

# **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN KOSOVO: THE ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS**

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## **Abstract**

While some scholars see compatibility between Islam with the concept of democracy, many of them disagree by manifesting great concern for the problem of how to assure that democracy could be developed in a way compatible with liberty. Best illustration is a number of Muslim societies possessing the outward forms of democracy but yet operating as authoritarian regimes. Democracy cannot exist without a functioning civil society that lies outside from the political sphere. Historically religion (Islam) for majority of Kosovo Albanians was an important factor in self-identification, but it never superseded ethnicity. Although history of religion in Kosovo is much different if compared to other Muslim societies in the world, religion remains an influential force both in people's daily lives and in politics. Due to the global changes that are happening to Islam and the inclusion of Kosovo youngsters in the ISIS front, the role of the Islamic Community and its leadership in this particular situation is of a high importance. However, religious leaders are rarely involved in policies by entering the public sphere as possible resources in civil society. Consequently, religious authorities are not able to supervise activities and networks of radical religious groups that are a potential threat for security. Given that strengthening civil society in Kosovo after the war of 1998-1999 was considered essential by international community and later by national authorities, religious leaders in the capacity of civil societies have the potential to strengthen or obstruct with the efforts to build peace and contribute to the democratization process, depending on the way in which they are engaged. This article tries to answer if it is possible to soften authoritarian tendencies of some of the important religious leaders and actors in Kosovo through a possibility of their convergence among civil society. Article examines to what extent Kosovo religious leaders have been involved

in their efforts to foster democracy and support state-building process. The article focuses if there are ways in which to engage Kosovo religious leaders and actors more thoroughly in their work for stability and development within the complex relationship between Islam and the concept of democracy.

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**Keywords:** Islam, Democracy, Religious Leaders, Islamic Community, National Identity

### **Introduction**

In today's world the relationship between Islam and democracy is very complex. In many societies around the world it can easily be recorded that the process of modernization and Islamic extremism are contradictory and mutually exclusive. The question arises if Islam is incompatible with the concept of democracy? In many academic debates and scholarly articles the main issue raised for discussion is if Islam is compatible with democracy or any form of government that empowers the citizens and limits the power of authoritarian leaders. There are groups of scholars ranging from the extremes of those who deny any possible connection between Islam and democracy to those who believe that a 'wedding' between Islam and democratic ideals is possible. The relationship between Islam and democracy is specific where Muslims are majority and where political system is not defined as Islamic.

Seen from a historical perspective Islam is the closest to the West, sharing much of the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage that helped to form the western modern civilization, while seen from a political perspective Islam seems to offer the worst prospects for liberal democracy. Historically, according to Muslim doctrine the Islamic state was a polity ruled by God where the holy law was God's law and the army was God's army which makes it inevitable that the enemy was God's enemy (Lewis, 1993). In Islamic defined states and in those states where political power has been hijacked by Islamic extremists, Islamic laws are interpreted by a ruling body of clerics. There is no room for interpretation from legislative institutions as part of the secular political system that derives from the will of people respectively from free and democratic elections. This situation produces a direct confrontation with the very basic principles of the concept of democracy developed and derived from Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece through Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in eighteenth century. In a democracy, every citizen has certain basic individual rights like the right to elect and get elected. However, the approach that emphasizes civil liberties, human rights and freedoms, instead of over-reliance on elections and the formal institutions of the state is very important (Diamond, 1988).

It is obvious that basic rights and civil liberties deriving from the concept of democracy are contradictory with the principles of the societies where law is interpreted by ruling body of clerics. As a result, transition from religious authoritarianism to a modernized and secularized form of Islamic democracy is almost impossible. Based on these discussions and contradicts many scholars share and reinforce the argument that the relationship between Islam and democracy is very complex. On the other hand, other scholars disagree with the similar findings and seek to prove that Islam enshrines democratic values. Some of them argue that in cases where political power is not hijacked by extremists every culture can establish a model of independent religious democracy (Esposito, 1999). Consequently, one group of scholars supports the idea that Islam is an open religion while the other group of contemporary scholars considers this blasphemous. For them many principles within Islamic laws are in direct contradiction with the basic principles of western liberal democracy because Islamic laws are immutable.

