

РЕЛИГИЈАТА И НАЦИЈАТА: СЛУЧАЈОТ НА РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА RELIGION AND NATION: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract:

Historically to ensure unity in a country where religion played a significant role, it was required that the country have only one religion i.e., "the sovereign of the country determines its religion." This politicization of religion led to religious wars within and among the nations of Europe; hence the principle was replaced by one of secularity, i.e. separation of religion from the state. So, today western liberal democratic societies are secular, or in other words, religion is set apart from the state. However, the beginning of the 21st century has seen a re-politicizing of the religion. This trend has been particularly noticeable in the period since the end of the Cold War.

The Republic of Macedonia is no exception to this international trend. Under the constitution, the state is a secular one and religion is segregated. This means that the state has no right to interfere in religious matters, nor may religious communities involve themselves in matters of state. In practice, however, this strict division of labor is not achieved in any secular society. In this paper, we shall investigate the interlocking relationships that have come to exist between politics and religious communities in the Republic of Macedonia in the building of the contemporary Macedonian nation. In the paper authors concluded that the process of building the modern nation should continue to occur within the existing cultural matrix, which in itself articulates the values of two civilizations - Muslim and Orthodox. Religious groups, in essence, are calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the "other", which can contribute to building a multicultural society. On the other hand, disrespect and manipulation of religious particularity can adversely affect the building of the sense of a single nation. In a society such as Macedonia's, inter-religious co-

operation is very important. Only this concept carries any promise for the future of the contemporary Macedonian nation.

Keywords: politics, religious communities, nation, fundamentalism, secularism

Introduction

Until the mid 17th century and beginning of the formation of the modern (secular) international system of states, religion was the key ideology that often provoked political conflict between social groups within countries and between countries. But after the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and the development of the modern nation-state, first in Western Europe and then in the European colonies and the rest of the world, at both the intrastate and international level, the political importance of religion declined significantly.³⁰

However, at the beginning of the 21st century, religion is once again politicized. This trend has been particularly noticeable in the period since the end of the Cold War. And this is especially true of the so-called "world religions" (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Confucianism). Many analysts point to the Iranian Revolution (1978-79) as the moment when there was a "re-awakening of religion", in this case of Shia Islam. For many years, Iran, like Turkey, with its Sunni Muslim majority, had been an example of a secular state patterned on the Western liberal model. Moreover, many other parts of the world witnessed the emergence of states where religion played an increasingly important role. Europe was partly an exception to this trend, because most of its countries emphasize their secularity having displaced religion from the public into the private sphere.

Religious fundamentalism

The concept of popular religious interpretation, including religious fundamentalism, is not new. There have always been opponents of the prevailing religious interpretation. What is new, however, is that whereas in the past, manifestations of popular religion occurred within the framework – and under the control of the main religion, in a modern society, it is no longer possible to keep under control all religious tendencies within a traditional organizational framework. This is primarily a result of two actors. First, it is due to the process of modernization and secularization. And secondly, it's part of the process of shifting religion from the public to the private sphere.

Contemporary manifestations of religious fundamentalism are only one aspect of the global "re-awakening of religion". It is interesting to note that the various manifestations of contemporary religious fundamentalism constitute a kind of reaction, often in militant form, to what its adherents perceive as the western liberal trend of secularization which leads to the public and political marginalization and the privatization of religion.

³⁰ See more: Jeffrey Haynes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), London and New York, 2009.

Many observers in defining religious fundamentalism attribute it to it a social and political conservatism. From a social point of view religious fundamentalism is seen as backward, not modern, and inherently opposed to change. However, it should be noted that if this is the case, it is very difficult to satisfactorily explain the sometimes revolutionary political demands and programs of some fundamentalist religious leaders and activists. For example, some religious fundamentalists, particularly Islamists in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, want to replace regimes that they consider anti-Islamic, with ones that will have more authentically Islamic governments.

