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RADICAL GROUPS IN THE BALKANS: THE CASE OF WAHHABI JAŠAREVIĆ



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On October 28, 2011 Mevlid Jašarević /23/ of Novi Pazar fired his Kalashnikov at the building housing the American Embassy in Sarajevo wounding two policemen. Before wounded himself by the police Jasarevic managed for fire several hits at the building. He was taken to the hospital and then taken into custody. He said when arrested, "I will never shoot at my Muslim brothers. This was a revenge to the Americans for Pakistan and Afghanistan."

Mevlid and another Wahhabi had been arrested last year in Novi Pazar during the visit of the American Ambassador Mary Warlick to the region. The police took him in for not having an ID card while standing in front of the municipal hall. He had a knife on him. He was released after spending several hours in custody.

Only after the incident the police revealed that in 2005 Jasarevic had served three years in

prison in Vienna for a 100,000 Euro robbery. Upon release he was expelled from Vienna.

Jasarevic told the investigation that in February 2010 he had been in the village of Gornja Maoca, a well-known Wahhabi stronghold in Bosnia-Herzegovina when the police raided it and arrested many Wahhabis. He himself returned to Novi Pazar to “spread Islam.”¹

Everything was quickly placed under control by prompt action by security services in Bosnia and Serbia, and FBI team arrival on the spot. But no one provided any detailed information.

¹ Jasarevic adheres to the radical Takfir ideology advocating intolerance for non-Muslims and defying secular laws. His grandfather in Novi Pazar, Shain Jasarevic, told the Sarajevo-based “Dnevni Avaz” paper that after his parents’ divorce long ago mother took the baby Mevlid to Austria where she had several marriages the last one to “some Arab.” One day, said the grandfather, Mevlid showed up wearing a beard and propagating “weird ideas about the observance of Islam.” Then he directed himself to Gornja Maoca near Brcko to join the community of radical Wahhabi Muslims. He took his wife and son with him. According to the police in Bosnia-Herzegovina Jasarevic was already in the village when they raided it. Enes Ljevakovic, chairman of the Fatwa Council, told the press that the adherents of the Takfir ideology such as Jasarevic were grossly misusing Islam for the purposes contrary to its spirit. “We strongly condemn the Takfir ideology, its anathemization and advocacy against cooperation between peoples and coexistence,” he said calling such radicals Islamic anarchists. On Christmas Eve 2002 Muamer Topalovic, also an adherent of the Takfir ideology massacred everyone in the Andjelic family. He was sentenced to 35-year imprisonment. Members of the group that in June 2010 planted an explosive device in front of the Bugojno police station killing one police officer were of the same ideological affiliation. According to the media, Vienna is a recruitment seat for Wahhabis, while several of their communities were operating in Bosnia and destabilizing the state. The Sarajevo-based “Oslobodjenje” daily claimed that security services were not up to their task in the Jasarevic case. He was registered as a dangerous person long ago, says the paper, adding that the bombing attack at the Bugojno police station was obviously not seen as a warning about the danger of such ‘lone hands.’

RADICAL ISLAM IN THE BALKANS

Despite the fact that there have been no serious threats up to now the Sarajevo incident indicates that the danger of radicalism is real. Once again the Balkans made the breaking news in the world. The question of Balkan radicalisms was reopened without sensationalistic exaggeration.

Extreme rightist groups have rampaged in Belgrade on several occasions (torching of embassies, the murder of French citizen Bruce Taton, assaults at LGBT persons and Roma, journalists and human rights defenders).

The police response to such situations is more and more prompt though many in police forces are intolerant.

Radicalisms of no matter what types call not only for social mobilization and actions promoting tolerance, mutual respect and the respect for human rights but also for a serious analysis of their origins, actual scope and instrumentalization.

First of all the collapse of communism was followed by revival of nationalistic sentiments in all ethnic groups in post-communist countries – from USSR to Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In 1990s Balkan Muslims emerged as autonomous political actors. That was not an anomaly but a logical consequence of the collapsed communism and a signal that Muslim population was involved in the process of political modernization in Europe.

The problems in Balkan regions inhabited by Muslims can be understood only in larger context. The origins of radicalization among Muslims are in the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo – caused by Serbia’s imperial policy (and Croatia’s in Bosnia) – and in the protracted crisis, absence of prospects and, above all, in

the absence of visionary policies for the Balkans. Besides, all right-wing movements, including those marked by Islam, are, like the movements in Germany and some other European countries, outcomes of larger social problems, notably those related to the masses of unadjusted and alienated young people searching their identities in various extremist movements.

