Islam in Europe through the Balkan Prism

24-26 October 2013

■ Abstracts

Panel I – *The State and Institutional Arrangements*

1. *Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The State and Institutional Arrangements*
    Ahmet Alibašić (Dr.) (University of Sarajevo)

Since the fall of Communism reaching political consensus on anything in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been extremely difficult. However despite various difficulties the issue of state-church relations has so far evaded that destiny. A key to that has been general - albeit not universal - acceptance of the Freedom of Religion as the framework within which solutions for various issues pertaining to religion, religious communities and practice should be looked for. This paper looks at the negotiation process between Bosnian state and the Islamic Community regarding the agreement which should further regulate their mutual relationship. Particular attention will be devoted to the issues that are specific for Muslim religious practice such as halal food, clothing, and Friday-noon prayer and how those will be accounted for the in agreement.

2. *Plural Islam in Albania: Patterns of relationship with the state and religious peace*
    Giovanni Cimbalo (Bologna University)

    Federica Botti (Bologna University)

The protection of individual and collective freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, the regulation of state relations with religious communities in Albania, have found a solution in peculiar legal rules and traditions that in the history of the Albanian people have guaranteed the religious peace. Of great significance was the Albanian legal system resistance to accept the advice of the Venice Commission, Council of Europe and the EU that would rather prefer and have sought to impose the adoption of a single political-legal model for the Balkans, focused on a general law for the protection of religious freedom.

Albanian model dates back to 1923, recognizes the cultural and religious pluralism of society and the opportunity for all religious communities to obtain civil legal personality, now allows cooperation agreements with the various religious communities. The rules put as guarantees of religious freedom those of the general law without any recourse to special rules. What happened was possible because of the plural nature of Balkan Islam which has allowed mutual respect and tolerance, and thanks to the secular and separatist nature of the Albanian state since its origins. State law likewise religious rules, determined by the Statutes that communities have been given themselves and their progressive transformation have played a role in education for coexistence which has allowed, in contrast to what happened in many Balkan countries, religious peace.

The smaller denominations and cults have found, and find now, legal protection, and at present are five the creeds that have concluded agreements with the state and others may do so in the future. The success of the Albanian model warns against standardization policies, substantially octroyé, supported by international bodies end one size fits all legal model/pattern

3. *State-Religion Relations in a Multicultural Society: Case of Republic of Macedonia*
    Engin Ceka (University of Vienna)

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4. *Institutionalizing Islam in Bulgaria: A Historical Overview*
    Ina Merdjanova (Trinity College Dublin)

The establishment of the modern Bulgarian nation-state in 1878 led to a profound transformation of the country's political and human geography. Muslim community faced the challenges of adaptation to a polity with a majority Christian population: initially in the framework of a Christian monarchy and later, after WWII, in a secular state.

This paper will discuss the continuously evolving institutionalization of Islam in Bulgaria from the late 19th century to the present day. It will look at how Islamic institutions were formed and transformed under the influence of three interrelated factors: (a) the political regimes in the country; (b) external regional and international geopolitical influences such as the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the two world wars, the inclusion of Bulgaria in the Soviet sphere of influence, and the post-1989 democratization; and (c) last but not least, the trajectories of internal transformations of the Muslim community itself.

5. *Rhetorical strategies of Kosovo's imams in the fight for "women's rights"*
    Behar Sadriu (SOAS, University of London)

How do Kosovo's most influential Islamic scholars press their claims for greater rights? What sorts of rhetorical devices are used? What can we learn about how these imams view their place in Europe? Such questions will be explored by examining talks given by prominent Albanian imams in Kosovo (three in total) where they demand greater prerogatives, specifically the lifting of the government injunction against the hijab in public schools. Theoretically, this will help us better understand a number of key issues; namely, the ways in which Muslim elite understand their place in Europe and the importance they place on being "from Europe". The hijab restriction brings to light a number of issues that Muslims generally face across the continent – such as discrimination and demonization. Interestingly though, Kosovo is an overwhelmingly majority-Muslim country and one

of only a handful in Europe that places restriction on the hijab. Exploring the rhetorical strategies that prominent imams deploy, will enrich our understanding of how Islamically-rooted actors use democratic discourse to press their demands. More broadly, the paper seeks to question the idea that 'Islam' and 'Europe' are diametrically opposed notions. Islam, it is argued, has a long history of interaction in Europe and imams acutely acknowledge this, not seeking to set 'Islam' apart from 'Europe'. Instead, Imams astutely appropriate liberal democratic notions (as the prevailing political concept in the EU bloc) in order to press their own claims more forcefully. While arguing that imams in Kosovo are acutely aware of their own European identity – and therefore a particular historical experience – this paper does not try to essentialize or 'cement' a quintessentially 'European Islam' in the making. Instead, it takes what the actors themselves say seriously, while at the same time situating events within the larger framework of Islam in Europe, albeit 'through the Balkan prism'.

