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Ethnic Identity Resentment and Increasing Anxiety in the Modern World Society vs. State vs. Individual

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Abstract

In this paper we critically examine the troubled interdependence between religious identity and mounting violence in contemporary world. This interdependence was enormously revealed with the ongoing militancy of "Islamic State", and the radical Islamist groups. Their professed aim sounds appealing – to get rid the corrupt government and create a state and society governed by Sharia. Recently we witness a wave of increasingly sophisticated attacks against 'infidels' mainly in war-torn Syria and Iraq, but elsewhere too, which suggests not only growing foreign support, but also indicates a strategy of provocation through which "Islamic State" seeks to spark large scale sectarian conflict that will strike at the foundations of modern world. And this relates deeply with the Balkan realms with their fragile balances of old and new latent conflicts – and far beyond the grueling influx of refugees that is almost impossible to deal with. Here we expose details of individual states, EU and world failure to handle effectively the problem. In the last part we offer recommendations on how to mitigate that situation.

Key words: Religion; Ethnicity; Identity; Violence; *"Islamic State"*.

Introduction

Balkans with their difficult past and heavy burden of wars, reallocation of borders, and ethnic cleansing, makes an interesting case study of the uneasy nexus between religion, identity and violence. This is largely due to its complicate dknot of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts. This makes the region as one of the most deeply divided in Europe (see, for example, Jelavich, 1983, Kaplan, 2005).

Even the record of the alliances, mutual cooperation agreements, or geopolitical projects as Yugoslavia, NATO, Warsaw Pact, COMECON, and more recently, the EU, to mention some of the most significant, reveals that resentments, prejudices, confrontations, inherited from the past, never cease to exist.

Balkan's extensive heterogeneity, particularly its ethnic and religious diversity, together with its lagging behind the affluent Europe, lingers as an enduring source of societal tensions and recurrent political instability. This amalgam of harmful properties serves not only as a potential and a seam perpetually intimidating to cleave the very roots of the peaceful coexistence, concord and future prospects. Specifically, political mobilization along ethno-religious lines, gradually, put ethno-religious groups on the edge of rejecting main policy projects as an imminent threat. This is not only triggering controversies that in the distant, but also recent past have claimed thousands of lives and properties, but ultimately impedes the emergence of the internal and interstate cooperation, development and prosperity. The disparate, often victims of competitive claims and loyalties ethnic and religious groups on the Balkans (parts of the same ethnicity devoted to diverse confessions, or divided through borders from the mother nation, etc.) belong to a pattern of conduct that often promotes religion (even after decades of atheist rule during the communism, or when it is recently introduced or re-introduced) over and above the broader interests of the national states and societies. Balkans transition from totalitarian regimes brought an alarming level of clashes and violence, especially in the otherwise cradle of an exemplary liberal form of communist regime under Tito, but also in Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, violence associated primarily with religious identity politics adopted historically unprecedented for post WWII proportions.

Theoretical Premises and Prospects[1]

Since the astonishing terrorist attacks of 9/11 it is often said that 'more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetuated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history' (Kimball, 2002: 1). As McGuire notes, 'religion is one of the most powerful, deeply felt, and influential forces in human society. It has shaped people's relationships with each other, influencing family,

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[1] Expanded elaboration of these issues with more attention to the theoretical premises is forthcoming in Bulgarian: in *Sociologicheski problemi,* no. 3-4.

community, economic, and political life... Religious values influence their actions, and religious meanings help them interpret their experiences.'(McGuire, 1992: 3). Other authors identify three core aspects of religion: a social construction, created by people, and an essential component of culture, an integrated set of ideas by which a group attempts to explain the meaning of life and death, and, third, a normative system defining immorality and sin as well as morality and righteousness. (Eitzen and Zinn, 2010: 487). Sociological explanations bound religion with the core of both group and self-identity, offering responses to the question: 'Who am I?' (Nikolov, 1993: 57-8), and being"(1) a ubiquitous phenomenon that has a profound impact on human behavior, and (2) religion influences society and society impacts on religion (Agbiboa and Okem, 2012).

Religious identity can be both an integrative and disruptive force in any society; thus, it may not only stimulate and perpetuate violence but may also contribute to peace (see for more details Parekh, 1999; Appleby, 2000).This 'ambivalence of the sacred', to use the Appleby's term, is clearly apprehended by his analytical query as for why religion is a source of 'intolerance, human rights violations, and extremist violence, but also of nonviolent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided societies?' (Appleby, 2006: 821).

