IR literature has recently ‘rediscovered’ religion as an explanatory variable to understand the dynamics of international politics. This is no news for regional studies, including those on the Balkans, which have always used it to explain political behavior in the region, including war and peace. Indeed, data from the World Values Survey and findings from various Balkan countries offer supporting evidence that religion remains an important factor for many people in the region. However, public perceptions on the importance of religious institutions and actors do not match with their behavior on creating and maintaining long term peace in the region. What accounts for this discrepancy? Although more detailed research is needed for conclusive results, this study suggests that the intertwined religious and ethnic identities in the region can lead the opposing or estranged groups to discount the significance of any positive signaling by the religious leaders in the other group by dismissing it as unreliable or disingenuous, or sometimes even offensive. Moreover, globalization of local religious networks has also contributed to the internal splits in certain religious congregations, such as Muslims, and diluted effective religious leadership over their group. Finally, intensive foreign involvement in places like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo may make the religious leaders there unwilling to undertake significant steps for an interfaith dialogue—paradoxically because they, too, rely on the existence and support of external actors to maintain their activities in the first place. (235)

Keywords: Balkans, religion, religious institutions, peace, conflict
Introduction

Religion as an explanatory variable has recently attracted an increasing amount of interest in IR studies. (Hatzopoulos and Petito 2003; Pettman 2004; Fox and Sandler 2004; Thomas 2005) Unlike earlier works that dismissed religion as either irrelevant or immeasurable factor on political behavior, contemporary studies state that this is a useless artificial categorical distinction between human activities. (Cavanaugh 2009: 3) Recent studies particularly focus on the linkage between religion and peace, albeit with contradictory claims. For some researchers, “[i]n an international society of ‘weak states’ and ‘strong religions’, the resurgence of religion threatens both domestic stability and international order.” (Thomas 2000: 15) Based on data drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program covering 1989-2003, Svensson (2007) concludes that if conflicts have a religious origin, they are unlikely to be settled peacefully through negotiation.

Disagreeing scholars, however, opine that all religions offer “a hermeneutics of peace, namely, an interpretive framework that begins with the conviction that the pursuit of justice and peace by peaceful means is a sacred priority in each of the traditions represented [emphasis original].” (Little 2006: 438) In fact, according to Cavanaugh (2009: 3), “the ‘myth of religious violence’ arrives from the idea that religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from “secular” features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence.”

While discussing the positive impact of religion on peace, Little and Appleby (2004: 5) therefore refer to the process of “religious peacebuilding”:

we use the term religious peacebuilding to describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and
political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence.

In tandem with these views, some studies have investigated the possibility of promoting peace in conflict prone regions through religious actors and institutions. Abu Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana (2008: 562), for instance, point out that religion is capable of both creating and resolving conflicts in different settings. Based on data provided by the Minorities at Risk dataset compiled by Ted Robert Gurr et al, Fox and Sandler (2004: 65-8) also reflect that religious differences can play a key role in the decisions for international political interventions.

Unlike in IR literature, the pivotal impact of religion on Balkan politics and history is readily acknowledged by scholars, who often use it interchangeably with ethnicity for individual and group identification. In fact, some observers go so far as to claim that “the real future shaping force in the Balkans . . . will not be ethnicity but religion” (Deliso 2007: xii). Similar to the recent discussions on religion in IR literature, although Balkan experts converge on the overall importance of religion, they remain divided on its exact role.1 During 1990s, while the region were torn apart by bloody conflicts like the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later in Kosovo, primordial debates stressed ethno-religious differences as a major underlying cause. Similarly, functionalist arguments raised during the same years approached religion as a tool conveniently used by conflicting sides to further their goals (Kaplan 1993; Zimmerman 1996).

Based on the activities of some extremist and/or externally funded religious groups in the region, some observers regard religion to have a divisive and centrifugal effect on the Balkan people. The heterogeneity of major religious groups like Muslims in the Balkans is also regarded as a security problem. Detailed works on the nature and depth of the threat from religious terrorists in certain countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina already exist

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1 On the role of churches in politics of former Yugoslavia, see Palmer (2000).
(Tziampiris 2009). While discussing the impact of religious groups established and/or funded by international actors and their impact on Balkan security, Nazarko (2007: 15) claims that they are poorly controlled by the governments in countries where they operate, thus making them pervious to infiltration of religious extremists, including terrorists. Nevertheless, authors challenging this view argue that the link between religious groups/networks and the possibility of increasing levels of religious terrorism in the region is probably exaggerated (Oktem 2011: 156).

