

Research Note

PREPOROD Newspaper: An Agent of and a Witness to Islamic Revival in Bosnia

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Abstract: *Bosnian biweekly paper Preporod (Renaissance) has been, since its first appearance in September 1970, an agent of, and a witness to Islamic revival in this Balkan country. This paper has significantly contributed to the creation of a new self-conscious and dynamic Islamic identity of the Bosniaks. It has also recorded main issues debated within Bosniak Muslim community, internal intellectual and ideological developments as well as obstacles to Islamic renaissance there.*

Islamic revival in Bosnia symbolically began with the appearance of the first issue of biweekly paper *Preporod* (Renaissance) in Sarajevo on September 15, 1970.¹ That paper celebrated its 25th anniversary in September 1995 in the besieged capital of Bosnia. It has been recorded that during a quarter of century of its continuous appearance, *Preporod* has been edited by 11 successive editors. News, essays and articles written in Bosnian and submitted by more than 1,100 contributors were published and the paper reached a circulation of circa 30,000 copies.²

The founder of "Preporod" was Husein Džozo (1912-1982), a leading Bosnian Muslim thinker during the period after the Second World War. In 1970 he was the president of the Association of 'Ulamā' (*Udruženje ilmijje*) in Bosnia. Trying to reach out to Bosnian youth and to overcome the predominant concern of 'ulamā' with themselves and their economic and social status, Husein Džozo decided to publish an Islamic paper. In the then Bosnia, a paper could be published only by a recognised institution. Religious communities were allowed only to publish papers devoted to the exposition of religious teachings and dissemination of news on confessional matters. The leadership of the

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Islamic Religious Community (*Islamska vjerska zajednica*), the Administration of Islamic affairs virtually under the control of Socialist state, did not feel any need to start a paper which would come out of sphere of narrowly defined devotional matters. Among the ranks of the Association of 'Ulamā' there were people who realised that Islam should become relevant for the social reality of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) and that such a move should be taken up in a way understandable to a younger generation growing up in an increasingly modernised society. *Preporod*, from its very first issue, began to address a number of topics which were out of the narrowly defined "profession" of 'ulamā' in a socialist country: observance of Islamic regulations in a secular state, social engagement of Muslims, religion and education, Islam and ethnicity, contemporary trends in the Muslim world, development of Islamic institutions in the then Bosnia and Yugoslavia and the like. Husin Džozo, as the founding editor of *Preporod*, was assisted by a group of young Bosniak students coming mainly from state universities but conscious that something should be done for the preservation of the Bosniaks' Islamic identity.

Preporod was followed by the appearance of several more Islamic papers and magazines in different parts of Yugoslavia: *Islamska misao* (Islamic Thought) in Sarajevo, *El-Hilal* (The Crescent) in Skopje and *Edukata Islame* (Islamic Education) in Priština. Before 1970, Muslims in Bosnia and Yugoslavia had three periodicals: *Glasnik* (The Herald), an official bimonthly journal published by The Supreme Islamic Authorities in Sarajevo, *Zemzem* (Zam-zam), a paper of the students of *Gazi Husrevbegova Medresa* (Madrasa al-Ghazi Khusraw Bey, established in 1537) and *Takvim* (*Taqwīm*), an almanac with *Hijri* calendar, published by the Association of 'Ulamā'.³

Newspapers provided the Muslims with new channels of internal communal communication: reports on rejuvenated religious life within the community and proper information about the teaching of Islam now reached the most distant Bosnian villages. Occasionally, *Preporod* cautiously mentioned demands for broader religious freedom, criticised the rigidity of local bureaucrats toward Muslim requests for building new mosques or defended Islam and Muslims from attacks in state-sponsored media. Doing all that, *Preporod* kept a low profile in comparison to the Catholic *Glas Koncila* (The Voice of the Council) or Serbian Orthodox papers.⁴

The circle around *Preporod* began to organise promotion of the new issues of the paper in different Muslim local communities (*jamā'ats*),

lecturers on Islam, Arabic classes, special programmes on the celebration of famous events of Islamic history, and the like. The premises of the Association of 'Ulamā' in Sarajevo became a focal point of renewed interest of Bosniak youth. Soon, a number of Bosniak intellectuals began to publish in *Preporod*, mainly using pseudonyms.