The existence of Wahhabi movements in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sandzak and other Balkan regions and young people's adherence to radical movements indicate the absence of social prospects – education, employment and basic necessities of life. Therefore, those who are poor are attracted to extremist movements the most.

REACTIONS IN BOSNIA

The Wahhabi movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina is not autochthonous – it was “imported” in the course of the 1990s wars. Balkan Muslims are mostly Sunnis. In the 20th century the great majority of them were secular but conservative. The conservative current (like among other nations in ex-Yugoslavia) prevailed in the elites emerging from the Democratic Action Party / SDA/ advocating traditional Islam as a common denominator of Bosniak identity.

The Wahhabi movement in Bosnia recruits a relatively small number of people (3,000), who generally live in isolated communities. In the Bosnian war, particularly at the very beginning, Muslims/Bosniak had no arms to fight back Serb aggression. In such desperate situation Wahhabis, Islamic humanitarian aid agencies and veteran mujahedins including Al-Qaeda fighters came to rescue. Many remained in Bosnia after the war to help the devastated Muslim

community. However, they started spreading Wahhabism. As the biggest investor Saudi Arabia gave over 373 million US dollar for “Bosnian jihad.” This, in addition to the Bosniaks studying abroad, resulted in the emergence of the Wahhabi movement. Relations between Islamic groups that fought in solidarity with each other during the war became tense in peacetime, notably between Wahhabis and Sunnis.

According to Stephen Schwartz, the well-known Islamologist, they remained in Bosnia after the war to “revive” Islam. The great majority of Bosnian and Balkan Muslims, he says, despise Wahhabis and defy their dictate. However, Wahhabis, Muslim brothers and other extremists have bribed some leaders of the Islamic community in Bosnia. That is why a part of the Islamic flock in Bosnia perceives ulemas as gangsters and enemies of Muslims.²

Thanks to the funds pouring from abroad Wahhabis were in the position to aggressively provoke the predominant Islamic community. Two persons are outstanding in the movement itself – Jusuf Barcic and Muhamad Porca, Bosnian imams who have studied in Saudi Arabia.³ In early 2007 Barcic and his followers attracted public attention when they tried to take over some mosques in Tuzla and Sarajevo. Barcic was killed in a car accident two months later. Some 3,000 people attended his funeral.

Years ago, Esad Durakovic, academician and professor of Orientalism, was warning that radical stands of a “distorted religion” could generate terrorism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. “The terrorist attack in Sarajevo is almost a logical outcome of the post-aggression developments among Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” he says. Durakovic was also warning against euphemized interpretation of Wahhabism.

² <http://www.islamicpluralism.eu/WP/?p=1629>.

³ In the Arab world Wahhabis are predominantly in Saudi Arabia only.

He blames the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina the most because of its “utterly wrong” attitude towards Wahhabis. It has pampered them, he says. The Ryaset referred to them as “decent Muslims from our villages” and “new Muslims,” which almost implied their avant-gardism. “In Bosnia-Herzegovina Wahhabis are in the function of the aggression from the inside but are mostly unaware of that. Their fanaticism and acts such as the one against the American Embassy harm Bosniaks and Bosnia-Herzegovina the most and play into the hands of those who had been ‘telling’ the world during the war that local Muslims were dangerous and should be eliminated as such,” says Durakovic. “Bosniaks could be proud of the fact that they did not turn into revengers or terrorists but managed to keep their dignity during the epic pogrom, during those several years when the entire world turned its back on us leaving us to the mercy of the fourth biggest military power in Europe. With this Bosniaks have demonstrated their true character and nature because in those hard and irrational times one would expect measure for measure, an eye for an eye. And, fortunately, this never happened,” he adds.⁴

On the other hand, Durakovic emphasizes that the Dayton Accords were so formulated that their revision within Bosnia was almost impossible. Bosnia is, therefore, hopelessly paralyzed and frustrated. For its part, the international community insists that everything depends on Bosnians and their mutual agreement. At the same time it is benevolent about all of Dodik’s destructive actions. Highest representatives of the European Union come to visit him... Such behavior is more than hypocritical,” says Durakovic.⁵

