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# **RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE INFLUENCE OF THE CROATIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE 21st CENTURY**

**By Stefan Ubiparipović**

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## **Introduction**

Religion has played an important, but more supportive than decisive role in the creation of the modern societies in South-Eastern Europe. At the end of the twentieth century, brutal civil war in Yugoslavia was labelled as having varying religious influences which shaped national identities and policies. Moreover, contrary to creating peace and coexistence between people, beliefs and faith in clerical organizations and their representatives were misused and lost in the vortex of warmongering, intolerance, and conflict.

This essay will not go into details or analyse the influence of religious dogma which led to the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia and supported nationalistic policies of the 1990s. Instead, it will try to point whether these “pious” organizations still have considerable impact on current secular democracies. Furthermore, there is a need to specify that influence shown through tangible and vivid political decisions coming from the highest authorities and their behavior in regional and international relations. The focus will be on the two dominant Christian churches, namely the

Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia and it will emphasize on their present relations with the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia.

Firstly, for each case separately, I will underscore the important legal relations between the state and church, pointing out their rights, privileges and obligations stemming from them. Secondly, recent events indicating war-like discourses supported indirectly or directly by the churches and with political consequences, are very important to be mentioned as an integral part of the explanation of the persisting poor quality of the contemporary Balkan relations. Thirdly, I will try to conclude with identifying similarities, together with relevant differences in these two cases, which are both being neglected and easily understood as if the internal situation has not changed since the Balkan wars.

### **Fruitful Church-State Relations**

When writing about the Catholic Church among Croats (hereafter CCC) and Serbian Orthodox Church (hereafter SOC), it is important to point out several inexorable distinctive characteristics: their structural setup, hierarchy and the level of the official relations and secondly, the benefits and advantages when cooperating with the state.

Firstly, structural architecture in both SOC and CCC is based on the strict respect of hierarchy and obeying Robert Michels' "iron law of oligarchy."<sup>1</sup> What is extensive in this parallel is that the Croatian Church's "supervisor" is a head of state and represents a personification of a different country (Vatican) and who is a state organ *de jure*. On the other side, the Serbian Patriarch enthroned in Belgrade can inadequately be compared to the Pope in view of controlling SOC branches in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Macedonia.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 224. Available at: <http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/michels/polipart.pdf>;

Position of the CCC is buttressed on several levels, with high importance of contracts regulating its work in Croatia and with logistical and political support from Vatican's diplomatic missions accredited in the country. Pope Francis continues to back Croatia in international relations, as did Benedict XVI and John Paul II, having more internal and external weight and more advocating power. Notwithstanding, incumbent Patriarch Irinej may produce palpable outcomes after his meetings and joint statements with Serbian government officials, but has limited capacities to cope with external issues even during occasional limited tours and visits to the Serbian Orthodox diaspora. This may lead to the conclusion that the centralized SOC has an advantage. But without a strong international and morally legitimized support this is not the case. The Serbian Orthodox Church quickly updates its agenda in accordance with its contemporary challenges, but the voice of its ideas is not amplified nearly as much as in Croatia.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, in order to better determine the church-state cooperation, we need to underline their benefits and obligations. Prudent Apostolic Nuncio in Croatia, Giulio Einaudi, signed four treaties between 1996-1998, with the highest ranking Tuđman government members and with the help of the negotiating team headed by the then bishop of Krk, Josip Bozanić. These concessions offer stability and diminish the possibility of erratic political developments which would end badly for the church. Regardless, the first agreement revealed that the CCC "gained a high degree of autonomy and was widely protected" and is an independent legal entity. Furthermore, it has immunity for its clergy where "any judge had to inform the respective ecclesiastical authorities before starting an investigation against a clergyman."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it states that the

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<sup>2</sup> As a result, Jovan Zizulas, Eastern Orthodox metropolitan of Pergamon and the Chairman of the Academy of Athens, points out that Roman Catholics "have difficulties in identifying the Church because it exists as pendant to the state structures [...] Vatican is appearing as a state in relations to other states". His quote is translated from the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Original text in Serbian is available at: <http://www.spc.rs/sr/crkva>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Bremer, "Croatian Catholic Church and its Role in Politics and Society" *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 30, No.3 (2010): 8; Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol30/iss3/1>.

