

Current challenges and societal responsibility of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Hercegovina*

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Abstract

The Islamic Community has been the core organisation serving the needs of Muslims in and from Bosnia and Hercegovina for 140 years. It has faced diverse challenges over its history but the current are different. Challenges currently being faced by Muslims and society in Bosnia and Hercegovina (and elsewhere) include how to counter accusations of radicalization and violent extremism, how to make a meaningful contribution to peace and stability, and how to respond to the pandemic, climate change, and the migrant crisis. This paper examines the Islamic Community's response to these issues.

Key words: Islamic Community in Bosnia and Hercegovina, international cooperation, EU integration, prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, resilience, pandemic, climate change, migration crisis.

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Preventing radicalization and violent extremism

Over more than 40 years of socialism, the Communist party of the former Yugoslavia, like those of the other Communist countries, applied a policy of suppressing religion in the public sphere and of controlling religious institutions closely. A democratisation process was launched as Communism fell all across Southeastern Europe. Democratisation meant human rights and freedom of religion or belief, with a concomitant increase in the visibility of religion and religious practice. The experience of war, forced migration, ethnic cleansing, and genocide that lasted from 1992 to 1995 led many to turn to God, while humanitarian organisations from East and West organized help and offered life-saving aid. People received more than just food, clothes, and other necessities. Islamic literature was translated from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish in books, often just small booklets, that were easy to and quickly read and distributed for free. There was also an increasing presence of foreign aid workers, some of whom married local Muslim women. This led to attempts to introduce a new understanding of Islam into Bosnia. The reaction of the Islamic Community would show it was not welcome.¹

During the war, more than 1,000 Islamic buildings, mostly mosques, were either entirely or partially destroyed. While few Western countries showed any interest in rebuilding such religious buildings, Turkey and other Middle Eastern (the Gulf countries, Saudi Arabia, Jordan) and Southeast Asian (Indonesia, Malaysia) states did. Later, first Turkey but then also Iran and Kuwait also showed an interest in primary and high schools and granted scholarships to Bosnian university students to study, mainly theology, at Middle Eastern Universities (in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, etc.). These graduates often adopted a new understanding of how Islam should be lived, interpreted, taught, and practiced. All of this led to pluralization of the Islamic scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The influence of other actors should not be neglected. The EU has played an important role in guiding Bosnia and Herzegovina through the EU accession process, as has the US in strengthening democracy, peace, and stability in the country and the wider region. Russia's interest in the region and the Serb orthodox population more particularly has historical roots and has always been there. More recently, China has been spreading its influence through investment in heavy industry and power plant projects. The *One Belt One Road Initiative*, which aims at connecting China to European markets via the Balkans amongst other regions, has been evaluated as highly damaging to the long-term economic and financial stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1 Peter Münch, "Unerwünschter Import. Wie sich Bosnien erfolgreich gegen aggressive Einflussnahme wehrt", *Süddeutsche.de*, 27 December 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/balkan-unerwuen-schter-import-1.4266860>.

Against this background of competing geopolitical and great power interests, intense competition evolved during and after the war between the states of the Middle East over Bosnia and Herzegovina, mainly to save ‘Bosnian Muslim souls.’ At the same time, Islamophobia and intolerance towards Muslims were both on the rise, spurring radicalization and violent extremism.

The question thus arises as to how mainstream Bosnian Muslims and their representative organ, the Islamic Community, responded to these emerging circumstances and influences.² The Islamic Community’s measures can be summarized in three terms: education, prevention, and building resilience.

By 1993, the Islamic Community had already issued a decree declaring the Hanafi school, the traditional school of law for Bosnian Muslims since the Ottoman period, the standard for religious practice in mosques, prayer rooms, and tekkes. The decree called for Islam to be practiced in ways that were in line with its norms. The need for this was obvious to imams who had noticed individuals starting to perform their prayers in ways that diverged from the centuries-old Islamic traditions of Bosnia, something that was causing insecurity and anxiety among congregation members. This is why the Islamic Community, seeking peace and order in the mosques, prayer rooms, and tekkes, established clear guidelines and reminded Bosnian Muslims that they had traditionally performed their prayers and interpreted Islam in line with the Hanafi school of thought. This was followed by ongoing education, discussions, conferences, publications, manuals on alternative interpretations of Islam and on moderation in Islam, youth work, etc., affirming the Bosniak Islamic tradition and strengthening the resilience of members and followers of the Islamic Community.

