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Public Islam on the Balkans in a Wider Europe Context

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Islamic Resurgence as a Challenge to Wider Europe

Religion comprises a main source of identity, value orientations and worldview concepts on the large scale level. Secularized Europe is not and cannot be perceived as a rule – it is an apparent exception in the modern world, as well as the post-modern one. Industrialization and modernization in different regions of the world – the USA, the Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia and Japan – did not lead to accomplishing the dream of liberalism, which saw religion as "hiding" in the private sphere. The very basis of that "wall of separation" between religion and politics the building of which was advised by Thomas Jefferson, seem shaken down. Nowadays religion plays again an important role in social life; while on that basis new public spheres emerge, including the means of modern communication technologies. In that sense, Peter Burger is completely right by emphasizing that "those who neglect religion in their analyses of the present situation are running a serious risk at the same time".[1] Many of the intellectual and political movements of modernity actually ran that risk but our modernity turned to be in no way "dispelled". The case of Islam is in fact different, because there secularization was not accomplished in the sense of this term given by Peter Burger.

The "revival" or "awakening" (*sahwa*) of Islam in public and social life during the last decades is a various and multi-faceted process. It started as characterized by an extraordinary dynamics in the 70's of the 20th century in the form of a "return" of Islam as a powerful factor in the policy of Middle Eastern societies. In the Islamic world exists an established consensus opinion that the roots of such an "awakening" should be looked for in the humiliating defeat of Arabs in the June War in 1967 with Israel.[2] A strong impetus to that process was given by the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) but

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[1] Burger, Peter, *Desecularization of the World: a Global Overview*, Sofia, 2004, p. 33.
[2] Hanafi, Hasan. „Ahadith fi-l-harakat ad-diniyya al-mu'asira" [Discussions on Modern religious Movements], *Ad-din wa d-dawla fi-Misr* [Religion and State in Egypt], vol. VI: *Al-wusuliya al-islamiyya* [Islamic Fundamentalism], Cairo, 1989, p. 320.

it soon spread over the largest part of the Muslim world or a least over the countries from Sudan to Indonesia. The revival of Islam passes under the sign of the tendency to ground political legitimacy in Islamic religion. This was done by the ruling regimes and statesmen, as well as by many of the opposing groups and leaders. The characteristics of this process always depend on the definite political, culturally-historical and economical context.

The dynamic return of Islam in public and political life did not spread over the Muslims of the Middle East only, but also over their co-fellows in the faith in Europe and America. The Balkans are not excluded out of this process either. In the European Union countries where nowadays live between 15 and 20 million Muslims[3], talks about a "post migrational religious minority" carrying out a "silent revolution", have already started. This minority shapes the outlines of a phenomenon called "Islamization of European political cultures"[4] which comprises a part of the complex changes in post-modern *religiosity* of Muslims and Christians alike. In the 60's and 70's of the twentieth century, significant differences in the emigration motives to America and the Western Europe were observed. People traveled beyond the Ocean in order to settle permanently there, while those who went to the Old Continent did that in order to earn some money, after that returning to their places of origin. Since the 90's of the past century, however, a permanent "Americanization" of the emigration to Europe occurred. As a result of that, according to some prognoses – though exaggerated to some extent – the number of Muslims in Europe in 2050 is supposed to exceed that of non-Muslims[5]. Having this background information, it is natural that the Islamophobic analysis and pessimistic prognoses about the future are often based on the demographic factor in defense of the thesis that Islam is "taking over" Europe.

A typical example in that aspect is the activity of some journalists and public writers such as the Italian Orianna Falaci who stated that Europe is becoming more and more a province of Islam, a colony of Islam". This rebirth

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[3] The statistical data is based on different estimations and it is very difficult to cite exact figures about the number of Muslims in Europe.
[4] Cesari, Jocelyne, "Muslim Minorities in Europe: The Silent Revolution", John L. Esposito and François Burgat (eds.) *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick / New Jersey, 2003, pp. 256, 265.

of the old image of the "Islamic threat" after September 11th 2001 is being supplemented by the analysis of experts on Middle East issues, for example the American Daniel Pipes; in his view, the national European cultures, such as the Italian, French and English ones, are doomed to be assimilated and melted down in a sort of a "transnational Muslim identity" which will be a "mixture of North-African, Turkish and sub-continental elements"[6].

These exaggerated and ideologically tinted prognoses contain also a hint of a really existing tendency, namely the merging of boundaries between 'Islam" and "Europe" which has been more evident in recent years. This, however, is not only a result of emigration. Olivier Roy quite soundly distinguished the more general new phenomenon of *deterritorialization*. According to him, Islam is less and less bound to a definite territory and civilization area, while "the frontier between Islam and the West is no longer geographical, and is less and less civilisational"[7]. In this sense deterrritorialization of Islam is also related to globalization and has nothing to do with Islam as religion which makes the thesis of the "clash of civilizations" less feasible.

This emerging change of proportions and shifting of whole historical and demographical layers enforce a reconsideration of the attitude towards Islam which defines the life of the majority of population in the Middle East,[8] as well the life of a vast bulk of the population of the Old Continent and the New World. Questions regarding the *political participation* of Muslims in societies with democratic social structure according to the Western pattern are raised. New religious authority statements-*fatwas* have been issued in order to regulate the life of Muslims as a minority. New Muslim organizations emerge. Some of them dedicate their activity to religious preaching while others (such

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[5] Cheribi, Oussama. "The Growing Islamization of Europe", *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, New Brunswick / New Jersey, 2003, p. 195.
[6] Pipes, Daniel. "Muslim Europe", *New York Sun*, May 14, 2004. The article is available in the Internet at: <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/1796>.
[7] Roy. Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a new Ummah*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2004, p. 18.
[8] It its broader sense used recently, the Middle East includes the territories from Rabat to Teheran spreading over countries on three continents – North Africa, South-Eastern Asia and the European part of Turkey.

as the Muslim Youth Union in France) combine Islamic communalist claims with the *civility* rhetoric[9].

It is obvious now that – no matter how much it has been discussed until now – the issue of the relation between *religion* and *politics* in the Muslim world again comes forth, this time connected to Muslim communities in Europe and America as well. In Europe this relation becomes more and more pressing while the present encounter between "Islam" and the European identity in the process of formation is often looked upon as being problematic. What are the reasons for this existing ambivalent attitude towards Islam and Muslims in the Old Continent?

Among all world religions nowadays Islam seems to be the most active one, putting forth its universalist claims in the global public sphere in the most dynamic way; at the same time, this does not mean that there are not similar processes of revival running in Christian and other religious communities in the world. Nowadays a new "social communication infrastructure"[10] emerges on the national and transnational levels, which establishes new conditions of publicity. Modern English speaking academic studies of the processes related to public role of Islam, employ "nuanced" (as Charles Taylor would say) terms such as "societal Islam" and "public Islam". In this study of mine the term "public Islam" has been used as an academic convention in the sense defined by Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore:

> "Public Islam" refers to the highly diverse invocations of Islam as ideas and practices that religious scholars, self-ascribed religious authorities, secular intellectuals, Sufi orders, mothers, students, workers, engineers, and many others make to civic debate and public life. In this "public" capacity, "Islam" makes a difference in configuring the politics and social life of large parts of the globe, and not just for self-ascribed religious authorities. It makes this difference not only as a template for ideas and practices but also as a way of envisioning alternative political realities and, increasingly, in acting on both local and global stages, thus reconfiguring established boundaries of civil and social life.[11]

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[9] Kepel, Gilles. *Allah in the West: Islamic Movements in America and Europe*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 1997, p. 227.
[10] Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (Eds.). *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere.* 2nd Edition, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2003, p. X.
[11] Salvatore, A. and D. Eickelman, "Pubic Islam and the Common Good", Preface to *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Edited by A. Salvatore and D. Eickelman, Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2004, p. xii.

The new Islamic public sphere that has emerged in the last years is connected with the development of *mass education* and *new communication technologies* whereas *new media* and Internet play an extraordinary significant role by unleashing new processes and deepening old tendencies. Probably the most important one among them is the *fragmentation* of the public sphere and *the religious authority* in the Muslim world. As a whole, however, in Islamic public sphere nowadays – on the national, as well as the transnational level[12] – the ideals that do not allow religion to stay in the sphere of the private life of the individual according to the Western democratic model, are still alive.

In the modern time this has been changed under the pressure of internal and external factors to the Middle East – the role of the traditional ulamas has decreased significantly which led to a *fragmentation of religious authority*, unknown to the history of Islam to-date[13]. It has been running since the 19th century on and has a key role for the understanding also of contemporary events and processes in Muslim communities. In Iran after the ill successes of the Islamic revolution, in the Arab world and other Sunni states this represents a clear-cut crisis of the spiritual authority, as well a crisis of the traditional centers of Islamic religious education. We have to emphasize that this is a tendency existing not only in Islam. The general crisis of the Catholic priesthood is also an evident truth, as it is running alongside with the emergence of the idea of the *charisma* to the foreground. The influence of the large number of charismatic leaders contributes to circumventing the established religious institutions and academic authorities on the basis of the principle "anyone could speak about the truth because one achieves it by means of experience". The emotional ties with religion substitute the *intellectual* and scientific approach and this is a common feature of Christianity and Islam nowadays when the "success of conservative values is not the success of religious institutions".[14]

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[12] Cf. Eickelman, Dale F. and Armando Salvatore. "Muslim Publics", In: D. Eickelman and A. Salvatore. *Public Islam and the Common Good*. Brill: Leiden, Boston, 2004, p. 10.
[13] Cf. Bulliet, Richard W. *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, 2004, pp. 135-136.
[14] Roy. Olivier. Globalized Islam: The Search for a new Ummah, New York, 2004, p. 34-35.

1.2 The Re-Islamization of the Balkan Muslims in a Wider Europe Context

The re-emergence of Islam in the public sphere is a plural and varied process, and *re-Islamization* is a diverse and complex process which occurs not only in countries and regions with Muslim majorities as those in the Middle East but also among the large Muslim minorities in Europe and America. Olivier Roy defines re-Islamization as "a process of deculturation (that is a crisis of pristine cultures giving way to westernization and reconstructed identities"[15] emphasizing that "the role of Islam in shaping contemporary societies has been overemphasized"[16]. Is there a "return of the religious" among the Muslims in the Balkans and at which extend are they involved in the process of re-Islamization?

Muslims in the Balkans, like Muslims worldwide, are turning Islam into a significant public and political force. Yet "religion is obviously central to the political life of peoples around the world, not simply to Muslims";[17] however, the notion of an "Islamic threat" coming mainly from Middle Eastern political regimes and movements has been created in the West. Observers speak of the alleged incompatibility of Islam and democracy, of the fanaticism of "Islamic fundamentalists" and of the strong opposition to the secularization and modernization of Middle Eastern societies that have completely different cultural values than those of the West. Furthermore, many still maintain that there is a single monolithic political doctrine of Islam and that this doctrine is incompatible with pluralist democracy, an idea that first developed in the West.[18]

Islamic actors with an agenda in the public sphere challenge the domestic politics of various EU countries as well as the political life in many of the EU 'candidates' and 'neighbours'. Both the Muslim majority world and the Muslim minorities in Europe outside the EU are perceived as one of the major challenges for the Wider Europe Initiative and the new European

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[15] Ibid, p. 22.
[16] Ibid, p. 14.
[17] Eickelman, Dale F. and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1996, p. 56.
[18] See Krämer, Gudrun. "Islamist Notions of Democracy." *Political Islam*, edited by J. Benin and Joe Stork. Pp. 71-82. Berkley, Los Angeles University of California Press, 1997, p.71.

Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)[19] which seeks to share the benefits of the EU's enlargement with the neighboring Eastern and Southern countries. [20] For these Muslim minority communities the long-standing cultural links with the Arab world or with Turkey are getting more and more important in the period after the Cold War.

Balkan countries are pursuing their relations with the EU in several different frameworks. Bulgaria and Romania are well advanced and aim to join the Union in January 2007. Turkey is a country with a different timetable remaining for now between 'candidate' and 'neighbour'. Except for Croatia, which is already a candidate country, the other Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, including Kosovo, are defined by the EU as 'potential candidate countries'. [21] These potential future EU members are developing their relations with the Union supported by the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). Yet, the ENP does not cover any Balkan country, however, Bulgaria and Romania will be involved in its implementation after they become EU members.

There are a variety of perspectives to the EU in South-East Europe where the population is ethnically and religiously mixed, for apart from the Christians there are significant Muslim communities. For all of these Muslim communities the long-standing cultural links with the Muslim majority, particularly with Turkey and the Arab world, world are getting more and more important in the post-communist period. Bulgaria is the only EU acceding Balkan country with a substantial Muslim minority (more than 12%). Since the change of the regime in 1989, Bulgaria's policy towards the Muslim-majority world, and sometimes even to the local Muslim community, has been erratic and virtually non-existent on a conceptual level. Islam is underestimated and misused as a factor in the design of the public policy. Public interest has been mainly sensation-based, and the vague attempts for public discussions.

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[19] http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/index_en.htm
[20] See Michael Emerson. "The Wider Europe Matrix", Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, January, 2004.
[21] http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/candidate.htm

The basic argument of this paper is that policy analysis and policy design should not simply rely on the modernist strategy that saw religion as a problem. This "classical" approach was to avoid religion's conflictual terrain by setting it outside the public sphere. Yet, the undoubted quest for cultural authenticity within Islam today requires an adequate response, including within the ENP. The future success of the European project depends in a considerable degree on the re-conceptualization of the cultural factors in the design of a new neighbourhood policy, particularly as far as Islamic factor is concerned. Given the strong relationship between religious identity and political and social peace in the Balkans, the argument here is that it is extremely important to study the impact of the Islamic and Islamist movements and discourses on the Balkan Muslim communities. There is an urgent need to search for new strategies, continually re-thinking the role of Islam and its potential to collaborate in addressing the more trenchant problems of domestic and international affairs.

The discussion paper aims to contribute to these debates by suggesting directions for inter-disciplinary research on Islam and Muslim identity in the public sphere, particularly in the Balkans but also in the Middle East and within the EU's

'neighbourhood' project. Attention should be given to the capacity of Muslim publics to overcome the broader cultural divide between "Islam" and the "West", in this regard exploring the Bulgarian, and more generally the Balkan, model for interethnic and interfaith coexistence in the ENP context can make an important contribution. Thirdly, how can Islam play a role in the design and the implementation of the ENP in the Balkans, and particularly with Bulgaria as an EU member?

