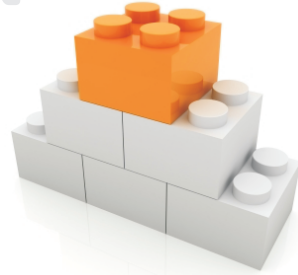


DE CONSTRUCTION ONE

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Thoughts On Terrorist Heaven



In March 2009, one of the most popular Russian TV stations that broadcasts its programmes in English, published a video report and an article entitled: "**Is There a Heaven for Islamists in Europe's Backyard?**"

This analysis will try to point out the disastrous journalistic errors and biases that are not unusual in media-outlets such as Russia Today.

We will start with the title: "Is There a Heaven for Islamists in Europe's Backyard?".

Here, at the very beginning, a journalist jeopardizes the development of the entire story. If you use the word "paradise" you imply that a specific situation is so well developed that it has reached a kind of perfection. So, for this journalist, it is not in question whether or not there are radical Islamist organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH); according to him, they are already largely present there. The use of the word "Islamists" is also problematic since it is necessary to add the word "radical" in order to accurately define the group which the author targets, and not to refer to the entire religion. Accordingly, one could argue that this title is discriminatory.

Another issue is important in this title; something that not only Russia Today does wrong, but many other media corporations also. The phrase "**backyard of Europe**", which is often used to describe the geographic location of BiH and the entire Western Balkans, presents a false and distorted picture of our region. All the countries of former Yugoslavia are geographically, historically, economically, and culturally part of the European continent and are not merely its "backyard". The journalist was probably referring to the European Union as a political community where, compared to BiH, one could use the phrase mentioned above, but the word "Europe" is clearly used here as geographic term, which confirms directly the potency of this misleading expression.

To analyse the title: If you are prone to using stylistic comparisons and characterize something that is potentially present in a particular area as a form of perfection (paradise), you discriminate against one of the largest religious communities in the world, and quite accidentally confuse political and geographical terms, then you can apply for the job of journalist with Russia Today.

Further on, the story develops following the same manipulative flow as the title, especially the statement: "**Many of the biggest terrorist attacks in recent years have links to the country (BiH)**". I now ask: How much is "many?" Fifty percent? Thirty?, Ninety? When you write "many" it means that you are thinking of a significant part of a certain phenomenon, for which you do not have any correct information. The obvious unprofessionalism of this journalist is evidenced here by using descriptive, but imprecise words like "many" in such a serious topic as terrorism.

The fact is that there were some links,¹ however weak, between the terrorist attacks in New York and Madrid, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet no government has ever formally condemned the state of BiH for having any direct involvement in those terrorist activities. If you look at the State Department's report from the year 2007, it clearly states that BiH does represent a ground for possible development of potential terrorism because of its administrative and political system, ethnic conflicts, and past, but so far neither a significant presence nor terrorist movements have not been noticed, and BiH authorities cooperate fully with the security forces of the United States on this issue². However, Russia Today has skillfully avoided this fact and directly connected BiH with the demolished Twin Towers.

As a cherry on top of the cake, there comes the part where this journalistic story must be confirmed by an interviewee. Before I proceed with further analysis, I would like to set a quiz for everyone reading this text: If you were to write about the vast potential terrorist risk in a European country as an interviewer, would you choose:

1. A representative of the government?
2. A representative of the security forces?
3. A representative of an international organization?
4. A local political analyst?
5. Someone else?

A local political analyst is a great interviewee for the third-rate media because they always offer a sensationalist story that is interesting to the masses. In this case, Goran Popovic appears as a commentator. He states, "**Muslims here are involved in every action connected to Islamic radicalism in the world. Muslims in Bosnia are the primary source of Islamic extremism in Europe, especially in the southeastern part. It's becoming very dangerous**". This is a crucial moment in the article, the

¹http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-04-14-bosnian-madrid_x.htm

²<http://sarajevo.usembassy.gov/terrorism-2007.html>

moment when the cheap use of misinformation becomes an obvious and direct lie. Whilst I was writing this text, I tried, persistently, to find information about spectacular terrorist attacks in Europe, especially in our region, that have been carried out under the auspices of Bosnian terrorists. The journalist in this piece is using a technique called "spinning" - a technique which allows you to move from mere unprofessionalism into the dangerous zone of willful deception.

The King Fahd Mosque in Sarajevo is, according to this journalist, "**a magnet for terrorists**". Of course, the reporter did not visit the mosque; neither did he meet with its religious visitors. One gets the impression that he just randomly selected a location, because at this stage of the article, actions and subjects become completely divorced from the stage on which they are occurring.

This bunch of misinformation which has already passed the media boiling point becomes almost humorous. A journalist tries to explain how young Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina become radicalised with the following sentence: "**More and more, young Bosnian Muslims want to learn the Farsi language, culture and history**". So, if you want to visit Iran, or, heaven forbid, you learn the local culture and language, then you are automatically a breeding ground for terrorism. Many young people from the Balkans did visit Iran and they were thrilled by its culture, yet they did not return with their bodies covered in bombs.³⁴ It is funny to even compare the general desire to learn a foreign language with a terrorist threat.

Now that all the background is prepared and the story has assumed its shape, the journalist finds a interviewee who still, in a distant and general way, explains that there is a potential for the activation of terrorist cells. If the journalist of Russia Today spent a little more time analysing terrorism as reported in the local media, he would find a detailed treatment of this topic; Wherever there are examples of links between certain terrorist cells and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is always stated that there is no real evidence of the presence of terrorism in BiH.⁵

This text is accompanied by a video story which abounds with images of the past war in BiH, bloody faces of the attacked metro in Madrid, etc... in order to produce an atmosphere full of fear and uncertainty. If you are not thoroughly familiar with the BiH situation, such a "view of the influential media" creates a strong and negative image for the viewer of a small, but extremely dangerous country in the "Europe's backyard."

Unfortunately, there has been no reaction from the media or BiH authorities to this article. This article was, however, translated and published word for word in Nezavisne novine (the Independent Newspaper). 🍌

³ <http://www.serbiatravelers.org/forum/index.php?topic=1383.0>

⁴ <http://www.serbiatravelers.org/forum/index.php?topic=3307.0>

⁵ Vlado Azinović: «Al Kaida u Bosni i Hercegovini: mit ili stvarnost?».