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THE BOSNIAN ULEMA AND MUSLIM NATIONALISM

During almost the entire communist era until 1989, the Muslim religious organization—the Islamic Community in the *Socialist Federal Republic (SFR) of Yugoslavia*—had been managed by leaders recruited from World War II Partisan veterans dedicated to Titoist brotherhood and unity. This Muslim organization had been a factor of stability in religious and ethnic relations and the source of religious legitimation for the Yugoslav regime. Leaders of the Muslim organization were appointed with the regime's consent from the rank and file of the Bosnian ulema associated with the Ilmija clerical organization. The top Muslim leaders were all Partisan veterans of the Anti-fascist People's Liberation Struggle. Their policy was based on the belief that the Muslims scattered across Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and other Yugoslav regions should live in a united Yugoslav state with Bosnia and Herzegovina as its federated republic.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the patriotic leadership of the Islamic Community encountered a challenge from Muslim ethnic nationalism that came from above, namely from the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as from below, for example, in the religious nationalism advanced by the outlawed "Young Muslims" organization. Even though Yugoslav Muslims thought of themselves as a distinct entity, before 1968 they were not recognized as a nationality on a par with other Yugoslav constituent ethnic nations. The Muslim religious organization did not establish itself, like the Christian Churches, as a guardian of national identity. In contrast to Serbian and Croatian Christian clergy, Muslim clerics (*hodjas, imams*) and ulema did not systematically worship medieval native rulers, native saints, shrines, territory, and ethnic myths. According to the mythology advanced by the Christian churches, Bosnia and Herzegovina were Catholic or Orthodox but unquestionably Christian lands. Muslims did not have myths of their own—they were aliens in their native land. The weak-

ness or total absence of religious nationalism as exemplified in a churchlike hierarchical organization dedicated to the worship of ethnic nationalism made Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslims uneven partners in the religious-nationalist competition in Yugoslavia. For the same reason the communists had a relatively easier task in controlling the Muslim religious organization. A government analysis of church-state relations in the 1960s reported that the Muslim religious organization, the Islamic Religious Community, "was placed under direct supervision of the state, and even though in the early 1960s administrative control had been eased, this religious organization is still unable to operate without governmental financial support."¹ The loyalty of the ulema to the communist regime was unquestionable. One of the radical Bosnian Muslim nationalists who came to the fore in the late 1980s, Djemaludin Latić, argued that many Muslims ignored the reis-ul-ulema and other authorities and recognized as their genuine religious leaders recitators of the Holy Koran and Islamic theologians.² In reality, the so-called Young Muslims, radical Bosnian nationalists who emerged in World War II, and other Muslim extremists were isolated and virtually unknown, while the Reis-ul-ulema and other religious leaders managed to keep the Muslim organization going and rebuilt it and expanded its activities.

A Nationality with a Religious Name

In February 1968, the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared that Bosnian Muslims, as well as other Yugoslav Muslims who thought of themselves as a distinct nationality, be granted the status of a full-fledged nationality recognized by the federal constitution. The new Yugoslav ethnic nation was given the religious label "Muslim" as a national name. The national label was capitalized, as opposed to the religious term. The Socialist Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was designated a national state of Serbs, Croats, and "Muslims by nationality." Muslims welcomed the new status. In the 1971 census 1,482,430 citizens of Yugoslavia declared themselves Muslims by nationality, in contrast to the census of 1961, when 842,247 persons were registered as "ethnic" Muslims. The number of "undecided" dropped from 275,883 in 1961 to 43,796 in 1971.³ The new identity appealed not only to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina but also to Serbo-Croatian-speaking Muslims in Sandjak and Kosovo and Macedonian-speaking Muslims in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. Similarly, Montenegrin Muslims had to choose whether to declare themselves as Montegrins or go under the new religious-ethnic name.⁴ Some minor Muslim groups such as the Torbesh, Pomaks, Gorans, and Turkic Muslims also came under pressure to make the choice.

The "religious" name for the new nation triggered a polemic. The founder of the Yugoslav Sociology of Religion, Esad Ćimić, viewed the use of the

religious label as a national name as inappropriate. The exiled Muslim leader Adil Zulfikarpašić proposed the term “Bosniak” as the solution. Muslim religious leaders pleaded for more time, the establishment of Muslim cultural institutions, and more religious liberty, thereby to empower the Muslims to solve the controversy by themselves.⁵ The communists disagreed. In the words of the communist leader Nijaz Duraković, the label “Muslim” as a national name was “the only possible name, whether one likes it or not.”⁶

