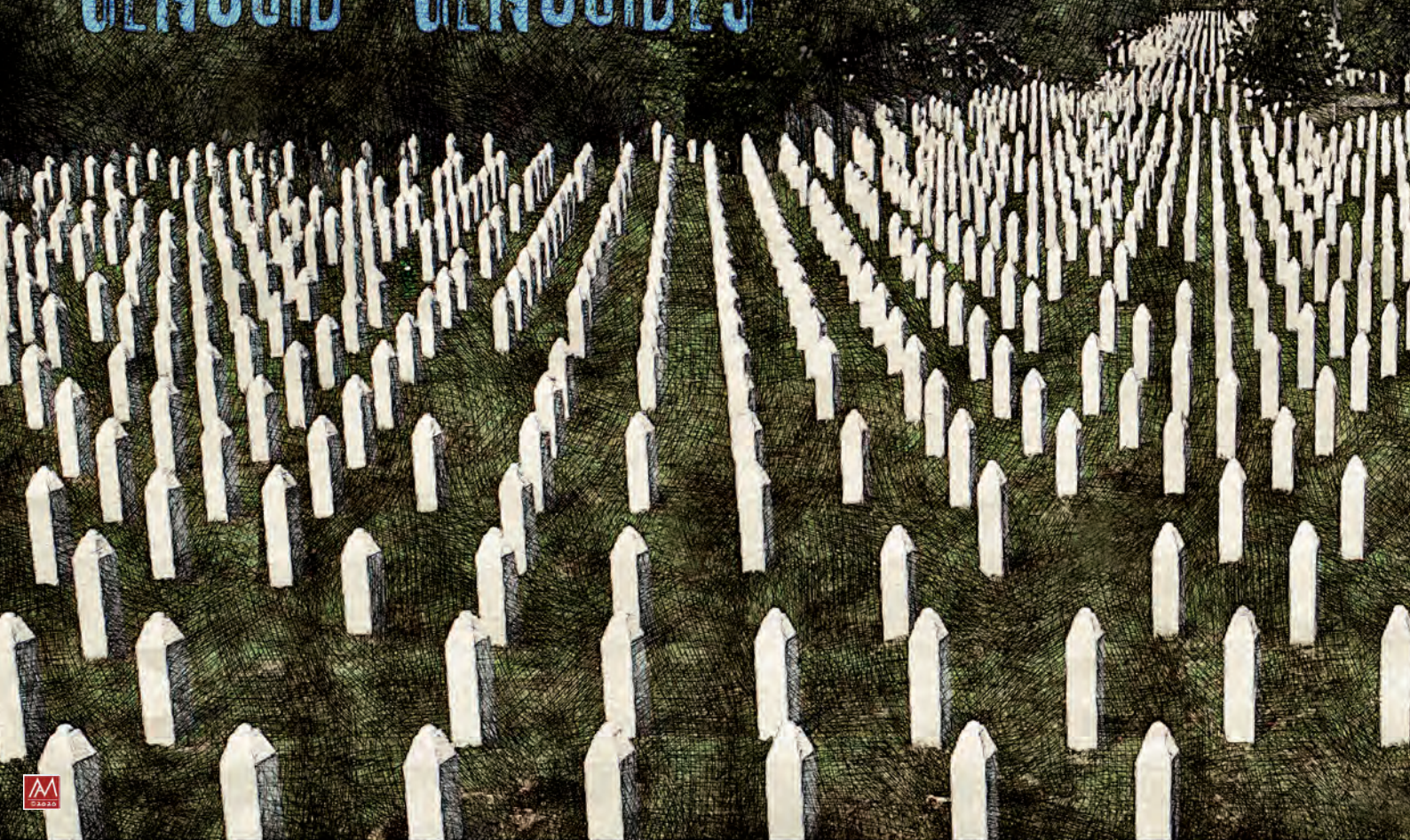


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Asim ZUBČEVIĆ

SEDAM IZAZOVA PRED BOSNOM I NJEZINIM MUSLIMANIMA
SEVEN CHALLENGES FACING BOSNIA AND HER MUSLIMS

Abstract

This article is examining seven challenges facing Bosnia as state and society. Overcoming them will determine if a way out of the current conditions is found. Although these challenges concern all the people of Bosnia, they seem to be of crucial significance for Bosnia's Muslims.