Against this view is the argument that religious actors can help prevent or mitigate conflicts in the Balkans. Proponents of this viewpoint stress the proximity of local religious actors to public and their intimate knowledge of their everyday needs, which makes them ideal for knitting closer ties between estranged communities. As Little (2006: 440) points out, “[i]n some circumstances, prominent religious identity provides a badge of trustworthiness and impartiality that can be of great benefit in either formal or informal negotiations.”

This study argues that both sides seem to have validating points to their claims. On the one hand, data from the World Values Survey and other findings from the region offer supporting evidence that religion is an important element in most parts of the Balkans. On the other hand, the importance attributed to religious institutions in the region does not match up with their role in creating and maintaining long term peace in the region. In fact, while the possibility of reaching long-term peace in the Balkans through the help of religious actors is real, some of the factors that would make it possible are currently missing. The impact of religious institutions on attaining and maintaining peace in the region has not reached its full potential in the region. What explains this discrepancy?

Although more detailed research is needed for conclusive results, this study suggests that multiple factors have likely played a role in the outcome. First, due to historical reasons,

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2 See also Broun (2007) for a detailed discussion of similar concerns among Muslims in Bulgaria.
religion is intertwined with ethnic identity in the Balkans, which is directly related to many of conflicts experienced in the region since the end of the Cold War. Since the majority of the existing religious institutions in the region have also spearheaded or supported the ethnic/nationalist sentiments since 1990s, religious leaders face the problem of convincing other groups about their willingness or sincerity in adopting an unbiased/universalist stance for the past events, or seeking reconciliation for the future. As skeptics point out, while each religious organization in the region has been quick to point out at the extremist actions committed by the opposite group/religion members during violent conflicts, they have been less willing to acknowledge the extremist actions committed by their own members. Second, globalization of local religious networks has also likely to have contributed to or further speeded up internal splits in certain religious congregations, such as Muslims, and diluted effective religious leadership within their respective group. Finally, intensive foreign involvement in places like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo may make the religious leaders there unwilling to undertake significant steps for an interfaith dialogue—paradoxically because they, too, rely on the existence and support of external actors to maintain their activities in the first place.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: The first part overviews the views of the Balkan people on religion and religious institutions by going over the data on the region from World Values Survey and other organizations. Then it reviews some of the arguments in favor of, or against viewing religion as a positive influence over establishing and maintaining long-term peace in the Balkans. As this section aims to underline, the existing works on religion in the Balkans do not fully account for the gap between the public opinion on religious institutions vs. their reluctance to play a more active role in promoting peace in the region. The second part focuses on three factors that can help account for the discrepancy between the regional perceptions and attitudes toward religious organizations and the actual steps taken by
Religious actors for establishing regional peace in recent years. They are: i) the leading role of religious institutions in defining or framing ethno-national identities in the Balkans, and their past role in conflicts, ii) the globalization of local religious networks and their impact on congregational unity and iii) the impact of intense international involvement in the region and its impact on religious actors. The final part concludes.

**Religion and the Balkan People: figures vs. debates**

Prior to discussing the capabilities and limits of religion as an independent variable on Balkan politics, it is worthwhile to briefly go over how the Balkan people perceive the subject. Data from World Values Survey (WVS) and other available research on the region affirm the general stance that religion constitutes a significant factor in the lives of Balkan people and politics. According to the WVS data, 40% of the Balkan people consider religion as “very important” in their lives, which is followed by 28% of people, who regard it to be a “rather important” factor (see Table 3). Recent findings also concur with these data. A Gallup survey conducted in the Balkans, for instance, reports that the significance of religion in the Albanian society has elevated to 44%, which was measured as 33% back in 2006 (Gallup 2010: 32). This figure is measured to be even higher for Croatia at 68% (Gallup 2010: 12).

