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# RECONSIDERING ETHNICITY
# AND DOMINANT RELIGION IN SERBIA[1]

*Abstract:* Religion is an important aspect of ethnic identity in Serbia. After the socialist period characterized by the ideological suppression of both ethnic identification and religion, the two forms of identification have bloomed in Serbia.
In order to illustrate the complex relationship of ethnicity and religion in contemporary Serbia in this paper the following topics will be discussed : 1. Ethnicity in Serbia, 2. Religion in Serbia, 3. Determinants of ethnicity and religion in Serbia, 4. Where does ethnicity meet religion and 5. Shaping the ethnicity-religion nexus.

*Key Words:* Ethnicity, Religion, Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church.

## Introduction

Religion is an important aspect of ethnic identity in Serbia. After the socialist period characterized by the ideological suppression of both ethnic identification and religion, the two forms of identification have bloomed in Serbia. These processes were as a rule connected, as the religious and ethnic awareness rose in

the majority population – the Serbs, and in the minority peoples, e.g. the Bosniaks. It is difficult to determine the cause and effect relations in Serbia in the post-communist period and during the breakup of Yugoslavia, and it is also difficult to say whether the increased ethnic and religious identification played the role of the cause or the effect. Nevertheless, they did have an important role in the turbulent period of transition.

Apart from the processes, which are specific for post-socialist countries, Serbia was also faced with the gradual breakup of Yugoslavia, wars, and the bombing campaign of 1999. The rule and politics of Milošević also led to international sanctions, which culminated in the unprecedented inflation and war conflict against the NATO. After the breakup of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia initially formed a union with Montenegro in 1992 under the name of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which changed its name in 2003 to State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This was followed by the secession of Montenegro in 2006. In 2008, Serbian autonomous province of Kosovo self-declared independence (not acknowledged by Serbia). With the separation of Montenegro, for the first time since 1918, against its own will, Serbia became the Republic of Serbia (as an independent state, and not one of the republics of Yugoslavia). This separation opened a number of ethnic and religious issues.

Religion is here used in the function of "the defence of culture" – preventing the decline of the national or ethnic culture (Gavrilović, 2008). In such a case religious identity is linked to the ethnic one in a symbiosis, which still has a great emotional legitimacy in the modern Serbian and other ex-Yugoslav societies. What is happening is the sacralization of the nation and the nationalization of the sacred, that is, the *politicization of religion* and the *religization of politics* (Vrcan, 2001).[2] Thus, the examples of Serbs of other confessions are very rare, e.g. the case of the renowned legal and social theoretician Valtazar Bogišić, who was a Catholic. Similarly, there were Jews in the pre-war Yugoslavia who were assimilated and experienced themselves as the "Serbs of the faith of Moses". "Both the religious and the national community are imagined communities and they are connected by symbols (flags, crosses, and the like), which ensure common meaning to their members" (Reiffer, 2003: 215).

In order to illustrate the complex relationship of ethnicity and religion in contemporary Serbia in this paper will discuss the following topics: 1. Ethnicity in Serbia, 2. Religion in Serbia, 3. Determinants of ethnicity and religion in Serbia, 4. Where does ethnicity meet religion and 5. Shaping the ethnicity-religion nexus.

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[2] For the Serbs, Orthodox Christianity remains, first and foremost, the faith of identity, so to say, "the faith of national identity" (D. Bogdanović, quoted in Vrcan, 1995: 362).

## Ethnicity in Serbia

With the dissolution of socialism, retraditionalization and traditional forms of identification have established themselves as a reply to the challenges of social changes, as well as something to take over the vacant spot once occupied by the socialist ideology. Importance is assigned to various elements of tradition, and certain contents are declared values, which represent the continuity with the past that came before the socialist period. As a rule, ethnic groups turn to historical reminiscences and discover conflicts as a significant determiner of their relations (from the period of slavery under the Ottoman Empire to World War II). After the socialist period of repression and sporadic conflicts, all of the Balkan peoples now remember well the crimes which they did to one another during the tempestuous history, victims of their own and other people's guilt, and are beginning to seek those elements of identity that separate them, even though the idea of "brotherhood and unity" (*братство и јединство*)[3] of Yugoslav peoples was advocated in socialism. Neither the common language (Serbs, Croats, Bosnians), nor the territory, and not even the belonging to the same religion (Montenegrins, Serbs, Macedonians), is a sufficient "marker" without believing in the common origin which is now being questioned by these peoples. They are searching for differences.

In the words of Anthony Smith (1998), within the Serbian community an "ethnic core" was organized in the period of slavery under the Turks. Namely, a common collective consciousness was formed on the basis of the unity of customs, religious and moral norms that served as a foundation upon which a certain administrative, military, judicial, and fiscal structure was constructed in the Serbian medieval state. During the period of slavery this identity was preserved, and important elements of the identification corpus were created[4]. One could say that in the case of the Serbian people the nation was created on the basis of the "ethnic core". The Serbian ethnie can be called a "vertical" type ethnie (Smith), with its ethnic culture spreading to all social layers. Namely, during the long period of slavery, class feuds were forgotten, the upper layers vanished, and the folk culture became common for all layers. As already mentioned above, this identity was mostly formed as an opposition to the Turks, which was to bear grave consequences on the contemporary relations with Muslims, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and

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[3] The idea of establishing a common state of South Slavic people grew through the 19th and early 20th century. It emerged in the late 17th century and gained prominence through the *Illyrian Movement* of young Croatian intellectuals (ca. 1835–1849).