Conflicts over the role of religion in society or the state are expected to emerge between different religious groups, especially if the given religion professes universal validity. Besides, militants may well be motivated through specific religious incentives/returns for their contribution to deceitful acts of hostility (see Anderson, P.: 2004). Religious issues might be appreciated as a likely mobilization resource, as for and as well within conflicts.

A different outlook associates religion to the commencement of terrorism: religious terrorism is seemingly uplifted above a simple indicator to a whole array of explanatory features and fundamental contentions that appear to demarcate it as a special category of violence, fundamentally different from secular forms of terrorism and violent behavior (Rapoport, M., 1984; Gunning and Jackson,2011).

It is essential to note that the immense rise of radical Islamist terrorism from the 1980s and 1990s on has contributed extensively to the disastrous nature of assaults committed by religious terrorist groups (Rapoport, 1998; Juergensmeyer, 2003; Agbiboa, 2013). Available empirical data shows that over the period 1968 to 2005, Islamists groups (especially groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) were responsible for 93.6 percent of all terrorist attacks and 86.9 percent of all casualties inflicted by religiously-

oriented terrorist groups (Terrorism Knowledge Base; Conrad and Milton 2013). It is significant to say that in 2013 only, 66% of all fatalities caused by terrorist attacks were instigated by only four terrorist groups, all of Islamist background: al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, Boko Haram, and ISIL. This is partly related to the previous stipulation: Islamist terrorism is a form of 'market state terrorism' that causes vast amount of casualties. Charles Kurzman (2011, 11) upholds however, that fewer than 1 in 100,000 Muslims since 9/11 have been recruited by Islamist terrorists. Ahmad (2014) further minifies the role of social factors for radicalization: "There are grievances to be found in the world, many of which never culminate in the membership of a radical party or the formation of a social movements. If there was a direct link between them, society would be swarming with countless organization and movements struggling for [resolution]" (op. cit.). If only replace 'grievances' with 'religion', we may say that Islam in general, or being a Muslim does not play an underlying role in carrying out terrorism.

Piazza explains the higher frequency and intensity of terrorist activity among Islamists in the light of the (mis)interpretation of certain doctrine and practice within Islam, including the concept of 'lesser jihad', the practice of militant struggle to defend Islam from its perceived enemies, or the Muslim reverence for 'Itishhad' – the practice of martyrdom (Piazza, op.cit.: 66). Thus, rise in Islamic terrorism would also be about how Al-Qaeda type group fit a typology defined as 'universal/abstract' while other Islamist terrorist groups are more properly categorized as 'strategic' (ibid., 65)[2]. According to this perspective, extremist groups like Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and others fall into the universal/abstract category on account of their global jihadist appeal and their ideological stance against Western missions and perceived (or real) enemies of Islam (Zimmerman, 2011).

Mapping the Conflict Scenario

Balkans are located immediately to areas with a centuries long, well documented history of belligerent Islam, being itself an integral part of the Ottoman Empire and inheriting a painful record of imposed confession, reallocation of huge groups of population,

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[2] 'The primary difference between universal/abstract groups and strategic groups is that the former are distinguished by highly ambitious, abstract, complex, and nebulous goals that are driven primarily by ideology... in contrast, strategic groups have much limited and discrete goals: the liberation of specific territory, the creation of an independent homeland for a specific ethnic group, or the overthrow of a specific government' (Ibid., 65).

ethnic changes, and border changes. Not all of these are due to the Islam, but even when they were not caused by any Muslim-driven factors, they all certainly add to the complex nature of the area, its numerous confrontations and both boiling and latent conflicts, rooted back to the past. For many authors, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, which gave birth to a number of national states, accompanied with bloody wars and blatant intrusion of the "Great Powers" opened the region to the corrupting influence of secular political power. In the search for 'allies' and strengthening their supremacy they turned to ethno-religious purification which soon was transformed into a quest for a political kingdom. The outcome is that first Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, then Catholicism especially in Croatia and in Transylvanian part of Romania tried to become the main national state shaping force, incl. with attempts to take revenge over Islam incl. with attempts to convert at least the allegedly forced to adopt Islam parts of own population. This made Muslim minorities a second-rate people in the newly established national states, which strived to appear mono national paying no attention to the problems and plight of the minorities. Thus religion became the focal veneer for the legitimacy of the state, regime, ruling class and, consequently, political class has appreciated themselves as warriors for the defense of the faith'. Moslems, as well as other minority groups, even during the years of atheist and purportedly equal-for-all communist totalitarian regime, became merely a decoration to the propaganda efforts, and the price for their political and socio-economical upward mobility was fervent display of loyalty to the kin/regime/ruling party, and at least external, superficial adoption of the dominating values and assimilation with the majority ethnicity.

