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Political parties in Serbia's regions

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xxx We need to decide in Brno which elections to include and how to present the tables... xxx

Despite the high centralisation of the State, Serbia has developed a vivid political scene in its regions, including a richness of political parties, namely in the three ethnically heterogeneous regions Vojvodina, Sandžak, and Preševo valley. While previous work on the Serbian political landscape has mainly concentrated on the national political landscape of Serbia (Komšić 2003; Goati 2004, 2006; Lutovac 2005; Bieber 2003, etc.), regional parties have often be reduced to short paragraphs or footnotes, possibly because they appear not to be very crucial players on the national political level. Whereas the study of regionalism and regional party systems in many European countries has flourished in recent years (e.g. Heller 2002; Ishiyama 2002; De Winter/Türsan 1998, etc.), there is no such work known to the author on the Serbian case. Nevertheless, the study of regional parties in Serbia appears important because of two aspects. First, it might give new suggestions for the research on territorial differences in party systems, such as the study of the importance of territorial ethnic divisions for party formation and electoral behaviour, and second, regional parties play an important part of political life in Serbia, and should for this reason be looked at closer. The most important ethno-regional and regional parties in Serbia exist in the Vojvodina region, followed by the Sandžak region, and in the Preševo valley.

Since the emergence of regional parties is to a high extent (but not exclusively) related to the ethnic structure of the country, and to territorially concentrated ethnic groups, this chapter offers at the same time a view on ethnically motivated party formation and electoral behaviour in Serbia. In this book chapter, I first discuss both the political institutions and the social conflicts which are relevant for the creation of regional and ethno-regional parties. Building on this institutional and socio-economic framework, I discuss how territorial differences in the Serbian party system have developed since 1992, before devoting a closer look at regional parties, namely investigating the parties which play a role in the post-authoritarian period, which in Serbia started in 2000.

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1 The institutional and socio-economic framework

Recently, two main contributions have proposed theoretical perspectives for the study of regional differences in party systems (Chhibber/Kollman 2004; Caramani 2004). Both look at *party nationalisation*, what is understood as the homogeneity of the party system and party strength across the territory. Strong regional and local parties and political organisations are understood as the contrary of a nationalised party system. In this section, the main arguments of these schools are reported, and their relevance is discussed for the Serbian case, and this will help me to come up with theoretically based expectations about the occurrence and relevance of regional parties in Serbia.

The major school in this field explains that party nationalisation is a consequence of government institutions that incite the formation of a national party system. Chhibber and Kollman (2004: 222) rely party nationalisation namely to the degree of centralisation of the government. In their view, when the main competences rely on the central government, then national political issue will dominate the elections, and “voters are more likely to support national political parties as the national government becomes more important in their lives”, so that “local parties are abandoned altogether and disappear”. Quite in contrast, decentralised political structures, and most importantly substantial policy competences for lower levels of government help to nurture local and regional parties, that can make a difference to their voters in the local or regional government.

In difference to this school, Caramani (2004) plaid rather for a cleavage-based view on party nationalisation. In this approach, a party system becomes nationalised when the main social and economic divides become national in their character, thus they cross-cut (almost) all territorial unities. This is typically the case for the economic cleavage, what – among others – explains the development of highly nationalised party systems in many West European party systems in the 19th and early 20th century. Territorially based conflicts however would explain why a party system might not get nationalised, and why regional parties emerge.

Apart from these views, electoral systems have been discussed as an institutional feature that might shape the format of a party system, and, among others, contribute to the nationalisation of party systems, or in contrast, to the emerging of regional parties (Cox 1999; Van Cott 2003; Bochsler 2006).

With its high centralisation, the Serbian institutional framework is little favourable to the creation and success of regional parties. Similar to most post-communist countries in Europe, Serbia has inherited a rather centralised administrative structure. The sub-national level of administration relies on two levels and on the special status of the Vojvodina region. On the one hand, Serbia consists of 144 rather large municipalities, with own elected municipal assemblies and executive bodies. On the other hand, these municipalities are aggregated in 24 districts, that however do not have important tasks, nor any elected institutions. The capital city Belgrade it its own 25th district, with a city

parliament and a major, and consists of 16 city municipalities.¹ The Northern Serbian province of Vojvodina was accorded a wide autonomy in the Yugoslav constitution of 1974, and had almost the same competences as Republics. This autonomy was – as in the case of Kosovo – removed in 1989, and later different, less wide-going autonomy statutes have been introduced. Vojvodina has two millions of inhabitants (27% of the Serbian population), and its own directly elected parliamentary assembly and executive body.

After the “omnibus law”, which moved some of the competences back to the Vojvodina region, and a revision of the Law on Local Self-Governance in 2001-2, the policy competences and financial situation of the Serbian municipalities and Vojvodina have increased, but still, they lack of funds to implement their own policies. The degree of financial decentralisation is estimated as 27%: the Vojvodina region managed about 4.7% of the overall budget, and the municipal level about 22.3%, while the central government administers the remaining 73.0% (in 2002/3, numbers taken from Marcou 2005: 41).

Apart from municipalities and the Vojvodina regions, the National Minority Councils offer a further political space where (ethno-)regional parties can get active. The Hungarian minority was the first to constitute such a body, and by 2006, fourteen ethnic minorities – all ethnic minorities in Serbia with a substantial number of members, and a few extremely small minorities – had created such a body, except for the Albanian minority (Bašić/Crnjanski 2006: 90-4), but the competences of the Minority Councils remain unclear, and their funds limited. Because these councils are neither territorially based, nor importantly dominated by political parties, they are not in the focus of this article.

Following Chhibbers and Kollmans view, the low level of decentralisation in Serbia should only give weak incentives for the creation of strong regional parties. But even if many countries confirm a correlation of decentralisation and regionalisation of the party system (Harbers 2008), this view is not uncontested: the causality of the empirical link might instead be inverted. Not decentralisation incites regional parties, but instead, regional parties demand for decentralisation (Caramani 2004). Namely, the processes of decentralisation in Central and Eastern Europe support this inverted causality (Bochsler 2006).

In this view, regional parties rather emerge along territorially-based social and economic differences (Caramani 2004) than along boundaries of sub-national territorial units. This second approach borrows elements of the cleavage approach by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), that argues that a party system is the product of the underlying structure of social conflicts.

¹ All the population statistics and financial statistics refer to the Serbian territory without Kosovo, which has not administered by Serbia since 1999. All population numbers taken from the 2002 census.