“state accepted a marriage performed in church as valid for the state records [...] and access to prisons and hospitals for pastoral purposes.”<sup>4</sup> The second treaty states that the Vatican can change the structure of dioceses, and Catholic education is recognized within the edifice of the Croatian system by the state. This means that the church is present at all academic levels with guarantees that the state bears the costs of religious education. The third treaty regulated formation of army and police priests and a special army ordinariate and a diocese. The final, fourth one, stipulates financial regulations by donating to each parish two average salaries per month,<sup>5</sup> paying teachers in schools, universities, and kindergartens and taking over costs of reconstruction of church property damaged or destroyed during armed conflicts.

The Serbian Patriarchate (Patrijaršija), the seat of the Patriarch, controls and sets up administrative units, chooses bishops and priests, and taxes its own churches on a yearly basis. Officially, SOC's status is recognized as one of seven religious organizations by the Law on Churches and Religious Communities adopted in 2006, including legislation concerning Orthodox classes in elementary and high schools and church property restitution. A parallel could be drawn from the fact that both churches made their preferential statuses in a period of several years during a wave of government support. What is reverberated constantly in the public criticism against the SOC is its exemption from paying taxes and permissibility to establish and buy properties and make profits.<sup>6</sup> Each bishop of a diocese is a manager, taxed by the Patriarchate, after which he can invest funds into reasonable or profitable policies. It is impossible to determine the quantity of money circulating, but some estimates show that SOC earns over €140 million per year, which would make it the biggest profitable enterprise after Oil

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Established parishes were taken into account only if they have more than 3,000 members in cities or 1,000 in villages”. Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> All religious organizations are exempt from paying taxes similarly as non-profit organizations.

Industry of Serbia and Telekom Serbia.<sup>7</sup> The Serbian state budget pays for social, health, and pension securities for priests, monks, bishops, and other qualified employees of (all) religious communities which bulk up to €8, 5 million annually.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding, the situation in Croatia is interesting when it comes to state subventions to the CCC, where every citizen pays a portion of his or her taxes to the church. The annual amount is almost ten times higher; the budget report from 2003-2013 showed that total of around €80 million (6 billion Croatian Kuna), was given to the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Zagreb pays for the property which was not returned to the church, and which is unadulterated and emblematically valuable. Restitution of Church property in Serbia was reported by the European Commission, in its 2006 Progress Report, as one of the signs showing limited and perhaps a partial rule of law where: “the Law on restitution of Church property was adopted [...] the legislation concerning restitution of other properties is still [negatively] outstanding.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Political Engagement and Influence of the Church on the Society**

South-Eastern European countries suffer from a detrimental etatism of discourses, where the state basically owns and creates wide array of public opinions. Political elites directly impact on culture and serve as a linchpin in the amalgam with religious organizations which also influence the society. By creating strong relations and interdependence with the state, the intertwinement of the church and state bodies reflects the national identity and culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Due to the lack of official data and only expert estimates and information from unnamed sources, this number is reported with great reservations. Look at: N1 (2015), “Crkva godišnje zaradi 140 miliona evra“, Belgrade; See: <http://rs.n1info.com/a57268/Vesti/Crkva-godisnje-zaradi-140-miliona-evra.html>

<sup>8</sup> B92, “Crkva: Iz budžeta 8,5 mil. evra, u budžet nula“, Belgrade (2016); See: [http://www.b92.net/video/vesti.php?yyyy=2015&mm=11&dd=03&nav\\_id=1058893](http://www.b92.net/video/vesti.php?yyyy=2015&mm=11&dd=03&nav_id=1058893)