In 2007, a resolution was issued stating that the interpretation of Islam had to be institutionally anchored. This was important insofar as self-proclaimed online preachers were increasingly interpreting Islam in ways foreign to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Islamic Community established the Institute for the Islamic Tradition of Bosniaks in 2008 to affirm how Bosnian Muslims have lived, interpreted, practiced, and taught Islam, and to give this affirmation an academic character. In addition to already existing faculties of Islamic studies in Sarajevo, Zenica, and Bihać, a research institution had thus been founded to promote research into Islam and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and strengthen the Bosnian Muslim identity and sense of belonging in Europe.³ In 2012, a Centre for intra-Muslim Dialogue and Moderation in Islam (*Vesatijja*) was established. It

2 Hamza Preljević, “Preventing Religious Radicalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Role of the BiH Islamic Community,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37 (2017), pp. 8-14. Cf. Muhamed Jusić (ed.), *The Ideology of takfir and violent extremism: an analysis*. Issued by the Council of muftis of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, El-Kalem, 2018.

3 For the institute’s work, see www.iitb.ba.

has brought out a series of publications and organised lectures that affirm the culture of dialogue and a moderate interpretation of Islam, including a series of seminars for imams entitled “Toward different interpretations of Islam.”⁴

The Islamic Community and its various institutions also organized a range of seminars and conferences for imams, parents, religious teachers, and young people to help them face such attempts to introduce new practices of Islam. For example, the Association of imams (*Imijja*), in cooperation with the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation, organized a round table discussion on the Islamic scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina, papers from which were later collected and published.⁵

One side effect of the democratization process has been the growing number of NGOs, some of them faith-based organizations whose activities in the civil society sector draw on faith for their motivation and as an integral part of their activities. In 2013, the Islamic Community launched a platform for cooperation with other faith-based organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue synergies and work together for the benefit of the people.⁶ A few years later, in 2016, the Council of muftis adopted a strategy to integrate Muslim activists and groups outside of the Islamic Community (in so-called para-jamaat organisations) in order to counter fragmentation and parallelism, to identify illegal jamaat organisations, and to avoid deviant interpretations of Islam that might eventually become a security threat.⁷ This position of the Islamic Community is in line with the state-level Law on Freedom of Religion and the legal status of churches and religious communities, which recognises the sole right of the registered religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish prayer facilities and to teach and interpret the faith.⁸ As a result, faith-based organisations and informal faith organizations at which self-proclaimed imams and preachers give religious classes and lead prayers, including the Friday congregational prayers, are considered illegal.⁹

With the rise of terrorist attacks, often claimed as committed in the name of Islam, the Islamic Community gathered the most influential Bosniaks (politicians, theologians, and intellectuals) to sign a joint Declaration in 2015 against

4 See further www.cdv.ba.

5 Sabina Wölkner and Mensur Pašalić (eds.), *Islamska scena u Bosni i Hercegovini. Islamic Scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (bilingual edition), Sarajevo, 2011.

6 Text at https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18958:platforma-o-saradnji-iz-sa-organizacijama-islamskog-odredenja-koje-djeluju-u-bih&catid=201:aktuelnosti-kat&Itemid=457, accessed 14 September 2020.

7 “Krajem februara spisak paradžemata” <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php/vijesti/aktuelno/23492-krajem-februara-spisak-paradzemata>, accessed 13 November 2020.

8 “Zakon o slobodi vjere i pravnom položaju crkava i vjerskih zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini”, <http://www.mpr.gov.ba/biblioteka/zakoni/bs/ZAKON%20o%20slobodi%20vjere.pdf>, accessed 13 November 2020.