Panel II – *The Role of Historical Legacies*

1. *Albanian Muslims and a Twentieth Century Disorder*
Isa Blumi (Georgia State University)

Albanians in the Balkans present a unique socio-political case of how an "ethnic" group›s collective identity is not formed by religion alone. Nevertheless, constituting the majority population in the independent and sovereign states of Albania and Kosovo, and large minorities in Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia, scholars and the policy-makers they inform still choose to identify Albanians firstly as Muslims. The fundamental problem as argued in this paper, is this association with faith often obscures other factors that contributed to Albanians› 20th century history of state persecution and the periodic inter-communal conflicts that inform the scholarship on Islam in the Balkans today. When put in the context of a larger survey on European Islam, it is crucial to appreciate that Albanian Muslims constitute a diffuse and complex set of stories that make any understanding of the larger issues dependent on differentiating distinctive Muslim (and ethno-national) communities using various analytical tools. By offering an interdisciplinary approach that brings nuance to otherwise normative historical analysis and social scientific codification, this presentation will suggest that scholars and policy-makers differentiate between Albanian Muslims and situate their political, socioeconomic and spiritual diversity in the larger context of state and regional life over the last century of European and Balkan life. This will thus differentiate between state-driven attempts to institutionalize and standardize religious practices among Albanians from the more recent inroads of Middle Eastern funded «charity» organizations that have created new, but historically unique fissures in recently disrupted communities because of war.

2. *Being Muslim in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Leyla Amzi-Erdoğdular (Columbia University)

This paper examines the ways in which the Muslims defined their religion and religiosity in the aftermath of the Ottoman withdrawal and during the Habsburg period. Faced with a new empire and all it brought, the Muslims were compelled to recast themselves under new socio-cultural circumstances. The Muslims defined, charted and formed their particular path in a European context: They focused on the immediate issues of the community, but also engaged in discourses of modernity and tradition, European ideas, and Pan-Islamic concepts.

This period was characterized by attempts to define "true" Islam and what living and following it meant for the Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina: whether it was ignoring, or embracing the new authority and their religious and educational institutions; holding on to the Ottoman Empire; migration; or asserting a Muslim identity particular to Bosnia Herzegovina. This study challenges the dichotomous split between the traditionalist and reformist Muslims in Bosnian historiography that failed to acknowledge the common origins and influences, rooted in the role Islam played in integrating new concepts and institutions.

By analyzing the Ottoman archival documentation and Bosnian publications of the

period, this paper presents a unique perspective on theoretical debates about Islam as well as its practical aspects in Bosnia Herzegovina. It argues that being Muslim entailed a redefined relationship with the Ottoman Empire and the Caliph, as well as the incorporation of European models and ideas in fashioning a distinctive historical, institutional and religious experience in Bosnia Herzegovina. In particular, the paper

considers the changes in religious hierarchical and educational institutions, intellectual influences, and the reconciliation of Islam and modernity as articulated by the Bosnian Muslims.

3. *The Debate on Religion in Interwar Albania: The Religious Communities confronted to the Secular State Reforms*
Redi Halimi (Ca' Foscari. University of Venice)

In the interwar period, Albania was the only predominantly Muslim European country. Islam was the religion of about 70% of the population, while the rest of the Albanians were Orthodox Christians (20%) and Catholic Christians (10%).

In 1928, the President of the country, Ahmet Zogu, proclaimed himself king under the name of Zog I and Albania became the first and only European monarchy ruled by a Muslim. During the early years of his reign, Zog started an extensive legislative work that intended to modernize the country following the Western models. Between 1928 and 1933, the civil administration, the police, the army and the public health were reformed; new codes (penal, civil and commercial) wich put an end to the legal platform inherited from the Ottoman Empire were introduced; a new law on the status of religious communities was voted; the agrarian reform was approved; the school system was nationalized. The program was extensive and difficult to implement in a short time. Many reforms faced the opposition of different sectors of the Albanian society.

