

## **Kosova and the European Catholicism**

**By Xhavit Shala**

The planned enlargement of the EU<sup>1</sup> towards the East will provide the Orthodox countries with an opportunity to carry out a symbolic “invasion” of the European Union<sup>2</sup>. 200 million Orthodox believers will transform Orthodox Christianity and with it the Russian Orthodox Church into an important element in the political decision making process of the EU.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, there are around 120 million Muslims living in Europe, of whom about 15 million living in the Western Europe. «Europe is Muslim, but it does not know it yet,” Bernard Lewis, a well known Western scholar on Islam says.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of the Orthodox and Islamic “invasion,” the face of the European Catholicism has shown deep wrinkles. But in spite of its wrinkles in Western Europe, the Catholic faith is gaining new ground in Kosova. It has unofficially been released that the spiritual leader of the Albanians of Kosova, Ibrahim Rugova had voluntarily converted to Catholicism. Soon, work will begin to build a Catholic Cathedral in the center of Prishtina, the capital of Kosova. Albanians are showing that even in modern times they will stand in defense of the Catholic faith as their National Hero, George Kastrioti Skanderbeg did centuries ago. The Albanians of Kosova are also counting in Europe’s support at a time when they are seeking to make their comeback to the civilization from which they were violently separated.

Even though Islam has entered into EU countries in a clandestine and undesired manner, it is now, alongside Christian faiths [the Orthodox Church and the traditional Catholic and Protestant Churches], part of a new religious reality in Europe. This will undoubtedly lead to a rethinking of European security policies in the XXI century. These policies will have a great impact on the security and the future of Europe and its relations with the U.S. and the Russian Federation.

Culture and Religion find themselves today on the front lines of global issues. “They are a key part of the foreign policy of the XXI century. Their partnership, when used properly, can become a force for justice and peace,” Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State said.<sup>5</sup> Culture and religion are inseparable and often play an important

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<sup>2</sup> The article was published in the daily “Koha Jonë” on September 7, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Nicolai N. Petro- “The Orthodox are coming” <http://www.forumishqiptar.com/archive/index.php/t-44584.html>

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Lewis- “Europe will be called Eurabia ” an interview given to Flemming Rose, the Danish journalist of “Jyllands-Posten” who published the cartoons on Mohammed, carried by the Albanian daily “Metropol”, July 3, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> In her new book titled “The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God and World Affairs”, Madeleine Albright speaks about the importance of understanding Islam. She says that the American

role in developments in regional and global security. But how will the interaction of these two factors affect the security of Europe in the century when Orthodox and Islamic influence have to be taken into consideration by the “Christian club?”

The issue of Kosova and the manner of its resolution will be the touchstone. Its resolution in favor of the Kosova people will demonstrate the maturity and strength of the European Union. The independence of Kosova is the only resolution that is in line with the demands of European security. Any attempt to let Kosova become the first sacrifice on the altar of the new religious reality of Europe would demonstrate the Orthodox invasion of the EU politics and show the latter’s capitulation to the Russian bear which many had by now considered tamed.

The European enlargement towards the Orthodox East has repositioned Orthodox Christianity into a decision-making reality in the European Union. Huntington many years ago had already predicted a possible clash between Slav Orthodox civilization and the Western Catholic and Protestant one. “Only if the Orthodox countries will change their identity in keeping with clear secular requirements can these countries hope to join the West,” he said.<sup>6</sup>

And developments in this area do not leave a lot of room for optimism. Some of the Orthodox countries that have become members of the EU have not manifested a secular stance in their positions. The political weight of the Church in these countries rather than decreasing has increased and is influencing their foreign policy. The political influence of Orthodox Christianity is clearly visible in the internal divisions the EU has demonstrated on the issue of the recognition of the independence of Kosova and the possible Russian veto in UNSC.

Several EU countries of the Orthodox tradition provided Moscow with guarantees that they would not recognize the independence of Kosova absent a UN resolution. These states not only put into question the EU’s ability to act as a team in matters of foreign policy, but they also allowed Russia to become a key factor in the decision making process on Kosova.” A divided and weak Europe would only help entice Russia towards pursuing a dangerous path for its future,” Joshka Fischer, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, said<sup>7</sup>. And the signs of such a development are already there. Russia declared Kosova, a territory located in the heart of Europe, as a red line for the national security of Russia.

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policymakers must understand the power and the role religion plays in motivating others and the way it influences the perception of American actions. She says that religion and politics are inseparable and that their partnership when used appropriately could become a force for justice and peace. (excerpts from a summary of the book published in the daily “Metropol” May 30, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Nicolai N. Petro- “The Orthodox are coming” <http://www.forumishqiptar.com/archive/index.php/t-44584.html>,

<sup>7</sup> Joshka Fisher: “The Future of Russia and the West”- Interview for the Serb daily “Danas,” August 2007. Joshka Fisher, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany and deputy Chancellor from 1998 to 2005.