Overall, the nature and impact of fundamentalist doctrines form part of a moral and social concern about the relationship between state and society. In some cases, the basic defensiveness of the religious fundamentalists comes from the belief that they are threatened by modernization and secularization and/or the arrival of hostile groups with different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds. Sometimes, in an effort to change the situation on the ground, this security develops into wider social and political with attacks on the established political and religious leadership for their weakness and inadequate response. In their quest for a response to current political issues religious fundamentalists turn to basic religious texts such as the Koran and the Bible in order to find the "opinion" of God on various social and political issues. Usually this is done through the use of selected paragraphs from the holy books that can later for the basis for the creation of reform programs.³¹

It is often said that the modern religious fundamentalism is rooted in the unfulfilled expectations of modernity, especially in the disappearance of moral values or the perception that the role of the family as a social institution has been devalued. For many religious fundamentalists, God is threatened with a loss of meaning, due to fast-moving global social changes. All over the world, especially since the end of World War II, the pace of socio-economic change has been so great as to gravely threatened traditional mores, beliefs and cultures and societies are under strong and unrelenting pressure to adapt to modernization. In a material world, the value of the individual is measured against secular standards of wealth and status. So it seems that religion is being ignored and devalued and even its existence threatened. Hence, many religious fundamentalists are hostile towards social, cultural and economic changes seeing them as a toxic cocktail that is responsible for religious, moral and social decay.³²

The general characteristics of the religious fundamentalists are as follows: They are afraid that their preferred religious way of life is under threat from unwelcomed secular influences and hostile groups. Their goal is to create a traditionally-oriented, less modernized society. As a result, many of them support campaigns to change laws, morals and social norms in ways that they believe to be in the interests of their particular religious groups. In some cases, the target of the change is the domestic and/or international political configuration. Many religious fundamentalists are willing to mount a range of political challenges to the ruling regime if they consider that its

³¹ See more in: Jeffrey Haynes, "Religious fundamentalism", in Jeffrey Haynes (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), London and New York, 2009, pp. 159-174.

³² Ibid.

policies on education, relationships between sexes, and employment lack the required degree of moral "purity" for a domain that they hold to be integral part of their vision of a proper religious society. They may also denounce those members of their own religious group that they think are not performing their religious obligation. Likewise they may confront rival or opposing religious groups that they consider to be infidels and a threat to their own religious group.

This is especially true for "Abraham" religions - Christianity, Islam and Judaism- which refer to the holy "book": Fundamentalists belonging to these religions take their defining dogmas from the holy books in which they are written. In other words, the sacred books are the basis of these three religions when they refer to the will of God. Sometimes Abraham fundamentalists manifest themselves as conservative (African Christian fundamentalists), sometimes as political reformers or even revolutionists (some Islamic groups) and sometimes as xenophobic, racist and reactionary (some Jewish fundamentalist groups).

In short, religious fundamentalism can be defined as a religious stance that requires strict adherence to religious beliefs. It often results in intolerance not just towards other religions and believers but also towards those followers of their own religion that do not adhere to these fundamental values. Hence, Protestant fundamentalists despise Protestants who fail to see the threat of Catholicism. Jewish fundamentalists attack Jews who are inclined to secularism. Finally Muslim fundamentalists believe they have a sacred duty to protect Islam from any form of cultural modernization. The political implications of such fundamentalist tendencies can sometimes result in terrorism, as it is the case with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Religion and Nation

Unlike in European countries, the role of religion in the United States is quite prominent. More than half of Americans say they regularly attend religious services, which is three to four times more than European norms. Even on the American currency, the dollar, the words "In God we trust" are written. The importance of religion in public life in the United States is partly explained by the fact that it is an element of the cultural heritage of the 17th and 18th-century settlers, many of whom were Anglo-Protestants. This is an important cultural factor that is present in the daily lives of Americans, and even in the formation of the American multi-ethnic yet civil nation.

Hence, no one can deny that religion is an important resource that can be used in the building of a nation. According to Mike Pierce, "it is not possible to build a complete and well-functioning society in which religion is completely absent."³³ There are two approaches to the utilization of religion in nation building, organic and voluntaristic.

When it comes to identity, religion sometimes bulks larger than ethnicity. Religion is one of the earliest and most general expressions of humanity that connects people. Hence, many politicians have used it in the creation of their nation-states. Religion has a special place in the organic

³³ Interview with Mike Pierce with the weekly Citizen, no. 29, 17 November 2012, p. 17 (*Граѓански*, бр. 29, 17 ноември, 2012, стр. 17).

approach to building a nation.

