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## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. INTENDED OUTCOME  | 5  |
| 2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  | 8  |
| 3. THE ARRIVAL TO BIH OF FOREIGN INTERPRETATIONS<br>OF ISLAM   | 20 |
| 4. BOSNIAN TRADITIONAL ISLAM VERSUS SALAFISM   | 23 |
| 5. THE CONFLICT AMONG BOSNIAK INTELLECTUALS,<br>RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SCHOLARS ON THE WAY<br>TO DEAL WITH SALAFISM | 26 |
| 6. REACTIONS COMING FROM THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY<br>TO CONTROL SALAFISM  | 28 |
| 7. CURRENT SITUATION OF THE SALAFI MOVEMENT IN BIH   | 31 |
| 8. NEED OF PROFESSIONAL,<br>SERIOUS AND OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS   | 42 |
| 9. LINKS BETWEEN BOSNIAN SALAFIS AND TERRORISM   | 47 |
| 10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:<br>HOW TO DEFEAT RADICAL SALAFISM?  | 51 |
| 11. BIBLIOGRAPHY   | 59 |





## 1.

# INTENDED OUTCOME

Islam in Bosnia and Hercegovina (BIH) was introduced by the Ottoman Empire. From 1463 to 1878 this empire ruled the area. So, the history of Islam in Bosnia is intimately connected to the history of Islam in the Ottoman Empire. The State within the Ottoman Empire, like other Muslim empires before, was organized according to the principle of organic unity of religious and political authority. They did however introduce an unprecedented hierarchy of Muslims scholars or *Ulama*. *Muftis*, *Mudarris* and *Imams*, together with judges, *Qadis*, and Friday prayer preachers, or *Khatibs*, were under state jurisdiction and they were very often state officials. Because this rigid organisation, there was little autonomy in interpretation and practice of Islam in Bosnia.

The Ottoman troops also brought the Sunni Islam and the official legal school to the Ottoman Empire: the *Hanafi* School of Jurisprudence. The *Hanafi* is one of the four Sunni legal schools. It is the largest one and it is followed by approximately 30 percent of Muslims worldwide. This school is predominant in Turkey, northern Egypt, Levant, and amongst the Muslim communities of the Balkans, Central and South Asia, China, Russia and Ukraine. *Hanafi* School has been considered by many authors as the most open-minded School. Early Hanafism was associated with the partisans of *Ra'y* (trans. Opinion). Other schools, however, especially *Hambalism*, that wanted to base everything on formal reports about the

prophetic Sunna, grew out of the party of *Hadith*. This has been cast as “rationalism vs. traditionalism”. According to the *Hanafi* School, the *Iytilhad*, or individual reasoning, is often a used source of the *Sharia*, or Islamic Law, together with customs or *Urf*, hence a degree of flexibility in interpretation. For more than 500 years Bosnian Muslims have maintained the *Hanafi* tradition, following a moderate and open minded version of Islam: rich on tradition, tolerant of other communities and compatible with western values.

During and just after the war in BiH the financial support coming from foreign Muslim countries undermined the power of the well-organized and structured Bosnian Islamic community. The Islamic revival that began in Yugoslavia in the 70's decade, which was developed in the framework of the local Muslim institutions and tradition, turned during and after the war to a different revitalization influenced by alien elements as some foreign fighters and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from the Middle East. The Official Islamic Community of BiH (IZ) has been taking control of Islam in BiH since the end of the 1992-95 war. However, the IZ has recognized the presence of religious organizations outside its control, and that one of these organizations is an obstacle for the legitimate activities of the wider Islamic Community.

Besides efforts on behalf of the IZ to counter external influence, ordinary believers are very often staunch opponents of Salafis and that might be the really insurmountable obstacle in front of Salafism in BiH. Since the end of the war the largely secular and European attitude among the Bosniaks has caused friction with foreign Islamic creeds. Different reports on incidents involving moderate and radical Muslims have shown that Salafi communities are willing to use coercive methods to spread their radical ideas. Traditional Muslims have also demonstrated that they can use radical methods to counter the spread of the Salafi movement in BiH. Assessments show that, despite their efforts, the Salafi movement does not have many supporters in BiH. The general population is afraid of their

fundamentalist approach towards religion. BIH Muslims want to maintain the local traditional and moderate version of Islam.

While the predominance of traditional 'Bosnian' Islam is widespread, the Salafi movement has established itself in some areas of BIH. Some radical groups have been determined in their efforts to publicly confront the role of the IZ and its control over Islamic religion in BIH, using their literal interpretation of the Koran. Their actions have drawn the attention of both local and international media and security services.

An element of the local media, that often shows nationalist or political bias, has tried to show the problem of Salafism in BIH as a growing threat against the safety and security within BIH and perhaps within the rest of Europe. This media element has used a theme that is similar to that used at the beginning of the 1990's, in changing the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' to 'Wahhabism' or Salafism. To counter this, media close to the Bosniak establishment, have tried to 'hide' any evidence of the *Salafi* presence in BIH or, at least, to downplay the significant of their influence.

Most of the information gathered until now about this topic is based on the regurgitation of media or biased spread of rumours without further confirmation. This article, which is focused on the current situation of Salafism, intends to represent original thinking about the real picture of the Islamic community in the country and not a 'regurgitation of open-source wisdom'. It is very important to defeat prejudices and misunderstandings that present obstacles to make a serious analysis on this issue.



## 2.

# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Although this is not an article focused on ethnic, historic, social, psychological or theological issues, some terms and concepts related to the previously mentioned disciplines have to be explained before starting any analysis of the impact of foreign religious interpretations among the Muslim population in BIH.

### A) “BOSNIAN MUSLIMS” vs. “BOSNIACS”

The Preamble of the Dayton Peace Accords<sup>1</sup> states, among other things, the commitment of BIH to freedom, equality, tolerance and democratic institutions of government<sup>2</sup>. It also states that the carriers of sovereignty are “constituent<sup>3</sup> peoples”: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, along with “Others” and “citizens of BIH”.

While each have their own standard language variation and a name for it, they speak a variety of dialects that are mutually intelligible, but have fixed phonetic, morphological and lexical differences<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Due to the nature of the Constitution, the Preamble has the normative binding.

2 Recalling the Basic Principles agreed in Geneva on 08 Sep 95, and in New York on 26 Sep 95.

3 The term “constituent” refers to the fact that these three ethnic groups are explicitly mentioned in the constitution, and that none of them can be considered a minority or immigrant.

4 The question of standard language of BIH is resolved in such a way that three constituent ethnic groups have their educational and cultural institutions in their respective native or mother tongue.

Despite it was believed that these ethnics groups emerged from religious groups in a process that occurred in 15<sup>th</sup> century, numerous historians, anthropologists and ethnologists consider that Croats and Serbs have merely completed their ethnic integration in the 19th century (like, for instance, Norwegians), while Bosniaks crystallized into a separate ethnic group only at the end of the 20th century. A “Y Chromosome Haplogroups” study published in 2005 found that “three main groups of BIH, in spite of some quantitative differences, share a large fraction of the same ancient gene pool distinctive for the Balkan area”<sup>5</sup>.

Because linguistic and genetic similarities, the most easily recognizable feature that distinguishes the three ethnic groups is a religious one. Bosniaks are generally associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats (B-Croats) with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs (B-Serbs) with the Serb Orthodox Church.

However, many persons who identify with major ethno-religious group are atheist or agnostics who do not regularly practice any religion. Much of the post-war data are estimates. Most sources, however, estimate the BIH population at roughly four million and a half (4,613,414). According to data from 2000, approximately 48% of BIH population is ethnically Bosniac (2,214,438) but only 40 % (1,845,366) consider themselves to be Muslim. So, based on these rough estimates it can be argued there are 369,072 Bosniaks who consider themselves “non-Muslims”.

Despite of an increase in the prominence of religion in BIH during and subsequent to the war, most of the BIH Muslim believers have a religious approach very similar to believers of different religions throughout Europe. For many of the local believers, religion is linked to tradition, heritage and culture. This position is a result of the largely secular and European attitude among Bosniaks. Religious practice is confined to occasional visits to the mosque or significant rites of passage such as birth,

5 Marjanovic, D; Fornarino, S, Montagna, S, Primorac, D, Hadziselimovic, R, Vidovic, S, Pojskic, N, Battaglia, V, Achilli, A, Drobic, K, Andjelinovic, S, Torrioni, A, Santachiara-Benerecetti, AS, Semino, O (2005) “The Peopling of Modern Bosnia-Herzegovina: Y-chromosome Haplogroups in the Three Main Ethnic Groups”.

marriage, and death. For instance, Bosniaks celebrate Bajram and other religious holidays in the same way that many Christian believers celebrate Christmas or Easter: arguably based more on a social approach than on a religious one.

Regardless of the mentioned religious stance of an important part of the Bosniak population, Bosniak political leaders and parties are very frequently referred to as “Muslims” by international news agencies and broadcasting companies that translate articles published by the local media, although Muslim is not the denomination of any of the BIH constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats).

This phenomenon exclusively affects Bosniacs. B-Croats and B-Serbs are never reported as Catholics or Orthodox respectively. Despite the fact that the most easily recognizable feature that distinguishes the three ethnic groups is religious one, DPA does not mention religious affiliations of the “constituent peoples” of BIH: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.

The 92-95 war was not a religious conflict. However, the association of ethnicity and religion is so close that the bitterness engendered by the war and the enormous number of deaths it caused contributed to mutual suspicion among members of all three major religious groups.

For the author of this article, the categorization of Bosniaks as “Muslims” contributes to the perpetuation of this situation. It is strongly recommended avoiding the use of the term “Muslim” in order to categorize the whole “Bosniak” population.

## B) INCREASE OF RELIGIOSITY VS. RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION

Building or rebuilding of mosques in different areas of BIH have focused the attention of a part of the local, regional and even international public opinion that have tried to link a supposed increase in the

number of Islamic religious buildings in BIH that evidences a hypothetical “Islamization” and even radicalization of the Bosniak society.

From the beginning, the war in BIH was characterized by two features that had little to do with military objectives:

- The mass expulsion of civilians driven from their homes, robbed, raped and murdered for being of the “wrong” ethnicity and religion, and
- The deliberate targeting and destruction of cultural, religious and historic landmarks by nationalist extremists<sup>6</sup>.

More than one-thousand of Bosnia’s mosques, hundreds of Catholic churches and scores of Orthodox churches, monasteries, private and public libraries, archives, and museums were shelled, burned, and dynamited, and in many cases even the ruins were removed by nationalist extremists in order to complete the cultural and religious “cleansing” of the land they had seized<sup>7</sup>.

This strategy can be seen as an attempt to eliminate the material evidence of previous common heritage and common space in BIH, creating a religiously and ethnically “pure” future, based on the premise that coexistence is impossible.