Serbia offers a number of differences that might be the basis of politicised social cleavages with a territorial dimension. On the one hand, Serbian regions carry a diverse cultural and historical heritage and economic power. While the main parts of the country have been under Ottoman rule before getting independent, the Northern region Vojvodina was part of the Kingdom of Hungary until the 16th century and – after two centuries under Ottoman rule – of the Habsburg empire from the early 18th century until World War I. The difference between Austrian-Hungarian and Turkish influences is today still visible in local identities, in cultural aspects, and dialectic expressions in the language. Economically, the Vojvodina region (after the capital Belgrade) is still ahead of Central and Southern Serbia. And finally, the Austrian-Hungarian experience has contributed to the ethnic structure of Vojvodina: It is ethnically much richer than the ethnically rather homogeneous central parts of Serbia,² and a number of ethnic groups who lived in the Austrian-Hungarian empire live in Vojvodina; first of all the Hungarian minority, followed by the Slovaks (see below for details). Ethnic engineering by Slobodan Milošević, who settled ethnic Serbian refugees from Bosnia in Vojvodina, and the flight of many members of ethnic minorities during this period contributed to a change in the ethnic structure of Vojvodina, and allegedly contributed to ethnic tensions in the region.³ Finally, several smaller regions in Southern Serbia are distinguished through their ethnic structure: The Preševo valley, at the borders with Macedonia and Kosovo in Southern Serbia, is predominantly populated by ethnic Albanians. The Sandžak region, partly in Serbia, and partly in Montenegro, connecting Bosnia and Kosovo, is the home to the Bosniak minority, while ethnic Bulgarians constitute the local majority in the municipality Bosilegrad and the single largest community in the town Dimitrovgrad, both in the South-East at the Bulgarian border (see OSCE 2008). Both the historic-cultural divides, and the partly territorially based ethnic divides provide thus a basis for the emergence of regional differences in the party system.

Furthermore, we would expect that due to the high degree of centralisation, and the importance of territorial divides, political pressure might be created for an enhancement of regional and local self-government. The importance of strong autonomous institutions for the ethnic minorities gets even more relevant, because in Serbia the state still plays a role in many spheres which are relevant for the minorities. For instance, the Serbian state (on all its levels) is (still) importantly involved in public information, and namely a narrow majority of media titles in minority languages is state-controlled, mostly founded by municipalities or the autonomous minority councils (Fond za otvoreno društvo 2007). Due to the importance of the territorial divisions and the only hesitant decentralisation in Serbia, we might ask if the link between decentralisation and regional parties

² When referring to central parts of Serbia here, I employ a geographical and not a political definition. The unit which is politically defined as "Central Serbia" encompasses ethnically heterogeneous regions in Serbia's South.

³ xxx find source for Vojvodina.

might not work similar as in other countries of the region, the other way round, than suggested by Chhibber and Kollman. It is not necessarily the level of decentralisation that shapes the party system, but, to the contrary, territorial social divides might provide the basis of mobilisation for regional parties, that call for decentralisation.

A third element is worth mentioning that might affect the way how regional political differences translate into the territorial structure of the party system, the national electoral system. In the Serbian case, an electoral reform of the year 2000 appears to have a peculiar effect: the district-based system was abolished, and a new single countrywide electoral districts was introduced. However, it's not the *size* of this electoral district that directly affects the chances of regional parties.⁴ Rather, the change of the district structure changed the effect of the legal threshold on the formation of regional parties. Already in the elections in the 1990s, a legal threshold of 5% was applied, on the basis of the vote share that a party wins in the electoral district. With the electoral reform of 2000, and the introduction of the a single nationwide electoral district, the 5% threshold was applied at the national level. While it is easy for a regional party to pass a 5% threshold in a *regional* district, 5% of the votes *on the national level* appear hardly reachable. As a consequence, after 2000, regional parties did not have chances any more to get represented in parliament on their own, and joined electoral alliances. Only since the 2007 elections, the threshold has been lifted for parties of ethnic minorities – but the law fails to define what is such an ethnic minority party (OSCE 2007).

Finally, political parties in Serbia are heavily centralised. Internal party democracy and local autonomy are not far developed (Goati 2004: 110-1, 127-9, 133), and the electoral system provides closed national lists, so that the voters do not have the possibility to favour candidates from their own region. Rather, the party leadership can decide over two thirds of the mandates ex-post on the composition of the parliamentary group, irrespective of the order on the electoral list.⁵ This is even aggravated through the parliamentary practise that mandates are not free; rather, most parties demand undated letters of resignation from every MP (Orlović 2006: 110), so that the party leadership can put elected MPs under pressure. In a system with such centralised power, it is difficult for local branches to follow their own policies, and parties can hardly credibly differentiate their program according to regional differences in voter preferences. We might expect that as a consequence of the high degree of centralisation of the national parties, specific regional interests can only be expressed by specific regional parties, and not by the regional branches of national parties.

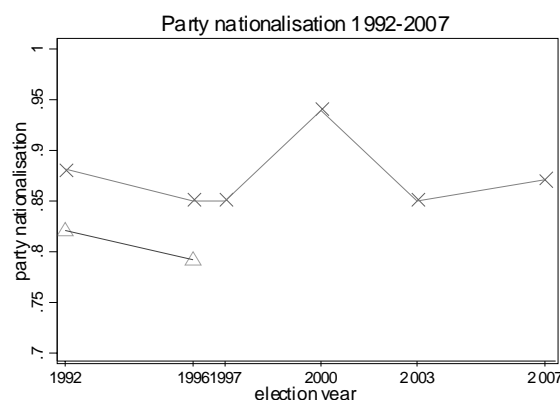
⁴ With the same votes as a regional party gets in district-based elections, the party can gain approximately the same amount of seats in a nationwide constituency, and there is little reason why a regional party should gain or lose substantially votes, if small electoral districts are replaced by a single countrywide one.

⁵ Electoral law (Zakon o izboru narodnih poslanika), art. 84. Available from <http://www.cesid.org/zakoni/sr/poslanici.jsp> (last accessed 6 April 2008).

