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## **THE ISLAMIC ULEMA(CLERGY) AND BREAKUP OF FORMER YUGOSLAVA<sup>1)</sup>**

### **Резиме**

Распад Југославије 90-тих година 20 тог века није био случајан акт. Југославија се распала зато што је почивала да погрешној препоставци да њени народи желе да живе заједно. Била је то трагична заблуда. У овом тексту се показује да је исламско свештенство (улема) од настанка Југославије деловало против интереса те државе, што је са тачке гледишта ислама сасвим легитимно. Текст показује да је исламска улема чинила све да се Југославија распадне и да се на њеним развалинама формира што већа исламска држава. А што то они, који су водили Југославију, нису хтели да виде није грешка муслимана већ комунистичких руководиоца. Због тога се у тексту показује веома детаљно активност коју је у периоду непосредно пред распад СФРЈ свештенство предузимало. Те су акције биле савим јавне и публиковане су у најугицајнијој исламској штампи. Текст пажљиво прати све те поступке и показује нам како су се све акције могле видети и да се према њима могла применити одговарајућа политика. Али да за то није било политичке воље.

Кључне речи: улема, распад Југославије, цихад, исламска држава, теократија

### **ИСЛАМСКО СВЕШТЕНСТВО И РАСПАД ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ**

Peculiarity of the war which befell former YU cannot be understood without considering the role of the Islamic religious community in the period prior to it. However, the very mention of Islam can produce a

1) Овај рад је рађен у оквиру пројекта 149006 Д Министарства за науку Србије

confusing effect, because it is a very broad notion which implies many things and allows many different interpretations. It is a well-known that where was a Moslem nation in former YU and that some people who declared themselves members of the nation also stated publicly they were communist and did not adhere to the Islamic faith. According to the Islamic religious law, they were apostates murtads, for whom shariat (Islamic law) provides capital punishment.<sup>2)</sup>

In order to present to reader with as much specified information as possible, I am going to concentrate on an organization which represents the Islamic faith – the Islamic Religious Community ( hereafter: IRC ) , because in this way the official position of the Islam on the war and crisis in former Yugoslavia will be best exemplified.

As soon as the multy-party system was restored which resulted in a greater degree of political freedom, , IRC began to propagate a version of Islam which had hitherto been inconceivable . Alija Izetbegovic the president of Moslem Bosnia and Herzegovina stated in his “Islamic Declaration” : “ There can be no peaceful coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions”... “ no lay principles can be the basis of a state which should express and support ethical principles of the religion...”<sup>3)</sup>. As regards the foregoing Jakub Selimoski, the last reis ulema (supreme head) of the united IRC stated : “*The Declaration by Izetbegovic is based on his adherence to Islam and his religious teachings.* Viewed from a religious aspect no one should be irritated by Moslems having a religious obligation to return to the essentially Islamic organization of social relations in countries where Moslems constitute an absolute or great majority of the population. The reason for that is that Islam has its own positions on the issues regarding the social, political and even financial system.<sup>4)</sup>

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2) Quoted from the *Koran* translated by Besim Korkut, Sarajevo, 1984, edited by Islamic Religious Community of Bosnia, p.617. footnote 33, See also Fatma Sundal, What has happened in AKP Years in Turkey: The Condition of Islamism, Turkish Islam Synthesis, and Islamist Violence, *Politikologija religije (Politics and Religion)* , Volume II, no. 1/2008 , Belgrade, accessed also at [http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj%203/01\\_fatma\\_sundal.pdf](http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj%203/01_fatma_sundal.pdf) (2.5.2009)

3) Alija Izetbegovic, *Islamic Declaration*, Bosna Edition, Sarajevo, 1990, p. 22

4) “*The Revival*” (Preporod) an Islamic organ published by the Seniors of IRC, 15 January, 1991, p.20; See also Dragan Novakovic, Relationship of Islamic Community in the Socialist Yugoslavia Towards the Publishing Activity as Modern Method of Information, (serbian) *Politikologija religije (Politics and Religion)*, Volume II, no.1/2008, Belgrade, accessed also at [http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj%203/07\\_dragan\\_novakovic.pdf](http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj%203/07_dragan_novakovic.pdf) (2.5.2009)