In a context where ethnic identity is defined by the religious choices made by one’s ancestors, the horrific living conditions for those who stayed in their residence places and those who were forced to leave, combined with the massacres suffered or/and witnessed have probably increased the religiosity among some of them<sup>8</sup>.

6 For further reference see Andras Riedlmayer, “From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage” in Islam and Bosnia, Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States edited by Maya Shatzmiller (Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press 2002)

7 Council of Europe: Committee on Culture and Education, *Information Reports on the Destruction by War of the Cultural Heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, 1993-97), nos. 1-10 = Assembly Documents nos. 6756, 6869, 6904, 6989 + addendum, 6999, 7070, 7133, 7308, 7341, 7674, 7740; Andras Riedlmayer, “Erasing the Past: The Destruction of Libraries and Archives in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 29 i (July 1995), pp. 7-11; Vesna Blazina, “Mémoricide ou la purification culturelle: la guerre et les bibliothèques de Croatie et de Bosnie-Herzégovine,” *Documentation et bibliothèques* 42 (1996), pp. 149-64; Alain-Charles Lefèvre, “Bosnie et Croatie: un désastre culturel sans précédent,” *Archéologia* no. 328 (Nov. 1996), pp. 26-35.

8 On the fatal nexus between ethnicity, religion and genocide during the 1992-95 Bosnian war, see Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Despite that the increase of religiousness among BIH Muslim believers happened mainly in the framework of the local religious institutions and according to the traditional religious interpretation, the increase of religiousness has been frequently and wrongly identify as a supposed “Muslim radicalization” in the country.

Although it is likely that since the war polarized and radicalized some members of the different ethno-religious or “national” communities in BIH, talks of a fundamentalist threat in BIH are in any case particularly inappropriate, because the BIH Muslims are among the most secularized Muslim populations in the world and their desperate situation during the war has not significantly eroded the progressive bloc of Bosnian Islam.

It has been argued that Islam as a social identity can not be understood properly in the Bosnian context without taking into account the importance of the Catholic and Orthodox Christian belief systems to identities of the B-Croats and B-Serbs respectively. In B-H nationality is defined by religion, and a religious revival will be at core of an aggressive nationalism among any of the three Bosnian nationalities (B-Serb, B-Croat, or Bosniak)<sup>9</sup>.

There is no doubt that the increase of religiousness among Muslim population frequently creates headlines in local and international media while the phenomenon in the Orthodox or catholic communities rarely if ever received any coverage at all<sup>10</sup>.

### C) RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION: CAUSE OR RESULT OF THE WAR?

The presence of Islamic volunteers and the appearance of some sort of radical Islam in BIH is a consequence rather than the cause of the war. The war in BIH has been very often justified as a religious one, in

<sup>9</sup> Bringa Tone (2002), “Islam and the Quest for Identity”, in Shatzmiller, Maya, “Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States”, McGill Queen’s University Press, pg 33.

<sup>10</sup> Sells (1998), (p.122-123)

which B-Croats (Catholic) and B-Serbs (Orthodox Christians) defended the Western Countries from violent, penetrating Islam. "A clash of Civilizations" was necessary to create an excuse of the further destruction of the State. Also, the radicalization of some BIH Muslims was very useful to achieve the abovementioned political aim. It was simply a political war for the territory and the destruction of BIH as a country, whilst the religion, as a tool was used as a justification for ethnic cleansing and mass murdering conducted immediately at the beginning of the war<sup>11</sup>.

The breakup of multiethnic states placed rival ethnic groups in an anarchic setting, thereby triggering intense fears and tempting each group to use force to improve its relative position. This problem was particularly severe when each group's territory contained enclaves inhabited by their ethnic rivals (as in the case of B-H) because each side would be tempted to "cleanse" these alien minorities and expand to incorporate any others from their ethnic group that lay outside their borders<sup>12</sup>.

Most Bosnian Muslim thought about themselves as Europeans and even feared some Islamic values that could clash with their secular views on life. A Bosnian Muslim had more in common with a B-Serb or B-Croat than with a Muslim living in the Meddle East<sup>13</sup>.

#### D) MONO-ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC POLARIZATION VS. RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION

Some local and media have severely criticized the current interethnic situation in BIH. This criticism has frequently included the assessment

11 Edin JAHIC: "Developments of events in Bosnia and Herzegovina Following the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001". This paper was presented at the *First Annual Conference on Human Security, Terrorism and Organized Crime in the Western Balkan Region*, organized by the HUMSEC project in Ljubljana, 23-25 November 2006.

12 Barry Posen, quoted by Stephen M. Walt in "International Relations: One World, Many Theories" "Foreign Policy". Washington: Spring 1998. Iss. 110; pg, 29, 16 pgs. <http://www.foreign-policy.com/Ning/archive/archive/110/irelations.pdf>

13 Fine, John V.A. (2002) "The Various faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present", in Shatzmiller, Maya, "Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States", McGill Queen's University Press, pg 13.

that Sarajevo is being turned to a rigid mono-ethnic and religious exclusive city<sup>14</sup>. A supposed radicalization of the Muslim population has been used as one of the main facts to support this theory.

Ethnic cleansing during the 92-95 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. As a result, the majority of B-Serbs live in the Serb Republic and the majority of Bosniacs and B-Croats in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Bosniac and B-Croat areas remain, with most B-Croats living in Herzegovina region and most Bosniacs in Central Bosnia region<sup>15</sup>.

According to statistics from the Office of the United Nations High commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sarajevo's population has slumped from 500,000 in 1991 to 349,000 in 1998. At the same time, the Bosniac population jumped from 252,000, or 50 percent of the total, in 1991 to 303,000, or 87 percent, in 1998; the Serb population dwindled from 139,000, or 28 percent, in 1991, to 18,000, or 5 percent, in 1998; and the Croat population fallen back from 35,000, or 7 percent, in 1991, to 21,000, or 6 percent, in 1998. Sarajevo is also home to a large number of internally displaced persons who make up about a quarter of the canton's population. Of these, some 89,000 are Bosniaks, 2,000 Croats and 1,000 Serbs. The UNHCR estimates that 13,200 Croats and 5,600 Serbs have returned to the canton since the end of the war. Meanwhile, 75,600 Bosniaks have either returned or resettled in the Bosnian capital in the same period<sup>16</sup>.

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14 On 02 March 2009, Srdjan Dizdarevic, the President of BIH Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, warned that Sarajevo is now, in effect, a mono-ethnic city. Dizdarevic explained that Sarajevo is a city where Bosniacs constitute 90% of the population. He added that everyone knew that there were other completely ethnically cleansed communities, but that it is very important for Sarajevo, the Capital, to reconstitute itself as a multiethnic environment.

15 Bosnia and Herzegovina has several levels of political structuring under the state government level. Most important of these levels is the division of the country into two entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For more information on this topic please see Bulletin no. 66 of the Office of the High Representative (February 3, 1998): [http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/preso/chronology/bulletins/default.asp?content\\_id=4991#8](http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/preso/chronology/bulletins/default.asp?content_id=4991#8)

16 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Rebuilding a Multi-Ethnic Sarajevo*, 3 February 1998, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a6ec10.html> [accessed 16 November 2009]

The International Religious Freedom Report 2009<sup>17</sup>, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the US State Department, affirms that the BIH weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedoms and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases local governments made improvements to protect religious freedoms; however, respect for religious freedoms continued to be limited by selective legal enforcement and the indifference of some government officials, which allowed social violence and the threat of violence to restrict the ability to worship of adherents of religious groups in areas where they are in minority. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of vandalism of religious buildings or violence against and harassment of religious officials or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles, intoxicated individuals, or mentally unstable persons were responsible.

Lack of uniform protection, the Report adds, posed obstacle to safeguarding minority rights. Police forces as well as entities' and local governments frequently allowed or encouraged an atmosphere in which violations of religious freedoms could take place. In some cases the reluctance of police and prosecutors to aggressively investigate and prosecute crimes against religious minorities remained a major obstacle to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. The appropriation of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes had a negative impact on inter-religious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. Authorities of the majority religious or ethnic group often discriminated against those of the minority group in matters related to municipal services, including security and education.

Some political and even religious leaders have been contributing to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feelings through public statements and through religious speeches. While they applaud a growing nationalistic sentiment among their respective population, the scars of the

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor: International Religious Freedom Report 2009. Bosnia and Herzegovina. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127302.htm>

war, economic woes, and a recent history of segregation as a result of post-war returnee movements has, in many places, also injected a streak of nationalism especially in the younger generation that at times is targeted against other religious communities and their symbols.

Ultra-nationalistic symbols and slogans that very often glorify war crimes and their perpetrators are widely used specially by youngster as provocative graffiti, particularly against the religious buildings and symbols of the other ethnicities. It is a common occurrence all across the BIH but in particular in some areas where different ethnicities live together and the return process is still ongoing. Slogans and graffiti are used to stress the ethnic presence and dominance of the majority ethno-religious group in the respective areas. The nature of the incidents can be described as acts of vandalism that show the radical approach of a part of the BIH youth and their ultra-nationalistic tendencies. Based on the study of similar events that happened during the last five years, it is possible to assess that the verbal and physical attacks against religious persons and facilities represent a message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethno-religious group in the area. It reflects the need for an ethnic identity and another phase of psychological war to preserve the supremacy of their own ethnic group. These incidents seriously contribute to nourish the fear of the returnees and the return process.

Many of these incidents have been exaggerated, tergiversated or even invented by the media according to the different political and nationalistic agendas. These reports have been widely used to feed fear of the other ethnical groups and insist on the thesis of their own people threatened by them. Nationalistically-biased information that is never confirmed or rectified feed the feelings of fear and insecurity of the targeted population, who do not have access to other sources of information, thus creating a defensive feeling among them and maintaining a high level of interethnic tension.

Some of these incidents have been wrongly attributed to Salafi or “Wahhabi” followers. One of these cases might be analyzed and used as

an example. After serious incidents that took place during the opening of the “Sarajevo Queer Festival” on 24 October 2008, an important part of the international news agencies reported about the incidents during the festival as only linked to the so-called “Wahhabi movement”. They used this event as evidence of Islamic extremist who beat up minorities. Based on the experiences from the similar events in the neighboring countries, such as Croatia (Gay Pride Parade in Zagreb) and Serbia (Gay Pride Parade in Novi Sad), violent acts against the participants of the “Q events” might be linked to various extreme right-wing groups such as “skinheads”, neo-Nazi sympathizers and similar. Different sources reported about the presence of a major group of supporters of the main local football teams “Sarajevo” and “Zeljeznicar” and other trouble makers who played an important and active role during the incidents after the opening of the “Sarajevo Queer Festival”.

Incidents during the “Sarajevo Queer Festival” were a result of an overall very conservative/non-tolerant mentality in the region. They were greatly influenced by the statements of an important part of the local religious and political leader’s stance, which, together with some NGOs harshly condemned the event. They can not be directly linked to the radicalization of any of any particular religious community in BIH.