The problem occurs when there is more than one religion in the country: The political elite cannot use the religion of the majority community as a means of homogenizing the society, because it creates a feeling of inferiority among other religious communities. In such cases, the "ethics and morals" that are basic tenets of each religion need to be brought into play. However, sometimes, due to different interests, religions cannot act together to accomplish the goals of the national state. That's the cue for the secularists to make their entrance, "to limit them (the religious groups) in that impulsive rejection of each other". This is the essence of the voluntary approach in building the nation. As a positive example of how different religions can live together, Pierce cites the Ottoman and the Hapsburg Empires.³⁴

Religion and Politics in the Republic of Macedonia

Multi-religious societies are a defining feature of life in the Balkans.³⁵ In today's Republic of Macedonia, along with the ethnic Macedonians, who are predominantly Christians, there are ethnic Albanians, who are mostly Muslims.³⁶ During the Ottoman Empire, which was an Islamic theocracy the so-called "millet" system was established for non-Muslim communities. Muslims in the Ottoman Empire enjoyed certain advantages over non-Muslims. On the other hand, the "millet" system of faith-religious self-government gave a degree of autonomy to the Christian population, for whom religious affiliation had much greater importance than ethnicity. In other words, ethnic identity was closely tied to religious affiliation.

The end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth century saw the beginning of the process of forming autocephalous national churches, which marked the end of the ecumenical community of Balkan Orthodoxy. The newly established national churches had the task of assisting in building the nation and the state. On the one hand, these national churches were a promoter of the state, and on the other, they were a means of assimilating the enslaved peoples. The pop-

³⁴ Ibid, page. 17.

³⁵ H. Poulton and S. Taji-Farouki, (ed.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, Hurst, London, 1997.

³⁶ Albanians are divided into two major cultural groups, Ghegs and Tosca. Ghegs in the XIX century inhabited the higher areas of Kosovo, the western part of today's Republic of Macedonia and the northern Albania today. While Tosca were living in southern Albania, around Prespa Lake and in northwestern Greece, Ghegs tribes were organized, disobedient and rebellious. Unlike them Tosca, who lived in more urban environments were less inclined to war. During the Ottoman Empire, the majority of Ghegs have given up the Christian religion to become Sunni Muslims. The majority Tosca also converted to Islam while a fraction remained Christians - Catholic or Orthodox. But unlike their northern compatriots they belong to less traditional Bektashi sect. Overall, these cultural and dialect groups haven't had developed an Albanian national consciousness until the beginning of the XX century. Until then, Muslim Albanians considered themselves Turks, but also members of a particular clan who have a specific regional identity. On the other hand, for the Christian Albanians, religion and place of residence had a great role in their identification. Unlike Ghegs for Tosca tribal affiliation had much more meaning. See Duncan Perry, "Conflicting ambitions and shared destinies: Past, present and future of Albanians and Macedonians", in Victor Rudometof of Macedonian Question/Issue, Euro-Balkan Press, Skopje, 2003, p. 367th (Виктор Рудометоф, *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 367.)

ulation in Macedonia was the target of assimilation by the autocephalous churches of the new nation states (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia). Particularly fierce was the fight between the Greek Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate over the Christian population in Macedonia.³⁷ Wars in the Balkans and the division of Macedonia only complicated the process "because of the more acute awareness among some people that they were not Bulgarian, Greek or Serb, but Macedonian"³⁸.

Thus at the beginning of the XXth century, the primary role in the development of the Macedonian ethnic identity was played by church affiliation, while for the Albanians the Muslim religion, besides "language and culture"³⁹, had a decisive influence on the definition of their ethnic identity.⁴⁰ After the First World War, with the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, first called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in this country found themselves in an environment in which they had an inferior status. This was an additional incentive for both groups to work on their projects for ethnic homogenization.⁴¹ In this period the Macedonians and Albanians "coexisted peacefully", but rarely mixed with each other.⁴²

The Macedonian state has always been aware of the role played by religion in nation building, hence the requisite attention has been devoted to the issue right from the creation of the state up until today. Since the 1944 decisions of the Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) and the establishment of the modern Macedonian state, the state has maintained a wide-ranging interest in relations between itself and its religious communities. To this end, a number of regulatory acts were adopted. In all of these legal measures, the

³⁷ Анастасија Каракасиду, „Трансформирање на идентитетот, создавање на свеста: Принуда и хомогеност во Северозападна Грција“, во Виктор Рудометоф и др., *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан-Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 83.