Another consequence of the birth of the “religious” nation in Bosnia was the friction between Muslims, who stressed ethnicity and modern secular national identity, and Muslims, who considered religion the key ingredient of the new national identity. The regime noticed growing pressures by local ethnic nationalists (Muslim and Albanian) on Muslim religious officials in Bosnia, as well as in Macedonia and Kosovo, to emphasize religious identity. In Sarajevo, members of the outlawed Young Muslims group (most of whom were jailed by the communists as collaborators with the foreign invaders during the war and/or as religious zealots and Bosnian nationalists) criticized the Islamic Community’s head reis-ul-ulema and high clergy for collaborating with the antireligious regime and neglecting the religious component in Muslim national identity. The Young Muslim group was established in the 1930s as a radical wing of the moderate Yugoslav Muslim Organization (YMO). As opposed to the JMO, which advocated autonomy for Muslims as a religious group within the Yugoslav state, the Young Muslims perceived themselves as a full-fledged ethnic nation in which Islam constituted the main ingredient of national identity. The Young Muslim organization always involved some, but not very many, imams. Young Muslims were the outgrowth of the right-wing nationalism of the 1930s, and they fought for an independent homogenous Muslim nation. During World War II, Young Muslims constituted an independent faction in the Bosnian civil war and sided with various factions, except the Četniks.⁷ The Islamic religious institutions and the Bosnian ulema had struggled for their own autonomy in religious matters ever since the Ottoman era and continued the quest under Austrian and Yugoslav rule. The Muslim religious organization and the Young Muslims (that is, their successors), however, did not come together and unite over the issue of the Muslim nation-state until the 1990s.

The upsurge of nationalism in all Yugoslav ethnic nations during the communist liberal reforms of the 1960s provided an impulse for the mobilization of various Muslim factions. Communists of Muslim background sought to forge a Muslim national identity and restructure Bosnia within the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, nationalist anticommunists, notably the Young Muslim group, led by the Sarajevo lawyer Alija Izetbegović (jailed by the communists in 1948), also became active. Concerning the Islamic Community (IZ), its leaders sought greater autonomy through cooperation with the regime and were supportive of the concept of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a federated republic within socialist Yugoslavia with the recognition of the Muslim nationality. To be sure, not all clergy were pro-Titoist

as the IZ leaders were. For example, the young imam Hasan Čengić, with a group of students of the medresa (Islamic seminary), at Sarajevo and with the participation of ex-Young Muslims Alija Izetbegović, Omer Behmen, and others, envisioned a new Muslim national identity in which religion would play key role and a Muslim state would operate in accordance with *Sharia* (traditional Muslim law). Proregime Muslim religious leaders helped to isolate this group. According to a government document, “although the Islamic Community’s leaders had successfully rebuffed nationalistic and extremist pressures, it is evident that some Muslim clerics tend to overrate the importance of the religious factor for Muslim national identity, arguing that religious and ethnic identity is all the same.”⁸

The Izetbegović group outlined its ideology in a document, entitled “The Islamic Declaration—A Program for the Islamization of Muslims and Muslim Peoples,” written in 1970.⁹ In the document, Izetbegović envisioned that Muslims of the world would unite and launch a “religious as well as social revolution” but did not explicitly refer to the situation in Yugoslavia or Bosnia-Herzegovina. The transformation of a non-Islamic into an Islamic society, according to Izetbegović, would begin with a “moral reconstruction” and “inner purification” and evolve into “social and political revolution.”¹⁰ In spite of the omission of any direct reference to Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Declaration made it clear that once Muslims become a majority in one country (thanks to their relatively high population growth) they should demand a state of their own, organized according to Islamic laws and norms because, in Izetbegović’s words, “Islam and non-Islamic systems are incompatible.”¹¹ The Declaration designated Pakistan as a model country to be emulated by Muslim revolutionaries worldwide. The Pakistan parallel also revealed Izetbegović’s vision of Yugoslavia’s fate as analogous to that of India after 1948.

The Islamic Declaration was copied and circulated but did not reach a large audience. The communist secret police, SDB, in Sarajevo called up Alija Izetbegović several times and warned him not to continue political and religious agitation, but the Sarajevo radical was not prosecuted. The Islamic Community had played a critically important role in the peaceful containment of Izetbegović’s “Islamic revolution.” The chairman of the Socialist Alliance of Working People, Todo Kurtović, had asked the *reis-ul-ulema* and leaders of the *Ilmija* to explain to the clergy the danger of Alija Izetbegović’s ideas. Muslim clergy in Bosnia and elsewhere throughout the country held meetings and were briefed about Izetbegović’s activities. The IZ leaders often spoke publicly about values of brotherhood and unity and Muslims’ vital interest in supporting united Yugoslavia.