In this paper, I will show some reactions among the religious communities, or rather, among the religious elites, confronted with the secular reforms of the Albanian state. I will focus mainly on the debates surrounding the introduction of the Civil Code and the school reform in 1933. These debates help to question and reflect upon some issues related to Islam and other main faith communities confronted in a context of secularization and separation of "Church and State". I will show some dynamics of the opposition, but also the collaboration among the various religious communities in Albania. The focus will be mainly on Muslims and Catholics because the Orthodox mostly stayed out of the public debate on periodicals and of the polical debate in parliament.

4. *From Ottoman Islam to the Gülen movement: Turkish religious influence in the Western Balkans*
   Anne Ross Solberg

One of the ways in which the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans is manifested is through the continuing presence of Islam. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish republic, ties between Muslim populations in the Balkans and Turkey were severed. The Balkans was not high on Turkey's foreign policy agenda, and local Islamic institutions in the Balkans developed ties with the Middle East rather than with the secularist Turkish state. However, after the 1990s and especially in the last decade, Turkey has become an increasingly influential religious actor in the Balkans, both in terms of formal foreign policy and through the presence of Turkish civil society organizations. This paper examines the role played by both non-governmental Turkish networks such as neo-Sufi communities and Islamic charity organizations, as well as state actors such as the Diyanet and TIKA. The purpose of the paper is to map the activities and assess the influence of these Turkish networks, and to explore historical dimensions of the renewed religious presence of Turkey in the region.

Panel III – *Muslims' Religiosity in Practice*

1. *Muslims religiosity in practice - Women` views and visibility in Kosovo?*
   Besa Ismaili (Faculty of Islamic Studies)

After 500 years of Shari'a, 50 years of Communism, ten years of severe repression under Milošević, and more than a decade of democratic transition, Kosovo has been declared secular and neutral in terms of religion. In the midst of these three different histories, Kosovo women have been perplexedly trying to shapen their identity. Trying to escape from the perceived "guilt ":1) of being Muslim/Islamic in Europe, and 2) having shared and fuelled the same communist ideology with the Serbs in Yugoslavia – women in Kosovo have turned to ethno-nationalist ideology to gain some recognition by their male counterparts in the society. Caught between the East/the West; between dictatorship/democracy; between strong Albanian Nationalism/Communism and International Protectorate (EU&USA), Kosovo women have a thorny way ahead to build up on a secular and gender balanced state that accommodates both women and their religion. Analysing this very endeavour, the paper tends to draw some arguments, considerations and conclusions on Muslims' religiosity in general women`s religiosity in particular – this is an attempt to portray Kosovar Muslim Women fighting double battles in the society: both as women in the respective Islamic/Muslim community and as a Muslim in the society with hostile attitudes against religiosity.

This paper tends to highlight some key points between these three historic periods (Ottoman, Yugoslav Communist and transition) with major focus on their impact on constructing the modern identity (women) in Kosovo today.   A part of this paper focuses on the current position of women, analysing the relation of Women- State-Religion. International sponsored legislation and policies empowering women and their effects in changing societal attitudes will also be reflected. Some comparative analysis in this paper shall also highlight some common and some different grounds with women of other religions (catholic and orthodox) and their current and potential interactions.

2. *Place for Implicit Religiosity in Interreligious Coexistence and Tolerance: A Case of Bosnian Muslims*
   Aid Smajić (University of Sarajevo)

Inter-religious coexistence and tolerance could be approached and understood also as a personal attitude of individuals towards respective religious others, usually determined by various and specific socio-political, religious and psycho-spiritual factors in their complex and continuous interaction. Accordingly, apart from social teaching of respective religion, it is an individual's experience of referent religious worldview in particular socio-historical context too that eventually decides his / her standpoint as believing person towards members of other confessions. Given idiosyncrasy of every individual religious experience and some degree of selectivity always present in personal decision of a believer to follow religious injunctions in general and those pertaining inter-confessional relations in particular, altogether significantly influenced by on-going debates and cleavages in the society, the end product is limitless varieties of implicit religiosity that more or less approximate explicit teaching of referent religion in regard to other confessional communities. Therefore, the above mentioned rather raises the question whether the level and nature of religious outlook and conviction currently prevailing among Bosnian Muslims solely and on its own have capacities to provide solid ground for inter-religious coexistence and tolerance at the moment when major socio-political divisions and fierce political debates are taking place along ethno-religious lines. In the light of existing empirical data, the author argues that it is very difficult to provide positive answer, but also insists that considerable, even greater deal of blame should be directed not towards main religious institutions and actors among Bosnian Muslims, or among Catholics and Orthodox in the case of other traditional communities, but rather towards other significant socio-political actors in the country contributing to the situation of existential fear among ordinary people that expectedly overpower positive impulses of their still underdeveloped spiritual sentiment in the context of their attitudes towards others.