The general question is how Muslim values practices can fit into the European project? Can desecularization proceed without a reversal of modernization and the creation of identity conflicts which in turn may spawn extremist attitudes? It seems hardly possible to study the interactions between European institutions and Muslim countries adjacent to Europe without taking into account cultural differences. For various reasons, the cleavage between Christianity and Islam does coincide with comprehensive differences in ways of life. For example, a key concept to understand current issues involving

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Islam is the idea of the public sphere. In Western Europe, this is an idea closely associate with the German social theorist, Jürgen Habermas and his idea of the "rationality potential" of communicative action.

Habermas follows Immanuel Kant in characterizing the public sphere as "ideally an intermediate space in which ideas are presented in their own merits by self-reflective moral subjects rather than as emanating from authorities such as preachers, judges and rulers. Even for early modern Europe, however, the early Habermas neglected the role of religion in the development and expansion of the public sphere."[22] Given the salience of religious identity in the preservation and promotion of political and social peace in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe information about religion needs to be conveyed across groups so as to maximize mutual understanding and minimize stereotyping.

A second key concept for overcoming existing intercultural gap between Islam and secular European societies is the idea of religion and religiosity. During the fourteen centuries of their mutual history the civilizations of Christianity and Islam created complicated political, economic and intercultural relations. From these two world religions sprung societies which have, on occasion, faced encounters which evolved into military conflicts under the banners of "Crusades" or "Jihad". Byzantine sources mentioned the first encounter with the Muslims as a border battle with followers of a "false prophet". From a theological perspective, the first evaluation of Islam was similar. In his "Book of Heresies" St. John of Damascus described Islam as a newly emerged "heresy" of the Arian type denying Jesus Christ's consubstantiality with God.

On the doctrinal level Muslims also demonstrated a lack of interest in Christians. The Qur'an had categorized Christians as "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*) with whom, generally, good relations should be maintained. However, Christians were seen as having adulterated the Gospel with many mistakes and misinterpretations. These mutual perceptions characterized the relations between Christianity and Islam during the middle ages, although the

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[22] Eickelman, Dale F. and Armando Salvatore, "Muslim Publics", *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Eds. D. Eickelman and A. Salvatore, Brill: Leiden, Boston. 2004.

actual features of "the true face" of each of the two religions remained hidden to "the Other". The Christian and Muslim worlds entered the Modern Era burdened with mutual prejudice. The West saw the political and economic backwardness of the "realm of Islam" (*dār al-islām*), and in particular, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, as an occasion for its colonial "civilizing mission". In turn, the religious, social and cultural elite of the Muslim world responded with actions that had far-reaching effects. In the nineteenth century, prominent Muslim thinkers sought to adapt the interpretation of Islam to modern reality, beginning a reform process that continues to date. Reform has comprised a dynamic combination of modernization and a revival of faith and return to its basic texts: the Qur'an (the Word of God for Muslims) and the Prophetic Sunna (the Holy Tradition of Islam comprising the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). It this process, one sees almost all reformers (aside from the secularized modernists) continuing to draw on basic texts and teachings. This can to a certain degree be compared to the Christian tradition and Martin Luther and his call for a return to the foundation of the Gospel and a purification of the historical aberrations and misapprehensions within the Catholic Church.

Despite the history of misreading, there was a gradual rectification of Christianity's "medieval misunderstandings" of Islam and Muslims. This was due not only because of social and political developments during the colonial and decolonial ages, it was also a consequence of developments in the humanities, especially in Arabic and Islamic Studies. Introduced in some European universities as early as in the 16th and 17th centuries [23] this academic project was very often closely linked to the imperial. [24] Some orientalists, like Louis Massignon and his follower Henri Corbin, even gradually came to be convinced that Islam, like Christianity, was a great religion of Revelation with a deep mystic spirit, underlying one of the most significant civilizations. Other orientalists such as Hamilton Gibb eagerly defended the merits of Islamic orthodoxy. Although Edward Said criticized

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[23]   Collège de France 1587, Leiden 1613, Cambridge 1632, and Oxford 1634.
[24] Jorgen S. Nielsen, "Orientalism and Anti-Orientalism: Is There a Middle Way?", *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice,* Proceedings of the British-Bulgarian Workshop on Sufi

both types for "essentialising Islam"[25] they gradually convinced some in the West that, with respect to spirituality, Islam was also a path to religious salvation. In the eyes of Christians, Muslims' search for religious truth became increasingly legitimate, and in consequence, so did their religious identity. In other words, the conclusions of scholars were not confined to universities but brought about a slow but persistent change in the attitude of Western Christianity towards Islam.

This change in official dialogue acted as the catalyst for a series of initiatives, meetings and resolutions. One such was the 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* which invited Muslims to meetings dealing with various concerns, including "Meaning and Levels of Revelation", "The Concept of Monotheism in Islam and Christianity" and "Common Humanitarian Ideals for Muslims and Christians". Thus Western Christianity gradually managed to push to the fore not merely toleration of Islam, but also real consideration and respect for "the Other" – his religious identity and tradition.

Can such historical examples be applied in the current realities with regard to the recent debates and challenges involving Islam? Is the European notion of secularism still relevant to contemporary realities, including the demographic ones? Is the modernization of Muslims possible only by emancipation from Islam or there is a way to achieve modernization without to abandon religion? We can examine some of these issues in respect of the Western Balkans, the region with the largest native Muslim populations in Europe.

The greater part of the Balkans fell under Ottoman rule before the end of the 14th century. What is the outcome of the long coexistence between Christians and Muslims in South-Eastern Europe? Is there any sort of tolerance peculiar to the Balkans and if the answer is "yes", is it a positive acknowledgement and recognition of differences carried by the "Other", or there is rather a pragmatic compliance to one another, a peculiar "antagonistic

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Orders 19-23 May 2000, Sofia, Ed. Antonina Zhelyazkova and J. Nielsen, International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, Sofia 2001, p. 339.
[25] Said, Edward, *Orientalism,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 265.

tolerance", if we have to use this successful term of Robert Hayden[26]. In this case we are interested in two main problems. The first one is what type of "public Islam" has been developed on the Balkans, and then, does it impose a model or different "Balkan" models which could contribute to understanding and coexistence with Muslims in the framework of modern Europe? And second, what sorts of new European strategies and policies complying with the terms of contemporary realities should be developed by the EU or in other cases by the particular Balkan states in order to curb that conflict potential which stems (be it right or not) from the political and cultural problems related to Islam?

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[26] Hayden, Robert M. "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans", *Current Anthropology*, Volume 43, Number 2, April 2002.

2. Public Islam in the Western Balkans

2.1 Historical and demographic characteristics

The Balkan Peninsula was conquered by the Ottomans at the end of the 14th century. Meanwhile, a parallel process of spreading Islam in these Christian territories took place. Ottoman studies are dominated by the view that although the Ottoman Empire adhered to the doctrine of the "holy war" (*jihad*), the main purpose of the conquests was not the extermination of subjugated indigenous population but rather ruling over the new subjects according to the doctrines of Islam. That is why whenever a certain town or region surrendered without resisting the advancing Ottoman army, its inhabitants were allowed to retain their faith; otherwise, the subjugated population was enslaved or killed.[27]

As a whole, academic literature offers three different theories on the way of spreading Islam on the Balkans. According to the first one in historical science, immediately after the Ottoman conquests a genocide over the indigenous population started; then it was followed by mass settlement of Anatolian Turks in these lands.[28] The second theory about the compulsive enforcement of Islam is supported by some nationalistically minded historians who emphasize before all upon the coercive recruitment of Christian boys (*devshirme*) and their military training in order to participate in Ottoman Janissary Corps (14th–18th centuries). [29] According to the third theory, supported by the majority of Western scholars, conversion to Islam was carried on a voluntary basis, in most of the cases due to economic reasons, because by accepting the new religion the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire avoided a number of taxes and enjoyed considerable

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[27] Jelavic, Barbara. *History of the Balkans. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Volume 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 39.
[28] Zhelyazkova, Antonina. "Formirane na myusyulmanskite obshnosti i kompleksite na balkanskite istoriografii" ["The Formation of the Muslim Communities and the Balkan Historiographies"], *Myusyulmanskite obshtnosti na Balkanite i v Bulgariya. Istoricheski eskizi. [Muslim Communities in the Balkans and in Bulgaria. Historical Excerpts]*, International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations Foundation, Sofia, 1997, p. 14.

privileges.[30] At present Southeastern Europe is inhabited by about 8 million of Muslims which comprises about one-third of all the Muslims in Europe. Contrary to immigrant Muslim communities in Western Europe, Muslims in the Balkans represent a part of the indigenous population. They belong to four main *ethno-linguistic group*s – the Slavonic speaking ones, ethnical Turks, Albanians and Roma. Their status in each different country is distinguished by its different cultural, historical, social and economical context in which their communities developed. In Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina Muslims constitute a majority, while in all other Balkan countries they are a minority. Some regions, such as Sandzak, which is situated between the inner borders of Serbia and Montenegro, are inhabited by a compact Muslim community, comprising a local majority. As a result of the historical development since the age of the Ottoman Empire, the type of Islam which is the most common one in the Balkans, is the Sunni Islam belonging to the Hanafi *madhab* (a religious-juridical school), defined as the most tolerant and flexible one when interpreting the Islamic religious Law (the *shari'a*). In some of the Balkan regions there are Shia-Alevis, as well Sufi (mystical) orders and brotherhoods, among whom a special role is played by the Bektashi.

During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the religious organization of the Muslims was initially divide into three regions. The Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia were under the leadership of *reis-ul-ulama* ("the Grand Ulem", the analogue of the "Grand Mufti" in Sarajevo), while Serbian and Macedonian Muslims fell under the jurisdiction of the *reis-ul-ulama* in Belgrade. The *Mufti* of Stari Bar, on the other hand, was the leader of the Muslims in Montenegro. In 1930, however, as a part of the centralization program of King Alexander, Muslim religious interests were united in the newly created *Supreme Council of the Islamic Religious Community* with its headquarters based in Belgrade. Until the end of 1936 two main seats were preserved, one of them being in Sarajevo, and the other one in Belgrade; after that both of them were united in a Sarajevo based

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[29] Mutafchieva, Vera. *Turtsiya* [Turkey], Open Society Publishing House), Sofia, 1998, p.10.

[30] Jelavic, Barbara. *History of the Balkans. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. Volume 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 40.

organization.[31] During the Communist period the doctrine of "Yugoslavism" based on the principle of "brotherhood and unity" was laid down in the federal Constitution. The citizens enjoyed equal rights and obligations with no regard of their ethnical and religious identity[32]. The Muslims in Macedonia were looked upon as an integral part of Yugoslavian Muslim community and were headed by the *reis-ul-ulama* in Sarajevo. Practically, the Islamic Community (*Islamska zajednica*) in socialist Yugoslavia was divided into four administrative regions: Sarajevo, Prishtina, Skopje and Titograd.[33]

According to scholars of the Balkans, there are at least two reasons for tolerating Islam in former Yugoslavia. The first one has a local, regional character and is related to the fact that the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established as a *modus vivendi* of the three main groups of population in the territories that belong to it, namely *Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croatians* and *Muslim Slavs.* Historically speaking, this territory has been inhabited by ethnically mixed population; this provides a ground of both Serbs and Croatians to claim over these lands and population. In the 1970's the 'Muslim" nation was established as means of counteracting both Serbian and Croatian claims over the Muslim Slavs on the territory of Yugoslavia[34]. The second reason is also related to the specific position of Yugoslavia "between East and West" during the Cold War. This made its statesmen seek a political space beyond the East-west confrontation pattern among the "non-aligned nations", many of which were Muslim states.[35]

It has to be made clear that Muslims in the socialist republic of Macedonia did not enjoy such a freedom to express their religious identity to the extent that Bosnian Muslims did. Most probably, this was because with the establishment of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (which did not exist before the creation of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) and its

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[31] Friedman, Francine. *The Bosnian Muslims. Denial of a Nation.* Westview Press: Colorado, 1996, p. 107.
[32] Lampe, John R. *Yugoslavia as a History. Twice There Was a Country.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996, p. 232.
[33] Poulton, Hugh. *The Balkans. States and Minorities in Conflict*, Minority Rights Group Publications: London, 1993, p.41.
[34] Ibid, p. 39-41.
[35] Popovic, Alexandar. Posrednici i metafore. Jugoslovenski muslimani (1945-1989) [Intermediaries and Metaphors. Yugoslav Muslims (1945-1989)], Akvarius: Belgrade, 1990, pp. 20-21.

subsequent separation from the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1967, the Macedonian Orthodox population started enjoying special attitude on behalf of Yugoslavian authorities. The Orthodox faith was used to encourage the constitution of a Macedonian ethical and national identity and respectively, loyalty towards Yugoslavia. This was not applied, however, to Muslims during the regime of Tito.[36]

After the death of Tito in 1980 and the collapse of Yugoslavian economy, the politicians of Yugoslavia started being "ethnicized" more and more. At the end of the 1980's the regime of the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic changed the ethnical and religious balance in Serbia. The authorities directed their attention to the increasing Albanian nationalistic disaffection which started originating in the 1970's. The Albanian claims over the independency of Kosovo were violently crushed during the time of the Prishtina commotions in 1981. In 1989 the Serbian Parliament even abolished the autonomous status of Kosovo and Voyvodina, which was guaranteed by the Constitution from 1974. During the 1970's and 1980's the Macedonian authorities undertook a series of initiatives to keep away the Muslim Macedonian community from "Albanization". This fear originated from the growing Albanian nationalism in Kosovo and the fact that the Albanians in Macedonia constituted the most numerous Muslim minority which could exert pressure upon the less numerous Muslim minorities. In 1970 with the support of the official authorities an Association of Macedonian Muslims was established.[37] In 1981 in Gostivar a special academic team was formed which conducted studies of Muslims in Macedonia. In Skopje the Isa Beg Madrasa was opened again. The Muslim newspaper "Al-Hilal" started being published in three languages, namely Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish.[38] After the political changes in 1989 and the proclamation of the independency of Macedonia in

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[36] Fraenkel, Eran. "Turning a Donkey into a Horse: Paradox and Conflict in the Identity of Makedontsi Muslimani", In *Balkan Forum. An International Journal of Politics and Culture*, Vol. 3 No. 4 (13), December 1995, 1995, pp. 153-163.
[37] Poulton, Hugh. "Changing Notions of National Identity among Muslims in Thrace and Macedonia: Turks, Pomaks and Roma," In Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki, eds., *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, Hurst & Company: London, 1997, p. 94.
[38] Popovic, Alexandar. Posrednici i metafore. Jugoslovenski muslimani (1945-1989) [Intermediaries and Metaphors. Yugoslav Muslims (1945-1989)], Akvarius: Belgrade, 1990), pp. 25-26.