Therefore, the head of all the Yugoslav Moslems clearly said that the positions put forward in “The Islamic Declaration” were legitimate according to Islam. The foregoing implies an aspiration to the institutionalization of social relations; thus the lax principle is excluded from the process of organizing a state in which all non-Islamic organizations should be prohibited. Consequently, democracy of any type should be annulled and discrimination introduced for those who have non-Islamic views. Izetbegovic used to be a prominent member of the Young Moslems Movement during the World

War II and in the subsequent period. Referring to the Young Moslems, the chief of the Muslims said: “the Young Muslims were exponents of the best ideal conceived within our ranks and their upright and honourous ambitions were, in fact, shared by all Muslims”.<sup>5)</sup> In order to illustrate their ambitions it is best to quote Izetbegovic who said once while discussing the political programme of the Young Muslims: “I remember there was a clause putting forward the unity of Muslims all over the world. We interpreted the clause in forms of establishing a big Muslim state...”.<sup>6)</sup> Izetbegovic goes on to reveal their meanings of achieving the objective: “The plenum was held on 20-21, February, 1949, in the course of which it was decided to start an open fight with the communist system.”<sup>7)</sup>

It is very important to stress that Izetbegovic had to admit once that there had been Young Muslims fostering some “terrorist ideas”<sup>8)</sup>, although in his capacity as the president of the state and the party of Democratic Action, he has been making feverish efforts to win himself and tell the truth risking to lose the support of the West where terrorism is considered and equivalent to evil. As seen above IRC qualified such ambitions as “upright and honourous and shared by all Muslims”.

Those who have analyzed IRC’s publications regularly have logically inferred that IRC has advocated the annulment of the secular principle of the social organization and has been in favour of an ideological Islamic state since the multi-party system was introduced.

On the occasion of setting up the party of Democratic Action which was ready to stake everything to establish an Islamic state in Bosnia, an editorial was published to mark the act of formation in praising

5) *Glasnik* the organ of the Supreme Islamic Seniority of SFRJ (Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia), Sarajevo, No. 6/1991, p. 808

6) “*Young Muslims*”, Kljucanin edition, Sarajevo, 1991, pp. 56-57

7) *ibid*, p. 64

8) *ibid*, p. 66

terms qualifying the party as “*eminently Muslim*”<sup>9)</sup>. A hadith<sup>10)</sup> quoted on the front page of the editorial indicated what a Muslim party must stand for, its message being that the whole world would be, eventually, converted to Islam. The words of Mohammed quoted in the “Revival” were aimed at the non-Islamic population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus implying that conversion to Islam lay in store of Orthodox and Catholic believers living there. The announcement of their desire to have Islam spread was not objectionable in itself, as long as it reflect willingness to achieve it by means of persistent and non-aggressive persuasion, so that Islam could be adopted on a voluntary basis. However, the above hadith was another matter; it was indicated in an explanatory comment printed below the quoted hadith which represented the position of the editorial staff and the Seniors of IRC whose organ the paper was. It said: “There is a growing self-awareness in the Muslim world *that its future lies in the revival on the rule which is not to be established on secularized social and political system but on the words of Allah*. The opponents are also aware of the increasing political consciousness of Muslims which had resulted in a fierce confrontation with the world of Islam. But, nobody can prevent US from pursuing the course of action announced in our hadith”<sup>11)</sup>. There was a sentence in the above hadith saying the Islam would enter every single household which implied that other religions would cease to exist and also announce the destruction of secular political systems which were to be replaced by the Islamic establishment whose necessary consequence was a discrimination against non-Muslims and women.<sup>12)</sup>

All in the articles which had been published in the Islamic press since that point, confirmed that the aim of IRC, stated in the above-mentioned editorial, was true. Consequently, an interview with a Secretary