According to the analysis “Security Risks” by the Atlantic Initiative, Bosnia-Herzegovina is

4 DEPO Portal, November 5, 2011.

5 Ibid.

obviously vulnerable to domestic and transnational terrorism but this threat is in no way bigger than threats to other countries in Europe. Statistically speaking, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been for years among the countries with the smallest number of terrorist incidents. “The unfounded stories about the growing risk of terrorism in Bosnia-Herzegovina rest on senseless claims that some 10,000 Wahhabis live there. Such stories are not meant to warn but to define Bosniaks as terrorists and thus delegitimize their political goals,” says the analysis.⁶

Bosnian Serbs and their media have often played on identifying Wahhabis and terrorists, especially in the times of critical processes (police reform, local and general elections, constitutional amendments, referendum on the judiciary, etc.) Their aggressive rhetoric considerably contributed to the perception of Wahhabis and, hence, Bosniaks, as people prone to terrorism. Milodard Dodik used to say, “Bosniaks’ struggle for national identity is closely connected with the idea about Bosnia-Herzegovina at any cost.” “Bosniaks are people existing only in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who have proclaimed themselves as such around 1993. They stubbornly try to prove their identity by destroying the identities of others – primarily of other constitutive ethnic groups in Bosnia,” said Dodik.⁷

Aware that Wahhabis are under global scrutiny, Bosnian leaders promptly condemned the attack at the American Embassy. Major of Sarajevo Alija Behman said all citizens were in shock, but the police reacted adequately and “immobilized that lunatic.”⁸ Member of Bosnian Presidency Bakir Izetbegovic called for a prompt

6 <http://atlantskainicijativa.org/images/stories/ai/pdf/ai-dpc%20bih%20security%20study%20final%202010-9-11.pdf>

7 RFE/RL, October 14, 2010

8 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=167&nav_id=553232.

investigation. Expressing his sympathies with the American Ambassador and his staff he said the US was a “time-tested friend of Bosnia-Herzegovina.” “The American government and people were there for Bosnia-Herzegovina at the hard times and no one has the right to undermine the friendly relations between the two countries,” he added.⁹

The federal government called the act an assault against the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁰ “Regardless who’s the mastermind, these shots were directed against our friends and Bosnia-Herzegovina,” said Haris Silajdzic. For Zeljko Komsic, member of the Bosnian Presidency, the act was an assault at Bosnia-Herzegovina and its citizens. “Bosnia-Herzegovina is not a safe heaven for terrorists. Bosnia-Herzegovina and its peoples would never back anything that might jeopardize peace, security or a human life,” he said.¹¹ Mustafa Ceric, head of the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, called up relevant authorities to decisively deter such violent attempts.¹²

Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj said he believed the authorities would detect perpetrators and publicize details as soon as possible. Reiterating his support to the US Embassy and its staff he said, “Bosnia-Herzegovina has never been and will never be a terrorist country. This vile individual act by ad foreign national was meant to undermine international reputation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and present it as an unstable state.”¹³

⁹ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=28&nav_category=16&nav_id=553264.nm

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=167&nav_id=553436.

“All circumstances must be investigated, including the possibility that the Serb intelligence service had a finger in the pie,” said academic Muhamed Filipovic. “Serb officials boasted about having Jasarevic under their control all the time. History teaches us that extremists were those ex-Yugoslavia’s intelligence service had used for its goals,” he said.¹⁴ Ismet Dahic, former head of the police in Sarajevo, said, “It is quite possible that police agencies have recruited Mevlid Jasarevic and sent him to Sarajevo.”¹⁵

Some papers (such as “Oslobđjenje”) strongly criticized the Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina for being more engaged in politics and the national question than in interpretation of Islam and scholarly actions against extremists. Bosnian analysts warn that Jasarevic’s act of terrorism indicates serious flaws in the functioning of domestic security agencies and that such cases cannot be called isolated after what happened in Bugojno and Sarajevo. Vlado Azinovic, professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, says that rather than a coincidence Jasarevic’s attack at the Embassy was “well-planned like every act of terrorism.” “Such acts imply ideological indoctrination, training and logistics,” he explains.¹⁶ “The problem is in the absence of political will to have this problem finally solved. I was convinced this would happen a year before, shortly after the terrorist attack at the police station in Bugojno,” says the professor.¹⁷