In order to emphasize its role as a “national” (rather than merely religious) institution of the Muslim people, in November 1969 the Supreme Islamic Assembly changed the official title of the organization from “Islamic Religious Community” to “Islamic Community.” The principal legislative body of the Islamic Community, the Supreme Islamic Assembly, convened

on 5 November 1969 in Sarajevo and adopted a new constitution under the organizations' new title, "The Islamic Community in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." The Federal Commission for Religious Affairs noticed the change and described it as "a strange and unexpected move whose real purpose and motives need to be further examined."¹² The new Islamic Community defined itself not merely as religious but also as a national institution for all Muslims. From 1969 through 1970 the Islamic newspaper *Preporod* complained in a series of articles and editorials that Muslims were not allowed to establish national institutions of their own that would serve as an equivalent to national cultural institutions in Croatia and Serbia. Under the new name, the Islamic Community aspired to become a de facto Muslim national institution that would compensate for the lack of what were national academies of sciences and arts and cultural umbrella organizations (*maticas*) in Serbia and Croatia.

Rebuilding and Expansion

Relying on state support and foreign assistance from Islamic countries, the leaders of the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia managed to rebuild the organization and upgrade religious life. From 1950s to late 1980s, the Islamic Community had been the most patriotic among mainline Yugoslav religious organizations and was particularly instrumental in championing the official plan of brotherhood and unity for all Yugoslav ethnic nations and national minorities. Islamic religion and culture and the Muslim religious organization had benefited from the Muslim leaders' patriotic policy. Muslims earned the regime's confidence and in return were granted more religious liberty. Thus, for example, one of the first religious services shown on state television in the communist era was the 1975 Muslim funeral in honor of the mother of Prime Minister Djemal Bijedić (a popular native of Herzegovina and Partisan fighter against both Ustašas and Četniks). As the *Washington Post* Balkan correspondent Dusko Doder observed, "the mother of Djemal Bijedić, who served as Prime Minister in 1975, was given a religious funeral that year with top state and party leaders marching in the traditional Moslem funeral procession (the pictures of the funeral were shown on national television)."¹³

Between 1969 and 1980 more than 800 Muslim places of worship had been built, and the Community operated over 3,000 mosques in the early 1980s.¹⁴ In the first half of the 1980s, the Islamic Community had 1,600 officials—imams; in the first half of the 1980s, the Islamic Community had 1,600 officials—imams, hafezs (recitators of the Koran), religious instructors, and other employees.¹⁵ As noted earlier, the Muslim religious organization had the most favorable cleric-per-believer ratio among the three major religions in Yugoslavia: one imam for every 1,250 Muslims.¹⁶ In 1977 the new Islamic Theological School was opened in Sarajevo, and a new medresa

was to be opened in Skopje, Macedonia, in 1982. Between 1978 and 1988, 52 students graduated from the Sarajevo Islamic Theological School. In the academic year 1979–80, 366 students were enrolled in medresas in Sarajevo and Priština, with 62 students in the female section of the Sarajevo Gaze-Husrev-Bey seminary.¹⁷ In the academic year 1987–88, there were 310 male students and 140 female students in the Sarajevo medresa alone.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Ahmed Smajlović, one of a few high officials of the Islamic Community close to the fundamentalist Izetbegović (according to my conversations with the Community's officials in the 1980s, Smajlović was annoying for moderate officials and staff in the Community but the leaders did not know how to get rid of him) complained in the Arab press that Islam was suppressed in Yugoslavia. A U.S. expert on political Islam took Smajlović as a reliable source for the conclusion that “there was no great Islamic learning in Yugoslavia” and that the Tito regime oppressed Muslims.¹⁹ To provide more evidence about the good standing of Yugoslav Islam after the 1960s, it is worth noting that the Sarajevo-based Islamic bi-weekly *Preporod* (Renewal) increased its circulation from 30,000 in the early 1980s to over 70,000 at the end of the decade.²⁰ Among other publications, the *Preporod* publishing house and the Sarajevo Oriental Institute published in the 1985 a luxury edition of the Holy Koran and a two-volume Arabic-Serbo-Croatian dictionary in 1987. Finally, in the late 1970s, the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia began developing its own foreign branch (in North America, western Europe, and Australia), with ten years' delay in comparison with the two Christian churches. Nevertheless, Yugoslav Islam in the country's last decade was by all means an expanding religious institution.