The importance attributed to religion in the Balkans, however, may not be solely a sign of piety on the part of an individual, and also have institutional significance. In a study on Bulgaria, for instance, Broun (2007: 108) points out that less than 2 percent of young people in the 18-29 age range prayed on a regular basis, regardless of their religious affiliation (i.e., of Muslim or Orthodox background). Similarly, Jakelic (2004: 10) reports that even though Catholicism is the predominant religion in both Croatia and Slovenia, the confidence levels in the Catholic Church in both countries vastly differ: while 41.3% of the Slovenian respondents have expressed to “have no trust in the Church at all . . . 75% of the Croatian population has more confidence in the Catholic church than any other authority in society.”
Nevertheless, a simple overview of the relationship between religion and Balkan politics in figures suggest that for the Balkan people, religious institutions play a significant role in politics. In fact, according to the WVS data, a considerable amount of people in Balkans, such as Croatia, Romania or Turkey seem to be convinced that “churches” (religious institutions) “absolutely” influence national politics (See Table 1). Balkan people also express more confidence in their religious institutions than in their parliaments: an average of 26% of the people in the region has stated that they have “a great deal of confidence” and 34.1% of them have “quite a lot of confidence” in religious institutions. Meanwhile, only 8.2% of the same people seem to have “a great deal of confidence” and 44.5% of them have “quite a lot of confidence” in their parliaments (see Table 4 and Table 5). In the same vein, an average of 3.9% of Balkan people seems to have “a great deal of confidence” and 19.3% of them have “quite a lot of confidence” in political parties (Table 6). In comparison, Table 6 also suggests that 42.7% of the people have explicitly stated that they “do not have very much confidence” and 34.1% of them “do not have any confidence” in political parties.

The WVS data also offer important input on the tolerance level of Balkan people toward people of different religious faith. When asked about their preferences concerning neighbors, an average of 27% of them has responded that they would not like to live with neighbors with a different religious faith (Table 7). The worldwide average for this question in the WVS data is 17.8%. Somewhat in tandem with these findings, in countries like Bulgaria, some authors also explain the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups like Orthodox people and Muslims with their relative isolation from each other. (Broun 2007: 106)

The data and findings in the previous section suggest that a significant portion of the Balkan people consider religious institutions and leaders as important. Due to their distinguished position in society, it is reasonable to assume them to play a constructive role in achieving long-term peace in the region. According to Abu Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana
(2008: 567), religious actors, particularly local Muslim clerics are respected in their respective communities in the Balkans, and can play a significant role in establishing ties between estranged ethno-religious groups in conflicting lands. Their local communities consider these religious leaders to be able “to rehumanize the ‘other,’” since the locals perceive them as closer to their community and thus, as more capable to address their daily concerns than another figure (ibid). Similar experiences are also reported by Catholic priests during the Bosnian war and its aftermath. (Little 2006: 111) While discussing the inter-religious relations in Bulgaria, Broun (2007: 123) reflects that “at local level, relations between Orthodox and Muslims are often cordial.” Broun also gives some examples on how local religious communities have helped each other to help repair their churches or mosques, or help overcome intra-communal conflicts (ibid). Clark (2010: 674) underlines the greater credibility of local religious leaders in their respective groups in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where political leaders are regarded as far more corrupt:

religious actors are to some extent not merely the guardians of their nation’s religious identity, but also of its national identity . . . Religion, therefore, is about something much deeper than spirituality alone. Hence religious actors . . . are theoretically well equipped to reach people and to thereby gain their trust (Clark 2010: 674).

The positive impact of inter-religious dialogue on preventing further violent conflict is already observable in certain parts of the Balkans. For instance, in Macedonia, along with political measures, Mojzes (2008: 413) argues that the co-operation of the leaders of main religious groups were significant in preventing the country from falling into the clutches of a bloody civil war. While political negotiations and external actors were the outstanding factors in ending the conflict, the author argues that the atmosphere of dialogue maintained by the major religious leaders in that country have enabled conflicting parties to trust each other (ibid).
Contrary to the arguments that inter-religious dialogue can promote peace in the Balkans, pessimists question its significance. After the fall of communism and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, religion became an increasingly salient, albeit often negative factor in regional politics. (Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009: 46) Drawing on the example of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, observers point out that religious authorities had almost no influence in ending that conflict (Johnston and Eastvold 2004: 229). Worse, they have been accused of promoting, or at times even abetting violence against other religious groups, sometimes to promote their own position and status in their respective communities (Iveković 2002: 524-525; Baucau and Zittoun 2013: 215; Little 2006: 106). While the positions of religious institutions that represent the majority of the Balkan people later changed on a lot of issues that sparked violent conflicts in the first place, observers remain cautious and reflect that “self-criticism and willingness to remythologize the past – a sine qua non premise for reconciliation – are by and large lacking in the postwar Balkan societies.” (Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009: 46-47)

Among other factors, those that doubt the impact of religion on peacebuilding also further draw out the potential pitfalls of religious extremism, including its potential to segregate communities living together. Similar to the essentialist arguments that associated religions like Islam with violence in earlier years; religious groups established and/or funded by external actors in the Balkans are often suspected to have ties with terrorism, or condone violence.3 While discussing radical Islamist groups in the Balkans, for instance, a proponent of this view argues that

“[f]or the Islamists, the desirable future political order is not one of cozy nation states, but rather a religious commonwealth, a sort of revived Ottoman Empire distinguished by Saudi mosques, Afghan clothes, and fundamentalist mores . . .