Key words: *Bosnia, Bosnian Muslims, Bosniaks, Bosnian history, state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosnian society, Bosnian politics, the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, south east Europe, the Balkans*

SEVEN CHALLENGES FACING BOSNIA AND HER MUSLIMS

Introduction

In the past two centuries, during which the current state of Europe came into being, the Muslims of south east Europe (Albanians, Bosniaks, Roma, Pomaks, Turks as well as many others whose ethnic belonging is hard to establish since it is clear that there are Montenegrin, Serbian, Macedonian, Romanian, Greek and Turkish Muslims who could not or cannot identify with the afore-mentioned ethnic labels) have suffered greatly. When it comes to the Bosniaks, or better said – the Bosnian people’s Muslims – it is clear that in this period they have experienced great suffering including the repeated cases of genocide. There has been no clear answer to their condition. However, an answer can only be found through persistent, systematically conducted and open conversation among them. No such conversation has taken place to this day. It is possible to chart quite clearly and irrefutably the process of the disappearance of Muslims over the past two centuries in various parts of south east Europe, even in Bosnia herself.^{▼1} There are regions within the present borders of the sovereign Bosnian state where they have been almost completely uprooted (eg. in the towns and villages of east and west Herzegovina). There is no more urgent question to which the earlier mentioned open conversation should seek an answer than this: what are the key causes of the suffering experienced by Bosnia’s Muslims, of the failure to stop it and to ensure their right to life and happiness?

In attempt to answer this question, this article is examining seven challenges facing Bosnia as state and society. Overcoming them will determine if a way out of the current conditions is found. Although these challenges concern all the people of Bosnia, they seem to be of crucial significance for Bosnia’s Muslims.

^{▼1} See the following works by Safet Bandžović: *Bošnjaci i Turska: deosmanizacija Balkana i muhadžirski pokreti u XX stoljeću*, Sarajevo: vlastita naklada, 2014; *Deosmanizacija Balkana i Bošnjaci: ratovi i muhadžirska pribježišta (1876–1923.)*, Sarajevo: vlastita naklada, 2013; Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922*, Princeton, N. J: The Darwin Press, 1995.

First challenge: The survival of and strengthening of the Bosnian state

during the past two centuries the Bosnian people's Muslims had neither a clear awareness about the state that would ensure their survival and life of freedom, nor a political strategy for relating to it. Therefore, this author regards the attitude towards the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina^{▼2} to be the key precondition for a struggle for their future and that includes changing the prevailing perceptions.

It has been nearly 32 years since Bosnia gained independence and became a UN member and more than 28 years since the signing of the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords, which ended the three and half years long war against Bosnia 1992-95. Yet, remarkably, there is still an insufficiently developed awareness about the importance of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina as the optimum framework for the survival of all its citizens, including those who view it as the guarantor of survival for them and their children against attempts at its weakening and destruction. This can be seen in the examples of acquiescence in the distribution of public property^{▼3} along ethnic and party lines, the organized appropriation of public funds, the undermining of the instruments of state such as judiciary and in the attitude of state representatives towards other states and international organizations, which are all too-often characterized by an absence of a planned and steadfast course of action that is hard to understand.

