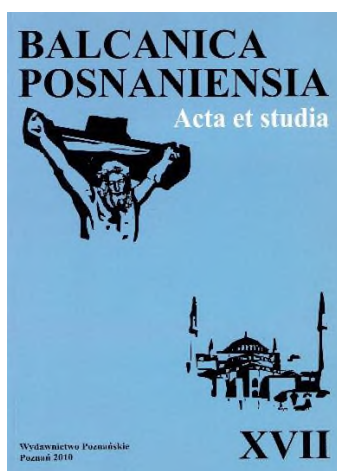




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THE CONFESSIONAL DIVERSITIES: ADVANTAGE OR DISADVANTAGE FOR THE INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Introduction

"United Europe" was the motif represented by Jean Monnet, Rober Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and many other statesmen which life-desire was integrated, united Europe. The World Wars, conflicts among the nations, big economic crises and social disasters were all events which destroyed the European continent and generated big instability, in and among the European states.

The European Union is an international entity which is constitute with the Maas-tricht treaty – 1993, and The European Community is established few years after World War II with the Treaty establishing a European coal and steel community (1951, Paris), Treaty establishing a European economic community (1957, Rome) and Treaty establishing a European atomic agency (1957, Rome).

The membership of the candidate and potential candidate countries in The European Union is determined as a main strategic priority, and consequently all of the administrative, judicial, executive, human and infrastructural capacities are pointed to this essential goal. But the European "road" is full of different obstacles and challenges, so fulfilling of many criteria and standards, which are incorporated in *acquis communautaire* is needed. The quality, dynamics and the intensity of the euro-integration process of the candidate and potential candidate countries will depend on the international political constellation, on the fulfilling of the criteria established by EU, on the enlargement

policy which will be promoted by the Union, but mostly on the solving of the opened political questions which are obstacles for Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo on their way towards membership in EU.

But there is a big discrepancy between the desire and the real possibility to be part of the European Union, in each of the candidate countries. Unfortunately, we have to ascertain that the multidimensional capacities of the Balkan states does not correspond with the principles which are typical for a modern Europe. That automatically does not mean that the European gates for the Balkans are closed, but means that fulfilling of many criteria (Copenhagen are the most important ones) and reaching many standards, which are established by the European Union, is necessary.

The approximation of the Western Balkans' countries to the European Union means, not only adoption, and implementation of the so-called *acquis communautaire*, but also creating a mentality which is compatible with the mentality of the citizens of the member states in EU. The rules and procedures without the emotive components are like a shape with no contents, and the emotions without the shape are like an amorphous mass. For these reasons, a dialectical unanimity of the informal and formal segments of the integration processes for the countries from Western Balkans is needed, so they can easily become part of the European Union.

In May 1999, the European Commission had established a model for cooperation among the EU and the Western Balkans' countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, today Kosovo). The Process for Stabilization and Association (PSA) was incorporated in the frame of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and it's essence is through concluding Agreements for Stabilization and Association, similar as the EUROPA Agreements, made with the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, to establish a type of bilateral agreements with SEE countries. The possibility for creating an institutional relationship between EU and Kosovo remains open, but it depends on the political, economical and other performances, and also depends on its entrance in the United Nations (UN).

The final goal of the European Union is to unify all of the European countries in one entity. For these reasons, it launches many agreements, instruments, initiatives, partnerships and programs to accelerate the way of the potential candidate countries to the membership in the EU. The most frequent manner of cooperation between European Union and the countries which have an intention to become its' members, is by making bilateral agreements (EC and the member states – potential candidate countries) known as Association agreements or Stabilization and Association agreements.¹

The confessional structure in the countries of the Western Balkans is very complex. Due to the national histories of all these countries, and also due to the political, economical and cultural constelations and also migrations, there is emphasized confessional diversity characterising the Western Balkans' countries. There are numerous advantages and disadvantages of the mixed religious structure in the countries of the Western Balkans, which is an essential goal of this paper.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/index_en.htm, 2009.