Problems faced by minority communities in BIH are the main obstacles to development of a multiethnic society and they must be solved and reverted as the best measure to reach a stable and secure BIH.

## E) WAHHABISM VS. SALAFISM

Wahhabism is an eighteenth-century reformist/reformist movement for socio-moral reconstruction of society. It was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a Hanbali scholar, in Arabia. Wahhabism proclaims *tawhid* (uniqueness and unity of Allah) as its primary doctrine. The movement began in response to the perceived moral decline and

political weakness of the Muslim community in Arabia. It proposes a return to an idealized Islamic past through reassertion of monotheism and reliance on Quran and *hadith*, rejecting medieval interpretations of Islam and jurisprudence. Wahhabism belongs to the category of the movements that seek to return to a strict application of the Sharia while opposing both Western encroachment and the intellectual, artistic, and mystical tradition of Islam itself, and all this in the name of an early puritan Islam considered to have been lost by later generations.

Elements of the movement are referred to as Wahhabis by opponents, but refer to themselves as *Muwahhidun*, or those upholding the doctrine of *tawhid*<sup>18</sup>.

Typically Wahhabism label is associated with those who follow the teachings of Saudi Wahhabi scholars. In BIH however, there is a tendency to indiscriminately label as Wahhabis not only members of other religious streams different to the traditional version of Islam, but also all Muslims deemed excessively conservative or zealous. Some elements of the local media go further and even consider as Wahhabis the local believers who are only more observant and fervent than the ordinary Muslim population.

Salafism is a generic term, depicting a school of thought that takes the pious ancestors, *Salaf*, of the patristic period of early Islam as exemplary models and emphasizes restoration to Islamic doctrines to pure form, adherence to the Quran and Sunnah, rejection of the authority of later interpretations, and maintaining the unity of Ummah. Essentially intellectual and modern in nature, Salafism initially worked to assert the validity of Islam in modern times, prove its compatibility with reason and science, and legitimize the acquisition of Western scientific and technological achievements. At the turn of the twentieth century, Salafism viewed political reform as an essential requirement for revitalization of the Muslim community. Despite of the initial stance of the movement, the term came to refer to traditionalist reformers<sup>19</sup>.

18 For additional information about the term Wahhabism or any other Islamic concept, please consult Exposito, John L. "The Oxford Dictionary of Islam". (Oxford University Press, 2003)

19 Exposito, John L. (2003)

Despite that nowadays Salafism and Wahhabism are frequently equated with radicalism and terrorism, Salafism and Wahhabism are not inherently synonymous with violence, terrorism, or radicalism. Many Salafis and Wahhabis throughout the world are doctrinally rigid, but peaceful<sup>20</sup>.

The widespread sharp distinction between Wahhabism and Salafism is less justified in Eastern portion of the European continent because different reasons<sup>21</sup>:

- Despite their apparent differences, the two often refer to the same authors and concepts.
- They had inspired each other at the Saudi faculties of theology for decades.
- Then, from the late 1990s on, the prominent Eastern European Salafi preachers, particularly the Bosniac ones, also studied there.
- Despite of this, the recommend using the term Salafism to label those local Muslim believers who have left the traditional interpretation of their faith and turned to different foreign creeds. This recommendation is mainly based on two facts:
  - Wahhabism is a particular orientation within Salafism
  - Most puritanical groups in the Muslim world are Salafis in orientation, but not necessarily Wahhabis

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<sup>20</sup> For more reference, see “Salafi Islam”, GlobalSecurity.Org: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-salafi.htm>

<sup>21</sup> “Islamist and public security concerns in Eastern Europe”, Gyorgy’s Lederer’s talk at a 2008 conference of the “Obcansky Institute” in Prague



### 3.

## THE ARRIVAL TO BIH OF FOREIGN INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAM

By 1990, after forty-five years of communism, all of Bosnian society was very secularized, and though all three ethnic groups had their origins in a religion, religion played little role in the lives of any of the elite. Thus one not should see Bosniak, Serbs, and Croats as being Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic, but as being of those three respective backgrounds. As since persons of all ethnicities were twenty-century, modern, secular Europeans, led by members of the Communist Party of BiH, there was much intermarriage among different groups in BiH cities. Between the Second World War and 1991 roughly 40 percent of urban marriages were mixed and over 20 percent of urban Bosnians declared themselves in censuses “Yugoslav” or other, refusing to define themselves in ethnic terms. Thus the first definition for the term “Muslim” after the 1968 was ethnic and few educated Muslims gave Islam much thought.<sup>22</sup>

One survey in 1985 put the proportion of religious believers in BiH at 17 percent. Decades of secular education and Communist political culture had been reinforced, in this respect, by an ever-increasing Westernization of society too. The growing urbanization of BiH, though slow at first, had also had an effect; by the late 1980s 30 percent

<sup>22</sup> Fine, John V.A. (2002), “The Various Faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present”, in Shatzmiller, Maya, *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, McGill Queen’s University Press, pp. 12-13 .

of marriages in urban districts were “mixed” marriages.<sup>23</sup> For many rural Muslims and the vast majority of urban ones, being a Muslim was reduced to a set of cultural traditions: Muslim names, circumcision, baklava, and the celebration of Ramazan Bajram (the feast which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan), getting a god-parent to cut a one-year-old child’s hair, a preference for tiny coffee cups without handles, a sympathy for spiders and various other traditional practices, the origins of which are frequently unknown to those who practice them. The previous mentioned revival, which happened into the institutional framework of the IZ and alternative organizations were practically ignored, dramatically changed after April 1992.

When the Bosnian conflict heated up in the early ‘90s’, while the International Community debated the possible intervention, the embryonic Army of the Republic of BiH (ARBiH) was clearly at a disadvantage. This weakness was further exacerbated by the UN arms embargo. Although most Bosniacs were secular individuals, Muslims throughout the world saw them as victims because they were Muslims. Foreign Muslims began volunteering, often very religious ones, and some states began smuggling in arms and advisors<sup>24</sup>.

In those parts of BiH under Serbian and Croatian forces, 75 per cent of Bosnian territory was “cleansed” of Muslims while mosques and other Islamic buildings were in almost all cases destroyed.<sup>25</sup> However, freedom for Islamic activities became almost unlimited in some territories under the control of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is reported that several hundred Afghan-Arab *Mujahidin*, or Holy Warriors, joined with, fought along side, Bosniacs during the 1992-5 war in BiH. Highly religious and motivated, they brought a specific understanding of Islam with them and they tried to indoctrinate

23 Malcom, Noel: “Bosnia a Short History” (1996). New York University. (pg. 221 and 222)

24 Fine, John V.A. (2002) “The Various faiths in the History of Bosnia: Middle Ages to the Present”, in Shatzmiller, Maya, “Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States”, McGill Queen’s University Press, pg 18.

25 Andras Riedlmayer, “From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage” in Islam and Bosnia, Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States edited by Maya Shatzmiller (Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press 2002), p. 100.

nate those ideas into Bosniak minds, having the opportunity to preach and spread propaganda freely. Thus the *Salafi* ideas surfaced for the first time on a wider scale. This foreign creed was different from the moderate and traditional version of Islam in BiH. During this time, the relations between BiH and the Muslim world were elevated to an unprecedented level. The number of graduates of Islamic Studies outside the country increased and Islamic literature arrived in significant quantities. Additionally, the economic power of local populations was practically reduced to nothing and the foreign agencies became the prime founders of the Islamic revival. This financial support, coming from Middle East countries, undermined the power of the well-organized and structured IZ and brought some Bosnian Muslims closer to beliefs and practices acceptable to *Salafism*.

According to data from 2000,<sup>26</sup> more than 156 mosques that had been repaired, rebuilt or newly constructed in BiH since the war had been sponsored by foreign relief agencies, some of which used their financial clout in order to promote their fundamentalist missionary agenda. The financing of the reconstruction of a mosque by these NGO's was a part of a strategy aimed at acquiring the spiritual leadership of the community. The result of this process is the replacement of the Hanafi, the moderate traditional local version of Islam, with a radical and intolerant one and a shift toward more radical activities. After 11th September 2001 this situation changed because the media identified some organizations as sources of extremism. Some of their members were arrested or questioned by local police or international forces about their links to the terrorism. Many of the foreign NGO's closed their offices in BiH and all the mosques whose construction had been financed them were handed over to the BiH Islamic Community.

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26 Stephen Schwartz, "Islamic Fundamentalism in the Balkans," *Partisan Review* (July 2000), pp. 421-26; Saïd Zulficar, "Alerte aux iconoclastes!" *Al-Ahram Hebdo* (February, 28, 2001), on line at <http://hebdo.ahram.org.eg/Arab/Ahram/2001/2/28/Null0.htm> Jolyon Naegele, "Saudi Wahhabi Aid Workers Bulldoze Balkan Monuments," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine* (August 4, 2000) <http://www.rferl.org/specials/yugoslavia/monuments/>.



#### 4.

## BOSNIAN TRADITIONAL ISLAM VERSUS SALAFISM

Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s was in a unique situation: it had the political and mobilizing structures in place even for the creation of an Islamic state. Nevertheless, it lacked the cultural framework around which to mobilize social support, nor did it have a context in which to develop a strong Islamic social movement. Islam was used more in a nationalist context rather than as a pervasive issue that could transform the society. At the moment, despite its efforts, the *Salafi* movement does not have many supporters in BiH. The general population appears to be afraid of their fundamentalist approach towards religion. The Bosnian Muslims have been among the most secularised Muslim populations in the world. The largely secular and European attitude among the Bosniaks has caused friction with foreign Islamic extremists. In the past, Islamic radical groups have been financed through the donations of some Arabic countries and by non-governmental organizations that were headquartered in BiH. These NGOs have been present in the Balkans since the 1990s, many evolving from the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. Since then, some of these organizations developed support structures that have proven to be easily exploited by extremist groups.

As a consequence of a number of worldwide terrorist attacks, the situation dramatically changed with police starting to raid a number of

foreign charities. The arrests of suspected terrorists alerted local and international attention to the birth of a different interpretation of Islam in BiH. Also the situation in some Middle East countries has undergone serious changes. Currently, their leaders and political systems are significant targets for international terrorist groups linked to the *Salafi* ideas. These authorities are now more careful about the final use of the money that they send abroad. It is, however, necessary to be aware of the fact that the radical networks have been looking for other financial sources to support their activities and are careful to avoid police and intelligence agencies.

BiH local authorities and the IZ attempt to counter *Salafi* influence. Additionally ordinary believers are very often staunch opponents of Salafis, and this might be an insurmountable obstacle for *Salafism* in BiH. It is possible that the *Salafi* movement does not have many supporters in BiH because the general population is afraid of their fundamentalist approach towards religion. They want to maintain the traditional local and moderate version of Islam.

Measures taken by local and international authorities, together with the secular attitude of the Bosniaks and the well-organised Islamic Community, which has been taking control for Islam in BiH since the end of the 1992-95 war, have hampered the spread of radical ideas in BiH. Some Salafi believers probably realized on this and started to openly challenge and verbally attack the Islamic Community.

