



The relationship between the religious Muslim communities in Albania and the foreign religious communities

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Abstract

This article provides a brief synopsis of the relationship between the religious communities in Albania and the foreign Muslim religious communities around the world. This study aims to provide an answer to a major question which is widely discussed below. As described above the relationship between the religious communities in Albania with those of the Soviet Union are treated in the above paragraphs, we will continue describing the relationship of the Albanians religious communities with the other religious communities in the other states. In order to be comprehensible for every reader we will treat each community on itself until we reach the period where in our country were destroyed all the churches and the mosques and the religious propaganda was banned by law (Qazimi, 2012: 32-34).

Keywords: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Committee of the Clergy affairs in Council of Ministries, Sunni Muslim community, Shejh-UI-Islami, Imam Hafiz Musa, Haxhi Aliu, Bektashi Muslim community, Ahmet Myftar Dede, Baba Dervish Rexhepi

Introduction

Religion situation during communism in Albania was much different with the Muslim communities because there was no centralized center, beside the pilgrim of Mecca where are gathered together the people from all over the world, and the Bektashi community whose center is in Albania after the 1924.

But, in order to treat the relationship between the Albanian communities with the other communities we need to take into consideration the draft decree with Nb. 743, date 26 November 1949, approved by law Nb. 773 date 16.1.1950 (*Gazeta Zyrtare*, Nr 8, Tiranë, 23 shkurt 1950). "On the religious communities" which controlled the activity of these religious communities in our country. By this law, the state controlled the selection of the board direction in the religious communities, could dismiss or hire any cleric who did not fulfilled the criteria's established in the draft decree (Dekretligji Nr 743, "Mbi komunitetet fetare", neni 15); it controlled their financial activity and their budget should be approved initially from the Council of Ministers (Dekretligji Nr 743, "Mbi komunitetet fetare", neni 16) etc.

Meanwhile the Act 25 of this draft decree banned the religious communities to keep relationship with other religious communities, institutions, organization or official representative whose address was outside the borders of Albania, in this case it was needed firstly an authorization from the Council of Ministers. But even in the cases where the authorization was given, the correspondence will pass only through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Dekretligji Nr 743, "Mbi komunitetet fetare", neni 25). At the same time the state should be notified for all the public announcement or published news of the religious communities and the Council of Ministers had the right to ban the publishment of such

information, their press and delivery if they were not conform the law (Dekretligji Nr 743, "Mbi komunitetet fetare", neni 18).

Another restriction was presented in the Act 27 of this draft decree. According to which the religious communities could not receive nor sent presents or material gifts from the other countries without taking firstly the permission from the Council of Ministries. A concrete example for this act is as follow.

The clergy who directed in our country were all approved from the Albanian state based on some features presented from the Clergy Committee Affairs, which was responsible to select the candidates who should fulfill some conditions" They must come from the poor society of the country... they should have fought against the fascism occupation; they should have fought for the National Liberation War They must have agreed and comply with the reforms of the people power..." (Qazimi, 2012: 36-37). Based on these rules, it is understandable that even the selected candidates on this post should comply with politics followed from the Albanian state. This is most noticeable in the letters and telegrams sent from the directors of the religious cults who traveled abroad for the international problems encountered in that period. It should be mentioned that all these materials were previously sent toward the Albanian government for taking the approval. Here we are mentioning only some of them. On 1950 the world grandfather informs all the religious Bektashi followers for the Ashura Day. Initially this material was sent near the institution of Prime Minister for a pre-scanning process and later to be transmitted from Radio Tirana and ATSH (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr. 490, viti 1950, d. 2221, fl. 3). The most "collaborative" in the process of sending letters and telegrams were the chiefs of orthodox communities, those of the

Bektashi community and Muslim community, meanwhile the chiefs of catholic communities were much more reserved.