1991, the Islamic community of Macedonia was separated form the administration of Sarajevo.

The break up of Yugoslavia denoted the start of a new stage in the modern history of Islam and Muslim communities in the territories that belonged to it. The new processes and tendencies that have developed since the 1990's on have their long-lasting influence upon the face of the "Balkan Islam". The events in former Yugoslavia during the last 15 years and the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia led to deepening the re-Islamization tendency, as far the religion of Islam turned into a main factor of ethnical distinguishing and self-identification. Before the war Bosnia and the Balkans were generally perceived as a model of not only a religious tolerance but also of an educated, pluralistically minded "Euro-Islam". Islam, however, started being given a central role since the very beginning of the Bosnian conflict. Nowadays, after the subsidence of the armed conflicts, the issue of the imminent change in the image of Muslim communities on the Balkans concerning the global processes of re-Islamization and local tendencies of return to religion is also an important one.

In the post-communist period since the beginning of the 1990's century, the encroachment of non-typical for Southeastern Europe Islamic influences from the Middle East, the Arab world and particularly from Saudi Arabia started. In spite of the common religious basis, the cultural differences between the local Muslim population and the Muslim Arabs led to the rise of a series of misunderstandings and the establishment of a new kind of stereotypes related to the "Muslim threat". In public space, under the influence of the global challenges related to Islam, started a noisy talk about the danger of the conservative *Wahhabism* – the puritan, official interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia.   A permanent public view was formed among non-Muslims on the Balkans: that Arab emissaries as well as local Muslims who fell under their influence, are bearers of a "foreign", "fundamentalist" type of Islam.

Scholars outline two main types of penetration of Wahhabism in the Balkans: either through Islamic humanitarian organizations and foundations or through local Balkan Muslims who receive their education in the Middle East and return to their countries of origin. As early as 2002 Natalie Claire, an expert at the French National Studies Council, noted that this "double import",

i.e. through charity organizations and returning students, is one of the most interesting characteristics of the evolution of Balkan Islam in the last years and leads to its "deep transformation".[39] This transformation, however, is manifested in different ways in the different states and regions of the Balkans.

Southeastern Europe ahs always been a zone of turbulences which have often been results of conflicts, provoked by countries and forces external to the region. Nowadays a great part of the Muslims in the Balkan states perceive in this way re-Islamization which in fact comes as a result of two different processes of a purely modern nature, further aggravating the hidden conflict potential between Christians and Muslims. The first one is the origin of new identities, while the second one is related to globalization and transnational relations or "deterritorialization of Islam". In this context, the pragmatic elite of the Balkan Muslims faces the challenge of how to preserve the appearance of the typically Balkan "tradition' in these contemporary conditions. In the last years in Southeastern Europe the organized religious life of Muslims and Christians alike underwent a true revival. Just like various Christian denominations, more radical fundamentalist tendencies appeared within different Muslim communities. Though marginal from a sociological point of view their ideology and influence should not be underestimated.

2.2 Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Antagonistic Tolerance

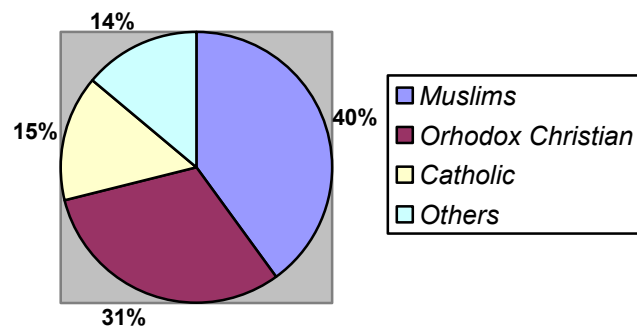*Population – 4 499 000*
Ethnical groups

Pie chart showing:
- 48% Bosniaks
- 37,1% Serbs
- 14,3% Croatians
- 0,6% Others

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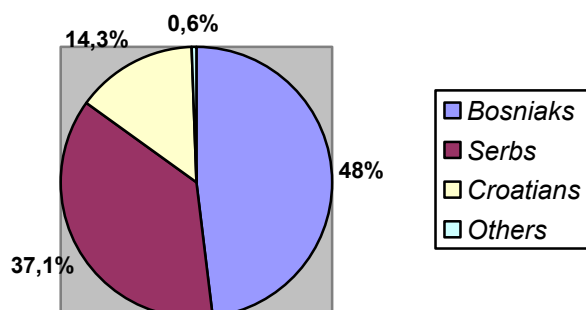
[39] Risto Karajkov, "The Young and the Old: Radical Islam Takes Roots in the Balkans", May 3, 2006, www.worldpress.org.

Religious groups

In the last 15 years the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina went through a complex process related to the issue of reconsideration and reformulation of its ethnical and religious identity. The deep economic crisis that occurred after the break down of former Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars urged some of the representatives of Muslims in Bosnia and the other countries of the Western Balkans to seek establishing of close relations with countries of the Muslim world – Turkey, as well as more conservative regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, the rest of the Gulf states and Iran. During the war the Bosnian Muslim government received a powerful support, including weapons, from Muslim states.

Even before the war, although being an "apolitical" one, the Bosnian type of Islam represented the central source of formation the social and cultural identities of the so-called *Bosniaks*. Not all of the Bosnians, however, are Muslims; there are also Orthodox Christians among them, as well as Catholics. What is typical is that only the Muslims developed the identity of *Bosniaks*, while the rest of the population remained "Serbian" (Orthodox) or "Croatian" (Catholic). Before the war Bosnian Islam was an exemplum for the followers of this religion who lived in the secular democracies of Europe, which gave it its peculiar name of "Euro-Islam". Even then such distinguished scholars as Smail Balic warned about the danger of replacing the "Bosnian" Islam with the "Oriental" type of Islam.[40]

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[40] Tibi, Bassam. „Der bosnische Islam. Von säkularer Religion zum Fundamentalismus?", In Internationale Politik, 7/1997.

In this aspect, the war in the country that last for four years brought about a negative development of the situation in Bosnia. Before that *Bosniaks* perceived themselves as "Muslims" (*muslimani*), taking into consideration their adherence to a specific cultural and religious community. From the viewpoint of their political identity, however, they belonged to a secular public and legal community. The term *nation* in the language of the Bosnians which is an ethno-linguistic variety of the Serb-Croatian means an "ethno-religious group". In this case this group includes mainly *Bosniaks*. Before the war *Bosniaks* had no particular relation with the Islamic world outside Europe and were not included in the Islamic *umma*, i.e. the universal political community to which – according to the Orthodox Islamic concept – every Muslim belongs, with no regard for his ethnical origin and locality.

Similar to the rest of the countries inhabited by a Muslim minority, the Bosnian institutions face the serious problem of the character and structure of religious education. Emphasizing that "in Bosnia and Herzegovina traditionally good relations between the religious communities and churches exist", the head of the Religious Service at "Preporod" (a sort of a "public relations" section of the Islamic Community)[41] Muharem Omerdich stresses upon the significance of the Islamic spiritual education.[42] In the framework of each one of the so-called traditional religious communities this type of education is regulated by a law.

The Islamic community in Bosnia has *mektebs* where religious education is carried out under the control of an Imam. High religious education lasts for a period of four years and is carried out in eight *madrasas*. Higher Islamic education is offered by two Islamic Pedagogical Academies: one of them is in Bihac while the other is situated in Mostar. The latter is affiliated with "Djemal Biedic" University of Mostar which is a state institution. There are also two faculties: the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica which provides education of teachers of religion, as well a Department of social services. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences (FIS) in Sarajevo which is the most prestigious religious educational institution offers two types of education: theological and

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[41] This institution has also a website (www.preporod.com). The fact that the site is only in Bosnian, shows that it is directed mainly to Bosnian Muslims on the territory of the country.
[42] Interview of the author with Muharem Omerdich, Sarajevo, March 22nd 2006.

pedagogical ones. The Faculty of Islamic pedagogy in Zenica has about 300 students while the FIS in Sarajevo has about 500 students, both regular and correspondence students. The FIS has also post-graduate students. At present, the number of the students who study at the FIS is about 150. It offers Master and Ph.D. Degrees; because of the high level of its cadres, the FIS has already started carrying out a good cooperation with the University of Sarajevo.

Aiming at a better level of coordination between the religious communities, there is a special Interreligious Council comprised by representatives of the four main religious communities: the Islamic, the Jewish, the Catholic and the Orthodox ones. This Council is informal and was established as a temporary solution with the hope that it will facilitate rapprochement among the religious communities and their actions. Out of Bosnia, the Council has been acknowledged by some of the European states, in Japan and America. The Interreligious Council is obviously one of the steps that the Bosnian society and state are trying to undertake on the way of the slow overcoming of sharp controversies. Putting down of the hate accumulated in a certain country the main city of which is marked by graveyards, will not be easy; the population of

Bosnia for a long time will keep on looking upon the concept of "tolerance" as something artificial which most probably they will be able to experience personally after two generation. Today, in the best case, we could speak about an "antagonistic tolerance", enforced by the pragmatic requirements of the political and social life and the international community in the post-war period.

In a discussion on the issue of tolerance the chief secretary of "Preporod" Aziz Kadribegovic shared that having in mind the recent war in the country, Bosnia could hardly contribute with positive practices in this aspect.[43] Hate and antagonism will also be overcome with difficulties according to the Director of the famous "Gazi Husrev" Library in Sarajevo Dr. Mustafa Jahic to whom this institution owes the rescue of hundreds of manuscripts during the time of the conflict. According to another scholar of the same library – Dr. Osman Lavic – the most terrific fact is that all these things will not pass in the course of time but rather the opposite: the accumulated hate will be transmitted to the future generations. According to him, "the first thing that a child learns from the parents is who his enemy is and which are the temples and cemeteries of the enemies which sooner or later he must crush".[44]

According to the French scholar Xavier Bugarel, re-Islamization in Bosnia leads to a transformation of the collective identity of the Islamic community without that corresponding to the relevant modifications in the individual behavior of its members.[45] This is also one of the reasons for the contentions and internal conflicts in the Islamic elite.   Consequently, this leads to cleavage of the Islamic community and the emergence of independent "cultural centers" and re-Islamization movements which break down the year-lasting monopoly of the Islamic Community (*Islamska Zaednitsa*) over the religious life of Muslims. Some of them are bearers of ideas which are perceived in the traditional environment of Balkan Muslims as "radical" and "fundamentalist" – often because the dazzling cultural differences, but also sometimes because of the very views professed by them.

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[43] Interview of the author with Aziz Kadribegovic, Sarajevo, March 22nd 2006..
[44] Interview of the author with Mustafa Jahic and Osman Lavic, Sarajevo, March 23rd 2006.
[45] Xavier Bougarel, *How Panislamism Replaces Communism*, Part 3, July 2, 1999.

Just like the tendencies in the other Balkan states and the other countries of the world as well, the bearers of radical interpretations of Islam in Bosnia are usually propagandist's representatives of the young generation. Some of them have returned to their countries with a diploma obtained abroad, while others have been fighting in the famous brigade of the Mujahidins which is a Para-military formation that acted in Central Bosnia during the war in the period between 1992–1995. According to some observers, in spite of the distrain over the activity of a number of humanitarian organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the accusations that they supported relations with "Al-Qaeda", recently it has been observed intensification of the activity of some Islamic groups, considered to be "radical". Two of them have a chief importance and provide a basis for the accusations of fundamentalism: the "Muslim Brotherhood" and the Active Islamic Youth (AIY).

In the beginning of 2002 in Sarajevo was established a branch of the Egyptian organization and movements of the "Muslim Brotherhood" whose activity has been expanding over the years that followed. It is not quite clear to what extent the organization has succeeded in using the already established charity network as a primary basis for developing its activity. It is directed mainly to the families of Muslims returning to the territory of the Republic of Serbia, meanwhile working in cooperation with the Bosnian humanitarian organization of "Sedra". The analysis of the accusations against them in the public space, however, one has to consider always the fact that the "Muslim Brotherhood" in Egypt left behind long ago the "revolutionary stage" of its ideology and social practice; the present core of their current ideology is the idea of the reform (*islah*).

The Zenica based AIY which has been acting in Sarajevo, as well as in Central Bosnia, and has become a symbol of Islamic rebirth and re-Islamization on the territory of the country. Among youth organizations, together with the "Young Muslims", it enjoys the largest share of popularity. Registered as early as 1995, this organization claims that it has over 2000 members, the majority of them being students. Among their main ideas stays the idea of the defense of Muslims from encroachments upon them. For example, in 2002 supporters of the AIY embarked upon series of demonstrations in Sarajevo against the deportation of six Algerians accused

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of developing terrorist activity.[46] These actions, together with other similar ones, provide sufficient ground for the search of possible interdependencies in building of Islamic transnational network which aims at supporting terrorism. The ground of such accusations is also provided by the sources of finance of these organizations which generally come from Middle Eastern countries. Very often they do not imply a direct membership, but rather different levels of "affiliation" and "bounds" which is a borrowing from the historically established scheme of the 'Muslim Brotherhood".

One of the founders of the AIY – Muris Cupic being himself a former fighter – several times stated that there was no danger of the spreading of militant Islam over Bosnia. But his fellows from the AIY have often been identified with the people who promote fundamentalism on the local level. They come up with sharp critics towards the local Muslims that they do not behave as "true believers" and have been too much influenced by their Christian neighbors. The AIY have been inspected after the terrorist attacks on September 11th 2001 and it has been found that they have been financed by the Saudi foundation of *Al-Haramayn* ("The Two Holy Places", i.e. Mecca and Medina) which was later on declared by the USA to be one of the sponsors of "global terrorism".

