

Dženita Sarač-Rujanac, *Branko Mikulić: politička biografija 1965-1989* [*Branko Mikulić: political biography 1965-1989*], Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo - Institute of History, 2020, 557 p.

Dženita Sarač-Rujanac's doctoral dissertation on the political biography of Branko Mikulić, one of the most important members of the leadership of the socialist period of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was published by the Institute of History of the University of Sarajevo in late 2020. However, given the modest resources at the Institute's disposal, from material support to the already small number of researchers of publishing capacities, the publication of this book represents a significant contribution to the historiography of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Book *Branko Mikulić. The political biography: 1965-1989* is divided into two major sections. In the first part, the author Sarač-Rujanac follows the political rise of Branko Mikulić from the very end of World War II, and especially since 1965, when Mikulić gradually became one of the most important politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then in Yugoslavia. Born in 1928 in a family that moved from Široki Brijeg to the area between Gornji Vakuf and Bugojno in the previous generation, Branko grew up with a father who was a trade union and party activist before the war, one of the organizers of the uprising in that area and a prominent fighter and post-war official at the local and regional level. Branko also joined the National Liberation Struggle at an early age, and between his military and political career he chose the latter, far surpassing his father.

Biographies are useful because on a personal example you have the opportunity to see how one system is reflected and how what is general and personal, social and individual permeates. Branko Mikulić's career corresponds unusually to the general development of the Socialist Republic of BiH. Until 1965, Mikulić performed party and state functions at the local or regional level, slowly but surely climbing in the hierarchy or geographically moving from the periphery to the center, from Bugojno and Livno, through

Zenica to Sarajevo. From 1965, Mikulić climbed from local to regional level and became the center of political processes in the Republic, where he held a number of prominent and leading positions in the CKSK BiH (Central Committee of the League of Communists of BiH), the Assembly and the Presidency of SR BiH, from where he was delegated to the highest federal institutions – CKSKJ (Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia), Presidency of SFRY and SIV (Federal Executive Council).

For both Mikulić and SR BiH, the 1960s were a turning point. In the second part of the book, starting from the 1960s, the author follows the most important political issues during Mikulić's work. As he performed the most important political and state functions, trying to contextualize his activities, the second part of the book actually presents the most important socio-political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Yugoslavia of that period.

Exactly from the middle of the 1960s, Yugoslavia entered a completely new phase of its development, which Dejan Jović called the period of the “fourth Yugoslavia”. In a fierce struggle between the two currents in the political leadership, the so-called reformers and dogmatizers, the current, which was often at the federal level personified as Kradelj's, prevailed. With the complex process of constitutional changes and the “federating the Federation”, the republics and republican leaders gained primacy over the federal level, and among the new generation in the Bosnian leadership, which faithfully supported the new direction, was Branko Mikulić. For Mikulić and others, this was an opportunity to insist on real political and economic equality of SR BiH within the Yugoslav framework, to open or continue unfinished processes such as the attitude towards Western Herzegovina and Croats in BiH in general (Mostar Conference in 1966) or the issue of recognizing Muslims as a nation in 1968.

It is especially interesting to follow how Branko Mikulić, depending on current issues and his own position at that moment, moved along a sensitive political pendulum between two poles, which, conditionally speaking, could be called reformist and dogmatic-conservative. Thus, in the mid-1960s,

Mikulić was part of the reformist current that insisted on substantial changes not only in the functioning of the state but also in the League of Communists, which since that period became a kind of loose alliance of eight almost completely independent republican leaders. When the Croatian and Serbian political leaders, led by Savka Dabčević-Kučar in Croatia and Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović in Serbia, were removed in 1971 and 1972, Branko Mikulić and the rest of the Bosnian leadership supported such developments and from the perspective of the dismissed leadership, they sided with the *dogmatizer* part of the party, which stopped the process of democratization that had begun earlier after 1972.