¹⁴ Svedok, November 8, 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ http://atlantskainicijativa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1022%3Anapad-na-ambasadu-sad-a-u-sarajevu-propusti-nadlenih-agencija-&catid=4

¹⁷ http://atlantskainicijativa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1032%3Adr-vlado-azinovistrunjak-za-terorizam-vjerovao-sam-da-e-vlasti-rijeiti-problem-jo-od-napada-u-bugojnu&catid=45%3A-vijesti&Itemid=118&lang=hr

Leaders of the Islamic Community and local politicians have usually labeled acts of terrorism in Bosnia-Herzegovina “isolated crimes” rather than ascribed it to the growth of Islamic extremism. They often accused researches into the Wahhabi movement Islamophobia. Ceric used to stand for Wahhabis’ right to interpret Islam in their own way. “Everyone is entitled to interpret his religion in his own way. We may agree or disagree but we are not authorized to judge anyone unless he violates the law,” he said.¹⁸

Condemning the assault at the American Embassy Reis Mustafa Ceric said, “Those who have separated themselves from the Islamic Community are in the hands of Satan.” He called Jasarevic “a traitor of the Islamic community” and said that the followers of the Wahhabi thought were undermining “Islamic unity.”¹⁹ In his Curban Bairam sermon Ceric appealed to Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina to refrain from the mosques in which Wahhabis were preaching and said, “Everyone has the right to his lifestyle but no one has the right to endanger people’s peace and safety. Conscientious people must stop everyone prone to violence.”²⁰ “The American Embassy can count on us as its friends. The assault at the Embassy is an assault at all of us. We shall, therefore, stand against any individual or groups that endanger peace and security in this town and in this country,” he concluded.²¹

18 Daily.tportal.hr [Zagreb], September 8, 2010

19 <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/07/175825.html>

20 <http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/reis-ceric-kritizirao-vehabije-s-jasarevicem-je-vrag-kolo-vodio/581316.aspx>

21 <http://www.smedia.rs/vesti/vest/78894/Napad-na-americku-ambasadu-Sarajevo-Vehabije-Mustafa-Ceric-Ceric-Napad-na-ambasadu-SAD-je-napad-nas.html>

REACTIONS IN REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

Milorad Dodik played on the assault at the American Embassy to discredit Bosniak leaders and accuse them of complicity. Above all he blamed Bakir Izetbegovic for the rise of Wahhabis. It is common knowledge, he said, that Izetbegovic is in permanent touch with these groups and is highly appreciated in radical Islamic circles.

In past years, said Dodik, the director of the Intelligence Service was referring to some 3,500 persons willing to commit terrorist acts. He couldn’t tell whether this one, Jasarevic, was on the list but knew for sure that no Serb was on it. Wahhabis in Bosnia-Herzegovina are after a Muslim state based on Shari, he explained, adding that their actions are in the service of Izetbegovic’s policy. He used to be a main contact between his father, Alija, and Iranian humanitarian organizations, claims Dodik. “Emphasizing the fact that Jasarevic is a citizen of Serbia is the way Sarajevo frames the case and promotes the stereotype about Serbs’ guilt.”²²

Serb official Igor Radojic told the press that the underrepresented danger of radical Islamic terrorism in Bosnia-Herzegovina troubled him the most. “The danger is real. The official Sarajevo is responsible for this underrepresentation,” he said.²³

At the same time a monument dedicated to Russian citizens killed in action during the Bosnian war was ceremoniously presented to the public eye in Visegrad. Names of 37 Russian volunteers are inscribed on it. On the occasion, Russian general and Cossack ataman Alexander

22 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=11&dd=02&nav_category=11&nav_id=554531.

23 http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=167&nav_id=553436.

Pavlovich conferred a high Russian military decoration on Milorad Dodik.²⁴

Dodik holds that the role of Russian volunteers in the Bosnian war cannot be compared with the one of “those who came to Bosnia and sided with Bosniaks to spread extremism.”²⁵

But Dodik seems to ignore the fact that a specialized Belgrade-seated agency managed by Vojislav Seselj had actually organized the arrival of Ukrainians, Russians and Rumanians to Bosnia and their joining Serb troops. Dr. Fikret Becirovic, senior fellow at the Institute for Investigation of the Crimes against Humanity, says, “That agency played a crucial role as an extended hand of the masterminds and logistics engineers of the aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina...In Belgrade Major Jovan Djogo was in charge of the logistics for Republika Srpska. This agency has forcefully recruited 4,500 persons and transferred them to Bijeljina barracks in Republika Srpska Krajina and another 1,500 to Republika Srpska...Foreign mercenaries and those forcefully recruited have been either allocated to the headquarters of the RS Army or to units such as White Eagles, Subversive Battalion of the Sarajevo-Romanija corps, etc.” brigade.²⁶