In contrast to the centralized and hierarchical Christian churches linked to their respective ethnic communities, the Islamic Community was a Pan-Yugoslav, multiethnic federation of autonomous Muslim institutions and associations. The constitution of the Islamic Community was congruent with the Yugoslav “self-management” system. Self-administered regional assemblies in Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo (for all Serbia), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (including Croatia and Slovenia) influenced the central authority at Sarajevo through representatives and delegations. Sarajevo religious authorities also granted broad autonomy to local muftis and Muslim assemblies in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Belgrade.²¹ The *reis-ul-ulema* had special prerogatives as the religious authority and head of the clergy but could not veto decisions passed by the autonomous assemblies. Tuzla, Belgrade, Priština, and Skopje also enjoyed considerable autonomy. Some Sufi (or dervish) orders and monasteries (*tekijas*) recognized the Sarajevo authorities, while some others were independent. Sixty percent of all the Yugoslav *tekijas* were located in Kosovo and Macedonia. Mostly Albanians by nationality, the Sufis of Kosovo and western Macedonia parted ways with the *reis-ul-ulema* and his Sarajevo headquarters in 1974. Albanian Sufis founded an autonomous association of Sufi orders under Sheik Djemali Shehu Rufai, a Kosovar Al-

banian, headquartered at Prizren. Sheik Djemali, according to his words a one-time associate of the American Black Muslim leader Elijah Mohammed, also directly manages a four-thousand-member monastic community with tekijas in Yugoslavia, western Europe, the United States, (Washington, D.C., Cleveland, New York), and Canada. Sheik Djemali was an admirer of Josip Broz Tito, who, as the Sheik said in an interview with me, had done great things for the Albanian people in Kosovo.²²

In the last decade of the six-republic federation, when the Christian churches spearheaded ethnic nationalist movements, the Islamic Community remained pro-Yugoslav. After the spring 1982 elections in the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY), 169 religious officials (mostly Muslim imams with a few Orthodox priests and several Bosnian Franciscans) were elected members of local boards of this communist-sponsored political organization.²³ According to a SAWPY report,

the participation of clergy in the elections was very encouraging now that a resolute resistance to religious nationalism is badly needed . . . the elections have demonstrated that a large number of religious officials in Bosnia-Herzegovina support the legacy and achievements of the Popular Liberation War and Socialist Revolution and refuse to accept ideas advocated by some nationalist clerics who often occupy high positions in the religious institutions' hierarchies.²⁴

Patriotic leaders of the Islamic Community were instrumental in backing the Titoist foreign policy of nonalignment. In 1982, as *Preporod* reported, the reis-ul-ulema Naim Hadžiabdić met with several foreign statesmen, such as the president of India and representatives of the Tunisian and Malaysian governments. Hadžiabdić discussed problems of the Community's activity and used the occasion to stress that Yugoslav Muslims enjoy full religious liberty. However, according to the same report, while visiting Algeria in March 1982, the Yugoslav reis was welcomed by a government representative who said to him that "Yugoslavia and Algeria would play an important role in the renaissance of Islam, and actively promote the faith worldwide."²⁵

After the death of Tito in 1980, the leader's memory lived among patriotic Yugoslavs. In March 1982, the Islamic newspaper *Preporod* featured a travel report from the Muslim community of Bijelo Polje, Montenegro, in which the reporter described a renovation of the local mosque, surrounded with a memorial to President Tito, who had died at the age of 88. The Islamic newspaper wrote: "In the mosque's garden in Bijelo Polje, 88 roses blossom. Their scent and beauty remind us of the noble image and great deeds of Comrade Tito, who built the foundations of brotherhood and unity, liberty, independence, and prosperity for our Socialist Yugoslavia."²⁶

The spirit of the Titoist brotherhood and unity continued to live in the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia, even though at the time the nationalistic mobilizations of the Christian churches were in full swing. On 18 May 1985

at Sarajevo, the reis-ul-ulema Naim Hadziabdić spoke at the opening session of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Community:

We have gathered today to discuss questions and problems of the Islamic Community. But let me first remind all of you, that we mark this year two great jubilees. The first is the 40th anniversary of the victory over fascism and liberation of our country. Along with Victory Day, we are commemorating the fifth anniversary of the death of our dear president Tito, who is not physically with us; nonetheless we remain loyal to him, and we shall proceed to march down the Tito's path of brotherhood and unity for the benefit of all of us, for our own happiness. . . . Only united as brothers will we be able to march forward and defend our freedom and self-management. Religious officials in our mosques will have special responsibility to preserve these ideals and achievements.²⁷

