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**WOULD A WALL OF SEPARATION HELP?  
CONSTITUTIONAL POSITION AND SOCIAL ROLE OF  
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA  
AND THE PLACE FOR POLITICAL THEOLOGY**

**Abstract:** Due to its rich history, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. After the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), it is established as one country consisting of two entities (Republic of Srpska and Federation of BH) and three “constituent peoples” (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats). Its constitutional system was established as a set of different rules in order to represent each one of these “constituent peoples” and to prevent menaces to democracy or outvoting. Nevertheless, it seems that this constitutional system needs improvement. Since religion and ethnicity are almost empirically equal, it becomes quite interesting to observe that the legislative displays a strong tendency to adopt the principle of accommodation instead of strict separation, when it comes to religious freedoms.

However, on one hand, proponents of secularization emphasize this relation between religion and ethnicity as being one of the main causes for inter-ethnic tensions.

On the other hand, opponents of strict separation invoke their experience with the communist type of secularization as destructive and oversimplified. Their main argument is that secularization, regarded especially as a social concept, does not resolve but rather *silences* identity problems. In each case, whatever constitutional and social solution might be found for the future of the country, the author tries to show that *political theology*, as a critical and engaged approach of the Orthodox Church, must find its place in the day to day life of the Church and in the society.

**Keywords:** *constituent peoples, religious communities, accommodation principle, secularization, political theology*

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*Danubius*, XXXII, Supliment, Galați, 2014, pp. 63-73.

## 1. Introduction: Everything Begins with History

Following one of the most violent and severe wars in Europe after WWII, Bosnia and Herzegovina was established as one country with two federal units (entities); Republic of Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (not to be confused with the entire country which is constitutionally known only as “Bosnia and Herzegovina”). The Dayton (1995)<sup>1</sup> and Paris (1996) Peace Agreements put an end to the war, but none of the sides was pleased with the final solution: Serbs and Croats felt (and most of them still feel) that their right to self-determination and unification with Serbia or Croatia resp. was sacrificed by the International Community for political reasons. On the other hand, both nations were granted the role of “constituent peoples” in the newly founded country, while Serbian part in particular was disputing its autonomy. The Bosniak (Muslim) population was (and still is) unsatisfied with the fact that state is not a centralized one, but was (and still is) satisfied that it is *one* state after all.<sup>2</sup> These causes still remain a basic topic in

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**General note:** since this paper is written primarily for an international scientific and non-scientific audience, I tried as much as possible to rely on bibliographical references which are internationally available. That is the main reason why I refer to web references, especially in the case of such documents as the Dayton Agreement and various constitutional acts in the BH legislation. References given in this article may enable the reader to directly access these documents, check scientific accuracy and, possibly to further research. I believe that, as there are some reasonable concerns about the scientific reliability of web resources in the international scientific community, in 2013 it seems obvious that web resources are as reliable (or unreliable), verifiable (or unverifiable) as any other resource. I will also rely mainly on resources written in English.

<sup>1</sup> “Dayton Peace Agreement”, accessed July 10, 2013, [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BA\\_951121\\_DaytonAgreement.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BA_951121_DaytonAgreement.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The causes of wars remain a topic of intense political tensions even today so it makes it very difficult to deal with this issue “scientifically”, especially because the perspective on some events, even “scientific” ones, changes according to the cultural and other standpoints of a historian. That is why there is virtually no single “*neutral*” book written about the breakdown of Yugoslavia, at least not to my knowledge. Even the historical books who tend to be descriptive, like John Lampe’s, *Yugoslavia as History (Twice There was a Country)*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000) did not manage to avoid favouritism in their *description*. Although it may be argued that his account of the Yugoslav wars is affected by his view on the civilization interactions, I find the version of Samuel Huntington, presented in his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2003), 260-63 to be the most informative one. I want to prevent any other interpretation of this recalling of mine on Huntington’s work by saying that I make reference to his work only on an informative level. As a Christian Orthodox and thinker, I do not believe that complicated existential experiences such as wars could be explained only by *one* predominant hermeneutical key, called either “clash” or “cooperation” of civilization or anything else. From my perspective, I would also have much to say about Huntington’s description and classification of the Christian Orthodox Culture.

BH political agenda even 17 years after the war is over. The new generations who were born during the war or after it was ended, grew up with the same problems which made my generation suffer, watching our fathers going to war and our mothers praying for their return.