On 26 October 2006, Imad Al Husain, also known as Abu Hamza, former mujahidin warrior and famous salafi believer, stated that the *Salafi* community had succeeded with their methods among the young people. He affirmed that the *Salafi* community members had mostly turned to young people and indoctrinated them with their version of Islam. Abu

Hamza also stated that the Islamic Community had admitted its defeat. According to him, if anybody enters a mosque, he usually finds two or three elderly people and the rest are young people that society views as *Salafis* but who only want something new, something genuine. Al Husain's statement also coincided with a number of incidents in BiH, and in Sandzak<sup>27</sup> that were caused by the aggressive behaviour of members of the *Salafi* community, who openly challenged the authority of the BiH Islamic Community and tried to take the control over some mosques and conduct Muslim celebrations according to the *Salafi* ritual.

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<sup>27</sup> Sandzak covers a large area of 8,686 square kilometres between Kosovo, Albania and BiH. Serbia runs 6 Sandzak municipalities (Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Priboj, Prijepole and Nova Varos) and Montenegro runs 5 (Bijelo Polje, Rozaje, Plav, Pljevlja and Berane). That region did not have a special status or enjoyed any form of autonomy in former Yugoslavia, or after its administrative division. Despite of this, Sandzak is inhabited by an important Muslim community, which has special historical and ethnic affiliation with the Bosniacs of BiH and maintain a strong regionalist feeling.



## 5.

# THE CONFLICT AMONG BOSNIAK INTELLECTUALS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SCHOLARS ON THE WAY TO DEAL WITH SALAFISM

*Reis Ul Ulema* (leader of the Islamic community) Mustafa Cerić's stance on Salafism has been widely questioned by different sectors of the Bosniak society. On 4 November 2006, Dževad Hodžić, a professor at the Sarajevo Faculty of Islamic Studies had defended Bosnian traditional Islam and stated that the IZ had been underestimating the *Salafi* problem. Later, Adnan Siladžić, a Bosnian Islamic scholar and a lecturer at the Sarajevo Faculty of Islamic Studies, blamed the responsible institutions of the IZ for the success of the *Salafi* teachings in BiH. According to him, *Wahhabis* have found fertile ground. They have filled the gap that existed for several years between an exaggerated academicism of Islamic teaching in BiH and the conservative dogmatism of which the official Bosniak scholars are proud. This empty space has been occupied by people who came from abroad. Siladžić added that the IZ has to launch a process of reform in order to address contemporary Islam more comprehensively and in order to seek its own ways to modernise.

Esad Duraković, a member of the Sarajevo Faculty of Philosophy staff, criticized Cerić's measures, considering them completely inadequate to tackle *Salafi* activism. Professor Resid Hafizovic, an eminent Bosnian Islamic scholar and a long-time critic of the *Salafi* movement, issued the

harshest reaction on the issue and the way the IZ had dealt with it. He stated that he considered this religious offshoot as the most treacherous, dangerous, dreadful and uncertain nightmare of the bloody history of Muslims in the Balkans. In a reaction, Cerić distanced himself and the IZ from the statements of Hafizovic and stated that *Salafis* should not be feared even though many in BiH believe that they are a threat to the Islamic traditions. Cerić added that the IZ is strong enough to preserve the Islamic tradition and that the work of this community must be respected. He insisted upon respect for the hierarchy in the community and warned that any religious scare-mongering would endanger the survival of Bosniaks.

More scholars and journalists have openly criticized *Salafism* and the way the BiH Islamic Community had dealt with the issue. According to them, Mustafa Cerić has adopted a deliberately ambiguous position on the *Salafi* issue. Although Cerić has condemned violence, calling on Muslims in Europe to be a bridge of understanding and tolerance, and preaching inter-faith dialogue and understanding, he has not publicly condemned the radical Muslim ideas in BiH. At its session on 19 March 2007, the Association of Independent Intellectuals KRUG 99, criticized the Islamic Community in BiH for having failed to deal with the problem of *Salafism* in BiH<sup>28</sup>. Mustafa Spahic, a professor at the Sarajevo faculty of Islamic Studies, stated that *Salafism* is more fatal than any form of violence, that the *Salafis* neglect all civil laws, and are active in spreading their influence by communicating widely to ordinary people, which the Islamic Community fails to do. The head of the Islamic Community was also criticized for travelling so much at the time when BiH was struck by the events involving Salafi groups. In spite of this, intellectuals considered that *Salafism* cannot take root in BiH because such ideas are not part of the BiH culture, and that *Salafism* could not exist in BiH anymore “than dates and figs could grow on Mountain Trebevic”. KRUG 99 concluded that the Islamic Community failed to follow its own tenets and so people tend to see it only as an institution of power rather than a moral authority, which is why its influence is constantly waning.

<sup>28</sup> Bosnian-Serb newspaper *Nezavisne novine* (Banja Luka), 20 March 2007.



## 6.

# REACTIONS COMING FROM THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY TO CONTROL SALAFISM

Mustafa Cerić, leader of the IZ, reacted promptly to Abu Hamza's statements previously mentioned and presented, on 8 November 2006, an Amended Resolution on the Different Interpretations of Islam in BiH. Cerić condemned the statements by Abu Hamza and stated that whoever does not accept the Bosnian way of practicing Islam should not have come to BiH and neither should he to stay. But the Resolution did not explicitly mention *Wahhabism* or *Salafism*. On 26 January 2007, Salafi *S.A.F.F.* magazine commented that during the Friday prayer (*Dzuma Namaž*) on 19 January 2007, Imams of the Zenica *Medžlis* read the religious decree (*Fatwa*) issued by the IZ, forbidding people to lead the *Dzuma Namaž*, unless they had first obtained a permit from the *Rijaset*, the highest administrative body of the IZ. Because of the aforementioned incidents, the IZ reacted and announced that it planned to ask for police presence close to the mosque, in order to avoid a conflict between *Salafis* and local residents (that practice religion in the way prescribed and practiced by the IZ). It will be recalled that the IZ sent a letter to the BiH authorities, asking for their attention to the fact that the registration of the number of associations and foundations, whose activities overlap with those of the IZ, had recently increased in BiH. Senior officials of the IZ expressed their concern and asked the Government for an urgent reaction.

The *Rijaset*, the Supreme Council of the IZ, also adopted a protocol on behaviour in mosques, which it would be forward to all Imams. According to this protocol, no events can be held in mosques, and not even in the courtyard of a mosque, without the knowledge of the Imam. The *Rijaset* would publish this set of rules in all daily papers. If radical groups flout the rules of the *Rijaset*, the Imams would have the police to contend with. There has been no rulebook on behaviour in mosques in the past, but one would be written as a result of the problems caused by the *Salafis*. It would be on that basis that the police would intervene if the rulebook's provisions are breached.

On 26 June 2007, the *Rijaset*, highest administrative body of the IZ held its 24<sup>th</sup> session. During this session, the *Rijaset* adopted the reports on the *akaid*, or Islamic doctrine, and on the Commission and the *fiqh*, or Islamic religious jurisprudence. Both commissions were tasked with reviewing all religious instruction textbooks used by schools, *madrasas*, and Islamic faculties under the jurisdiction of the Islamic community, and with determining the degree of application of Bosniaks' Islamic tradition. Specifically, the commissions' job was to determine the degree of application of the *Rijaset's* 27 March 2006 Resolution on the Interpretation of Islam. The commissions concluded that the textbooks of *madrasas* and faculties contained nothing that disrupted to a significant degree the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks. Certain details, however, were identified, and the Religious Education Committee will take follow-up action on the issue. According to the media,<sup>29</sup> particularly interesting was the discussion of Islamic doctrine. The *Rijaset* has formed a new commission, tasked with drafting – pursuant to the suggestions of the *Akaid* Commission – in order to define the fundamental science of Islam as the basis for preserving the Islamic tradition of Bosniaks.

Despite the measures taken by the IZ, Mustafa Cerić continued to mention the *Salafi* issue, stating that Bosniaks were surprised and scared by an intensive “Islamophobic” campaign that had been carried out by some local and international electronic and written media. According

<sup>29</sup> *Dnevni avaz* (Sarajevo), 27 June 2007.

to Cerić, “It is obvious that, through this, the old ‘Turkish guilt’ is to be switched for a new one – the “*Wahhabi* guilt”. Mustafa Cerić avoided again any kind of responsibility on the spreading of radical ideas in BiH and he blamed media, again, for an intensive “Islamophobic” campaign allegedly being carried out.

In order to understand the position of the IZ, it is necessary to remark that the latest events in BiH and other parts of the region have provoked an increase in the number of articles about *Salafism* and its possible links to terrorism. Most of these articles are based on rumors or recycling of previous media information and not on new evidence. The Bosnian media, very often ethnically and politically biased, have tried to depict *Salafists* as a growing threat for the safety and security, not only in BiH but also in the rest of the Europe. Despite the fact that the IZ leadership is obviously worried about the increase of the spreading of foreign radical ideas in BiH that could undermine its control over the Muslim community, any official Islamic institution is not going to openly admit the importance or threat of *Salafism* in BiH or publicly condemn these ideas because of the two main reasons:

1. *Salafism* in BiH is an amalgam of different streams that, if all of them were treated in the same harsh way, could merge into one single group. This resulting group would probably be more powerful and almost certainly led by the most radical elements.

2. Official admission of the importance of or risk posed by *Salafis* would be important dialectical political weaponry to be used against Bosniak interests, blaming the entire Muslim society for extremism and terrorism.

The IZ leadership will likely continue challenging *Salafi* ideas in a silent and cautious way to gather around them not only the traditional Bosnian Muslim believers, but also a part of the *Salafi* reformists that want to distance themselves from the more radical wing of the movement that will be almost isolated by the main part of the Muslim society.



## 7.

# CURRENT SITUATION OF THE SALAFI MOVEMENT IN BIH

During the most recent years different sources have reported about the number and behaviour of members of the *Salafi* sect in BiH creating social alarm and overreaction in some security and intelligence agencies. The lack of accurate statistics for the number of followers of the *Salafi* religious sect has impeded the serious analysis of the evolution and size of this issue in BiH. After contact with Local and International Law Enforcement Agencies, Islamic scholars, journalists, intellectuals and politicians, the researcher can construct figures ranging from 1,000 to 200.000 *Salafi* followers in BiH. The variation in the number of followers of the *Salafi* movement may be due in part to the absence of a definition of participants in the movement or in the actual concept that defines the movement. Also the lack of an official census and serious studies about the number of *Salafi* followers, articles that are based on rumours or recycling of previous media information and not on new evidence, local Muslim special sensitivity about the issue and, finally, the lack of knowledge of journalists, analysts and International Community personnel about the Islam and local Muslims have been serious obstacles in the intend to offer a picture as completed, serious and professional as possible.