[4] Kosovo as a mythical homeland where, above all, the "Kingdom of Heaven" was chosen over the "Kingdom of the Earth" (Bandić, 1989: 31–42), the cult of the "holy rulers" (Bandić, 2010: 25–38), and the idea of the great role of the SOC in the preservation of ethnic identity.

in Serbia (Sandžak), since modern-day Muslims are considered by the majority ethnic group – the Serbs, as the successors of the Osmanli, or as those who have abandoned their religion and converted to Islam.[5] These elements of national identity will later be used and combined in accordance with the political needs.[6]

After the Balkan wars and the victory over the Turks, Serbia immediately entered into World War I. Following the end of the war, it relinquished its recently acquired autonomy and became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918), later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The idea of Yugoslavism was present in Serbia, as well as in the other ex-Yugoslav republics, in the 19th century. In this one, and later on after the end of World War II, the socialist Yugoslavia, the idea of ethnic belonging was suppressed on behalf of the ideology of "brotherhood and unity". Occasional "ethic awakenings" occurred in the former Yugoslav republics, and they were harshly judged. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the territory of Serbia witnessed changes in the ethnic composition due to the influx of refugees and displaced persons (e.g. Serbs from Croatia and Kosovo and Metohija) or displacement of parts of minority groups (e.g. the Croats in Vojvodina). However, there were no great changes in the ethnic composition.

Today, Serbia is relatively homogenous as far as ethnicity is concerned – 83.32% of the population are Serbs (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013). Such a distribution is, naturally, not uniform on the whole territory. Vojvodina has a specific composition (ethnically most diverse) in relation to Central Serbia as very homogenous, with Sandžak dominantly populated by the Bosniaks, while the border regions are ethnically heterogeneous. The most numerous minorities in Serbia are Hungarians, Roma, and Bosniaks. In certain border towns in Serbia, the minorities are, in fact, the majority at the local level (Albanians in Bujanovac and Preševo, Bulgarians in Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad). It is worth mentioning that the position of minorities is not equal. Some of them live in relatively favourable social circumstances with a formed cultural elite – e.g. the Hungarians, while the majority of the Roma live in very difficult conditions.

The previous decades in Serbia have seen the significant changes in the minority structure. The number of Yugoslavs has dropped, while the numbers of Vlachs and Roma have risen. Such changes are not always consequences of a real increase or decrease in the number of members of a certain community, but the true reason lies behind the different declaration of those people. It is interesting to note that the number of members of particular communities, as the abovementioned Vlachs and Roma, has risen after the fall of socialism and the breakup of

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[5] "[F]or the nationalist Serbs, the Bosnian Muslims are 'traitors' of the faith of their ancestors who should be regarded as 'former Serbs', who are 'in fact' Serbs, etc. Historically, we find examples of attempts to re-convert them to Orthodoxy" (Bremer, 2008: 5).
[6] In the 19th century and after the liberation from the Turks, but also during the latest armed conflicts. For an insightful analysis of the continual political functioning of the Kosovo myth in Serbia from the 19th century to the present see Spasić, 2011.

Yugoslavia, as an effect of the general ethnic awakening. Since both Vlachs and Bulgarians are of Orthodox confession, oftentimes small ethnic differences occur as the factor of assimilation, which leads to a further emphasis of these differences at the level of religion, that is best exemplified by the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in eastern Serbia to which the Vlachs are turning in order to differentiate themselves from the majority people (Gavrilović & Petrušić, 2011; Jovanović & Tasić, 2012; Jovanović & Tasić, 2013). The new category which appears in the data (see Table 1) from 2002, and is not present in the table from 1991, is the category of Bosniaks, who have separated themselves from the population previously identified as Muslims (an ethnic group formed on the basis of religious identity, recognized in the SFRY in 1971), thus making this larger group now divided into those who have started declaring themselves as Bosniaks, and the ones who have remained Muslims only.

One of the still most important demarcation factors in the differentiation of ethnic groups in Serbia is religion, so what most often occurs here today, apart from rather shy ecumenist attempts, are the conflicts and opposition intensified by religious differences. Similar symbolic battles are also being led in the area of language. Even though Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian are extremely similar, which guarantees absolute comprehension between the members of different ethnic groups, Sandžak insists on the schooling of children in Bosnian, while a settlement in Vojvodina with a dominant Montenegrin population insists on the Montenegrin language.

The figures in Table 1 show that the number of ethnic Serbs is in decline[7], due to the low birth rate, as is the case with the Hungarians and Romanians. Number of Roma is on the increase, due to a high birth rate, but also because an increase in numbers of those declaring themselves as members of this ethnic community (which is an effect of positive discrimination policies of the State and altered social environment). Because of the tendency toward *ethnic mimicry* a proportion of Roma population declares as Serb[8], thus the official statistics records that there are close to 150,000, while leading demographers estimate the size of this population around 450,000.

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[7] The rise in percentages of Serbs is partly due to the drastic decrease in number of those that declare themselves as Yugoslav.