<sup>9</sup> Information is based on the Croatian state budget reports. See: Ministarstvo finansija, “A. Račun prihoda i rashoda za 2013. godinu“, Republika Hrvatska, Zagreb and Ministarstvo finansija (2013), “B. Račun financiranja za 2013. godinu“, Republika Hrvatska, Zagreb; Available at: <http://www.mfin.hr/hr/drzavni-proracun-2013-godina>;

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, “Commission Staff Working Document: Serbia 2006 Progress Report“, Brussels; Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2006/nov/sr\\_sec\\_1389\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/nov/sr_sec_1389_en.pdf)

Even though political activism and advocacy is not their purpose, churches speak for the civil society and show they are an important stake holder.<sup>11</sup> If we look closely to the population censuses from 2011, it is noticeable that in Serbia, 83.3 percent of the population are declared as ethnic Serbs and a bit more as Orthodox Christians with 84.6 percent.<sup>12</sup> In Croatia, 90.4 percent declare themselves as ethnic Croatians but then religious self-determination drops to 83.9 percent Catholic.<sup>13</sup> It is obvious that there is a connection with the religious affiliation and national identity, but that does not justify the unconstructive political approaches of the church or the inconsistent interreligious dialogue.

Indeed, political involvement could be perceived as a voice of the underrepresented society or a self-interest motivation in order to secure the avoidance of repetition of a “basically hostile social settings for religion and church in general.”<sup>14</sup> Orthodox church-state relations may have been fruitful, but it becomes vividly clear that Belgrade’s government practically owns the clergy decision-making hierarchy together with Patriarch Irinej.<sup>15</sup> Even the pro-EU and pro-NATO political decisions with which the church would never agree are passed, where only President Tomislav Nikolić strongly aligns with the conservative Patriarchate reactions. During

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<sup>11</sup> “Being active both in time and space, [Church’s] mission cannot but have political implications.” Look at: Radovan Bigović, *“The Orthodox Church in the 21st Century”* (Belgrade: Foundation Konrad Adenauer, Christian Cultural Center, 2013), 29. See: [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_36567-1522-2-30.pdf?140114143653](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_36567-1522-2-30.pdf?140114143653);

<sup>12</sup> Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *“Religion, Mother Tongue and Ethnicity: Data by municipalities and cities”*, 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade; Available at: [http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Knjiga4\\_Veroispovest.pdf](http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Knjiga4_Veroispovest.pdf)  
 Državni zavod za statistiku, *“Stanovništvo prema narodnosti-detaljna klasifikacija-popis 2011.”*, Republika Hrvatska, Zagreb; See [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01\\_01\\_05/H01\\_01\\_05.html](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01_01_05/H01_01_05.html);  
 Državni zavod za statistiku (2011), *“Stanovništvo prema narodnosti i vjeri, popis 2011.”*, Republika Hrvatska, available at: [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01\\_01\\_12/H01\\_01\\_12.html](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/census2011/results/htm/H01_01_12/H01_01_12.html);  
 CCC built up the “reputation of being always against communism and [...] of being an organization which was undoubtedly Croat”. See: Thomas Bremer, op.cit., 1.

<sup>14</sup> Mirko Blagojevic, “Desecularization of Contemporary Serbian Society” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 28: No. 1 (2008): 40. See: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol28/iss1/4>;

<sup>15</sup> Close cooperation between PM Aleksandar Vučić and Patriarch Irinej raises criticism from more conservative clergy and laity. Look at Teleprompter (2015), *“Sprega između režima i crkve: Patrijarh Irinej obukao mantiju režimskog politikanta”*, Beograd; Available at: <http://www.teleprompter.rs/sprega-između-rezima-crkve-patrijarh-irinej-obukao-mantiju-rezimskog-politikanta.html>

the incumbency of President Boris Tadić, Serbian government has not dared to seriously approach Belgrade-Priština negotiations, frightened by church reactions which could incite wide social reaction.