9 Interview with Sarajevo mufti Enes Ljevaković in weekly magazine Stav. “Paradžemati su izravan atak na institucionalni autoritet Islamske zajednice”, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/index.php/vijesti/aktuelno/23407-paradzemati-su-izravan-atak-na-institucionalni-autorit-et-islamske-zajednice>, accessed 13 November 2020.

violent extremism, terrorism, and the abuse of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Europe, and the world more widely. The Declaration states:

We, citizens of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bosniaks and Muslims, representatives of political, cultural and religious life, are worried about terrorist acts in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Europe, and the world, and we are aware of our responsibility to preserve freedom, peace and coexistence in our home country.¹⁰

The Declaration clearly condemns any sort of violence and terrorism at home and abroad. It calls on the government authorities to oppose all kinds of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism and to preserve the rule of law and the safety, health, and other rights and freedoms of all people. It affirms the centuries-old tradition of coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Declaration expects Muslim countries, religious and academic scholars to respect the religious tradition, the institutions and autonomy of the Islamic Community. The Declaration also calls on the EU:

We expect the leaders of European countries, particularly in the EU, where Muslims are a minority, to oppose islamophobia, discrimination against Muslims, and categorization of them as terrorists and enemies of civilization.¹¹

Over the past two decades, there have been several projects with embassies and international organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage in PRVE (Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism) activities and develop PRVE tools. The aim in organising these projects has been to provide clarification and information from psychological, theological, sociological, and political perspectives and to prevent radicalization, extremism, and violence. In 2016, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway a project on “Working with Youth to guide them on the Right Path and Prevent the Disorders of Addiction, Violence, and Extremism” has been implemented.¹² This included training trainers to apply skills learnt in their congregations and local communities, with three manuals published for trainers, parents, and children, respectively, addressing the security of children and protection from abuse on the internet.

10 For full text, see <https://www.cdv.ba/vijesti/zajednicka-izjava-najodgovornijih-bosnjackih-predstavnika/>, accessed 13 November 2020.

11 See <https://www.cdv.ba/vijesti/zajednicka-izjava-najodgovornijih-bosnjackih-predstavnika/>, accessed 13 November 2020.

12 “Bjelašnica: Kamp za 50 mladih iz cijele domovine”, <https://static.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/23436-bjelasnica-kamp-za-50-mladih-iz-cijele-domovine>, accessed 14 September 2020.

The same year, OSCE funded seminars with imams to inform and discuss religious radicalism and violent extremism. The EU as well has shown interest in supporting the Islamic Community's preventive work and supported a project on PRVE training in 2018. The target audience were again principally imams but also included female religious teachers in mosques and schools (*muallimas*), parents, practitioners, and young activists at mosques. At these workshops, they learned how to detect, prevent, and counter cases of radicalization. A further outcome was three manuals for further action at mosques, schools, and at home. A similar PRVE project was realized in cooperation with the Embassy of Germany with teachers at Islamic high schools. Theologians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, and security experts held the seminars and workshops and topics covered included the process of radicalization into violence, psychological aspects of radicalization, religion and ideology, etc. Seminars with parents covered the broader topic of advanced parenting, including parenting styles, approaches to non-adaptive behaviour and radical extremist ideas, self-esteem, unachieved life goals, and the risk of adopting non-adaptive behaviours, specific aspects of adolescent development, adolescence and identity crises, and the links between non-adaptive behaviour, radicalism, and violent extremism. Young people were addressed through life-skills workshops, including building their capability for independent decision-making, communication skills, resisting peer pressure, non-violent dispute resolution, critical thinking, and assertiveness.

These manuals and workshops help with recognising and reacting appropriately to the first signs of radicalization. They also strengthen the capacities of imams, religious teachers, parents, young people themselves, and the local community. Sustainability was reached through the training of trainers, and both the adults and young people involved have continued to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired within their local communities. In conclusion, these projects have contributed to social resilience within the Bosnian Muslim community.¹³

EU integration: strengthening common values, dialogue, peace, and stability

The EU is a unique international community initially established to strengthen peace and security in Europe and prevent any further war. These founding pillars were later expanded with EU enlargement and the inclusion of former Communist

13 The Grand Mufti's speech at a presentation of certificates for participants at the "Prevention of radicalism and violent extremism among youth" project, <https://english.islamskazajednica.ba/news/326-the-grand-mufti-speech-at-the-ceremony-for-presentation-of-the-certificates-for-the-participants-of-the-project-prevention-of-radicalism-and-violent-extremism-among-youth>, accessed 14 September 2020.

states from East Europe. After the experience of war, the Islamic Community realized the importance of complying with EU standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the sake of stability, security, peace, and prosperity, as well as in support of common universal values.