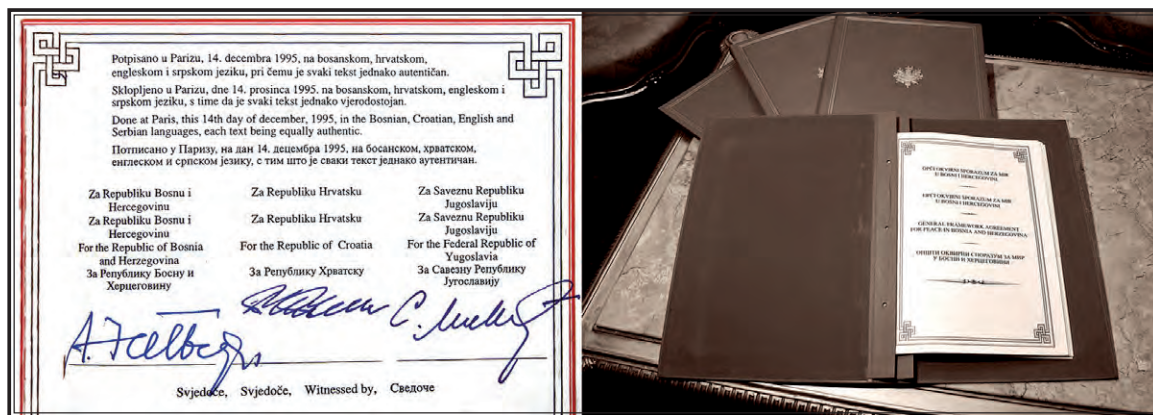


ILLUSTRATION ~ 28 years have passed since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

ILUSTRACIJA - Od potpisivanja Dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma proteklo je 28 godina. (Arhiv Akšamija)

^{▼2} In this text the expression „Bosnian-Herzegovinian“ is used occasionally for the Bosnian state in accordance with its official name following the signing of the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords in 1995. More on the baselessness and harmfulness of the double-barrel name of our country see: Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, „Laž Hercegovinstva“; in: *O antibosanstvu: muke života u tuđim predstavama*, Sarajevo: Connectum, 2018, 33–39.

^{▼3} In his writings Rasim Gačanović highlights the repeated encroachments on our country's sovereignty in the field of energy, for example: Rasim Gačanović, „Bosanska geografija: bosanski i bošnjački identiteti“, *Godišnjak BZK Preporod*, XIX (2019): 106–145. Particularly relevant is his most recent article „Razaranje i odbrana bosanskohercegovačkog naroda i njegove države: energetske strategije i antistrategije“, *Forum Bosnae*, 103 (2023), 906–929.

Second challenge: Survival and development of the Bosnian people's Muslims

The survival and development of the Bosnian people's Muslims^{▼4} – which does not preclude in any way the equal rights to all those who are part of that people – are possible only within a sovereign state, a participant in the international legal order with all of its territory. Any attempt at undermining the state from within or without represents a threat to the survival of the Bosnian people's Muslims. There are many examples of the attempts to cut off the Bosnian people's Muslims from any awareness of the crucial importance of the state as the framework for their survival and development.

Here it needs to be stressed that the Islamic Community bears a particular responsibility for the survival of Bosnia's Muslims. The spiritual health of Bosnia's Muslims depends on the extent to which the Islamic Community is successful in fulfilling its task of cultivating ethical values in the new generations and of finding theologically authentic answers to the challenges of living in our times. Today, enjoying a full freedom, the space for action has never been greater and so has the responsibility for the current conditions of the people and society.^{▼5}



ILLUSTRATION – The object of the administrative building of Rijaset Islamic Community in Sarajevo.

ILUSTRACIJA – Objekat upravne zgrada Rijaseta Islamske zajednice u Sarajevu. (Arhiv Akšamija)

^{▼4} The expression “Bosnian people's Muslims” is based on the view that there is a historically, linguistically, culturally and politically a single people living in Bosnia – the Bosnian people – who adhere to various religious, ethnic and other forms of belonging which are not mutually exclusive. For more on the question of labelling the Bosnian Muslims as a separate group see: Šaćir Filandra, *Bošnjaci nakon socijalizma: o bošnjačkom identitetu u postjugoslavenskom dobu*, Sarajevo – Zagreb: BZK “Preporod” – Synopsis, 2012, 131–240. On the question of the Bosnian nation see especially the chapter “Bosanska nacija”, 444–52 and, Esad Zgodić, *Ideja bosanske nacije*, Sarajevo: Zaliha, 2008. On Bosnianhood as a historically founded, culturally witnessed and politically desirable framework for the people of Bosnia see: Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *Bauk bosanstva: u anesteziji i poslije*, Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2022; Also by the same author, *O antibosanstvu: muke života u tuđim predstavama*.