The Peace Agreement was made on one particular criterion: that none of the sides will get all they demand and that they will not lose everything they have. It was a good foundation for that moment in history. Nevertheless, the very fact that it was a compromise proved to be the main reason why political elites of all three nations (ethnicities) have tried to reach their goals through *political activism*. What was lost in the war might be regained during the peace and vice-versa.

Due to its history and geography, the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, has always been a multi-religious and multi-ethnic one (if we could apply the contemporary notion of "nation" or "ethnicity" to any society prior to the period of European national romanticism). Even before the Slavs came to the Balkan Peninsula, the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina was a border of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires (from 395 AD onwards). Later, in the Middle Ages, the new formed Slavic states were influenced by both the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. Slavs formed their own culture based on their own language in 9<sup>th</sup> century but their church relations with Constantinople and Rome were far more than spiritual<sup>3</sup>.

When in 1054, the Christian East and West finally split, the victims were not the Catalonian pirates nor the Russian princes, but south Slavic population who suddenly had to choose between two equally close (or distant) ecclesiastical and cultural centers. Later, both Christian communities, Orthodox and Catholic, regretted the history of conflict at the arrival of the Ottoman Empire. Together with the Ottomans, Islam came to Bosnia and Herzegovina and thus all three major religious communities were formed in BH before the ending of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They had to find their way to survive under a foreign occupation (Ottoman and Habsburg) and to survive *with or without another* for, although historical

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Nevertheless, it seems to me that precisely his eagerness to present each side of the Yugoslav wars leads to *the most balanced description*. For instance, his insistence on the participation of foreign war volunteers in the Bosnian war gives account on all three sides, while almost every other historian only emphasizes the participation of the *other side's* "mercenaries". It is obvious for everyone who was at that time in Bosnia that *there were not that many volunteers* in the War - Huntington emphasized their role in order to prove his points, but the fact remains that only Huntington found it important to explain that *all* sides had their "helpers from the outside". For the history of Yugoslav society, it might be very helpful to read Branislav Radeljic, *Europe and the Collapse of Yugoslavia* (I.B. Tauris: London, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> See Dimitri Obolenski, *Byzantium and the Slavs* (St Vladimir Orthodox Press, 1994), 205 ff.

circumstances were changing in favor of one of the communities, there was never a point when one community had monopoly over the entire country.

Moreover, despite religious differences, common biological roots, language, material culture and mentality had always formed the basis for inter-religious interactions and influences. The same tension of being distant and yet close, different from and different for, suspicious and attracted - it could be seen as one of the constant characteristics of the BH life and history. Both Yugoslav projects (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918-1945<sup>4</sup>; Socialist Yugoslavia 1945-1990<sup>5</sup>) failed to overcome the negative side of that ambivalent feeling. The “Brotherhood and Unity” policy failed the test of history. Will the new state, based on war trauma, deprived of the very illusion that “Brotherhood and Unity” are possible and yet composed by the same large ethnicities which formed Yugoslavia manage to survive?

## **2. Constitutional Structure of BH and “constituent peoples”**

According to the preamble of BH Constitution (which is an integrated part of Dayton Agreement and therefore cannot be changed)<sup>6</sup>, “Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs”, are “constituent peoples (along with Others)”<sup>7</sup>. Although the Preamble, as well as the entire Constitution was “based on respect for human dignity, liberty, and equality”<sup>8</sup>, the specific naming of the three nationalities as constituent peoples has both a historical and constitutional significance. The historical one consists of the traumatic history of Yugoslavia’s break, which started by omitting the status of the Serbs as a constituent people in the first Croatian post-communist Constitution (1991), which was one of the most reliable signs that the relations between Croats and Serbs would lead to the conflict. Secondly, naming some nation “constituent” means that nothing in this country can be done without prior consent of that nation. In practice, in the BH context, that means that every decision must be approved by the elected representatives of each one of the constituent peoples. Thus, BH, in

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<sup>4</sup> The first official name of the country was “The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes”, but from 1921 the name was officially changed to “The Kingdom of Yugoslavia”.

<sup>5</sup> From 1945 to 1963 officially “The Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia” and from 1963 to 1991, “The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”.

<sup>6</sup> The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is an integral part of the Dayton Peace Agreement (technically, it is the Annex 4 of the Agreement). Political and legal significance of that fact must be stressed upon. As an integral part of the peace agreement, it cannot be changed without prior consent of all parties and, specially, without the consent of the constituent peoples.