Since party and electoral campaign financing is mostly concentrated on parties which are competing in national elections, local and regional parties have only a small state-fund income (Milosavljević 2005).⁶

2 Territorial heterogeneity in national elections

Before looking at single cases of regional parties, I describe the territorial heterogeneity of the party system of Serbia. Measures of heterogeneity allow us to quantify the differences and similarities of party strength across the territory, and to compare it with other cases. I employ the standardised party nationalisation score (Bochsler 2008), and look at the electoral results of the national parliament. For the early 1990s, still elections to the Federal Assembly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (including Serbia and Montenegro at time) were held. This allows a calculation of heterogeneity of the party system of FRY as a whole, as opposed to the heterogeneity of the Serbian party system. Since political parties compete either in Serbia or in Montenegro, values for whole FRY reveal much stronger territorial differences than values only for Serbia (without Montenegro). In the case of perfect homogeneity across the territory, the employed measure would indicate a value of 1. This maximum is hardly ever reached, but the 2000 elections in Serbia, with a score of 0.94, came close to a very high level of party nationalisation (see table 1). Otherwise, the party nationalisation score was around 0.85 to 0.87. This is a value that typically emerges in countries with few territorial differences, such as Bulgaria, Slovenia, or Poland. It is higher than in countries with a general territorial split in the party system – such as it was the case for FRY, where the Montenegrin party system was fully different from the Serbian one, reflected through lower levels of nationalisation of the FRY party system about 0.79-0.82.



⁶ The electoral campaign financing is fixed as a percentage (0.05% at the local and regional level) of the budget of the relevant government authority, and due to the small budgets of local and regional governments, the state contributions for parties in local and regional elections are not very substantial.

	1992	1996	1997	2000	2003	2007
FR Yugoslavia	0.82	0.79				
Serbia	0.88	0.85	0.85	0.94	0.85	0.87

Table 1: Development of party system nationalisation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and in Serbia. (From: Bochslar 2008).

X Serbia; Δ FRY

The development of party nationalisation shall be discussed, and linked to aspects of party competition and of the electoral system. The main aspects that explain variance in party system nationalisation across the years are the legal electoral threshold and electoral coalitions.

The impact of the legal threshold

The first aspect to discuss is the legal electoral threshold of 5%. It had already been enacted in the 1990s, but applied for electoral districts. This allowed namely Hungarians, Bosniaks, and Albanians to pass the threshold in the districts where they were concentrated. However, only the Hungarian minority parties had a constant representation in the Serbian parliament. In 1993, an alliance of two Albanian minority parties (Party of Democratic Action and Democratic Party of Albanians) won two mandates, and in 1997, one mandate for the Democratic Coalition Preševo-Bujanovac. Further, in 1997, after they did not continue their electoral boycott, Bosniak parties, allied as “Lista za Sandžak”, won three parliamentary mandates. The shifting of the legal threshold in 2000 from the local to the national level excluded all these (ethno-)regional parties from running independently from elections. This has contributed to the increase in party nationalisation in this year. This, however, does not necessarily mean that regional parties disappeared. As shall be shown later in detail, an introduction of a national legal threshold hinders regional parties from competing on their own in national elections, but they can still form electoral alliances, and they remain represented in local and regional institutions. The consequences of the national legal threshold were partly reversed by 2007, when the threshold was lifted for parties of ethnic minorities, what explains why many ethno-regional parties run separately, so that the nationalisation degree dropped.

The formation of the opposition umbrella coalition in 2000

The second reason that – complementary to the electoral system – explains a change in party nationalisation is the formation of a broad umbrella coalition in the 2000 elections. The elections in this year were exceptional in their character, similar to democratising elections in almost all post-communist countries in Europe. Namely, (almost) all democratically oriented opposition parties ran jointly in a broad umbrella coalition, called Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS). This coalition has included many regional parties, namely the Hungarian minority party SVM, the Bosniak

minority SDP, and the regional Vojvodina parties LSV, RV and KV (Goati 2006: 84) (see next section). Since the conflict between the old regime and the democratic reformers is not territorially based, the umbrella coalition gathered a very homogeneous vote throughout the territory. After the democratising elections, such umbrella coalitions have everywhere in the region quickly split of, and Serbia is no exception to this rule, so that party nationalisation has dropped again.

Coalition of regional parties

A very different type of a coalition was formed in the subsequent elections in 2003, explaining a drop of party system nationalisation. In this election, ethnic minority and regional parties (namely the Vojvodina party LSV and the Šumadija party «Liga za Šumadiju», see below) attempted to pass the electoral threshold jointly, forming a broad coalition under the label “Together for Tolerance” (ZZT). Even if they failed to reach the necessary 5% of the vote, their participation in elections has lead to heterogeneity in the support level across Serbia; the party nationalisation degree of ZZT was about 0.45 (and has further negatively affected the party nationalisation degree of parties that are in electoral competition with ethnic and regional parties, and accordingly have lost votes in the regions where ZZT was strong). The exclusion of ZZT through the 5% threshold gets very substantial, if looking at the amounts of “wasted votes” (votes cast for not represented parties) by municipalities. The national legal threshold has lead to a fairly unequal representation of voters across the territory in parliament. Namely, in 13 municipalities with strong Hungarian or Bosniak minorities, the national legal threshold has – mainly due to the ZZT failure (and to a lower extent due to the non-success of other regional or small parties) – excluded 30% up to 70% of the voters from being represented in parliament. In other municipalities, where ZZT was weaker (below 10%), the rate of wasted votes was just about 12%. The failure of ZZT might have contributed to the exception of ethnic minority parties from the threshold requirement subsequently to the 2003 elections (Bašić/Crnjanski 2006: 58).

(De)centralisation policies of parties in the national assembly

The theoretically relevant question of the relationship of the nationalisation of the party system and of decentralisation makes it worth to spend attention to the party policies regarding decentralisation.⁷ This question – namely with regards to the autonomy of the Vojvodina region – separates Serbian parties. After the victory of the Democratic Opposition in 2000, the main parties of the “Democratic” bloc, the Democratic Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), have shifted their position regarding the autonomy of Vojvodina in 2000 and 2001. Both parties in the

⁷ Information on this aspect is taken from Komšić (2003: 83-8), Goati (2004: 42, 45-6, 52, 2006: 228-31), and Crisis Group (2006).