^{▼5} Among the few works on the role and work of the Islamic Community since Dayton one can mention the following: Dževad Hodžić, *Post restante: kuda ide Islamska zajednica?*, Sarajevo: Tugra, 2005; Samir Beglerović, “Islamska zajednica pred izazovom i nužnosti transformacije institucija: potreba za sržnim izmjenama ustava”, *Glasnik Rijasetu Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini*, 3-4 (2012): 274–288; Aziz Kadribegović, Ahmet Alibašić and Ekrem Tucaković, ed., *Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini: dvije decenije reisu-l-uleme dr. Mustafe Cerića*, Sarajevo: Centar za napredne studije, 2012.

Third challenge: **The terror of ignorance and of the ignorant**

addressing the above-mentioned issues is possible only with the insights based on scholarship and humanities as have been reached by the world's most developed countries. Today the Bosnian people's Muslims stand nearly completely outside of those international currents. They keep recycling or placing under taboo their utterly outdated knowledge of politics, culture and economy. Their investment into science is negligible and consequently their interpretations of their condition in their own state and in the world is really a caricature. That causes arrogance and intolerance towards those who advocate the growth of the communities of communication, in which the rights of every individual to speak, be heard, be responsible for their words and accept critical re-examination of what they stand for, including the right to respond to their critics in the same way and in the same place.



ILLUSTRATION – Bosnian Muslims have expressed efforts to improve their position in culture.

ILUSTRACIJA – Muslimani bosanskog naroda imaju izražena nastojanja za poboljšanje svog položaja u kulturi.

Fourth challenge: Emigration to foreign representations of oneself

In the previous two centuries, during which the processes of awakening and liberation of Europe's peoples have been taking place the relationship with Muslims was rooted in the paradigm of their orientalism and, consequently, of their not being included into European processes of awakening and liberation. This is the root cause for the rise of an emotional response to utopian images of a universal Muslim community, Arabdom, Turkdom and so on among them.^{▼6} While neighbouring peoples established their cultural and political awakening on a relationship with their land and state as their *telos* and in discovering their people's genius in language and folk culture, Bosnian people's Muslims became increasingly self-alienated. Even today the conditions concerning understanding Bosnian history, culture, language and art lie outside the above-mentioned debates that would include the intellectual community. Those debates continue to be in the hands of the so-called scholars whose relevancy has not been tested within a communicative community. There are no such kinds of scholarship and knowledge in the developed world, nor can there be.



ILLUSTRATION ~ The Muslims of the Bosnian people were alienated from basing their cultural and political awareness on their country and state as a *telos*.

ILUSTRACIJA ~ Muslimani bosanskog naroda su bili otuđeni od toga da svoje kulturno i političko osvješćenje temelje prema svojoj zemlji i državi kao *telosu*. (Arhiv Akšamija)

^{▼6} Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, "Orijentalizam, islamizam i osmanizam"; in: *Bauk bosanstva: u anesteziji i poslije*, 96–102; Also by the same author, "Rasizam i orijentalizam"; in: *O antibosanstvu: muke života u tuđim predstavama*, 59–63.

Fifth challenge: A new historical picture of themselves

Although the Bosnian people's Muslims are neither old nor newly arrived in this state, but have been present here throughout its existence, they are yet to form a picture of their history and uninterrupted presence since the early middle ages and through the various forms of Bosnian Christianity with their different christologies and ecclesiologies. And they are still emotionally completely opposed to their Christian forefathers, whose heirs they are *de facto* and *de iure*, and to their culture and politics. For example, Bosnian people's Muslim are excited about the fact that their forefathers, Christians of whichever denomination, are buried under the medieval stone slabs (stecći) and that they could have accepted Muhammad p.b.u.h. as God's messenger and everything connected with him precisely out of who they were and as a confirmation of what they had already had in their Christian heritage.⁷



ILLUSTRATION - Even today, the Muslims of the Bosnian people are emotionally completely opposed to their Christian ancestors, their culture and politics, whose *de facto* and *de iure* heirs they are.