REACTIONS IN SERBIA

Back in 1990s Serbia’s academic and intelligence circles launched the thesis about the “danger of Islamic fundamentalism.” Accordingly, the Bosnian war has been interpreted since as actualization of the centuries-long conflict between Muslims, Eastern Orthodox Christians and Catholics in the region, even as a “the clash of civilizations.”

²⁴ www.b92.net November 6, 2011.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Darko Tanaskovic, islamologist, holds that the religious dimension of the Bosnian war has been hushed up given that opening of “the terrifying abyss” of a religious war reality would have questioned the fiction about “Tchetnik aggression” and the “the new world order’s” approach to the ex-Yugoslav crisis and other similar crises all over the globe. For him, that was definitely a religious war, meaning that many Muslims were perceiving it as jihad.²⁷

According to the thesis predominant in Serbia and launched by historian Milorad Ekmecic, Muslim intelligentsia failed in a historical mission of “turning a community fully separated from Serbs and Croats in Yugoslavia into a national community, a secular community that is not propelled by religions.”²⁸

Almost the entire academic elite in Serbia are presently revising the recent past on the grounds of this thesis. These efforts for historical reinterpretation are reflected in the governmental attitude towards Sandzak, that is towards Muslims/Bosniaks and Islam in general. Throughout the modern history Sandzak has been perceived as a dangerous spot marked by the so-called Islamic transversal (Istanbul, Kosovo, Sandzak, Sarajevo). Over the preparations for the Bosnian war this thesis was crucial in the planning of genocide as well. This was based on the premise that “the beginning of the process of re-Islamization of Yugoslav Muslims was in the line with the pan-Islamic project for Islamic renewal as testified by Alija Izetbegovic’s political manifest ‘Islamic Declaration.’”

The terrorist attack of September 11 played into the hands of Serbia’s thesis about Islamic fundamentalism, at present referred to as “new

²⁷ Darko Tanasković, *Islam and Us, Jihad in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Illusion or Reality*, Partenon, Belgrade, 2006, pp. 62.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 81.

Balkan Islam.” No doubt that Tanaskovic was among those creating the atmosphere of Islamic danger in 1980s. Therefore, after September 11 he emerged as someone who used to “forewarn the world about metamorphoses of the Islamic phenomenon in the Balkans.” After September 11, journalist Zeljko Cvijanovic claimed in his articles that “Belgrade scores points in the war against terror” and that “Serbia looks forward to gaining political capital thanks to America’s war on terror.” “Serbia can overcome Milosevic’s heritage by redefining in modern terms its self-proclaimed role of the Western civilization’s stronghold against Muslim hordes coming from the East.”²⁹

Mujaheedins’ involvement in the Bosnian war has been used as an ironclad proof of the said thesis. The emergence of Wahhabis in Sandzak has been played on to emphasize the danger of Islamic fundamentalism – targeting Serbia’s security this time. The media spinning of an anti-Islamic hysteria mostly by publicizing interviews with former officers of civil and military intelligence services culminated in the arrest of a group of Wahhabis in 2006. They were consequently accused of undermining the country’s integrity. Belgrade authorities used the case to further disqualify Muslims and Islam. The trial of the group of fifteen young men, Wahhabis, raised hue and cry among people in Sandzak: the whole case was “overblown” and no sound evidence was presented during the trial, people thought.

The attack at the US Embassy in Sarajevo only added fuel to the fire of the induced threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Unlike in the past, however, the rhetoric and qualification of the incident were more moderate. Major media in Serbia did not pay that much attention to it as they would have had it taken place earlier. Serbian police acted promptly in Novi Pazar,

²⁹ *Blic News*, October 3, 2001.

Sjenica and Tutin: they immediately arrested 17 persons suspected of connections with Jasarevic.