The ethno-religious violence was generally hidden during totalitarian period, with only occasional bursts with various degree of hostility and larger media exposure like in Kosovo-Metohija, Transylvania, and the 'Revival' process in Bulgaria. However, since region's return to democratic rule in 1989, it erupted enormously, and this occurred in the most unexpected place – in the ostensibly liberal, compared with it neighbors, Yugoslavia. Bloody wars in Bosnia and Eastern Croatia opposed up to yesterday engaged in 'Bratstvo i jedinstvo' (Brotherhood and Unity) people – Muslim Bosniaks vs. Orthodox Serbs vs Catholic Croats. Most of the conflicts between 1990 and 2005 took place in the Muslim populated regions, and by far and large were related to religion. Failure of the governments, NATO, European structures, the US and other outside actors to warrant public order, to contribute to dispute settlement and to implement post-conflict peace-building measures were also a crucial contributing factor. Equally, absence of economic opportunities and productive,

rewarding employment, especially with the growing inequality, further ignited s violent conflict in the region.

The Politicization and Militarization of Religion

Yugoslav wars, coupled with strings of civil unrests, ethno-religious clashes, resource skirmishes and riots. Specifically, this violent behavior has tainted the history of the regions return to democratic rule in 1989 highlights the persuasive, most often troublesome, role of religion in the politics and identity there. Competitive, repeatedly mutually defying ethno-religious belongings and loyalties added to the conundrum. Historically, during the Ottoman domination, Christians were largely seen as infidels and they were treated as such. To ease their tasks in governing vast, multinational and multi-confessional Empire, Sultan delegated dealing with the Orthodox Christian diaspora, no matter if they were part of previously autonomous churches, to the Greek Patriarchate in Istanbul, which furthermore complicated situation even within apparently same religion professing ethnic groups – a majority, combined, in the most parts of the Balkans. After the WWI, when Christian people from the predominantly Turkish areas in Anatolia, were driven out from their native places amidst abundant malice they had to pass the hardships of resettlement which produced the notions of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Furthermore, with the typically inadequate reallocations of the state borders – main victim there was the people of Bulgaria, which were defeated in both WWI and the preceding Balkan wars the overall plight was deepened. Mutual prejudices, animosity, occasional alliances, together with the self-interested policies of the Great Powers, created another pity contribution to the political discourse – 'Balkanization'. Also, most of the terrorist arsenal of methods – hijackings, seeking of ransom, bank robberies, blasts, political murders, and so on, emerged first right here on the Balkans, often with their most merciless forms, and disguised with the noble banner of the struggle for national liberation and social justice.

Those who after the WWI did not succeed to emigrate or escape, remaining under the rule of alien for them ethno-religious political structures, were compelled to adopt new identity and loyalties, or to suffer – they and their families – permanent abuse and tortures. Their children were placed either in separate schools and forced to live in segregated areas, or subjected of a forded assimilation, especially in parts of Northern Greece, Bulgarian and Serbian parts of Macedonia, Serbian-occupied 'Eastern bounds', Dobruja. In addition, for long periods of time, any form of interaction between the divided groups previously part of

common ethno-religious set was forbidden. Many were separated from their relatives and property, and often deprived of such rights as using their own tongue and religious rites. These discriminative policies were continued after the WWII, and even aggravated with the Cold War dawn, setting the scene for the new resistance and suffering, that exploded in the 1990s.

To sum, this encroachment of religion and ethnic strife into the political realm everywhere foretells a numinous threat for the peace, cooperation and prosperity. Quite obviously, the dense merger between religion, politics and social life creates deep suspicions when there is felt that one ethno-religious group is dominating (or trying to dominate) the political affairs. Subsequent shoving for hegemony puts the major religions – Christianity and Islam – at the odds. Regrettably, the actions of the leaders from the past have often provoked the sparks of conflict by suggesting that the country was under a single religion. Such endeavors are going on by proclaiming individual countries as 'mono national' – while there exist other more or less significant ethno-religious minorities, and by putting in the laws, incl. in the constitutions unfeasible ban on political parties, organizations of various kinds, and even cultural activities based on ethno-religious origin.