⁷ For more on this see the writings of Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, for example: *Hval i Djeva: sabiranje rasutog*, 3, Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2011, 18–35. The work is available in English as: *The Praised and the Virgin*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2015.

Although they have undoubtedly experienced suffering which in modern legal categories can be shown to be genocide, they have no clear understanding of the underlining genocidal ideology which is one of the preconditions for genocide to happen. The most recent mass crimes perpetrated against Bosnian people's Muslims have partly been established and judged to constitute a genocide. But, among the Bosnian people's Muslims there is no clear epistemological framework of that which in their culture and politics as well as in the culture and politics of their neighbours serves an ideology of genocide. Committing the crime of genocide and related crimes always takes a relatively short time. The perpetrators may be punished, as some of them have been, but the ideology of genocide lives both before and after. For the survivors to prevent a repetition of the crime they must have a clear understanding of the ideology of genocide because it creates conditions for the crime to happen again.

All through their existence, Bosnian people's Muslims could not and cannot be isolated, either diachronically and synchronically. Their forefathers were Christians and a majority of their neighbours today are Christians, too. They cannot know themselves in their past, nor in their present without having a serious relationship with Christians, without studying everything that is connected with Christians and without presenting themselves in a way which is not menacing or threatening.

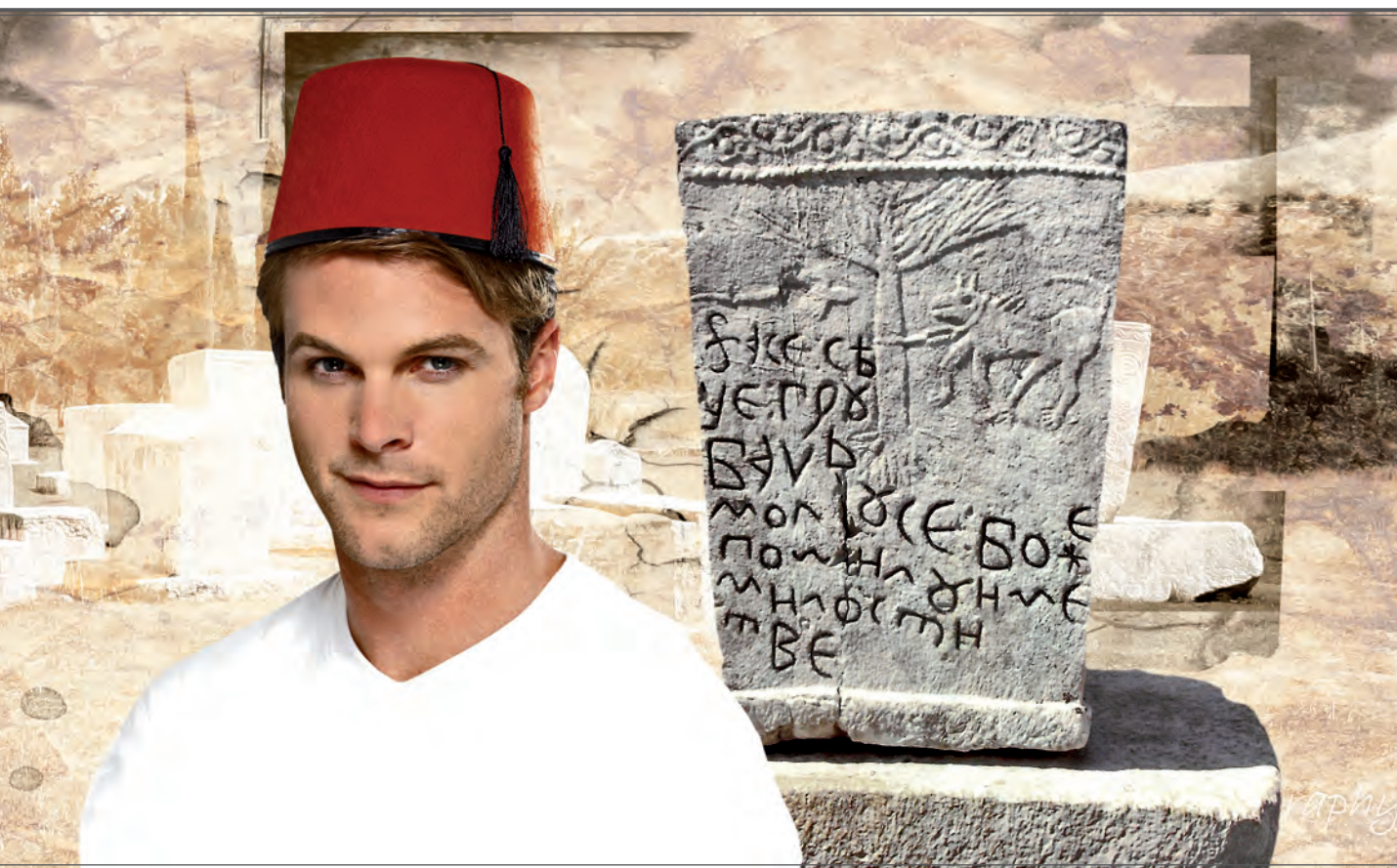


ILLUSTRATION ~ The Muslims of the Bosnian people are excited by the fact that their ancestors, Christians, are resting under the stećci, and that they are exactly who they were and accepted Islam.

Sixth challenge: **Weak military protection**

In the last war against the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its people, the Muslims were largely unarmed and incapable for systematic defence. The institution of state is therefore a heroic achievement, which under extremely difficult circumstances preserved police as an organised form and, based on law, established army and civil defence and in that way prevented the destruction of the state and its people. What matters now is to prevent reducing the defence of the Bosnian people to para-state defence organisations, which was one of the aggressor's key aims.