The official Islamic Community of Bosnia headed by the *reis-ul-ulama* Prof. Dr. Mustafa Ceric has often been represented as an institution which is trying to assimilate the "fundamentalist" groups that originated under foreign influence, including those ones among them that profess views in total contradiction with the "official" Islam. The person of Ceric himself influences upon this policy of the Sarajevo Islamic Community, who defended a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago and recently got the UNESCO intercultural understanding prize. He succeeds into finding a balance of his own between "Islam" and the West and convincing the West that Bosnia is a reliable European partner, meanwhile establishing and maintaining contacts with conservative Muslims in the country and the Middle East. In an interview from 2005, given before the *Saff* Islamic youth magazine, Ceric rejected the

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[46] Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Seeds of Hate: In Postwar Bosnia. Militant Islam Turns US Allies to Enemies", *Wall Street Journal,* March 18, 2002, A.1.

statement that fundamentalist organizations such as the AIY should not be considered to be a part of the Islamic Community in Bosnia, saying that "the Islamic Community is more important than me, us or them. All of us constitute the Islamic Community." In that sense Mustafa Ceric has succeeded into building himself an image of a leader who successfully communicates with even the most vehement supporters of fundamentalist Islam.

The result of this policy is the transformation of the relations existing between the official Islamic Community representing as a whole the traditional interpretation of Islam in Bosnian territories on one hand, and the "new faces", often related to organizations defined as fundamentalist, on the other. In this way Mustafa Ceric and the organs of the Islamic Community, together with the Bosnian "Preporod" participate adequately in building the new religious public sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the case of Bosnia in this "competition for the souls of the people", defined by the sociologist Peter Burger as a "religious market', really diverse people and organizations participate but the Islamic Community succeeded into preserving its authority even in the new conditions. Even more, former critics and "competitors" of the official religious authorities such as the AIY and "Furqan" already seem inclined to acknowledge the authority of the Islamic Community, although they insist upon their right to act independently from its administrative organs. The situation has gone so far that the AIY and the Islamic Community even organize cooperate events (seminars, lectures in mosques etc.) which shows that the "assimilation policy" carried out by Mustafa Ceric, works successfully on the Bosnian ground.

Many of the accusations directed towards the Bosnian humanitarian organizations, are most probably exaggerated, but one thing is sure – introducing of a foreign cultural model from Middle Eastern societies could lead to a de-culturation of Bosnian Muslims by means of Islamic religion. The question is to what extent this model could be spread in other Balkan countries too, fro example Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, even Bulgaria and Greece. The answer to this question requires drawing a prognostic outline of the possible future development of re-Islamization processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the short run, as well as the middle-term perspective, some key problems could be pointed out.

Sociologically and economically speaking, a great problem is represented by the deepening differences between rural and urban areas of the country, and particularly the present high level of unemployment in towns which is still estimated at about 40%.[47] This, consequently, will impede integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the EU, meanwhile giving rise to problems for the very process of state building. The problems concerning the return of Bosnian refugees also have a primary importance; they constitute a major obstacle before the normal development of the society and state; Bosnian refugees are one of the main target groups of the Islamic organizations penetrating from the Middle East. The inadequate nature of the measures related to "antiterrorism" which do not take into consideration the cultural peculiarities and religious identity of the indigenous population, could also have a negative a negative effect instead of the positive one.

In that sense, it is necessary to distinguish clearly the organizations, thus avoiding classifying all of them under the common category of "fundamentalism" and "terrorism". Besides that, an important division should be made, distinguishing between re-Islamization (which is a natural process not only in Bosnia) and the Islamic activism as a movement, connecting Islamic religion with politics. Re-Islamization does not always represent the first step towards Islamic activism in the political sense of the term. A proof of that is given by the development of "public Islam" in the rest of the countries of the Western Balkans.

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[47] "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2004", *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State).

2.3 Sandzak: a new religious dynamic of the territory of Serbia

The population of the present state of Serbia and Montenegro numbers about 10,832,000 people who ethnically and religiously speaking are distributed in the following way:

Ethnical Groups
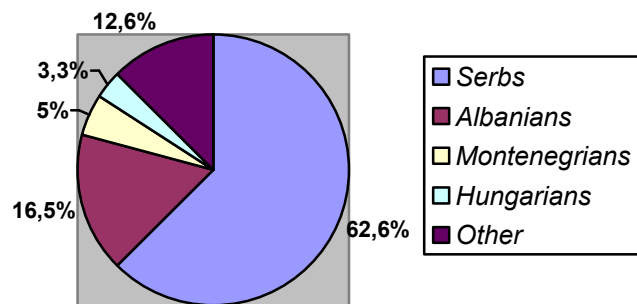
Religious communities
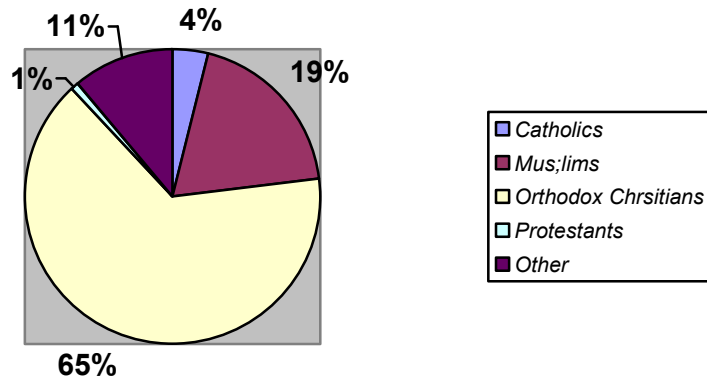
The region of Sandzak which is situated between Serbia and Montenegro has a population of about 530,000 people; Bosnian Muslims represent about 67% while the rest are Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians etc. The population of Sandzak is represented in the UNPO by the Muslim National Council of Sandzak. This organization was established in order to defend the individual

and collective rights of the people in the region, so that Sandzak gains a special status.

The main city of the region of is Novi Pazar and the emerging religious dynamic of the Muslim community around it are particularly important for the understanding of the new processes in Islam in the Balkans. The Sandzak region enjoys a significant demographic prevalence of Muslims: about 80% of them profess Islam; just in the region of Novi Pazar there are about 37 mosques, 25 of them are found in the very city. In spite of that, however, Muslim leaders of Novi Pazar, such as the Director of the "Ghazi Isa-Beg" until recently Mevlud-efendi Dudic, a present Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences at the International University in the city, shares that the model of Novi Pazar is a unique one. [48] Among the reasons for this mutual understanding among Serbs and Muslims in Sandzak, Dudic emphasizes upon the traditional "Balkan" model, as well as the "mutual recognition" – something that often lacks in relations between Christians and Muslims in the Balkans. The Mufti of Novi Pazar Sead Shakirovic explains another fact with the good relations existing between Christians and Muslims: Sandzak, situated between Kosovo and Bosnia, was the only region which did not witness military operations and conflicts between Muslims and Christians.[49]

What gives rise to a problem of Muslims, is not only their ethnical identification as Bosniaks and the claim that they speak a "Bosnian" language, but rather their aspiration to be institutionally bound not to the Muslim leadership in Belgrade but rather to the Islamic Community in Sarajevo. It is not an accident that the young Mufti of Belgrade Mohamed Yusufspahic expresses his concern, speaking about the separatism of Muslims in Vojvodina, who would like to separate it from Serbia and Montenegro and to join Hungary; in Kosovo, which has its own Mufti Administration responsible also for some other communities out of the region, inhabited by Albanians; in Sandzak where Muslims identify themselves as Bosniaks who are Slavonized Albanians and not Islamized Serbs, and who would like to separate from Serbia and Montenegro, and to join Bosnia and Herzegovina etc.

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[48] Personal communication of the author with Mevlud-efendi Dudic, Novi Pazar, March 20th 2006.
[49] Personal communication of the author with Sead Shakirovic, Novi Pazar, March 21st 2006.

In Sandzak there are centuries-long traditions in the field of Islamic studies and spiritual education. In Novi Pazar there are two Islamic high schools (*madrasa*); the madrasa for the training of men – "Ghazi Isa-Beg" has a centuries-long tradition and represents one of the most prestigious ones on the Balkans. It is not a surprise that the Muslim community in Novi Pazar initiated the establishment of a Higher Islamic educational institution in the city, namely the International University; its Rector is the Sandzak Mufti Zukorlic. Four years ago a Higher Islamic education institutional department was founded; that is the Faculty of Islamic Sciences at the University in Novi Pazar.

In Novi Pazar over 90% of the population attend classes of religion in schools. In Muslim High and Higher education schools not only the doctrines of Islam are studied, but also the doctrines of other religions professed in Serbia. Of course, the emphasis falls mainly upon Orthodox Christianity. As a proof of the latter serves the fact that the lectures on Orthodox Christianity are delivered by Proto-Presbyter Prof. Radovan Bigovic, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Belgrade, who is one of the leading Orthodox theologians not only on the Balkans but also in the world.

What is exactly the uniqueness of the example given by Sandzak and Novi Pazar, apart from the peaceful coexistence of ethnical and religious communities which is typical for other Balkan territories? Compared with the global challenges put forth nowadays, related also to the penetration of religious and cultural influences from the Middle East countries, influences foreign to the Balkan Muslims, Novi Pazar also has to offer interesting examples. Many of the representatives of its religious elite, among whom stand also the above-mentioned Dudic and Shakirovic, have obtained their spiritual education in the Arab world. This sort of religious education, however, in their case has not led to the deculturation, usually observed in such cases. Just the opposite – due to their strong tradition in the local interpretation of Islam, Muslim leaders of Novi Pazar remain faithful to it, developing it in an adequate way in the new conditions, mainly by means of education and public life.

2.4 Kosovo: between secular nationalism and return of religion

The region of Kosovo has been administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission (UNMIK) since June 1999, appointed by virtue of resolution № 1244 of the Security Council of the United Nations. This administration of the international community is supported by the Albanians in Kosovo, while the official authorities of Serbia oppose the imminent independence of Kosovo. The difficult process of imposing multiethnic democracy in Kosovo is meanwhile accompanied by the refusal of ethnical Albanians to agree upon the demarcation of the border line with Macedonia in compliance with the agreement reached in 2000 between Macedonia, on one hand, and Serbia and Montenegro, on the other.

The population of Kosovo is estimated to number about 1.9 million people; according to the World Bank data from 2000, 88% of them are Albanians, 7% are Serbs, and about 5% belong to other ethnical groups. The majority of Kosovo Muslims are Sunni, while the Serbs are Orthodox Christian. Among Albanians a very small percentage of Catholics and Orthodox Christians are found. According to the most recent statistical data, the present ethnical situation in Kosovo is as follows: 91% Albanians, 5% Serbs, 4 % other minority groups. The percentage of the ethnical Albanian population has increased as a result of the war in Kosovo.

Kosovo, apart from the Serbian minority and the small number of Catholics, is almost exclusively comprised of Muslims who are explicitly secularly minded.
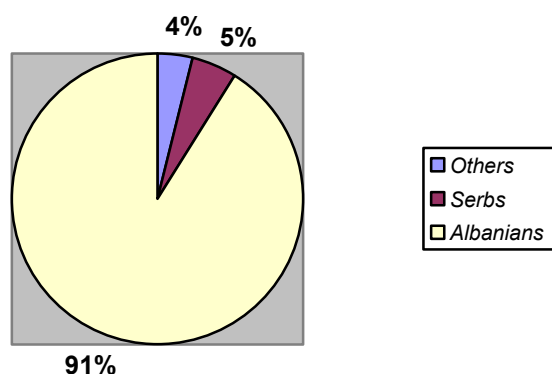
Despite its definitely secular nationalism, the Albanians in Kosovo are also engaged in the process of re-Islamization, although they do that in a totally different manner from the Bosniaks and other Slavonic speaking Muslims on the Balkans. The institution of the *Islamic Community* in Prishtina, headed by the *reis-ul-ulama* Naim Tarnava, a representative of the middle generation of leaders who obtained their education in Cairo, is still resolving important problems in the postwar period. The main ones among them are the very building of the institution, the constitution of a native, Albanian Muslim elite of Kosovo and the restoration of the Muslim temples destroyed during the military conflicts. Under the leadership of Naim Tarnava the Islamic Community is building itself an image of an institution opened for a dialogue with the Muslim countries, including the Arab states, as well as with the West, including the USA.

Together with this "official Islam", just like the rest of the countries of the Western Balkans, ideas are also spread in Kosovo that are perceived by the majority as "radical" of "fundamentalist", due to their foreign cultural origin. Here we can also observe the typical conflict between generations, where the bearers of the fundamentalist ideas are mainly young graduates of the Arab Universities, often accused of preaching Wahhabism. The leader of this movement is considered to be the 29-years' old Albert Haziri-Zejdi, who graduated his education in Jordan. In Kosovo, however, still there is no local organized structure of these more conservative Islamic movements. After the war a lot of official charity and humanitarian organizations operate in the country, such as the World Islamic League through the "Islamic Help" (*Al-Ighatha Al-Islamiya*) organization. Just similar to the "King Fahd" Islamic Culture Center that operates in Sarajevo, these organizations are, of course, foreign to the local population with respect of their culture, but although their ideology is a conservative one, this does not automatically mean that they provide support for radical Muslim groups.

The leaders of the *Islamic Community* in Kosovo, like the religious leaders in Bosnia, have ambivalent relations with these foreign representatives. On one hand, they support official contacts with them, but on the other, they do not let them occupy key positions which could have influence on larger masses of the local population. This represents an obstacle to the possibility

that these organizations build parallel structures competing with the official religious organs of the *Islamic Community* in Kosovo.