<sup>7</sup> “Bosnia and Herzegovina – Constitution”, accessed July 8, 2013, [http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/bk00000\\_.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/bk00000_.html).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

addition to the “usual” *trias politica* system, also has different checks and balances which prove that none of the constituent ethnicities could be marginalized. The country has tripartite Presidency instead of one president (actually, one of the co-presidents is only a ceremonial president according to the rotation principle) and each important decision must be approved by consensus. In the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Nations, there are also quotas required according to the representation principle. The same situation could be found in the Constitutional Court.

This system was created with the evident purpose of giving all constituent peoples a sense of control and security. However, things become very complicated when a new law needs to be approved. Checks and balances sometimes prolong legal procedures very much. The situation is especially complicated in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where, along with the State and Entity level, there are 10 cantons which are, in fact, states with own Government, Police, Education and Healthcare system. Political games and constitutional reforms entered the new phase when, in the winter of 2009, the European Court for Human Rights proclaimed that in the case *Seidic/Finci vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina*<sup>9</sup>, rights of “Others” (people not belonging to constituent populations) were jeopardized by the quota/veto system and other legal provisions. That game, the Game of Constitution, is still going on with various outcomes and with players (local politicians) and referees (international politicians) playing often dirty.

### **3. Social Role of Religion(s) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Their Constitutional Position**

The situation becomes even more interesting when we add religion(s). Since three religions (Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam) were the pillars on which the same population formed three different nationalities/ethnicities, there is a general identity of national and religious identity. Orthodox Christians and Serbs are interchangeable, just like Catholics and Croats or Muslims and Bosniaks. Although BH is quite a religious country in terms of the population practicing their religion, there are also many citizens who would declare themselves as belonging to a religious community, although they do not believe in the basic truths of that religion or they do not believe in God at all. You can be an “Orthodox” or “Muslim” atheist not just in Northern Ireland, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina, too.

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<sup>9</sup> Marko Milanovic, “Sejdic and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *American Journal of International Law* 104 (2010), accessed July 8, 2013, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1672883](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1672883).

Religion is also the most significant social factor in BH. Although widely misunderstood as “traditionalism” or “patrimonial folklore”, religion plays an important role in the everyday life of most of the population of BH. Religious institutions are amongst the most respected in the society. Religious holidays and feasts are an inseparable part of family life. Religion is also an important factor in the political life: some of the most important religious figures, like former Reis-ul-Ulema (Grand Mufti) Mustafa ef. Ceric, played rather active roles in political life of the country. On the local level, it is also quite common knowledge that political parties, even with a “Social Democrat” profile, need an alliance with the local clergy in order to get a better “electoral basis”. The eternal question: *to which extent is religion being used for political purposes and to which extent religious leaders like this alliance*, remains opened. Whatever the answer to this question may be, religion cannot be neglected as a sociopolitical force and as an everyday experience.

Hence, it could be expected that, although secular in its constitutional structure, BH opts for an accommodation principle in the State-Religious Communities relation. The Constitution of BH contains an Enumeration of rights amongst which “freedom of thought, conscience, and religion” is promised (Article 4, Paragraph 3.g)<sup>10</sup>. The Constitution of the Republic of Srpska is more specific in its provisions. Article 10 guarantees human rights to our citizens “irrespective of their race, sex, language, national or social origin, religion, education, material standing, political or other conviction, social status or any other personal circumstance”.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Article 28 specifically refers to the freedom of religious conviction: “Freedom of religion shall be guaranteed. Religious communities shall be equal before the law and free to manage their religious affairs and practice religious services. They may open religious schools and conduct religious education in all schools at all levels of education; they may engage in commercial activities, receive gifts, establish and manage legacies, in accordance with the law. The Serbian Orthodox Church shall be the church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion.”<sup>12</sup>

The openness of our legislature to the accommodation principle could be easily noticed from the article quoted above, just like a semi-Constantine relation with the Church: the Serbian Orthodox Church is mentioned there as “the Church of the Serb people and other people of Orthodox religion” which actually has neither constitutional value (what are the exact constitutional consequence of this rather casual mentioning of the SOC?) nor it has any ecclesiastic value (SOC was

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<sup>10</sup> “Bosnia and Herzegovina – Constitution.”