Today the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina has a constitutionally guaranteed right to defence from possible destructive acts from within or without its borders and in that regard it enjoys the guarantees made by the international community. However weak its defence system may be, one should seek guarantees only within it. Its weakening and disappearance is in the interest of those forces that waged war against the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina and its people. Any attempt to advocate and conduct any form of organisation of future defence outside of state structures poses a threat to the survival of the state and Bosnian people's Muslims. What is more, any form of para state activity in any part of society whose existence and development is guaranteed by state, represents an anti-Bosnian, and therefore an anti-Muslim, venture. ▼⁸

Seventh challenge: **Trust building**

Based on everything mentioned before, it does not follow that Bosnian people's Muslims, citizens of the Bosnian state, are in any way limited in working towards removing mistrust in their own future. It is up to them to speak up publicly about all the questions that threaten their rights and their survival and to formulate such questions in public forums in accordance with the Constitution and related documents. Any form of autistic politics undermines the state whose weakening threatens the survival of Bosnian people's Muslims. No social or political unit can survive without building and strengthening trust and that includes state. Reconstructing social fabric through by through trust building is a precondition and guarantor of the survival of the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. ▼⁹

▼⁸ And yet Bosnia's neighbours continue to arm, particularly Serbia: Zorica Ilić, "Za kakvu budućnost se sprema Srbija?", *Deutsche Welle* [online]. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/hr/za-kakvu-budu%C4%87nost-se-sprema-srbija/a-66848104> (accessed 28. 12. 2023.)

▼⁹ Although published years ago, the UNDP report on Bosnia seems as relevant for the issue of social trust in our society as it was when in 2007: Maida Fetahagić i dr., *Socijalna uključenost u Bosni i Hercegovini: izvještaj o humanom razvoju 2007*. Available at: <https://www.ibhi.ba/Documents/Publikacije/2007/NHDRBiHSocInclusion2007bos.pdf> (accessed 8. 1. 2024)

Final words

no people has ever disappeared just because its enemies were strong, but because it lacked self-awareness. Without such an awareness and without offering a compelling vision of Bosnia, her people, especially her youth, will give up on building a better future for their homeland and will keep searching happiness in other parts of the world. It remains to be seen if the present leaders and elites of the Bosnian state and society, particularly the Muslims, will rise to the occasion and respond to the needs of time and the aforementioned challenges.

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