[8] In the Balkan *gradients of depreciation*, the Roma are placed at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy (Živković, 2001).

*Table 1: Ethnic Groups in Serbia (1990–2012)*

| Ethnic group | Size (number) | | | Percentage in the population | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1991[*] | 2002 | 2011 | 1991 | 2002 | 2011 |
| Serbs | 6252405 | 6212838 | 5988150 | 79.93 | 82.86 | 83.32 |
| Hungarians | 343800 | 293299 | 253899 | 4.39 | 3.91 | 3.53 |
| Did not declare | 10718 | 107732 | 160346 | 0.14 | 1.44 | 2.23 |
| Roma people | 94492 | 108193 | 147604 | 1.21 | 1.44 | 2.05 |
| Bosniaks | - | 136087 | 145278 | - | 1.81 | 2.02 |
| Unknown | 47958 | 75483 | 81740 | 0.61 | 1.01 | 1.14 |
| Croats | 97344 | 70602 | 57900 | 1.24 | 0.94 | 0.81 |
| Slovaks | 66772 | 59021 | 52750 | 0.85 | 0.79 | 0.73 |
| Montenegrins | 118934 | 69049 | 38527 | 1.52 | 0.92 | 0.54 |
| Vlachs | 17804 | 40054 | 35330 | 0.23 | 0.53 | 0.49 |
| Regional affiliation | 4841 | 11485 | 30771 | 0.06 | 0.15 | 0.43 |
| Romanians | 42316 | 34576 | 29332 | 0.54 | 0.46 | 0.41 |
| Yugoslavs | 320168 | 80721 | 23303 | 4.09 | 1.08 | 0.32 |
| Macedonians | 45068 | 25847 | 22755 | 0.58 | 0.34 | 0.32 |
| Muslims | 180222 | 19503 | 22301 | 2.3 | 0.26 | 0.31 |
| Bulgarians | 26698 | 20497 | 18543 | 0.34 | 0.27 | 0.26 |
| Other | 14800 | 13922 | 17558 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.24 |
| Bunjevci | 21434 | 20012 | 16706 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.23 |
| Ruthenians | 18052 | 15905 | 14246 | 0.23 | 0.21 | 0.20 |
| Goranci | - | 4581 | 7767 | - | 0.06 | 0.11 |
| Albanians[**] | 78281 | 61647 | 5809 | 1 | 0.82 | 0.08 |
| Ukrainians | 5042 | 5354 | 4903 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.07 |
| Germans | 5172 | 3901 | 4064 | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.06 |
| Slovenians | 8001 | 5104 | 4033 | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.06 |
| Russians | 2473 | 2588 | 3247 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.05 |
| **Total** | 7822795 | 7498001 | 7186862 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

[*] For 1991 the estimated data were presented (estimates were worked out only for the municipalities of Bujanovac and Preševo, since the actual data for these two municipalities were not available due to the boycott of the Census by the majority of the Albanian population).
[**] 1991, 2002 and 2011 censuses do not contain the data for the AP Kosovo and Metohija. Namely, the 1991 Census was boycotted by the majority Albanian population, while in 2002 and 2011 there were no conditions on the territory of the southern Serbian province for the implementation of the census. In the municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac there was an undercoverage of the census units in 2011 owing to the boycott by most of the members of the Albanian ethnic community.

## Religion in Serbia

Serbia is a multireligious state, in which Christianity and Islam are present with their confessional branches: Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism, that is, Sunni and Shia Islam. Christianity dominates Islam, the Orthodox confession dominates Catholicism and Protestantism, while Sunni Islam is absolutely dominant over the Shia (Đorđević, 2005a; 2007). The Muslim community encompasses the Slavic Muslims in Sandžak, ethnic Albanians in the south, and Roma in the entire country. The Roman Catholics comprise almost 5% of the population, and these are mostly ethnic Hungarians and Croats in Vojvodina. The Protestants of various proveniences amount to 1% of the population. The Jewish community has around 3000 members.[9]

Living in several countries during the 20th century (Kingdom of Serbia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, SFRY, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, Republic of Serbia), church, religion and religiosity of the population of Serbia have passed through three different periods: 1. from the beginning of the century to the end of World War II, 2. from the end of World War II to the end of the 1980s, and 3. from the beginning of the 1990s until today.

The first period was characterized by Orthodoxy enjoyed the status of a state religion, and there was a harmony between the dynasty and the episcopate[10]. The Vidovdan Constitution of 1922 declared the principle of the freedom of religion and equality between religious communities, and the 1931 Yugoslav Constitution adopted the principle of state sovereignty over all religious communities. (Radić, 2005; Todorović, 2005a).

Following the conclusion of World War II started the processes of *atheization* and *secularization,* with a devastating influence among the Orthodox and somewhat milder effects among the Roman Catholics and members of Islam. A decades-long spiritual and social demonopolization and marginalization of religion and church created the so-called *marginal typical believer* (Đorđević, 1984).