The Albanian Sunni Muslim community

As it is well-known the majority of population in our country belongs to the Muslim religion which is established mostly during the ottoman period. But after the independence in our country, which was congratulated as well from the Albanian Muslim imam, we noticed a separation from Shejh-Ul-Islami and after the Second World War and the decision taken from Lushnja Congress the imam considered an important role "to declare autonomous the Muslim Albanian religion" (Hysi, 2006: 21) and the first step that was made from Muslim National alliance was to separate itself from Shejh-Ul-Islami. This action was made two years before his own separation from Turkey. On February 24, 1923 in Tirana it was held the first congress of Islam Sunnite which declared it autonomous and this was legalized in the status of the Albanian Muslim Xhemati. The main decision taken in this congress was "the Muslim Albanian community should not obey to a foreign spiritual authority, declaring in this the separation of the Albanian Muslim Community from Caliphate"(Hysi, 2006: 22).

After the invasion from Italia, things became more difficult for the Muslims because the Italians started to interfere and preach the Christian religion in order to gather a social support from the community for their invasion, but still they did not dare to criticize the Muslim community. Even though they recruit in their side some of the imams and this was expressed in a telegram sent toward the Muslim Community on November 1939, "it is necessary to organize a ceremony for the birthday of King Viktor Emanuel III" (Hysi, 2006: 54).

The second World War had still time to end when in October 1944, the future communist regime approved "the Declaration of Human Rights" and in 1946 "the Constitutions of the People Republic of Albania" which according to the Muslim community "completed the entire juridical basement which guaranteed the freedom of conscious and the freedom to follow a religion" (Hysi, 2006: 55-56). Despite this, the activity of the Muslim Community in our country just like the other communities was fixed under the Article for the Religious Communities dating November 26, 1949 which controlled all the relations that these communities had including here the foreign ones. Under these circumstances the state interrupted all the foreign relations and at the same did not allowed that these centers created branches in Albania

A natural question arises, of how was the relationship between the Albanian Muslim community and the foreign religious organization?

It is important to emphasize that during the first years of liberation, and after the aggression performed against the Muslim imams, as new directors of these communities were placed people who were considered trustable from the communist party and sustained their political ideas. So it was started to preach the friendship with SU and other eastern countries, it was paid a special attention to the political leader during the war and after the war as well, there were sent many greetings for the political celebrations etc. Also in such cases the state requires from these imams to pronounce themselves in favor of their politics. So, for example, in the newspaper "Bashkimi" on 8.X.1951 required a declaration from the

Muslim Imam Hafiz Musa Haxhi Aliu regarding an interview given from the Stalin related with the nuclear energy. The imam expressed: "... At the end what is more important is that peace is very near and for this is working hard the Soviet Union with the great Stalin"(AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1951, d. 1914, fl. 4.). The same thing was repeated even in the international big events. On February 17, 1954 the imam of the Muslim community Hafiz Sulejman Myrto sent a condolence telegram to the General Algerian Unions regarding the earth-quake that happened in this country and sent some aids to the believers (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1954, d. 1113, fl. 1.). The imam of the Muslim community had sent a telegram where he greets the nationalization of Suez channel events happened in Egypt on 1956 (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1956, d. 1206, fl. 2.); another telegram was sent to the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser where he approves the war of the Egyptian people against the aggression English-French-Israel (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1956, d. 1206, fl. 7.) and another one sent on 5.XI.1956 toward the OKB secretary Dag Hammarskjold, where is requested the departure of the foreign forces from Egypt (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1956, d. 1206, fl. 8.).

As we have mentioned, on 1950 to the Soviet Union paid a visit from the Muslim and Bektashi delegation community invited from the chief of the Muslim Directorate in the Central Asia. Meanwhile on 1958 a delegation from Muslim community, two members were sent to Mecca. The approved delegation from KQ has made a trip to Egypt, Syria, and Mecca departed from Beograd on 17.06.1958 and turning back in Albania on 20.07.1958. After their returning they have prepared a detailed report where the most important part was the meetings held with Albanians living in Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1958, d. 1097, fl. 5-19.).

It is important to emphasize that the Muslim community have enforced their relations with the Arabic countries mainly through telegrams. This is shown from a correspondence from the clergy committee, on 11.V.1959, where it is stated that "after 1957 the relations with the Arabic countries are stronger" (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1959, d. 1270, fl. 1.). In this information it is also stated that the Muslim community "for the 15 years of celebration wants to invite in our country 2 persons from Egypt and Syria, 3 persons from Iraq because one is Bektashi and 1 person from Libya ... as well it was required to send 3 persons in Mecca."(AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1959, d. 1270, fl. 1.).