In these circumstances, if these states will not choose to demonstrate a clear secular stance and show support for the democratic European institutions by leaving the Church to play only the spiritual role that is appropriate in a democracy, the chances of a possible clash between the Western Christian block and the Orthodox one will only grow. Only their decision to side with the majority of the members of the European Union on the determination of the Kosova's status would demonstrate proof of their growing laicite.

Alongside the official Orthodox presence, Europe is also facing a constant and silent assault by Islam. The Muslim population within the EU may double by 2025, from 15 million today to about 30 million.<sup>8</sup> In France alone, they already make up 7% of the population.<sup>9</sup> A large number of European Muslims, however, feel isolated, separated from their cultures and the origin of their parents. They are turning to Islam to find a source for their identity. According to polls, one third of the French children of Muslim background and of school age consider their religion as the dominant shaper of their identity. Many Muslim youth in the UK tend to consider Islam rather than Britain as their true home. "Many second or third generation Muslims in Europe seek fulfillment for their spiritual needs. It is the foreign financiers and religious activists from abroad that are now filling this spiritual void by building mosques and putting in place extremist imams," Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Euro Asian Affaires, said.<sup>10</sup>

Europeans do not pay sufficient attention to religion, as they do not fully appreciate the profound role that religion plays in the life of a people. And they have so far struggled without success to resolve the Muslim question. The high level of Islamophobia has further exacerbated the divide and has often led to Islam being perceived as an extremist reality. "In reality, the selafis, the wahabies and the Al Qaeda creed is as typical to Islam as Ku Klux Klan is for American Christianity," Bernard Lewis says.<sup>11</sup> And the Europeans must deal with these issues before they become a real problem for the security of Europe and beyond. The situation in Europe worries the U.S. as well. Americans do not forget that the planning for 9/11 took place in Europe. "Europe has become a Jihad battleground and it may become the place where the U.S. will face the greatest threat from Islamic

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel Benjamin, former White House council, terrorism expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as carried by "The Economist"- and republished by the Albanian daily ABC no.43-05.07.2006

<sup>9</sup>According to Mr. Qemajl Morina, the percentage of Muslim population in EU countries is as follows: France 7 millions or about 7 per cent of the population; Germany 3.2 millions or 3.4 per cent; United Kingdom 2 million or 2.7 per cent; Italy 1 million or 1.3% ; Holland 800.000 - 3 per cent; Belgium 400.000 or 4 per cent; Denmark 160.000 or 2 per cent; Sweden 320.000 - 3.6% ; Austria 400.000 - 4.8%; Greece 158.079 - 1.5%; Slovenia 19.540 - 1% ; Malta 52.581 - 14%; Norway 66.578 - 1.5%; Cyprus 245.721 - 33%; Spain 500.000 - 1.24%.

<sup>10</sup> The threat of extremist Islam against the US -"Voice of America" 15-04-2006

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lewis- "Europe will be called Eurabia " an interview given to Flemming Rose, the Danish journalist of "Jyllands-Posten" who published the cartoons on Mohammed, carried by the Albanian daily "Metropol", July 3, 2007

extremism,” Daniel Benjamin, former White House advisor and a researcher on Terrorism at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said.<sup>12</sup>

The Muslim question can be solved only by a tolerant integration of Muslims into society and not segregation. Otherwise, the Europeans, at best may soon have to face a civil rights movement like the one undertaken by the Afro-American community in the U.S. The violent actions of Muslims in the suburbs of France and the commotion that followed the publication of the caricatures in Denmark were a warning that should be taken seriously. These events also demonstrated the fail of Europe to deal effectively with extremism.

Only the fostering of their integration could help Muslims realize that they can be equal citizens of Europe and still preserve some of the values of their inherited culture. The American example of integration, however, is not fully applicable in Europe. Europe is not America and unlike America, it has an autochthonous population. Europe needs a new model to resolve the new religious reality in Europe.

The Albanian model of religious tolerance and equal treatment of religious communities can provide the solution Europe needs. The equal treatment and representation of the three main religions is the way forward. The independent state of Kosova, the integration of Albania and Kosova into the Euro-Atlantic structures will make this model of tolerance and peace a value that Europe can share. This example could provide a good investment for the security of Europe in the XXI century and a boost to the wrinkled Catholicism of Europe.

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Benjamin, former White House council, terrorism expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, as carried by “The Economist”- and republished by the Albanian daily ABC no.43-05.07.2006