The Islamic Community had already developed and applied democratic procedures within its organizational structures and adapted for work within a secular state. While the historical experience of the Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks, in terms of their ethnic or national identity, has been of being both Muslim and European, EU integration was considered a natural development for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Islamic Community supports this EU integration process. Both the current grand mufti, Husein Kavazović, and his predecessor, Mustafa Cerić (who lead the community from 1993 to 2012), have emphasised the European identity of Bosniaks and their practice of “Islam with a European face”, based on liberalism, the desire for peace, reconciliation, and openness to the world.¹⁴ As Riada Ašimović Akyol said:

Today, the history and practice of Bosnian Islam yield a number of noteworthy lessons for those seeking to cultivate a liberal Islam in Europe. One is that an institutionalized, centralized form of Islam can be highly successful, as seen in the case of the Islamic Community. This probably can't be replicated precisely in other European countries—the Bosnian organization of Islamic religious affairs is distinct in that it is independent of the state and incorporates elements of representative democracy for legislative and representative bodies—but it can still serve as a useful example to the rest of Europe.¹⁵

Over recent decades, the Islamic Community has developed continuous communication with the EU and with embassies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several visits have been organized to Brussels and to European countries, particularly those where the Bosniak diaspora is strong, as it is in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries, as well as to the US.¹⁶

Since 2016, the Islamic Community has had a Representative Office registered with the EU in Brussels to strengthen dialogue, cooperation, and joint programmes with EU institutions and other religious institutions. The Islamic Community

14 Dževada Šuško, “A Model for Europe? History and Practice of Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *International Reports* 4 (2017): 7.

15 Riada Ašimović Akyol, “Want to cultivate a liberal European Islam? Look to Bosnia.” *The Atlantic*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/01/bosnia-offers-model-liberal-european-islam/579529/>, accessed 14 September 2020.

16 Dževada Šuško (ed.), *Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini. Uprava za vanjske poslove i dijasporu. Zadaci. Aktivnosti. Projekti. Rezultati* (Sarajevo: Dobra knjiga, 2019) outlines the various activities, including the Islamic Community's visits to and dialogue and conferences with local and international actors.

published a booklet on “Major Policy Considerations” for the first official visit of the Grand Mufti to Brussels that included texts by him and other relevant actors that stress Bosnian Muslims’ sense of belonging to the EU and the importance of EU integration for Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁷ In one of these texts, the Grand Mufti Kavazović stated:

I argue firmly that the Islamic Community can and should be a representative actor in developing European forms of representing Muslims and in establishing valuable relationships of European institutions and Muslim communities. The basis for our argumentation lies in the religious, institutional, and historical continuity of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Islamic Community is the institutional form and traditional framework of religious life of the Bosniaks, an indigenous European people. It is an independent religious community with the largest number of members of indigenous Muslims in Europe. It is a moral community. No one is forced to believe, nor do we make any differences among the believers. Our faith and institutional foundations has its roots in the universal tradition of Islam and the continuity of religious life of Muslims from prophet Muhammed.¹⁸

The Grand Mufti regularly meets senior politicians and ambassadors from the EU, other states and religious communities. Such intensifying cooperation with the EU has required the establishment of a new office within the Directorate for Foreign Affairs and the Diaspora. An Office for International Cooperation and the Western World was therefore established. The aim is to strengthen dialogue, exchange, and cooperation with international actors both in and outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many visits and conferences have been organised, with projects launched to raise the awareness of the importance of the EU and of interreligious dialogue for the sake of peace, stability, and prosperity. Bosnian Muslims’ European identity and their identification with European values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, and the importance of the EU integration process for Bosnia and Herzegovina have been addressed in a further joint project of the Islamic Community and the EU delegation in 2019. This project, “My place in Europe”, addressed high school students at all six Islamic high schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It included lectures on the history and system of the EU, the EU accession process, the common Muslim and European heritage, and the compatibility of European and Islamic values. In workshops, students developed their perspective on the EU through art and photographic, video, and written essays. The best works were chosen for an exhibition shown in Brussels at

17 *The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union. Main Policy Considerations* is a booklet for internal use and handed out during official visits to the EU and on similar occasions.