³⁸ Лоринг М. Денфорт, „Црковниот национализам и македонското прашање во австралиската дијаспора“, во Виктор Рудометоф и др., *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан-Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 42.

³⁹ According to Duncan Perry, using the language and culture as links to create national awareness, Albanian leaders have succeeded in efforts to unite Gheg from Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania with their Northern brethren Toscs from southern Albania. See Duncan Perry, "Conflicting ambitions and shared destinies: Past, present and future of Albanians and Macedonians", in Victor Rudometof, *Macedonian Question/Issue*, Euro-Balkan Press, Skopje, 2003, p. 378. Данкан Пери, „Конфликтни амбиции и заеднички судбини: Минатото, сегашноста и иднината на Албанците и Македонците“, во Виктор Рудометоф, *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 378.

⁴⁰ Данкан Пери, „Конфликтни амбиции и заеднички судбини: Минатото, сегашноста и иднината на Албанците и Македонците“, во Виктор Рудометоф, *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 373.

⁴¹ Ibid. 380.

⁴² Although they had a common enemy, the two groups "never united forces." During the Second World War most of the ethnic Macedonians joined the Yugoslav Partisan movement which guaranteed it would recognize their distinct national identity. On the other hand, ethnic Albanians from the territory of Macedonia in great portion joined the "Bali Kombetar", an anti-communist movement, which fought to create a Greater Albania which will include Kosovo and Western Macedonia. The other part of the Albanians joined Albanian partisan movement. But relations between the Albanian and Yugoslav partisans were often strained so that mistrust and hostility between Macedonians and Albanians have grown. In the postwar period in the newly created Republic of Macedonia although religious tolerance has been practiced there has been one veiled hostility because of the conflicting goals of the groups, creating a Macedonian state and nation against the unification of Albanian territories into a single country.

emphasis is placed on freedom of conscience and religion as a private matter; separation of religious communities from the state and freedom in the exercise of religious activities and religious rituals; prohibition of abuse of religion for political purposes; equality of citizens in rights and obligations regardless of religious, racial and national origin etc.⁴³ All believers are guaranteed the right of free expression of religious feelings, but the use of religion for anti-state objectives is not permitted. In other words, the voluntary approach to building the nation allows religion as a significant social resource to contribute to the development of the nation, but prohibits any abuse of religion.

In the period of cohabitation in the Yugoslav federation, the political leadership of federal Macedonia supported the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC), as the largest religious community in the country, in its bid to win ecclesiastical independence from the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the secular leadership seeing this as a way to strengthen the independence of the Macedonian nation and its identity. These efforts culminated in the decision by the Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1967 to proclaim itself autocephalous. However, the move was not accepted by the Serbian Orthodox Church. The rationale for the SOC's opposition was that one country could not have two autocephalous Orthodox churches.⁴⁴ The status of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM) as a federal unit within the former Yugoslavia was an argument for SOC to oppose autocephaly for the Macedonian church. SOC treated SRM as "an administrative federal unit" hence it would only recognize the autonomous status of MOC. For this reason, the MOC was reproved for "attempting to destroy the brotherhood and unity" of the former state.⁴⁵ In other words, MOC was impairing the affirmation of the "Yugoslav political nation". However, according to Keith Brown, the Macedonian political elite, aware of the importance of the Church for the construction of the Macedonian ethno-nation,⁴⁶ "...orchestrated the creation of the autocephalous Macedonian Church and for the most part accepted the modernist vision of statehood".⁴⁷ This vision was generally supported by the Yugoslav federal authorities. On the other hand, in this period measures were taken in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia to abolish certain traditional Muslim customs⁴⁸, such as the wearing of the veil by women. These moves were aimed at "modernizing" the population,

⁴³ See the official website of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups: <http://www.kovz.gov.mk>

⁴⁴ At that time there was no Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

⁴⁵ Interview with protodeacon Slave P. Projkovski for the weekly Civic. (Civil, no. 27, November 3, 2012, p. 36), (*Граѓански*, бр. 27, 3 ноември, 2012, стр. 36)

⁴⁶ The issue of autonomy of MOC has not been resolved yet. From time to time among the Macedonian public there are allegations for a "union" to be a way of resolving the dispute with the SOC and the isolation which is imposed by other Orthodox churches. It is very sensitive and conditioned solution. First, because it is difficult to guess what will be the reaction of believers to this move of the church and second, this decision needs to be approved from the Vatican. Given the stronger position of the SOC regarding MOC not only in the Orthodoxy but in the entire Christian world then the answer could be perceived.