At the dawn of democracy in 1989, the quasi harmony forged during the protracted totalitarian rule in some countries was exposed as diverse religious groups began a systematic campaign for the recognition of their rights. Changes in the political realm acted as a discharge of a pressure valve, which enabled people to express their earlier stifled irritation and to articulate their frustrations freely enough.

Democratic changes and unruly transition to the market economy triggered increasing poverty, growing unemployment, and swelling emigration of young people with education and vocational skills. Unemployment is higher in the mixed or minority populated areas. Statistics emotionlessly shows that the Roma populace affected by the highest proportion of uneducated, unskilled, illiterate persons, most often unable to sustain themselves and their large families. When link this chronic marginalization, lack of prospects, degenerated, ghetto-type living environment to a higher birthrate, one can easily envisage that these areas are actually a breeding ground for crime, political clientelism, voting fraud, but also radicalism and terrorism.

Relation between the rise of terrorism and socio-economic underdevelopment has been often criticized as simplistic because it fails to explain why certain poor places are not involved in collective violence. Another criticism is submitted by Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierriek in their recent empirical research. In their work entitled 'What Causes Terrorism?'

the duo examines a host of possible influences on terrorism including global order, contagion, modernization, institutional order, identity conflict, inter alia (Krieger, Meierriek, 2011: 3).

Following a detailed review of the relevant empirical literature on terrorism causes they conclude that 'there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that economic deprivation causes terrorism... poor economic conditions matter less to terrorism once it is controlled for institutional and political factors' (Ibid.). As an alternative, they argue that terrorism is closely linked to political instability, sharp divides within the populace, country size and further demographic, institutional and international factors (Ibid.).

ISIL As a Peril to Balkans and Post-Communist States in Particular

ISIL[3] poses a threat to the countries of the Middle East, Central Asia, South Caucasus and Balkans too. The Islamic State militants penetrate Syria being strongly concentrated in the northern regions, bordering Turkey. Former Ba'ath officials and military cadres, extremists and radicals from across the larger area around, but also the vast Muslim community in Western Europe, are actively recruited into the ranks of ISIL. For the moment similar data about the enrollment from the Balkan countries are missing, but this is far not a reason for reassurance.

Against the enclosed background in the Balkans' post-communist states, strengthening of the ISIL extremist group risks further destabilizing the situation in the countries around the war-torn Syria and Iraq. And this is not only with the huge wave of refugees seeking safe place and essential living.

Given the not so established polities in most post-communist countries of the Balkans, together with economic problems, corruption, cronyism, and other factors, comprising these countries, but also the one-time blessed Greece, ethnic tensions among the populations there diminishes their effective ability to counter all new threats for their security, incl. the risks of extremism and terrorism that emanate from a very close regions.

Of all the Balkan states, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and recently captured by humanitarian crisis Greece seem especially endangered. Their borders seem to be porous

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[3] The term ISIL is now being used by the UN, the U.S State Department as well in the EU papers. This abbreviation stands for (in Arabic), '*al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq wa al-Sham*', the English equivalent of which is the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*, or ISIL.

both to drug trafficking, and to the flow of illegal migrants and extremists, who have been penetrating this space in recent years. Back in mid-2014 Bulgaria started erecting fence along its border with Turkey, and pending further enclosing entire length of its to prevent both extremists' and all illegal migrants entering its territory. Greece already sealed its land border with Turkey, but its countless islands are targeted by the influx of desperate people from the Middle East, Libya, and even from Sub-Saharan Africa. Turkey is also already having troubles with this unusual flood, being located literally on the frontline with ISIL fighters in Kurds' populated areas of Syria.

Additional threat is travelling through the region of recruited militants for joining ISIL troops. More often these are holders of EU passports which makes very difficult to prevent their hidden intentions. Suspicions exist that a number of radical Islamic groups and movements, incl. ISIL, are already operating (or having the so called "sleeping cells") on the territory of former communists states on the Balkans. Namely, this refers to the predominantly Muslim ones - Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania, but also Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia, probably also in some parts of Romania. They will certainly continue to build up their potential, tightly trailing the ISIL advancement in the Middle East in general and closer to the region in particular.