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It is highly likely that, because of their activities, the Balkans will increasingly come to be identified as a spawning ground for terrorists, dotted with no-go areas and concealed urban command centers, together comprising a series of interconnected nodal points in a global network of terrorist and fundamentalist organizations” (Deliso 2007: xii).

A point raised by critics on the impact of religion on peace is the incapability or unwillingness of the religious actors in the region to take the initiative and try to find solutions to the existing problems on their own (Mojzes 2008: 412). While foreign actors have encouraged different ethnic communities to meet in common settings like international conferences to create rapport, not much base seems to be covered in such meetings, and that there is little hope that these steps can lead into more concrete actions. (Mojzes 2007: 416; Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009: 47) In fact, while discussing the future prospects, authors like Johnston and Eastvold (2004: 232) have gone as far as to claim that “it is important to recognize that moves by the West to bring all the religious factions together to smooth over their differences, as a prerequisite to restoring multiethnic harmony, are unlikely to succeed.”

Accounting for the discrepancy between public perception and reality:

As the previous section has roughly sketched, there are arguments both in favor of, and against the efficacy of religion as a promoter of peace in the Balkans. On the one hand, some steps were taken in recent years to promote inter-faith cooperation through multi-religious meetings, such as those conducted with Orthodox and Muslim actors in different parts of the Balkans. Johnston and Eastvold (2004:230-231) mention the efforts of an international organization, named as The World Conference of Religions for Peace along with several other international donors to bring together the religious actors representing the major religious groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Dayton agreement to build a common moral understanding between communities. While the resulting collaboration has faced some
serious difficulties in taking the initial steps further, the authors state that it has nonetheless received a lot of praise (ibid: 231). On the other hand, pessimists have dismissed such attempts as shallow, and unable to propel the participating actors into taking concrete steps for further cooperation. Mojzes (2007: 416) explains this outcome with “the lack of visionary leadership and of a critical mass of educated religious leaders, as well as the inertia that is the result of centuries of suspicion, hatred, wars and oppression.”

All of these reflections, however, do not explain the discrepancy between high public opinion of religious institutions (particularly vis-à-vis political institutions) and why religious actors have refrained from playing a more active role in building peace in the Balkans following conflicts. Although religious leaders of formerly antagonistic groups have made some positive statements and shown some friendly gestures toward each other, they have refrained from fully utilizing their status in public to take more decisive steps that lead to longer lasting results in the region to date.

The critics of religious actors argue that they simply have not done as much as they should to promote peace in the region. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, where long-term reconciliation is still much needed, they point out that religious actors have eschewed taking serious steps to acknowledge any wartime atrocities committed by their respective group, which is considered by many as a vital initial step. To make things worse, some of the clerics have even adopted extremist stances, which further drive conflicting groups apart (Clark 2010: 676). The internal split of Serbian Orthodox Church following the end of the Bosnian war remains a good case in point: while the more extremist group condemned Milošević for signing the Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the war in 1995, for being antinationalist, the other group sought to reach a working relationship with the political regime. (Iveković 2002: 525)
A significant factor beyond this passivity may be traced to the complex relationship between ethnicity and religion in the Balkans. Due to the dual nature of ethnicity and religion in the region, the deterioration of ethnic relations thus has also often meant the deterioration of interreligious dialogue. (Merdjanova and Broudeur 2009: 54) Although religion was not an important factor in former Yugoslavian politics, and the wars that brutally tore it apart were not initiated by religious concerns, religious themes and symbols proved to be superb vehicles for mobilizing different groups in the name of the “nation.” (Barker 2009: 145)