2.5 Islam in the Republic of Macedonia: new challenges
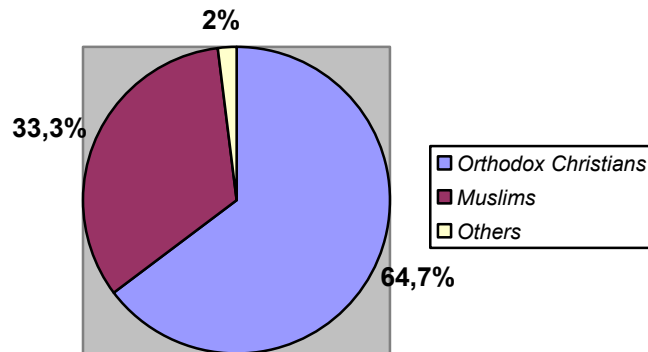
Muslims in Macedonia belong to five ethnical groups: Albanians, Turks, Roma, Macedonian Muslims (more widely known as *Torbeshi* or *Pomaks*, i.e. Slavs who adopted Islam in the Islamic period) and Bosnians. Contrary to Pomaks in Greece and Bulgaria, the Torbeshis are officially acknowledged by the Macedonian state as constituting a separate ethnical group. The majority of Muslims in Macedonia are Sunni, while the other small art of them are Bektashi.

Many of the representatives of the minorities in Macedonia collide with great political and technical problems when applying for a Macedonian citizenship after the independency of this former Yugoslavian republic has been declared. It is difficult to provide objective statistical data for the real number of Muslims in Macedonia. The leaders of the different ethnical communities give the following figures: Albanians are about 40% of the population,[50] Turks vary between 170,000 and 200,000, and Bosnians are

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[50] CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) (1992). Report on the US Helsinki Commission Delegation to Hungary, Greece, Macedonia and Croatia (Washington: CSCE), p.13.

about 60,000-80,000, while Roma are about 200,000.[51] In any case, we could speak about more than half a million of Muslims.

The officially registered Islamic community in the Republic of Macedonia is being regulated according to the rules that were accepted in 1994. This religious community has four main organizational organs: the *reis-ul-ulama*, the Executive Council (*Mejlisi Shura*), The Financial and Juridical Council (*Mejlis*) and the offices of the Muftis.[52] The *reis-ul-ulama* is the leader of the Islamic community and has great legal power as far as administrative and executive authorities are concerned.

The executive council consists of 23 members and works in six main spheres, i.e. religious education, science and culture, information and publications, administrative and financial sector, and sector that takes care of the *waqf* property. This council includes all of the Muftis, the Director of the High Islamic School, the Rector of the Islamic Faculty of Theology, the Director of the humanitarian organization of *El-Hilal*, the Directors of the six main spheres of work of the Council, the head of the Association of Imams and five experts in law, economy, political and economy sciences, who are appointed by the *reis-ul-ulama.*

The humanitarian organization *El-Hilal* is functioning within the organizational structure of the Islamic Community. *El-Hilal* was established in 1991 as an association of the Muslims and was transformed in a humanitarian organization in December 1993. It has five branches in Skopje and nine ones outside the Macedonian capital. Its chief activities are related to the distribution of humanitarian aid, the support of events in the sphere of culture, support of refugees, education of children with unfavorable social status.

According to the tradition, the inter-confessional relation between the Islamic community and the Orthodox Church and the Macedonian majority, are quite wintry and self-contained. These relations have become more strained in the last years after the independency of Macedonia (1992-1993). In that time, the myth of the "Muslim conspiracy" which puts Orthodox

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[51] Human Rights Watch (HRW) (1996). *A Threat to "Stability": Human Rights Violations in Macedonia* (New York: Human Rights Watch /Helsinki), p.68.

Christianity in danger appeared. In the course of time, the strong opposition between Orthodox Christians and Muslims gradually subsided, but obviously politicizing of religion still continued to exist. The social division between them also remained evident. The cases of mixed marriages are very rare. The Orthodox Christians look upon Muslims as a monolith group while Muslims feel like "second-hand" citizens in their own country.

After more than one year of internal political disturbances and turmoil, including many cases of violence, the Head of the Islamic Community in Macedonia, the *reis-ul-ulama* Arif Emini, was forced to resign from his office in June 2005. The pressure upon him was exerted on behalf of the wing of Zenon Berisha who wanted to gain leadership over Muslims. Berisha and his followers were accused of pro-Wahhabi tendencies. The society of Macedonia was shocked when Emini was taken as a hostage in his office by some of the people of Berisha. In 2001, when Macedonia was seized by turmoil, this was mainly due to the aspiration to draw ethnical lines of distinguishment and Islam has never played a significant role in this conflict. Some days after the resignation of Emini, a group of imams from Skopje was attacked and beaten. Later on, the chief Imam of the Skopje "Hudaverli" Mosque Shaban Ahmeti stated before the *Utrinski Vestnik* newspaper: "The people who attacked us, were undoubtedly representatives of the radical Islam, or, as we call them – Wahhabis, supporters of Zenon Berisha".

Not all of the people support he view that the conflicts in the Islamic community represent a proof in favor of the existence of clear separation among the Macedonian Albanians who profess Islam. In January 2006 the International Crisis Group, based in Brussels, concluded that "in spite of the insinuations that differences have their ground in religious theology, religion is rarely mentioned during discussions as a reason for conflicts within the community. The access to real estate, money and influence is the main issue of conflict. This is equivalent to what the leading Albanian politician Arben

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[52] Islamska Zaednitsa (1997). *Islamska zaednitsa i nejzinite institutsii [The Islamic Community and Its Institutions]*, a brochure in Albanian, Turkish and Macedonian, (Skopje: Albina Gold), p.67.

Xhaferi stated, namely that "contemporary politicians and leaders instrumentalize religion to achieve their own goals".[53]

At this stage of the development of the situation in the Republic of Macedonia, there are no sufficient arguments to assert that fundamentalist interpretations of Islam could have a long-lasting impact upon the Muslims in the country. The present *reis-ul-ulama* Bahri Aliu has some priorities, among which the most significant role for the activity of the Islamic Community is played by the following items: a pursuit to introduce classes of religion in state schools; restitution of the *waqf* property and enhancing the status of the Islamic Community similarly to the Macedonian Orthodox Church.[54] All of these problems to a certain extent are also typical for other countries on Southeastern Europe, where Muslims are "a great minority".

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[53] Interview with Arben Xhaferi, Tetovo, March 17th 2006.
[54] Interview with Bahri Aliju, Skopje, March 16th 2006.

3. Islam and Public Policy in Bulgaria

The transition of Bulgaria from a totalitarian to a democratic system created an expectation that public policy might work to reconcile the public interest with social justice. Although the government did guarantee the rights of religious denominations in general, public policy has largely ignored the challenges related to religion, particularly Islam. This ignorance of Islam as a religion and social practice among Bulgaria's elite and influential policy makers ensures an official ambivalence towards the Muslim minority. We can consider the example of how the government handled the centers of Islamic religious education – an issue that has recently come to the forefront of public policy debate. Not only do governmental bodies such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs not have any updated communication strategies for these Muslim institutions, both the secondary and higher Islamic schools in Bulgaria are chronically under funded. The state, claiming an explicitly secular character, refuses to provide any financial support, categorizing religious schools as "private," and thereby denying them access to government support. In turn, that means that religious schools remain relatively isolated from other academic institutions. Furthermore, limited access to international academic cooperation has resulted in Islamic religious schools relying on foreign religious foundations for scholarships and fellowships to study and specialize abroad. The academic marginalization which has been tacitly "encouraged" by the government, forces these educational institutions to remain independent of local development and international secular cooperation. They have become an object of suspicion in mainstream Bulgarian society – a mistrust that is reinforced by the lack of public access to the educational and research activities of these schools.

What is increasingly important for Bulgaria, and more broadly of Southeast Europe, is the impact of the global events related to Islam on the relations between the Muslim community and mainstream society. The central issue is whether conflictual relations on an international level will be internalized into local reality, a situation that could easily be realized within the emerging new religious public sphere. If we take into consideration the traditional secularist

approaches that prevail in public policy making towards religious and minority communities, this could be fast becoming a pressing issue.

A typical example of this problem can again be found in the educational sector. During the 45 years of communist rule, there was no religious instruction in mainstream Bulgarian schools. It was only in 1997-1998 and 1999-2000 that courses on Christianity and Islam were (respectively) reintroduced. Nevertheless, mainstream public policy still relies on traditional secularist strategies, which as a rule attempt to avoid religion. This is consistent in the teaching of religion in mainstream (secular) schools even though proper religious instruction could foster a new type of informed understanding adequate to address today's challenges. Religious instruction remains conservative, ethnocentric and dogmatic and religion's basic moral values are represented as exclusive, with little or no attention to interfaith relations, either in an ethical/theological or practical/social sense. Religious education is cut off from broader social and political development and, rather than supporting social integration and building bridges, it perpetuates if not exacerbates divides between Christian and Muslim populations. The influence of religious instruction will increase with time, so it is crucial that it stops acting as an impediment to inter-religious relations. More academic and intercultural competence must be brought towards curriculum development and instruction.

3.1 Islam in Wider Europe Context: Towards Bridging the Divides from the Balkans with Bulgaria as an EU member

The appearance of Muslim population in the Bulgaria territories, as well as the Balkan region as a whole, is connected with their overtaking by the Ottoman Empire around the beginning of the 14th century. Muslims from Anadola came to inhabit what are now Bulgarian territories around the end of the 14th century, as usually they live in compact communities. The historical studies testify that the present Muslim communities in the Balkans have been formed gradually during the centuries under the impact of various factors. The historical fate of those communities has been built in the course of a complex, historically conditioned process, in which took part the conquerors from Asia Minor and other Muslim immigrants, as well as the local Islamized population.

Apart from the assumptions that even before the Ottoman conquest in our lands was settled Islam professing population, only the conquest and permanent subjection of the Bulgarian territories by the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 14th century brought about the demographic, institutional and economic conditions for the development of Muslim culture and self-consciousness here. The problems that arose around the appearance and growth of the population that professed Islam in Bulgaria and in the Balkans are very old and much developed in academic studies. Still, the main ways through which that was accomplished remained two, namely *colonization of Muslim population* and *Islamization of natively-born population*.   The colonization of Turks and Islamic elements as a whole did not affect equally all parts of the Bulgarian lands and more generally speaking the Balkans, but rather was concentrated in particular regions for which this was one of the factors that determined the characteristics of the historical and cultural processes there.

Together with that, however, there was another parallel process, probably more profoundly affecting the demographic situation, namely the process of adopting Islam by the native population. According to most scholars of the Ottoman Empire, exactly Islamization proved to be the decisive factor for the increase of the number of Muslim population in the Balkans and the Bulgarian territories in particular. Together with that, however, there has been an years-lasting debate in Bulgarian historiography on the reasons and the ways of adopting Islam, as well as on the role of Ottoman authority.

The result of these briefly sketched historical processes was that on the territory of Bulgaria and Bulgarian lands appeared *compact Muslim communities*. In a most general manner, they are divided into two groups: Turkish speaking Muslims and Muslim population, speaking Slavonic languages (or Albanian in the West Balkans). Here we have to add also the Roma Muslims, who – just like the Roma Christians – have been suspiciously looked upon by the representatives of both religions and definitely were not considered to belong to one faith with them.

3.2 Islam and the Modern Bulgarian State

After the Liberation from the Ottoman rule in the period between 1877–78 and the rise of the modern Bulgarian state Orthodox Christianity was proclaimed to be the "dominant religion", although the members of ethnical and religious groups were acknowledged to be Bulgarian citizens enjoying equal rights. In spite of that our history knows series of acts of violence and deportation campaigns carried by some of the Bulgarian governments targeting building of as homogenous single-nation state as possible.

The changes of the names of members of the Bulgarian minorities after the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman rule – changes that gave rise to controversial academic and public discussions – together with propaganda and pragmatic political purposes, had also a more profound meaning. As a whole, changes of names were used to break off a tradition or a historical heritage. Changes of names of settlements or streets have been a common practice in Bulgaria since the establishment of the modern state at the end of the 19th century – a practice which, by the way, depended upon the dominant ideology. Until the Second World War these changes of names were meant on the first place to extinguish Ottoman heritage. They constituted an element of the large scale *de-Ottomanisation* of Bulgarian society, which was reflected in the outer look of many settlements.

The de-Ottomanisation process also affected the population. During the Balkan wars in the period between 1912–1913 for the first time portion of the Muslim population was forcedly converted to Christianity. Particularly affected by this forced conversion was the Pomak population along the Bulgarian-Greek border. In this way the Bulgarian speaking Muslim population had to adopt the second important (next to language) attribute of the Bulgarian nationality, namely the Orthodox Christianity faith. With this conversion into Christianity the new Christians were also given Christian names which erased one of the outer distinguishing distinctions between Christians and Muslims. Together with that the abrogation of such forced conversions turned into a part of the political agenda of the rulers in case that they strove towards providing for the support of the Pomaks. That is exactly what the government of Radoslavov did after the Balkan wars, as well the Fatherland Front after the Second World War.

The totalitarian communist order in its turn made Muslim communities in our country face multiple difficulties and hardships. Led by its desire to turn Bulgaria into a single-nation country, this regime embarked upon series of attempts to assimilate Pomaks, as well as ethical Turks. The state policy of forced assimilation began during the 50's of the 19th century with the abolition of newspapers and schools and went on through series of changes of names of Bulgarian Muslims. In 1972-1974 the names of Pomaks were substituted for Bulgarian ones, while in 1984-1985 the so called "rebirth process" took place; it was related to the events of the mass change of names of the ethnical Turks.

This process was grounded on the presumption that all of the Muslims in Bulgaria are Bulgarians who adopted Islam during the age of the Ottoman Empire; therefore they needed "awakening" in order to realize their true national identity. In the spring and summer of 1989 the ethnical Turks of Bulgaria started mass protests in North-Eastern and South Bulgaria raising claims to restore their original names. Protest burst out, which were put down with the help of the police and the army and innocent victims fell. The oppositional behavior of the ethnical Turks led to a change of strategy of the communist regime which enabled them to leave the country by opening the border with neighboring Turkey. The same year just during the time period between June and August about 300,000 ethnical Turks-Bulgarian citizens left Bulgaria, finding a refuge in Turkey.