Police Minister Ivica Dacic confirmed that Jasarevic was from Novi Pazar, telling a press conference that this act of terrorism was “yet another evidence of the threat of radical Islamic movements.”³⁰

The Serbian police will contribute to the struggle against radical Islamic Wahhabism in the Balkan region and together with their American counterparts fight radical Islam in the period to come, he said.³¹ Milorad Veljovic, police director, said that Serbian police and FBI agreed that radical Wahhabism was a global problem. “Together with our colleagues from Washington and Sarajevo we are analyzing the evidence...The attack in Sarajevo should not be perceived as an isolated case,” he said.³²

As Serbian President Boris Tadic put it, the terrorist attack in Sarajevo should not be linked with everyone professing Islam because such individual cases of religious extremism are characteristic of other religions as well. “On this day no one should use a profane word for people professing Islam,” he said.³³

³⁰ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=167&nav_id=553232 .

³¹ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=31&nav_category=16&nav_id=553751.

³² http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=11&dd=03&nav_category=11&nav_id=554845.

³³ http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=11&dd=03&nav_category=11&nav_id=554845.

³³ Reacting to the incident, people from academic and intelligence circles mostly invoked once warnings against “the green transversal.” That thesis was abundantly used in Serbia’s warring propaganda in 1990s. The thesis itself was even more cemented after the 1990s wars, especially in Serbian academicians’ interpretations of the Bosnian war. Historian Milorad Ekmečić was quite explicit about “Islamic fundamentalism” having destroyed Yugoslavia. The same thesis underlies a variety of Serbia’s strategic

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REACTIONS BY INTELLIGENCE SERVICES AND ACADEMIC CIRCLES IN SERBIA

For intelligence and academic circles the Sarajevo incident proved the thesis about the Islamic fundamentalists' responsibility for ex-Yugoslavia's disintegration. This time, however, they manifested more respect for Islam as one of world's religions, emphasizing that Serbs and Muslims have cohabitated and lived side by side throughout history. Indicatively, Belgrade had asked Turkey to assist it in unification of the two Islamic communities in Serbia.

"The Green Transversal outlines the spread of Islam in Europe. This marked the civil war in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was evident in the policy pursued by Alija Izetbegovic and, today, of his son who is Bosniaks' political leader. Understanding of and tolerance for the ideas of radical Islam have been present in these areas for long and still are,"

and tactical moves. For instance, the indictments against Bosniak politicians for the cases of Dobrovoljacka Street in Sarajevo and "Tuzla column" in 1992 underline that "Muslims started a war against YPA." This is what writer Dobrica Cosic, a crucial figure in shaping the history of the period, often elaborates. He claims, among other things, that Bosnian war was a Serb liberation war, that in 1992 "Muslims launched a massive campaign of killing Serbs, plundering their property and torching their homes." "The Bosnian war stood for the only big victory Serb people won in the late 20th century by creating their first state on the other bank of the Drina River," he says. He also claims that "Sarajevo is the town of a massive Muslim crime" and that what happened in Srebrenica was not "a genocide but a grave, bestial crime against Muslim prisoners." For him, Bosnia will be "a springboard" to Islamic fundamentalists' movement towards the North and the West, "deeper into Europe where their Islamic brothers, fragmented at present but staunch in their belief, wait for them." (Dobrica Cosic's foreword to the book "The Creation of Republika Srpska: A Diary 1993-95" by Nikola Koljevic, Sluzbeni glasnik, 2010.) http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=16&nav_id=553340Ivica.

says Professor Andreja Savic.³⁴ In support of his arguments he take a quote from the book by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu titled "Strategic Depth" – "The Southwest belt from Bihac, through Middle and Eastern Bosnia, Sandzak, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia and Kirchizia to Eastern Thrace is Turkey's geopolitical and geo-cultural jugular vein in the Balkans."³⁵

In his book "Neo-Osmalism" Professor Darko Tanaskovic claims that in the Balkans Turkey also pursues its own religious politics through the Directorate for Religious Issues which closely cooperates with local Islamic communities and assists them logistically and in human resources. According to him, Turkey thus maintains a certain level of control over the course of Balkan Islam so as to suppress the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran.³⁶

The actions by Wahhabis in these regions, says Professor Andreja Savic, reflect the influence and interests of Saudi Arabia and Turkey but also of Bosnian religious leaders such as Mustafa Cerić. For him all these actions "follow the Green Transversal cutting through Raska and the Bosniak part of Bosnia." "Wahhabis are closely connected with Al-Qaeda," he says.³⁷ "The attack in Sarajevo marks a defeat of Americans' and the West's policy of double standards for the Balkans," he explains, adding that such attacks could easily take place in Belgrade as well.³⁸