While similar academic debates do not exit the universities, the argumentation over the compatibility of Islam with democracy affects policymakers, political leadership and religious leaders in societies like Kosovo where Muslims are majority and where political system is not defined as Islamic. The question arises if Kosovo can establish liberal democracy while retaining its Islamic beliefs. In this particular debate the role and contributions of religious leaders in the capacity of civil societies is very important depending on the way in which they are engaged.

### **Islam in Kosovo**

In today's Kosovo religious expression began to emerge between 6500-3500 BC. History of religion in Kosovo is marked mainly through three phases: The first phase pagan deities; the second a blending in of Roman Gods and Goddesses; and the third was the arrival of monotheism. The first Christians of Kosovo were not Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, or any other denomination; they were simply Christian – following the word, falling in the footsteps, of Jesus and his Apostles. During those early days today's Kosovo sat within Dardania, a wider province ruled by Romans, whose pagan pantheon of gods mixed with local pagan worship – of suns, of animal and human figures and fertility goddesses (Interfaith Kosovo, 2015).

In the Albanian inhabited territories throughout history there have been ongoing colonization, invasions, emigration and migration. Albanians have experienced three great empires for a long time: Roman (59 BC- 395 AD), the Byzantine (395-850) and Ottoman (1455-1912). Between the drain and the arrival of these empires territories inhabited by Albanians were occupied by Slavic neighbors (mainly Serbs and Bulgarians). Before the arrival of the Ottoman Empire today's Kosovo was ruled by Serbian kings

and princes who only for a short time had their residences in Kosovo (Schmitt, 2008). Before the arrival of the Ottomans the population of the territory of today's Kosovo had a life of amphibian, between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, because Kosovo and territories of Albanians in general marked the far boundaries of Roman and Byzantine Empires. Because geographically Albanian-inhabited territories were located at the edges of the borders of the two empires of the time the life of local population was characterized by the absence of the wise clergy in order to meet their spiritual needs. It is possible that due to these circumstances religion has had less impact in the construction and development of Albanian national identity during the ottoman rule and when ottomans left Balkans.

There are authors who have launched the idea that the first contacts between Islam and the ethnic Albanian lands have been made through Andalusia (Spain), where Muslims ruled for eight centuries, through Sicily, where the Arabs entered in the second half of X century, through the wars of the Crusades in the XII-XIV centuries. However conversion of Albanians into Islam is marked with the period when Ottoman Empire came in Balkans. Islam among Kosovo ethnic Albanians cannot be treated separately from the Albanians in the Balkans. In 1385 Albanian Mansion from Durres Karl Topia was bounced from his property from a northern Albanian tribe Balsha and on this occasion he invited Ottomans for help to fight against the Balsha tribe. As a result, through similar situations the sovereignty of the Sultan was recognized for the first time (Skendi, 1967). It should be noted that the first century of Ottoman occupation (1455-1550) was not characterized by mass conversion into Islam. In the beginning Ottomans did not use violence to force people to convert to Islam. Apostasy occurred only after the death of Skanderbeg because he lifted up the cross in the wars against Crescent. It is not known precisely, but it is assumed that the majority of the population in Kosovo became Muslim sometime after 1800. To write a social history of the conversion of Albanians into Islam Ottoman tax registers need to be referred because there were listed the names of the heads of householders obliged to pay taxes. In these registers people had religious names (Ali, Abdullah, Hasan, etc.) but by this it cannot be confirmed which languages they spoke which also means that not all the converts were necessarily Albanian. In some cases their names were marked by father's Christian name which sometimes allows us to assume their linguistic affiliation (Schmitt, 2008). After the withdrawal of the Austro Hungarian troops around the year of 1689 it was noted that forced conversion of the population in Islam took place in today's northern Albania and Kosovo. The situation with Orthodox Albanians in Southern Albania was different since Mehmet II had proclaimed himself protector of Orthodox Christians in the Balkans seeking their loyalty. As such, the Albanian Orthodox population was settled under

the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and thereby followed lessons in Greek schools. Pressures against the Albanian Orthodox Christians intensified after the Turkish-Russian war in 1877 (Arnold, 1952).