<sup>11</sup> “Constitution of Republika Srpska”, accessed July 8, 2013, <http://www.vijecenarodars.net/materijali/constitution.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

and still is the Church of the Serb people and of all Orthodox believers with or without being mentioned as such in the Constitution). Nevertheless, *making it sound religious and patriotic* is one of the best “abilities” of BH politicians. In each case, it is obvious that the RS Constitution gives a broad range of social activities to religious communities, which is evidently a socially mature decision having in mind a social presence of religions. The Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina includes the “freedom of religion” in Article 2.<sup>13</sup>

But the real legal incarnation of the accommodation principle could be found in the state *Law on religious freedoms and legal status of Churches and religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.<sup>14</sup> The Law recognizes four existing communities (Serbian Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Islamic Community and Jewish Community) as “traditional religious communities” which has given them only one “advantage” over others: they did not have to apply for registration in the Central Register of Religious Communities of the Ministry of Justice. Other religious communities were required to do so, but the Law had set rather low “quota” for new registrations: 300 adult citizens of BH.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that, among other documents required for registration, a newly-registering community must provide “a document about its official religious doctrine”.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the Law did not favor any religious community neither has it given any religious community a specific social or political role. For instance, it did not declare any religious holiday as an official holiday in any part of the country.

#### 4. Would more Secularism Help – Lesions from Communist Past

With so much political tension and so much accommodation principle in the BH legislative, it became quite common for most of the international political personalities and for some local politicians to consider that *more secularism would calm down the country*. The rationale of the proponents of the “more solid wall of Separation” is that, if religions would be less present in society, there would be fewer tensions in politics. Of course, this program also includes not just a political process, but social measures as well. The replacement of Religious education, given by religious communities by teaching a “Culture of religions” class, using religious sociologists as teachers, was just one of such moves. Generally, the

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<sup>13</sup> “*Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 18 March 1994,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b56e4.html>.

<sup>14</sup> “Zakon o slobodi vjere i pravnom položaju crkava i vjerskih zajednica u Bosni i Hercegovini,” accessed July 13, 2013, [http://www.mpr.gov.ba/biblioteka/zakoni/ bs/ZAKON%20o%20slobodi%20vjere.pdf](http://www.mpr.gov.ba/biblioteka/zakoni/bs/ZAKON%20o%20slobodi%20vjere.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

project failed not only because the religious communities opposed to it, but because its exact intention was *to compete* with Religious Education instead of giving wider insight *along with* Religious Education.

One of the most interesting characteristics of former Yugoslav societies is “sudden” conversion of former leading Communists to Social Democrats and, very often, Neoliberals.<sup>17</sup> While replacing “dictatorship of proletarians” for the “human rights” discourse, most of these politicians and their political inheritors remained loyal to the concept of *strict separation between the Community and the State*. It seems that their political philosophy/ideology adopted a new form which is equally critical towards the role for religion in society. However, this conversion, just like the conversion of former communists to nationalists and religious fanatics, show how (in)sincere was their old “faith” and how opportunistic is the new one. Still, the new wave of economical and political problems, as well as the nostalgic sentiment towards the times of relative wealth and social stability under communism give more public presence and sympathy for this alternative vision of society.

As much as secularism might seem logical, perhaps just in some future will it come to be considered as any kind of a legitimate solution. There are at least two reasons for that:

The first is *the historical experience*. Secularization in its most radical form (as the total “exile” of religion from public space) was one of the hallmarks of Communism. We live in era in which influential members of the clergy still remember what was it like to be a priest or imam in Tito’s “liberal” Yugoslavia: when instead of the Secretary for relations with Religions (affiliated to the Ministry of Education and Culture) you had a “Commission” for the same purpose (affiliated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs i.e. Police); when you had to file a report to the local policemen about everything you said and did. So, the wounds of *militant* secularism are still too fresh as to let other types of secularism be taken in consideration.