Professor Radoslav Gacic, senior fellow at the Institute of Political Studies in Belgrade, holds that only strong political will could put an end to tolerance for the growing radicalization of

34 Svedok, November 8, 2011.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

Muslims in the Balkans. And Turkey could be a major player in all this.³⁹

In Professor Dragan Simeunovic's view, Turkey is strong enough to curb Wahhabis' influence given that the great majority of Muslims in the Balkans belongs to the so-called people's Islam imported at the time of the Ottoman Empire. "Indeed, Turks do not love Wahhabis and that is why the latter are hardly present in Turkey... But it is in Turks' interest to maintain their centuries-long influence on Balkan Muslims."⁴⁰

REACTIONS BY BOSNIAKS IN SERBIA

Wahhabis emerged in Sandzak in 1997. They became active after the change of regime of October 5, 2000. Their initial activities were mostly restricted to cleaning up the trash and providing assistance to drug addicts – many of which after the treatment joined the ranks of Wahhabis. In its report for 2005, the International Crisis Group quotes that the Wahhabi movement in Sandzak was imported from Sarajevo. They were mostly assisted by Saudi Arabia, via Vienna.

In February 2006 a group of Wahhabis staged a protest against publication of Prophet Mohammed's caricature in Danish newspaper. In June 2006 Wahhabis broke a concert by "Balkanica" band in Novi Pazar and clashed with believers in mosques in the attempt to impose their manner of prayer. Then, in March 2007 the police found out "a training camp for terrorists" in the Zabren village, nearby Sjenica and some 30 kilometers away from Novi Pazar. They arrested a group of young men, Wahhabis, who were consequently accused of illegal possession of arms, planning of acts of terrorism and assassination of mufti Muamer Zukorlic. In

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

further action, a month later, the police shot Ismail Peric and wounded the main suspect, Senad Ramovic.⁴¹

In September 2007 in Novi Pazar, two Wahhabis were arrested and accused of planning an attack at the police at the main stadium in Novi Pazar. The indictment encompassed four persons, two of whom are still at large. Both groups were accused of "criminal association aimed against constitutional order and of terrorism" and sentenced to years-long imprisonment.

In 2007, the Sandzak Islamic Community split in two. Belgrade played a crucial role in this schism. Tensions and conflicts in this community have to be perceived in a larger context. On the one hand, religious freedoms of citizens of Serbia – believers and non-believers alike – were breached. On the other hand, these tensions and conflicts testified of periodic waves of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic actions in Serbia to which governmental institutions failed to react properly. All this was not about an inter-Muslim division in Sandzak but of a well-thought-out governmental policy aimed at obstructing the constitution of Bosniak community, mostly embodied in the Islamic Community.

Citizens and believers alike in Sandzak are averse to Wahhabis. Local public protested loud against Belgrade's attempt to use Wahhabis to present Sandzak as a potential stronghold of Islamic extremists. All local leaders strongly condemned the incident in Sarajevo.

Mufti of Belgrade Muhamed Jusufspahic appealed to Muslims to do their utmost to prevent "disturbance and the scourge of terrorism." In his message he said that Islam was a

⁴¹ Ramovic already had a police record. In Italy he got a long term sentence for several crimes, including pimping. Once he returned to Sandzak he „discovered Islam“ and decided to „repent his sins“ through Wahhabism.

religion of peace and that peace with God implies peace among people. Reis-el-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Serbia Adem Zilkic said the attack was actually an attack at Bosnia-Herzegovina and “at human dignity of every sincere Muslim.” Meshihat of the Islamic Community in Serbia released that terror and violence were evil and danger for those they targeted but also for the cause on behalf of which they were committed.

According to local politicians in Sandzak, there is no danger of the strengthening of the Wahhabi movement in Sandzak. Munir Poturak, MP from the Sandzak Democratic Party, claims that Wahhabis or other extremist groups are not organized as movements though individual acts are not to be ruled out for various reasons and motives.⁴²

For her part, Aida Corovic, director of Urban-In NGO from Novi Pazar, argues that mufti Muamer Zukorlic’s Islamic Community in Serbia and Wahhabi terrorists are closely connected. In support of her argument she provides the information that Muamer Zukorlic has been receiving funds from Wahhabi seats in Vienna and Rome for long. She knows the exact addresses of the hotels in which they meet and raise funds for their followers in Bosnia and Sandzak, she said, adding that she has

⁴² http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=11&nav_id=553398.