The adoption of the 1974 constitution legally completed the transformation of Yugoslavia, which began in the mid-1960s, but this was not the end of a kind of constitutional crisis, given that the issue of amending the constitution was raised immediately after its adoption. Here, too, Branko Mikulić, together with the rest of the SR BiH leadership, sided with the ombudsman against the constitutional reformers led by the SR Serbia's leadership. In addition to the already existing real and imaginary enemies such as nationalism, bureaucracy, and statism, Mikulić often referred to centralism as one of the threats to the survival of Yugoslavia.

In this period of Mikulić's activity, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced a significant transformation and full economic momentum. The construction of schools, roads, large economic systems was symbolically crowned with the organization of the Winter Olympic Games in Sarajevo in 1984. Mikulić was one of the key figures in all these processes, and he was especially credited for the Olympics as the head of the organizing committee. As the Bosnian leadership took great care of national parity for the entire period of Mikulić's political activity, Rato Dugonjić, Milenko Renovica, Nikola Stojanović, Hamdija Pozderac, Džemal Bijedić and others performed equally important functions.

In this period, it is especially interesting to follow two topics that were directly reflected in Mikulić's work. The first is the role of Tito, who was,

in fact, a kind of supreme arbiter since the mid-1960s, with the fact that he was not at the top of the system but, in a way, outside or above it. In the increasingly frequent and fierce conflicts of the republican leadership, Tito was used as a last resort and someone who was called to judge in moments when there was no way out, and prominent officials considered Mikulić especially close to Tito. Such a role of Tito can be seen in the example of difficult negotiations on the extent to which the federal level and other republics helped Bosnia and Herzegovina after the devastating earthquake that hit Krajina in 1969. When negotiations come to a standstill, a supreme arbiter warned both sides that he would not take an official position and that it is up to them to reach a compromise.

Regarding the previous question, it is also interesting to follow the intensity and frequency of conflicts between party leaders while Tito was still alive. Even then, there was trench warfare that at times completely went beyond the party-political framework. Thus, in the late 1970s, Mikulić asked the leadership of the BiH State Security Service to escort him on a trip to Belgrade, fearing for his own safety.

After Tito's death, the struggle of the party leaders intensified to the point that it significantly blocked the entire system. From the perspective of later events and wars during and after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, it is simply impossible to ask whether the war would have taken place if a multi-party system had not been introduced in the 1990s with the victory of national parties. After all, back in the mid-1980s, Mikulić spoke about a kind of "nationalization" of the republican party leaderships and the factual situation that Yugoslavia was not a one-party but an "eight-party" state. Although he remained a faithful defender of the constitutional principles from 1974 until the end of his career, Mikulić, especially as the leading man of the SIV, saw how paralyzed the system was. Continuing to warn against centralism, and remaining faithful to the ideological foundations of Yugoslavia, Mikulić advocated significant changes in the economic system, which again in some way classified him with the reformist current.

In addition, it shows how difficult it is to overcome oneself, regardless of the circumstances: Mikulić never surpassed the ideological and political foundations on which he grew up and worked, although circumstances in the late 1980s obviously demanded something like that.

The end of Mikulić's political career is connected with the fate of SR BiH. At the end of the 1980s, through various processes, an entire generation of the SR BiH political leadership was replaced, so Mikulić, Pozderac, Renovica and Stojanović left the political scene. Until his death in 1994 in besieged Sarajevo, Mikulić remained strongly attached to the idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multinational country equal to its neighbors. Until the end, he remained the example of the permeation of a Bosnian by birth and a Herzegovinian by origin, Croat by national affiliation, but again equally Bosnian and Herzegovinian. He remained a Yugoslav until the end, considering Yugoslavia the best framework for all its people.

Although this is a doctoral dissertation, which can often burden a book with a scientific apparatus and style that is not very useful to ordinary readers, the author managed to avoid such a trap and make the book *passable* and exciting. Along with the previously published book *The Relation of the Religious and the National in the Identity of Bosniaks from 1980 to 1990*, Dženita Sarač-Rujanac affirmed herself as a significant researcher and historian of the younger generation whose special focus is the socialist period of Bosnian history.

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