3. *Islamic Education in Albania: A Case Study on Educational Institutions of Muslim Community of Albania*
   Bajram Karci (Hëna e Plotë Beder University)

Muslim Community of Albania (MCA) is the legal entity, which represents Muslims in Albania. MCA coordinates all kinds of religious affairs activities for Muslims in Albania. Education of imams and religious educators is also an important part of the activities of the MCA. Medrese schools opened as early as in 1924, which is right after the establishment in 1923. Medrese schools raised so many intellectuals who contributed greatly to the formation and preservation of Albanian Islamic tradition as well as to the formation of a culture of tolerance and dialogue in Albania. Today, MCA operates seven Medrese schools in the cities of Tirana, Shkodra, Durres, Kavaje, Berat, Cerrik and Korce. Medrese schools are more than traditional vocational schools. Curriculums of medrese schools bring together the essential Islamic sciences and contemporary modern sciences.

MCA opened Hena e Plote Beder University in the year 2011 in order to meet the Islamic studies instructor needs of the medrese schools and imam needs of the mosques. The university Currently the university has two faculties Faculty of Humanities and Faculty of Philology and Education. Faculty of Humanities has

three departments: Department of Islamic Studies, Department of Law and Department of Communication. Faculty of Philology and Education has three departments: Department of English Language and Literature, Department of Turkish Language and Literature and Department of Educational Sciences.

This paper will discuss medrese schools and Beder University from the aspects of history, curriculum, legal status and contributions to the Albanian society. The paper will further discuss the challenges and problems these educational institutions and their students are facing today.

4. *Secularising Islam: Continuous Reform of Sunnis in Albania*
   Olsi Jazexhi (University of Toronto Mississauga)

My paper "Secularizing Islam: The continuous reform of Sunni Islam in nation-state Albania" will analyze the process of the creation of the official body of Sunni Islam in Albania - the Muslim Jemaat of Albania (nowadays known as the Muslim Community of Albania), and investigate the process by which the secular Albanian state has used this religious institution to reform Islam in the country and legitimize its secular and "occidental" policies over its Muslim population. The paper will also highlight the recent developments in the Albanian Islam and the influences that the global Muslim agendas are having over the Muslims of Albania

Panel IV – *Interreligious Dialogue*

1. *The Use of Art in Interreligious Dialogue, Case Study Bosnia*
   Ivo Marković

Art in social change is again a relevant research theme. The nature of art and its power in human beings and social life is becoming better understood. Art is an aberrance of reality and a reason for the aberrance (step aside) is to overcome reduced view on reality, to look at life from a different point of view, to deepen understanding of reality, and the goal finally is to make it more quality, beautiful and happier. Therefore art is advance, exercise, exposure to unforeseeable destiny, imagination, frivolity, risk, opening to the something new and unknown, growing in own identity. Art is an inescapable part of spirituality and therefore the religions and art have to live together and through their art religions communicate and mutually influence one another. This study is systematic approach to art as a part of interreligious dialogue. Excellent examples of the smart using of art in the actual religious and cultural misunderstanding is the new mosque in Rijeka, the choir Pontanima in Sarajevo, the picture Graphoscopy of Sarajevo of Charles Billich, the movie Blood and Honey of Angelina Jolie.

2. *From Conflict and Genocide to Reluctant Dialogue*
   Paul Mojzes (Rosemont College)

Interreligious relationships in the Balkans were characterized by conflict from the moment of either their schism, as was the case with Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, or encounters, as was the case with Islam with the Christian Churches. Yet the relationships oscillated between frequently good interpersonal relationships among common people, including marriages and the exceedingly cruel mutual massacres culminating in three major waves of ethnic cleansing and genocides in the twentieth century.

This is not a promising context for interreligious dialogue as these recent bloodletting created fear, suspicion, hatred, and intolerance. Interreligious dialogue was not indigenous but was accepted out of despair of caused by the violence and the desire to make it end and not repeat. The experience of interreligious dialogue which had been nurtured in the West in more conducive circumstances were applicable in the Balkans and became earnestly but cautiously and haltingly practiced during and after the fall of Communism and the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution, although there were examples of "protocol dialogue" in the 1970s and 80s.