9) *The Revival*, 1. June, 1990, p. 1

10) *ibid.* 1. March, 1991; a hadith is declaration or an act of Muslim prophet, Mohammed and his fellows fighters, in case they were given his permission; hadiths have been compiled in a canonized collection which constitutes Suna i.e. Islamic tradition. Suna and the Koran represent the sources of Islam. Cf. Fikret Karcic, “Serijatski sudovi u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941” (“*Shari’at Law Courts in Yugoslavia between 1918-1941*”) edited by Islamic Theology School, 1986 and Džananović Ibrahim, “*Idžtihad u prva četiri stoljeća islama*” (Ijtihad in the First Four Centuries of Islam”), Islamic Theology School, Sarajevo, 1986

11) *The Revival*, 1. March, 1991, p. 1

12) I have already written about the same subject in the following publications:

- “*Political System of Iran and Human Rights*”, in *Political Thought*, Zagreb, No. 4/1990
- “The Position of Orthodox Christians in the Islamic World”, in *Orthodoxy between Heaven and Earth*, Nis;
- “Human Rights in Islamic Countries”, in *Marxist Thought*, No. 5/1986; Beograd
- “Human Rights in Islamic Political Systems in the Light of the Universal Islamic Declaration on Human Rights”, in *International Issues*, No. 2/1991, Beograd;

General of “The World Islamic League” better known as “Rabita” was published in “The Revival” in which he concluded : “*Islam, essentially, represents the unity of the faith and state. That is first and foremost. All the social, historical, political, economic and educational system hitherto developed by Islam fell down after collapse of hilafet i.e. the united Islamic state. The main duty of the present ulama is to re-establish the foregoing Islamic Social institutions and system, first of all, in the regions populated by Muslims. The foregoing systems based on historical experience and knowledge are something that non-Muslims can also benefit from*”.<sup>13)</sup> Nasef Omer’s interview took up two central pages of “The Revival” and its title “The Unity of faith and state” was printed a big, red letters which indicated that the editorial staff and meshihat i.e. The Seniors of IRC attached great importance to the messages imparted by Secretary General of “Rabita” which is the most influential Muslim organization in the world. Evidently, the main task of the ulama i.e. Muslim priests or religious officers, was not to preach faith in God, but to strive for the creation of a state in which all the Muslims would be politically united. The implications of the above relevant to the Serbs and Croats in former B. and H. Was that the then Yugoslavia had to be disintegrated in order that Sarajevo could be linked with Turkey, Iran etc. In view of what Secretary General said about the Islamic state being beneficial to non-Muslims, such a system was to be imposed on the Christian population on former B. and H.

Apart from propagating a need to establish an Islamic state in Bosnia, the organs of the Seniors of IRC also promulgated that a prospective state must become a centre of Islamic expansion to the rest of the world. During “The First Conference of the Muslims of Eastern Europe” prof. *Es-Sammari* of Saudi Arabia said: “Islam is still firmly rooted in Eastern Europe and, with the help of Allah, has all the predispositions to become not only a *centre of political power*, but also a centre of the Islamic diffusion to the rest of Europe and the Soviet Union.”<sup>14)</sup>

Evidently, it has been conceived that the Balkans, above all Bosnia, should become a centre of political power concentrated in a state. Islam conceived in the form of an Islamic state should spread across the rest of Europe.

Apart from propagating the above version of Islam, the propaganda of *Jihad* was launched as well, the latter being of particular importance. According to the most prominent Islamic theologians of IRC

13) “The Revival”, August, 15, 1991, pp. 12-13

14) Ibid. September, 15, 1991, p. 13

, Jihad was a “declaration of and a conduct of war”.<sup>15)</sup> It was stated further on, *that* “Jihad is the climax of the sublimity of Islam. It is a road to dignity, nobleness and sovereignty and for that reason it was obligatory throughout the past and will be so up till the last day”.<sup>16)</sup> Obviously, it was ordered to conduct Jihad till the end of the world in order to reveal the sublimity of Islam. “*To hanefias Jihad is a struggle against infidels. First, they should be invited to adopt the true faith and if they do not adhere, they should be fought against*”.<sup>17)</sup> Considering the fact that all Yugoslav Muslims are hanefias, it is clear that, in their view, Jihad presents a mission of converting non-Muslims to Islam under the threat of war in case they decline the offer.