Individual or public preferences excluded, Churches and Muslim organizations have also shown themselves as willing to take part, or even lead, issues that the respective institution/s regard as closely related to their “nation” or congregation. The Serbian Orthodox Church, for instance, regards itself as “the guardian of the Serbian spiritual being for centuries and also the Serbian national identity” (Baucal and Zittoun 2013: 216). Similarly, “the representatives of the Catholic Church in Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia [have] asserted themselves as representatives of collective identities.” (Jakelic 2004: 6). Meanwhile, according to Barker (2009: 146) “[r]egardless of issues of church attendance or political religion (both of which are difficult to assess in a period of civil war), religion was and continues to be an obvious factor in national identity in Croatia.” Barker (ibid, 147) further argues that while Bosnian ethnic identity is also strongly related to religion, Slovenia and Macedonia display a more mixed attitude. In those Balkan countries, such as Slovenia, where the dominant religious establishment fails to make itself indispensable to national identity is also likely to enjoy less leading power in spearheading or influencing any peace efforts. In countries where they enjoy a dominant position, however, it is possible that religious actors consciously tone down or reduce inter-religious/ethnic interaction, since they believe that it would gradually diminish the dominant position they are currently enjoying. (Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009: 114)
Another potential roadblock facing the efforts of the religious actors is the heterogeneous composition of the communities they are addressing. Balkan Muslims constitute a good example here. Due to historical reasons, religious groups like Muslims in the Balkans do not have a united religious identity. In fact, Islam in the Balkans is hardly a homogenous entity (Babuna 2004: 287-288). Notwithstanding the tendency to portray all external Islamic actors as a monolithic bloc in popular media, there is little evidence that they act together, or even pursue similar goals. Rather, as Mandaville (2010: 8) states, “contemporary forms of Muslim transnational solidarity express a diverse range of political and normative agendas, and only rarely and in the most extreme cases articulate a vision of the umma as a political unit.”

Countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, “exhibits a patchwork of micro micro-identities that are far from homogeneous and cannot be aggregated into simple categories” (Sarajlic 2011: 174). Meanwhile, in countries like Bulgaria, Islam “is highly diversified both ethnically (it includes Turks, Pomaks, Roma and Tatars) and religiously (the Turkish Muslims are divided into Sunnis and Shiites)” (Merdjanova 2006: 5) Often, Muslims from different regions within the same country are biased toward each other on various cultural or other differences (Broun 2007: 108). Therefore, as Oktem (2011: 157) underlines, “[f]or Muslims in the Balkans, ‘being Muslim’ means different things in different places at different times.” Adding further complexity to the picture is the fact that Muslims in the Balkans do not share the same language, which makes intra-religious cooperation across borders more difficult, and can exacerbate inter-ethnic conflicts (Oktem 2011: 160).

One of the consequences of the internal fragmentation of major religious communities is the elevated tendency to encounter intra-religious conflicts, along with inter-religious rivalry (Bougarel 2007: 97; Mojzes 2007:55). Some of the recent examples to this pattern include the cooling relations between Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox churches following
the split of Montenegro from Serbia and the rising antagonism within the Muslim community in Belgrade following its internal division. (Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009: 54) In post-communist Bulgaria, Merdjanova (2006: 9) similarly points out that the Muslim population has experienced conflict amidst its ranks to pick the Chief Mufti: “[t]he severe contest over the post of the Chief Mufti has led to the establishment of rival Muslim councils, selecting rival chief muftis, and subsequent lawsuits, accompanied by mutual accusations and bitter fights in the media.”

The fact that the religious leaders are unable to speak for the whole community affects their credibility—another crucial factor in using religion for peacebuilding. Internal divisions within major religious communities in countries with a violent past like Bosnia and Herzegovina may particularly diminish the potency of religious leadership on advocating peace, as it raises the stakes of getting involved in, or maintain a steady and fruitful inter-religious dialogue. For instance, an administrative unit called the Islamic Community formally represents the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is in charge of the religious schools and mosques, and other similar units. However, its authority and capacity is often challenged by the other Islamic players in the country (Sarajlic 2011: 177).