However, regarding the process of the integration of the countries from the Western Balkans into the European Union, a consensus among all religious groups in these countries must be met, because every interconfessional anomaly can be very serious obstacle for the entrance of each country into the EU. For these reasons, only strong and sincere interconfessional dialogue, close cooperation between the religious groups, high level of mutual tolerance, and "speaking with one voice" about the eurointegration processes can be a precondition for a successful progress of Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in their way towards EU.

Confessional structure in the countries of the Western Balkans

Croatia

Croatia is inhabited mostly by Croats (89.6%), while minority groups include Serbs (4.5%), Bosniaks, Hungarians, Italians, Slovenes, Germans, Czechs, Romani people and others (5.9%). For the most of the 20th century the population of Croatia has been rising from 3,430,270 in 1931 to 4,784,265 in 1991. The natural growth rate of the population is currently negative with the demographic transition completed in the 1970s. Average life expectancy is 75.1 years, and the literacy rate is 98.1%. During recent years Croatian government is pressured each year to add 40% to work permit quotas for foreign workers and in accordance with its immigration policy it is trying to entice emigrants to return. The main religions of Croatia are Roman Catholic 88%, Orthodox 4.4%, other Christian 0.4%, Muslim 1.3%, other and unspecified 0.9%, none 5.2%. During the last decade of the 20th century the population of Croatia has been stagnating because of Croatian War of Independence. During the 1991-95 war, large sections of the population were displaced and emigration increased. In 1991, during the war campaign started by rebel Serb forces more than 80,000 Croats were forced out of their homes or fled the violence. During the final days of the war in 1995, more than 120,000 Serbs, and perhaps as many as 200,000 fled Croatia due to a liberation of occupied areas by Croatian forces. Only a small fraction of Serbs and Croats have returned to their homes since 1995, according to the Human Rights Watch.

Macedonia

The majority (64.7%) of the population belongs to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. It declared autocephaly in 1968, though that is still not recognised by the Serbian and other Eastern Orthodox Churches, although the Archbishop's Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church has recognised the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Muslims comprise 33.3% of the population and other Christian denominations comprise 0.37%. The remainder (1.63%) is recorded as "unspecified" in the 2002 national census. Most of the native Albanians, Turks and Bosniaks are Muslims, as are a minority of the country's ethnic Macedonian population, known as Macedonian Muslims. Altogether, there are more than 1200 churches and 400 mosques in the country. The Orthodox and Islamic religious communities have

secondary religion schools in Skopje. There is an Orthodox theological college in the capital. Macedonia has the largest proportion of Muslims of any country in Europe after Turkey, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Macedonian Orthodox Church is the dominant church in the country. It has 10 provinces (seven in the country and three abroad), 10 bishops, and about 350 priests.² Macedonians, who are the majority of the population, are generally Orthodox Christians. A total of 30,000 people are baptised in all the provinces every year. The church has issues with the Serbian Orthodox Church after the separation and self-declaration of autocephaly (not recognised by any other Orthodox church) in 1967. However, the Archbishop's Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church, with Decision No. 06/1959, has recognised the autonomy (self-dependence) of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. After the negotiations between the two churches were suspended, the Serbian Orthodox Church recognised a group led by Zoran Vraniškovski (also known as Archbishop Jovan of Ohrid, a former Macedonian church bishop, as the Archbishop of Ohrid. The reaction of the Macedonian Orthodox Church was to cut off all relations with the new Ohrid Archbishopric and to prevent bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church from entering Macedonia. Bishop Jovan was jailed for 18 months for "defaming the Macedonian Orthodox church and harming the religious feelings of local citizens" by distributing Serbian Orthodox church calendars and pamphlets. Approximately 33% of Macedonia's total population are adherents of Islam. It has the fourth largest Muslim population in Europe by percentage after Kosovo (90%), Albania (70%), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (48%). Some northwestern and western regions have Muslim majorities. Most Muslims are Albanian, Turkish, or Roma, although some are Macedonian Muslims. According to the 2002 census, there are about 600,000 Muslims in Macedonia. The Albanian Muslims live mostly in the Polog and western regions of the country. The Turkish population is scattered throughout the country, but mostly in the west. The Macedonian Byzantine Catholic Church has approximately 11,000 adherents in Macedonia. The Church was established in 1918, and is made up mostly of converts to Catholicism and their descendants. The Church is of the Byzantine Rite and is in communion with the Roman and Eastern Catholic Churches. Its liturgical worship is performed in Macedonian. There is a small Protestant community. The most famous Protestant in the country is the former president Boris Trajkovski. He was from the Methodist Community, which is the largest and oldest Protestant Church in the Republic, dating back to the late 19th century. Since the 1980s the small Protestant community has grown, partly through new confidence and partly with outside missionary help. The Macedonian Jewish community, which numbered some 7,200 people on the eve of World War II, was almost entirely destroyed during the War, with only 2% of Macedonian Jews surviving the Holocaust. After their liberation and the end of the War, most opted to emigrate to Israel. Today, the country's Jewish community numbers approximately 200 persons, almost all of whom live in Skopje. Most Macedonian Jews are Sephardic – the descendants of 15th century refugees who had fled the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.

² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_\(country\)#Religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_(country)#Religion), 2009

Albania

Although most Albanians still associate themselves with religious groups like Muslims and Christians, some of them do not participate in religious services. According to the information on internet, this is the approximately estimated religious structure in Albania (no official date available)

30-35%	Orthodox Christians
50-55%	Muslims (Sunni)
15%	Roman Catholics
1.27%	Bektashi
0.6%	Christian Protestants
0.1%	Evangelist
0.6%	Others

After independence (1912) from the Ottoman Empire, the Albanian republican, monarchic and later communist regimes followed a systematic policy of separating religion from official functions and cultural life. Albania never had an official state religion either as a republic or as a kingdom. In the 20th century, the clergy of all faiths was weakened under the monarchy, and ultimately eradicated during the 1940s and 1950s, under the state policy of obliterating all organized religion from Albanian territories. Christianity spread in urban centers in the region of Albania during the later period of the Roman Empire. It had to compete up to the Middle Ages with native Illyrian paganism and culture. The steady growth of the Christian community in Dyrrhachium (the Roman name for Epidamnus) led to the creation of a local bishopric in 58 AD. Later, episcopal seats were established in Apollonia, Buthrotum (modern Butrint), and Scodra (modern Shkodra). After the division of the Roman Empire in 395, Albania fell administratively under the umbrella of the Eastern Roman Empire, but its Christians remained ecclesiastically dependent on Rome. Six centuries later, as a result of the final schism of 1054 between the Western and Eastern churches, the Christians in southern Albania came under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, and those in the north under the purview of the Pope in Rome. The Communist regime that took control of Albania after World War II suppressed religious observance and institutions and entirely banned religion to the point where Albania was officially declared to be the world's first atheist state. Religious freedom has returned to Albania since the regime's change in 1992. Albanian Muslim (65-70%) are found throughout the country whereas Orthodox Christians (20-25%) are concentrated in the south and Roman Catholics (10%) are found in the north of the country. No reliable data are available on active participation in formal religious services, and estimates range from 25 to 40%.

Serbia

For centuries straddling the religious boundary between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, joined up later by Islam, Serbia remains one of the most diverse countries on the continent. Centuries on, different regions of Serbia remain heavily cos-