It must be noted that the changes of names that took place during the communist rule did not target achieving the same goals as the previous Bulgarian regimes. A task of a primary importance of the communist government was to hinder the Roma and the Pomaks from associating with the Turkish minority. In the case of the Pomaks this task was related to the argument that the change of names restored "the historical truth" and thus the Pomaks were returned back to the cradle of Bulgarian civilization which they had been forced to leave some centuries ago with their conversion to Islam, either forcedly or voluntarily. The fact that such argument has never been referred to during the change of names of the Pomaks makes this justification even more unlikely. When later on the Turkish population also fell victim to the change of names, once again the primary goal was to carry out a "divide and

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conquer" type of a policy. The priority objective in this case was to cut off the relation between the Turks in Bulgaria and Turks in Turkey. The research efforts to justify it that were undertaken at the end of the process of changing of names were so great also because of the fact that the Turkish population of the country even before the war developed a "strong Turkish conscience". This conscience was all the more affirmed by the bonds of relation that existed with neighboring Turkey. Besides that, the Bulgarian Communist Party hoped that through the change of names the Turkish community will join the Bulgarian nation. These hopes nevertheless proved to be mistaken.

After the democratic changes in 1989 the role of Islam in Bulgaria has undergone a significant change. With the fall of the Communist regime the rights of the Muslim minority have been restored. The existence of religious freedom and multi-party political system enabled the existence of an ethnical party of the Bulgarian Turks, namely Movement for Rights and Freedoms which in the last years has developed also as a liberal political organization taking part for the second time in the ruling coalition. In a political pluralism and religious freedom environment the traditional for our territories system to administrate the religious affairs of Muslims started to operate, represented by the General Mufti Administration and its organs. In a normal environment it should bear responsibility for the activity of the Muslim mosques (at present numbering about 1040) and more than 500 *hojjas* and *imams* working in them.

3.3 Demographic and Ethno-Religious Aspects

At present the Muslim population in Bulgaria consist of ethnical Turks, Pomaks (Bulgarian Muslims) and Roma Muslims. According to the most recent census of the population from year 2001, about 12.2 % of the Bulgarian population confesses Islam. This relatively great portion of Muslims turns them into the greatest minority group in a country with dominantly Christian population (82.6 %). Undoubtedly Islam is the dominant religion among ethnical Turks (1.3 % of them only are Christians). Although this has always been difficult to find out, at least according to the official census 131,531 individuals (or 2%) of the Bulgarian ethnical community profess Islam. Muslims are more than one fourth (27.9 %) of the Roma population. The

charts on pages 5 and 6 show the share of those who profess Islam compared with the other religious communities in Bulgaria and respectively the distribution of Muslims according to ethnical criteria:

Chart 1:

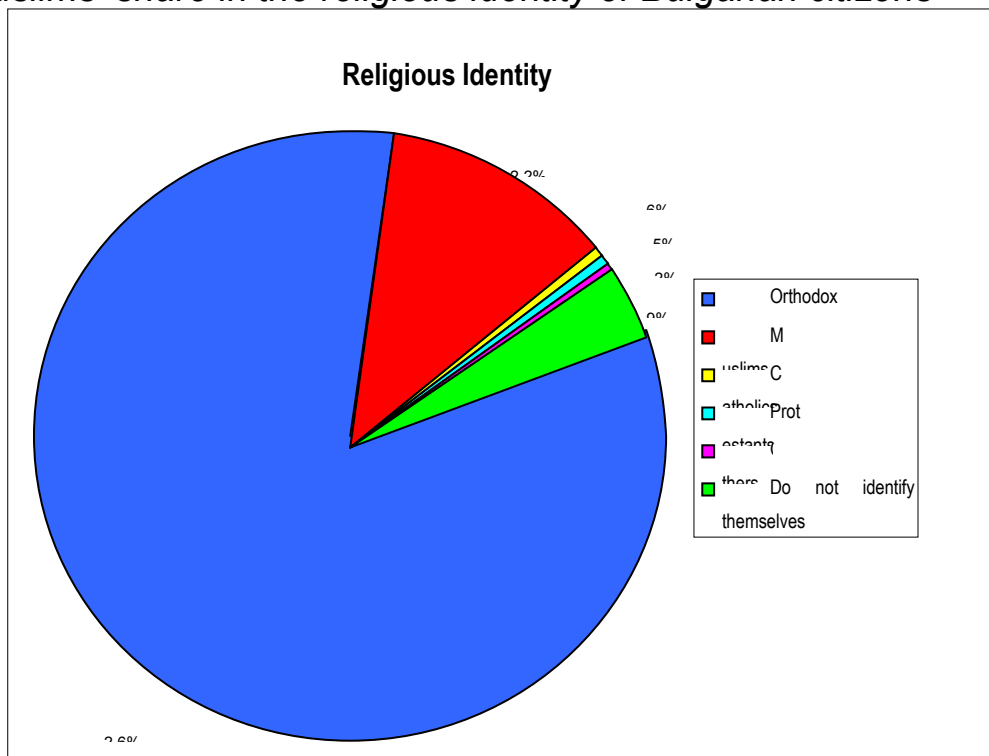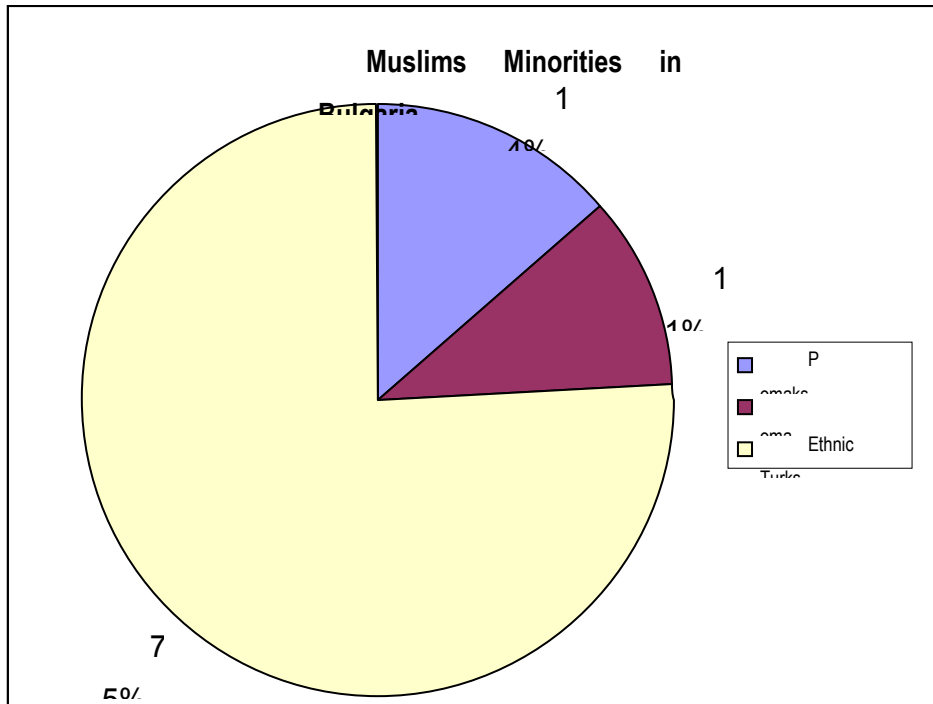*Muslims' share in the religious identity of Bulgarian citizens*

Chart 2:

Distribution of these 12.2% of Muslims among the ethnical groups that comprise them

From the viewpoint of the geographical distribution ethnical Turks enjoy a particular concentration in some specific regions, while other people professing Islam enjoy a wider and more scattered territorial distribution. This is related also to the different ethno-cultural characteristics of the Pomaks and Roma who profess Islam. As a whole, however, among all of these regions Kurdzhali is especially prominent for it is inhabited by an overall number of 114,217 Muslims who comprise about 69.6% of the whole population of the region. The second place speaking in numbers of the Muslim population is Razgrad region where 81,835 individuals of this confession live (53.7%). Next follow the regions of Shumen (72,544), Burgas (64,568), Plovdiv (62,595), Blagoevgrad (62,431), Targovishte (58,838), Smolyan (58,758), and Silistra (54,174).

In present day Bulgaria Muslim communities inhabit mainly the territories in the North-Eastern part of the country and the Rhodopes region. The majority of the Muslims in the country are Sunni, because Sunni Islam was the

one spread by the conquerors in the age of the Ottoman rule. Together with Sunni Islam that has often been conventionally designated by specialists as "Islamic Orthodoxy", among Muslims in Bulgaria are also found representatives of Shiism – a movement which acknowledges Ali – the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law together with his successors – for leaders of the Muslim community (*umma*). Shiites in Bulgaria territories have been mainly associated with the community of the *Kizilbashs* (Alewis) or the Sufi mystical order of the *Bektashi*.

The Kizilbashs (known as *Alewis*, as well as *Ali-Ilahis* or *Alians*) call themselves "People of Truth" and basically have been looked upon as a radical Shi'a sect, as far as their religious dogmas are concerned. They have reached as far as to deify Ali and believe that God is associated with Ali in an inseparable way and consequently manifests Himself in emanations embodied by the Prophets Adam, Noah (Arabic *Nuh*), Abraham (Arabic *Ibrahim*), Moses (Arabic *Musa*), Jesus (Arabic *Isa*) and Muhammad himself, as well as by the saints and the Imams. In their rites the Alewi use books called "Exodus" (*khuruj*) that are kept in secret from the people outside of the sect. Among the things that characterize them are also night vigils and rituals and worshipping of local saints and totems. There are also things adopted from Christians who enjoy a special tolerance. Polygamy is rejected. This sect appeared in 15th – 16th centuries as an opposition to the Ottomans in Western Iran and Asia Minor. The very name "Kizilbashs" comes from the Turkish word for "red heads" and was related to the twelve red ribbons honoring the twelve Shia Imams which were used by the warriors of the Safavid dynasty (the dynasty that imposed Shiism as the ruling doctrine in Iran) to decorate their turbans during their conflict with the Ottoman state. Today Alewis number about 3 million people. The majority of them live in Turkey and partly Iran and Afghanistan while they are represented on the territory of Bulgaria by single communities only in the North-Eastern part.

Generally speaking, however, Bulgarian Muslims from the three ethnical segments of the Islamic community in our country – ethnical Turks, Pomaks and Roma – are *Sunni*. The prevailing influence upon their spiritual life and rites is still exerted by interpretations and rituals inherited from the Ottoman period. What characterizes Sunni Islam is that it has no sects but rather four

main juridical schools – the Hanafi (to which belong Bulgarian Muslims by virtue of tradition dating from the Ottoman empire), Hanbali (today this school exerts a strong influence, for example among the Wahhabi Muslims in Saudi Arabia), Shafii and Maliki, the influence of which is weak in the Balkans. Although these schools are considered to be equal, sometimes there are serious differences in the interpretation of the Islamic sacred Law, namely the *shari'a*.

3.3.1 Ethnic Turks

Ethnic Turks comprise the greatest community that professed the Islamic faith on the territory of modern Bulgaria – 746,664 people according to the official census. After the Liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1877-1878 and the rise of the Third Bulgarian State, Orthodox Christianity was proclaimed to be the "dominant religion" although minority ethnical and religious groups were acknowledged to be Bulgarian citizens enjoying equal rights. Even during the war between Russia and Turkey and especially after the Liberation the largest part of the subjects of emigrated to the neighboring territories   of the Ottoman Empire. According to the statistics in 1887 they were about 21.44% of the whole population of the newly created Bulgarian state.

Considerable parts of the Bulgarian Turk (about 90.000) are Alewi Shiites. They inhabit the North-Eastern regions. What characterizes this community is still the relatively unfavorable educational structure (6% of them are illiterate) which hinders the optimal realization and fulfillment of those who belong to it. The fact that Turkish is the mother-tongue for 96.2% of the people belonging to this community serves as a proof that Islam still continues being a powerfully influencing factor in the process of self-identification in it.

3.3.2 Pomaks

Next to the ethnical Turks, Pomaks (often called also Bulgarian Mohammedans or even Slavonic speaking Muslims) are the biggest Muslim community – by estimates of specialists, their number ranges between 200,000 and 250,000 people. They are Bulgarians and Bulgarian is their mother tongue but nevertheless their religion, everyday life and rituals are Islamic. The material culture of the Bulgarian Muslims who inhabit mainly the

Rhodopes region but also some parts of the Balkan mountain (Stara Planina) proves their Bulgarian ethnical identity; besides that, anthropologically speaking, they are one of the most prominent representatives of the Slavonic racial type. In 1880 their number was 20,000 while in 1920 their number had already reached 100,000 i.e. they have a higher birthrate compared with Bulgarian Muslims.

Pomaks are also a community which is not quite inherently coherent. Some scholars define them as "a world of its own which is situated between Bulgarians and Turks". The greatest problem around the Pomaks stems from their ethnical self-consciousness. What connects them with Bulgarians is their common ethnical origin while the connection between them and Turks is the common religion, namely Islam. In modern times the process of building self-confidence in them and the establishment of relations with those who surround them is an extremely complex one. Some of them identify with *Turks*, others with *Bulgarians*, while a third group searches for its identity as *Pomaks*.

Because of their complex historical fate, as well because of the permanently varying state policy towards them which was often related with violence, the Pomaks who live in the surroundings of Bulgarian Christians often tend to identify themselves as Turks. Pomaks, who inhabit the regions with compact Turkish minority, prefer to define themselves as Bulgarians. Some of them are even prone to convert to Christianity as a sign of being fully merged into the Bulgarian community. There is also a third subgroup whose presence in the public and spiritual life of the community has become more prominent in recent years. This group insists upon its own Pomak and Muslim identity and would not like to be integrated neither in Turks nor in Bulgarians.

This third subgroup, asserting the existence of "a Pomak ethnical community (the term "nation" is usually avoided) has even already created its own "scientific" or quasi-scientific theory of its origin using the language and the arguments of the historical science. Probably the most important two elements in it are as follows: their *self-exemption from belonging to Bulgarian medieval history* (because of the two factors to form Bulgarian ethical identity, namely statehood and Christian religion) and *the quest for their own ethnical origin in the age before the Ottoman conquest*, implying that the Pomaks had adopted Islam directly from the Arabs.

