

AYDIN BABUNA

## Professor Hadžibegović and I

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In the late 1980's I was a young research assistant at Bogaziçi University in Istanbul. Like many other people all over the world I was following the political developments and drastic changes in the Balkans, more particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with curiosity. One of the most striking developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990's was the re-emergence of the Bosniaks as an important actor on the political scene. So, I thought that it would be interesting to find the historical roots of the national development of the Bosniaks. Having read some key books on the subject I came to the conclusion that I had to focus on the Austro-Hungarian period. As a next step I got a scholarship for Austria and started on my PhD at the Political Science Department and the Department for the History of East and South-Eastern Europe at the University of Vienna. Austria was the ideal country for me, not only because of my PhD subject but also because of its proximity to former Yugoslavia, making it easy for me to conduct research in Yugoslavia. However, before embarking on my archival and field research in Bosnia I had to spend two long years in Vienna to finish my courses.

I came to Sarajevo to carry out my research in the state archive of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the beginning of 1991. It was in this archive that I met Professor Hadžibegović. We soon became friends, even though he was a professor and I a research assistant just at the beginning of my career. We had long conversations on the situation of the Bosniaks under Austro-Hungarian rule and Professor Hadžibegović gave me some important clues for my research. He also introduced me to the staff of the archive, which was very helpful during my research. Our friendship was not confined to the archive and he also invited me to his home. Even though we had met just a short time previously he treated me like his guest in Sarajevo. He took me to various sights in the city, mostly together with Professor Ibrahim Tepić. Of course, we also ate many "ćevapčići" in Baščaršija together.

It is very difficult to describe to those who were not in the city at that time the strange atmosphere in Sarajevo in 1991. Despite the fact that everybody was conscious of the approach of the impending war and was uncertain about the future, everyday life was going on normally. However, every single person living in the city,

including Professor Hadžibegović, was dominated by the pervading spirit of pessimism. I remember very well how he was concerned about the future of his country as well as the future of his family and daughters.

Towards the end of my research in Sarajevo the first signs of the war came from Slovenia. The Bosnian newspapers were full of the reports about the clashes between the JNA and the Slovenian forces in June 1991. All the foreign scholars working in the state archive had already left the city. I decided that it was now time to go back. In all this turmoil I had to wait for a couple of days to find a bus for Vienna. On the day of departure, when I was waiting in the Sarajevo bus station, Professor Hadžibegović suddenly appeared. I was quite surprised since I already said goodbye to him. He had brought a box full of cookies for my journey. This was the last time that I saw him before the war.

It was not until the year 2000 that I met him again. In November 2000, I came to Bosnia-Herzegovina as the OSCE observer for the elections. During my short stay in Sarajevo I had the opportunity to visit him in his office at the University of Sarajevo. He looked much older and suffered from diabetes. We talked about the war and his family and the situation in Bosnia. This was the very last time that I saw him.

I remember Professor Hadžibegović not only as a distinguished scholar but also as a good man. The signed copy of his important work *Bosanskohercegovački gradovi na razmeđu 19. i 20. stoljeća* is certainly one of the most valued works in my library.