Globalization and its impact on the effectiveness of religion as an aid on establishing and/or maintaining long term peace is also a nexus that requires inspection. As Thomas (2000: 18) points out, “[t]ransnational religious groups can . . . challenge the sovereignty of ‘weak states’ by representing ideas and values that cannot be confined or controlled by states.” Through globalization, the spread of international religious networks into regions with earlier restrictions, such as the Balkans bring at least two factors into consideration. The first variable is the domination of the international versions of different religious faiths over local and/or underrepresented versions of religious discourses. While discussing the impact of globalization on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Karčić (2010: 152) argues that the locals do not
regard it in negative terms. On the contrary, many regard globalization to have saved them from extinction by helping them getting heard by the international community during the war that tore down Yugoslavia in early 1990s. Although Karčić (2010:152) contends that religious pluralism is not a novelty for the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina, different interpretations of the same religion that become available through extended international networks preceded—sometimes acerbic—intra-religious debates in their aftermath. Among international Islamic networks, Karčić (2010:156) argues that

“By far the most widespread and most talked about foreign influence is Salafism (often called Wahabbism), which came mainly from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Emirates and Jordan. The other two influences, Shiism from Iran and Sufi brotherhoods from Turkey, were much less strongly expressed but nevertheless fall into the category of ‘foreign factors’.”

Local people regard conservative interpretations of Islam like Wahhabism, which is funded and promoted through Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia to be at odds with the more moderate forms of Islam practiced among the locals. Nevertheless, such conservative religious networks continued to spread among the youth in the post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina (Karčić 2010:158). However, following the Islamist terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in USA, some of them were closed down due to their fierce anti-American and anti-western stance (Karčić 2010:158-159).

Another variable is the increasing leverage that international religious networks provide to their supporters and founders in regional politics. (Karčić 2010: 163) While discussing the impact of such Islamic networks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Karčić (2010: 152) mentions Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey as “the big players of the Muslim world.” Throughout the Bosnian war, countries like Saudi Arabia provided significant amounts of food and financial aid to the Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which greatly aided their
resistance power.

Turkey was also got involved with the region both on state level and religious networks during the same period. One of the Turkish state institutions that played a critical role during these years was the Turkish Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi, whose activities ranged from providing imams (prayer leaders) during the Muslim fasting month (Ramadan) to selecting students to receive technical and religious training in Turkey (Karčić 2010: 159). In addition to offering significant amount of military aid during the Bosnian war, Iran is another country that has followed a two pronged approach to form a sphere of influence over the Bosnian society through cultural centers and religious foundations (Karčić 2010: 161).

Finally, to complete the picture, the inadvertent impact of external state and non-state actors over the outcome needs some analysis, too. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the fall of communism in the region, the following turbulent years have witnessed the increasing influence of external actors on religious affairs. In addition to religious networks promoted by external states, the number of religious transnational networks based on civil society initiatives has also soared in the region. As Sarajlic (2001: 174) has put it, “[t]he vacuum that was created by the breakdown of the entire social fabric in the region was filled with activities of external actors and their local proxies.” External actors have also sought to create inter-ethnic and inter-religious peace by supporting the gathering of religious leaders of major religious communities in the region.

For Balkan Muslims, one of the external players influencing religious actors and forming new networks is Turkey, which operates both through state institutions, such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs and Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency (TIKA), and socio-religious non-state networks like the Gulen movement, which originated in Turkey (Oktem 2011: 160). Along with Turkey, Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran have also have remained active in the creation of religious networks. While earlier religious
networks often concentrated on providing relief to war struck areas places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with proselytizing their version of Islamic teachings, recent years have witnessed the increased involvement of religious networks into politics on both domestic and international level (Sarajlic 2011: 174).

Islamic networks with ties with the external actors not only seek to influence the Muslim population in religious matters, but also seek to play a role in the foreign policies of their respective countries. Sarajlic (2001: 174) goes further and claims that in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, “the state ceased to be the sole player in the realm of foreign policy.” This condition, in return, has increased the stakes for all players involved.

While international actors have played a definitive role in stopping violent conflicts in the Balkans, they also seem to have inadvertently propelled intra-religious rivalry.

For instance, an important factor fuelling the rivalry between the Bosnian Muslim activist groups is the diminishing international funding that was formerly available to the community through the international Islamic players. (Sarajlic 2011: 177). Furthermore, external religious actors sharing the same faith also frequently end up competing with each other to expand/control their existing networks, thus carrying religious rivalry on an international level.

Independent of any history of conflicts between different religious groups, external factors can exacerbate the widening rift within and between the religious congregations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, Muslims remain divided between the Middle Eastern oriented and more conservative interpretations of Islam, and its liberal interpretations represented by the Turkish and European Muslim networks.⁴ To summarize, “The arrival of many other Islamic players, belonging to other schools of thought and practice within Islam, has brought these in conflict with the local Islamic practices and produced conflicts along the

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⁴ For similar problems and conditions in Bulgaria, see Broun (2007).
interpretative dimension of Islam in Bosnia... Essentially, it is a matter of a particular ideological vision outlining the orthodoxy and orthopraxis of Islam in Bosnia (Sarajlic 2011: 176-177).