It is important to note here that the exemption from the Bulgarian medieval history in no way indicates any anti-Bulgarian or even anti-Christian inclinations. Just contrary to that, it is admitted that Bulgarian Christians and Bulgarian Muslims have common Slavonic and Thracian origins. What this quasi-scientific theory in fact denies, is the idea of *treachery* and *apostasy from the Christian faith*, promoted by official historiography in the course of decades. Precisely that fact lies in the basis of the assertions that Pomaks have not accepted Islam from the Ottoman Turks by preferring the more prestigious option of its adoption directly from Arabs.

All these three groups of Bulgarian Muslims which have been shaped in that way according to their own desire fro self-identification as Bulgarians, Turks or Pomaks, are approximately equal in number.

3.3.3 Roma Muslims

Roma constitute a significant part of the population of Bulgaria. They came to settle down in Bulgarian territories in the beginning of the 13th century. The majority of them adopted Islam in the period between 16–17th centuries, but after the Liberation a great part of them goes back to Christian traditions. The official census indicates that their number is 370,908 but according to the experts, it is accepted that today their number id greater. In fact, although they usually define themselves either as Christians or Muslims, practically speaking, Roma often follow syncretic rituals combining elements of both Christianity and Islam (more than 55% of the Roma population in Bulgaria are Christians while in recent 10 years the share of Protestants among them has been rapidly increasing). Inside the two main religious groups of Roma we can observe a division of a lot of subgroups in accordance with their way and age of settling down, as well as with their professional occupations which has defined some specifics in the everyday life and the traditions of the subgroups. About 18% of the Roma do not define themselves as belonging to neither of the religious communities found in our country. This is indicative of the still weak influences of traditional faiths upon their ethnic community. Considering these ethno-cultural and religious specifics of the Roma community, still it is one of the least homogenous.

Despite this common characteristic of Pomak religious life and its inherent syncretism, among Roma Muslims there could also be observed specific processes of re-Islamization. Ethnical and cultural differences between Roma and other Muslims in Bulgaria (Pomaks and ethnical Turks), as well the intensive demographic increase of this population make it extremely important to study the present-day processes, related to spread of Islam and following it. Generally speaking, Roma are more inclined to break off from the local traditions of Balkan Islam that are typical for Bulgarian territories. This makes them more yielding to foreign cultural and religious influence compared not only with ethnical Turks, but also with Pomaks.

3.4 Islam in everyday life and the public sphere in Bulgaria

During the last 15 years after the democratization process in the regions inhabited by Muslim population there has been running with a different degree of intensity a process of *re-Islamization*. It is a process that has its global grounds and dimensions, but besides that it is also affected by local traditions and ethno-cultural characteristics of the communities which profess Islam. In our country this is especially manifest by observing the distinct differences among the processes running in the spiritual life of Turks, Pomaks and Roma Muslims. As a direct consequence of the restored civil rights and religious freedoms in Bulgaria, just similar to other countries of Eastern Europe, there has been a process of going back to the religious roots; in that process the tendency of re-Islamization is related to the historical, cultural and doctrinal peculiarities of Islam itself.

Until the democratic changes in Bulgaria the vast majority of Muslims in our country practiced the so-called "popular Islam" – a term used to imply that they have been observing some ritual traditions, part of which even contradict "Orthodox" Islamic doctrine. In fact until the end of the 80's of the past century what was observed were not exactly the universally valid dogmas and rituals in Islam but rather the local customs and forms of religious belief. The freedoms that have been granted in the period since the end of 1989 until nowadays have brought Muslims to a new environment. Many of them re-discover their religious roots and turn Islam into an important element of their

identity. Part of them went abroad to study Islamic theology and religious sciences – as a rule ethnical Turks traveled to the Republic of Turkey, while Pomaks were usually educated in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and other countries of the Middle East.

According to geographical criteria, the role of religion in everyday life and public relations of Bulgarian Muslims, hence the degree of re-Islamization, have been quite diverse; they have always been affected by the specific ethno-cultural features of the relevant group of population. The Muslim community in North-Eastern Bulgaria and East Rhodopes region in its largest part is comprised of ethnical Turks who profess Islam by virtue of tradition ("popular Islam"). It has rather more ritual, celebrational and ethnographical meaning for the community that any other specifically religious importance. For the Muslims in these regions ethnical identity is much more important than the religious one. The Muslim community in the Western Rhodopes region consists of Bulgarian Muslims – the Pomaks. Islam play a significant role in the community but since those people who profess it have no clear ethnical conscience – they waver among Bulgarian, Pomak and Turkish elements – the type of Islam that they profess, is mixed with a lot of ethnographical elements, i.e. caps, dresses etc. that are still considered to be very important symbols of the community. Here we can observe rather a clash of an isolated traditionally patriarchal community with modernity than religious confrontation or re-Islamization. Although the local imams are young people educated in Islam, even they prefer holding to local traditional forms of professing Islam by thinking that these forms play a significant role by forming the public identity. In spite of that, although here re-Islamization follows a different course in comparison with the Central Rhodopes region, it gradually leaves its stamp upon the everyday life and the public relations of the Muslim population.

The most dynamic re-Islamization processes are the ones in the Muslim community in the Central Rhodopes. It is comprised of Bulgarian Muslims who in the different parts of the region represent from 30% to 90% of the population of the region. As a whole, the Islamic community in the Central Rhodopes has long ago resolved the issue of its ethnical and national identity. The existence of compact Christian population in the region – population with which the Muslim community has been always co-existing and maintaining

contacts – does not allow Muslim population to forget its Bulgarian ethnical origin during the Ottoman rule; the relations of kinship between Christians and Muslims that have been maintained also contribute strongly to that. Islam has always had a powerful impact upon the life of the Muslim community in the Central Rhodopes. It is the base upon which the identity of the community has been build. Without it the community would have shrunk from existence because it constitutes the only ground for distinction between its Bulgarian Christian and Bulgarian Muslim members. After 50 years of atheistic dictatorship the fall of the Communist regime quite naturally provoked a process of re-Islamization among the Muslims in the Central Rhodopes region.

The re-Islamization process in Bulgaria coincided with a global process of reviving the religion of Islam in the countries with dominantly Muslim population as well as those ones among them in which Muslims constitute a minority. In the European Union itself "the Islamic theme" has become one of the most pressing ones; meanwhile authoritative commentators prognosticate that it will keep on defining the course of the further debates on the Old Continent. Precisely Islam turned to be the reason to carry out important expert and political discussions on the issues of the relations between religion and politics, as well as religion and the public sphere. Issues which in the European context have been considered solved long ago, now again emerge to the surface. Thus, for example, because of the new rise of Islam, the issues of the "religious community", the relation between freedom of conscience and religious freedom were also put forth, in a new light, though. The question of the religious symbols emerged, as well as the question about whether it is necessary to have specific laws for Muslims or observing common civil and criminal law should be enough.

The religious regulations intrinsic to the Muslim community collide with some problems stemming from civil law (in France for example some female Muslim students refused to be examined by a male examiner, because Islam forbids being alone with outsiders among men). In Bulgaria some re-Islamized Muslims think that "if you keep the decrees of your religion, you are found to contradict some public norms" because in this country, as well as in the West "the unbelievers define the course of the everyday life of believers". Among believing Bulgarians Muslims in the Rhodopes region has arisen a painful

dilemma: what is necessary to be followed in case of contradiction between what is stipulated by civil laws *versus* religion. Until now "popular Islam" in Bulgaria suggested not particularly strict adherence to fundamental dogmas and norms of the Islamic faith; contrary to that, re-Islamization leads to a profound change in the way of thinking of Muslims who go through it, and Pomaks on the first place who have been distanced from the "Turkish model".

As a rule in Islamic religion does not exist the division that characterizes Western democracies – the separation between what is secular and spiritual in the community life: "Religion, Islam – that is the whole life – politics, economy, and social sphere. There is no sphere of human activity which is not subject to religion. While in Christianity – such as it has arrived to us, and not such as it functioned – religion is separated from social life. Jesus is more bearer of spiritual, while with Mohammed we also enter the social sphere." These are words shared by a Muslim participant in a focus group in the framework of the project – thoughts that by nothing differ from the way of thinking of many Muslims in the world. In this aspect the statement of another participant is also a typical one: "The problem is that right at the moment in Bulgaria, as well as among Muslims as a result of the 45 years passed prevails the way of thinking that separates religion as a spiritual sphere from its social and political aspect". The conflict that emerged between representatives of the younger and the older generations of Muslims in the Rhodopes region, is not a coincidental one. Young people explain that fact with the religious ignorance of the older ones who have not been following "true Islam", but rather local folklore traditions and religious delusions inherited by Turks. These views reflect the processes of re-Islamization and gradual break off with the local traditions of the "popular Islam" – a tendency which is hardly reversible, especially regarding the Central Rhodopes region, as well as to a great extent the Eastern Rhodopes region.

These are serious challenges to the very legal basis of contemporary European democracies and these challenges could threaten the state of civil peace in some otherwise stable countries of the European Union. Although in Bulgaria there has been a century long model of peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims, our country is not protected against conflicts on that basis. The inevitable increase in the degree of re-Islamization

provoked the emergence of various processes in the different ethnical segments of the Islamic community in Bulgaria – some of them have entirely positive character (for example, observing religious moral values), others are neutral (for example, observance of usual Islamic rituals and rites), while others hide potential risks for the civil peace. Generally speaking, these processes are associated – especially by media which forms public tendencies – with the influx and influence of foreign religious and political factors.

3.5 New Tendencies among Muslims in Bulgaria

As a whole, the inherited model of peaceful ethnical and religious co-existence that has been preserved until today, keeps on functioning successfully after the democratic changes. This mutual understanding is deservedly looked upon as an achievement of Bulgaria as it manifestly distinguishes our country in comparison with the vehement ethnical conflicts in the Western Balkans. At this stage Muslims in Bulgaria as a whole are moderate ones. At the same time, in the framework on the studies carried out "on the spot", Muslims leaders from the Rhodopes region informally share that "the ice is thin" and "every mention of the word "religion" could lead to conflicts" which could be brought just by "one sparkle" because of the offenses accumulated in the past. The combination of these unfavorable factors and the historical aggravations combined with external influences in the last years could lead to emergence of fundamentalist moods among part of the Bulgarian population. Among these factors the key role is played by:

- the social and economical problems in the regions inhabited by Muslims;
- the unfavorable degree of integration of Bulgarian Muslim population, as far as education and culture are concerned;
- the influence and the character of the process of re-Islamization;
- the global processes related to Islam after 11th September 2001 and the public discussions on the situation of Muslims;
- the penetration of foreign in cultural aspect religious influences upon the Bulgarian Muslims.

The combination of these factors has a lot of negative consequences but those which deserve the greatest deal of attention are marginalization and encapsulation of a part of the Muslim community. Because of the above-

mentioned factors, in some of the Muslims – especially those in whose life religion plays an important role – emerges the feeling that they are "rejected" by the majority; they remain related to it mainly because of the common for all Bulgarians economical and everyday hardships in the transition period. In some of the re-Islamized Bulgarian citizens originated the permanent point of view that it is difficult to be a Muslim in a non-Muslim society. Such difficulties of integration and full co-existence have already started to create serious problems in American and some Western European societies; Bulgaria will confront them as a member of the EU too.

At this stage the intertwining of the aforementioned factors lead to some disturbing processes which in a most general manner affect the problems of the two important spheres of the public life in Bulgaria, namely *Islamic religious education* and *leadership in Muslim community*. Although they are different in their manifestation, the process of deepening of those problems could lead to separations among Muslims; the consequences are difficult to foresee as this would aggravate the differences in their religious points of view and cultural identity by hindering their adequate integration in the public sphere. All of this, despite the native character of the Bulgarian Muslim community, to a great extent could lead to convergence between the problems of the Bulgarian society and Western society.

3.6 Islamic Religious Education in Bulgaria

At the moment in Bulgaria on different educational levels function different types of Islamic schools:

- The Higher Islamic Institute, Sofia:

The institute which was established in the beginning of the 90's of the last century and has a status of private college affiliated with the Chief Mufti Administration in Bulgaria. The state does not allot finance for it, meanwhile delegating its financial support to the pro-government Turkish Religious Foundation (*Diyanet Vakfi*). Although it has already been functioning for a whole decade, the High Islamic Institute offers an exclusively low level of education and suffers from lacks of qualified staff. The insufficient number of the habilitated professors is among the chief reasons because of which the

diploma of the Institutes graduates is not acknowledges by the Bulgarian state. Thus they could find their professional realization only in the Mufti system as hojjas and imams or teachers in Islam. This leads to lack of other perspectives before the Institute graduates. On this stage the High Islamic Institute is not in fact capable of producing well educated qualified staff. The aggravated present condition of the Islamic university education lead to promoting of different idea about its future, but nether of then has been accomplished by now which effected in young Muslims the feeling that true religious education is possible abroad only.

- High Islamic Spiritual School in Shumen, Rousse and Momchilgrad:

The subjects taught in them are Islamic sciences, as well as all secular disciplines which are taught in Bulgarian state schools. They are coordinated with all of the criteria of the Ministry of Education and provide their graduates with good perspectives for continuation of their education and social personal realization. The biggest problems of these schools is again represented by the issue of finance by Diyanet Vakfi, which in the case also controls entirely the religious education while the teaching process is often performed in Turkish only. This is not an obstacle to the majority of the ethnical Turks, but a problem appears when taking into consideration the fact that in recent years practically the greatest shares of the students are Pomaks. This creates in the representatives of the Pomaks a sense of inferiority and they share that they feel "Turkisized" instead of receiving good religious education. Among the reasons for that is the natural propaganda of a "Turkish" vision of Islam which insists upon preservation of Ottoman heritage. All of this, however, contradicts the re-Islamization processes among Pomaks who start looking for alternatives way to receive a religious education. In this way, in spite of the valid diploma issued by these schools, they stay aside from the significant processes that keep on running in the Bulgarian Muslim community.

- Religious schools of the "Qur'an-Course" type:

These schools have appeared in the last decade and are of a particular interest; that is why they turned into a subject of lively debates in media and public c space as a whole. The subjects taught in them are only part of

traditional Islamic religious sciences related to the Qur'an and partly related to the Prophetic Tradition (what the Prophet Mohammed did or said) and Islamic law. These types of schools are spread in some settlements with dominant Muslim population. The school of that type near the village of Sarnitsa in the Dospat region has become to enjoy a lamentable reputation though an exaggerated one. Although its school curricula has been approved by the Grand Mufti Administration, the *cultural* gap between its graduates and the followers of the traditional Islam in Bulgarian territories is that great that the school periodically falls in the focus of public attention. There are also Qur'an courses that develop its activities assisted by Turkish support. A typical example of such a school is the school in the village of Ustina.

