

LEADERSHIP SCENE



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Interview conducted by Ghada Khalafallah, Manager of Communication and Media, General Secretariat Office, AlBaraka Forum for Islamic Economy. On the sidelines of the first London Halal Forum, themed “Halal Tayyib for Humanity”, with the AlBaraka Forum as the principal partner.



Halal is much more than a religious label. It is a framework for quality, ethics and fairness that can connect markets from Bosnia to London, empower young entrepreneurs and help create a more balanced global economy.

H.E. MR. DINO SELIMOVIĆ

Adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

H.E. Mr. Dino Selimović focused throughout the interview on Bosnia’s unique positioning as a European halal hub, the sectors with fastest growth potential such as tourism and agriculture, the global challenges facing halal standardisation, and the importance of ethical, well-communicated development of the halal economy.

Halal as a lifestyle, as a habit, as a way of living, has been around the country for more than five or six centuries... and our Agency for Halal Quality Certification has been globally recognized and adopted to the European standards.

Question 1:

what factors have contributed to Bosnia and Herzegovina's emergence as a key hub for the Halal economy in Europe?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

There are two main reasons why Bosnia and Herzegovina is emerging as a natural hub for the halal economy in Europe.

First, Bosniak Muslims are an indigenous European people who embraced Islam five to six centuries ago. Over those centuries, halal has not just been a label, but a way of life – embedded in daily habits, food culture and business ethics. So when we talk about the halal industry, we are not importing a foreign concept; we are building on something that has been present in society for generations.

Second, more than 20 years ago our economic community took a strategic step by establishing the Agency for Halal Quality Certification. The agency is globally recognised and accredited, and its work is aligned with European standards not only in halal certification but also in general food quality control and assurance. This gives our producers credibility in regional and international markets.

When you combine a deeply rooted halal culture with a professional, recognised certification system – and add our potential in agriculture, tourism, food production, manufacturing and industry – Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a very strong candidate to serve as a European Halal hub.

We have been recognized as a go-to destination by both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers from all over the world.

Question 2:

Which sectors in Bosnia would hold the greatest growth potential in the halal ecosystem over the coming years?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

In financial services, we already have a foundation through our Islamic bank, which was established with the support of the Islamic Development Bank Group and partners from Abu Dhabi and Dubai. So Islamic finance is present, but I see the strongest growth coming from other sectors.

The clearest opportunity is halal-friendly tourism. Bosnia and Herzegovina has increasingly become a “go-to” destination for both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers. We see exponential growth in visitor numbers, especially through Sarajevo International Airport, which has more than doubled its passengers compared to only a few years ago. At the same time, there is rapid development of tourism infrastructure – new hotels, resorts and facilities – which creates many investment opportunities.

The second major potential lies in agriculture and food production. We have fertile, relatively uncontaminated land that is highly suitable for organic cultivation and halal livestock farms. With the right government policies and better integration into European markets, our farmers can become more competitive regionally and globally.

A third, still underdeveloped, area is halal-certified cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. We are starting to see more certified products, and I believe this segment could grow into a significant industry in the coming years.

We need to see how to change the growing narrative of Islamophobia, which then somehow touches upon the Halal as a concept.

Question 3:

From your expertise, what are the main challenges facing the development of Halal ecosystems in non-Muslim countries in general?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

One of the main challenges is the wider narrative around Islam in many parts of the world. Islamophobia can easily spill over onto the concept of halal, so that some people see the word “halal” as something negative or divisive. To counter that, we need better communication, better presentation and much more effort in explaining what halal really is – and just as importantly, what it is not.

The second big challenge is the lack of a unified halal certification logo and standard. Every country tries to protect its own system and issues slightly different rules. For producers, especially non-Muslim companies who want to enter halal markets, this can be confusing: Which logo do they need? Which authority should they go to?

There are already efforts by international bodies to harmonise standards, and new technologies like blockchain could support traceability, so consumers can see exactly where a product came from and how it was handled. But we still need political will and consensus to move towards mutual recognition and a global halal mark that is widely trusted.

When a person sees a Halal logo, which should be a global one, they should know what is behind it... otherwise anyone can say my products are Halal, and how can we as consumers be sure?

Question 4:

Do you think that standards or regulations can hinder that, the principle of Halal economy in this country?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

Standards themselves are not the problem; in fact, they are part of the solution. If you look at Europe or the United States, many technical standards – whether ISO or others – are globally recognised. When you see those logos on a product, you immediately understand the level of quality and compliance behind them.

I believe halal certification should follow a similar logic. We need clear, transparent and professional procedures that are recognised beyond national borders. When a consumer sees a halal logo, ideally a global one, they should know exactly what it stands for, who is behind it and how the certification process works.

Without this trust, anyone can simply claim “my product is halal”, and the consumer has no reliable way to verify that. So strong, harmonised standards actually protect the principle of halal: they ensure integrity, prevent misuse of the term and give confidence to both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers.