Islam that was brought from the Ottoman Empire had lost the dynamism and vitality of the Islamic empires which gave more to global civilization through science, education and culture. As a result, the process of conversion into Islam did not gain momentum but it was spread gradually among Albanians in general. This is mainly due to a series of factors such as poor economy, inadequate level of education of the population, the role of the Bektashi as a liberal variant of Islam, geographical position, and the tendency to gain privileges since the political economical basis of the Ottoman Empire was not nationality but religion. However when the massive conversion of Albanians began, instances of the Krypto Christianity phenomena surfaced - so local Albanian population accepted Islam but continued to practice Christianity secretly. This could also had happen due to the historical legacy of Albanians who in the Middle Ages as we mentioned above due to their geographical position (located in the extreme borders of the two empires-Roman and Byzantine) changed often between Catholics and Orthodox. It is also interconnected with their political proverb 'where the sword there is the religion' (G.V. Hahn, 2015).

Kosovo Albanians throughout this process of conversion had a stronger connection with Islam. Due to their geographical position its northern border had always been pressured from their Slavic neighbors, especially from Serbs. Through Islam they apparently demanded a protectorate from the Empire. Bosnians practiced even more fanatical Islam because they were surrounded on all sides by Christians against whom they had to fight in order to defend the Empire. Either way, unlike their neighbors, due to historical circumstances religion apparently had less impact in the construction of their national identity. Albanians living between Christianity and Islam following both religions, going to the mosque on Fridays and to the church on Sundays had problems in finding out who is their true prophet (T.W. Montagu, 2013).

In his recent book "Paxottomana' Albanian well known publicist Mustafa Nano from Tirana describes in absolutely impressive way what various authors and writers wrote (mainly European) while they visited Albania during the Ottoman rule. Nano simultaneously gives his assessment of the quotations he makes to these foreign authors. Nano quoted English poet Lord Byron who wrote to his mother and said that Albanians are both Catholic and Muslims but religion has very little significance in the way and their style of life. Nano describes a situation of Scottish historian Charles Macfarlane who during the year 1848 accompanied by a Muslim Albanian got surprised when the latter swallowed a glass of brandy. In

Macfarlane's question whether he is a Muslim or Catholic the Albanian guy simple answer was: 'depends, sometimes I am Muslim and sometimes Christian'. Nano also illustrates impressions of the French historian Louis Gabriel who traveling throughout Kosovo accompanied by a local Albanian describes him as poorly clad Muslim Albanian, with plastic shoes, with a large band around him where he had his food and his gun, but time to time he took of a bottle of brandy for a few sip of flame. While American journalist Rose Lane in her conversations with local Catholic Albanians in the city of Peja shows how they believe in the existence of 'witches' more than to the Christ. Edith Durham British traveler, artist and writer in her memories about her trips around today's border between Kosovo and Albania describes how her local Albanian companion mocked with Turkish soldiers when he saw them praying along the street. Nano concludes with a note from Eqrem Cabej Vlora a prominent intellectual of the period before and after the declaration of independence of Albania who wrote that Albanians only four times a year are religious, Muslims twice a year for the Bajram's and Christians when they celebrate Christmas and Easter (Nano, 2014). Turkish author and traveler Evliya Celebi in a note to the year of 1660 describes the majority of Muslim Albanians as disbelievers who don't practice Islam regularly because they don't pray five times a day and there are cases where Muslim family asks spiritual fulfillment from a Catholic priest and vice versa (Kreiser, 1988). These days as I am writing this paper interesting case was reported in local media, in Gjakova a city in western Kosovo several Albanian civilians killed during the war 1998/1999 whose bodies were found recently were buried in a common religious ceremony where Imam was present together with the Catholic priest.