1990s were in favour of a limited autonomy, but later the DS approved a territorial autonomy of Vojvodina, with a full institutional system, but without specifying the policy competences that should be decentralised. The DSS introduced in 2001 a regionalist concept, that did not mention explicitly Vojvodina, and the party position remained partly ambiguous, namely it was afraid of all elements that might be seen as limited statehood for autonomous regions. The reformist G17+ party expressed support for an expansion of the autonomous status of Vojvodina. However, this positioning was de facto reverted in 2006, when all three parties supported the new Serbian constitution, establishing a more restrictive centralisation of the Serbian state, mainly as a concessions to the nationalist parties (Crisis Group 2006: 4). Namely, parties that are related to the Milošević regime, the Socialist (SPS) and the Radical Party (SRS), rule out any autonomy, and favour a unitary state. Claims for territorial autonomy, particularly if they come from multi-ethnic areas, are often interpreted as first steps towards separatism by the nationalist parties and medias. The lack of a particularly strong advocate for regional autonomies among the national parties in Serbia creates the opportunity for regional and ethnic minority parties to campaign on politicise the cultural and socio-economic differences, and to campaign on these issues, pressuring for increased decentralisation. Due to the change of the electoral system, no such party could gain any mandates in the national parliament on its own in the 2000 and 2003 elections, but nevertheless, they could retain certain relevance in the Serbian party system. On the one hand, the Serbian electoral system allows them to join electoral alliances, so that a few members of regional parties became member of the national parliament on the lists of mainstream parties, and being integrated in the caucus of the list on which they became elected. On the other hand, regional and ethnic parties retained power in the regional and local bodies of representation, as will be shown in the next section.

3 Regional parties in Serbia

While regional parties have been only marginally represented in the Serbian national assembly, they have clearly shaped the political landscape in the regional and local institutions. Despite the limited importance of lower levels of administration, a quite a vivid collection of ethno-regional and regional parties has developed. Ethno-regional parties are based on the support of ethnic minority groups. Three out of the four largest ethnic minorities in Serbia, the Hungarians (in the Vojvodina region), Albanians (in the Preševo valley) and Bosniaks (in the Sandžak region), are these with the richest set of relevant parties, but the multi-ethnic Vojvodina region counts further a few non-ethnically related regional parties, and parties of smaller minorities that are active mostly at the local level.

Three of the aspects shown in this section appear particularly relevant with regards to the discussion of the underlying theoretical aspects: first, it shows how despite low decentralisation regional parties are formed along ethnic divides and along political issues that create territorial divides in

Serbian politics. Second, I argue that one of the main issue of regional political parties is the claim for territorial autonomy. Their strength partly relies on the opposition of the national parties to these claims, and this supports the view that decentralisation might rather be initiated by regional parties than vice versa. And, third, the comparison of electoral results at the local and national level of politics reveals the importance of local and regional institutions for the representation of local and regional parties, namely in cases where the electoral system hinders their representation in national institutions.

In this section, I will discuss ethno-regional and regional parties, that are mainly active in the three mentioned regions of Serbia, and discuss their coalition strategies.

3.1 Vojvodina

Vojvodina is often portrayed as a multi-ethnic oasis in Serbia, and different historic-cultural roots, and the economic situation give Vojvodina a particular face within Serbia. This is as well reflected politically, namely there is a number of regional and ethnic parties that compete exclusively in Vojvodina. The political scene of the Vojvodina region is discussed with look at the elections to the Assembly of the Vojvodina region, their vote share in Vojvodina in national parliamentary elections and their representation in the national parliament, and their representation in municipal assemblies. Vojvodina is rich of its own parties, both created along ethnic lines as with a non-ethnic orientation. Different from most Serbian mainstream parties, they are advocating tolerance towards ethnic minorities and an improvement of their rights, and they focus on decentralisation and territorial autonomy.

In the elections to the Assembly of the Vojvodina region (APV) in the years 1992-2000, the Socialist Party of Serbia was dominating the political scene, partly due to the majoritarian electoral system that was giving advantages to the largest party, and disadvantaged the non-unified democratic opposition. Only in the 2000 elections, the picture changed, with DOS and the (ethno-)regionalist parties winning 117 of the 120 seats; – now the democratic victory was magnified by the majority vote system (Goati 2001: 248-9). The strength of single democratically oriented opposition parties and the regional parties can hardly be estimated for the elections until 2000, because they often formed electoral coalitions. In the 2004 elections to the APV, the electoral system was changed a to mixed non-compensatory electoral system, with 60 mandates in each tier, so that the strength of single national parties and of ethnic and regional parties was for a first time clearly identifiable. Overall, (ethno-)regional parties obtained some 20% of the votes and seats in the Vojvodina elections (see table 2). Furthermore, they became important players in many municipal governments.

In the national parliamentary elections, the vote shares of all large national parties in Vojvodina are lower than in the rest of Serbia (see chapter on Serbia in this volume),⁸ with only one exception, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS). It is often argued that SRS gets substantial support from ethnic Serb refugees, namely from Croatia and Bosnia, who have settled in Vojvodina in the 1990s. Generally, it is observed that through the polarisation of the ethnic conflict in multi-ethnic areas, less radical parties lose votes towards the Serbian Radical party, which takes more radical stances on ethnic issues (Bochsler 2007; Stefanovic 2008). Compared to the results in the local and regional elections, the regional and ethnic parties get lower vote shares in national parliamentary elections. On the one hand, national parties might be more visible with their national campaigns in national elections; on the other hand, the national legal threshold of 5% has hindered regional parties and (until 2007) ethnic parties from competing on their own.

	APV elections 2004				Local elections 2004		National elections parliamentary	
	PR seats	District seats	Seat share	Vote share (PR)	Local mayors	Seats in local assemblies	2003, vote share in Vojvodina	2007, vote share in Vojvodina
National parties								
DS	15	20	29.2%	22.3%	9 ^c	338	9.9%	24.1%
SRS	21	15	30.0%	30.4%	14	442	31.9%	32.3%
SPS	4	4	6.7%	6.0%	3 ^c	124 ^c	5.1%	4.0%
DSS	4	2	5.0%	7.0%	2	112	12.2%	9.9%
PSS	4	3	5.8%	6.9%	1	101		1.7%
G17+	-	2	1.7%	5.0%	2	89	13.6%	6.3%
"Clean hands Vojvodina"	-	-	-	2.4%	-	15 (SPO) ^c	3.8% (SPO/NS)	2.1% (SPO)
NS	-	-	-	1.4%	-	5	with SPO	with DSS
Regional and ethnic parties								
SVM	6	5	9.2%	8.8%	2	73	13.0% (ZZT)	5.0%
Coalition "together for Vojvodina" ^{ra}	6	1	5.8%	9.8%	-	74 (LSV) ^c	partly in ZZT	8.1% (with LDP)
RV	-	2	1.7%	-	2	9	1.7% (with SDP and others)	-
DSVM	-	1	0.8%	-	-	15	-	1.2% (with DZVM)
DZVM	-	-	-	-	-	13	-	-
Local coalitions and local citizens' groups	-	5	4.2%	-	8	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-	2	313	8.8%	5.3%
Overall	60	60	100% (120)	100%	45	1666	100%	100%

Table 2: Results of the elections to the autonomous assembly of the Vojvodina region, 2004, and comparison to the vote shares in the Vojvodina region in the national parliamentary elections 2003.