Internal fragmentation may not be unique to the Balkan Muslims, either. Following the end of communism, the Orthodox Christians have also experienced a split among their ranks between their Byzantinian/Russian and Central European religious tradition and teachings. According to Merdjanova (2006:3), in countries like Bulgaria in particular, this condition has caught the Orthodox Church unprepared. Aside from its theological or sociological implications, such splits can have important consequences on long-term peace prospects in the region. In fact, some observers consider the consequences of picking conservative or extremist traditions on both sides as a recipe for disaster. For instance, Mojzes (2008: 417) claims that “[i]f the Middle Eastern orientation among the Muslims and Eastern orientation among the Orthodox prevails, the clash of these two civilisations would seem to be inescapable.” As discussed earlier, external interference of any form to help solve the issue may further complicate the existing picture.

Conclusion

Unlike in international relations, where it has only recently attracted the interest of scholars, religion has always remained a prominent variable for experts studying Balkan politics. The steps that religious leaders have undertaken to promote inter-communal peace in the region during the past few years raise hopes for them to increase their efforts in time to improve dialogue between estranged groups or increase inter-communal solidarity. As things currently stand, however, serious impediments exist against this possibility being taken for granted. Nonetheless, given the role religious actors and institutions have played in other multiethnic or conflict prone parts of the world in recent years, there is reason for cautious optimism for the region in foreseeable future.
Bibliography


New York: Palgrave Macmillan.


Appendix:

Table 1: The impact of religious institutions on national politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church(es) influence on national politics</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, absolutely</td>
<td>19.9 %</td>
<td>12.0 %</td>
<td>15.8 %</td>
<td>29.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, think so</td>
<td>41.9 %</td>
<td>57.0 %</td>
<td>37.7 %</td>
<td>32.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I don’t think they have</td>
<td>26.3 %</td>
<td>26.4 %</td>
<td>28.9 %</td>
<td>24.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, absolutely not</td>
<td>11.9 %</td>
<td>4.3 %</td>
<td>17.5 %</td>
<td>13.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2929 (100%)</td>
<td>896 (100%)</td>
<td>906 (100%)</td>
<td>1127 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unless otherwise stated, all of the tables in this section are constructed from data from World Values Survey collected from the following Balkan countries in indicated years: Albania [1998], Albania [2002], Bosnia and Herzegovina [1998], Bosnia and Herzegovina [2001], Bulgaria [1990], Bulgaria [1997], Bulgaria [1999], Croatia [1996], Croatia [1999], Greece [1999], Macedonia [1998], Macedonia [2001], Montenegro [1996], Montenegro [2001], Romania [1993], Romania [1998], Romania [1999], Romania [1999], Serbia [1996], Serbia [2001], Slovenia [1992], Slovenia [1995], Slovenia [1999], Turkey [1990], Turkey [1996], Turkey [2001]. Since WVS is global in scale, only available Balkan countries in that survey are selected for the scope of this study. Data collected in various waves of WVS are subject to various limitations and shortcomings, which are discussed in detail on their website. As such, the findings presented here should be taken as preliminary, rather than conclusive in nature.