The first problem that we face in any analysis of the impact of *Salafi* in BiH is the absence of an official census (There has not been a real census since 1991 and none is planned, this is due to political disagreement).

Much of the post-war data is estimate. Most sources, however, estimate the BiH population at roughly 4 million. According to data from 2000,<sup>30</sup> approximately 48% of BiH population is ethnically Bosniak. There is a strong correlation between Bosniak ethnic identity and religion, illustrated by the fact that 90 % of Bosniaks consider themselves Muslim. So, we have an estimate of 1,728,000 Muslims in BiH. But how many of them are *Salafi* followers?

A poll surveying the appearance of the “*Wahhabi*” movement, and their interpretation and practice of Islam in BiH, was conducted among a cross section of 431 adult Bosnians of Muslim faith.<sup>31</sup> They were asked three questions in addition to expressing their opinions on “*Wahhabism*”. A majority (69 percent) of respondents said they opposed, strongly or mildly, the presence of “*Wahhabis*”, while approximately 12.9 per cent supported, to some degree, this type of Islam in BiH. The respondents’ attitude towards “*Wahhabi*” interpretation and practice of Islam in BiH appears to have been influenced by their educational level. Compared with less educated respondents, those with higher education were largely against this type of Islam in BiH. Being asked: “Do you consider yourself a follower of “*Wahhabism*” and are you practicing this type of Islam?” the survey showed that 3.3 per cent of respondents answered affirmatively. The poll shows that the age of supporters of “*Wahhabism*” is dominated by young people, aged 15 to 35.

If we extrapolate the results of the poll with the demographical data mentioned before we will obtain the following figures:

- 1,192,320 Muslims who oppose, strongly or mildly, the presence of “*Wahhabism*” in BiH.
- 222,912 people who support, to some degree, this type of Islam.
- 57,024 **hypothetical** Islamic believers who consider themselves as “*Wahhabi*” followers and practice this type of Islam.

<sup>30</sup> CIA WORLD FACTBOOK 2000.

<sup>31</sup> In Jun 2006 Sarajevo based Prism research Agency conducted a poll that went almost unnoticed by the public. The poll was based on the face-to-face method, going to respondents’ home. The Prism representatives stated that the margin of error for this survey was **plus or minus 7 per cent**.

Statistically a survey of 431 adults provides insufficient evidence to make an accurate assessment of the situation of the *Salafi* phenomenon in BiH. However we can use these figures to construct a possible worst model as a mean to clarify some ambiguous concepts. An element of the group that has declared themselves as “supporters” of “*Wahhabism*” (222,912 according to the survey) may be traditional Muslims influenced by different issues that may influence their opinions:

- Some local Muslims identify the concept “*Salafism or Wahhabism*” with *Mujahidin*, who, in their opinion, “were wounded heavily during the war when they were fighting for the Bosnian Army” and have no connection to any terrorist group.
- Information appearing in the media about “*Salafism or Wahhabism*” is considered by many Bosnian Muslims as being orchestrated by anti-Islamic forces to justify policies that are contrary to the interest of the Muslim community.
- Other Bosnian Muslim believers do not perceive a threat in the “*Salafism or Wahhabism*” interpretation of Islam and consider the “*Salafism or Wahhabism*” creed in the same way as any other religious movement.

These considerations suggest that support for *Salafism* could be, in some cases, mainly based on nationalist sentiments and religious tolerance. Bosnian Muslims appear to be split in their perception of the threat posed by *Salafism*. This statement is supported by a phone-in survey by TV Hayat conducted on 28 April 2007: 37 percent of the roughly 1,000 callers believed the reports were exaggerated and intended to divide Muslims, 36 percent saw the “*Wahhab*” movement as a threat to national security, and 20 percent viewed it as threat, but only to the Muslim community itself.

Are the **supposed 57,024** Islamic believers, who declared themselves as “*Wahhabis*”, devout sect followers? Do they condemn the local version of Islam, listening to music, praying while visiting tombs, following of one of the four *Madhabs* or schools of Islamic jurisprudence, celebrating the *Mawlid* (birth of Muhammad) and *Urf* (local customs)? It is likely that

not all of them are devout followers. If “*Wahhabis*” usually do not identify themselves as “*Wahhabis*”, what conclusion can we logically draw from the fact that 3.3 % of respondents declared themselves “*Wahhabis*”? Many of these converts are more likely to be influenced by “non-religious” factors, such as nationalism, “hooliganism”, feelings against the system or the desirability of being associated with a group that is perceived as “strong”. In some cases they might sympathize with an extreme religious conduct without actually knowing its tradition.

In spite of an increase in the prominence of religion in BiH during and subsequent to the war, most of the Bosnian Muslim community has a religious approach very similar to that of believers throughout Europe. For many of the local believers, religion is linked to tradition, heritage and culture. This position is a result of the largely secular and European attitude among Bosniaks. For instance, they celebrate *Bayram* and other religious holidays in the same way that many Christian believers celebrate Christmas or Easter: based more on a social approach than on a religious one.

The majority of “practising” Muslims adheres to local custom and accepts a degree of modernist Islamic reform.<sup>32</sup> They have maintained the *Hanafi* tradition, following a moderate and open minded version of Islam, rich in tradition, tolerant of other communities and essentially compatible with western values. Non-Muslims, secular and little “practising” believers and those who adhere to the *Hanafi* tradition are the most important and predominant group inside Bosniak society. In the absence of a suitable definition, we will now attempt to identify the characteristics that are associated with the *Wahhabi* movement in BiH.

Typically the *Wahhabism* label is associated with those who follow the teachings of Saudi *Wahhabi* scholars. In BiH however, there is a tendency to indiscriminately label as “*Wahhabi*” not only members of other religious streams different to the traditional version of Islam, but also all Muslims deemed excessively conservative or zealous. Some authors and journalists go further and consider as “*Wahhabis*” the local believers who

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32 Alibasic, Ahmet: “Traditional and Reformist Islam in Bosnia”(2003), available at: <http://www.cambridge-security.net/pdf/alibasic.pdf>

are only more observant and fervent than the ordinary Muslim population. According to some biased media and authors this would be the first group of the so-called *Wahhabi* movement in BiH: the more observant believers.<sup>33</sup> Members of any kind of Muslim religious groups that follow diverse versions of Islam that differ from the traditional Sunni *Hanafism* have been also labelled as *Wahhabis*, by the same authors, for instance: *Shi'a* and *Ahmadiyya*, and even Sufis.

By scrutinizing systematically collected information on the Salafi phenomenon in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the author of this paper has developed a worst case model to assess the possible number of Salafi followers. It could be assessed that the number of followers would likely not exceed **3,000 persons**; however, even this figure should be considered “the best guess possible” and should be further scrutinized and handled with necessary reasoning. Claims that there are 100,000, or even 400,000 Wahhabi followers in BiH (approximately 23.15% of the Bosniak population), should be considered to be a clear example of sensationalism and even propaganda and “media intoxication”.

Although the stance of the IZ has repeatedly been considered unclear and ambiguous, with intellectuals, scholars and journalists have continually asking for an active position in order to tackle *Salafism*, the “tardy and shy” measures taken by the IZ can be seen as positive. The response of the BiH Islamic Community increased the “schism” that had been observed in the *Salafi* community in BiH before. Since Aktivna

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<sup>33</sup> The author of this paper is not proposing to accept this usage, rather than the more precise definitions.

Islamska Omladina (Active Islamic Youth, AIO)<sup>34</sup> closed down, due to funding and leadership issues, there has been a serious ideological schism in the Salafi movement. Salafism in BiH cannot be seen as monolithic any more. Cerić has gathered around him, not only the traditional Bosnian Muslim believers but also a part of the *Salafi* reformists that want to distance themselves of the more radical wing of the movement. The more radical elements of the *Salafi* community are almost isolated by the main part of the Muslim society.

In spite of intentions to reunify BiH Salafi movement on the part of some religious leaders who have perceived the schism inside the Salafi community as the really insurmountable obstacle for conversion of local traditional and moderate Muslims into Salafism, other leaders of the same movement have refused to uphold any relationship with those who have

34 The "Aktivna Islamska Omladina" or Active Islamic Youth (AIO) was the major Salafi organization in BiH. Individuals with ties to the so-called "Al Mujahid Brigade," a wartime unit comprised mainly of foreign fighters, founded AIO in the city of Zenica in 1995. It was the most active of the Islamic youth organizations and the most prominent Salafi organization in BiH. The activists taught young Bosniaks a strict literal form of Islam under the guise of operating youth centers, summer camps, Internet cafes, and other outreach activities. AIO opened branch offices throughout BiH, and developed a growing presence of active members in Western Europe and the United States.

The AIO's "golden era" was in the years 1997-1999. Its main activities during this period included mainly summer camps, intensive "Sharia courses" teaching how to live as a Salafi Muslim from an AIO perspective, public lectures, martial training and publishing.

After the events of September 11th 2001, the measures that have been taken by the local and international authorities to raid a number of Arab charities, to block their bank accounts, to search for suspicious financial operations, and to close some of these organizations, have been successful and now Salafi organizations have more problems to find financial sources to support their activities.

Since its creation, the AIO faced opposition from both secular and traditional Bosniaks. During the anti-terrorist campaign after September 11th, members of AIO were often questioned and premises searched, but the organization was never officially charged with any crime. Initially, the AIO was reportedly mainly supported by some NGO's, which later terminated its support to the organization, because the AIO "leaned toward" some Arab dissidents. The operations conducted by the local and international authorities to raid a number of Arab charities, to block their bank accounts, to search for suspicious financial operations and to close some of these organizations, put AIO in a difficult economical situation. These circumstances forced AIO leadership to change its strategy. The organization established more modest premises to create Youth Cultural Centres across the country. The activities conducted in these clubs were mainly focused on computers training, language courses, courses on Islam, tutoring, lectures, and the rental of audio and video materials, etc.

The number of AIO members has never been established, although different authors estimate that during "AIO golden age" its membership might have reached several thousand.

On 17 Nov 06, the Salafi SAFF magazine published an interview with Adnan Pezo. Pezo, the former chairman of the organization, declared that the Steering Board of AIO had recently decided to close down the organization because of a lack of funds. The lack of funds, leadership issues, as well as a serious ideological schism in the organization, forced the AIO to close.

maintained contacts with the IZ. One group within the Salafi movement wants to distance itself from the more radical elements and gather around the official Islamic Community. The other one is completely outside the control of the BiH Islamic Community. Although their primary focus is “missionary” activities and the strategy of quiet creation of a parallel Islamic structure in BiH, different web pages show that *takfiri* and *jihadi* ideas have taken roots in some minority *Salafi* groups in BiH.