All this requires supplying Border Police with modern dissuasive weaponry, special monitoring gear and other necessary equipment. Further measures involve a targeted approach to the Bulgarian-Turkish border and Eastern Mediterranean that requires developing an EU-large and outside interstate program of cooperation going beyond the policing, border guard and refugees' quotas.

ISIL is altogether a formidable financial institution, rather than a paramilitary political force. Hitherto, it has been actively engaged in recruiting supporters and followers – far beyond its proper operating area. It is also intimidating, fighting battles, capturing towns, training fighters, and so on. Some observers assert that the ISIL has replaced Al-Qaeda, which once was a very powerful terrorist organization. It may well be that that in a few years' time, ISIL will be able to absorb this movement former combatants, but also talibans, mujahidins, and more, since it displays quite successful appealing force that attracts followers even among non-Muslim individuals.

The establishment of a newfangled 'Islamic state', though more or less radical or even moderate it may be, implies bureaucratic procedures, creation of permanent institutions of power, and so on, while ISIL militants, in fact, are primarily 'soldiers of fortune' that participate in war-like conflict. At present it seems unlikely for them to

become join launching means and structures of power and public administration. It is for this particular reason that ISIL's activities should be countered and stopped before negotiating with the Islamic State becomes the only thing left. Although ISIL is not attempting to enter in a meaningful dialogue even with Arab Muslim government in the region, the inter/national community should not shelve the idea of mobilizing all possible forces both to fight it and prevent further destructive, virulent establishment.

As long as some part of the US and NATO military contingent remains in the area, though it earlier performance was far not effective and even ultimately foreign intervention contributed, it acts as a deterrent against the radical activities of the ISIL and other militants. A drastic intensification of extremist forces' activity in areas adjacent to the Balkans appears not quite likely for the time being, although individual acts of terrorism, presumably may take place from time to time (to recall at least the blatant assault on Israeli tourists near Bourgas airport and the action in Kumanovo in Macedonia by Kosovo militants, later solemnly buried with military honors in Prishtina. These and other cases reveal that affected countries' security agencies and special forces lack essential skills and tools not only to prevent such acts, but also to appropriately investigate its consequences, to seize and prosecute both executioners and those who plotted, and to boldly and trustworthy explain what is happening. Using of such allegedly fabricated incidents for diverting attention from hot internal political issues or for intimidation, hullabaloo, ill-prepared lawsuits– where both attorneys and invited experts only ostensibly know Quran, hadiths, particulars of the Arabic language, regional tongues and dialects – may only aggravate situation. All this may certainly have serious consequences for the Balkan countries and could even destabilize them politically. Given the relatively fragile statehood, feeble democratic tradition, and harsh socio-economic problems of countries across the post-communist and post-Soviet space, Europe may further suffer from ISIL activity, as it faces the serious problem posed by its restive borders.

As of today, it is possible to provide not only military-technical assistance to the countries immediately threaten and with most complicated circumstances, and to cooperate with NATO framework and US military, in order to ensure better interaction and adequate response to militants' acts of provocation and to prevent terrorism leaking into neighboring countries. As well, Balkan countries may also provide know-how and useful consultation to avoid severe errors and miscalculations committed by hasty actions in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East. Thus, coordinated efforts by the EU, NATO, USA and also Russia, countries from the Balkan, Middle East, Northern Africa Central Asia, altogether,

could serve to contain the threat of exporting and spreading ISIL radical ideas into nearby territories and regions.

Conclusion: Some Hints of National and International Response

Since the early 1990s, the Balkan governments have taken a number of constitutional, legislative and policy measures aiming, among other, to manage the incidences of religious identity conflict and sectarian violence. Such measures include:

- Exclusion, or making it matter of personal choice, to reveal religion and ethnicity background an index in the design, conduct and reporting of national population census;
- promotion of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue through the establishment of various inter-religious counseling bodies – formal as well as informal, ad-hoc, non-governmental, etc.;
- constitutional provisions aiming to prevent predominance of one ethno-religious group in all kinds and levels of government and institutions;
- political application of the principle of power sharing between all regions as well as Christians (E. Orthodox, Catholic, Protestants etc.), Muslims, and representatives of other confessions and ethnicities;
- non-registration of political parties with ethnic or religious overtones; and
- prohibition of registration of businesses with religious appellations.