mopolitan: Vojvodina province is 25% Catholic or Protestant, while Central Serbia and Belgrade regions are over 90% Orthodox Christian. Kosovo consists of a 90% Albanian Muslim majority. Among the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Serbian Orthodox Church is the westernmost. According to the 2002 Census, 82% of the population of Serbia (excluding Kosovo) or 6,2 million people declared their nationality as Serbian, who are overwhelmingly adherents of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Other Orthodox Christian communities in Serbia include Montenegrins, Romanians/Vlachs, Macedonians, Bulgarians. Together they comprise about 84% of the entire population. Catholicism is mostly present in Vojvodina (mainly in its northern part), where almost 20% of the regional population (minority ethnic groups such as the Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Bunjevci, Czechs belong to this Christian denomination. There are an estimated 433,000 baptized Catholics in Serbia, roughly 6.2% of the population, mostly in northern Serbia. Protestantism accounts for about 1.5% of the country's population. Islam has a strong historic following in the southern regions of Serbia – Raska and several municipalities in the south-east. Bosniaks are the largest Muslim community in Serbia at about 140,000 (2%), followed by Albanians (1%), Turks, Arabs. With the exile of Jews from Spain during the infamous Inquisition era, thousands of escaping families and individuals made their way through Europe to the Balkans. A goodly number settled in Serbia and became part of the general population. They were well accepted and during the ensuing generations the majority assimilated or became traditional or secular, rather than remain orthodox Jews as had been the original immigrants. Later on the wars that ravaged the region resulted in a great part of the Serbian Jewish population emigrating from Europe.

Montenegro

Most Montenegrin inhabitants are Orthodox Christians, followers of the Serbian Orthodox Church's Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. The religious institutions all have guaranteed rights and are separate from the state. There is a sizeable number of Sunni Muslims in Montenegro that maintain their own Islamic Community of Montenegro. There is also a small Roman Catholic population, divided between the Archdiocese of Antivari headed by Primate of Serbia and the Diocese of Kotor that is a part of the Church of Croatia. Religious determination according to the census:

Table 1: Confessional structure in Montenegro, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montenegro>
#Religion

	Number	%
Total	620,145	100
Orthodox	460,383	74.24
Muslim	110,034	17.74
Roman Catholic	21,972	3.54
Other	27,756	4.48

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia is home to three ethnic “constituent peoples”: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. Tensions between the three constitutional peoples remain high and often provoke political disagreements. A Y-chromosome haplogroups study published in 2005 found that “three main groups of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in spite of some quantitative differences, share a large fraction of the same ancient gene pool distinctive for the Balkan area.” According to the 1991 census, Bosnia and Herzegovina had a population of 4,377,033. Ethnically, 1,902,956 (43%) were Bosniak, 1,366,104 (31%) Serbs, and 760,852 (17%) Croats, with 242,682 (6%) Yugoslavs. The remaining 2% of the population – numbering 104,439 – consisted of various other ethnicities. According to 2000 data from the CIA World Factbook, Bosnia’s largest ethnic groups are Bosniaks (48%), Serbs (37%) and Croats (14%). There is a strong correlation between ethnic identity and religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Muslims constitute 45% of the population, Serb Orthodox 36%, Roman Catholics 15%, and other groups, including Jews and Protestants, 4%. Large population migrations during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s have caused demographic shifts in the country. No census has been taken since 1991, and political disagreements have made it impossible to organize one. Nevertheless, a census has been planned for the year 2011. Since censuses are the only statistical, inclusive, and objective way to analyze demographics, almost all of the post-war data is simply an estimate. Most sources, however, estimate the population to be about four million, representing a decrease of 350,000 since 1991.

Kosovo

Islam (mostly Sunni, with a Bektashi minority) is the predominant religion in Kosovo, brought into the region with the Ottoman conquest in the 15th century and now nominally professed by most of the ethnic Albanians, by the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and by some of the Roma/Ashkali – “Egyptian” community. Islam, however, hasn’t saturated the Kosovar society, which remains largely secular. About three percent of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo remain Roman Catholic despite centuries of the Ottoman rule. The Serb population, estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 persons, is largely Serbian Orthodox. Kosovo is densely covered by numerous Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries. Some 140 churches are reported to have been destroyed and partly looted for the black market in the 1999 to 2004 period, of these 30 in a single outburst of violence in March 2004.

Interaction between religion, politics and the process of eurointegration of the countries from the Western Balkans

In this context, we must not omit the organic connection and interaction between the religion and politics in South-Eastern Europe, i.e. the countries from the Western Balkans. Like other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Poland, Bulgaria, Russia), the “return” to religion of the Western Balkans’ countries populations took place during a long-lasting economic, social and political crisis.