18 Grand Mufti Kavazović’s speech has not been published. The author of this chapter used the manuscript.

the EEAS and the students were awarded with a trip through Europe and to the EU in Brussels.¹⁹ A further project entitled “My green deal” was realized in 2021 again with the support of the EU in order to raise awareness among students and organise concrete activities on environment protection. The EU, the Islamic Community, and the high school students who were the target group evaluated both projects as useful and successful.²⁰

Response to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the migrant crisis

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has changed everyday life for people and how they interact with the outside world. Religious communities have also had to adapt in response to the new circumstances especially the measures to prevent the spread of the virus. On the one hand, community life in churches and mosques had to be adapted. On the other, the role of the religious communities as a supportive element in preserving the mental health of and supporting their members psychologically and spiritually has not been an easy task. The recommendation by experts to maintain social and physical distancing has been a particularly hard challenge, as communal prayers and ceremonies are an integral part of church and mosque activities. This has been insofar challenging as Muslims perform their collective prayers in rows placed immediately beside each other.

Given the various crises it has experienced since its establishment, the Islamic Community had already endorsed in its Statute (Art. 84) that all its organs should continue their work under exceptional situations and times of war by adapting to the new circumstances.²¹ The Islamic Community issued a series of guidelines that also cover community activities by members in the region or the diaspora, stressing that activities follow instructions from local or state authorities. These guidelines were addressed to all of the Community’s organizational units, including congregations (*džemats/jamaats*), local organisational units (*medžlis/majlis* and *mufrijstvo/mufriates*), administrative units, centres, agencies, Islamic high schools (*medrese/madrasahs*), and university faculties and departments.²² The Grand Mufti and his deputy offered the *hutba* sermon and lead

19 “Učenci sa direktoricom Genoveva Ruiz Calavera”, <https://mojemjestoeu.ba/novost/10/ucenici-s-direktoricom-genoveve-ruiz-calaverom>, accessed 13 November 2020.

20 See <https://mojemjestoeu.ba/>, accessed 14 September 2020.

21 *Ustav Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini – službeni prečišćeni tekst*, https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/images/stories/Ustavi/Ustav_IZ-e_precisceni_tekst_2014.pdf, accessed 13 November 2020.

22 “Instrukcija Islamske zajednice za postupanje u slučajevima širenja korona virusa. Sva okupljanja će se organizovati prema instrukcijama nadležnih državnih organa”, 10 March 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/instrukcija-islamske-zajednice-za-postupanje-u-slu%C4%8Dajevima-%C5%A1irenja-korona-virusa-/1761058>, accessed 13 November 2020.

congregational prayers at the central Gazi Husrev-bey mosque via live stream, carried by RTV Bir and TV Hayat, ensuring global reach. In a *hutba* of 27 March 2020, the mufti stated:

To stay at home is the best good deed and the highest level of responsibility. Currently, on earth, the message is to stay at home and save mankind, as Allah said: Who saves the life of one human being has saved all of humankind.²³

The importance of responsibility and solidarity regarding the pandemic are also reflected in more intense use of key messages on social media, including the Grand Mufti's official facebook and twitter accounts.²⁴ Other imams and muftis have followed the Grand Mufti in calling for responsibility and taken a unified position to counter the spread of the virus.

In mid-March 2020, the Council of muftis issued a fatwa on how to perform regular prayers, including the obligatory Friday prayers (*juma*) at the mosque.²⁵ Due to lockdown, the Grand Mufti issued additional measures, restricting prayers in mosques to the imam and the mujezin (who makes the call to prayer), and for obligatory Friday prayers, the members of the mosque council.²⁶ The call for prayer (*ezan*) continued to be made, however. The elderly and sick were asked not to come to the mosque. All these rules were based on respect for the guidelines issued by local and national authorities for the sake of protecting public health and lives.

As time passed and government instructions changed, e.g., on the number of persons allowed to gather, the Islamic Community adjusted its own guidelines. Prayer in mosques were therefore allowed with certain restrictions. Those entering a mosque had to wear masks, bring their own prayer mat, and keep a distance of 2 metres.²⁷ Many mosques put stickers on the floor to mark the distance

23 "Reis Kavazović predvodio džumu: Pogodila nas je nevolja i veliko iskušenje", 27 March 2020 <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/557793/reis-kavazovic-predvodio-dzumu-pogodila-nas-je-nevolja-i-veliko-iskusenje>, accessed 13 November 2020.