The Islamic activism expressed in the circle around *Preporod* drew the attention of the Yugoslav socialist regime. In the winter of 1972 the students of Madrasa Ghazi Khusraw Bey went on strike asking for changes in curriculum and improvement of teaching. The state and the pro-regime leadership of the Islamic Religious Community indicted *Preporod* as the main source of the new ideological and activist trend among young Bosniaks. In April 1972, Husin Djozo was forced, by continued pressure of government agencies and official leadership of Islamic Community, to step down.⁵

The pro-government figures took control of *Preporod*, but at the same time *Zem-zem*, the paper of the students of Madrasa Al-Ghazi Khusraw Bey, continued to publish articles written in the spirit of the *Preporod* circle. A more dynamic approach to Islam became evident among young Bosniaks. That trend made possible for the ousted first team of the *Preporod* to return to the public scene after several years of silence.

On April 15, 1977 after the elections in the Association of 'Ulamā', Hilmo Neimarlija, a lecturer at the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Sarajevo and one of the figures of the former *Preporod* circle, was appointed as editor-in-chief of the paper. That appointment coincided and, in fact, reflected the increasing trend of the revitalisation of Islamic institutions in Bosnia. *Preporod* regained its position among Bosniaks and virtually became the only paper of this religious and ethnic group. The Yugoslav Socialist regime recognised the Bosniaks under the name *Muslimani* (Muslims) as a separate ethnic group (*nacija*), but did not allow them to have separate cultural institutions.⁶ Therefore, the Islamic Religious Community acquired the role of a "national" institution.

Revivalist Islamic orientation of *Preporod* and its circle was soon stopped by secularist Muslim intellectuals who enjoyed high ranks in the Marxist hierarchy in Bosnia, such as Hamdija Pozderac and Fuad Muhić. In summer 1979, pro-regime writer Derviš Sušić published a part of his book *Parergon* attacking Bosnian Muslim leaders in the pre-war period and during War World II for their pan-Islamism,

collaboration with Nazis, betrayal of the Muslim masses and the like. The editor of the *Preporod* reacted, openly contradicting what was considered to be an "official truth". At that point the Socialist state decided to crack down on the *Preporod* circle. Husein Džozo and Hilmo Nemanlija were attacked in state-controlled media as "pan-Islamists," "Muslim nationalists," "clerics," etc. A public attack on a person in Communist countries could mean only two things: criminal prosecution or removal from office. In this case, it ended with removal: in November 1979 Husein Džozo was removed from the Presidency of the Association of 'Ulamā' and Hilmo Nemanlija quit his post as the editor of the paper.⁷

Preporod came under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Islamic Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia (*Starješinstvo Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Sloveniji*) and returned to a conformist position of non-involvement in disputes. That was justified by a new editor as "a programme based on reality and not utopia and dreams."⁸ That orientation generally continued for a decade.

During the period 1989-1991 *Preporod* again became actively involved in public debates of Muslim issues in Bosnia. But, now a new editorial team, mainly consisting of the younger generation of the graduates of Madrasa al-Ghazi Khusraw Bey, the Faculty of Islamic Theology in Sarajevo and Sarajevo University. Previous editors and contributors also continued sporadically to publish in *Preporod*. In the new editorial team the focal figure was Džemal Latič, a poet jailed for his Islamic activism by the Socialist regime after the infamous trial in 1983.

A good example of the *Preporod* involvement in public debates at that time was a forum on "Islamic fundamentalism: what is that?" organised in winter 1990. It was the first opportunity for Bosniak intellectuals to critically discuss this confusing term and its mainly arbitrary use.⁹

The activism of the *Preporod* circle coincided with the revival of political life in Bosnia and the introduction of political pluralism. In 1990 new political parties were formed. Among the Bosniaks, the only, and later on the biggest, party was the Democratic Action Party (*Stranka demokratske akcije*) led by Alija Izetbegović. That development opened the question of the relationship between the Islamic Religious Community and a Muslim political party: possible overlapping of activities, loyalties and representation of Muslim

Bosniaks as an ethnic and a religious group. About the same time changes took place in the leadership of the Islamic Religious Community in Bosnia. It was a result of internal upheavals within the community. The breakdown of the monolith political system was followed by the eruption of dissatisfaction with similar structures in every aspect of life. In that context the Islamic Religious Community was shocked by the wave of the protest of *imāms*. That phenomenon has still not been properly studied. Its evaluation varies from the description as a pro-democracy movement within the Islamic religious administration to its branding as a manipulation by the state security service in order to undermine the position of the section of religious leadership favourable towards a Muslim role in the solution of the Yugoslav drama.