Table 2: Religious Institutions and Government Policy⁷:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Churches speak out on: government policy</th>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>74.2 %</td>
<td>59.8 %</td>
<td>79.6 %</td>
<td>81.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.8 %</td>
<td>40.2 %</td>
<td>20.4 %</td>
<td>18.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2708 (100 %)</td>
<td>836 (100 %)</td>
<td>1010 (100 %)</td>
<td>862 (100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: The Importance of Religion for Balkan People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion important in life</th>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Macedonia, Republic of</th>
<th>Serbia and Montenegro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40.9 %</td>
<td>26.4 %</td>
<td>34.7 %</td>
<td>14.6 %</td>
<td>25.9 %</td>
<td>32.9 %</td>
<td>43.8 %</td>
<td>15.4 %</td>
<td>78.8 %</td>
<td>41.7 %</td>
<td>25.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather important</td>
<td></td>
<td>28.0 %</td>
<td>33.6 %</td>
<td>37.9 %</td>
<td>24.7 %</td>
<td>40.5 %</td>
<td>35.4 %</td>
<td>33.1 %</td>
<td>25.8 %</td>
<td>13.4 %</td>
<td>30.6 %</td>
<td>37.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.2 %</td>
<td>27.3 %</td>
<td>18.1 %</td>
<td>32.4 %</td>
<td>23.0 %</td>
<td>20.3 %</td>
<td>17.4 %</td>
<td>35.2 %</td>
<td>4.9 %</td>
<td>18.3 %</td>
<td>28.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.9 %</td>
<td>12.7 %</td>
<td>9.3 %</td>
<td>28.3 %</td>
<td>10.6 %</td>
<td>11.4 %</td>
<td>5.7 %</td>
<td>23.6 %</td>
<td>2.9 %</td>
<td>9.4 %</td>
<td>8.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>30218</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2376</td>
<td>2962</td>
<td>2168</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>3428</td>
<td>2986</td>
<td>7525</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Confidence in Churches in the Balkans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence: Churches</th>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Macedonia, Republic of</th>
<th>Serbia and Montenegro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>24.1 %</td>
<td>26.0 %</td>
<td>21.8 %</td>
<td>15.4 %</td>
<td>21.1 %</td>
<td>14.8 %</td>
<td>43.7 %</td>
<td>12.6 %</td>
<td>32.5 %</td>
<td>19.7 %</td>
<td>12.6 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>33.2 %</td>
<td>34.1 %</td>
<td>39.1 %</td>
<td>25.3 %</td>
<td>39.5 %</td>
<td>40.0 %</td>
<td>35.0 %</td>
<td>24.8 %</td>
<td>37.8 %</td>
<td>19.5 %</td>
<td>33.1 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>26.5 %</td>
<td>26.4 %</td>
<td>29.5 %</td>
<td>30.8 %</td>
<td>29.6 %</td>
<td>32.7 %</td>
<td>17.4 %</td>
<td>38.6 %</td>
<td>13.8 %</td>
<td>37.8 %</td>
<td>35.6 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>16.2 %</td>
<td>13.5 %</td>
<td>9.6 %</td>
<td>28.5 %</td>
<td>9.8 %</td>
<td>12.6 %</td>
<td>3.9 %</td>
<td>24.0 %</td>
<td>16.0 %</td>
<td>23.1 %</td>
<td>18.7 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29839 (100%)</td>
<td>1972 (100%)</td>
<td>2348 (100%)</td>
<td>2932 (100%)</td>
<td>2147 (100%)</td>
<td>1123 (100%)</td>
<td>3422 (100%)</td>
<td>3011 (100%)</td>
<td>7367 (100%)</td>
<td>1957 (100%)</td>
<td>3560 (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence: Parliament</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Macedonia, Republic of</th>
<th>Serbia and Montenegro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29408</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>2341</td>
<td>2936</td>
<td>2113</td>
<td>1119</td>
<td>3329</td>
<td>2955</td>
<td>7295</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Confidence in Political Parties in the Balkans\textsuperscript{11}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence: The Political Parties</th>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Macedonia, Republic of</th>
<th>Serbia and Montenegro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9 %</td>
<td>2.7 %</td>
<td>4.9 %</td>
<td>4.6 %</td>
<td>3.4 %</td>
<td>2.2 %</td>
<td>2.2 %</td>
<td>6.6 %</td>
<td>1.8 %</td>
<td>1.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.3 %</td>
<td>23.4 %</td>
<td>25.6 %</td>
<td>24.6 %</td>
<td>19.0 %</td>
<td>11.7 %</td>
<td>11.5 %</td>
<td>22.6 %</td>
<td>8.6 %</td>
<td>17.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.7 %</td>
<td>48.1 %</td>
<td>48.4 %</td>
<td>44.2 %</td>
<td>56.5 %</td>
<td>46.4 %</td>
<td>50.9 %</td>
<td>27.7 %</td>
<td>44.2 %</td>
<td>48.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.1 %</td>
<td>25.7 %</td>
<td>21.1 %</td>
<td>26.6 %</td>
<td>21.1 %</td>
<td>39.7 %</td>
<td>35.4 %</td>
<td>43.1 %</td>
<td>45.4 %</td>
<td>32.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>19072</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>2360</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>1157</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>5138</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3446</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Neighbor Preferences in the Balkans—People of A Different Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbours: People of a different religion</th>
<th>Country/region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Bosnia and Herzegovina</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10114</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>1196</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>3401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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