24 <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=ReisKavazovic&set=a.454521208251667>

25 "Fetva o načinu obavljanja dnevnih namaza i džume-namaza tokom pandemije koronavirusa", 17 March 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/fetve-i-rezolucije/28830-fetvu-o-nacinu-obavljanja-dnevnih-namaza-i-dzume-namaza-tokom-pandemije-koronavirusa>, accessed 14 September 2020; "Formiranje safova u vrijeme pandemije korona virusa", <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/namaz-ezan/29021-formiranje-safova-u-vrijeme-pandemije-korona-virusa>, accessed 14 September 2020. Further fatwas have been issued on the organization of funerals and the washing of the COVID 19 dead.

26 "Instrukcija imamima i džematskim odborima za postupanje u okolnostima vanrednog stanja proglašenog zbog pandemije koronavirusa", published 20 March 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/28745-instrukcija-imamima-i-dzematiskim-odborima-za-postupanje-u-okolnostima-vanrednog-stanja-proglašenog-zbog-pandemije-koronavirusa>, accessed 14 September 2020. Friday sermons (*hutba*) like that of the deputy grand mufti have dealt with the coronavirus and been distributed via social media, see <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/28890-hutba-zamjenika-reisu-l-uleme-dr-ensa-ef-ljevakovica-u-gazi-husrev-begovoj-dzamiji>, accessed 14 September 2020.

27 "Instrukcija Rijasetu o obavljanju dnevnih namaza u džamijama", published 30 April 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/29008-instrukcija-rijasetu-o-obavljanju-dnevnih-namaza-u-dzami-jama>, accessed 14 September 2020.

required. Many Muslims remained insecure as to whether God would accept such prayers, as it is clearly prescribed that participants should stand next to each other while performing prayers in congregation. The Islamic Community website (www.islamskazajednica.ba) includes a regular column on “Questions and answers”. A legal scholar answers on a regular basis questions Muslims have regarding everyday life. With the new circumstances that have arisen under the pandemic required as well new responses had to be given.²⁸

Furthermore, religious classes, normally held at the mosque during the weekend, have been either cancelled or moved online.²⁹ Many imams also used social media, such as for example viber groups to keep in contact with mosque members. Contact with the mosque and the imam is particularly important during the holy month of Ramadan. The traditional religious practice of collective prayers and Qur’anic recitations had to be reorganized. In April 2020, the Islamic Community launched its own TV station (RTV Bir) with a programme of Qur’anic recitations and other content at a time when mosque attendance was still greatly reduced because of physical distancing.

A further challenge has been continued work on projects and cooperation with partners, particularly in the field of humanitarian aid.³⁰ The Grand mufti has held regular meetings with government agencies, representative of the authorities, and the heads of the other traditional religious communities for advice, consultation, and support and to adjust Islamic Community activities accordingly.³¹

Organising activities related to the fifth pillar of Islam, pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, is an important regular activity that had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. Several consultations were held, but health and security considerations and decisions made in Saudi Arabia meant the hajj had to be postponed.³²

28 This legal scholar is known in the community as the *fetva-i-emin*. He offers answers to theological questions in Islamic law and so communicates with the public on current social issues. One pandemic-related question was about performing prayers using social distancing: “Formiranje safova u vrijeme pandemije korona virusa”, published 8 May 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/namaz-egan/29021-formiranje-safova-u-vrijeme-pandemije-korona-virusa>, accessed 14 September 2020.

29 “U Muftijstvu zeničkom održan radni sastanak o temi „Mektebska nastava na daljinu – Online mekteb, iskustva i preporuke””, published 25 June 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/muftijstva-s/vijesti-iz-muftijstava/29190-u-muftijstvu-zenickom-odrzan-radni-sastanak-o-temi-mektebska-nastava-na-daljinu-online-mekteb-iskustva-i-preporuke>, accessed 14 September 2020.

30 “Islamska zajednica koordinira svoje napore sa nevladinim organizacijama u suprotstavljanju pandemiji koronavirusa” published 25 March 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/rijaset-s/rijaset-vijesti/28790-islamska-zajednica-koordinira-svoje-napore-sa-nevladinim-organizacijama-u-suprotstavljanju-pandemiji-koronavirusa>, accessed 14 September 2020.

31 “Reisu-l-ulema i ministar Radončić o širenju koronavirusa”, published 20 March 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/28757-2020-reisu-l-ulema-i-ministar-radoncic-o-sirenju-koronavirusa>, accessed 14 September 2020. “Reisu-l-ulema sa pomoćnikom ministra zdravlja Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine”, published 21 April 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/28939-reisu-l-ulema-sa-pomocnikom-ministra-zdravlja-federacije-bosne-i-hercegovine>, accessed 14 September 2020.

