



Bosniaks, Muslims, Bosnians

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Whenever there is an article in newspapers about the nations who live in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is almost always about Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims, i.e. about the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic. Besides, my acquaintances here in Chicago often ask me how it is possible that I am a Bosniak, a Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian at the same time. For many it is a kind of a riddle.

This is my answer. On the Balkans and especially in Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) it has been persistently suggested over the years that when talking about Bosnian Muslims it has almost always been only about religious ones. This way the nationality of almost 2 million Bosnian Muslims has been ignored. My father, Mensur Seferovic- author and historian, wrote about that phenomena. There are more religious Muslims in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, especially among Albanians, Gypsies, Turks and others.

By the constitution of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnian Muslims as a nation got the official name- Bosniaks. Bosnian Muslims, Slavs by origin, who live in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, in the USA or anywhere else in the world should be referred to as Bosniaks. This way the ethnicity and religiousness are separated. Now Bosniaks, the religious ones and atheists, exist equally with Serbs, Orthodox and atheists, and with Croats, Catholics and atheists. Furthermore, all three nations in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs are at the same time Bosnians as well, because they live on the same geographic territory and in one country, The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which most of them can show by owning a Bosnian passport.

On the basis of all said, I am a Bosniak, if I am religious, I can say I am a Muslim, which is the case with vast majority of Bosniaks. At the same time I am a Bosnian because I was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo). But I am not a Turk* or a Poturica*. During the last war these names were used by the aggressor to refer to Bosniaks, although nobody of Bosniaks can speak Turkish except for few ones and Turkish teachers. Where does this wrong and biased name come from?

Prof. A. Peco, a member of the Bosnian Academy of Arts and Sciences, writes that “all our ancestors were pagans” and that various religions came from other countries. By converting to one of those religions our ancestors didn’t lose one of the important characteristics of their ethnicity-they didn’t lose their Slav languages. Further, Prof. A. Peco says that “since the islamization (Turks were on the Balkans, Serbia as well, for 500 years) didn’t imply losing their Slav ethnicity, there is no justification neither linguistic nor historical, for using the names like poturica*, poturcernjak*, and poturciti se*” just like “it

wouldn't be justified to say that converting to Orthodoxy would imply becoming a Greek or that converting to Catholicism would imply becoming a Roman." In other words, "in all these cases people convert to a particular religion and they don't lose their nationality."

Turks used the name Bosniaks in order to make a clear distinction between the native Bosnians who converted to Islam and Turks. The name Bosniak is the old name (modified by Turks) which comes from Bosnianin, the name for a man from Bosnia. Bosniaks were not understood even by Ottoman imperial officers in the 18th century and later in the conflicts with the sultan army which occurred because Bosniaks wanted to have their autonomy within the Turkish Empire. A Turkish statesman and historian, Jevdet Pasha Ahmed (1822-1895) wrote "it is pity that we haven't made them become Turks".

In spite of the fact that in that long period Turks couldn't impose their name and language together with their religion on Bosniaks, Bosniaks have been not only referred to as Turks*, poturice*, or Orientals*, but also they have been moved from their ancient homes by force.

A fortunate circumstance is that Bosniaks, with the help of the USA and other allies to preserve civilization on that part of the Balkans, defended its country from The Aggression (1992-1995) and to biologically survive the genocide , and build their future with the free world, together with Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs, Jews, and other national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*Terms like Turk, Poturica, poturciti se, Poturcenjak, and Orientals are very biased and refer to those who converted to Islam suggesting that they accepted not only a new religion, but also a new nationality.