After Ottoman Empire left Balkans and in between and aftermath of the two World Wars the majority ethnic Albanians lived in today's territory of Republic of Albania and others in the territory of Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia which became territories of the first and second Yugoslavia. During the first Yugoslavia (Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) Kosovo ethnic Albanians were allowed to pursue religious education. This was done in purpose from the authorities in order to activate their religious sentiment and try to undermine their national identity (Blumi, 2005). Thousands of Albanians were forced to declare themselves as Turks and deported in Turkey. In the socialist Yugoslavia after the World War II although in a secularized and socialist state authorities consistently attempted to force the development of Islamic identity among Albanians but that never superseded national identity ( Djokic, 2003). Not just because of the history but also as a result of the strategically logical calculations of the Albanian national leadership, after Ottoman Empire left Balkans Albanians in general and Albanians of Kosovo in particular never

defined their national identity through religion, but through language and had a relatively relaxed approach towards the Islam as religion. Islam had almost zero influence and role in either the eight-year campaign of non-violent resistance to the Serb occupation regime (1990-1998) or to the armed resistance of Albanians during the war of 1998-99. Although Slobodan Milosevic tried desperately to give an Islamic fundamentalist character to the conflict of 1998-1999, Islamic political fundamentalisms as a notion had very little resonance in Kosovo.

### **Religious harmony and its influence on national identity**

In order to address politics of identity open-public discussions from religious leaders in capacities of civil society are needed without bypassing historical facts that describe how Islamic tradition and experience was developed for centuries among Albanians in Balkans. It is understandable that this unique Islamic experience and tradition makes impression in the formation of a new Muslim as much as on the other side does a lecture given from a person coming from Salafi group in Kosovo. Therefore in the context of considering religious tradition and experience in Kosovo the question remains: If Albanians belonging to three religions Catholic, Islam and Orthodox have lived in peace without any major incident marked in history, then could this harmony be endangered if one of the parties is radicalized? Among other factors T.W. Arnold while speaking of Islam among Albanians emphasizes religious tolerance as a result of illumination by Islamic teachings. On the other side another argument raised from the Albanian scholar Stavro Skendi stands when he concludes that interfaith tolerance among Albanians during the history was a necessity for their national survival.

In a way Albanian nation was born wounded because no one can say that the fact that Albanians belong to three different confessions have served better to the purpose of liberation from Ottoman Empire compared with the case of their neighbors ( Serbs, Greeks, etc) where the religion was an essential element of their national identity. Another advantage for Serbs and Greeks is the fact that they had more space to build and develop their cultural and national identity until the Russian – Turkish war of 1877. Since the 1385 orthodox population in Balkans was in a way under sultan's protection based on the agreement that Patriarch in Constantinople had with Mehmet II in 1385. Orthodox population of course was persecuted time after time but they had some rights (if not privileges) which allowed them to communicate to the local administration in their local language and organize schools in their local languages as far as they accepted Sultan as their final authority. On the other side because majority of Albanians converted in Islam, schools in

Albanian language were not allowed until late 1880's, while orthodox Albanians would attend schools in Greek language (Skendi, 1967).

In such circumstances efforts for the Albanian national awakening were evident although it was difficult to start building a strong national and unified identity. The League of Prizren founded in 1877 and The Congress of Manastir in 1908 were the key historical events that determined Albanian national unification. League of Prizren changed its initial position to preserve Ottoman Empire's territorial integrity into demands for autonomy of Albanians and open war against the Ottoman Empire which later with the support in particular of Austro-Hungary resulted with Albania's independence in 1912. The Congress of Manastir was held in the city of Manastir (today's Macedonia) in 1908 with the goal of standardizing the Albanian alphabet. Prior to the Congress, the Albanian language was represented by a combination of six alphabets with the Arabic one being predominant, plus a number of sub-variants. The Congress decided that Albanian alphabet should be based on the Latin alphabet (Schwandner and Fischer, 2002).