During those years there has been sent even more telegrams to the government due to the national celebration, or sent toward other Muslims and Arabic countries for the celebration of the feast, and especially toward Egypt where in one telegram it was criticized the bombing of a Tunisian village from the French aviation etc.

On May 1958 in our country must have come foreign Arab delegation invited from the Muslim community, because in the archived file exist a greeting sent to them on 4.V.1958 in order to make stronger the relation between Albanian and Arabic countries (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1959, d. 1267, fl. 1-2.).

After the 1960 it seemed like the visit were more rarely and in

special occasions the Muslim community has meet with foreigners. In one of these meetings is also the one with the Turkish journalist who have required meeting with the representative of the Muslim community. He accompanied the sportive club of "Fenerbahçe". Even for this meeting it was taken previously the approval from the Albanian prime minister who has given the permission that this journalist "... should go and visit them in their communities"(AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1961, d. 1129, fl. 1.).

On 4.X.1961 the journalist went to the Muslim community where he asked about crucial things like how were the general conditions of Muslim community, how may pupils were staying at Madrasa, what kind of methodology was used, are there other Madrasas (religion school), how are celebrated the religious ceremonies etc. for which he took an answer (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1961, d. 1129, fl. 2-3.).

A year later, on 27.9.1962, the Muslim community was visited from the journalist Alejandro Bermudez from Nicaragua, who represented the "Bohemia" magazine in Havana. In his interview with the chief of Muslim community he was interested to know about the Islam religion in our country, how many pupils were frequenting Madrasa, how does this community covers its expenditure, what is the relation with the Albanian government, what is the percentage of the Muslims in Albania, and how can be describe the relation with the other religions etc. (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1962, d. 1234, fl. 10-12.).

The Albanian Shia or Bektashi community

During all the periods in the history of our country the Albanian Bektashi community has fought side by side with the liberation forces and has been part of the anti-Ottoman movement for the freedom of our country. The World Center of Bektashi was previously in Istanbul, but on 1924 it was closed from the Turkish authorities and it was opened in our country. Even during the Second World War many from the Albanian Bektashi took place in the liberation war and in this way they were more related with the highest circles of the governance. These two factors, so the participation in the liberation war and the having the World Center of Bektashi in Albanian, played an important role in the life of this community.

Immediately after the liberation, the Bektashi community "urged his request for statutory independence" (Hysi, 2006: 163) and on February 10, 1945 it was gathered the Bektashi Community Council which decided to organize the IV Bektashi Congress. From 2 to 5 May 1945 this congress was held in Tirana where did participate many political representatives which showed a better treatment comparing to the other communities. One of the most important decision deceased in this Congress was "the reconfirmation of the independence of the Bektashi communities in order to have equal rights with the Muslim (Hysi, 2006: 167). In this congress it was approved even the new Statutory, where it is important to mention that Bektashi community are more liberal in their religious point of view. At the same time the highest leaders of Bektashi community "more than ever belonged to a certain class of clergy who have political power and were part of the government" (Hysi, 2006: 169) which turned this community in party pro organization.

At the beginning the Bektashi Headquarters played its role as the international center directing the Bektashi community. So, in 1945, the Community declared the creation of 4 quarters two were built in Tetova and Gjakova part of Yugoslavia, another was built in Detroit in the USA and the fourth was built in Istanbul in Turkey. Actually the building of these quarters" could be considered just a merely desire" (Hysi, 2006: 181-182), because all the correspondence was kept only through sending letters since it was impossible to travel during that period where the world was divided into two antagonist parts. But even these forms were less effective during the 1949 where in the direction of the Bektashi community come Ahmet Myftar Dede. So, "for the last 4 years the Community was not able to make any connection directly or not with its Bektashi believers abroad" (Hysi, 2006: 183).

On 26.I. 1951 Ahmet Myftar Dede sent a letter toward the prime-ministry (the committee for the clergy affairs) where he expressed that: "we require from the Turkish government to reopen the Gate of Piri so that the Bektashi community can have the possibility to express its religion" with a Turkish Bektashi Spiritual (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1951, d. 1923, fl. 1.). For this request the committee wrote to the prime minister M. Shehu stating: "... we believe that it is necessary to oppose such a request because if we allow it we will risk to transfer the Headquarters of Bektashi from here to Turkey, and being in an imperialist country this religion institution will be used against the communist countries" (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1951, d. 1923, fl. 2.). And in reality on 29.III.1951 to the Bektashi community was sent a negative response.