The end of the socialist Yugoslavia and the merciless – more or less religious – war on the greater part of its territory initialized the creation of nation states with a pronounced religious legitimation, which led to desecularization, *i.e.* the return of the people to religion and church. A radical drop was witnessed in the number of the people declaring themselves atheists, with an increase in the readiness of the people to identify in the religious terms and acknowledge confessional belonging and faith in god, as well as the renewal of the religious

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[9] A complete registry of churches and religious communities in Serbia can be found at: http://www.vere.gov.rs/KSCVZ/uploads/Dokumenti/RegistarCrkavaIVerskihZajednica.pdf
[10] Radmila Radić (2005: 176), for example, cites the data that at the beginning of the 20th century 4.75% of members of the Serbian Parliament came from the clergy.

practical behaviour (baptism, marriage, memorial service, holidays) (Pantić, 1993; Blagojević, 1995; Blagojević & Đorđević, 1999). By the end of the 1990s the image of a typical believer from the 1980s had already altered: "with the increase in religiosity of the urban population, men, educated and younger generations, came the great uniformity in the attachment to religion and church according to the place of residence, gender, age, education, and vocation" (Radisavljević Ćipari-zović, 2006: 107). The expressed revitalization of the religious-church complex, however, was still not representative of the deep changes in the spiritual life of the people by returning to the forgotten god and religious morality, a genuine spiritualization of life and a dramatic change in the religious behaviour. A closer connection of an increasing circle of people with religion and church was more of a consequence of the fall of socialism and the total social, territorial, national, and confessional homogenization of the population in the newly-created independent states.

The coming of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and other religious communities out of the decades-long marginalization, stigmatization, and isolation in the private sphere, and gradual inclusion in the performance of public services reflected in the following: 1. media promotion of the church and its representatives (presentation of traditional customs related to the greatest church holidays and appearances of the representatives of all confessions in educational and informational radio and TV programmes), 2. an increased interest in the admission to the faculties and institutes of theology, 3. construction and renovation of churches and other religious buildings, 4. the revival of church publishing, 5. the renewal of the role of churches and religious communities in the domain of religious education (introduction of religious education in primary and secondary schools), care about morality, social and charity work, 6. the revitalization of monkhood in male and female monasteries, 7. the return of nationalized church property.

The Law on Churches and Religious Communities in Serbia was passed in 2006 and it granted the status of the SOC and other traditional religious communities without repeated registration, and on the basis of the contracts concluded with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which did not apply for the so-called small religious communities.[11] Special acts were introduced to further regulate health care, social security and retirement plans of priests and religious officers.

During the 1990s, Orthodoxy and the SOC once again became the key factor in the protection and homogenization of the Serbian national corpus in Kosovo,

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[11] Article 7 of this Law explicitly states that: "Traditional churches are those which have had a historical continuity within Serbia for many centuries and which have acquired the status of a legal person in accordance with particular acts, that is: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church (a.c.), the Christian Reformed Church and the Evangelical Christian Church (a.c.). Traditional religious communities are those which had a historical continuity within Serbia for many centuries and which have acquired the status of a legal person in accordance with particular acts, that is: the Islamic Religious Community and the Jewish Religious Community."

Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The notion of *svetosavlje*[12] as the cornerstone of the Serbian nation went hand in hand with the ethno-nationalistic Greater Serbian ideology of Slobodan Milošević and the contemporary state government, to the extent where the SOC gave blessings to war campaigns and changing the borders in the Balkans. The difference between the nationalistic and religious activity of the Serbian Orthodoxy, between politics and faith, disappeared. The speech of intolerance toward religious diversities (especially toward Protestants who were all categorized as "sects"), but also toward atheists, implied an open confrontation with those who thought differently. Police investigations in the cases of verbal delicts, vandalism, and physical assaults by the right-wing political groups were slow and without final results. Special attention was paid to moral and ideological arbitrations of the SOC, witnessed by numerous surveys conducted on the mood of the public and relevant scientific research, with a particular emphasis on the attitudes of the youth (Kuzmanović & Petrović, 2008). Such a position was also not threatened by negative actions of the clergy, since they were observed as individual behaviour, while the Church remained one of the supports of the Serbian ethnos.

Can one speak of the genuine connection of the citizens of Serbia to religion and church? Over half a century, declarative atheists have become declarative believers and this would have been enough of an indicator of religious renaissance for someone. By comparing the ex-Yugoslav experiences, it seems that we have witnessed a "return of religions" (in the sense of the return of religious institutions into the social sphere), rather than the "return to religion" (in the sense of the return of the citizens to the religious experience) (Cvitković, 2009). A revitalization of the public role of religion has happened in Serbia, under the influence of specific socio-political events in the Balkans. The SOC has become a relevant factor in the functioning of the social organism of the Serbian society, performing a number of functions: from the homogenizing and ethno-mobilizing one at the beginning of the 1990s to the socio-psychological and ideological one nowadays. Driven by the desire to compensate for the decades-long absence from the creation of the state policy and public thought, it has abandoned its primary, two-millennium long vocation: the *Orthodoxization* of the Serbian people, guidance in seeking god, and spiritualization of mutual relationships in everyday life.