On the eve of the war in 1992 there was an article in “Takvim” (IRC published by the Presidency of the associations of *ilmias* i.e. Islamic religious officers). The article exhibited their stance on coexistence and equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. The organ was also approved of by Riaset i.e. the Supreme Islamic Seniority<sup>18)</sup> and it said: “Islam strives to destroy all the states and government opposing the ideology and programme of Islam, regardless of that what part of the earth they may situated in, or what state of nation may be in power. The purpose of Islam is to establish a state based on its ideology and programme no matter which nation is to become a supporter of Islam or which nation is to become undermined in the course of creating an ideological Islamic state. Islam wants whole Globe-not just one part of Globe, but whole Planet”.<sup>19)</sup> As we can see the above was not an isolated view held by an extremist, but a position of the entire Muslim Religious Community of the then Yugoslavia, expressed through the agency of the foregoing organization and its organ “Takvim”. As for the author of the article named Mevdudi, IRC stated: “El-Mevdudi has no peer in the Islamic world, his ingenious thought reaching and imbuing all regions populated by Muslims.”<sup>20)</sup> The words of El-Mevdudi of Pakistan were looked upon as an Islamic dogma by IRC and printed in 30,000 copies. In the same number, Hasan Hilic, a Yugoslav Muslim theologian confirmed the above in a slightly different way: “God did not oblige Muslims to conduct war in order to force people to adopt Islam, but to establish a

15) Džananović Ibrahim, *ibid.* p. 31

16) “The Revival”, October, 1, 1991, p. 22

17) *Ibid.* October, 15, 1991, p. 15

18) Takvim, Sarajevo, 1992, p. 164

19) *Ibid.*, p. 68

20) Ebu-L-A' El-Mevdudi “The Basic Requirements for Understanding the Koran”, edited by the Seniority of IRC of B. and. H., Croatia and Slovenia, Sarajevo, 1984, p. 6

just, noble and upright system based on Islam.”<sup>21)</sup> Consequently, Hilic confirmed that God ordered Muslims to wage war so as to establish a just Islamic system on the earth with no thought for the opinion of non-Muslims on the Islamic system and its uprightness feasible by means of killing and bloodshed.

Apart from propagating war as a means of setting up a state, IRC activists also propagated that Muslims, who continued to live in the states based on a non-Islamic concept should revolt against the actual state authorities, not matter whether they came to power legitimately or not. In reference to the foregoing, it was said in “Takvim”: *“It is impossible for a Muslim to realize his intent to live in keeping with Islam in a non-Islamic system. All the laws and taxes which he considers unjust and illegal will be imposed on his household and children, thus making his life unbearable... An individual or a group of people living under the pressure of state authorities who implement a hostile doctrine cannot live according to their conviction. If those people neglected their duty to rise against such state authorities, it would mean they are hypocrites and liars among the Islamic believers. It is for that reason that we have no choice left, but to take over the governing of such a state”*.<sup>22)</sup> In view of the fact that about 1.5 million ethnic Albanians live in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia who are 98% Muslim, the foregoing was a clearly defined encouragement to revolt.

IRC started to put into practice that what had been hitherto theoretically achieved by its activists. The abovementioned reis-ul-ulema Jakub Selimoski took part in a session of the “World Council for Mosks” in Mecca, Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 1992, where it was decided that “Rabita” should propose to the countries participating in the conference to establish political and economic cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and recognize its independence. As for the problem of Kosovo they should help towards its solution so that the ethnic Albanians could also achieve independence which should be followed by political autonomy of the region of Sandzak and subsequently by the joint sovereignty of the Muslims and Christians living in Macedonia<sup>23)</sup>. Considering that Yugoslavia still existed at that time within