Religion could have been divisive factor among the Albanians but they have managed to portray it in the second plan while remaining connected through the common element of language in their efforts to build a strong national identity. In January 2015 the leaders of the four religions in Albania: The Head of the Muslim Community, the Head of the Orthodox Church, the Leader of the Bektashi and the Head of Catholic church marched side by side in Paris in support of the Charlie Hebdo victims. This is not a guarantee thought that religious harmony can last forever. As the great Albanian writer Ismail Kadare would say ' religious harmony as it is so magnificent among Albanians it is also fragile and it needs only a little bit of radicalization for the centuries long harmony to collapse'.

### **Islam in Kosovo after the war of 1998-1999**

As underlined Islam had little impact in the political and national formation of Kosovo Albanians from the time of the Ottoman Empire until 1999 but the question arises how it is possible that just 15 years after the war of 1998-1999 we have such serious tendencies for the radicalization of Islam in Kosovo. One fact stands for sure that Islam itself is changing globally while on the other hand the social, economic and political context in Kosovo is much different compared to the pre-war circumstances. After the NATO intervention in 1999 and the withdrawal of the Milosevic's regime an international administration was installed in Kosovo on the basis of UN Resolution 1244. In the postwar Kosovo its borders were open for the first time in history both for East and the West. During the first months and years



after the war Kosovo's society was characterized by a political chaos due to lack of a national government and highly bureaucratized UN international administration. Over the years different organizations from East found suitable ground and established their offices and network while continuing their activities even after the declaration of independence. In Kosovo they declared themselves as charitable organizations. Most of these organizations come from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey (USCIRF, 2012).

Islamic Relief World Wide (IRW), Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF), International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), Saudi Joint Relief for Kosovo and Chechnya (SJRC), Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), "Al-Waqf Al-Islami" and Peace TV channel are just some of the organizations in Kosovo presented as humanitarian organizations, but many countries recognize them as organizations that fund terrorism. Unfortunately, during all these years under the UN international administration as well as during the process of state building Kosovo's society was accompanied by corruption and weak economy. Consequently, thousands of young people remained unemployed. A number of them without any hope for a decent life and with a poor level of education were systematically 'treated' for years by many of the organizations mentioned above. All these NGOs under the umbrella of the 'humanitarian activities' promoted a radical interpretation of Islam by creating a climate for religious fanaticism which directly and consistently has led to the mobilization, recruitment and departure of Kosovo youth in wars of Syria and Iraq. The entire almost fifteen year long process of brain washing took place in front of international administration but also in front of Kosovo state institutions, the latter being occupied with their corruption affairs did not react in preventing activities of these organizations. Reaction of Kosovo institutions began only after more than 100 youngsters have joined to various branches of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the wars of Syria and Iraq.

Some of the factors causing Islamic radicalism in Kosovo are considered to be weak economy and poor education system. Ideological and religious interpretations take root in the society that lacks modern-quality and functional education system. However, high unemployment and poor education system are not the only factors that are believed to affect the manipulation of young people in order to send them to the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Imams of mosques which have been closely coordinated with the above organizations have had direct impact in the decision of many Kosovo youngsters to join to the terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. For years a certain number of these imams were almost unobserved as the security institutions in Kosovo reacted only recently by arresting eleven of them. Islamic community and its leadership is also to be hold responsible as they have had information which imam was doing what in their mosque. Among

arrested there are imams with charges of supporting movements and actions that have recruited Kosovo youth in order to join to the terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. Even after the arrest of more than 40 suspects for their interconnection with terrorist activities and the prohibition and the arrest of representatives of the above organizations reaction of the leadership of the Islamic community has been diminished. However, there were reactions from different imams throughout Kosovo who have blamed the head of the Islamic community and its leadership for unresponsiveness in certain situations when in mosques throughout Kosovo wahabism was preached. Teachings of Abdul – Whabi and later books of Nastrudin Albani (Albanian origin author) were translated and distributed free in Kosovo by local imams who are under direct supervision of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, respectively its head Naim Ternava. In fact various international reports such as that of 2012 of the United States Commission on Interior Religious Freedoms (USCIRF), said that range of Islamic states like Saudi Arabia and others continue to sponsor various agencies that distribute extremist and fundamentalist literature in Kosovo.

