

# World's richest man visits Ohrid, Macedonia

By Miki Trajkovski

Carlos Slim, the Mexican billionaire with a fortune estimated to be worth \$69 billion, was the main star of the fifth global conference on broadband internet in Ohrid.

On Monday, Slim drank Macedonian wine and tried Ohrid's famous cake. But he got to see Lake Ohrid only from his hotel balcony, as his scheduled stroll through the scenic town was canceled.

Slim's arrival was a hot subject of discussion among Ohrid locals for days before he came. They believe his visit will strengthen their town's tourist appeal around the world. Ohrid is by far Macedonia's biggest tourist destination.

Slim was in Ohrid as co-chair of the Commission for Digital Development, a joint initiative on the International Telecommunication Union and the UN's culture wing UNESCO to promote high-speed, high-capacity broadband connections.

Although high-speed internet is a global trend "there are still countries where limited access to broadband internet represents an open obstacle for their development," Slim told the meeting.



Carlos Slim in Ohrid.

Ohrid hosted other important guests at the conference, starting with the other co-chair of the Conference, Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, and the chairs of many of the world's largest IT companies, such as Intel, Ericsson, Telefonica, Cisco, Alcatel-Lucent and Huawei Technologies.

Participants discussed how broadband can help the poor and underprivileged in the world, and

its impact on the environment as well as on the global economy.

Macedonian leader Nikola Gruevski said his government had worked hard to develop communications in the Balkan country.

"While only 1 per cent of Macedonian households used broadband internet in 2006, the percentage had risen to 46.35 by the end of 2011," Gruevski said.

(Balkan Insight)

# Charges dropped against Albanian reporter

Besar Likmeta

The head of the department of communication in the Prime Minister office, Gjovalin Prenga,

has withdrawn charges against reporter Lindita Cela following pressure from media groups.

In a statement on Wednesday, Albania's Union of Jour-

nalists confirmed that Prenga had withdrawn the lawsuit, calling the move "a triumph of reason in an open society."

Prenga had sought a two-year prison sentence for Cela for an article published on October 7, in the daily Shekulli, which contained allegations concerning Prenga's ties to Albania's former Communist security apparatus.

The move had raised concern in the local journalists union but also in international media organizations, which only a few months earlier had applauded the partial de-criminalization of slander in Albania.

"I applauded the Albanian authorities when they took the right steps towards decriminalisation of defamation and slander," the Secretary General of the South East Europe Media Organization, Oliver Vujovic, recalled.

"Yet I am concerned that the very same month that these amendments were passed in the parliament, criminal charges were filed against a journalist," he added.

"I would also like to add that the increase of lawsuits leads to self-censorship and does not contribute to free media and democracy," he continued.

# The responsibility for protecting Islam in Kosova rests with BIK

On 19 March 2012, I published an article in the major American political journal *The Weekly Standard*, titled (in English) "Kosovo Continues Fight Against Wahhabi Infiltration" ["Kosova vazhdon luftën kundër infiltrimit të Vahabistëve"]. The article was written during my most recent visit to Kosova. It dealt mainly with the removal of Musli ef. Verbani as imam of the Gazi Sinan Pasha mosque in Kaçanik, and imam Verbani's challenge to Sabri ef. Bajgora.

I am a journalist and author. I am the executive director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism (CIP). CIP is an international network of moderate and traditional Muslim scholars, intellectuals, journalists, clerics, and activists in 25 countries. Its main areas of operation are the U.S., UK, Germany, the Balkans, Israel, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and India. The President of CIP is Kemal Silay, Ph.D, professor of Ottoman and modern Turkish culture at Indiana University, USA. The article titled "Kosovo Continues Fight Against Wahhabi Infiltration" ["Kosova vazhdon luftën kundër infiltrimit të Vahabistëve"] was a regular media reportage and was not a CIP report or official document.

Following the publication of my article, I was criticized in an official text of the BIK leadership, and in comments by Sabri ef. Bajgora to Kosova media. In a declaration titled 'Raporti' i Stefan Shvarcit - një pamflet i mbushur me shpifje ["The Report' of Stephen Schwartz - a pamphlet filled with slander," dated 29 March 2012, BIK asserted that my work "is known to be biased, contradictory, and tendentious" ["ka ditur të jetë i njëanshëm, kontradiktor dhe tendencioz"]. But the BIK statement admitted, "In reality, accusations and slanders like those of Mr. Schwartz... are derived from individuals inside the Islamic Community of Kosova" ["Ç'është e drejta, akuza e shpifje si këto të z. Shvarcit... i janë bërë edhe nga ca individë brenda Bashkësisë Islame në Kosovë."]. The BIK statement concluded by referring to me as "our friend Mr. Stephen Schwartz" ["miku ynë z. Stefan Shvarci."]

In an interview with Kosovar media, on the same day (29 March) Sabri ef. Bajgora repeated these charges against me and even threatened legal action against the public critics of the BIK leadership. He described imam Idriz ef. Bilalli as my "collaborator" [bashkëpunëtor]. I have never had the honor of meeting imam Idriz ef. Bilalli, but I admire him and would be pleased to serve him and his activities in any way of which I may be capable.

Earlier, on 26 March, Naim ef. Tërnavë, the chief Islamic cleric of Kosova, was interviewed by Radiotelevizioni i Kosovës (RTK) and

said, as noted in *Koha Ditore*, "the competent Kosova institutions should prohibit entry of foreign nationals who by their actions only spoil the image of the religion of Islam in Kosova and damage the religious tolerance cultivated for centuries among the Albanians" ["institucioneve kompetente të Kosovës të ndalojnë hyrjen në vend të shtetasve të huaj, të cilët me veprimet e tyre po prishin imazhin e fesë islame në Kosovë dhe po dëmtojnë tolerancën fetare të kultivuar me shekuj ndër shqiptarë."]. Most of Naim ef. Tërnavë's remarks of 26 March, however, consisted of demands for a large-scale mosque that will match the projected Catholic Cathedral in Prishtina. Rather than repudiating extremism, Naim ef. Tërnavë showed in this statement that he wishes to cleanse himself and his colleagues of the charge of encouraging radicalism by a perfunctory denunciation, while maintaining a hostile and unproductive polemic against the Catholics.

The statement of the BIK is correct in describing me as a "friend" of the Community. I here state openly, however, my disagreement with Naim ef. Tërnavë, on two counts. First, responsibility for protecting Islam in Kosova from foreign Islamist agitators does not rest with the state institutions for border control, but with the BIK, which guards the invisible border between Muslims and non-Muslims in the republic. If the BIK makes clear that Wahhabi and other extremist agitators have no place in Kosova, the radicals will be discouraged from entering the country. Naim ef. Tërnavë and his colleagues cannot shift responsibility for the moral health of Islam in the republic to the Kosovar authorities, especially since Kosova is a secular state.

Second, as a Muslim and long-time friend of the Albanian Catholics, I believe that controversy over the new Cathedral in Prishtina and statements of resentment by Muslims will serve no purpose other than that which Naim ef. Tërnavë claims to oppose: in his own words, "damage to the religious tolerance cultivated for centuries among the Albanians" ["dëmtojnë tolerancën fetare të kultivuar me shekuj ndër shqiptarë."]. BIK, in its 29 March statement, made various fine affirmations of its commitment to Hanafi jurisprudence and religious cooperation among Albanians. I wish to believe these words. But until discrimination against moderate clerics and professors of Islam in Kosova has ended, and until the BIK acts positively to end the current campaign of insinuation against Catholics - and even afterward - I will continue my professional activity and fulfill my spiritual duties in reporting on the problems within the BIK.

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3 June 2012

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