

FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS IN THE BALKANS

Dr. Darko Trifunovic

(RIEAS Senior Advisor and a Lecturer at the Faculty of Security University of Belgrade)

Copyright: Darko Trifunovic on line

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The U.S. Department of Treasury discovered in October 2002 that several charities operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) direct their funds to terrorist activities, specifically noting:

- **“Benevolence International Foundation”** (BIF) – Enaam Arnaut, director of its successor organization “Bosnian Ideal Future,” was convicted in the U.S. for directly aiding Bin Laden;
- **“Global Relief Foundation”** (GRF) – GRF had modest means in BiH, but still found around \$100,000 to fund a camp at lake Jablanica where Muslim youth were taught “essentials of Islam”. Similar summer camps were organized elsewhere in BiH, often with participants from Active Islamic Youth (AIO) ;
- **“Vezir”** – the Bosnian branch of the **Al Haramain Islamic Foundation** (AHF)¹.

The Bosnian branch of **“Taibah International”** first served as a cover for the GRF. One of its former members, Tunisian **Ayadi Chafiq Bin Muhammad**, was placed on the list of persons directly connected with terrorism by the U.S. Department of Treasury, on October 12, 2001 – as did the organization Al-Muwaffaq, which he ran during the war, and which was linked to radical Islamic circles in Pakistan. In 1996, Ayadi transferred \$500,000 to the Sarajevo SAB bank. He was later arrested in Dublin, Ireland on charges of financing Al-Qaeda. **Ayadi was given Bosnian citizenship**, and had several Bosnian passports.

It was also established that **Vakufska** and **Depozitna** banks² of Sarajevo aided and abetted the funding of terrorists in BiH. They were established by **Yassin Al-Qadi** (see his activities in Albania) and the already mentioned Chafiq Ayadi. These two banks gave assistance to Al-Muwaffaq, **“Al Haramain Islamic Foundation”** and the **“Saudi High Commission for Relief.”**

The Vakufska bank covered up the transfer payments from the **“Saudi High Commission for Relief”** to the private company **“Engra d.o.o.”**³, owned by **Edin Balta**.

At the traditional seminar of Islamic youth at the Begov Han mosque in Sarajevo, in early September 2005, the **“World Islamic League”** (a.k.a. **“Rabita”**) of Saudi Arabia conditioned its donation of significant funding for projects in the Raska region of Serbia on the ability of the Wahhabi movement to use the religious buildings there. In January and February of 2006 alone, “Rabita” has directed some 150,000 Euros to projects in Raska. Money came from accounts in Mecca to Munich, from where it was transferred to Vienna, arriving to Serbia through a branch of **“Societe Generale”** in Novi Pazar.

¹ According to EU reports, many Islamic charities that have been banned still operate in BiH – including **Al Haramain**, **Al Maysed Al Aqsa**, and **Benevolence International Foundation** (BIF). All these organizations were banned in BiH (after direct political pressure from the West) but there are indications they remain active. Specifically noted was BIF, which was blacklisted in the U.S.

² In August 2002, Federal Banking Agency approved the merger of Vakufska and Depozitna banks, owned by Yasin Al-Qadi (44.3%) and “Mahmal Investments” (44.2%), which has been under investigation by intelligence agencies for years, on suspicion of funding terrorism.

³ Between 1998 and 2000, “Енгра д.о.о” was conducting financial transactions on behalf of an organization linked to Bin-Laden, through accounts with Depozitna and Vakufska banks of Sarajevo (Zenica branch).

Regional prosecutors in Sarajevo and Zenica opened investigations in July 2007 into possible embezzlement charges against the Muslim charity “**Merhamet**,” including the allegations of **financial aid to the Wahhabi movement** in BiH. “Merhamet” allegedly funded Wahhabi organizations and several individuals.

Kosovo-Metohija

The U.S. Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have been stationed in Kosovo-Metohija since 1999, and have been monitoring the illegal financial flows in the province, especially funds used for illegal purchase of arms and equipment for terrorist groups in Kosovo-Metohija.

Money originates from Saudi Arabia, where specific individuals courier gold, coins and jewelry that are then sold, converted to local currency, and channeled through pre-determined NGOs.

American members of KFOR arranged a seminar for the high-ranking officials of the Kosovo Police Service in April 2007, covering “**Wahhabis in Kosovo**.” During the seminar, American representatives asserted that Wahhabism is on the rise in Kosovo, and that in five years Kosovo would become the most significant stronghold of this Islamic sect in Europe. According to them, **the greatest concentration of Wahhabis is around Prizren**.

A report published by the provisional authorities of Kosovo-Metohija in January 2007 acknowledged the rising presence of Wahhabis and other Islamic factors in the province.