⁸ Own calculations for parliamentary elections in 2003 and 2007, data taken from Cesid. In the second round of presidential elections, DS candidates get better results.

^a Vojvođanska unija – Vojvodina moj dom, Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine, Demokratska Vojvodina, Unija socijalista Vojvodine, Vojvođanski pokret, Građanski savez Srbije i Socijademokratska unija

^b SPO, Vojvodina reformists, OTPOR

^c 3 of the DS mayors were elected for a coalition of DS and SVM; 1 of the SPS mayors was elected in a coalition with SNS, the SPS figures for the local assembly include 6 members elected on a common list with SNS, and 8 elected on SNS lists; 4 of the SPO local deputies were elected in coalitions with NS; the numbers for LSV include 4 members that were jointly elected in a broad coalition with minor parties.

Sources: Vojvodina Government, Cesid, Statistical Yearbook of Serbia 2005, own corrections for local coalitions and own calculations.

Before discussing the ethnically oriented parties in detail, I spend a look at the non-ethnic regional parties. The largest party in this field is the League of Vojvodina Social Democrats (LSV), followed by the Vojvodina Reformists (RV), which in 2005 have merged with smaller parties into the Vojvodina Party (VP) (Goati 2006: 258). The most common denominator is the accent on a strong regional autonomy and decentralisation as main goal and on the first position of the parties' programs.⁹ Together with two other non-ethnic parties, they asked in 1997 for a wide-going autonomy of the Vojvodina region¹⁰, LSV in a declaration of 1999 demanded for a federalisation of Serbia (Komšić 2007: 272-3). Different from the national parties, the Vojvodina regionalist parties have rejected the new constitution in 2006, due to steps backwards regarding regional autonomy.

Otherwise, both LSV and RV(VP) belong to the democratically oriented parties, and some have indeed participated in the DOS alliance in 2000, and both declare to be Social Democrats.¹¹ Mihić (2002, 2005) characterises LSV and RV supporters to stand politically close to DS and G17+. They are opposed to societal authoritarianism, tolerant in ethnic questions, favour a normalisation of the relations to neighbouring states, and strongly pro-European. LSV supporters seem to be left-wing oriented on welfare issues. The LSV electorate is ethnically mixed; ethnic identities are less important to average LSV supporters, but on the other hand, they stress their Vojvodina identity.¹² They have remained weak in the national representative institutions, and never become dominant in regional politics, but they obtained 9.8% of the PR votes in the 2004 regional elections, and three direct seats, and are included in governing coalitions at the local and regional level in Vojvodina (see table 2).

⁹ Found on <http://www.lsv.org.yu/> and <http://www.reformisti.org.yu/> (last accessed on 5 April 2008).

¹⁰ "Deklaracija o Vojvodini - Koalicija Vojvodina", Novi Sad, 1 March 1997.

http://www.lsvsu.org.yu/dokumenti/deklaracija_koalicija_vojvodina.htm (last accessed on 6 April 2008).

¹¹ There are many parties that compete for the Social Democratic label in Serbia. Stojiljković (2007) considers LSV to belong to the parties which have a Social Democratic program and anti-nationalist, anti-traditionalist positions.

¹² Mihić provides some of very rare studies that focus on voters in Vojvodina. The number of respondents (302, out of which 14.2% LSV supporters) is rather small, but still very useful, if considering that the number of respondents in national surveys would be too small to analyse Vojvodina parties. The non-random sampling employed by the author does not follow standards employed in election studies. Most other Serbian party studies concentrate on the national parties, or on ethnically-oriented parties. The fact that the regional parties often competed in alliances in national elections means further that an analysis of aggregate electoral data from municipalities is difficult or impossible.

A second field of regional parties is related to ethnic minorities.¹³ However, they are not the exclusive representatives of ethnic minorities, since as well the regional and some of the national non-ethnic parties compete for the votes of minorities, and occasionally include minority members on their electoral lists (Lutovac 2007). The minority parties will be discussed for the different minority groups living in Vojvodina.

The **Hungarians** are the largest ethnic minority in Serbia. They count 4.0% of the Serbian population, and live almost all in the Vojvodina, where they count 14.3% of the population. They organised already in 1990 in the Democratic Union of the Vojvodina Hungarians (DZVM). The party, lead by András Ágoston, radicalised in the first year under increasing Serbian repression, and demanded a strong autonomy for Hungarians in Serbia, similar to the one that was discussed in peace plans for Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia at this time (Jenne 2004: 742). Since Ágoston was perceived as too radical, in 1994 several parties split off. One of those, the Union of the Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), under the moderate Subotica mayor József Kasza became the dominant party of the Hungarian minority (Jenne 2004: 743). In 1997, the Democratic party of the Vojvodina Hungarians (DSVM) split off of the DZVM (Bašić/Crnjanski 2006: 44).

The Hungarian minority parties are distinct from the previously discussed non-ethnic regional parties not only because of their exclusive orientation towards ethnic minority voters, but as well with regards to their decentralisation program. The *non-ethnic parties* favour substantial autonomy for the *whole Vojvodina* region, and SVM supports this position, while DZVM considers this as a *Serbian* question, in which the ethnic *Hungarians* should not involve in this issue.¹⁴ However, all Hungarian parties do not put their main focus on the question of *Vojvodina autonomy*, but rather demand a substantial political and cultural autonomy namely for the *eight municipalities with a high concentration of ethnic Hungarians in Northern Vojvodina*. They did however never adopt separatist claims. In most political issues, SVM supporters are politically close to LSV voters (Mihić 2005), while the other parties are too small to be polled.