The second important reason for which secularism cannot resolve the problem of interfaith relations is given by the fact that it is based on the premise that *ignoring the problem for some time might actually resolve it*. Again, historically speaking, it favors a social model which is impossible in BH’s historical and political conditions. History has proven that if you try to minimize the role of religions in the social life, they will still survive, but put on the margins of society, they might contribute to social explosion. The Yugoslav experiment has

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<sup>17</sup> Even Slovenian aspect of Yugoslav story can tell the same thing: the first Slovenian politician who won the presidency was Milan Kucan, notable Communist leader who, however, changed red for blue-with-golden stars flag quite rapidly in the period 1986-1991. See, Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 360.



shown that, if you constantly put religious and ethnic identities under the carpet, the dust will eventually ruin the carpet. The question also remains whether the powder you put under the carpet is just dust or gun-powder. Although to some extent it should be recommended that the accommodation principle should be exploited more cautiously in BH, the historical experience and (even) present situation do not give way for any other constitutional or social model of the State-Community relation. The opportunity that all of us might for moment “close our eyes” to the fact that we are Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim will not change the fact what we are when we open our eyes. Neither *pretending that we are not* any of that will do us any good. We are what we are. We must find a way to decrease the political usefulness of that fragile yet important aspect of our identity.

### **5. Political elite with vision and Political Theology for Communities**

In *Origins of Political Order*, Francis Fukuyama tried to explain how political institutions in the West were made and what historical, economical and social reasons were needed to make Western societies the most historically successful. How one society becomes democratic and comfortable to live in? Or, as he put it, by quoting Pritchett and Woolcock, “how to get to Denmark”.<sup>18</sup> Well, Bosnia and Herzegovina will never get to Denmark and in some sense it is better this way. But how can this country become a less stressful place to live and what is the role of political elites and religious communities in this context?

It is obvious that the political elite lack vision. It is too fragile to the everyday political dirt because it does not know any better. All ideologies are gone because they were made ad-hoc for special elections-to-elections purposes and not in order to make the country and its entities better. The same problem remains when it comes to the interaction between politics and religion. Political factors *use* religion for their own purposes and representatives of religious communities often *accept* that position for gaining some small favor or because of the fear of that old paradigm - “society which overcame religion” might be restored. It is obvious that *both* sides need to reconsider their positions.

Since I am not an expert in political science, I will refrain myself from giving advices to politicians. Maybe just one: some vision and statesman-hood would not kill you, you know? Our institutions should serve us and make us feel proud and there is no proud in seeing your most honest feelings being used for someone’s most dishonest ones.

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order from Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York, 2012), 14.

Moreover, I am an Orthodox Priest, a Theologian, professor and, above all, a father of two children (so far). That means that I want a better future for them, but the future in which all of our identities could be preserved and improved. As an Orthodox Christian, and as a believer, I stand for a new *Political Theology*.<sup>19</sup> I think that there is a far better place for us, as the Orthodox Church, to speak and to act than only on politicized forums. We are here to preserve our identity. But we will better preserve it if we start to openly testify Christ's presence amongst those who suffer on social margins, if we openly stand for what we believe, even *if* it will not be pleasant to hear for politicians. If we, like all Old Testament prophets, pay attention to injustice among our "New Israel", if we, like Christ told us, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17) and then fulfill the Gospel as our social program, instead of politicized theology which insists that the supreme ontological value lies on the "evil of the day", we should find strength to speak about modernity with the courage of Eternity, knowing that what really is relevant is *yet to come*. Thus, only by being grounded in the vision of permanent values, we will be able to speak about everyday events. Otherwise, we will suffer the problem of irrelevance. We should address all those people for whom we serve the mass, from civil authorities to "the sick and the suffering, for captives and their salvation".<sup>20</sup> Or, maybe, we should begin from "the sick and the suffering, for captives and their salvation" and then address the civil authorities. New Political, yet not *politicized* theology should be our voice in the future.

## Conclusion

One of the most evident causes for which people trust more their religious communities than politicians is because religious communities have shown the ability to survive for centuries under foreign occupations while political structures collapsed. It means they are *stable*. Can a state benefit from that stability? It can. But it must firstly quit the every-day political misuse of religion for small favors and cheap points. On the other hand, religions must find their intellectual and social force, or they must rather intellectually shape their view and their social responsibility. In such circumstances, the State could benefit from the stable pillars of its identities and could the religious communities raise their voice without fearing that the voice could be misused by politicians or muted by their own crisis of social relevance.

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<sup>19</sup> More about my view on the foundations of one Orthodox Political Theology is given Darko Djogo, "Trinity, Society and Political Theology," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 3:2 (2012): 89-112, accessed July 13, 2013, <http://orthodox-theology.com/media/PDF/IJOT2.2012/Djogo.Trinity.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church, according to the use at the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Diocese of North America*, 2012, 30

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