The current connection to Orthodoxy is very loose, and the religious behaviour is non-continuous. The process of revitalization of religion expressed in the willingness of the citizens to declare themselves in religious terms is not

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[12] Term *svetosavlje* was coined in the 1930s by Serbian theologians who based their ideas on the life and work of St. Sava (see note 20). Recently canonized Serbian bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, in his "Preface" to the book *Svetosavlje as a Philosophy of Life* (1953) by Justin Popović, spoke of *svetosavlje* as "nothing other than Orthodox Christianity of Serbian style and experience". In contemporary Serbia, svetosavlje is interpreted as a right-wing political ideology, a compound of nationalism and clericalism.

followed by a consequent religious practice. One counts on salvation, even though one does not fulfil religious duties and does not perform a number of church ritual actions. What is happening is an extreme widening of the traditional religious practical behaviour. One could speak of the typical "four-rite believers": baptism, marriage in a church, celebration of a saint's day, and memorial service (Đorđević, 2009; Topić & Todorović 2011). There is a very thin layer of believers who have established firm spiritual connections with the religious community that they belong to and who respect the religiously prescribed rules literally, that is, those people who can be described as pious believers.

The undoubted progress of conventional religiosity in the Serbian people should not be interpreted as a dedication to religion, but rather as partially getting closer to religion and church. It is true that an obvious revival of religious customs is taking place, but it is not an expression of a nostalgic return to the values whose continuity was violently broken by installing the scientific atheism in this region. It is not rare that a mere ceremony is accompanied by an unbecoming feast and kitsch iconography. Declared religiosity among the Serbian majority in Serbia is not a state, but a beginning of a long-term process of spiritual improvement and "churching" which is ongoing and uncertain. Owing to the two-decade long wave of affirmation of the collective piety in the context of the strengthening of national identification, "at the beginning of the 21st century the Serbs are religious in the manner of traditional belonging without believing" (Đorđević, 2009: 62).

*Table 2: Religious Groups in Serbia (1990–2012)*

| Religious group | Size (number) | | | Percentage in the population | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1991 | 2002 | 2011 | 1991 | 2002 | 2011 |
| Christian[*] | 6931527 | 6876279[*] | 6555931[*] | 89.33 | 91.71 | 91.22 |
| Orthodox | 6347026 | 6371584 | 6079396 | 81.80 | 84.98 | 92.73 |
| Catholic | 496226 | 410976 | 356957 | 6.40 | 5.48 | 4.97 |
| Protestant | 86894 | 78646 | 71284 | 1.12 | 1.05 | 0.99 |
| Other Christian | 1381 | 2191 | 3211 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.04 |
| Islam | 224120 | 239658 | 222828 | 2.89 | 3.20 | 3.10 |
| Judaism | 740 | 785 | 578 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Eastern religions | - | 240 | 1237 | - | 0.00 | 0.02 |
| Other | 13982 | 6649[**] | 1776[**] | 0.18 | 0.09 | 0.02 |
| Agnostics | - | - | 4010 | - | - | 0.06 |
| Not believers (atheists) | 159642 | 40068 | 80053 | 2.06 | 0.53 | 1.11 |
| Did not declare | - | 197031 | 220735 | - | 2.63 | 3.07 |
| Unknown | 429560 | 137291 | 99714 | 5.54 | 1.83 | 1.39 |
| **Total** | 7759571 | 7498001 | 7186862 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Notes: The 1991, 2002 and 2011 censuses do not contain the data for the Autonomous Province Kosovo and Metohija. Namely, the 1991 Census was boycotted by the majority

Albanian population, while in 2002 and 2011 there were no conditions on the territory of the southern Serbian province for the implementation of the census. In the municipalities of Preševo and Bujanovac there was an undercoverage of the census units in 2011 owing to the boycott by most of the members of the Albanian ethnic community.

* The difference between the total number of persons of Christian religion (line "Christian") and the sum of the lines for the persons of Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant and "other Christian" religions comprises the persons who responded to the question on religion by only stating Christians.

** The aggregate data are provided for the persons who opted for pro-oriental cults, belong to a religion not stated, or are believers but do not belong to any religion.


## Determinants of ethnicity and religion


The post-socialist period brought about great changes which were reflected in politics in the introduction of a multi-party system with strong right-wing parties, while the changes in the economic sphere created a large gap between the poor and the wealthy instead of a divided poverty (Borowik, Jerolimov & Zrinščak, 2004: 9–10).

After the fall of socialism in Serbia where the religiosity of people was implicitly and explicitly hampered, an increase in religiosity occurred (Blagojević, 2008a; 2008b; 2012). Several reasons can be taken as the basis of this phenomenon. Suppressed religiosity flourished after the improvement in the freedom of confession (the *jack-in-the-box* effect). In the escalation of the tensions between nations religion became an important identification marker.

Economic crisis in Serbia reached its peak in the early 1990s, and this resulted in general insecurity which made masses (especially the young[13]) turn to god for consolation, thus propelling the church as the most trusted institution in the Serbian society (Gallup Balkan Monitor 2010). Furthermore, religion was employed for the purpose of solving psychological trauma caused by the insecurity of the late and slow period of transition with numerous transitional losers. Thus, the SOC emerged as the sole winner of transition in Serbia (Radić, 2010), while the affection of the political authorities for religious communities grew to such an extent that certain authors warned of the new clericalization of the state (Vukomanović, 2005).

In the 1990s a great trauma shook this part of the Balkans: the breakup of Yugoslavia through armed conflict. The rise of nationalistic politics in the region (beginning in the early 1980s) as much as giving impetus to secession of new national states, also gained strength from this process. With the 'national revival', which peaked in the civil war, the Western Balkans witnessed the 'comeback' of

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[13] "In the case of young people in Serbia, it seems that insecurity caused by the war, rather than the breakdown of the communist system, may have shaped their worldview and turned them to religion" (Naletova, 2009: 383).