In the current decade, SVM was the most relevant representative of the Hungarian minority. In the Serbian parliament of 2000, as part of DOS, it received six seats, and its leader, Kasza, became deputy prime minister, in charge of minority affairs and local governments (Jenne 2004: 744). Three years later, SVM failed in the national parliament elections (being part of the failed ZZT alliance), and in 2007, it won three seats with its own list. In the 2004 elections to the Vojvodina assembly, the party won 8.8% of the vote and it became part of the governing coalition. And, in the municipal elections of 2004, SVM was by far the strongest of all Hungarian parties, but both other

¹³ Informations on these parties and their representation, where not stated differently, were taken from Bašić/Crnjanski (2006), and from electoral results.

¹⁴ Politika, 23 December 2007, "Tema nedelje: Šta žele stranke nacionalnih – Namigivanje lokalnih šerifa".

Hungarian parties could as well win a few mandates in local assemblies (see table 2). Furthermore, DSVM won one seat in the Vojvodina assembly in 2004 in one of the majority districts. Before presenting a common candidate in the 2008 Serbian presidential elections, the Hungarian minority parties refused to cooperate with each other.

Parties of other minorities were rather active on the local level, or competed on the lists of mainstream parties.

Slovaks (0.8% in Serbia; 2.8% in Vojvodina) are the second-largest minority in Vojvodina, and quite large in a few municipalities, such as Kovačica or Bački Petrovac (where they are the single largest ethnic group), and in a few other municipalities. In the 2004 local elections, the Slovak people's party (Slovačka narodna stranka), obtained 2 out of 31 mandates in the Bački Petrovac assembly. However, in municipalities with high shares of Slovaks, they mainly participate in political life through other parties with non-ethnic orientation. As a members of DS, the head of the Slovak minority council and the (ethnic Slovak) mayor of Bački Petrovac got elected to the national assembly in 2007.

The **Croat** minority (0.9% of the Serbian population, 2.7% in Vojvodina) live in a few parts of Vojvodina, namely in the districts of Northern Bačka and Srem. They form the Democratic Union of the Croats in Vojvodina (Demokratski savez Hrvata u Vojvodini). The party got access to the Vojvodina assembly in 2004, where it forms a local governing coalition with SVM and DS, and to the national parliament in 2007 with one deputy each, elected on the DS list.¹⁵ In the 2003 elections to the national parliament, the party competed on the non-successful minority parties' list.

Ethnic **Romanians** (0.5% in Serbia, 1.5% in Vojvodina) are concentrated in a number of municipalities in the Banat (South-Eastern Vojvodina), namely in Alibunar, Zrenjanin, Vršac, Kovačica, Kovin, Apatin and Žitište. There is a related minority of **Vlachs** (0.5% in Serbia, not present in Vojvodina) who live mainly in Eastern Serbia and speak a Romanian dialect; their own ethnic status is disputed by the ethnic Romanians.¹⁶ The Romanians and Vlachs have their common national minority council, and some minority parties address both Romanians and Vlachs jointly. The Movement of Romanians and Vlachs in Yugoslavia competed in 2003 on the list of a minor political party for the national parliament, without gaining any seats. In the national minority council, two marginal parties are represented, the Alliance of Romanians from Vojvodina, and the Democratic Union of Romanians, but generally, Romanians and Vlachs rather get elected on the lists of parties with a non-ethnic orientation; most notably in Alibunar on the DS, DSS, and G17+ list.

¹⁵ Danas, 25 August 2004, "Za evropsku Vojvodinu u evropskoj Srbiji"; Danas, 17 November 2006, "Kuntić na listi DS".

¹⁶ Danas, 15 October 2002, "Rusini, Slovaci i Rumuni u 'elektorskoj groznici'. Do saveta u bar dve struje".

The **Bunjevac** (0.3% in Serbia, 1.0% in Vojvodina) live mostly in the towns of Sombor and Subotica. They have a specific regional origin in the Dinara mountains (on the border between Croatia and Bosnia, cf. OSCE 2008), but as Croats they are Roman Catholics, and they speak the same language, so that they are often perceived to be close to ethnic Croats. Bunjevacs have their own national minority council, and they formed their own Bunjevac party (Bunjevačka stranka). While this party has remained without any larger electoral success, a descendant of a Bunjevac family, Oliver Dulić, has become parliament speaker in 2007, elected on the DS list. It might be indicative for the complexity of ethnic identities in the region, that Dulić himself tells that in his view, the Bunjevacs belong rather to the Croats, but himself he declares as a “child of a Yugoslav family and a big ‘Yugo-nostalgic’”.¹⁷

Other, smaller, minorities in Vojvodina are not represented by their own parties, or they are too marginal to be prominently discussed.

At the local and regional level, the ethnic minority parties and the regional parties in Vojvodina cooperate mostly with DS and G17+, not at least in the Vojvodina government: After 2000, the DOS alliance formed the Serbian government (however, DSS quit the government and the alliance in 2001 both at the national and at the regional level), and after the 2004 elections, a coalition was formed of almost the same parties, namely DS, SVM, the LSV coalition (Together for Vojvodina), and PSS (Goati 2006: 79).

The DS and SVM have closely cooperated on the local and regional level, occasionally as well presented joint candidates in local elections, namely in elections by majority rule. However, both parties perceive each other as fierce competitors for votes in areas that are ethnically mainly Hungarian (Lutovac 2007: 232). But cooperation is not fully exclusive for democratically oriented parties: In the Bečej municipality, the DZVM has enabled after 2004 the Serbian Radicals to lead a governing coalition.¹⁸

3.2 Sandžak

Sandžak is a region covering eleven municipalities both in South-East Serbia and Northern Montenegro, on the border to Kosovo and Bosnia.¹⁹ It is populated mostly by the Bosniak minority, who are Muslims speaking Serbo-Croat, and are the largest ethnic group in neighbouring Bosnia. The Serbian part of Sandžak consists of six municipalities that have been split into two districts, so that the Bosniaks in none of it are in a majority (Schmidt 1996). Apart from the power in the municipalities, the Bosniak minority is organised in the Bosniak National Council.

¹⁷ Press, 27 May 2007, Oliver Dulić, predsednik Skupštine: Manjina.

¹⁸ Politika, 23 December 2007, “Tema nedelje: Šta žele stranke nacionalnih – Namigivanje lokalnih šerifa”.

¹⁹ Information on the Sandžak draws mainly on a report by the International Crisis Group (2005).