Since Albania was related with the eastern countries starting from SU, the propaganda of Bektashi community kept the same political course and beside one visit paid to SU there was no other visit performed from the members of this community.

On 1954 there was a struggle between the Headquarters and the representative Bektashi community in Detroit USA. On 18 and 19.IX.1954 the program in radio "Voice of America" transmitted news for the inauguration of the Bektashi masjid which will be directed Baba Dervish Rexhepi. But during this period the World Spiritual Leader announced that Baba Rexhepi, was connected with the Italian and German conquerors and left the country. At the same time he criticizes because he had consecrated baba Dervish Rexhepi (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1954, d. 1116, fl. 3-4.). For this he also writes a letter to Siriu where he had listed all the reasons why Dervish Rexhepi should not be consecrated. On 20.V.1955 the Committee for the clergy affairs believes that this letter should be checked primarily from MFA because in this way it was sure that he would receive it (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1954, d. 1116, fl. 9.).

The struggle with Siriu will continue even for the next year. On 1957, the Committee for the clergy affairs sends information to the prime-minister that was related with Siriu of Egypt. Since its masjid was destroyed from the Egyptian government he had requested to migrate in USA. The World Spiritual Leader requires from the prime-ministry permission for Siriu to come in Albania so that it can be explained to him that his presence is required in Egypt. In this information it is also a footnote with hand-writing: "The secretary of CT does

not approve this requirement. Just send him an explanation letter. The information was delivered to the Spiritual leader on 10.I.1958" (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr. 490, viti 1957, d. 1260, fl. 1.).

As we mention above, the foreign activity of the Bektashi community is related with the letters correspondence. These notifications were sent mainly for religious celebration and important national events. On 1956 the world spiritual leader sent letters to Siriu where he congratulate the nationalization of Suez channel (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr. 490, viti 1956, d. 1206, fl. 2,3.); on 1957 it was written a strong opposition against the British and American aggression in Jordan and Lebanon where was included even the Eisenhower to whom it was requested the retrieval of the army in these (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr. 490, viti 1957, d. 1261, fl. 3,5.). This practice was followed up to 1965; where the headquarters send a letter to the embassy of RD in Vietnam where criticize the USA war against the Vietnam population (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1965, d. 1010.fl. 6.).

Beside what is mentioned above the religious communities in our country did not declared all their activity because there has been many efforts from foreign states and religion community to connect with our country. So for example, on 14.5.1956 the highest rabbi requested from the authorities dealing with religion a doctor performing a surgical operation named "circumcision" in order to apply this activity for all the Hebrews in our country (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1956, d. 1227, fl. 3.). In the same year, on September 11, 1956, is recorded a letter coming from the Great Loggia in Nil valley which requires the unification against the two killed priest in Cyprus and some aggression against some other priest and Archimandrite (AQSh, F. Kryeministria, nr.490, viti 1956, d. 1227, fl. 4-5.).

Conclusion

Keeping in mind the prepared material we can say that After World War II, as Albania joined the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, it also gave orientations for political, social, religious, etc. orientation toward this bloc.

Religious cults in our country, because they did not have enough income to meet their needs, so even that the Albanian state was a layman assigned a lot of money to them in the state budget State control over religious beliefs was expressed in all their activity. Through the Committee on Clerical Affairs, the Albanian state decided on their relations abroad, examining the invitations coming from abroad, the delegations that would go, their composition and funding etc.

The position of the leaders of religious beliefs had to match the political stance and line that the party and the Albanian state pursued. In this regard, all the speeches that would be held by the leaders of religious beliefs and conversations they would have with the foreign representatives had to be seen and controlled in advance by the Albanian Government; they were instructed on what attitude they had to hold on important international events, with individual countries, different organisms, and so on.

Part of this orchestrated organization by the state would also be a religious community. Due to the changes in the legislation in the country, Muslim religious communities would be included in the socialist political swirl in Albania.

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