Orthodoxy in Serbia[14] (also in Macedonia and Montenegro), Roman Catholicism in Croatia, and all of the aforementioned religious traditions together with Islam in Bosnia (Perica, 2002). Therefore, "Orthodoxy became increasingly important for the cultural and national uniqueness of the Serbian people and its homogenization and identification in the face of other national and confessional identities" (Radić, 2000a: 271). The church granted substantial moral and material support to the Serbian population on the territories affected by the war. The message church was conveying to the public was "the Serbian people were not the aggressors but the victims of the conflict, and that they, for the second time in their history, were confronting genocide" (Radić, 2000a: 272). At some point, the church defended the war, characterizing it as defensive and in the glory of god, characterizing peace which did not direct people to godly ways as "rotten". In this way, the SOC worked as an agent of demobilization of all social and political forces that were opposed to nationalist politics. The church viewed the unification of the entire Serbian people as *Endlösung* of the national question. It is noteworthy that the majority of bishops in the church originated from the lands in which the war was being waged. Although pleas for ending the violence, calls for negotiations and fair solution of the conflicts were constantly voiced, "the concept of a 'just solution' coincided with the articulated interests of the Serbian nation" (Radić, 2000a: 272).

The proclamation of Montenegro independence in 2006 was another blow to the programme of the all-Serbian-unification, and added fuel to the fire of schism related to the autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which was established in January 1991, with Miraš Dedeić becoming its first Metropolitan, a short time after he was excommunicated by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. The Serbian Orthodox Church declared the Montenegrin Church "schismatic" (Ramet, 2006: 132–133). Mutual accusations of "atheism" followed, together with massive ethnic mobilizations and violent outbreaks in Montenegro, now a nation divided between those calling for unity with Serbia, and those praising the newly-gained autonomy.

Disputes between the SOC and the Macedonian Orthodox Church[15], as well as the most recent one with the Romanian Orthodox Church[16], again follow a familiar pattern of state, church and ethnic group forming a tripartite unity.

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[14] "The national revivals have given the churches great opportunities to reveal the transcendent truth of Christianity not only through the transcendent symbolism of the Christian vision of the world but also through the experience of post-communist nation-building" (Naletova, 2009: 392).

[15] After long and tumultuous history an agreement was reached in 1992 on the canonical unity of the Serbian and Macedonian Church, only to be vetoed by the Serbian Church later on. In 2002 a new agreement was concluded according to which the autocephaly would be discontinued and the autonomy of the Macedonian Church established, yet it only led to a discord among the Macedonian bishops, out of whom one (Jovan), with this agreement also falling through, accepted the invitation of the Serbian Patriarch Pavle to recognize the authority of the Belgrade Patriarchate. The problem between the two churches developed

The separatist calls of Albanians started in the early 1980s, and reached the highest volume in the late 1990s, when an armed conflict broke out and ended after the NATO intervention in 1999. The Republic of Kosovo as an independent state was declared in 2008. Up to date, Serbia has not recognized it, and still claims that Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of Serbia. A strong mythical significance of Kosovo constitutes the core point of a specific form of religious nationalism, enhanced by the fact that the Albanians inhabiting Kosovo are Muslims.

One should also mention several of the more recent affairs which have shaken the SOC. These scandals are connected with the (documented) accusations against two of the SOC bishops (Pahomije and Vasilije Kačavenda), who have abused their position and forced theology students and other young men into physical closeness, then with the murder case that took place in the Orthodox Centre for Drug Rehabilitation in 2011, as well as with the material misconduct in the SOC (the bishop of Raška-Prizren Artemije and his associates were accused of embezzling large sums of money mostly from the monastery renovation funds intended for Kosovo and Metohija).

As for the EU accession process, it must be noted that the Church vehemently opposes the European integration (Buchenau, 2011; 2012; Gaćeša, 2007; Mylonas, 2003), and positions itself among the anti-European political forces in Serbia – such as "Democratic Party of Serbia" and "Dveri", along with clero-fascist and ultra-nationalist organizations, which promote a general conservative agenda. By closely lining with this side in the struggles about the EU, the Church enhances the symbolic divisions in the Serbian society, often using strong language and condemnation in stigmatizing the pro-European wing of the Serbian public. There are also factions within the SOC which recognize and accept the need for EU integration, but they are in the minority (Bigović, 2011; Buchenau, 2005).

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into a state problem between Macedonia and Serbia, which, similarly to the situation in Montenegro, led to the polarization of the Macedonian population.

[16] The problem with the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in eastern Serbia, on the territory of the SOC jurisdiction, also possesses an ethnic dimension (the Vlachian minority in Serbia has a part whose members consider themselves Romanians). The problem magnified to such an extent, that at one point the president of Romania threatened with cutting the support to Serbia for its joining the European Union if the activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the eastern Serbia remained forbidden (Jovanović & Tasić, 2012).

