Title of Session: The role of religion in the post conflict period in the West Balkan region

Name of Session Convener(s): Prof.d-r Zoran Matevski
University/Organization incl. City: Sts. "Cyril and Methodius", Skopje
Chair: Prof. d-r Etem Aziri
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I) Title of Selected Paper: Sociological Analysis of the Religious dialogue and tolerance in the multiethnic West Balkan region

Name/s of Author/s: Ph.D. Zoran Matevski, ordinary professor and Ph.D. Etem Aziri associate professor

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Abstract:

After the fall of the Berlin wall the countries from the Balkan region entered in deep and dramatic social crisis. There are a few crucial social characteristics which are common for countries from West Balkan. Firstly, this is the extremely high link between the religious and ethnic personal identification. Secondly, it is the high degree of connection between the religious and political elite. These characteristics were a precondition of the bloody interethnic conflicts in the region. All serious sociological researches proved that these conflicts didn't have typical characteristics of religious conflicts. But using the revitalization of religion and the deep crisis of secularization the political elites of the West Balkan states misused the religious feelings of their own citizens for the accomplishment of their goals and dark scenarios. After the conflicts ended with mediation from the international community, the countries from the region (Croatia, BH, Serbia, Macedonia etc.) entered in a so called post conflict period. From that moment on

the political and religious elite started with the realization of the processes of interethnic and interreligious tolerance, a priority condition for the entrance in EU and NATO. Based on what we already said this session, based on sociological researches and analysis, should answer these crucial questions:

-What is the role of religion in peace and conflict in the West Balkan states?

-What is the type of interreligious tolerance (dogmatic, practical, dosed or declarative)?

-What is the role of the political and religious elite in the practical implementation of religious tolerance?

II) Title of Selected Paper: Religion and violent communication in region Western Balkan

Name/s of Author/s: Ph.D. Srdjan Vukadinovic

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Abstract:

Dramatic social occur in region Western Balkans at the end of the XX and the start XXI century, procause and redecree religious activitys thought influence religion inj sphere politcs.After period e xist in margins social, religion is in postconlict period in area Western Balkan to strive that sudden influences in all pores social «compenstation» period to exclude from key social occur. To strive religion for dominate above majority social spheres and other cognition form in social characteristics is for social reality in which is constitute conflict social relations and expressive crisis.

The conflict is procause and decomposition how social in such a way and spiritual space in Western Balkan. The attempt religious community that in area in which is individual from him domination own many persons and influence to intrude as supreme arbiters, to create is, and constitution certain form violent communication   with persons, groups and institutions which different to think as dissimilar. The season and current occur to demonstrate that is vague condition influence religion in sphere political happen throught existence different form violent communication in society Western Balkan. That the kind condition non lead to create modern, already before modern strate and society.

III) Title of Selected Paper: :The relationship between the political and religious elite in R. Macedonia in the post conflict period

Name/s of Author/s: Ph.D. Duska Matevska, Docent and Ph.D. Fadil Zendeli, Docent

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Abstract:

In contrast to the political parties which are a relatively new social phenomenon, the religiosity is a universal social one which has been incorporated in almost every significant civilization and was established on the grounds of a certain religious component. Historically, the interweaving of the political and the religious occurred much earlier than the political parties, respectively. Regarding the Christianity, this act has been directly bounded to the recognition of the Christianity as an official religion of the Roman Empire which led to an impermissible relationship between the church and the state. The Church began to neglect its holy duties more frequently by turning to secular ones. It was no longer a Church that served the people but, rather, it became a Church aspiring towards power and dominion.

In the opening part of this paper we will draw attention to certain similarities in expression of both the religious and ideological awareness. By no means, the focus of this paper will be the relationship between the political and religious elite in the Macedonian contemporary society. We will do our best to determine both the genesis and the reasons that led to such a firm link between the political parties of the Macedonian provenience and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as the possible negative impact of this "matrimony" between the holy and the secular over the Macedonian multi-cultural, multi-ethnical and multi-confessional society in the post-conflict period.

IV) Title of Selected Paper: Callenges of traditional Islamist after expansion of vehabism radicalism among Muslims in Macedonia

Name/s of Author/s: Ph.D. Abdilnaser Sinani

University/Organization incl. City: State University, Tetovo

Abstract:

From around the year 1990, after the fall of komunism in Macedonia have entered a relatively large number of sects and religious extremist currents as vehabism. This