⁴³ [www.b92.net](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2011&mm=10&dd=29&nav_category=11&nav_id=553398) 2. “I know even the names of young guys who have been taking money to Zukorlic,” she said among other things.

imparted this piece of information to the Austrian Ambassador to Serbia.⁴³

Among other things the police arrested two groups of Wahhabis in the vicinity of Novi Pazar in 2007 and 2008 as suspects of assassination attempt at mufti Zukorlic. Zukorlic himself had said on several occasions that Wahhabis were a deviant in Islam and that a strong Islamic community is the best insurance against such harmful phenomena, whereas he and his religious community were advocates of a moderate and the right course.

After several incidents in Novi Pazar mosques caused by Wahhabis Zukorlic banned them from praying there. They have been praying in private homes ever since.

However, Aida Corovic⁴⁴ says, “Maybe the story about their plan to kill him is true but what is not true is that there motives were religious. It was all about a conflict of interests. I believe that he would not allow the money he received to be spent on common causes. So he is afraid of all those he has deprived of funds as he would not allow access to money to anyone but himself.”⁴⁵ “This explains that many bodyguards he keeps. If you know that Wahhabis are usually recruited from circles of sociopaths you must know that they have no problem with shooting and killing people.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ As well as Rasim Ljaljic, Aida Corovic used to be close to mufti Zukorlic. Then they split up and became open enemies.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To all appearances the attack at the US Embassy in Sarajevo was not a part of a larger plan. However, this might change in the future. Wahhabis are present throughout Europe (especially in the Great Britain) and no wonder they emerged in the Balkans as well. The chances that Muslims in the Balkans support the cause of Islamic extremists are meager.

The emergence of Wahhabis in the Balkans has to be perceived in a larger context – primarily in the context of the Bosnian war and the consequences of the Dayton Accords. Treating Balkan Islam as a threat to Europe would be wrong the same as amnestying Islamic leaders when it comes to their overall responsibility.

All in all, though marginal radical and nationalistic currents within the Islamic community attract the public attention only when political and ethnic tensions escalate. In such situations there is always a danger various players instrumentalize national, political and social frustrations of Muslim population. So usually rather than Wahhabis real threats are manipulations of isolated incidents, aimed at preventing democratic consolidation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, as well as in the region as a whole. Wahhabis' influence on new generations of Muslims is the biggest threat of all.

The emergence of extremist currents is also a symptom of Islam's pluralization and individualization of regional religions. Not all Wahhabis are after political radicalism. Therefore, offhand stigmatization and criminalization of these radical currents may radicalize them even more and turn their leaders into victims.

Insistence on the thesis about the so-called green transversal and the Muslim population a potential source of conflict or crisis in the Balkans is counterproductive from the angle of lessening interethnic tensions. There is no such thing as "green transversal." And political and religious leaders in Bosnia cannot be blamed for conflicts or the war that devastated their country and Balkan regions in 1990s.

The international community and most democratic forces in the region have already defined the Bosnian war as an aggression marked by genocide against Bosniaks. People in Serbia and Republika Srpska have to learn and recognize the truth about the Bosnian war. Otherwise, young people among Bosniaks will be further frustrated with the mainstream victim-aggressor counterbalance. Serbia must end its policy of undermining the Bosniak community and assist the unification of the Islamic Community without further delay. Law enforcement officers in Serbia should do their job but not resort to repression. Repression is more often than not counterproductive.

Bosniaks should resolutely curb any form of aggressive Islam. By putting its infrastructure and dedication to good use the Islamic Community can efficiently neutralize any potential threat.

Politicians liable for legislation and action against terrorism are responsible the most. A unified security system is still inoperative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, mostly due to Republika Srpska's defiance of any common institution. An effective fight against terrorism implies an adequate law on prevention of terrorism and a law against money laundering. The establishment of a functional state preconditions a solution to this problem the same as to most problems plaguing Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In conclusion, radicalisms of any sort in the Balkans, Wahhabism included, call not only for social mobilization and actions promoting tolerance, mutual respect and human rights but also for a serious analysis of the origins of radicalisms, their scope and the manner in which they are instrumentalized.