BiH *Salafi* movement currently comprise four main streams:

- *Missionary Salafi* stream.
- *Jihadi and pro-Al-Qa’ida* Salafism
- *Takfiri and Neo-Khawarij Salafism*
- Outsiders

## A) MISSIONARY SALAFISM

After the split inside the movement at the end of 2006, between those who praised Mustafa Cerić its leader and those who refused his authority, the Missionary Salafist community who initially stayed outside the control of the IZ was almost isolated by the main part of the Muslim society in BiH and their message appeared to have little support. Despite previous theological differences and arguments with members of the IZ they have decided, at least publicly, to establish contact with it and accept its authority.

Main part of Salafist missionaries, previously members of the AIO, has moderated their views and accepted cooperation with the Islamic Community of BiH and obedience to its leader. They consider that Bosnian Salafist and their *da’wa* (missionary work) are in a state of *fitna* (discord). They praised Mustafa Cerić, its leader. They have also sharply criticized Bosnian Neo-*Khawarij*, and pro-*jihadi* groups because their refusal to cooperate with other Bosnian Muslims. They considerer these groups are undermining the unity of Muslims.

Some former AIO members defend the proposition that is possible to cooperate with the BiH Islamic Community if it will benefit Islam and Muslims.<sup>35</sup> This circle has also defended the need for dialogue between Islamic scholars and religious leaders of other faiths and confessions and for religious tolerance since both are firmly rooted in the Koran and the *Sunna* of Allah's Prophet. *Saff* has published the *fatwas* issued by important scholars about when permission can be granted to engage politically, to vote, and take part in elections.

Other members of this group have even stated that "if terrorism means killing innocent women and children, and if someone in BiH were to do it, then they would be the first to report SIPA (State Investigation and Protection Agency) in denouncing terrorists. They have recommended that Bosnian *Salafists* should be advised on how to be civil to other people, and how to show respect for the opinions of others.

In spite of their public acceptance of the IZ, some elements of the Salafi movement might have designed a middle-long term strategy<sup>36</sup> to finally defeat the IZ can not be discarded. This strategy might be summarized as:

- Recruitment of the Bosniak Diaspora. This recruitment is especially easy and profitable for them because: first, the BiH Islamic Community is weaker abroad; second, the Bosnian "converted" Muslims are a healthy financial source; and third, converted Muslims abroad are able to spread *Salafism* in their close circle when they come back BiH.
- Well trained *Salafi* scholars who finished their studies at universities of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries will argue with those less prepared within the BiH Islamic Community. Although many of them would easily find their place in the Official Islamic Community upon return to the country, some of these students could adopt *Salafi* ideas.

<sup>35</sup> Excerpt from report by SARAJEVO DZEMAT.ORG, 04 Sep 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Mainstream Islamic biweekly "*Preporod*", published by the BiH Islamic Community (IZ) of BiH, in its 15 Mar 07 issue, featured an editorial entitled "Destruction of the Islamic Community as a Long Term Goal", in which the author claimed that Bosnian *Salafis* were contemplating a new strategy for their mid-term activity.

- Silent creation of a parallel Islamic religious structure, without publicly facing the official one but with the final goal of defeating it.
- Not to be directly linked to any kind of radical or terrorist activity or engaged in the political arena.

Some elements of the Salafi movement were closely linked in the past to some Vienna based *Salafi* leaders who has vociferously and openly advocated the idea of establishing a parallel Islamic community in BiH. The current role of the Vienna based leaders with the mentioned elements in BiH is still unknown. Despite of this, their common goal of defeating the IZ could suggest mutual connivance and even foreign leadership in the shadow.

#### B.) JIHADI AND PRO-AL-QA'IDA SALAFISM:

On 12 December 2008, the Bosnian Serb newspaper *Nezavisne novine* focused local and international attention on views about suicide attacks presented on the portal "Put Vjernika" (The Path of the Believer). In an answer to the question by a portal's visitor as to whether it was a sin to put dynamite around one's waist and blow oneself up among the group of the *kaffirs* (unbelievers), one of "Put Vjernika"'s leaders does not consider such means as forbidden, but at the same time, he does not think that it should be used as the classic, usual weapons are used, but only on the exceptional occasions and situations. Leadres of the some group had previously stated their views about violence as a mean to reach their goals. They have also urged believers to submit to the will of Allah and follow his path and to respond to his messages and calls including the one for Jihad. "Through Jihad, man achieves total fulfillment and martyrdom", emphasizing that "the life of a martyr is the most glorious and most complete one". They have also urged separation "physical and in your hearts" from "innovators" (referring to the mainstream IZ and other Salafi streams) who destroy the Islamic religion against the *Sunna* or

tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. He stated that many people have abandoned their movement “as soon as they realized that embracing this path was dangerous and entailed certain challenges”. In their lectures they have repeatedly reminded believers that taking part in elections was against the *Sharia* or Islamic Law. Leaders of this group has also verbally attacked the group of his erstwhile *Salafis* fellow missionaries from the now disbanded AIO organization who have since moderated their views and accepted cooperation with Mustafa Cerić and the IZ.

The group gathered around “Put Vjernika”, probably no more than 150 people, has shown almost all the archetypal signs of religious radicalization: isolation, group cohesion and identity, strong leadership, others “demonization”, all-or-nothing thinking. These factors indicate they are the only known cluster among the *Salafi* streams in BiH that could be considered as “potential group” to have effect on the biH safety and security.

### C) TAKFIRI AND NEO-KHAWARIJ SALAFISM

The Sandžak-based *Takfiri* (one who proclaims other Muslims unbelievers) and *neo-khawarij*<sup>37</sup> portal “Kelimetulhaqq” (Words of the Truth, Right Words) was labeled as the first openly *jihadi* Bosniak website. They actively promoted the concept of holy war and disseminating *jihadi* videos and lectures. However, its radical message appears to have little support outside its base in the Sandzak region. By early 2008, this group was involved in a dispute with the group of pro-jihad Bosnian Salafis gathered around “Put Vjernika”. Although in favor of *Jihad*, “Kelimetulhaqq” posted different lectures that even proclaimed *takfir* on Usama Ben Laden and Al-Qaeda for supposedly failing to adhere to the basic tenets of Islam.

37 Kharijites (Arabic Khawarij, literally “those who went out”) is a general term embracing various Muslims who, while initially supporting the Caliphate of the fourth and final “Rightly Guided” caliph, later rejected him. In modern times, Muslim scholars and governments have called terrorist groups which emphasize the practice of *takfir* and justify the killing of innocent people as *neo-kharijites*. (John EXPOSITO, “Islam the Straight Path”)

The lack of activity of the website “Kelimetulhaqq” since the end of 2008 could suggest its closure down. Modest support outside Sandzak region and internal leadership problems might be the reason for the shutting down.

#### D) OUTSIDERS

The *Salafi* magazine *Saff*<sup>38</sup> has focused on a small group of young Bosniaks who has decided to separate from other Muslims in the *džemats* (lowest administrative units of BiH Islamic Community) in their towns and to organize in private homes and organize in private homes and makeshift *mesdžids* (houses of prayer) the *džuma-namaz* (Friday prayer), and sometimes the daily *namazes* (prayers) as well. It is reportedly characteristic of this gathering that some ten (10) young men come together from several towns or neighboring settlements and attend the *džuma-namaz*. The reason why they separate themselves from other Muslims is found in their religious conviction that these *džemats* practice novelties in faith and that novelty practitioners should be ignored.

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38 *SAFF* magazine (19 June 2009).



## 8.

# NEED OF PROFESSIONAL, SERIOUS AND OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

In order to evaluate the risk of radicalization among BIH Muslims it is necessary to use research and investigation methods based on an active and direct observation. They might provide a more objective and rigorous approach on the phenomenon. Similar methods have been applied to evaluate the risk of radicalization in some Spanish mosques<sup>39</sup> and prisons<sup>40</sup>.

These methods might permit avoiding more intuitive, speculative and even anecdotic “ad hoc” approaches, based only on analysis of media and interviews with local and international sometime self declared experts on the topic. “Ad hoc” approaches have proved to bias the result of the analysis and, due to methodological deficiencies, stalled the generation of empirically contrastable hypothesis and the evaluation of the dimension and evolution of the impact of Salafi ideas in BIH.

Researchers must categorically avoid turning the study to a “witch haunt” that could raise suspicion over the whole BIH Muslim population: placing Bosnia’s Muslims under special scrutiny sends the wrong message, suggesting all Muslims are untrustworthy<sup>41</sup>.

39 “Estudio del riesgo de radicalización islamista en cinco mezquitas de una ciudad española”. Humberto M. Trujillo, Cristobal León, David Sevilla y Joaquín González-Cabrera. Athena Assessment No 5/09. 3 March 2009.

40 “Indicios sobre la radicalización yihadista en prisiones”. Humberto M. Trujillo, Javier Jordán, José Antonio Gutiérrez and Joaquín González-Cabrera. Athena Assessment No. 12/08. 2 December 2008.

41 Niksic, Sabina “Bosnian Muslims: Threat or Opportunity?” (18 October 2009) *This article was produced as part of the Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence, an initiative of the Robert Bosch Stiftung and ERSTE Foundation, in cooperation with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, BIRN.*

Serious, rigorous, objective and professional researches would permit evaluation of the impact of Salafi ideas in BIH, in order to reach two (2) main goals:

- To detect, stop and reverse any threat to the security,
- If no threat is identified, the study would contribute to “cleaning” the image of the Muslim society, darkened by previous rumors, speculations and dubious analysis.

Researches might be periodically repeated in order to evaluate the real evolution of the phenomenon.

The lack of serious previous studies about the number of Salafi followers in BIH, articles that are based on rumors or recycling of previous media information and not on new evidence, local Muslim special sensitivity about the issue, lack of knowledge of journalists, personnel of different national organizations and even some academics, about BIH Islam and Muslims and local Muslims, and, finally, prejudices and stereotypes, have been serious obstacles in the intent to offer a picture as completed, serious and professional as possible about this topic.

Previous mistakes must be corrected in order to detect early conducts that could be signs of religious radicalization. Because it is a multidimensional phenomenon “transversal” to different fields of expertise, studies and researches might be conducted by teams with multi-disciplinary capabilities.

Earlier assessments have only been focused on the external appearance of the supposed Salafi believers: long beards, ankle-long trousers, veiled wives, etc. These external signs are really weak evidence and must be avoided in order to make a serious study about a radicalization process<sup>42</sup>, mainly based on some facts:

- Many Muslims who totally reject violence share the same attire.
- Some costumes are common for any kind of Muslims in BIH, and even non-Muslim alike.

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<sup>42</sup> For further reference about this topic, see “Indicios externos de la radicalización y militancia yihadista”. Javier Jordán and Fernando M. Mañas. *Athena Intelligence Journal*. Vol. 2, No. 1 (2007).

- Some external signs that can be observed at the beginning of the process might be avoided or hidden by the individual in its later phase.
- External signs can change on each organization, movement or group.
- External appearance also varies according to the grade of radicalization of the individual, and even his coherency, weaknesses, and contradictions.