21) Takvim, p. 44

22) Takvim, pp. 75-76

23) “The Revival”, February, 15, 1992, p. 10; See also Gregory R. Copley, Meeting the Burden of Statehood: Is Kosovo Ready, *Politikologija religije (Politics and Religion)* Vol. 1, no. 1/2007, Belgrade, accessed also at [http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj1/Meeting\\_the\\_burden\\_of\\_statehood\\_-\\_is\\_kosovo\\_ready.pdf](http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj1/Meeting_the_burden_of_statehood_-_is_kosovo_ready.pdf) (2. 5. 2009); See also Dragan Novakovic, The Role of the Islamic Community in Pursuing the Albanian National Interests, (serbian), *Politikologija Religije (Politics and Religion)* Vol. 1, no. 1/2007, Belgrade, accessed also at [http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj1/Islamska\\_zajednica\\_u\\_funkciji\\_ostvarivanja\\_albanskih\\_nacionalnih\\_interesa.pdf](http://www.politicsandreligionjournal.com/PDF/broj1/Islamska_zajednica_u_funkciji_ostvarivanja_albanskih_nacionalnih_interesa.pdf) (2. 5. 09)



the boundaries decreed by Tito, it was an act of blatant interference with Yugoslavia's internal affairs. Independence of Bosnia was proposed which was not approved of by the Bosnian Serbs and Croats who, taken together, constituted a majority of the population. It was also suggested that the Serbian province of Kosovo and the region of Sandzak should become independent which would, inevitably, lead up to the disintegration of Serbia<sup>1</sup>. In view of the above-mentioned, what reiš al ulem i.e. IRC actually proposed the reconstructing of Yugoslavia with the aim of creating an Islamic religious state through the influence of the world Islamic organizations. A prospective state, as stated in "Takvim", should become an Islamic diffusion centre until the collapse of all states and governments which have resisted to submit themselves voluntarily to Islamic rule. When the war broke out of Bosnia, IRC issued a fatwa to proclaim it was a religious war – Jihad; the fatwa i.e. a statement based on Islamic religious laws which should be unquestionably pursued by Muslims said: *"Every single individual, male or female, must rise in defense of the Islamic fate according to their competence and ability. If they fail to fulfill the obligation it will mean that they have failed to remain true to their faith and mission in this world... Begin to fight intently and with confidence in Allah – if you survive, you will be gazias (heroes of Jihad) and if you perish, you will be shahids (those sacrificed for the sake of Islam). During your offensives and clashes with the enemy, say tekbires (Allahu ekber), and, if possible, have a copy of the Koran on you. A Muslim must be aware that his fight is just, securing him the grace of God. A Muslim who has Allah on his side is invincible and dully owns this world and the one to come."*<sup>24)</sup> The above statements are abundant evidence of IRC position on the war in former B. And H.: it was a religious war aiming for the creation of a religious state. It is important to stress the deference between Islamic and Euro American usage of the terms offensive and defense. According to Islam the respective terms are irrelevant as stated in "Takvim": "Jihad is both: offensive and defensive at the same time. A Muslim party launches an offensive against the opposing ideology. Being a party, it has no fatherland from which to expect protection. The party itself must defend the principles which it represents. Hence, the party does not attack the fatherland of the opposing party, but launches an offensive on the opponents' principles. The objective of the offensive is not to cause the opponents to abandon their principles, but to bring about the collapse of the government which maintains the opposing principles."<sup>25)</sup> In view of the above it is quite clear that Jihad proclaimed by IRC was identical

24) "The Revival", April, 15, 1992, p. 8

25) Takvim, 1992, p. 79; See also Miroljub Jevtic, The Idea of the Islamic Transformation of the World (serbian), *Politicka revija*, vol.18, no. 4/2008, Belgrade



to that proclaimed in "Takvim". Its aim was not to defend Bosnia, but to form an Islamic state, not only in Bosnia but in neighboring Serbia and Croatia by using military means to annul the secular principle of the social organization.

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## Miroljub Jevtic

### THE ISLAMIC ULEMA (CLERGY) AND BREAKUP OF FORMER YUGOSLAVA

#### Summary

Breakup of Yugoslavia in 90 ties of XX centuries wasn't surprise. It was product of very objective acts. Many factors did to disintegrate the state. One of them was Islamic priesthood (ulema). This article wants to show that Islamic clergy from the beginning of Yugoslav state was oriented toward its destruction and transformation into Islamic one. But it is very important to underline that this was legitimate from the point of view of Islamic teaching. The communist leaders don't want to see that. Article shows all activities of Islamic clergy in that direction. Those activities were public and have been published into newspaper of Islamic community

Key words : Ulema, Breakup of Yugoslavia, jihad Islamic state, Theocracy,