

The Electoral battles, the Religious Communities and National Security

By Xhavit Shala

The tendency to involve religious communities in the electoral encounters of political forces does harm not only to the communities but also the security of our country. The siding of individuals within these communities with one political force or the other will cause political divisions within the religious communities. Such a development must be prevented and the religious communities, political forces and the public at large must be made aware of their danger before they sprout. Following is an interview that addressed these issues aired by the VOA Albanian service in June of 2005. The VOA journalist interviewed Mr. Bledar Myftari from the Albanian Muslim Community, the journalist Lutfi Dervishi, and the author, Xhavit Shala.

Ilirian Agolli: Religious components are being used for the first time in an electoral campaign in Albania. The sentiments of Albanian believers have been provoked by some incidents and statements of public figures in Albania and various believers have reacted. Muslim Community Reps say that they respect the constitution and the law in the country and that they distance themselves from any incident.

Bledar Myftari: The Albanian Muslim Community strongly distances itself from this political or electoral campaign. It distances itself from any political party without distinction. And I would like to add that the distancing applies not only on the larger parties but also on any other type of party that tries to create or make a name from itself by alluding to [attributing to themselves] principles of Islam.

Ilirian Agolli: Lutfi Dervishi, a journalist, says that such provocations with religious matters during party campaigns in Albania have always failed. He says that religious communities have built an admirable coexistence throughout these years and that these provocations will not succeed in creating tensions.

Lutfi Dervishi: No, there are no real dangers. The religions present in Albania have historically coexisted in harmony with each other. The incidents or deliberate provocations to create incidents have been dismissed first of all by the leaders of these religious communities.

Ilirian Agolli: Analysts of national security issues, such as Xhavit Shala, are of the opinion that religious matters should be treated with great care so as to not become so great in the future that can not be resolved.

Xhavit Shala: The mixing of religion with politics which is happening for the first time, if allowed to continue in the future, may create problems for our national security. These [incidents] may also be a result of efforts by certain forces who intend to mix politics

with religion. They may be trying to test the public opinion and see the reaction of the state.

Journalist Ilirian Agolli: the coexistence and harmony among the religious communities have often been praised in Albania. The communist regime banned religion, destroyed their places of worship and killed and imprisoned hundreds of believers and leading personalities of religious communities and the country. With the fall of communism, during the last 11 years the freedom of religion has been greatly developed in Albanian while believers affiliated with the traditional and new religions have flocked to newly built places of worship.