The first Bosniak party was organised in 1990 as a local branch of the dominant party of Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Party of Democratic Action (SDA). With Bosnia's independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, the Sandžak SDA became its own organisation. The party, and its leader Sulejman Ugljanin, remained the dominating part of the umbrella organisation List for Sandžak (Lista za Sandžak) that was formed later. A referendum for political autonomy for the Sandžak region, organised by the SDA in 1991, is affecting the relation towards the Bosniak political organisations until today. Ugljanin was accused of engineering Sandžak's secession from Serbia (ICG 1998: 8), even if all relevant Bosniak leaders denied this (Bašić 2002: 58-9). In the same year, the Muslim National Council of Sandžak (MNVS) as representative body of the Bosniaks in the Sandžak region was formed, later renamed as Bosnian National Council of Sandžak (BNVS).

In 1995, a leading member of the party, Rasim Ljajić, broke apart, and formed his own Sandžak Democratic Party (SDP). The Bosniak political scene has remained deeply divided between Ugljanin and Ljajić, and until the time of writing, is overshadowed by physical violence between members of both main party blocs.²⁰ After the 2004 elections resulted in a change of the municipal government of the largest Sandžak municipality Novi Pazar, the new office holders could only move into their offices after the central government had sent special police forces to Novi Pazar. Apart from the personal rivalry, a major difference between both parties is the SDA's goal of a substantial autonomy that includes the Sandžak municipalities both in Serbia and Montenegro. Unlike Ugljanin, Ljajić's SDP does not refer to the Montenegrin Sandžak, and appears to take more moderate stands (ICG 1998: 10-2; Schmidt 1996), what makes it a more suitable partner for coalitions with Serbian parties, both in the Sandžak municipalities as at the national level. After 2000, SDP joined coalitions with DOS and later DS in the national parliament elections, and in change, SDP leader Ljajić became minister in the Serbian government. Recently, Ljajić aims at reaching an electorate beyond the Sandžak region, and defines his party as non-ethnic, mainstream party.²¹ However, it has no offices and never ran in an election outside Sandžak.

Within the Sandžak region, the Bosniak parties profit however from a strong alignment of voters, and in national elections, they often join agreements with the non-ethnic national parties, which guarantee them a few seats in parliament in exchange for the supply of votes in Sandžak. Both in the 2003 and 2007 elections, one of both large Bosniak parties aligned with the Democratic Party (DS), and this helped the DS list to become the strongest one in the six Sandžak municipalities (see table 3). Of the other national parties, only the new pro-European and minority-friendly Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) got a slightly better result in the Sandžak than on the national average (table 3).

²⁰ For one of the latest incidents, see B92, 25.2.2008, "Bomba na kuću odbornika".

²¹ Politika, 23 December 2007, "Tema nedelje: Šta žele stranke nacionalnih – Ne predstavljam samo Bošnjake".

	Local elections 2004		National parliament elections	
	number of seats in local assemblies	number of local mayors	2003	2007
Lista za Sandžak/SDA (Ugljanin)	71	2	40.1% (with DS)	27.9% (own list)
SDP (Ljajić)	55	2	20.6% (with ZZT)	31.1% (with DS)
NPS	10	-	-	-
DS	21 ^a	1	with Lista za S.	with SDP
SRS	23	-	18.1%	14.1%
DSS	18 ^a	-	6.1%	10.3%
LDP	-	-	-	5.6%
other Serbian parties	39			
others	15	SPS	15.1%	11.0%

Table 3: Election results in the six Sandžak municipalities. Only parties over 5% considered.

^a 2 DSS mandates in a broad coalition with other ethnic Serbian parties. 9 DS mandates in a coalition with two smaller parties.

Source: Cesid, own calculations.

Apart from the two major players, many small parties had formed and disappeared, among which the most prominent is the Liberal-Bosniak organisation of the Sandžak (Liberalno-bošnjačka organizacija Sandžaka).

Coalition politics in the Sandžak are to a widely dominated by the quarrels between Ljajić and Ugljanin. After the 2004 elections, this has even led to two remarkable anti-Ugljanin coalitions in the municipal assemblies of Novi Pazar and of Sjenica: in both cases, all parties except Ugljanin participate in broad coalitions under the lead of Ljajić's SDP, including even five deputies of the ultra-nationalist SRS.

3.3 Preševo valley

The Preševo valley, located in Southern Serbia at the borders with Macedonia and Kosovo, consists of three municipalities. In two municipalities, Preševo and Bujanovac, ethnic Albanians (0.8% of Serbia's population) are a local majority. Ethnic Albanians in the Preševo valley almost exclusively vote for their own ethnic parties, or abstain. After the introduction of a new electoral law and the abolishment of gerrymandered districts in Bujanovac in 2002, ethnic Albanian parties control the local authorities both in Preševo and in Bujanovac. These are the largest, and rather moderate Party of Democratic Action (PDD), the more nationalist Party for Democratic Progress (Albanian LDP), the Party for the Democratic Unification of Albanians (PDSH), and the Party for Democratic Integration (PDI).²² Further split parties have emerged, such as the PDD-split Democratic Union of

²² Informations on the Preševo valley rely on Crisis Group (2003: 19-24, 2007: 4-5, 10).

the Valley (BDL) (see table 4 for their representation in local assemblies). The parties are politically oriented towards Kosovo, and have separatist programs. They like to refer to a unofficial 1992 referendum, when most ethnic Albanians of the valley voted for a unification with Kosovo. In a common platform of 2006, all parties call for a high degree of decentralisation and territorial autonomy, and, seconded by Kosovo leaders, for a unification of the Preševo Valley with Kosovo, if there should be any changes in the Kosovo borders (Crisis Group 2007: 10). The party divisions are based on legacies from the 2000/01 insurgence against Belgrade, personal rivalries, and differences in the willingness to cooperate with Belgrade (Crisis Group 2007: 4-5). The radicalism in the claims seems to be an important electoral vehicle, an observation that is in line with the ethnic outbidding effect that has often been described for ethnically divided societies: when several parties of the same ethnic group exist, the most hard-line one wins most of the votes.²³ Local governing coalitions in the Preševo valley are ethnically exclusive, and there is no cooperation of ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs. The electoral results from different levels of elections are difficult to compare, due to the large-scale election boycott of national elections through the Albanian minority in Preševo. In the period 2000-2007, Albanian parties have boycotted all national elections in Serbia, and only participated in local elections (Crisis Group 2007). In 2007, only due to international persuasion, two parties (PDD, BDL) have participated in the elections as an alliance and won a seat in the national parliament.