Despite these measures, menace of religiously inspired violence has not disappeared or diminished. Extreme, excessive, utmost measures here would led to the same outcomes as the lack of action and exclusion. Vague and left to personal option expression of the ethno-religious status in the censuses has led to inability of the national statistics to provide reliable information for the decision-makers. In Bulgaria, for example, growing Roma population tend to realign formally with the predominant ethnicity, or with the Turks (professing Islam), which they accept as more prestigious and permitting to avoid otherwise tough obstacles they encounter on the way of embitterment of their living conditions. This refers also to small ethnic groups as Karakachans, Vlakhs (Aromanians) etc. who voluntarily accept (assimilate with) the main surrounding ethnicity. Also, Roma, and Muslims disconnected from the predominantly Christian ethnic group of their nation (such as Pomaks, Torbeshi, etc.), occasionally declare themselves as belonging to distant exotic

ethnic group like Eskimo or Bushmen. In Macedonia, national census has been repeatedly postponed, remaining arguably among the biggest security challenges facing country today.

Further, all tools and provisions based on the method of the so called 'positive' (or reverse) discrimination, quotas, or deliberately promoting representatives of minorities on various political positions not on the basis of their qualification, skills, or personal virtues, and solely grounded on their ethnic background, may only outrage ethnic majority feeling it further deprived due to overall hardships.

Constitutional ban on registration of political parties, businesses and even NGOs which exists specifically in Bulgarian Constitution (art. 11 p. 4) needs further to be sharpen up not only because it failed to prevent establishment of such political parties, or allegations in deceitful using it in selective manner. Drives to avoid this provisions means first of all that existing presumably non-ethnic parties fail to express minority interests thus making them de facto ethno-centered, i. e., associated with the main ethnicity. Enforcing privileged status of one 'traditional' or 'major' religion, enabling its clergy to enjoy monopoly over all commencement, inauguration, etc. ceremonies and rituals incl. in the schools and military further complicates situation in interethnic attitudes and alienates certain groups of the population.

More than 15 years ago a recognition about possible future opening of the Armed Forces and police for representatives of minorities in Bulgaria caused much controversy (see Nikolov, 1997, 1998), especially Roma/Gypsy, caused much noise and weird comments. After more than decade, there is still no senior military or police officer from these minority groups. In neighbor Romania there are such examples, but only with individuals that have attained career advancement at the price of denying their ethnic background and breaking any connections with their fellow folks.

These management measures have emphatically failed to restrain dormant religious identity conflict due to their inconsistency and favoring short-term measures, aiming at repressing violent religious tendencies in lieu of a non-violent conflict management approach. Hence state responses have remained inchoate, uncoordinated, incendiary and ultimately counterproductive leading to further exclusion, which potentially nurtures too radical scenarios.

Balkan governments, if sincere in their intention to wipe sectarianism and rising militant religiosity around, have to invest in inter-religious dialogues between leaders and followers of the two predominant religions in the region, namely Christianity and Islam. Dialogue between the predominant ethnicity and other minorities is vital because it will

help clear the haze of misunderstanding creating a better ambience of mutual enrichment. Moreover, all religious communities must understand that there is no alternative to inter-faith dialogue, as there can never be a universal religion or an exclusive status for adherents of a particular religion. Christian and Muslim religious education should be tailored in such a way as to avoid the exclusive teaching of dogmatic Christian or Islamic doctrines, thus fostering mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and amity instead of prejudices and animosity.

There is an urgent need for Christian and Muslim leaders – clerical as well as secular – to join together to publicly denounce all forms of religious intolerance and sectarian violence and encourage, through their sermons or other public messages, the necessity for religious harmony and tolerance of other faiths. It may be of use to establish a comprehensive all-Balkan 'Religious Conflicts and Early Warning System' that would arrange an intelligence gathering and evaluation system on religious identity violence, and also design the means to its timely containment through preventive dialogue. It certainly may contribute for grasping more effective solutions to handle the growing refugees conundrum Finally, to achieve sustainable peace, governments should devise a sound socio-economic strategy that not only meaningfully addresses the problem of political corruption and control of the state apparatus for private or sectarian interests, but also incorporates development, security, and respect of the human rights of the citizenry, including those the members of minorities. Unless the physical and social wellbeing of the individual is sufficiently protected within the state, and unless the state refrains from the unjust use of rigid power and manipulative tactics, prosperity, peace and cooperation will continue to offer grave consequences for individual countries and the region as a whole shared existence and future.

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