After the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)<sup>16</sup> won the majority of votes in 2012,<sup>17</sup> it became clear that the church will not veto key decisions. In 2013, with the signing of the Brussels Agreement began the process of the “normalization of relations” between Belgrade and Priština and resulted in series of angry, relentless, denigrated, and unrealistic messages from SOC.<sup>18</sup> For example, as a response to the event, bishop Amfilohije prayed at the central public square in Belgrade for Kosovo and Metohija and then served a commemoration for the death of the Serbian government and the National Assembly.<sup>19</sup> Afterwards, the then Minister of Defence, Aleksandar Vučić<sup>20</sup>, for the first time in the history of the Patriarchate, participated in the meeting of the highest ranking episcopal body, the Holy Synod,<sup>21</sup> and came out supported by the

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<sup>16</sup> Serbian Progressive Party is a detached wing of the former highly nationalistic and conservative Serbian Radical Party.

<sup>17</sup> It also won 48% of votes in 2014 Parliamentary elections where it historically had 63% of the seats in the National Assembly, and in the early elections in April 2016 it again won approximately more than 48%.

<sup>18</sup> The pattern is already familiar as when “the militant faction of the clergy denounced Milošević after signing Dayton as a traitor”. See Ivan Iveković, “Nationalism and the Political Use and Abuse of Religion: The Politicization of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Islam in Yugoslav Successor States” *Social Compass* 49(4)(2002): 525.

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Amfilohije (not to be mistaken with Metropolitan Bishop Amfilohije Radović), went so far to compare PM Dačić with the assassinated PM Đinđić. He also was one of the loudest to fight against the Belgrade LGBT Pride walk through Belgrade. For more information look at: Aljazeera “Srbija: Varnice između Države i Crkve”; Available at: <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/srbija-varnice-izmedu-drzave-i-crkve> (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandar Vučić was one of the closest collaborators with Vojislav Šešelj, leader of the Serbian Radical Party who was accused of war crimes in the ICTY in The Hague. The Radical Party was nurturing strong relations with the SOC and Vučić continued to do so even after he split and founded a new party. Celebrating Orthodox holidays attracted a lot of votes, but recent years show that Vučić is not interested to show his religious tendencies to the public. A clear argument is the celebration of Slava by the SNS party without its leader in 2014. Slava is an Orthodox Christian celebration in honor of the patron saint, which is inscribed in 2014 on the UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Look at Telegraf (2014), “Evo ko je sve došao na slavu SNS”; Available at: <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1283649-kako-je-slavio-sns-evo-ko-je-sve-bio-na-veselju-naprednjaka-foto>

<sup>21</sup> The importance of the Holy Synod is reflected in its previous endeavours, for example, its campaigns to boycott 2004 Kosovo elections. For more information about the influence of this body since 1990 onwards see Angela Ilić, “Church and State Relations in Present-Day Serbia: Part II Legislation Regulating Church and State Relations” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 25, No.1, (2005). Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol25/iss1/2> and Radovan Bigović, “The Orthodox Church in the 21st



church.<sup>22</sup> Exercise of state control over religious dogma is not total, but it led to the de-labelling the government as being “traitor and quisling” and showing faith in desecularized Serbia.

Pressure from the government and a weak abutment from the president made Patriarch Irinej rearrange its radical bishops replacing them with moderate ones. In particular, among defrocking bishops involved in scandals and radical statements such as Filaret, Jovan, and Kačavenda,<sup>23</sup> bishop Artemije was additionally ostracized in 2015. Artemije was in charge of Kosovo and Metohija, and had an anti-government and anti-EU viewpoint and disagreed with Belgrade-Priština negotiations which led him to be, for the first time in the history of SOC, excommunicated. Currently, he leads a parallel organization, with catacomb churches and is heavily attacked by the Serbian Orthodox Church as a wild sectarian. Finally, after Kosovo negotiations continued in 2015, Patriarch Irinej reminded everybody of the danger of warmongering when he stated that Serbia will defend Kosovo “even with blood.”<sup>24</sup> Positive sign of desecularization is that according to recent research, students “do not point out special