The dynamic rebuilding of Muslim places of worship continued through the 1980s. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia 80 new mosques were built, and several new mosques were to be built in Croatia and Slovenia.²⁸ An extravagant new mosque came under construction in 1981 in Zagreb. Although the Zagreb city authorities were angered as it became evident that the size of the new mosque had exceeded the approved blueprint, the regime eventually endorsed the ambitious project. The mosque was completed in the second half of 1987. The new structure occupied 10,000 square meters, instead of the 3,000 originally approved by the city authorities. The Zagreb mosque became the third largest mosque in Europe, almost as big as the new mosques in London and Rome. It was a modern mosque with an elegant minaret, a library, offices, conference rooms, classrooms, and a restaurant. The Bosnian architects Mirza Goleš and Djemal Čelić designed a modernized version of the classical Islamic architecture in white marble. The minaret was 49 meters high with two *sheferets* (small balconies). The mosque could receive a thousand believers in prayer on the floor covered with carpets donated by the governments of Iran and Libya. According to speculations by the state press at the time of the mosque's opening, the total costs of the construction exceeded 6 million U.S. dollars.²⁹ The money was raised mostly in Libya (Libya's leader Quadafi donated half a million dollars), Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Two million U.S. dollars were put on hold by Yugoslav customs and later released. In September 1987, the mosque was solemnly opened with 30,000 visitors in attendance. Pilgrims arrived in 500 buses from all parts of Yugoslavia, and delegations came from 10 Islamic countries.

The local Zagreb Muslim community (*djemat*) and the new mosque were managed by two young imams educated in Arab countries, Ševko Omerbašić and Mustafa Cerić. Omerbašić said in an interview that the mosque's mission is "to make Islamic civilization closer to the people of Croatia and the whole of Yugoslavia, so as to facilitate better mutual understanding and togeth-

erness."³⁰ A governmental document expressed concern over the foreign involvement in the Zagreb religious enterprise, particularly regarding alleged activities of diplomatic representatives of Iran and Iraq, whose "governments, by all accounts, are playing certain political games with our Muslims."³¹ The same document was critical of the imam Mustafa Cerić, who spoke about Islamic revival in Yugoslavia on Iraqi television and maintained contacts with the chargé d'affaires of the Iranian embassy, who, drawing on his talks with Cerić, reported to his government that '100,000 Zagreb Muslims support the Islamic revolution in Iran.'³²

The symbolic expansion of Yugoslav Islam was observed with growing concern in the Serbian press. A Belgrade newspaper wrote in 1987 that the Zagreb grand mosque was "too big and lavish, far above the religious needs of the local Muslim community," designed by its builders to symbolize "rising Muslim self-awareness fostered by the fusion of religion and nationality in Islam."³³ The newspaper warned that "the proliferation of the new extravagant mosques can aggravate ethnic and religious relations and cause tensions and conflicts—although a high Muslim religious official had said that such mosques are built to defy communism, other religious institutions do not feel comfortable with that."³⁴ It is noteworthy that at the time when the Serbian press was publishing such texts on the rise of Islam, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade was rebuilding one of the largest Byzantine cathedrals in the world, while Belgrade city authorities were repeatedly denying construction permits for the new mosque.

Religious Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina

After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the death of Tito in 1980, Alija Izetbegović's faction made an attempt to revive its activities. In contrast to the 1970s, the secret police this time did not merely warn Izetbegović. In July and August 1983, Bosnian authorities brought Izetbegović and 11 others (a Muslim cleric was among them) before the court in the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The members of the group were sentenced to a combined total of 90 years in jail. The Iranian press wrote that "the Yugoslav model of socialism proved incompatible with Islam and hostile to Muslims . . . the Belgrade regime can no longer maintain its high reputation among the Non-Aligned."³⁵ The regime asked the reis-ul-ulema to support the sentence, but except for several announcements regarding inaccurate information in the foreign press, no explicit official statement on the issue was released from the Islamic Community's Sarajevo headquarters.³⁶

A few years later, the regime realized that the Sarajevo trial had been a mistake; it alienated from the Belgrade government many erstwhile allies in the nonaligned movement and Third World countries while prompting Muslim nationalism at home. By 1987, the imprisoned Muslim radicals had been

released through amnesty and reduced sentences. The regime's efforts to employ the reis-ul-ulema and other patriotic imams in proregime propaganda activities further discredited the leaders of the Islamic Community. At the same time Izetbegović's popularity was growing. In the second half of the 1980s, particularly when aggressive Serbian nationalism began spread through the media and even ordinary people became worried, the influence of Alija Izetbegović's faction among Bosnian Muslim clergy had increased. According to a British Balkan correspondent at the time,

[t]here is a religious movement in Yugoslavia routinely ignored by western observers of this country: the growth of Islam, particularly in Bosnia, the land converted to Islam in the 16th century by the Ottoman Turks. In recent years, several hundred new mosques have been built; some with substantial financial aid from Islamic countries. Last month, the *Borba*, a Belgrade daily newspaper close to the government, was complaining about numerous attempts of Islamic propaganda and religious agitation among Yugoslav Muslims. The newspaper asserted that some hundred Yugoslav students were currently enrolled into Islamic universities in the Arab and other Islamic countries. In 1983, a group of Yugoslav Muslims received long prison terms for alleged political and religious activity. The recent signs of an Islamic religious revival are evidently bothering Yugoslav authorities.³⁷