The shift towards traditional religion and conservative faith ("ecclesiastic nationalism") emerged as an important factor of preservation for the ethnic, cultural and historical identities of these nations. Religion was thus given a new role – turning from a negative into a positive social force – but was still heavily misused and misinterpreted in order to serve political power.³ This trend continued and was further aggravated during the periods of war. Despite numerous joint public calls for peace and dialogue, religious communities and their leaders in the Western Balkans have failed to distance themselves from nationalist propaganda and war ideologies. As many experts suggest, it is not enough to examine what they have done in the 90s and subsequently for reconciliation and conflict resolution, but also what they have not done or failed to do. The continuous silence of certain religious establishments regarding the crimes committed "in the name of their faith" proves that responsibility for inter-ethnic and interreligious hatred and violence in this region should be thoroughly researched. However, it is clear that the ex-Yugoslav wars were not of religious nature, although religion played an important role as the basis for fresh identity struggles and nationalist politics. Interestingly enough, religion is barely mentioned in the official documents of the stabilisation process in South-Eastern Europe. For instance, religion is only briefly referred to in the Dayton agreement that put an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and is altogether absent from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Yet the role of religions in the region's sociopolitical changes is far from marginal, as their presence in the political arena remains highly influential and often controversial. Territorial claims of predominant ethno-religious groups are still being expressed though inappropriate, exaggerated and aggressive – in style and size – religious objects and landmarks. Newly-erected colossal church towers and minarets, crosses on top of hills and similar architectonic rampages stand out as obvious examples of the misuse of religion for ethno-political purposes. Religious concerts en masse have become an interesting new strategy for religious communities to "send the right message" and are often staged a few days before elections or other politically important events. They are also used to counter the views within a given faith-based community that differ from the official line. In spite of such tendencies, religious pluralism in key concepts, practices and communities is increasingly present in all religious communities in the Western Balkans. While communities are becoming more diverse, there is a growing need for both intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue in the Balkans, as in most parts of the world, remains too theological and abstract. It would be much more useful to address current and concrete issues to help with reconciliation and acceptance of the past. Recent studies show that this gap is particularly wide when it comes to the promotion and enjoyment of human rights and freedoms, which some local theologians denounce as "a religion of its own." While most of the mainstream religious communities prefer not to talk publicly about the "hot issues" in this respect, such as the rights and freedoms based on one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, in reality their practice and behaviour are often among the most blatant

³ V. Hamzic, *Transitional religion in the Western Balkans*, "Shiftmag", Issue No. 3, 2007, pp. 1-2.

examples of discrimination and oppression against those people whose rights are "not to be discussed." Communities, however, willingly include the international human rights standards in their rhetoric when they demand their own rights, as in the case of the restitution of church property, although the charters and declarations they call upon usually contain references to the other non-religious rights they are not at ease with. The transitional societies of the Western Balkans have long been under the influence of nationalist propaganda, which is of a collectivist nature by definition. Shifting towards euro-integration and mutual cooperation strategies brings an important "wind of change" that elevates the individual as the basis of sustainable social development. The importance of a person's collective background gives way to their personal social value in terms of education, experience, skills and motivation. This new reality affects religion as well. There is an increasing number of believers equipped with their own concept of faith who are the harbingers of pluralism and social change. Their mutual interaction and the further empowerment of civil society and its values will inevitably foster development towards greater religious dialogue, tolerance, equality and inclusion. It is more than sure that the integration of the Western Balkans' countries in the European Union will enhance the interreligious cooperation among the different religious groups and will reduce the tensions which undoubtedly exist at this moment. But, the main question is whether this inter-confessional relations in Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, are advantage or disadvantage for their entrance in the European Union. The answer is very difficult and has two sides, but, anyway, religious conflicts are obstacles for eurointegration and religious cooperation is accelerator of the eurointegration. So, the confessional diversities can not be advantage or disadvantage for eurointegration of the Western Balkans by themselves, i.e. if we have good interreligious relations, it is advantage, and vice versa, bad interreligious relations are disadvantage for the process of the integration of the Western Balkans' countries in the European Union.

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