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*Century*” (Belgrade: Foundation Konrad Adenauer, Christian Cultural Center, 2013), 27-87; Available at: [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_36567-1522-2-30.pdf?140114143653](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_36567-1522-2-30.pdf?140114143653)

<sup>22</sup> With his harsh rhetoric he persuaded the Church to step aside and let the Government do its job and promised to include the Patriarchate in the negotiations when there is real need for it (for example the property of the SOC in Kosovo). *Večernje novosti* (Belgrade, 2013), “Vučić razgovarao sa članovima Sabora SPC“, Available in: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/politika/aktuelno.289.html:436598-Vucic-razgovarao-sa-clanovima-Sabora-SPC>

<sup>23</sup> Filaret was famous for his pictures with kalashnikov rifle during the civil war in Yugoslavia and his blessings for some paramilitary organizations. Jovan was a bishop active in Canada and Kačavenda active in Republika Srpska.

<sup>24</sup> The Patriarchate was also very active in 2015, campaigning against Kosovo joining UNESCO. An issue of Kosovo creating Kosovo Orthodox Church may lead to SOC losing its properties. B92 (2015), “*Da li patrijarhu priliči da poziva “silu” i “krv”*“, Available at: [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=11&dd=25&nav\\_category=12&nav\\_id=1067331](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2015&mm=11&dd=25&nav_category=12&nav_id=1067331)

Serbian government has a very careful approach when addressing the Kosovo issue where any realistic statement about Kosovo is a scandal. Vladimir Kostić, as a President of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 2015, stated that Kosovo is *de facto* and *de jure* an independent state, for which he was condemned by various politicians. The affair ended in a meeting hosted by the Serbian President Nikolić with special invitations to the academics, Patriarch Irinej, and where PM Vučić was asked to join. Look at: Balkan Insight, “Serbian Academy Boss in Hot Water Over Kosovo”; See: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-s-civil-society-backs-academy-director-10-20-2015>.

exclusivity of their nation comparing to other, which represents basis for economic, social and political development and progress.”<sup>25</sup>

In Croatia, national feelings are coinciding with the current CCC policies and, contrary to Serbia, with the official statements of the highest government officials. It seems that modern Croatia still fears for its independence, despite being an EU member state, because anti-Serbian messages are used in order to keep the population united and to win political votes during campaigning. War-alike rhetoric provides help to certain civil society movements express their opinions, which are indirectly supported by religious dogma with an example of the unit named “Headquarters for the Defence of Croatian Vukovar [... which is] refusing two-alphabet Latin and Cyrillic signs in areas with minorities.”<sup>26</sup> Seemingly interesting neighboring amity was at its apex in October 2015 when, due to a large inflow of migrants/refugees, Croatian government decided to close the borders unilaterally towards Serbia. Nationalistic public statements happened in both Serbia and Croatia where Croatian PM Zoran Milanović “reminded” Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić who is and who is not in the EU, even though Brussels practically ordered the borders to be open.

The CCC continued to support the celebration of the operation “Storm” in 1995, which led to the forceful migration of 250,000 Serbs from Croatia, and avoids speaking negatively about fascist Ustasha regime during the WWII. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, criticizes the CCC and its nationalistic religious pillars which may contribute to the imploding of the edifice built above them. After the SOC turned to its internal political issues “most forceful ethnic nationalism in the region has become Croatian nationalism with the Catholic Church as its

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<sup>25</sup> Translated from Serbian from Iva Kalaba, “Čekajući regionalno pomirenje: studenti i nacionalizam u Srbiji” *Zbirka radova (Post)sekularni obrt: Religijske moralne i društveno-političke vrednosti studenata u Srbiji*, (2013), p. 278; Available at: <http://www.kas.de/serbien/sr/publications/36583/>;

