

## **Sandzak Severed**

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Links between the Sandzak and the rest of Serbia have been severed by NATO bombing, and its Muslims continue to leave.

NATO spared the Sandzak, a predominantly Muslim region of Serbia, during the first 10 days of its air offensive against Yugoslavia.

Now, however, the residents of Novi Pazar, the region's most populous municipality, have come to expect attacks almost every night.

Judging by the plumes of smoke that billowed over the northern end of the town, it seems that the army barracks by Novopazarska Banja took another hit April 30. During an earlier attack on the same target, local officials reported that some 30 private houses were damaged.

During one night, in mid-April, 18 missiles struck Novi Pazar's other barracks, close to the town centre. On that occasion, the nearby private houses sustained collateral damage and the headmaster of one of Novi Pazar's primary schools reported that almost all the windows in his school had been shattered.

On several occasions NATO war planes have also attacked the Sjenica municipality, disabling a military airport, and damaging some radar systems. The bridge that links the Nova Varos-Prijepolje motorway with Priboj was damaged and cut in the Nova Varos municipality, as was the Belgrade-Bar railroad.

All communication--road and rail--between the Sandzak and the rest of Serbia was finally severed with the destruction of the last bridge on the Ibar highway, some 30 kilometres away from Novi Pazar in the direction of Belgrade. The bridges in Zubin Potok and Leposavic, leading towards Kosovo, had been destroyed earlier.

As a consequence, milk and milk products, that used to be come from the Kragujevac dairy, are now in short supply in Novi Pazar.

The only road connection between the Sandzak--which straddles Serbia and Montenegro and borders both Bosnia and Kosovo--and the rest of the world now runs through Montenegro. Since Podgorica has defied Belgrade and refused to impose a state of war, Muslims from the Sandzak, including males of military age, are able to make their through Montenegro across Republika Srpska to Sarajevo in Bosnia.

Muslims began moving out of the Sandzak as soon as Serb forces launched their ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosovo, fearing that they would be next in line. The exodus has intensified since April 18 when the Yugoslav Army killed five Kosovo refugees in the village of Kaludjerski Laz in the Montenegrin municipality of Rozaje.

Muslims living in the five Sandzak municipalities in Montenegro are leaving in especially large numbers fearing that they would bear the brunt of a possible conflict between Milosevic loyalists and the Montenegrin authorities. The north of Montenegro, where the Muslims live, is considered to be a stronghold of Momir Bulatovic, Yugoslavia's prime minister and a close ally of Slobodan Milosevic.

No one knows exactly how many Muslims have left the Sandzak since the beginning of NATO's bombing campaign. However, most estimates suggest that the figure is greater than 20,000.

The Yugoslav Army has been calling up Serb reservists in the Sandzak and has placed seven check-points on the 60 kilometres of road between Novi Pazar and Rozaje.

To date, however, there has only been one incident between the Yugoslav Army and the Muslim population. The commander of the Yugoslav Army's Uzice Corps, Col. Gruica Davidovic, entered the town hall in Tutin, a municipality whose population is 98 per cent Muslim, and removed all insignia with golden lilies and crescents, deemed Muslim.

Elsewhere, the Yugoslav Army has chosen to maintain good relations with the Muslim population and has not been mobilising Muslim males of military age. Moreover, the Yugoslav Army points out that it has generally been well-received in the Sandzak, and that some Muslims have even turned over their houses for military use.

Some 350 private businessmen and traders from Novi Pazar have also participated in a funding drive for the Yugoslav Army, contributing some 100,000 German marks. The second stage of this drive is currently under way and is expected to raise a further 40,000 German marks.

Such financial support is likely to dry up shortly. The economy in Novi Pazar, as throughout Serbia, is on the verge of the total collapse.

Factories, which for the past decade have manufactured of bogus designer jeans and footwear, now lie idle. Many owners have transferred the machines and equipment to Bosnia, where they plan to resume production. Huge quantities of unsold stock remain in warehouses in Novi Pazar. Goods sold on credit to be paid by instalments may never be paid for.

Despite the economic slowdown, private firms are still obliged to continue paying taxes and other dues. Even small retail-stores have to pay taxes every fifth day. Novi Pazar's bars and restaurants are obliged to close by 8 o'clock in the evening. After that time the town becomes eerily quiet. Police patrol the streets and few civilians venture out.

According to the 1991 census, 420,000 people lived in the Sandzak--278,000 in Serbia and 162,000 in Montenegro--of whom 54 per cent were Muslims. The population prior to NATO's bombing campaign was already probably considerably lower since as many as 50,000 Muslims are believed to have moved out during the Bosnian war.

The Sandzak, which takes its name from the Turkish word for military district, was administratively part of Bosnia within the Ottoman Empire until 1878. At the Congress of Berlin of that year, the Great Powers decided to leave the Sandzak within the Ottoman Empire, but allowed Austria-Hungary to deploy troops in part of the region. It was seized by Serbia and Montenegro in the first Balkan war of 1912.

Six municipalities of the Sandzak are in Serbia and five in Montenegro, all of which are ethnically mixed. Muslims form 2.7 per cent of the population in Serbia and 14.6 per cent in Montenegro, and 3.2 per cent overall in rump Yugoslavia.

The author is a journalist in Novi Pazar.

**Location:** Serbia  
Kosovo  
Bosnia and  
Herzegovina

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