Despite this, external evidence might be used, avoiding overreaction, if:

- Several of them coincide in the same individual.
- They appear suddenly.
- They are combined with suspicious individual and group behaviors (recruits suddenly and deeply change their behavior and attire after they are indoctrinated).

Some individual behavioral patterns that can be considered as early warnings are:

- Exaggerated and scrupulous and sudden compliance with Islamic precepts (radical religious groups' ideology mostly attracts those who have not had strong contact with religion. Most of the members of these groups had their first religious experiences through radical and distorted interpretation of their creeds).
- Tensions and change of attitude inside familiar and social circles (the recruiter gradually isolates the recruits from their families and steps into the role of a mentor).
- Isolation and social polarization with those who do not share the same religion interpretation.
- Repeated religious and political rhetoric mainly focused on real or perceived injustices conducted by Westerns against Muslims.
- Selective use of media and internet, according to a particular religious and political vision.

- Disproportionate and hasty interest on first historical developments of the Muslim religion, specially the first battles fought by the Muslim armies.
- Increase of aggressive behavior.
- Unexpected interest in military issues.
- Special attention must be also paid to the archetypal patterns of group religious radicalization:
  - Group isolation from the rest of the community
  - Group cohesion and identity
  - Strong leadership
  - Others “demonization”
  - All-or-nothing thinking
  - Terrorism justification and apology

The observation of some other facts might also contribute to the early detection of a radicalization inside a religious group:

- These kinds of groups try to attract former drug users and petty criminals. The weak mental and physical condition of the addicts makes them easy targets for indoctrination and recruiting. In addition, former drug users are familiar with illegal activities and once recruited these individuals may be used to support the organization, through criminal activity.
- The recruiter gradually isolates the recruits from their families and steps into the role of a mentor. In this newfound clique, young recruits find the social integration and spiritual space they have yearned for, as radical indoctrination intensifies, and bonds tighten around a shared worldview. Radical religious recruiters take the young people under their care, organizing bonding activities like camping trips and sporting events, which contribute also to increased leadership and group cohesion.
- Although many of them were previously members of a Salafi organization, they were excluded or left the organization because their violent behavior or religious stance.

- The group might lack a religious leader and receive ideological inspirations mainly by internet for self indoctrination.

In order to early detect patterns of religious radicalization is vital the support, involvement and collaboration of the local Muslim religious leaders. Based on his own experience, the author of this article consider that them, if there are approached in a respectful, serious and professional, showing deference and interest in their culture, religion and tradition, can be reliable sources to obtain trustworthy information on this issue.



## 9.

# LINKS BETWEEN BOSNIAN SALAFIS AND TERRORISM

Different political events in BiH and other parts of the region have provoked an increase in the number of articles about BiH links to terrorism. Most of these articles are based on rumors or recycling of previous media information and not on new evidence. Some local and regional media, very often ethnically and politically biased, have tried to depict BiH Bosnian Muslims as a threat for the safety and security, not only in BiH but also in the rest of the Europe.

This information is regularly generalized by a certain media to the point of suggestion that BiH is allegedly a significant threat to ethno-national security, because it allegedly harbors “foreign Islamic terrorists”. This nationalist propaganda deliberately deforms the facts in two ways. In the first place, the symptoms of global security threats are confused with the causes of BiH state-level weakness, mixing an alleged deliberate state-level support to terrorism with the actual weak state’s inability to police itself. Secondly, it labels the main part of the Bosniac establishment and population as radicals, where in fact these are merely staunch opponents of any kind of radicalization.

Members of different “self declared” experts on terrorism have played a very active and important role on the above mentioned campaign. Their classical method of “enhancing the credibility of their articles” is to use expressions like “foreign intelligence sources that would

like to remain anonymous” or “high ranking officials from the International Community” (Embassies, Office of the High Representative, etc.) or “credible informant close to Prime Minister, etc. and known to our editor that would like to remain anonymous”. It is strongly recommend not considering most part of this information as a trustworthy reference for ongoing issues, and the assessments based on articles published by them should be avoided. This kind of articles can be deemed as nationalistic propaganda that obscures the facts.

Some authors have constructed a bogey of a “coming Balkan caliphate” trough multiple confluations: nationalism with religious chauvinism; moderate Balkan Muslim nationalist leaders with the radicals operating in their midst; Sunni Al-Qa’ida with Shi’ite Iran; Al-Qa’ida with the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates; quite Saudi Wahhabite proselytizing with Al-Qa’ida terrorism<sup>43</sup>. All these diverse, conflicting elements are thrown together to make a single indeterminate green Islamic stew. Certain terrorism analysts referred to these tendentious exaggerations like the so-called “Balkan Green Transversal theory”. Same analyst also intent to conflate the mainstream Bosnian Army struggle against Serb and Croat forces with the activities of “Al-Qa’ida” and the foreign mujahedin to create a single “Bosnian jihad”.

It is already a well documented fact that as of 1992, BiH had indeed become a meeting point for some members of various militant groups arriving directly not only from training camps in Afghanistan but also from Western countries, where they had been recruited in mosques and Islamic centers. The total number of mujahedin who fought in BiH from 1992 to 1995 is estimated to be between three and four thousand<sup>44</sup>.

Most of the mujahedin were requested to leave BiH in accordance with the Article 3 of the Agreement on the Military aspects of the Peace

43 “Al-Qa’ida in Bosnia” comments made by Marko Attila Hoare on published books by John R. Schindler “*Unholy terror: Bosnia, al-Qa’ida, and the rise of global jihad*” and Christopher Deliso “*The coming Balkan caliphate: The threat of radical Islam to Europe and the West?*”.

44 Vlado Azinovic: “Challenges to international security: the case of Bosnia-Hercegovina”. This paper was presented at the *Second Annual Conference on Human Security, Terrorism and Organized Crime in the Western Balkan Region*, organized by the HUMSEC project in Sarajevo, 4-6 October 2007.

Settlement that is part of the Dayton Peace Agreement. In the coming years, a number of them left BiH, but some of them stayed since they became Bosnians citizens in the meantime by legal (getting married to a Bosnian woman) or illegal means. A few hundred mujahedin remained in BiH after the war, and a few dozen still remain. Some authors have tried to show the Bosnian citizenships granted to the mujahidin, who could consequently go on to engage in acts of terrorism and jihad elsewhere, as a serious threat for the Western world. Based on the difficulties for any Bosnian citizen to obtain the required to travel to western countries, this possibility is considered, as at least, dubious<sup>45</sup>.

The role of Al-Qa'ida and the foreign mujahedin in the wars in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s remains controversial. BiH is unusual in that it attracted foreign mujahedin during the war, some of whom settled and who inspired local youths who fought with them to adopt their ways. But this does not seem sufficient to account for the persistent discussions of BiH as sui generis a potential source of or base for terrorism<sup>46</sup>.

A more thorough research can establish that the sole presence of people trained for and capable of committing various terrorist acts, as well as ideology behind them, does not qualify BiH as a bigger threat to international security in comparison to other countries. The current environment in BiH provides some preconditions for the purposes of international terrorism (in that it is still fairly easy to obtain weapons and explosives in BiH due to the endemic corruption, the influential networks of organized crime, the lack of enforced law and order, a "porous" border control, a dreadful economical and social situation and the presence of some radical communities). Despite of this, radical groups that could promote their ideology, to recruit more personnel and to develop their organizational and logistic structures inside BiH, still suffer from a lack of support from the BiH population as a whole and also

45 Edin Jahic: "Developments of events in Bosnia and Herzegovina Following the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001". This paper was presented at the *First Annual Conference on Human Security, Terrorism and Organized Crime in the Western Balkan Region*, organized by the HUMSEC project in Ljubljana, 23-25 November 2006.

46 Christian Moe: Comments to the program "*Islamic radicalization-Reality or Fata Morgana?*", aired by Radio Free Europa on 17 November 2007.

a part of the Salafi reformists that want to distance themselves of the more radical wing of the movement.

The more radical elements of the Salafi community are almost isolated by the rest of the Bosniac society. These elements are considered the only “potential groups” to result in violent events against moderate Muslims and non-Muslims alike, after been recruited and organized by some individuals or organization with radical goals. Security efforts must be focused on those “outsiders” that have decided themselves to separate from other Muslims or have been excluded from other groups because their radical an even violent behavior and religious stance.



## 10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO DEFEAT RADICAL SALAFISM?

Several conclusions emerge from the foregoing analysis:

First, it has been repeatedly stated that, although *Salafism* has taken root in BiH for the last fifteen years, their number is not as important as some media have claimed. The BiH example has often been quoted as a role-model for the concept of a “European Islam”; moderate, peaceful and flexible, an incarnation of the ideas of Islamic reformism reconciling traditional Islam with modern statehood. The following features of Islam in BiH support this assessment:

- The exclusive Sunni tradition reaching back to Ottoman times with strong influence from the moderate *Hanafi* Law School and Sufi orders;
- The unbroken tradition of a central spiritual authority with a well-organized *Ulama* or Islamic scholars structure;
- Centuries of co-existence with other world religions and confessions including more than 130 years in a secular state with rule-of-law elements;
- Compatibility of the legitimate Islamic institutions with the secular state: a well-organized *Ulama*, *Madrasas* as publicly recognized secondary schools, Islamic foundations (*Vakufi*) and (until 1946) *Sharia*-courts for family law.

- Second, the possible influence of extremist outsiders on the Islamic community in BiH is lower than in other countries due to two main reasons:
- Personal reasons: Although his position on *Salafism* has been considered ambiguous, *Reis Ul Ulama* Mustafa Cerić is a strong leader who keeps the Islamic community together;
- Structural arrangements: to be eligible, future Imams must have studied first at one of the six *Madrasas* (Secondary Islamic Schools) and then at the Islamic Faculty in Sarajevo.

Third, different political events in BiH and other parts of the region have provoked an increase in the number of articles about “*Wahhabism*” and *Salafism* and its possible links to terrorism. Most of these articles are based on rumors or recycling of previous media information and not on new evidence. BiH media, very often ethnically and politically biased, have tried to depict Bosnian “*Wahhabism*” as a growing threat for the safety and security, not only in BiH but also in the rest of the Europe. To do so, they have used a discourse very similar to that used in the 1990s, changing the term “Islamic fundamentalism” to “*Salafism*” or “*Wahhabism*”. This information is regularly generalized by certain media to the point of suggesting that BiH is allegedly a significant threat to ethno-national security, because it allegedly harbours foreign Islamic terrorists. This nationalist propaganda deliberately deforms the facts in two ways. In the first place, the symptoms of global security threats are confused with the causes of BiH state-level weakness, mixing an alleged deliberate state-level support to terrorism with the actual weak state’s inability to police itself. Secondly, it labels the main part of the Bosniak establishment and population as radicals, where in fact these are on the contrary staunch opponents of any kind of radicalization.