<sup>26</sup> Magda Ela (2015) “In Search of a Crisis in Croatia” *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 35. No. 2, p. 10; Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol35/iss2/3/>;

backbone and the church-state alliance as the key feature of its national identity,”<sup>27</sup> it is interested in geopolitical and geoeconomical studies and asks questions whether the Croatian independent state is endangering anybody<sup>28</sup>. Far right bishops as Vlado Košić in Sisak, Ante Ivas in Šibenik and Mile Bogović in Gospić follow the path ignoring the Ustasha regime or even denying the existence of the concentration camp in Jasenovac, where thousands of Serbs, Jews, and Roma lost lives. Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, active during WWII and beatified in 1998 by Pope John Paul II,<sup>29</sup> is a problem on which Vatican tries to guide both CCC and SOC to a consensus. This is what Pope Francis intends to do, after accepting to receive the SOC delegation in January 2016 to an official meeting in Rome where they discussed the canonization of Stepinac. Some official church policies are practiced by civil servants and bureaucracy, as the refusal to organize sex-education in schools, advocating against same sex marriages and even persuading several doctors in state clinics to refuse giving abortions<sup>30</sup>.

## Conclusion

Religious organizations in the Balkans, observed closely through the most dominant ones in Croatia and Serbia, have had more than a mild influence on the national identity and culture in the past. Their current strong position of economic independence is sustained through agreements and legislation regulating state-church relations. Both CCC and SOC gather more than 83 percent of the populations respectively, which declared themselves Catholic or Orthodox

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<sup>27</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, "Power, Corruption and Dissent: Varieties of Contemporary Croatian Political Catholicism" *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 35. No. 4, (2015), p. 4. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol35/iss4/2>

<sup>28</sup> Many texts in the Croatian Churches' newspaper *Glas koncila* are focused on international relations, see: <http://www.glas-koncila.hr/index.php>;

<sup>29</sup> Pope John Paul II had beatified more people than all of his predecessors since the invention of this procedure in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>30</sup> In February 2016, United Nations Human Rights Committee affirmed, in a landmark case concerning a 17 year old Peruvian woman, that abortion is a human right.

Christian in the censuses held in 2011. Strong role of politics in the entire region is connected to the churches, which historically became dominant again after advocating for nationalistic policies in the post-communist era.

Religion carries much clout and it is channelled through churches which are politically active and refuse to show propitiation and rejuvenation. In specific cases mentioned in this essay, churches are trying to preserve their status and act in their historic legacy and role. Nationalism in Serbia and Croatia switched roles, where the latter remained in the shape of radical and conservative clergy. Nobody is saying that the Orthodox Church does not have similar problems but there is a weaker role for it in uniting the population through religious dogma than remained is the case in Croatia.

Spiritual mobilization is not as popular as before; churches are not influential on a large scale. In the Serbian case, the state shows concrete results in containing religiously inspired actions outside of reconciliation and regional politics. The Catholic Church in Croatia still rides with the use of the national card, supported by high ranking politicians and reiterating feelings from the Homeland War of the 1990s and historic legacies.

I will finish with mentioning the “no interference of religious dogmas” indicator of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index.<sup>31</sup> All ex-Yugoslav countries combined have an average mark of 9/10 which shows encouragement that religious influences largely remain outside the institutional frameworks and that the respect for the democratic consolidation procedures is very active. Nevertheless, even though the methodology of the Index shows differently, there are a number of cases where decision-makers both in Serbia and Croatia have to seek the blessings from the churches and convince them of the correctness of their intended policies. This is not

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<sup>31</sup> The BTI measures the quality of democracy, political management and market economy in 128 developing countries, where the lowest value is 1 and the highest is 10. For more information look at Knoema website: <http://knoema.com/GSBTI2014/bertelsmann-transformation-index-2014?tsId=1007480>;

only depicted through the careful and under the radar solving of the Kosovo problem in Serbia or the protection and implementation of minority rights in Croatia, but also when considering changes in economic policies and other foreign relations. There is a need for a stronger system of checks and balances for the executive authorities in both countries but also for a mechanism which will avoid churches being a political representative of the civil society.