Wahabis who later called themselves Salafi meaning a ultra conservative school in terms of implementation of Islam as it was applied in the first three generations of Islam, continued to taught in mosques around Kosovo only for what is ‘forbidden’ in Islam (referring to Hadiths) and that salvation was to return to fundamentalism which is known as the doctrine of Salafism (Deluso, 2007). In 2009, local media reported that nine Salafi extremists beat a local Imam in the city of Drenas who is known as an outspoken critic of Salafism and religious radicalism. Salafi have organized other attacks against officials of the Islamic Community in Kosovo and against citizens who practice Islam outside of their orbit (not to say traditional Islam in Kosovo as the term is widely used but is very vague). Local media reported over the years that Mufti Ternava promoted to higher positions many of those who taught wahabism (including imams) and dismissed those who openly alarmed about spread of Wahabism. Local media reported how Mufti Ternava in the meantime changed the statute of the Islamic Community in order to enable himself to be infinitely Mufti of Kosovo as the old statute allowed that only for two mandates. The media also reported that trade unions in the Islamic Community accused Mufti for lack of transparency and misuse of huge amounts of money. The Islamic Community doesn’t foresee any financial audit from outside and the Law on Religious Freedom does not allow the state institutions to do such audit because the Law guarantees the independence of the religious institutions.

In June 2015 ISIS has published several video threats addressed to the public in Kosovo while last year a young Kosovo Albanian made suicide attack in Iraq killing more than 50 people. Kosovo youngsters who are now

members of terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq mainly follow the Salafi doctrine.

### **The role of religious leaders in capacities of civil society**

Despite that absolute majority of the Kosovo citizens have strong pro-western orientation pretending to build a liberal democratic society and despite the fact that recently Kosovo's parliament has passed the law on the prevention of Kosovo citizens to join to any war outside of Kosovo, latest developments could pose problems for Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic perspective. Involvement of young Kosovo Albanians in the wars of Syria and Irak has been recently used as argument from Serbia and countries that do not support Kosovo's Independence to present Kosovo to the world as a country with terrorist activities. Many times in the Security Council a key topic for Kosovo became the issue of inclusion of Kosovars in Syria.

Based on recent reports of the international agencies and Western Governments a direct violent threat is not foreseen yet from radical groups, although governments in Western Balkans are feeling the pressure from fundamentalists. This threat can take the form of direct violence and terrorist attacks, or of the tendency of promoting inter-ethnic conflicts and tensions in the future. Recently the U.K. Government has put back Kosovo on the list of countries that could potentially be the target of terrorist attacks (The Telegraph, 2015). A concert that was traditionally organized every year on 4th of July in honor of U.S. Independence Day has been canceled because of the security reasons. It is most urgent at this stage to save what can be saved in the sense not only to the reputation of Kosovo , but also in the broader sense of saving human lives, prevention of departure of young people in the wars of Syria and Iraq . Even after imams were arrested religious leaders in Kosovo have not been seen in public with strong statements that condemn their activities. Despite of these developments in one of his recent appearances in Klan TV Head of the Islamic Community Myfti Naim Ternava stated that ' There is no radical Islam and non- radical one. Islam is one. God has made Kosovo a part of Europe , Islamic Community observes imams continuously in their lectures , but so far did not find something concerning'. These statements, in fact, take us back to the beginning of this article in order to seek for analyzes of the compatibility between Islam and democracy, this time addressing only circumstances in Kosovo. If there is only one Islam, as Mufti says, and it is immutable then it is Mufti and his colleagues from the Islamic Community who should intensify public appearances in media and local mozgues in order to clarify to Kosovo youth the concept of Islam he is referring to. Because it is obvious that radical Islam is present in Kosovo. Mufti could also open a debate regarding the century's long Albanian tradition of practicing Islam in ways unique to the

world of Islam, practices which include a number of local forms and spiritual traditions.