movement has started to become a "trend", and every day is added to its ranks. Has penetrated in high school, university, family, almost everywhere. Ideology vehabism (founded in the XVIII century in Saudi Arabia), who tends the Islamic world should again dominate the world, which according to them, working in the destruction of the Islamic religion. Macedonian Muslims practicing Islam or traditional autochthonous, a gentle spirit of Islam, while vehabism, as in sect radical constitutes a threat to democracy and religious diversity in Macedonia, and promotes conflict and vehabism excludes religious tolerance between its Muslims in Macedonia and promote interfaith hatred between Albanians and Macedonians. These radical Islamist elements are supported by millions of dollars with associations and foundations Arab-Islamic, and by the way in Macedonia viti1998 this radical ideology made efforts to take control Islamic Unionof Macedonia. The extent of radicalism in Islam Macedonia is closely linked with and influenced its politics and the elite in this country: the uncontrolled liberalization of religious space, the possibility of infiltration of radical elements in Islamic institutions and organizations in Macedonia, the indifference of some structures and institutions of the country in order to spotted Muslims (in the context of the global fight against terrorism Islam), and increasing interest for religious values. In the 2001 war in Macedonia was the successful effort in the ranks of the Albanian army to penetrate and play an important role vehabistë soldiers (as a project imported from Bosnia). While in Kosovo, this project did not succeed, in Macedonia there is a military unit named "muhaxhedin". A period of great need to restore faith and interfaith tolerance, which is the hole in the Macedonian society. Rasizmin on religious topics and islamofobism Macedonia are inspired by the global anti-Islamic euphoria often supported by the government of the country which, although presented as a secular government, it actually made favoring the Orthodox religion as a religion major and largest in Macedonia. This approach has resulted in hostility of interfaith relations and are linked directly with religious tolerance in this country: 1) there is a high degree of connection and influence of religion in politics, and 2) manipulatin of religious feelings for other purposes, political cultural historical, etc.

V) Title of Selected Paper: The role of the inter religious dialogue in conflict prevention in Republic of Macedonia
Name/s of Author/s: Dervisha Hadzic-Rahic, postgraduate student

University/Organization incl. City: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Skopje

Republic of Macedonia, during the year 2001, suffered armed conflict on its ter¬ri¬tory, as last in the row, following the break-up of former Yugoslavia, ten years ago. Most visible characteristic was the ethnic component of the conflict, between ethnic Macedonian majority (around 67% of total population) and ethnic Albanians minority (23%) in the country. Inter-ethnic relations in the country, in all previous ten years of transition, were characterized as tensed, but constantly improving (like solving of the problem for high education on Alba¬ni¬an language, directing public funds for improvement of infrastructure in dominantly eth¬nic Albani¬an areas, etc.). Therefore, for most of the people in the coun¬try and many ab¬ro¬ad as well, start of the armed conflict was surprising. However, it hap¬pe¬ned, brought at least 150 casualties and a total of 170,000 displaced people. It severely deteriorated existing inter-ethnic relations. On the other hand, very small number of civilian casualties during the conflict and massive dis-placements before any military activity in most of the mixed villages, are showing that majority of po¬pulation was not ready to take up arms and fight for whatever cause (especially against their neighbors from other ethnicity). This gives a ground for the belief that inter-ethnic relations are not com¬pletely destroyed and are possible to improve, by con¬fi¬den¬ce building activities and other mea-sures.

While inter-ethnic component was much exploited during the conflict, underlying inter-religi¬ous relations were not so visible, but were also often used to escalate the conflict (like attacks on churches/mosques, etc.). Underlying, because most of the ethnic Ma¬ce¬do¬ni¬an are Orthodox Christians, while almost all (98%) of ethnic Albanians are Muslims. There were attempts to bring religious leaders together, for a joint appeal for peace (MCIC, was involved in this activity), but it took few months to come to a mutually acceptable solution. This was due to the lack of communication, cooperation and understanding for the ot¬her, among religious communities, especially dominant two: Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and Islamic Religious Community (IRC). There were mainly contacts on a high level, among reli¬gi¬ous leaders, but mainly on a protocol basis, driven by the State authorities (meetings with the President of the country), or international actors. Some isolated activities, like the inter-religious conference in May 2002 in Skopje, were showing how little they know about each other, but also gave some examples how that can be improved. Lectures by the Deans of the Theological faculties (both Orthodox and Islamic) on the other faculty (which happened

for the first time, ever), were inspiration to try to find models for further contacts and cooperation between different religious communities. In 2003 Macedonian civil society organization, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) in cooperation with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, Catholic Church, United Methodist Church and the Jewish Community, started with the systematic approach concerning inter religious dialogue through the Bridging religions in Macedonia programme. The overall goal of the program was to increase the level of understanding amongst the religious communities and the understanding of the Macedonian public about them. The target group was the general public, with an emphasis on members and activists of the religious communities in Macedonia, specifically the students and the professors from the educational institutions (Theology Faculties and to some degree the High Schools) within the religious communities. Cooperation, dialogue and understanding among religious communities are the essential components in building a sound democratic society. The members of religious communities, the clergy, may play significant role in peace promotion and respect of difference, particularly as these values should be embedded in their personality and should be conveyed to their believers.

The programme has mainly targeted the students of the Orthodox Theology Faculty and the Faculty of Islamic Science, who as future priests should understand the other religions, nurture the relations with the priests from other religions and promote the dialogue and cohabitation among citizens of different ethnic and religious background as this is the only way towards building a sustainable and constructive society.

In order to accomplish these results several projects were undertaken (exchange lectures, visit to theology faculties and religious facilities, basic skills training, summer camps, positive examples and providing technical support to the theology faculties, local meetings and debates, inter-religious calendar, fund for the initiatives of religious communities, bulletin for inter-religious cooperation, info and dialogue centre, comparative studies and address book of religious communities).

The project aimed to develop the educational, cultural and informational component in the target group. Besides the students of the two theology faculties, the programme activities have also covered the other religious communities that do not have educational institutions in the country, such as the Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church and the Jewish Community, while in some of the activities even the smaller religious communities took part.