Interreligious dialogue in which Muslims also participated were carried out in the form of occasional meetings and joint messages of the heads of the religious communities, the organization of Interreligious Councils in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Macedonia, local, regional, and international scholarly and/or religious functionaries dialogue conferences, as well as public or media joint discussions or interviews, and in journalistic and academic publications. What is needed is a widespread grassroots dialogue and the exploration of topics and techniques for its success.

3. *Islamic theology in Albania: a comparison of attitudes to otherness*
   Cecilie Endresen (University of Oslo)

This paper discusses possible theological differences between "old" and the "new" Islamic authorities in Albania with regard to the proclaimed tolerance of religious otherness – a question which potentially affects the relations between them and local Christians, atheists, Sufis and Muslim non-practitioners. My sources are the Muslim Community of Albania (Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqipërisë), the Muslim "establishment" which traditionally represents the majority of Albania's Muslims, and some recently created Albanian-Islamic hubs such as the Muslim Forum (Forumi Musliman) and the Imams' League (Lidhja e hoxhallarëve), which appear more lay-driven, internet-based, and possibly in opposition to the MC. My hypothesis is that the fragmentation and pluralisation of Islamic authority entail a certain theological reorientation in questions of otherness and pluralism.

The Muslim Community identifies closely with ethnic and national "interests", promotes inclusivist interpretations, deemphasise religious differences, and think pluralism and the secular state are theologically justified. This is also the case with the small Sufi orders under its umbrella and the independent Bektashi Community. However, many Albanians take it for granted that "foreign" and "fundamentalist" influence on Islam threaten the traditional "religious tolerance", which is considered an ethno-national marker.

Pivoting on theoretical concepts from Olivier Roy and Peter Clarke, I will discuss whether the alternative Islamic voices represent a more globalised, individualised form of Islam detached from ethnic and national affiliations. To shed light on this question, I will compare the "old" and the "new" Islamic theological interpretations. Do the new Islamic authorities rate "pure", "decultured" Islam and the global ummah higher than traditional practice and the local community? Do they assign a different role to Islam in public life, with emphasis on orthopraxy typical of

"born-again" Muslims? Are the "tolerant" and pro-Western interpretations of the Muslim establishment really on the defensive?

4. Love, belongings and boundaries: Perceptions and practices of interreligious relationships among Muslims from Macedonia
Anna Zadrożna (Yeditepe University)

ćEthnic, national or religious belonging can be practiced and manifested in many different ways and contexts. They emerge visibly in constructing group boundaries and can influence even a very private spheres of life. In this paper I analyze the importance of ethnicity and religion in a very life choices, i.e. establishing family and choosing a future marriage partner. My paper is based on multi-sited research conducted among Macedonian Muslims in western Macedonia, Turkey and northern Italy, where Muslims from Macedonia have been migrating since early nineties. In this paper I analyze their relationships with the others: non-Muslims and Muslims of different ethnicity and nationality, in terms of forbidden and accepted relationships and marriages.

Firstly, I present the examples of interethnic and interreligious relationships and marriages, asking how they meet local norms and standards, and how they are valuated within the families and communities. I describe the norms of the customary law, običaj, which defines proper and forbidden relationships, focusing on the relation between love and marriage, as well as family and community (zaednica). Secondly, through the evaluation of forbidden and accepted relationships, I am trying to mark different kind of boundaries between Muslims from Macedonia and other ethnic, national or religious group. I aim to answer the questions: what is the place of ethnicity, nationality and religion in establishing the otherness and to which level Macedonian Muslims can integrate with the others?

5. Shared Experience of Christians and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina regarding Religious Instruction in Public Shools
Mato Zovkić, Mons. Dr.

After BH was recognized in 1992 by UN as a new state issued from former Yugoslavia, Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox religious leaders submitted to State Presidency and education authorities their request for re-introduction of confessional religious instruction in public schools as it existed during Austrian-Hungarian administration (1878-1918) and during the kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941). Soon was reached an agreement that faith communities would educate teachers of religion, included preparation of school manuals for students, and propose them to school directors for employment. Minimal number of students belonging to Islam, Orthodoxy or Catholicism in individual schools should be seven to admit such a teacher and subject in that school. This agreement has been functioning so far very effectively because believing parents of about 80% of primary school students choose religion education for their children and high school students decide personally do they continue with confessional religious instruction or opt for ethics and "culture of religions".

In first years after the recent war for ethnic territories some extremist attitudes concerning that war and Ottoman time Muslim rule (1463-1878) were included into the manuals. Mixed commissions of religion pedagogy experts have revised all the manuals and new editions have been improved. Beside separate assessments of their work by Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic teachers of religion, there is a need for more exchange of experience and accent on common ethics.