Tensions between the *Preporod* circle, which obviously became close to the Democratic Action Party, and the new leadership of the Islamic Religious Community in Bosnia and Hercegovina led by Salih Čolaković of Mostar, who was involved in "the movement of *imāms*," became visible. Consequently, in March 1991, editorial staff of the paper were sacked. Editors and journalists who left *Preporod* very soon started *Muslimanski glas* (The Muslim Voice), a political weekly paper close to Democratic Action Party. That paper continued to express political views of the majority of the Bosniaks on the eve of war. After several months of publication in besieged Sarajevo in 1992 the paper stopped to be replaced by the *Liljan* (The Lily), published by some journalist of former *Muslimanski glas* who went to Croatia when the war broke out. Toward the end of war in Bosnia, the editorial office of *Liljan* moved to Bosnia.¹⁰ Today *Liljan* is a weekly magazine mainly dealing with Bosniak national issues with a manifest Islamic dimension.

In the meantime, the new leadership of the Islamic Religious Community, after the sacking of the old editorial board of *Preporod*, appointed a new team. That team published *Preporod* from March 1991 until the first month of war in 1992.¹¹

The disintegration of Yugoslavia brought about the collapse of all institutions formed on the federal principle. The Islamic Religious Community of Yugoslavia resembled the federal organisation: almost in each republic there was an Islamic Council (*Starješinstvo*) and at federal level there was a Supreme Islamic council (*Rijaset*) as a religious administrative body.¹² As a consequence, when the Yugoslav federation was dissolved, the federal structure of the Islamic Religious

Community collapsed too. In April 1993, the Muslims of Bosnia decided to reconstruct their own religious administration within the borders of the independent state of Bosnia. That move marked an end to the legitimacy of the previous Muslim religious leadership. New leadership headed by Dr. Mustafa Cerić was elected. In the beginning he had the title *nā'ib al-ra'īs* (deputy religious head), which indicates the temporary and transitory nature of the function, and later on *ra'īs al-ūlamā'*, which is a customary title of the supreme religious leader of the Bosniaks.¹³

In June 1993 the Council of the *Nā'ib* of the Islamic Community of Bosnia appointed Aziz Kadribegovic as the new editor-in-chief in charge to revive *Preporod*.¹⁴ Aziz Kadribegović, a publicist, was one of the close aides of Husein Džozo from the first years of the history of this paper. In the autumn of 1993, the *Preporod* appeared in the broken windows of bookshops and courtyards of the mosques in war-torn Bosnia. The circle of the personal and ideological changes in the orientation of this paper has been completed.

Today *Preporod* is regularly published by *Rijaset Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Hercegovina).¹⁵

The story of the paper *Preporod* is a story of Islamic revival in Bosnia from 1970s until present times. It is a story of the significant role of a newspaper in the process of revival (*tajdīd*) and reform (*išlāh*), and of relationship between Islamic activism, Islamic establishment and the intellectuals and politicians, within a Muslim community involved in an ideological struggle.

Notes

1. For a recent discussion of Islamic revival in Bosnia and other Balkan countries see, Fikret Karčić, "Islamic Revival in the Balkans 1970-1992," *Islamic Studies* 36 (1997) 2-3: 565-581.
2. *Preporod*, XXVI, no. 9/580 (September 1995), p. 4.
3. Ahmed Smajlović, "Muslims in Yugoslavia," *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 1(1979) 2:141-142.
4. S. P. Ramet, "Islam in Yugoslavia Today," *Religion in Communist Lands* 18 (1990) 3: 232.

5. *Preporod*, XXVI, no. 9/ 580 (September 1995), p. 2.
6. Sabrina P. Ramet, "Primordial Ethnicity or Modern Nationalism: The Case of Yugoslavia's Muslims Reconsidered," *The South Slav Journal* 13 (1990) 1-2:14.
7. Zachary T. Irwin, "The Islamic Revival and the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina," *East-European Quarterly* 17 (1984) 4:451.
8. Ibid.
9. *Islamski fundamentalizam: Šta je to?*, ed. Nusret Čančar and Enes Karić (Sarajevo: Preporod, 1991).
10. For an analyses of the *Ljiljan* coverage of pre-war and war events in Bosnia see, Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (London: International Centre Against Censorship, 1994).
11. For the illustration of different approaches of *Preporod* and *Muslimanski glas* to certain issues during 1992 see, Xavier Bougarel, "Ramadan During a Civil War (As Reflected in a Series of Sermons)," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 6 (1995) 1:79-103.
12. The Constitution of the Islamic Community in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske zajednice* 53 (1990) 2: 99-121.
13. Fikret Karčić, "The Office of Ra'īs al-'Ulamā' Among the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims)," *Intellectual Discourse* 5 (1997) 2:109-120.
14. *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske zajednice u Republici Bosni i Hercegovini*, 56(1994) 1-3:114.
15. Its address is: *Preporod*, Zelenih beretki 17, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Hercegovina. E-mail <elkalem@bih.net.ba>