



Introduction

The terrorist act of 9/11 in America has transformed the American Security Strategy in many ways. After changing the way of operation in the international arena, the United States re-dimensioned the use of force, their relations with their old and new allies, relations with international institutions of collective security etc. In the domestic arena, rapid changes took place as well, beginning with the creation of Home Land Security Department and the passing of "The Patriotic Act"

Other states also had to review their security strategies. This came as a result of the changed security environment existing in a post-communist world, which naturally, called for the respective reflections. Powerful European states, like Germany and France and others have changed much of their policy with regard to the US. So, it is visible that these nations have concepts that differ with those of the US regarding global, regional and national security, and in collaboration with Russia, they are thinking of a New System of European Security.

The effects of the war against terrorism war were felt in Albania as well. After 9/11 Albania, although without making any adjustment to its National Security Strategy, aligned itself side by side with America on the coalition against terror.

After the 9/11 terrorist act, discussion on the topics of Islamic Terrorism, Islamic extremism and fanaticism, political Islam, the threat coming form a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, came to surface. The media fuss over everything which had to do with Islam, was considered as very dangerous by the west, and as a result, heads of the most powerful states of the world, such as Bush, Bler, etc, intervened by a series of statement to clarify the world opinion and halt from spreading any anti-islamic spirit in the west.

As a matter of fact, the West a long time before 9/11, especially after the fall of Communism, had identified Islamic fundamentalism and politic Islam as a problem for its security

In general, in Balkan and Europe, there exists a great "vigilance" with regard to the Muslim factor. The Albanian Nation, within and out of its state borders, is a European state that has the majority of its populations Muslim. The increase of "the temperature" with regard to the Muslim factor in Europe coincided with a time when our national issue in Kosova and Macedonia was laid in the table. Immediately after, this national movement was labeled with allegations such as "Islamic and Fundamentalist movement", and many held the opinion that the Albanian fighters in Kosova and later in Macedonia were supported financially by Bin Laden. Their only purpose was to portray the Albanian movement as religious war with an Islamic background and, hence, cause them to lose any support from the west.

In Albania, after the beginning of democracy movement in 1990, the Albanians also regained the religious freedom, a freedom that was denied to them for the last 23 years.

On 16 November 1999, at the Mosque of Plumbi, the people of Shkodra attended the first public prayer to God after nearly a quarter of a century. This date marks the beginning of the reopening of religious institutions in our country. After 1922, there started a process of restoration of old religious buildings and the construction of new ones. Exactly at the same time, many missionaries of different religions flowed into Albania in an uncontrolled manner. They did not respect our tradition and began to interfere with the religious life of our country.

In order to help reestablish Islam, there were many foreigners, mainly coming from Arab countries, that came and established many associations and charity foundations. There must be accepted that they gave an valuable contribution in the reestablishment of religious centers, but most of them also began to propagate fractions of Islam that they practiced in their countries, which went against the Albanian Muslim tradition. They began to advocate a radicalization and Arabization of Islam in Albania, religious divisions, and to propagate fundamentalist Islamic sects, which later could create the “bed-stead” where the tender shoots of Islamic terrorism could spring up.

The Albanian orthodox community in Albania was helped to restore its infrastructure by the Greek Orthodox Church. This church helped also in the preparation of religious cadres. Nonetheless, there existed a debate, which was made even public, that was related to the issue of the primate of the Orthodox Church in Albania. At the head of this church was appointed a Greek citizen, although this went against the precedents of the Albanian Orthodox Church since the proclamation of the autocephaly of this church in 1922, and as it was legally sanctioned until 1967. There were also some clerics who had doubts on the real autocephalous status of the Albanian Orthodox Church, and declared that they did not recognized its central authority, such as the case of the church in the quarter of “Kala” area in Elbasan. There were many reactions also from the Orthodox Albanian Church of Boston, the followers of Noli.

There were fewer debates, but not less problems, with the Catholic Church, as well.

The situation with the Albanian of Bektashi Community was still unperturbed by outsiders. This was for the mere fact that Albania was the world center of this faith since 1925. However, considering the poverty of the Bektashi clergy, and if their properties will not be turned back to them or no domestic financial means will be provided to them, it will not be a surprise if “friends” from abroad will approach them.

An increase of foreign interference in the life of the Albanian religious communities, especially when coming from fanatic or fundamentalist circles, will destroy the century old equilibrium between religious communities in Albania, it will incite religious divisions, and consequently will undermine our national security.

In addition to the domestic controversies and problems of the religious communities, not in few cases, different intellectuals in a one sided manner have spread theses and tried to argue that part of our national misfortunes have come as a result of religions which the Albanians in the past have embraced and discarded, thus putting on the dock certain religions. There was an increase in these remarks especially after the 9/11 terrorist acts in the US.

In fact, what is the “dynamic” and religious demography of Albanians since ancient times to our days.

- Where do Albanians belong, to the West or to the East?
- What factors contributed on the mass conversion of Albanians into Islam and will this play any role in the euro-Atlantic integration of our country?
- What role have religions played in the Albanian National movement, from centuries to our days?
- Historically, what is the relation of the state with religions in Albania?
- Is it sufficient for the state to just remain neutral on religious issues? Is the Albanian Islam under threat from Islamic fundamentalist currents; which are these currents and have they penetrated into our country?
- What is the origin of the religious tolerance of Albanians and the dangers that threaten it?
- What role are the "suspicious" foreign emissaries playing in "water muddling" the relations between Albania's religious communities, how much have they penetrated in the structures of these communities; and in what manner can their activity be neutralized?

This work, and the other to follow, attempts to give a response to these questions focusing especially on the relations that exist between these problems and national security.

Upon not claiming that these points are the only one that stand, the author aims to sensitize state agencies, civil society and religious communities on the importance that religious issues play in the national security of our country.

The Author