In the late 1980s, the Titoist leadership of the Islamic Community began losing control over the increasingly anticommunist clergy, including many sympathizers with Izetbegović's Bosnian religious nationalism and imported fundamentalist ideas. In the winter of 1988 and through the spring and summer of 1989, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian ulema held a series of protest meetings in Sarajevo. Imams criticized the policies of the Islamic Community's leaders and demanded reforms in the Yugoslav Muslim religious organization. The protesters urged that the newly appointed reis-ul-ulema, Hasan Mujić (the regime's candidate), be removed from his post. They also asked for full autonomy for the Ilmiya clerical association; self-administration of the Islamic Community without the regime's interference; stricter application of Islamic norms regarding everyday life of Muslims; and improvement of imams' living and working conditions. After the meeting in Sarajevo held on 3 July 1989, a commission of imams led by the mufti of Mostar, Seid Smajkić, announced the early retirement of Hasan Mujić and opened a process for the revision of the Islamic Community's constitution.

In spite of several noisy meetings and fiery statements, the Islamic Community was able to normalize the situation and proceed with reform. However, the movement of imams in Sarajevo caused alarm in Serbia. In an interview with a Sarajevo University newspaper, the Serbian politician Vuk Drašković accused the imams of inciting a religious and national war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "Those Islamic hawks and followers of Khomeini," said Drašković.

want to overthrow the legitimate head of the Yugoslav Muslim organization; they would force Muslim women to wear Muslim attire like they do in Iran; they demand separate kindergartens for Muslim children, and special nutrition according to religious norms for Muslim servicemen in the Yugoslav Army. . . . [I]f their demands are met, that would cause religious and national war . . . a catastrophe in Bosnia-Herzegovina.³⁸

On 25 May 1989, the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Serbia held a conference in which the Serbian politician Živimir Stanković asserted that “the Sarajevo movement of imams is dominated by Islamic extremists and is under the influence of the international Islamic factor.”³⁹ At the same meeting, an Orthodox priest, a member of that forum, argued that the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia had turned radical fundamentalist and accused the imams of inciting ethnic and religious hatred.⁴⁰ As I will show, the media and some scholars in Serbia argued that religion (Islam) was the major catalyst of Albanian nationalism and Kosovo separatism, although according to government investigations and trials of clandestine nationalist organizations, the principal fomenter of anti-Yugoslav sentiments among ethnic Albanians of Kosovo was communist Albania under the Stalinist dictator Enver Hoxha. Islam was quite influential in Bosnia but not in Kosovo.

After the early retirement of Reis Mujić, the top position in the Islamic Community remained vacant, until the first democratic elections and a new constitution. Ferhat Šeta, a professor at Sarajevo Theological School and a moderate religious leader dedicated to the Titoist brotherhood and unity, served as acting reis. Šeta was soon replaced as acting reis by another prominent moderate religious leader, Jakub Selimoski, a Muslim from Macedonia. In February 1990, the Islamic Community submitted to the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia a proposal for further democratization of church-state relations in a “time of hope and encouragement.”⁴¹ In April 1990, the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia adopted a new constitution. It provided that “the Islamic Community operate on the Islamic principles and widely accepted norms and values of the contemporary world, in accordance with Islamic religious doctrine and under the constitutional and legal system of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.”⁴² The new supreme law proclaimed that the Islamic Community is independent from the state and its elected officials accountable to the electorate in local community assemblies. The Supreme Assembly was given more authority at the expense of the reis-ul-ulema. A new executive body, the *Rijasset*, shared authority with the reis and the assembly. The new constitution incorporated new Muslim communities under the religious authorities (meshihat) in the western republics of Croatia and Slovenia; brought all Sufi dervish orders (except those in Kosovo) under the jurisdiction of Sarajevo, and gave even broader autonomy to regional assemblies and their executive bodies (me-

shihat). The new labels *meshihat* and *rijasset* came from the Ottoman era, when the Bosnian ulema was part of the Meshihat in Istanbul. The two institutions had been abolished in the Serb-dominated interwar Yugoslav kingdom. In May 1990, imams restructured the Ilmiya clerical association as an autonomous professional association concerned with the imams' status and living and working conditions and also capable of influencing the Islamic Supreme Assembly. With the demise of communism in sight, the Islamic Community was able to democratize itself and became independent from the state.

In March 1991, the Islamic Community of Yugoslavia acquired its first democratically elected reis-ul-ulema, Jakub Selimoski. He was elected by a secret ballot among three candidates. Selimoski's opponents Senahid Bristrić, Mustafa Cerić, and Jusuf Ramić held advanced degrees from Islamic universities in Arab countries and were considered "Islamic hawks" close to Izetbegović. The moderate cleric from Macedonia was to secure an all-Yugoslav character for the Islamic Community and to testify to the organization's commitment to the country's unity. Selimoski functioned as a counterweight to the group around Izetbegović, which, in the meantime, had recruited a large number of sympathizers in the clerical rank and file. Having a Macedonian Muslim as reis-ul-ulema also worked as a check against growing ethnic nationalism among Muslims of Albanian background in western Macedonia and Kosovo.