⁴⁷ Interview with Keith Brown with the weekly Citizen entitled "Clever Peter late for the start," Citizen, no. 26, 27.10.2012, p. 46th(„Итар Пејо задоцни на стартот“, *Граѓански*, бр. 26, 27.10.2012, стр. 46).

⁴⁸ Gyorgy Lederer, "Islam in East Europe", *Central Asian Survey* (2001), 20(1), 5-32, Downloaded By: [EBSCO Host EJS Content Distribution] At: 10:06 21 May 2008, pp. 17-19.

and reducing the influence of Islam, and they caused a revolt by ethnic Albanians against the Macedonian state.⁴⁹

"Church nationalism" in the Balkans, according to Loring M. Denfort is an attempt by "Balkan nation-states to use the Orthodox churches in order to incorporate in the nation people living outside the country's borders"⁵⁰. This applies especially to the ethnic Macedonians and the Macedonian state.⁵¹ The state on the one hand is trying to establish links between Macedonian ethnic identity and the Christian religion, while on the other hand it seeks to integrate into the Macedonian ethno-nation Macedonians living abroad. Consequently an attack on the religious identity of the Macedonian ethnic community is seen by many Macedonians as an attack on the nation.

With the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, the conditions were created for according complete freedom of action and equality to religious communities in the country.⁵² However, Article 19 of the 1991 Constitution, which distinguishes the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the other religious communities in the country, was a source of friction between Macedonians and Albanians in the first years of Macedonian independence. So, smaller religious communities and religious groups in the country wanted to limit the power and influence of the MOC stemming from the Constitution.⁵³

The framework agreement envisaged that in addition to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Constitution would include the Islamic Religious Community⁵⁴ on an equal basis. But after strong opposition from the MOC, which argued that it was still unrecognized by other Orthodox churches and would lose its primacy in the state, a compromise was reached: After the reference to the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the word "and" was inserted, followed by a list other churches or religious communities in the country: the Islamic Religious Community (IRC/IVZ), the Catholic

⁴⁹ Данкан Пери, „Конфликтни амбиции и заеднички судбини: Минатото, сегашноста и иднината на Албанците и Македонците“, во Виктор Рудометоф, *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 385.

⁵⁰ Лоринг М. Денфорт, „Црковниот национализам и македонското прашање во австралиската дијаспора“, во Виктор Рудометоф и др., *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан-Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 38.

⁵¹ With the establishment of an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church and the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, many immigrants from Macedonia to Australia who previously had Greek or Bulgarian national identity embraced the Macedonian ethnic identity. See: M. Loring Denfort "Ecclesiastical nationalism and the Macedonian issue in the Australian Diaspora", in Victor Rudometof etc., *Macedonian Question/Issue*, Euro-Balkan Press, Skopje, 2003, p. 68: Лоринг М. Денфорт, „Црковниот национализам и македонското прашање во австралиската дијаспора“, во Виктор Рудометоф и др., *Македонското прашање*, Евро-Балкан-Пресс, Скопје, 2003, стр. 68.

⁵² It should be noted that there was an unsuccessful attempt a cleric (the head of the Orthodox Church, at that time Bishop Mihail) to be elected the first President of the Republic Macedonia. This solution certainly would have had negative consequences for the secular state and inter-religious coexistence, as in R. Macedonia there are other religions besides Orthodox-Christian. Namely, in R. Macedonia despite Orthodox Christian (about 67% of the total population) there is a Muslim religion (30%) and Christian-Catholic etc. The majority of Macedonians are Orthodox Christians. The ethnic Albanian minority is predominantly Muslim-Sunni.