Similar discussions could be of a tremendous contribution to open the minds of all those youngsters who are being victims of the Salafi groups. These analyses to some degree could also add to the academic debate whether Islam can coexist as religion with a society that claims to be liberal-democratic. Could it be that Albanians are softening Islam in order to build a liberal democratic society? Or maybe the concept of democracy is softened in order to retain Islam! Mufti's engagement is better than any kind of incomprehensible silence in front of these developments. Mufti's and Islamic Community leadership engagement in such debates is a contribution for Kosovo's public interest. Religious leaders in Kosovo should discuss openly if they identify obstacles for democracy in Islam's lack of an intellectual basis for constitutionalism, human rights, democracy, and lack of legislative deliberation. If not, they should be able to defend political thought of other scholars who think that democracy could be supported through the concepts of shurah (consultation), ijma (consensus), and ijihad (independent interpretive judgment).

On the other hand, Mufti publicly never accepted the fact that Wahabism sermons that he allowed in Kosovo mosques do not recognize the Hanafi School of Jurisprudence which is applied by the Islamic Community led by Mufti. Lack of essential discussion from religious leaders regarding the role of Islamic identity and its place in Kosovo's society produces polarized positions. One party considers the historical perspective and says that Islam is uniform and immutable and cannot be modified because Islamic theology was born and formed at a very specific and unrepeatable time for Muslims. Seen from the conceptual point of view they argue that Islam laws are immutable because of their divine sources of God directives that are absolute. While on the other side others try to build an argument that Islam is not so dogmatic and that democracy has many and varied meanings therefore it is possible for every culture to establish an independent democratic model of government in conjunction with Islamic beliefs. Religious leaders in Kosovo could potentially simplify the topic for new generations by discussing the differences between the Islam as a religion, as faith in God and ritual practices on one side, and lectures on Islam respectively theological thought of religion on the other side. Since most of the religious discourses and lectures are theological products that usually emerge from their respective schools of jurisprudence, they may qualify as fundamental and absolute because in one way or another they often exclude interpretations from other religions. Religious leaders could further give contributions by distinguishing between the concept of Islam as religion and the way Islam is lectured by discussing concepts of radical Islam vs the

recently invented vague notion‘ *the Kosovo traditional Islam*’. Consequently, further clarifications are needed in order to find out the differences between two or more ways on how Islam is lectured in Kosovo, meaning if the differences between these lectures consist in quality or in quantity.

By increasing their public role in capacities of civil societies with Kosovo institutions as their partners, religious leaders could bring more clarity to younger generations in order for them to understand that religion is not a driver of violence, contrary it could serve to peace, stability and development sometimes even integrating further with secular peace building efforts. This might sound way to idealistic but there is no other alternative for Kosovo circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

Besides efforts to comment possibilities of coexistence between Islam and democracy and analyze the consequences of understanding the differences between Islam as religion and the way different Imams fanatically lecture about Islam, the role and contributions of the religious leaders should primarily be seen in the function of preventing radical indoctrination of young generations in Kosovo. This kind of contribution is needed in order to avoid ruining the efforts of many generations to live in peace among Albanians, but also in view of respect for the Constitution of Kosovo which defines Kosovo as a secular state based on citizenship values through which equality is guaranteed for all and not only to a certain ethnic or religious group. When religious actors enjoy institutional independence from the state, like they do in Kosovo, they are likely to play a democratizing role in case they are truly interested. If not, results may vary depending if they chose the role of the pro-democratic activism of religious actors like Grand Ayatollah Sistani or the anti-democratic activism of religious actors like the Methodist Church in Fiji.