32 “Saudijski ambasador i direktor centra Kralj Fahd kod reisu-l-uleme”, published 1 July 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/29199-saudijski-ambasador-i-direktor-centra-kralj-fahd-kod-reisu-l-uleme>, accessed 14 September 2020.

Travel abroad by employees of the Islamic Community was suspended generally and only gradually reinstated, in accordance with government guidelines.

Commemoration of the Genocide in Srebrenica on July 11 is an annual Islamic Community activity, particularly given the ongoing need for burial of newly discovered and processed bodies from the mass graves around Srebrenica. July 2020 was the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide and the commemoration and other memorial events were to have involved much larger gatherings than usual. Senior politicians and leading figures from all around the world were expected. The commemoration was, however, significantly reorganised to respect pandemic-related restrictions.³³

The work of the administration (*Rijaset*) was generally carried out from home, with occasional use of the workplace, where necessary. As a result, the Islamic Community at no point ceased offering services, activities, or work. The focus was on social responsibility, countering conspiracy theories, and adapting to the new circumstances brought about by the pandemic and respecting the guidelines set by government experts.³⁴

Another important challenge nowadays is undoubtedly climate change, care for environment, and biodiversity. The Office for International Cooperation has established contacts with UNEP, the UN's environment protection agency, and the Faith for Earth Initiative. After participation at a capacity-building seminar at UNEP, the Islamic Community was one of the hosts of an international conference in March 2020 on "People and Planet: Faith in the 2030 Agenda". The conference was held simultaneously at six hubs around the world (Nairobi, Pretoria, Amman, Jakarta, Sarnosand, and Sarajevo) to discuss the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and strengthen the link between environmental protection and faith communities.³⁵ It is worth noting that the Islamic Community was the only faith-based organisation in Southeastern Europe to respond to the initiative. The Faith for Earth representative in Bosnia and Hercegovina is actually an employee of the Islamic Community. Since then, the Islamic Community has participated in various meetings and conferences and realized a project, as above

33 "U Potočarima 11. jula dženaza-namaz i komemoracija žrtvama Genocida", published 3 June 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/29137-u-potocarima-11-jula-dzenaza-namaz-i-komemoracija-zrtvama-genocida>, accessed 14 September 2020. "Centralna svečanost 510. dana Ajvatovice", published 29 June 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/29195-centralna-svecanost-510-dana-ajvatovice>, accessed September 14, 2020. "Dženaza za žrtve Prijedora i Kozarca 20. jula 2020. u Kozarcu", published 2 July 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/29203-dzenaza-za-zrtve-prijedora-i-kozarca-20-jula-2020-u-kozarcu>, accessed 14 September 14 2020.

34 "Muftija Dizdarević: Vjernici će biti primjer disciplinovanog ponašanja u ovom vremenu", published 23 April 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/muftijstva-s/vijesti-iz-muftijstava/28949-2020-muftija-dizdarevic-vjernici-ce-biti-primjer-disciplinovanog-ponasanja-u-ovom-vremenu>, accessed 14 September 2020.

35 Link to the event <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/32730?show=full>. For a publication related to this conference, see <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32730/PPFA.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, accessed 14 September 2020.

mentioned, to increase its involvement with climate change issues. A further progress has been made in 2021 when all four traditional religious leaders of the Islamic Community, Catholic Church, Orthodox Church and Jewish Community gave their commitment on the conference “The importance of environment protection and climate change from the perspective of faith communities”, an event organized in cooperation with UNEP, URI and the Interreligious Council.

Humanitarian aid is a further area of social responsibility. It is dealt with primarily by the Office for Social Care, which has a remit for care and the distribution of aid to the needy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and organises the collection at various institutions, including the Islamic high schools and the university faculties, of money, food, and clothes to help those in need. The Office for Social Care also provides financial support to individuals and families and offers scholarships for high school and university students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandžak, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Food is distributed to migrants and families in need. During Ramadan and on religious festivities like Eid, gifts are distributed, primarily to children.³⁶ Teams have been formed to care for the elderly and sick. This care consists of regular home visits, as well as the distribution of food packages, financial support, hygiene products, and medicines.³⁷