*Table 3: Determinants of ethnic and religious developments in Serbia (1990–2012)*

| Determinants | Ethnicity | | Religion | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1990s | 2000–2012 | 1990s | 2000–2012 |
| Collapse of socialism | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Breakup of Yugoslavia | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Economic crisis | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Montenegro independence | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Kosovo and Metohija independence | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Disputes between the Orthodox Churches | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Scandals within the Church | | | | ✓ |
| EU accession process | | ✓ | | ✓ |

## Where does ethnicity meet religion?

In Serbia, ethnicity does not meet religion – they are joined together, due to the historical linkage of ethnic and religious identity, and utilization of religion as the most important ethnic identifier.

An important relation has to be emphasized when talking about religion and identity, and that is the connection between the SOC and the preservation of ethnic identity during the slavery under the Ottoman Empire. The Patriarchate included all the countries where Serbs lived under the Turkish authority. After its renewal (1577) the Peć Patriarchate encompassed almost all of the Serbian regions and almost the entire Serbian population. The areas where the Serbian people did not live, but used to be parts of "Dušan's[17] Patriarchate", were abandoned, while the regions of Bosnia, Srem, Banat, Lika, and Baranja were included, i.e. the regions which were populated by the Serbs only after the arrival of the Turks. The analyses of the position and the role of the SOC in these processes provide a unanimous assessment of Serbian historians that the SOC was the main bearer and defender of the identity of Serbs after the fall of the medieval empire up to the beginning of the fight for independence.[18] On the other hand, Miša Gleni believes that this role had

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[17] Stephen Dušan (*Стефан Душан*, c. 1308–1355), commonly known as "Dušan the Mighty" (*Душан Силни*), was the „Emperor of the Serbs, Greeks (Romans) and Bulgarians". He enacted the constitution of the Serbian Empire in *Dušan's Code*. He promoted the Serbian Church from an archbishopric to a patriarchate. Under his rule medieval Serbia reached its territorial, economical, political and cultural peak. His death is seen as the end of resistance toward the advancing Ottoman Empire, and the subsequent fall of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the region.

[18] Somewhat paradoxically, the church became a more powerful institution among the Serbian people under the Ottomans than it had been while the Serbs had their own native

to be very limited since the service was not conducted in the folk language but in Slavonic-Serbian, a language not understood by the peasants (Gleni, 2001). Even though several other reasons could be given for the real position and influence of the SOC during history, the most important is the myth of its importance which became a part of the ethnic myth, and has to this day been the cause of a high level of trust in the SOC institution, as well as of its instrumentalization for political purposes. The Serbian, along with the other Orthodox churches, is distributed nationally, thus acquiring certain characteristics of a "folk religion". The specificities, such as the cult of Saint Sava, the syncretism with pagan elements and the tolerance of this practice by the SOC, make the basis of the "Serbian Orthodoxy" (Slijepčević, 1991).

After the socialist period in which the church enjoyed a completely peripheral role, came the redefinition of the relationship between the state and the church, and its increased importance in the Serbian society. "During the socialist period, the state one-sidedly determined the character of its relationship with religious communities from a position of total political and ideological supremacy. In the post-socialist era, however, religious rights and freedoms have been considerably extended, but this immediately brought into play the question of their increased *responsibility* in many areas" (Vukomanović, 2008: 240). Although declaratively secular,[19] Serbia is a state in which saint's days of almost all public institutions are celebrated, the SOC priests participate in state bodies (Republic Broadcasting Agency), Saint Sava[20] is celebrated in all schools not only as an educator, but as a saint as well, with explicit elements of the Orthodox cult. Its activity spreads to the educational sphere (religious education), the presence of chaplains in the army and prisons, to the influence on the legal-political sphere, and international relations and European integration (Vukomanović, 2008). The state dictates the policy which stimulates or provides an untruthful picture of the mass revitalization of religiosity by: "constructing sacred objects with the permits for the most attractive locations, introducing religious holidays as state holidays, their public celebration

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rulers, with the Serbian people's ecclesiastical leaders thenceforth becoming their secular leaders as well – *etharchs*. This was the practical result of the Ottoman *millet* system, which was a form of indirect rule and corporate self-government by ethno-confessional groups (Bardos, 2011: 562).

[19] Article 11 of *The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* reads as follows: "The Republic of Serbia is a secular state. Churches and religious communities shall be separated from the state. No religion may be established as the state or mandatory religion."

[20] Saint Sava (Свети Сава, 1174-1236) was a Serbian Prince and Orthodox monk, the first Archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church, the founder of Serbian law and literature (he authored the oldest known constitution of Serbia – *Nomocanon* [*Законоправило*]), and a diplomat. He is widely considered as one of the most important figures of Serbian history, celebrated as a great educator of the people, and is venerated by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

with the support from political structures, a large media space and the neglect of the cultural and sociological dimension of the holidays, for the purpose of emphasizing the religious, and often national, Orthodox-Serbian dimension" (Radulović, 2012: 16).

Religion was a follower and an actor in the creation of social events. The public role of the SOC rose and it was impossible to bring down Milošević without it, similar to the current situation where the SOC is asked to provide legitimacy for winning and holding on to the authority. Certain church representatives[21] instrumentalized religion/church politically (nationalistically), by using this legitimizing potential (Lukić & Vuković, 2005: 201–204, 206–217). "The church, which viewed itself as the protector of the Serbian people (…) did not regard the national question as a separate political problem, but as a form and an aspect of religion; thus it acted as a national, and not solely religious, institution. (…) The church did, in fact, identify itself with Serbia as a state and with the Serbian nation." (Radić, 2000a: 270).

