

# **The Serb Trap of Religious War**

**By Xhavit Shala**

“The International Community<sup>1</sup> is increasingly suspecting that Belgrade is trying to prolong the Kosova<sup>2</sup> status talks with the hope of this leading to violence, which would be a great disaster,” Daniel Server, an analyst of the American Institute for Peace said to VOA in Serbian a few days ago.<sup>3</sup>

The developments in the field on the eve of the status determination indicate that we are no longer dealing with suspicions but rather with well-organized Serb actions. They have already put in place the “infrastructure” needed to provoke violence and inaugurate with blood the birth of the independent state of Kosova. The scenario envisaged is similar with the one carried out in Bosnia and will be executed by the same paramilitary structures. This way the Serb official structures would not be exposed.

The Serbs will try to sell the incidents under the cover of actions carried out to fulfill their historic duty of protecting the “European Christianity” from the “Islamic invasion” allegedly embodied by Albanians in Kosova. In spite of living in the XXI century, the Serbs are trying to push the region into a new religious war.

The Socialist Serb Parliamentarian, Zheljko Vasiljević, was the first to let out details of this plan. He informed the domestic and international public opinion of the creation of the Volunteer Guard of the Holy King, Czar Lazar, and announced the creation of the “first unit of a uniformed Christian militia made up of war-experienced veterans from 30 cities in Serbia.”<sup>4</sup> Around 100 persons were expected to attend the event and the Serb MP who announced the news said that there were around five thousands volunteers who had been recruited across the country.

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<sup>2</sup> The article was first published in the daily “Koha Jonë” of 18.5.2007. You may also find it on the web page of the Albanian Center for National Security Studies (<http://www.acnss.com/html/studime/1805kurthi.htm>)

<sup>3</sup> In an interview for the VOA in Serbian of May 2007, Daniel Server, among other things says, “It is better for Serbia to support the Ahtisari plan...if Belgrade does not support the plan, I am afraid there will not be any guarantees in place to protect the Serb minority in Kosova. That is why I think that it would be in Serbia’s interest to accept it.”

<sup>4</sup> The Serb Veteran’s Movement and the United Serb People Movement said that the force would be made up of veterans of the conflicts of the 90s. Zheljko Vasiljević, the chairperson of the Veteran’s Movement and a Member of Parliament said that the first company would be sworn in a Church service on May 5. (Reuters - 30/04/07)

The Serbs are promoting military formations with a clear religious profile. This is taking place in 2007, not very far from Brussels, the capital city of a united Europe, and in the full knowledge of the “pro-Western” Serb President Tadic. All this is scarily reminiscent of the middle ages where soldier would rally around the flag of the Church. Trying to prove that this is not the undertaking of only a few extremist nationalists, the Socialist MPs said, “They have already put in place the military organizational structure and prepared the operational plans of attacks.” He also added that these plans had been made in cooperation with “several retired generals and colonels.”<sup>5</sup>

In their plan to provoke a new religious war in the Balkans, the Serbs have not taken into consideration at all the presence of NATO in Kosova. They hold that these forces will not take action and will allow them to repeat what the Serbs did in Srebrenica. “I do not think they will get involved, but even if they did, we have experience and know how to face up to them,” the Serb MP, Zheljko Vasiljević, told the daily “Danas” on April 28, 2007.

The Serb plan to push the region towards a religious conflict could benefit only Al Qaeda, which is always interested in opening a new front at the heart of Europe. Even in the absence of this opportunity, this terrorist organization has its own long-term plans for the region. With these attempts, the Serbs are throwing before them an opportunity to accelerate the realization of these plans. According to Joseph Bodanski, an advisor at the U.S. Congress, Al Qaeda has its own “Balkans 2020” plan, which would affect Sanxhak, Kosova, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. The plan has been designed in keeping with the role assigned to the Balkans “as one of the centers for expanding Islamic terrorism into the Western Europe.” At this moment, he said, at least five world secret services are focused on preventing the Al Qaeda plan from being realized.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, one can note a religious positioning of the Orthodox block in the attitude of certain EU countries against the independence of Kosova. There are efforts undertaken by Cyprus, Greece and Slovakia to divide the united European front that was once in favor of the Ahtisaari plan. We cannot leave without mentioning here the role played by Russia. It appears that religious sentiments have also been openly declared as one of the arguments for their adamant opposition to the independence. Such positions have provided support to the nationalistic Serbian politicians and the Guard of Czar Lazar and they have only added obstacles on the way to sustainable peace in the Balkans.

But will the EU allow violence to brake out again in the Balkans? “Quite often in the 90’s, Brussels has stood by while the Balkans was burning. We can not allow this to happen again,” the EU Commissioner for Enlargement told the Financial Times a few months ago. The region cannot make any progress unless the status of Kosova, as the major issues remaining from the dissolution of Yugoslavia, is resolved.

Unlike the Europeans, the United States has very clearly put forth and persistently pursued its policy on Kosova. The Americans are also worried about the outbreak of

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<sup>5</sup> Zheljko Vasiljević: Excerpts from his interview published in Danas on April 28 and 29.

<sup>6</sup>“Vecernije list”, September 7, 2006/

violence in the region but in spite of this, they have clearly expressed their position that the controlled independence of Kosova is the only option forward. Following the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and the ethnic cleansing carried out by Milosevic in Kosova , “any other result would lead to non-functional administration which would strengthen the influence of extremists and would lead to new wars,” the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, said a few days ago while addressing the House’s Foreign Affairs Committee.<sup>7</sup>

In closing, in spite of the Russian threat of a veto, the Serb trap of a new religious conflict will never be realized for as long as the EU and the U.S. remain united in support of the Ahtisaari plan and in favor of recognizing the independence of Kosova. Otherwise, if Brussels were again to allow the Balkans to burn, it would no longer be able to afford sitting idly by. If this were to happen, Brussels should get ready to receive a large wave of refugees that will come knocking on its doors, as the chain explosion of religious and ethnic violence will brake forth.

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<sup>7</sup> Nova Srbska Politicka Misao/[http://www.nspm.org.yu/debate\\_2007/2007\\_berns2.htm](http://www.nspm.org.yu/debate_2007/2007_berns2.htm)