Halal should be branded and promoted as a high-quality, healthy certificate for not just food products but for cosmetics, pharmaceuticals... If we position it in that premium area, we will not have challenges selling it to Muslims and non-Muslims.

Question 5:

How do you see the future of the Halal economy in Europe amid the growing Muslim consumer base and evolving consumption patterns?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

Europe is an emerging market for halal, not only because of its growing Muslim population but also because many non-Muslims are increasingly interested in quality, ethics and transparency in what they consume.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a good example. Around half of our population is Muslim, but we are a secular state. Halal is not imposed by law; it is a voluntary choice. That gives us a good understanding of how halal can function in a pluralistic European context.

I believe halal should be positioned as a premium quality and health-focused certification – for food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and other products. If we present it mainly as a religious label, some people may feel excluded or resistant. But if we highlight safety, cleanliness, animal welfare and ethical production, halal products can appeal to a much broader audience.

The key will be sophisticated branding, marketing and communication campaigns that explain in simple terms what halal stands for, and also clarify common misconceptions. If we succeed in that, halal can grow as a mainstream, high-value segment in European markets, not just a niche for Muslims.

There is no benefit, no profit without risk... entrepreneurs really need to be prepared to fail. You need to be courageous, you need to work hard, and you need to market and brand your product properly.

Question 6:

What opportunities exist to enhance cooperation between countries with advanced Halal practices and those that are just beginning to develop the sector?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

Cooperation usually starts with trade. Some countries have advanced halal ecosystems and produce high-quality certified goods; others are just developing their capabilities and want to import those products or learn how to produce their own. To make this work, we need smoother trade procedures, fewer bureaucratic obstacles and more efficient logistics so that halal products can move quickly and reliably from producer to consumer.

Beyond trade, the real long-term opportunity lies in transferring knowledge and technology. Conferences, educational programmes, workshops and training sessions can help emerging halal markets learn from more experienced ones. This is not only about technical standards; it is also about building institutions, improving governance and raising overall quality.

For me, halal also carries a moral dimension. It should contribute to greater balance between rich and poor, not just create new billionaires. If cooperation in the halal economy can support fairer trade, better livelihoods for farmers and small producers, and more just distribution of value, then it can become a powerful tool for addressing some of the inequalities we see in the world today.

To have the Mecca Halal Forum and then to have it in London, the centre of global economy, was a bold move but also a very logical place to start... I see this event really growing and evolving globally.

Question 7:

If you would give us an advice for entrepreneurs or young people who would like to start up their projects on Halal and have their own business on Halal, how would you advise them to be in the market?

Mr. Dino Selimović:

Young entrepreneurs today live in a paradox. Thanks to the internet and new technologies, the world is open to them: they can reach global customers from a small office or even from home. But at the same time, they are competing with the entire world, and their ideas can be copied very quickly.

The fundamentals, however, remain the same. Any successful product or service must solve a real problem or meet a clear demand. It needs the right price, strong branding and smart marketing. Public relations, digital communication and storytelling are not luxuries; they are essential tools.

Beyond skills, entrepreneurs need courage. There is no success without risk, and failure is almost always part of the journey. Finding mentors can be extremely valuable – people who have already gone through the process, made mistakes and are now willing to guide others. Small and medium enterprises are the backbone of most economies, so societies should encourage young people to create jobs, not just look for secure government positions.

Finally, even in a halal context, hard work and ethical behaviour go together. Put your trust in God, but also invest in knowledge, discipline and perseverance. Even becoming a successful YouTuber or content creator requires real effort; nothing serious comes overnight.

Halal is becoming a growing business, but first of all it's something that is permissible, and we need to take care of that principle... the Halal industry is going to change in the future and we should be thinking about it right now.

Question 8:

How do you position the first edition of London Halal Forum in London? As it is, it was convened twice in Mecca, but today we are in Europe. And how it can connect halal industries and corporates from different countries in the heart of London.

Mr. Dino Selimović:

I see the London Halal Forum as part of a larger, very thoughtful global vision. After experiencing the earlier editions in Mecca, it was clear that the organisers, under the leadership of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development, were building more than just a series of conferences. They were shaping a modern multilateral platform for the halal economy.

Holding the first two forums in Mecca, the birthplace of Islam, was symbolically and spiritually natural. Moving the event to London, one of the world's leading financial and economic centres, was a bold but logical next step. It signals that halal is not confined to Muslim-majority countries; it is part of the global conversation about ethical and sustainable business.

What excites me most is the plan to develop regional editions – for Europe, Africa and other continents – and to connect them into one network. These events bring together investors, companies, scholars and policymakers who want to engage in halal-certified and ethical trade, and to support each other's growth.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina, being the country in focus at the first London edition was an honour and a chance to present our tourism, investment opportunities and our ambition to serve as a European halal hub.