In spite of the obvious victory of moderates in the Islamic Community, the Belgrade press portrayed Selimoski as a fundamentalist whose intentions were to establish an Islamic state in Muslim-populated regions of Sandjak, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴³ In order to counter the Serb propaganda, the reis-elect rushed to announce the Community's new course. On the occasion of the 1991 holiday of Ramadan-Bajram, Jakub Selimoski presided over a televised religious ceremony in the new mosque at Zagreb. He said:

On this occasion, I want to make it clear that the Islamic Community is for Yugoslavia. Muslims live in the territory of the whole of Yugoslavia from Triglav to Gevgelija and view this whole country as their own fatherland. The Islamic Community will not interfere in the debates about Yugoslavia's future political arrangement, but we will support the country's unity.⁴⁴

However, the new Islamic Community sought to make itself more visible under the changing conditions in the country, which was then in the midst of dynamic ethnic and religious ferment as well as in the process of the transfer of power from the communists into the hands of ethnic nationalists. From 1989 to 1991, the new leadership of the Islamic Community launched a dynamic program of religious festivals. In consequence, Islam became as visible as the two rival Christian churches. In 1990, at the end of the holy

month of Ramadan, state television in all Yugoslav republics except Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia broadcast live religious ceremonies from the Sarajevo Gazi-Husrev Bey mosque. In June 1990 the Islamic Community, emulating the earlier described Christian churches' practices, organized a landmark commemoration of the sixteenth-century conversions to Islam in Bosnia. Concurrently the IZ symbolically restored the "national" Muslim shrine at Ajvatovica in western Bosnia via massive pilgrimage under green banners of Islam. The pilgrimage had originated in 1463 and had continued as an established tradition until it was interrupted by a police action in 1947. Legend has it that Ottoman religious instructors came to the Prusac area in the 1460s to establish regular religious instruction and convert local members of the Bogumil "Bosnian Church" to Islam. On 16–17 June 1990, over 100,000 people made pilgrimage to Ajvatovica to commemorate the beginning of the conversion to Islam in Bosnia. At the mountain shrine where Muslim mystics meditate above the valley of the historic conversion, Jakub Selimoski (then acting reis-ul-ulema) said:

With the help of the Almighty Merciful Allah, this is the time when we Muslims are restoring the right to express our religious identity in a dignified and humane way; this is the time when we restore our traditions and customs in liberty, though being aware of the responsibility and constraints the freedom we have acquired are imposing upon us. . . . Congregating here at Ajvatovica, as our ancestors before us did, we are paying tribute to literacy and education. . . . We are today also paying tribute to our history and our forefathers.⁴⁵

The next year, the "little haj" at Ajvatovica brought together over 150,000 pilgrims and guests. In addition to the traditional march to the holy site in the mountains, the organizers included a cultural program and pilgrimage for women. Yugoslav television and press ran previously unseen images, such as green banners with Arabic inscriptions and columns of Muslim women in traditional attire.

The new momentum in Yugoslav Islam came in the late 1980s when the Serbian, Albanian, and Croatian ethnic nationalist movements swamped Yugoslavia. Bosnian Muslims also became increasingly preoccupied with articulating their national identity and defining the territory and boundaries of their nation. Muslim religious leaders renounced Serbian threats as well as the nationalistic appropriations of Bosnian Muslims by other ethnic groups and urged the establishment of Muslim national and cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁶ In 1990 the Islamic newspaper *Preporod* wrote presumably the first "nationalist" text since the death of Tito. This article on Muslim national identity in Bosnian literature describes a Muslim as *homo duplex*—"schizophrenic creature"—and quotes the novelist Mehmed "Meša" Selimović: "Bosnians belong to no one. Settled in the middle of a crossroad, we were always being given to someone as a dowry."⁴⁷

The tactful reform inaugurated by the moderate leadership of the Islamic Community was facing a challenge not only from the Izetbegović fundamentalist group but also from growing anti-Muslim sentiment in Serbia, which made it possible for Izetbegović's faction to build an image of being the only defender of the endangered Muslim nation. As early as 1990, Izetbegović began secretly purchasing weapons and organizing a Muslim militia, the so-called Muslim Patriotic League.⁴⁸ The Islamic Community came under pressure to respond to the patriotic appeals for national defense and homogenization. Ironically, as soon as the Islamic Community, for decades the least autonomous among the Yugoslav denominations, had won independence from the communist regime, the new Community's status was challenged by the Izetbegović's movement, which aspired to evolve into a Muslim ethnoreligious party and national umbrella movement and absorb the religious organization.