⁵³ Stojanovska, G. (2001). "Macedonia: Church rage Over Political Reforms". *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, BCR 292, 31 October 2001, <http://www.iwpr.net>, accessed on 5.11.2001.

⁵⁴ Characteristic of Islam as a religion "supranational inspiration and direction" which does not mean "the abolition of national differences."

Church (CC), the United Methodist Church (UMC), and the Jewish community (JC/EC).⁵⁵ All churches, religious communities and religious groups are separated from the state and are equal before the law. This clearly shows that the Republic of Macedonia has no state religion and as such it cannot act as the exclusive builder of the nation. This is essentially a voluntaristic approach to building the nation.

Under the constitution, the state is secular and religion is separated from it. This means that the state does not have the right to interfere in religious matters⁵⁶, nor should religious communities interfere in state affairs. But this strict division of labor is not realized in practice in any secular society. Consequently, politics and religious communities are linked in a complex web of relationships. According to Slavejko Sasajkovski, the political engagement of religious communities could be defined as "efforts to build status as an institution... which, rising above day-to-day political divisions, consistently and selflessly works to restore the lost unity of society and state...."⁵⁷. For that reason, he advocates the inclusion of the MOC in discussions "on topics related to national identity".⁵⁸ According to Sasajkovski, in the first years of independence, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the IRC essentially didn't have the status of "relevant social and political entity." But the ruling conservative political elite now gives greater space and support to the MOC in the everyday life of society. For its part, the IRC uses current conditions to become more visible and influential in daily political developments.

Relations between religious communities and the communities and the state are governed by the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the Law on State Administration and the Law on church, religious communities and religious groups. Today in the Republic of Macedonia there is a Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups whose mandate is to oversee the legal status of religious communities and religious groups and the relations between the state and religious communities and religious groups. Given the nature of multi-confessional nature of Macedonian society an Inter-Religious Council (IRC) has been established,⁵⁹ its activities aimed at fostering cooperation among the religious communities.

Given that Macedonian society is a multi-religious one, with five of the numerous religions accorded constitutional status, we cannot talk about the exclusive role that religion might have played in the creation of contemporary Macedonian nation. The largest religious groups in the country are Orthodox Christianity (to which most ethnic Macedonians belong) and Islam (which is followed by most Albanians). Although historically these two largest religious groups have suc-

⁵⁵ In R. Macedonia 15 churches, 7 religious communities and 8 religious groups have been registered.

⁵⁶ In this paper under the term religious community we mean institutional form of organization of religious life.

⁵⁷ Slavejko Sasajkovski, „Ревитализација на верските заедници како политички субјекти“, во Панде Лазаревски и др., *Аспекти на националната безбедност на Република Македонија*, ИСППИ, Скопје, 2001, стр. 429.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, page. 436.

⁵⁹ This body was established by the five religious communities which are mentioned in the Constitution (MOC, IRC, CC, EMC and JC). Representatives in this body are appointed by the religious communities themselves. Management body is rotating with a period of one year.

cessfully co-existed, still, due to the experiences they underwent in the former Yugoslavia, we can say that there is a danger of their confrontation.⁶⁰

So far, that danger is minimal; moreover there exists an element that bridges the ethno-religious divide: Albanians who are Christians, and Macedonians who are Muslims. These small religious groups can be a connecting element between the two religions. In addition, religious communities can be a cohesive factor in ethno-political life, when it is divided by the ideological platforms of the political parties; thus religion can play a part in strengthening the ethnic identity of the communities in the state. Therefore, there needs to be a combination of organic and voluntary discourse in the use of religion as a social resource in building the modern Macedonian nation.

Conclusion

The process of building the contemporary Macedonian nation should continue to occur within the existing cultural matrix, which in itself articulates the values of two civilizations - Muslim and Orthodox. Religious groups, in essence, are calling for peace, tolerance and respect for the "other", which can contribute to building a multicultural society. On the other hand, disrespect and manipulation of religious particularity can adversely affect the building of the sense of a single nation. In a society such as Macedonia's, inter-religious cooperation is very important. Only this concept carries any promise for the future of the contemporary Macedonian nation.

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⁶⁰ The population in Macedonia, regardless of their religious affiliation, co-existed for centuries, and religion, that until the emergence of ethnic nationalism had cultural dimension now received and ethnic dimension.

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