	Bujanovac	Medveđa xxx	Preševo (2004)
PDD	13	4	12
LDP	9		5
PDI		3	
BDL			5
PDSH			15
SRS	12		1
DOS coalition	5		
Roma parties	2		

Table 4: Results of the 2004/2006 municipal elections. Sources: Cesid (Preševo, 2004), and Crisis Group (Medveđa, Bujanovac, 2006).

xxx Detailed results of the 2006 elections in Medveđa could not yet be found. xxx

3.4 Ethnic parties in other regions

Other ethnic groups are not relevant for the emergence of regional parties and party systems. Either, they live spread throughout the country, or they are organised in national, mainstream political parties.

The **Roma** minority counts 1.4% of the Serbian population, according to the census, but the number of Roma might be several times as high.²⁴ Roma live spread throughout the country. Their political

²³ See Mitchell (1995: 773), cf. Horowitz (1985: 291, 357-8).

²⁴ See for instance the website of the European Roma Rights Centre, <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=398> [accessed 23/4/08].

behaviour appears however to be little homogeneous. Two Roma parties have gained representation in the Serbian national parliament in 2007, with one deputy each, the Union of Roma in Serbia, and the Roma Party. There are several local councillors of Roma nationality, elected from different lists (OSCE 2008: 20).

Other minorities have only marginal parties which have a few municipal mandates.

Bulgarians count 0.3% of the Serbian population and live mainly in two towns in Eastern Serbia. There, the vote distribution in the national elections does not substantially differ from the national average. The Democratic party of Bulgarians (previously Democratic union of the Bulgarians) has entered local politics in Dimitrovgrad, and it was part of the minority parties' electoral list (ZZT) in the 2003 national elections, but in both Bulgarian-populated locations, the Serbian mainstream parties rule.

The **Gorani** (0.1% of Serbia's population) live mainly in and around Belgrade. Their language is very similar to Serbo-Croat, but they are Muslims, and further identified through their origin in the South-Eastern part of Kosovo. The Civic union of the Gorani was formed in 2006, under the same name as the Gorani party in Kosovo. It did since not run in any elections on its own.²⁵

Finally, the Šumadija party a tiny non-ethnic, regional party, which is related to the Šumadija region, South-East of Belgrade. It belongs to the democratic part of the political spectrum, and has participated in 2003 in the ZZT coalition with regional and ethnic parties.

4 Summary

Despite its still strong centralisation, Serbia is a country that is rich of regional parties, some that compete with a regionalist program, and others that appeal for votes of ethnic groups which are territorially concentrated in a small area. This has given party politics in three Serbian regions a specific touch: In the Albanian-dominated Preševo valley, mainly Albanian minority parties compete in elections, while Bosniak political parties play an important role in many of the municipalities in the Sandžak region, where many Bosniaks (Muslims) live. The largest regional parties however can be found in the multiethnic Vojvodina region.

The nature of these (ethno-)regional parties shows clearly that they are rather based on social and economic conflicts than formed due to administrative lines: either, they campaign along ethnic boundaries, or they are formed because they demand for the restoration of the previous autonomy of Vojvodina. With look at the theoretical explanations, the emergence of regional parties in Serbia fits well with the cleavage-based explanations, and puts a question mark behind the decentralisation approach. While for other areas of the world, it has been argued that administrative decentralisation

²⁵ Danas, 4-5 November 2006, Osnovana Građanska Inicijativa Goranaca.

offers incentives for the creation of strong regional parties, the empirical evidence in the Serbian case looks rather the other way round: regional parties have been formed despite of a lack of substantial decentralisation, or possibly they could attract their voters even *because* the major national parties were rather advocating a centralisation of the state (and have, after a short policy change, re-adopted this position again with their support for the new Serbian constitution). Namely, the stress of regional and ethnic minority parties on the decentralisation issue might be a vehicle to put pressure on the political authorities to move more competences to autonomous provinces and municipalities. Certainly, these parties might have remained weak in terms of seats, but they have been important coalition partners mainly for the democratically oriented parties in Serbia in several national, regional and local government coalitions, and occasionally, they even help the Serbian nationalists to get a governing majority. This openness for coalitions on both sides puts ethnic and regional parties in the position that they might sooner or later use such an opportunity to negotiate for a more decentralised system in Serbia.

This is why the sequence of happenings in Serbia puts a question mark behind the commonly supported hypothesis, and even a particularly relevant one: when, if not during the process of state-building, should the impact of party system patterns on the structure of the young democracy be particularly strong – and vice-versa? From the perspective of the growing party nationalisation and decentralisation literature, it would thus be particularly relevant to keep a close eye on the further development of regional autonomies and (ethno-)regional parties in Serbia.

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Appendix

Union of the Vojvodina Hungarians (Savez vojvođanskih Mađara)

Democratic party of the Vojvodina Hungarians (Demokratska stranka vojvođanskih Mađara)

Democratic Union of the Vojvodina Hungarians (Demokratska zajednica vojvođanskih Mađara)

Alliance of Romanians from Vojvodina (Alijansa vojvodjanskih Rumuna)

Democratic Union of Romanians (Demokratski savez Rumuna)

Movement of Romanians and Vlachs in Serbia (Pokret Rumuna i Vlaha u Srbiji)

Independent national party of the Vlachs (Narodna samostalna stranka Vlaha)

Bunjevac party (Bunjevačka stranka)

Democratic Party of the Bulgarians (Demokratska partija Bugara)

Democratic union of the Bulgarians (Demokratski savez Bugara)

Party of Democratic Action (PDD) – Partija za demokratsko delovanje PDD

Party for Democratic Progress (Albanian LDP) – Pokret za demokratski progres PDP

Democratic Union of the Valley (BDL) – Demokratska unija doline (DUD)

Democratic Party of Albanians (PDSH) – Demokratska partija Albanaca (DPA)

Party for Democratic Integration (PDI)

Bosniak National Council of Sandžak (BNVS), Bošnjačko nacionalno vijeće Sandžaka.

Muslim National Council of Sandžak (MNVS), Muslimansko nacionalno vijeće Sandžaka.

Union of Roma in Serbia – Unija Roma Srbije.

Roma Party – Romska Partija.

Civic Initiative of the Gorani – Građanska inicijativa Goranaca.