Unfortunately, with a corrupt government that Kosovo has in recent years, Kosovo institutions remain fragile in combating terrorism. However preventing young kosovars to join to the terrorist organizations is not just the government's duty, but it is the response of the whole society because everyone should react to why people are attracted to this ideology and the government should understand this reason and be able to draw up a comprehensive strategy. In this context the role of religious leaders is extremely important. In a word, religious leaders should not just condemn terrorism but they should be active in encouraging members of their communities to build bridges of understanding among religious people and to engage in interreligious relations and address religious tensions before they become violent. They should intensively cooperate with political leaders

in order to work for socio-economic justice as a prerequisite for peace building and resist all attempts by any individual or group to misuse religion for personal, political or ideological benefit. Religious leaders should actively advocate good governance, peace building, democracy, development and poverty alleviation.

Mustafa Nano emphasizes in his book that ‘Albanians can potentially allow any experiment between themselves but no hatred that introduces problems between religions’. The only way is religious tolerance as it has existed for centuries and religious leaders should actively discourage any form of radicalization in order to establish religious tolerance in the level of an ethical public norm and civic value. Kosovo youth should be clarified by religious leaders whether Kosovo is in the right direction and in the right ship. If this is not done intensively by religious leaders starting with Mufti, most likely in the years to come Takfiri’s will be a serious competition to ‘non - Takfiri’s’ in terms of numbers.

On 23 February 1998 Al-Qaida released a fatwa which is the first known official order of the World Islamic Front. The fatwa calls upon each Muslim of the existing Ummah to, "in accordance with the words of Almighty God, 'fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together,' and 'fight them until there will prevail justice and faith in God.'" It was never reported from any source that even one single Kosovo Albanian joined to this cause. Ten days later on March 5th, 1998 Serbian Special Forces organized a full-scale military mission involving tanks and helicopters and attacked in his home Adem Jashari who was one of the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). More than 50 members of Jashari family were killed that day. Compared to fatwa of February 28, 1998 that made no impression to Kosovo Muslim Albanians the deaths of Jashari and his family resulted with thousands of youngsters ( both of Muslim and Christian confessions) seeking to join to KLA in order to fight for their national cause-liberation from Serbia. After the NATO intervention in 1999 and withdrawal of Milosevic’s regime Kosovo with the Muslim majority population became one of the most pro-western countries with a widespread Americanism all over the territories where Albanians lived. Seventeen years ago nobody would imagine that for some young Kosovo Albanians in 2015 (still in small numbers thought) the Islamic Caliphate will represent more important cause compared to their national one.

Geographically located between East and West, with a population of converted Muslim majority but with a close connection with Western civilization , Albanians during the centuries passed from polytheism to Christianity in the Roman and Byzantine empires, then from Christianity to the Islamic Shari'ah of the Ottoman Empire , to the Albanian secular state announced in 1912 and then to the atheist state of the dictatorship of Enver

Hoxha , while the rest of Kosovo Albanians lived in the Tito's secular state of Yugoslavia and under the Milosevic's regime. Finally, today Albanians are free between Christ and Muhammad but also free to choose what kind of society they want to develop. As underlined in this study there is no simple answer to the one million dollar question "can liberal democracy work in a society inspired by Islamic beliefs and Islamic experience and tradition?".Thinking of the current situation in Kosovo best answer that comes to my mind is to quote Bernard Lewis who in one of his articles addressing the compatibility between Islam and the concept of democracy wrote: 'It is of course for Muslims, primarily and perhaps exclusively, to interpret and reinterpret the pristine original message of their faith, and to decide how much to retain, and in what form, of the rich accumulated heritage of fourteen centuries of Islamic history and culture. Not all Muslims give the same answers to the question posed above, but much will depend on the answer that prevails' (Lewis, 1993).

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