The Qur'an courses are foreign to Bulgarian educational and cultural model and are characterized by the extremely low level of education which is granted in them. After the graduation of a certain school, its graduates (whose age ranges between 15 and 30) could only become imams or hojjas. They are deprived of a secular perspective of a future realization. With the diploma of the Qur'an courses they cannot be appointed to a working place in a Bulgarian institution or to enroll a Bulgarian higher education institution. This peculiarity could contribute to the marginalization of a part of the future local spiritual Muslim elite. It could lead to its encapsulating; having in mind its importance for the formation of the growing generations, this is a factor to narrow the perspectives before the full integration of the Muslim minority in Bulgarian society. Many of the Bulgarian Muslims who received their education in the Arab world find their professional realization as teachers and educators exactly in the schools of that type.

As a whole the issue of religious education of the Muslim minority is one of the greatest challenges before the Bulgarian society and state. Its importance is all the more emphasized also by the influence exerted in our country by global and regional processes related international terrorism, ethnical and religious conflicts in the Middle East. The importance of the issue how to stimulate predictability of the Muslim elite and the transparency of its activity will be outlined more and more clearly. It is not coincidental that influential religious and political centers of the Middle East direct their efforts precisely to the field of education and religious propaganda.

3.7 The foreign Islamic influence in Bulgaria

Speaking about the origin of the foreign influences that penetrate Bulgaria in recent years, they come mainly from Turkey, the Arabic world and Iran. The influence of Teheran is too weak because its only social basis could be built upon the Alewi Shia community in North eastern Bulgaria but they themselves are too secularized as between them and Iranians exist cultural differences that cannot be overcome. Besides that, the Turkish ethnical identity of the Kizilbash population constitutes an additional obstacle for the serious infiltration of Iranian religious influence among Bulgarian Muslims.

The influence of Turkey upon the Muslim community in Bulgaria is traditional. On the first place, it is so because ethnical Turks represent the most numerous ethnical segment among our Muslims. Not less important, however, is the fact that – though in an unofficial form – the Bulgarian state has always left Turkey exert its influence and even control over the religious affairs of the Bulgarian Muslims. When this was allowed   after the democratization, probably it had its grounds in the state policy because of the secular character of the Turkish state and its firm control over the religious institutions and movements. Today the results of this policy are ambiguous. Probably the most important problem in this aspect is related to the fact that even if the Turkish control – in this case represented by organizations such as the powerful "Diyanet Vakfi" or foundations such as "Ahmed Davudoglu" – is relatively well accepted by ethnical Turks, in many other aspects it is not adequate as far as Pomaks or Roma Muslims are concerned.   Turkish religious influence is particularly painfully accepted by Pomaks, especially in the Central Rhodopes region; thus they feel abandoned by the Bulgaria state and get the impression that they are artificially pushed towards Turkization.

The existing religious educational institutions in Bulgaria do not respond to the educational needs of the Muslim community in the Central Rhodopes region because they are chiefly conformed to the needs of the ethnical Turks. Besides the extremely low educational level in them of education in them, in many places the educational process is carried out in Turkish which is not spoken by the population of the Central Rhodopes region. This made a great part of the community to receive its education abroad mainly in the Arab

states. Precisely those people who graduated abroad turned into the main vehicle of the re-Islamization process in the region. That is why exactly those Muslims who have preserved their Bulgarian ethnical identity or those of them who define themselves as "Pomaks" are pointed at for being the most susceptible ones to the penetration of conservative and fundamental influences from Middle Eastern (mainly   Arabic) regimes and movements. Among those tendencies the most embarrassing one is the *Wahhabism* dominating over Saudi Arabia – one of most traditionalist and purist interpretations of Islam on the global scene (for example, in Saudi Arabia where the dominant legal school of the Islamic law is the Hanbali one, in case of theft is applied the sanction   of cutting hands off; in case of repeating the crime, the penalty is cutting of one leg etc.)

The penetration of such an influence of conservative and fundamentally minded sponsors from the Arab world often utilizes the reluctance of the Pomaks to develop their religiosity under the control of Turkish organizations and religious authorities.   The ways and the means through which this influence tries to impose itself, are charity foundations such as "Tayba" or "Irshad", translations in Bulgarian language of more conservative sources of Islamic thought and Islamists among contemporary authors (for example, thinkers such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi or Ahmad al-Ghazzali). Being interesting and important by itself for the processes that keep on running in contemporary Islam, the point of view of these ideologists dethrone in an indirect way the dominant "Turkish interpretation" of Islamic faith in Bulgaria, as well as the system of rituals and rites. Together with these authors, children literature is also being published, as well many popular writings with dubious quality. Besides the above-mentioned financing of schools of the Qur'an course type, among other forms of penetration of such influence is also sending young people to be educated in the Arabic world as the criteria applied to elect candidates are not clear; the administration of the Grand Mufti does not have full information on the number of young people who have graduated their education abroad.

The religious education of the young people who return to the Central Rhodopes mountains (in most of the cases they are appointed by the local citizens for imams) in no way complies with the traditions of local Islam, but

rather with those ones in the country that they have graduated in. This fact often gives rise to conflicts between he local Muslim community and the imam, as well as between the Islamic and the Christian communities in the region of the Central Rhodopes because a model of mutual recognition, respect and non-conflict co-existence was developed; this model, however, has been leaning on century long traditions in the basis of which stands local Islam and not Islam of the Arab world.

The type of Islam professed by the re-Islamized Muslims is quite different from that one of Muslims, professing their faith by virtue of tradition and who have learned its doctrines by oral tradition. The young generation of Pomaks is separated from its traditional until now roots under the influence of foreign to their experience in the Bulgarian territories interpretations of Islam. In some places there are also attempts to substitute the traditional for the Balkans and more liberal law school of the Hanafis with the non-typical for our region and extremely conservative one of Hanbalism. These tendencies and processes lead to a conflict of interests and confrontations of various religious influences upon Muslims in Bulgaria, inevitably affecting also their new spiritual elite.

3.8 Splitting among Religious Leaders of Muslims in Bulgaria

Among the Muslim community in Bulgaria there are processes of splitting which probably will have permanent impact and will reflect upon the appearance and future fate of Muslims in our country. In the public space was launched the thesis that this is only a matter of scuffles of leaders with the only purpose to obtain high offices in the system of the Grand Mufti administration and the local Mufti organs. In fact, the reasons are not that simple and are related to two types of factors – internal political fights and outer religious influences.

The internal political factors circle around the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. The Turkish ethnical minority, more of the representatives of which accept Islam more through a cultural-ethnographical point of view, as a whole think it natural that the Movement for Rights and Freedoms – even being a secular political party – exerts a "natural" control upon the representatives of the Islamic leadership. Roma population is relatively indifferent to that fact.

Pomaks, however, and among them mainly Bulgarian Muslims in the Central Rhodopes, react to this fact as a violation of their own ethnical and religious identity.

There is one indicative fact, and it is that the election of the most recent Grand Mufti – the Pomak Mustafa Alish who undoubtedly is one of the most educated new Islamic leaders in Bulgaria – did not calm down vehemence in the discussions of this issue regardless of his own personal qualities. Just contrary to that, this led to deepening the separation as Bulgarian Muslims (particularly those in the central Rhodopes region) are convinced that his election is entirely due to contracting a "deal with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms". As a reaction of this, oppositionally minded Muslims have already started discussing the idea of establishing an alternative Grand Mufti's administration the establishment of which would have much more serious consequences than the permanent parody performances of ex-Grand Mufti Nedim Gendjev who occupied the office during the Communist rule. Another option discussed by the oppositional religious groups in the establishment of an Islamic Union which means the appearance of a new center of authority in the Islamic community.

At this stage the final conclusion of this delicate and complex environment around contesting the authority of the Grand Mufti is difficult to foresee, although generally speaking, it is more probable that the disintegration processes will be aggravated. Taking into consideration the global and regional challenges that stand before the Islamic community, this is a serious problem which hides potential security risks.

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The analysis of the processes related to the public role of Islam in the countries of the Western Balkans leads to the following conclusions and recommendations for the public policy in the context of Wider Europe processes:

- Among Muslims in both the Western Balkans and Bulgaria there are clearly distinguishable processes of re-Islamization which have a

permanent and irreversible character and will continue to develop with different levels of dynamic in the different countries through the years to come. These processes are most clearly outlined among the Slavonic-speaking Muslim communities like the Bosniaks in the Western Balkans and like the Pomaks in the Bulgarian Rhodopes region.

- In former Yugoslavia the re-Islamization of Muslims will continue with its fastest rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by Sandzak (Serbia), where the town of Novi Pazar is an important centre of contemporary Islamic education and culture, and last come the former Yugoslavian territories inhabited by ethnical Albanians, where the region of Tetovo (Macedonia) is a main religious centre preceded by Prishtina (Kosovo).

- In the context of the whole region of the Western Balkans two main centers of Islamic education and religious life emerge – Bosnia for the Slavonic-speaking Muslim population and Prishtina for ethnic Albanians, although for the latter in recent years religion has played a less significant role in their personal and public life.

- Just like Bulgaria, in the Western Balkans there is also a conflict between generations on a religious basis.

- As it is in Bulgaria too, Muslims in former Yugoslavia countries are extraordinary separated among themselves in the sphere of their religious beliefs and worldview concepts, as well as on the administrative and organizational level. These separations among Muslim communities and particularly the status of Muslims in Sandzak which still remains vague constitute a suitable ground for controversial influences and the development of negative centrifugal processes.

- Religion, including Islam, in the former Yugoslavian states, is strongly "ethnicized", as Islam represents a sign of not only confessional, but also of national identity.

- A crisis of ethnical identity exists among the Slavic-speaking Muslims like the Pomak population which is deepened by the political influence exerted upon them. Muslims in the central Rhodopes region have the most clearly manifested Bulgarian ethnical conscience. That is why they obviously distinguish themselves from the Turkish religious influence which has been imposed.

- In the years that follow Bulgarian Christians and Muslims in the Rhodopes region should work out a new model of co-existence, grounded from one side upon the type of Islam that the re-Islamized Muslim community professes, and from another upon the type of Orthodox Christianity that the re-Christianized Orthodox community professes.

- The process of re-Islamization among Rhodopes Muslims cannot and should not be stopped because this would mean to violate the right of this population to profess its religion and live according to its own convictions. This quite "natural" and necessary for Muslims process could be redirected to take a positive course in the first place through means of education.

- Pomaks still hope that the Bulgarian state will not forsake them and will take the measures necessary to prevent regional moods of vehemence from bursting out on a national level. Among them was formed the opinion that unless the Bulgarian state uses its resources, as well as

programs from the EU and the USA to solve their religious problems in about ten years the Rhodopes region could need a peacemaking process.

- Because of the lack of its own Bulgarian school in the field of Islamic religious education and also taking into consideration the fact that in traditional religious schools the educational process is often carried out in Turkish, also the interpretation of Islam typical for Turkey is promoted, a lot of the Pomaks especially in the Central Rhodopes region, find their way to Arab educational centers which leads to importing foreign religious and cultural traditions in the Bulgarian territories.

- Regarding this, the issue of Islamic education in Bulgaria is outlined as one of the most important ones not only in the sphere of education and science but also in the security field.

- A major problem of the Islamic religious community in Bulgaria is the growing permanent separation among its leaders which is looked upon by Muslims as something provoked by the political intervention in religious affairs on an ethnical ground. This could lead to establishing a numerous centers of influence among Bulgaria Muslims which could make them less predictable than if they acknowledged a certain centralized religious authority.

- The lack of unified leadership will weaken the mechanisms to control the processes that run in the framework of the Bulgarian Muslim community on behalf of the state. The same effect will be also exerted by an entirely formal unified leadership which, however, is not legitimate in the eyes of large parts of the Bulgarian Muslim population.

- The separated Muslim community in Bulgaria represents a convenient ground for development of diverse influences and start of negative centrifugal processes because separation provides a ground for controversies not only in the sphere of promoting different schools of Islam by people graduated abroad but also among their followers.

- The Bulgarian state should help Muslims to find solution of the existing problems without violating their will to obtain religious independence and without tolerating direct political interventions as an instrument to influence them.

- The effect of the Turkish influence permitted and encouraged in the religious life of Bulgarian Muslims should be reconsidered in the light of the new conditions so that they should not lead to loss of Bulgarian identity among Pomaks and to maintaining artificially low level among new Muslim spiritual leaders which in the long run could prove to be extremely problematic.

- It is necessary to have an updated national strategy on the issues of Muslim religious community and Islam which responds to contemporary problems; it should provide people who profess Islam with an opportunity to lead a fully-orbed spiritual life without being marginalized and detached from Bulgarian culture and society.

- The new strategies of the EU that corresponds to contemporary problems related to Muslim religious communities and Islam on the Balkans should enable those who profess it to live a fully-orbited spiritual life without being marginalized and separated from the secular type societies and culture in South-Eastern Europe.

5. General Conclusion

Conceiving new realities in a constructive way requires that public policy retain ideals of social justice and human rights whilst redefining traditional secularist strategies. There are needs to be intensive academic and programmatic work that addresses intercultural relations from a religious perspective, and not only from the point of view of inter-ethnic coexistence, which has been the case for the last fifteen years. Muslims in Bulgaria and the Balkans as Muslims elsewhere in Europe are experiencing a clearly definable though varied process of re-Islamization that seems to be irreversible. There is a conflict between the generations among the Muslim communities in the Balkans – the younger tend to "impose" the model of "classical" Islam while the older prefers the "traditional", i.e. the inherited from Ottoman times, interpretation of the religious doctrine and practice. Re-Islamization often seems to be accompanied by a de-culturation which leads to a crisis of the national and ethnic identities. Societies and policy makers face the challenge to elaborate a new model of co-existence in which the models inherited in the Balkans with its indigenous Muslim population can be helpful in some aspects also within the EU. Religion should not be completely marginalized in public life.

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