Fourth, most of the recent reported incidents by “*Wahhabis*” were not directly religious or ethnically motivated. The incidents were a result of an overall very conservative/non-tolerant mentality in the region. They were greatly influenced by the statements of an important part of

the local religious and political leader's stance and can not be directly linked to any kind of "Muslim secret agenda" or limited to any religious group. Some were also exaggerated, tergiversated or even invented by the media according to the different political and nationalistic agendas. These reports have been widely used to feed fear of the Muslims and insist on the thesis of Non Muslim citizens threatened by them.

Fifth, although *Salafism* in BiH is an alien and small movement within BiH, it has been partially successful in recruiting some young "converts" from within the BiH moderate Muslim tradition who have started to identify mainstream Bosnian Muslims as false Muslims and even as enemies. It has some potential to result in growing, and even violent, confrontation in BiH with moderate Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This could have serious ramifications for BiH in its efforts to maintain a pluralist society.

Sixth, it may be that the leadership of the BiH Islamic Community underestimated the *Salafi* phenomenon in BiH. More focused on political issues, they have not paid attention to this topic, and may not until they realized that some elements of the *Salafi* movement could seriously undermine the authority of the official BiH Islamic Community and create a parallel religious structure in the country.

Seventh, in spite of the fact that the stance of the BiH Islamic Community has repeatedly been considered as unclear and ambiguous, and intellectuals, scholars and journalists have continually asked for an active position to tackle *Salafism*, the "tardy and shy" measures taken by the BiH Islamic Community can be considered as positive. The response of the BiH Islamic Community has increased the "schism" that had been observed in the *Salafi* community in BiH for the last months. Cerić has gathered around him, not only the traditional Bosnian Muslim believers but also a part of the *Salafi* reformists that want to distance themselves of the more radical wing of the movement. The more radical elements of the *Salafi* community are almost isolated by the rest of the Muslim society.

Eighth, it is important to remember that the “*Salafi* movement” in BiH is comprised of several integrated streams. If these streams are treated harshly without differentiating them, two negative outcomes may occur:

- Different strands can come together in reaction, attenuating differences that might otherwise be fruitfully developed.
- The *Jihadis* and *Takfiris* can eclipse the other tendencies.

Ninth, an important consideration that guides the radical groups is time. They do not attach the same imperative to their objectives that Western nations might. The spreading of their radical ideas transcends a time-linked end state. If they perceive that the situation is not good to achieve their goals, they may move to isolated areas where they can practice their version of Islam, waiting for the right moment to proceed with their “mission”: that is to establish BiH as a homogenous Islamic country, based exclusively on the principles of the *Sharia*. This is the concept of Hijra or emigration that radical groups associate with a kind of spiritual and physical retirement outside a “corrupted society” or *Jabalia*, the “dark” period before Islam. This is the likely attitude of some radical groups in BiH currently. In order to reduce the isolation and possible further radicalization of these elements, the rest of the Muslim society must try to get closer to them and embrace into the Bosniak society.

Tenth, despite the first battle being won, the war is going to be long. Some aspirations of setting up a parallel Islamic Community, in order to undermine the power of the official one, in a silent and a discreet way, will go on.

Eleventh, religious intolerance in the country directly reflects ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with one’s religious background. Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) generally are associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serbian Orthodox Church. In some communities, local religious leaders and politicians have been contributing to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feelings through

public statements and through religious speeches. Politicians and religious leaders usually take advantages from the inter-ethnic unsolved problems arising ethnic differences in order to consolidate their high power position. Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remain powerful in the country. Most political parties continue to identify themselves closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group; however, many political parties claim to be multiethnic. Some clerics have characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of “true” religious practice. The line dividing politics and religion are often blurred, particularly during election seasons, when religious speeches and services have been commonly misused for campaigning purposes.

Twelfth, while religious leaders in the country applaud the growing religious sentiment among youth, the scars of the war, economic woes, and a recent history of segregation as a result of post-war returnee movements have, in many places, also injected a streak of nationalism in the younger generation that at times is targeted against other religious communities. Religious intolerance is a fertile recruitment ground for radical movements. Political and religious leaders must leave the use of speeches that spread “the hate and fear” to the others. Any initiative to develop a multiethnic society in BiH is also a measure to defeat any kind of religious radicalization.

Thirteenth, Bosnian Ulemas have tended to concentrate on “hard” theological topics and they have not developed a religious speech easily understood by the majority of ordinary Muslims and that fulfils their needs. This cultural gap between the scholars and the common believers has been widely used by foreign radical movements to convert local Muslims. *Salafism* has occupied an empty space among “too academic Islam”, folk Islam and secularism and laicism of a part of the Bosnian Muslims. Bosnian *Ulama* must speak to believers in their language, facing “butter and bread” issues to counter the influence of *Salafi* in some areas and oppose the spread of the movement in a future. They must realize how important their labour is in stopping this process and pay special attention to the religious teaching in the country.

Fourteenth, to face the probable arrival of a new generation of well trained scholars very close to *Salafi* ideas and graduated at some Middle East universities, the hierarchy of the BiH Islamic Community has to “recycle” its imams. These Imams, especially those veterans, have to receive a specific instruction to maintain an ideological and religious debate with the newcomer graduates in order to gather their communities around them.

Fifteenth, well prepared Bosnian traditional scholars have also to “reconvert” those believers that have already been caught by radical movements. Special attention has to be paid to former drug users and also imprisoned criminals that have been frequently targeted by *Salafi* groups.

Sixteenth, traditional Bosnian Muslim believers tend to recognize a world of multiple Islamic realities, and to identify closely with their “national” variant. Bosnian Muslim religious authorities have to convince local believers that they also have to be tolerant towards all interpretations of Islam but that they cannot tolerate aggressiveness and radicalism.

Seventeenth, the monitoring of the situation of the BiH youth, the unemployment rate and the development of social and health-care services, including centres for rehabilitation of drug addicts, are essential to the future of this issue. Local and international authorities and organizations must develop cultural and social programs to counter those of the radical movement. Any kind of activities for the youth, especially those attended by teenagers coming from different countries and different religious background are a way to avoid *Salafi* recruitment. The economic and social development in the country and its integration into the Euro-Atlantic structure are very important to defeat the Salafi movement in BiH.

Eighteenth, the danger that radical organizations might recruit Bosniak young people is greater outside Bosnia-Herzegovina than inside. In Western countries these teenagers lose their cultural roots and identities and family structures and are thus an easier target for radical groups.

Their parents are unable to provide cultural or spiritual guidance, while their communities may lack Imams with a modern, democratic orientation. Disconnected from the tolerant traditions of their families' original homelands, these teenagers are susceptible to foreign propaganda and sermons that preach narrow and hateful interpretations of Islam. The conversion of the Bosniak Diaspora is a risk from two different points of view:

- As a financial source for local Salafis.
- As possible Salafi missionaries in BiH.

Nineteenth, it is important to strengthen the relationship between the BiH Islamic Community and the Bosniak Diaspora and also between the BiH Islamic Community with the local authorities of the countries where the Bosniak Diaspora is present.

Twentieth, most of the information gathered until now is based on the regurgitation of media or biased spread of rumours without further confirmation. *Salafism* is a very sensitive issue in BiH, thus any activity to gather information on *Salafism* in BiH must be conducted according to the most careful observance of the procedures and the respect of freedom of religion. Personnel required to deal with this sensitive issue must receive the appropriate background and knowledge about the topic, in order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Based on his own experience, the author of this article affirms that, in this way, they will obtain information that represent original thinking about the real picture of Islamic community in the country and not a "regurgitation of open sources wisdom". This effort would contribute to defeat prejudices and misunderstandings that present obstacles to proper job performances, fulfilling information gaps and giving their organizations the chance to properly monitor and assess the evolution of this phenomenon.

Twenty-first, the close religious, historic and cultural relationship between the Bosniak population and Turkey is close. Turkey has been vigorously pursuing long-standing policies of modernization. Turkey has shown that Islam and modernity are compatible. As a secular democratic country with a free-market economy, Turkey relays key Western

concepts and values to the Middle East, the Trans-Caucasus, and central Asia. Turkey offers living proof that Muslim and Western values can be combined inside a secular and democratic system. The historical links between Bosniac people and Turkey might serve as a robust bulwark against the other “more foreign” influence coming from some Middle East countries, consolidating the traditional version of Islam and avoiding the spreading of radical ideas. In short, this influence is significant to the future direction and tenor of Islam in BiH.

Twenty-second, it is also affirmed that local Muslim believers, if they are approached in a respectful, serious and professional way, showing our deference and interest in their culture, religion and tradition, can be reliable sources to obtain trustworthy information about radical streams in the Muslim communities. Besides efforts on behalf of the ordinary local Muslims, that are very often staunch opponents of *Salafism*, members of the BiH Islamic Community might be a really insurmountable obstacle in front of *Salafism* in BiH.

Twenty-third, Bosnian Islam could play a constructive role as a bridge-builder between the Islamic world and the mainly Christian-defined Europe to which the Bosnian Muslims belong, geographically, historically, and indeed culturally.

And finally, for centuries Bosnian has been practicing Islam, albeit in a more moderate form. They have a long history of experience with a multicultural society. Bosnian Muslims also have a keen awareness that they need to develop a form of Islam that fits in with European norms and values. They are evidence that Islam, in the way that is understood and practice in BiH, can have a place in Europe, again those who claim that Europe and Islam do not fit together.



## 11.

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For more than 500 years Bosnian Muslims have maintained the Hanafi tradition, following a moderate version of Islam, tolerant of other communities and compatible with western values. The Islamic revival in Bosnia and Herzegovina , which began in 1970s, underwent radical changes from the beginning of the war in April 1992. It is reported that several hundred Mujahidin joined with and fought along side Bosniacs during the 1992-5 war in BiH. Highly religious and motivated, some foreign fighters brought a specific understanding of Islam with them and tried to indoctrinate those ideas into Bosniac minds. Thus the Salafi ideas surfaced for the first time on a wider scale. This foreign creed was very different from the traditional version of Islam in BiH.

Throughout 1990s BiH was in a unique situation: it had the political and mobilizing structures in place for the spreading of a different interpretation of Islam. Nevertheless, it lacked the cultural framework around which to mobilize social support. Nor did it have a context in which to develop a strong Salafi stream in BiH. Eventually, although Salafism has taken root in BiH for the last fifteen years, the number of its followers is not as important as some media try to show. The following features of Islam in BiH support this assessment: 1) The exclusive Sunni tradition reaching back to Ottoman times with strong influence from the moderate Hanafi Law School and Sufi orders; 2) The unbroken tradition of a central spiritual authority with a well-organized Ulama or Islamic scholars structure; 3) Centuries of co-existence with other world religions and confessions including more than 130 years in a secular state with rule-of-law elements; and 4) Compatibility of the legitimate Islamic institutions with the secular state: a well-organized Ulama, Madrasas as publicly recognized secondary schools, Islamic foundations (Waqfs) and (until 1946) Sharia-courts for family law.

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