

Wahabi-selafi movement

By Xhavit Shala

The protest of the three Muslims associations of Shkodra¹ on March 19, 2006 against the erection of a statue in honor of Mother Teresa in Shkodra² is an insult for our values and national culture.³ Claiming to represent all the Muslims in Shkodra, while representing only themselves, the declaration is an open attempt to smear and bring shame upon the Muslims of Shkodra and the citizens of all Albania. It can certainly be qualified as the most serious incident and provocation against religious tolerance among Albanians to our day. The statement is also a forewarning for developments that may follow and become a threat for our national security.

Their statement that “the plans for placing the statue of a catholic saint in our city’s entrance are a direct threat to religious tolerance in Shkodra,” “and that this lead us to think that there are groups and individuals in Shkodra who are trying to implement a strategy that undermines inter-religious tolerance in our town” must be taken in serious consideration by our law enforcement agencies. The predictions made by those who signed the statement about the existence of a strategy to incite religious conflicts, the casting of an alleged image of a marginalized Muslim community, efforts to blame the current developments on the government and their participation in the attacks some time ago against the President of the Republic demonstrate the fact that these associations are trying to assume the status of political defenders of Muslim believers.

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² This article was first published in the daily "Tirana Observer", on March 28, 2006

³ The Muslim Forum of Albania, the branch of Shkodra, in a press statement of March 19, 2006, that is also undersigned by the Islamic Humanitarian Association Shkoder, the Muslim Intellectuals Association and a Group of Shkodra Citizens says: « We know and agree with the evaluations that this humanitarian personality has received in our country, by having her name put into many squares, hospitals, and Tirana’s airport. We also have had no objection to the placement of her statue near Tirana’s University, since this lady has been a well known humanitarian personality. But the placement of the statue of this catholic personality in Shkodra, where the religious atmosphere is not so calm, we fear, will further infuriate the religious tension in our city. Considering what has happened in our city lately – the illegal placement of crosses and their uprooting in Bushat; the placements of other crosses in Beltoje; the attempt of certain people who want to turn the Mosque of the Castle into a church; as well as the improper balances in employment that exist in our city’s administration – we believe that it will be a smart thing to avoid the placement of mother Theresa statue in the city of Shkodra....But the plans for placing the statue of a catholic saint in our city’s entrance are a direct threat to our inherited tolerance, and we see this act as an open tendency which aims to destroy our harmony, as a result of which the citizens of our country might suffer.... For these reasons, we regard the attempts for the placement of the statue of this catholic saint in public places as a new provocation whose aim is to destroy our coexistence”.

The media, in spite of having initially reported sensational headlines such as “Shkodra against Mother Teresa” demonstrated a sense of civic responsibility and accurately reported the distancing of the citizens of Shkodra from the alleged defenders of their religious values. According to these reports the citizens of Shkodra demonstrated their strong support for mother Teresa as a figure that belongs to all Albanians and not only the catholic population. With this demonstration the citizens of Shkodra of both religions proved that they do not allow any one to manipulate them on the basis of their religious sentiments or allow any to use these sentiments as a justification for attacking the national figures.

As a matter of fact, those who wrote the statement know very well that they can not stop the statue of Mother Teresa from being placed in Shkodra. The open position and hatred that they demonstrated against this saint and Nobel peace laureate is inspired by the wahabi-selafi philosophy⁴ and is done with certain intentions in mind. Wahabies as a religious current within Islam put their religious values against the national ones. It is exclusive teaching not only towards other religions, such as Christianity, but to other variants of Islamic religion practiced by Albanians. National symbols and national days that do not have a religious significance are unacceptable to them. For wahabies, religion comes before country. Today this current has made the traditional Albanian Islam as a target of their offensive.

Taking into consideration the maximal media impact of these comments, those who issued the statement against mother Teresa intended to promote their organizations and philosophy and increase their base of followers by presenting themselves as protector of the Muslims. Only through this method they believe they can draw the attention of donors from the Islamic countries and countries of the gulf in particular. However, the prompt and responsible reaction from the Muslim Community of Albania blew away their cover.⁵ But if this time their objective failed, it does not mean that they will not try again.

⁴ One of the leaders of the Albanian Muslim Forum, Olsi Jazexhi, in his article titled «Sheh Albani, the man from Shkodra who shook the Orient, published in <http://www.geocities.com/olsi.rm/albani.htm>, says: «Alexander the Great was not the most famous person we have given the world. Neither was it Scanderbeg nor Mother Teresa. The most famous person was a man from Shkodra named Nasirudin and known in the orient as Nasirudin Al-Albani... A follower of the Saudi school of Islam, the selafis, Sheh Albanian is known as one of the main scholars of this school during the 20th century. Sheh Albanian remains one of the highest authorities for the followers of the Selafi School who perhaps ranks right after Muhamed Ibn Abdul-Wahhabit, who was the one who reformed this school during the 18th century. Sheh Nasirudin Al-Albani did not live in Calcutta and feed the hungry, or conquer India like Alexander the Great but he was able to conquer the hearts of millions of Muslims across the world who when hear the mentioning of his name thank the Great Creator for having given his mercy to the famous Albanian».

⁵ Selim Muça, the Chairman of the Muslim Community has spoken for REUTERS saying that these statements do not represent the official position of the community. “We respect the contribution given by great figures of our nation, like Mother Teresa who brings honor to our nation”, Muça said, adding that local government authorities should be careful not to allow that these matters become an issue of controversy among religious communities.

In closing, the Albanian public opinion must be made aware of the aims of those who want to destroy our religious tolerance and attempt to insult our national figures and culture. The statement made by the former Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge in Tirana, that Albania must look closely and eliminate nonprofit organizations that may have links with terrorism⁶ must be paid serious consideration.

Tirana, March 28, 2006

⁶ On March 6, 2006, the former US Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge, attended a roundtable held in Tirana on Security Issues in the Balkans. He drew attention to the dangers that nongovernmental organizations that put themselves at the service of terrorism present. According to Ridge Albanian should check and drive out such NGO and take measures to control their sources of funding. » Daily «Standard», 07.03.2006, page 6.