To help people in need more efficiently, the Islamic Community has also been building bridges with the non-governmental sector. An ongoing project is a mobile library for children in remote rural areas. A van full of books travels to many villages, particularly in the Republika Srpska, to gift or lend books to children. Food and clothes are collected within the Islamic Community’s institutions to support better living conditions for migrants now temporarily living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.³⁸ Obligatory juma prayers have been organized in refugee camps for the predominantly Muslim migrants, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).³⁹ The Grand Mufti himself visited a migrant center in Western Bosnia and has on various occasions, including during

36 Elvedin Subašić, “Socijalno-humanitarne aktivnosti u 2019. godini”, *Preporod*, 5:1159 (1 March 2020), p. 4.

37 “U Zenici održan sastanak timova za posjete starijim i iznemoglim osobama”, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/29327-u-zenici-odrzan-sastanak-timova-za-posjete-starijim-i-iznemoglim-osobama>, accessed 14 September 2020.

38 “Predstavnicu Ureda za društvenu brigu posjetili migrantski Centar u Blazuju”, published 23 February 2020, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/rijaset-s/rijaset-vijesti/28501-predstavnicu-ureda-za-drustvenu-brigu-posjetili-migrantski-centar-u-blazuju>, accessed 14 September 2020. “Mreža mladih Muftijstva travničkog realizovala akciju pomoći migrantima”, published 6 December 2019, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/muftijstva-s/vijesti-iz-muftijstava/28363-mreza-mladih-muftijstva-travnickog-realizovala-akciju-pomoci-migrantima>, accessed 14 September 2020.

39 “Islamska zajednica organizovala džumu-namaz u privremenim prihvatnim centrima za migrante”, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/28555-2020-islamska-zajednica-organizovala-dzumu-u-privremenim-prihvatnim-centrima-za-migrante>, accessed 14 September 2020.

the juma, addressed the migration crisis and the responsibility Muslims have to help people in need.⁴⁰

Conclusion

As the largest traditional organisation serving the religious needs of Bosnian Muslims, the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina has shown social responsibility, particularly in times of crisis. Recent challenges include preventing radicalisation and the spread of violent extremism, promoting peace, stability, and security in line with the goal of EU integration for Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing humanitarian aid, and tackling climate change, as well as guiding the faithful during the pandemic. One may sum up its activities in terms of education, prevention, and building resilience.

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40 "Reisu-l-ulema Husein-ef. Kavazović posjetio migrantski centar u Velikoj Kladuši", published 10 August 2018, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/vijesti/aktuelno/26998-reisu-l-ulema-husein-ef-kavazovic-posjetio-migrantski-centar-u-velikoj-kladusi>, accessed 14 September 2020. "Proglas reisu-l-uleme vjericima, ulemi, građanima i državnim organima: „Ne možemo više zatvarati oči pred migrantskom krizom potrebna je akcija svih“", published 1 November 2019, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/28267-proglas-reisu-l-uleme-vjericima-ulemi-gradanima-i-drzavnim-organima-ne-mozemo-vise-zatvarati-oci-pred-migrantskom-krizom-potrebna-je-akcija-svih>, accessed 14 September 2020. "Mevludska hutba reisu-l-uleme Kavazovića posvećena migrantskoj krizi", published 8 November 2019, <https://www.islamskazajednica.ba/aktivnosti-reisu-l-uleme/28294-mevludska-hutba-reisu-l-uleme-kavazovica-posvecena-migrantskoj-krizi>, accessed 14 September 2020.

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Trenutni izazovi i društvena odgovornost Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini

Sažetak

Islamska zajednica je jedinstvena organizacija koja 140 godina služi potrebama muslimana unutar i izvan Bosne i Hercegovine. Suočavala se sa raznim izazovima od svog osnivanja ali trenutni izazovi su drugačiji. Trenutni problemi s kojim se muslimani i društvo Bosne i Hercegovine, kao i u drugim zemljama, suočavaju su optužbe za radikalizaciju i nasilni ekstremizam, očuvanje mira i stabilnosti, pandemija, klimatske promjene i migrantska kriza. Ovaj članak analizira odgovore Islamske zajednice na ove izazove.

Ključne riječi: Islamska zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini, međunarodna saradnja, EU integracije, prevencija radikalizacije i nasilnog ekstremizma, rezilijentnost, pandemija, klimatske promjene, migrantska kriza