In 1990, Izetbegović fulfilled his old dream of the foundation of an Islamic religious and national party in Bosnia. The founding convention of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) as a "party of Muslim cultural-historic circle" took place in Sarajevo on 26 May 1990. The new party had to avoid an ethnic or religious label so as to comply with state laws that prohibited the establishment of ethnic or religious parties in multiethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet the new party was "evidently a Muslim party, which the party's founders openly declared," reported the Islamic newspaper *Preporod*.⁴⁹ Many members of the Islamic Community, including high officials and a number of imams, took part in the foundation of the Party of Democratic Action.

Alija Izetbegović was elected the new party's chairman amid ovations from 2,000 participants in the Sarajevo founding convention. Izetbegović chose to play a role of a "moderator" between the SDA radical nationalist-fundamentalist wing, led by Izetbegović's Young Muslim comrade Omer Behmen (who would become the first Bosnian ambassador to Iran), and the liberal secular Muslims, whose most prominent advocate was the exile "Bosniak" Adil Zulfikarpašić. In his inaugural speech as the new party's chairman, Izetbegović spoke about full religious freedom for all in Yugoslavia and denounced unfriendly sentiments toward any of the Yugoslav peoples.⁵⁰ The SDA founding convention released a declaration on religious liberty according to which religious pluralism and tolerance were viewed as a fundamental preconditions for success of the new democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina. As Adil Zulfikarpašić put it, "we were aware that playing games with religious sentiments of the other had always been the same as playing with fire—it was a matter of life and death in Bosnia."⁵¹

Although Izetbegović and Behmen spoke about "five hundred imams employed by SDA to organize the election campaign and win political support for the Muslim party,"⁵² the authorities of the Islamic Community made an attempt to preserve the organization's newly acquired autonomy instead of merging with the SDA. At the Rijasset's session of 9 June, 1990, the Islamic

Community banned direct involvement in partisan politics for the Community's officials and clergy. Religious leaders and clergy terminated their party membership.⁵³ Reis Selimoski, the Rijasset general secretary, Haris Silajdžić, and members of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Community (most of them SDA founding members) declared noninvolvement in party politics. Until mid-1990, Yugoslav Islam was still relatively the least nationalistic and militant organized religion in Yugoslavia. "Islam as a religion and culture cannot be nationalistic," *Preporod* wrote in an editorial: "a truly devout Muslim cannot be a nationalist—Islam in Yugoslavia will be waiting until this nationalistic frenzy is over."⁵⁴

Alija Izetbegović and the SDA pursued Bosnian nationalism with a strong religious dimension. One of first foreign policy moves by Izetbegović was an official visit to Quadafi's Islamic Republic of Libya. The Belgrade press wrote about Izetbegović's "fundamentalism and global geostrategic ambitions."⁵⁵ During the first multiparty elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Izetbegović continued to use Islam as the principal force of homogenization and mobilization of Bosnian Muslims. Between August and November 1990, the SDA needed Islam both as the vehicle of popular mobilization and the key component of the newly emerging Bosniak national identity (the possibility of statehood, though never explicitly mentioned, could be taken for granted). Besides, SDA voters were mostly of the rural population of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Izetbegović could not organize the election campaign without assistance from the local Muslim clergy. Despite protests by the liberal Zulfikarpašić and Reis Selimoski, Zulfikarpašić testifies, hundreds of clerics remained associated with the SDA and took part in organizing rallies, voting, and, later, helping in the formation of the party's armed echelon—the so-called Muslim Patriotic League.⁵⁶ The fear of Serbia had played the decisive role in the rise of Alija Izetbegović and the SDA.

The first democratically elected reis-ul-ulema had become a problem for the SDA and Izetbegović, and imams loyal to him contemplated a coup in the Islamic Community. Selimoski's pro-Yugoslav course and attempts to preserve the Islamic Community's autonomy collided with Izetbegović's desire to put the religious organization in the service of his politics. Meanwhile, Izetbegović, Behmen, and other SDA hawks hoped to take advantage of the disintegration of the Titoist federation and, through negotiations with Serbs and Croats (or if necessary through war, carve out of Bosnia-Herzegovina (including possibly Sandjak) an Islamic state. As the threat from Serbia worsened, the reis from Macedonia became more and more alienated from the Bosnian ulema. Selimoski would be formally removed from his post in 1993. The SDA and the IZ in Bosnia-Herzegovina were closing their ranks. The Islamic Community of Bosnia-Herzegovina was in the process of becoming another Yugoslav "national church," dedicated, like the Christian churches of Serbia and Croatia, to the making of ethnic nations.