Organizations connected to funding of Islamic extremism in Kosovo-Metohija are “**Iranian Relief Committee**” in Pristina and “**Taibah International Committee**” in Prizren. Western analysts claim that “Al-Islamiyya” and “**The World Assembly of Muslim Youth**” (WAMY) are fronts for extremists from Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the director of “**Revival of Islamic Heritage Society**” in Pristina, **Othman A.O. Alhaidar** used to run several “charities” in Bosnia-Herzegovina, starting with the “Revival of Islamic Heritage Society,” General Kuwaiti Aid Committee, “Dar El-Bir” of UAE, “Yhia Al-Turas,” and “World Islamic Charity.” He was investigated by SFOR/EUFOR in 2005 **on suspicion of sending volunteers from Kosovo-Metohija and Albania to Iraq**.

Albania

Interest in the presence of radical Islam in Albania and its connection with the authorities was reawakened on April 11, 2007, with the broadcast of a show “Fiks Fare” (sp?) on state television. The show publicized documents indicating that **Abdul Latif Saleh a close associate of Osama Bin Laden, was given Albanian citizenship in 1992 at the personal insistence of then-President, now Prime Minister Sali Berisha**⁴.

Saleh, a Jordanian, owned construction companies “**Mak Albania**” and “**Cement Albania**,” which were used to launder the money of Saudi businessman Yasin Qadi’s “**Caravan**” association in Tirana. In 2000, Saleh was deported from Albania on suspicion of Al-Qaeda connections, and his bank account in Tirana was frozen after an attempt to withdraw **2.4 million Euros**.

There are also numerous indications that several Islamic charities are abusing their activities in Albania to support terrorism. The government investigates allegations about their work solely because of obligations to the U.S.

⁴ Abdul Latif Saleh received Albanian citizenship in just over month; he filed a request on September 17, and received in on October 21, through Decree # 328.

In April 2006, Albania's anti-laundering directorate **froze 63 bank accounts, valued at around 4 million Euro**, used for money-laundering and support for terrorism. Albania's Minister of Interior issued a special order in July 2006 to put special scrutiny the Albanians studying in the Middle East and persons of Arab origin that come back to Albania to vacation with them.

Albanian Minister of Finance **Ridvan Bode** signed several decrees in July 2006 seizing the accounts and assets of many individuals and charities. Among the seizures were the accounts and properties of **Yasin Al Qadi**⁵, **Abdul Latif Saleh**, "**Taibah International**"⁶ and "**Al Haramain**"⁷.

At the same time, the anti-laundering directorate began investigating **Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Nagar, Hamya Abu Rajan, David Hicks**⁸, **Nabil Abdyl Sayadi, Patricia Rosa Vinck**, "**Global Relief Foundation**" (one account frozen) and "**Revival of Islamic Heritage Society**" (four account frozen).

In April 2007, a high court in Tirana overruled the decision to seize the accounts and assets of "**Albanian International Investment**" for lack of evidence that it took part in funding terrorism. Emboldened by the decision, **Yasin Al-Qadi** appealed⁹ the Ministry of Finance's decision to seize his assets – **almost 4 million Euro** over the past five years.

However, investigators at the High Crimes Division (HCD) in Tirana have managed to partially **uncover a new system of terrorism funding**. Assets in peril of seizure on charges of aiding terrorism were turned over to "administrators" – who would then channel the assets back to the original owner. Al-Qadi's "administrator" in Albania was Jordanian **Hamzeh Abu Rayyen**.

At the request of HCD, a court in Tirana ordered the seizure of Abu Rayyen's passport on April 3, 2007, until an investigation into "**laundering the proceedings of criminal activities**" could be concluded.

Many charities close to Islamic terrorist organizations recover from seizures by re-establishing themselves under new management. The "new" managers are local Albanians who studied theology in the Middle East. There are currently 80 religious associations and foundations operating in Albania, with accounts throughout the country in banks such as **Arab-Albanian Islamic Bank, Bank of Malaysia, Fefad Bank, and Dardania Bank**.

Five foundations have been outlawed because of proven links with terrorism: **Al Haramain, World Islamic Relief Organization, Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, Muwafaq** and **Al Vaffk**.

⁵ Two accounts of "MediCare" association, one at the "Raiffeisen" bank and the other at the National Trade Bank, both in Albanian currency; and two accounts (one of which was in U.S. dollars) at the National Trade Bank, of "Caravan".

⁶ Three houses of 200-350 sq. meters each in the town of Bulqiza.

⁷ One house of 500 sq. meters in Tirana.

⁸ David Hicks was in Albania in 1998-99, took part in the war in Kosovo, was captured as a member of Al-Qaeda and detained in Guantanamo Bay.

⁹ Both Abdul Latif Saleh and Yasin Al-Qadi were represented in court by Idayet Beqiri, political secretary of the "Front of Albanian National Unity" (FBKSh).