*Figure 1: Ethnic map of Serbia in 2011*[22]



*Figure 2: Religious map of Serbia in 2011*[23]



Figures 1 and 2 clearly show that ethnic and religious areas fully overlap.

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[21] "The Church is as divided as the society itself. There are advocates of various options and paths among the bishops. The illusion of unity is kept on the outside, while the inside is characterized by the balancing of power" (Radić, 2000b: 83).

[22] "Predominant ethnic communities of the Republic of Serbia, by municipalities and cities", Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013: 31.

[23] "Predominant religions in the Republic of Serbia by municipalities and cities", Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013: 28.

## Shaping the ethnicity-religion nexus

The strengthening of the religious sensibility in the near future in Serbia is a continuous process that will require much more energy from traditional churches and religious communities than they have exerted thus far. Do the strife for the preservation of the traditional pattern of national and cultural identity, at the collective, and the apotheosis through living with others and for others in a local temple, at the individual level, go hand in hand with the acquired political approval of the public opinion on the needs for the integration into the European flows?

World-renowned sociologists of religion assess that "[t]he closer a society moves toward Europe, the more it will come under the influence of European secularity," i.e. that a religious community has three options in the clash with the dynamic competition of the pluralistic situation: "to resist, withdraw from, or engage with pluralism" (Berger, 2005: 443–444). The first two could be considered neotraditionalism, while the third is the one to be counted upon, in line with expectations that the church is not opposed to the society. In the European religious market, with strict rules of the game, all of the churches and religious communities are subjected to competitiveness, and their success in religious activity depends exclusively on their own individual abilities and dedication. The shift from the *religion of fate* to the *religion of choice* is an inevitable fact that religious communities in Serbia have to get used to in conforming to their own religious activity within the European framework.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is the member of the *World Council of Churches*, has participated in the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue since 1965, and contributes to the witness of the gospels, even though it is yet to be subjected to a comprehensive *aggiornamento*, in the manner of the Catholics (Nikolić, 2011; Bigović, 2011; Todorović, 2005b; Đorđević, 2005b). It is also yet to compete in the open European cultural and religious surroundings, and not only provide a merely declarative support of the heritage promoted by the Western civilization in its spreading to the East (Bigović, 2011). To preserve the existing and multiply the new congregation, the Orthodox clergy will have to engage in more than the liturgical community and ascetic silence in the years to come. By redefining the public role and forms of its pastoral activity thus far in the Serbian society, the SOC could serve as a role model and orientation to its current and future believers, tired of transition problems and looking toward the European future, in their adjustment to coping with the conditions of a civil society. What would these changes encompass?

As already suggested before (Topić & Todorović, 2011), in the sphere of public activity these changes would comprise: 1. abandoning the inflammatory national rhetoric based on chauvinism (fanaticism and intolerance toward the

members of minority peoples and ethnic groups); 2. support to the believers for participating in the political life (the imbuement with the Christian spirit as an advantage in public service activities); 3. promotion of the Serbian-Orthodox cultural heritage as a contribution to the enrichment of the European cultural tradition, but also the introduction of the domestic congregation to the cultural achievements of other Christian peoples; 4. cooperation with the civil sector (the defence of the dignity of people and fundamental human rights: the right to life, freedom of conscience and religious freedom, social justice and peace, prevention of discrimination, xenophobia, and violence); 5. reconsideration of the basic values and ethos of the present (promotion of social justice, fight against corruption and crime, rejection of various forms of unequal distribution of social power, reconsideration of the range of the market economy based on unhindered competition); 6. encouragement of the socio-ethical discussion on the righteousness of economics and the criticism of the consumer society anomalies (greed for profit, human avarice, unequal distribution of social goods); 7. raising the awareness on the importance of environmental protection; 8. philanthropy, endowments, and charitable work; 9. affirmation of Christian values in economic activities (honesty, conscientious work, solidarity, relations toward the working environment).

In this way, religion in Serbia would take on the role of a "reservoir" of social capital (Putnam, 2000), which functions in accordance with the nature of the civil society, leaving behind the history of religious-ethnic conflicts that have been characteristic of the previous period. Political consensus and Serbia's aspirations for joining the EU can have a significant influence on this process, since this involves acceptance of norms and standards of minority rights protection.

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# ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ ОДНОСА ЕТНИЦИТЕТА И ДОМИНАНТНЕ РЕЛИГИЈЕ У СРБИЈИ

*Резиме:* Религија је важан аспект етничког идентитета у Србији. Након социјалистичког периода, који је одликовало идеолошко сузбијање етничке и религијске идентификације и религије, ова два облика идентификације су у великој мери добили на значају у Србији.

Да би илустровао сложени однос етницитета и религије у савременој Србији у овом раду ће се разматрати следеће теме: 1. етницитет у Србији, 2. религија у Србији, 3. детерминанте етницитета и религије у Србији, 4. место сусрета етницитета и религије и 5. обликовање етничко-религијске споне.

*Кључне речи:* етницитет, религија, Србија, Српска православна црква.