

# Bosnian Multiconfessionalism as a Foundation for Intercultural Dialogue

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## Abstract

Muslim communities in the Balkans where the practice of Islam had been developed in the European context, can be used as an exemplification of the bridge between the Islamic East and the Christian West. Although for over 400 years Bosnia was under the Ottoman rule, Muslims became one of the many first Yugoslav, and then Bosnian communities, contributing to the dynamic, yet moderate area of ontological and axiological negotiations within the cultural borderland, sharing the living space with members of the Orthodox church, Catholics, a small Jewish community, and even Protestants. The history of the Muslim-Christian contacts in Bosnia involves both the examples of collisions, as well as encounters, initiated both by Christians, and by Muslims. This article analyzes the religious diversity (multiconfessionalism) in the historical and contemporary cultural and social context of Bosnia-Herzegovina, revealing its specificity, dynamics and (often unsuccessful) attempts to conceptualize it from the perspective of the Eurocentric discourse. The aim is not only to portray this religiously diverse makeup, but also to emphasize its potential for establishing ground for intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** multiconfessionalism, Bosnian Islam, Christian faith in Bosnia-Herzegovina, inter-religious dialogue, Bosnia- Herzegovina, multiculturalism

## Introduction

Bosnia-Herzegovina as the federal state established on the legal validity of the Dayton Accord, in its current shape and political structure is divided into two autonomous administrative units (entities), i.e. the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Serbian Republic, with small autonomous region of the Brčko District. Conforming to the adopted constitution dated December 1, 1995, and following the stipulations of

peace accord signed in Paris on December 14 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina proportionally encompasses Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 51% of the area, and Serbian Republic in 49%. According to the BiH State Statistic Agency within the current total population of the estimated 3.9 million, Boshniaks (Bosnian Muslims) constitute 45 percent, Serb Orthodox Christians 36 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 1 percent, and other groups, including Jews<sup>1</sup>, 3 percent. In terms of the legal procedures, the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entity Constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the Republika Srpska all provide for freedom of religion. The legally binding documents also embrace the Law on Religious Freedom that guarantees comprehensive rights to religious communities. On the other hand, as it can be read from the report by the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor dated October 26, 2009 “local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalism through public statements, whereas religious symbols were often misused for political purposes”. Interestingly, the report does not point to some statistically significant inter-religious tensions within the communities, but rather stresses the ideologization of confession by some of the radical politicians and religious leaders in the region. Thus, such statistics do not reflect the social and cultural specificity of this state, divided into entities according to the ethnic and national patterns.

Although the repercussions of the 1992-1995 war in the Balkans (and Bosnia-Herzegovina specifically) “segregated” the Bosnian population into separate ethno-religious areas, when examining the dynamic consolidation of the cultural and social influences in this part of the Balkans, a certain “borderland” area is discernible, that can serve as a counterpoint to such “dry data”, which imply rather simplified, homogenous image.

The mountainous geography of Bosnia, located in the basins of the rivers Sava and Drina, along with Herzegovina distinguished in the 15th century with the capital city in Mostar, contributed to their specific, centuries-old isolation from the outside world. This geographic location became the arena of the clash between the Orthodox Church and the Catholicism, “resulting in the unstable religious identification prior to the Ottoman conquest” (Wróbel, 1997, pp. 84-85). As a result, in the face of the Islamic expansion in the first half of the 15th century, the conversion provided a path to the

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<sup>1</sup> As concluded by the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor “The Jewish community, with approximately 1,000 members, maintains a historic and respected place in society by virtue of centuries of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities”.

social promotion and to become a part of the Muslim *millet*s (ibidem). On the other hand, *millet* for Bosnian Christians (despite the latter being referred to as ‘infidels’), were grudgingly recognized for their monotheism, thus, as such they were not subject to persecution (Wynne, 2011, p. 13). Each religious community – administratively referred to as *millet* – “was placed under the supervision of its own leaders, who acted as agents for the Ottoman, imperial government in collecting taxes and maintaining order amongst their people” (Singleton, 1989, p. 37)<sup>1</sup>. This contributed to Bosnian religious exceptionalism, which “distinguished it from its contemporaries within the medieval world” (Wynne, 2001, p.3). as “at a time when religious heterodoxy was being crushed elsewhere in Europe, Bosnia opened its doors to heretics, serving as a sanctuary within a wider Christendom loathe to permit deviant theology to take root”( Wynne, 2001, p.3-4).

The uniqueness of the religious diversity in Bosnia-Herzegovina stems from the four centuries-long Turkish supremacy which resulted not only in the islamization of the substantial part of the population, but (paradoxically) contributed to the settlement of the Sephardic Jews, whose culture (next to Islam, the Orthodox faith and Catholicism) was to constitute the fourth pillar of the Bosnian religious legacy from then on. Interestingly, the flourishing multiconfessionalism was essentially related to the Bosnian peasantry that “viewed religion as a practical matter, focusing on worldly welfare, and it was not uncommon to switch from one faith to another with each change of ruling power” (Fine, 1996, p. 3). Moreover, the adherents of each particular faith lived “in accord with one another (...) there was no wholesale slaughter, no mass expulsion or one group or another”( Fine, 1996, p. 3). Concurrently, as the Catholic Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina drifted from the orbit of Rome, “it entered into a state of schism, metamorphosing into an independent order known as the Bosnian Church” (Wynne, 2011, p. 7).

The above highlights of the historical background of Bosnian multiconfessionalism signal how dynamic, heterogeneous and diverse were the confessional as well as political factors contributing to such a pluralistic cultural landscape. Having that in mind, and making a big timeline “shortcut”, one may wonder what happened in the course of the history that when in 1984 Sarajevo hosted the winter Olympics Games the European press attached much of attention to the harmonious co-existence of various religious groups within the multicultural society of the Yugoslavian Bosnia-Herzegovina, whereas only eight years later “Sarajevo and Bosnia became an arena of

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<sup>1</sup> In consequence, the millet system helped to preserve the Christian churches and monasteries in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

the war of everyone with everyone” (Hryniewicz, 2011, p. 18). Such stand contributed to the myth that has sunk into the mass imagination concerning the alleged “eternal hate” amongst the Balkan nations. Yet, a deeper insight into this matter proves that religion was rather instrumentally used as a part of nationalistic mobilization, serving the purpose of ethno-national differentiation. Consequently, the religious symbols were renewed and “traditionalized” in order to be utilized in military operations (Velikonja, 2003, pp. 25-40), what proves the thesis that religion can function as a mechanism sacralizing the conflict, yet it does not necessarily imply the “inherent” conflict-generating nature within a multiconfessional society.

During the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, religion was significantly politicized and ethnicized, aiming at national homogenization. In total, the conflict claimed 278 thousand persons, whereas in consequence of the military (and even more often paramilitary) displacing or fierce fights taking place, 58.2% of inhabitants of the country were forced to leave their homes (Wojciechowski, 2003, p. 336). Nonetheless, although strongly politicized and ethnicized, some scholars do not consider this war as a religious conflict (Cf.: Sokolović, 2005, pp. 115-130, Abazović, 2015, p. 1). Some arguments supporting this stance point to the fact that within all three involved parties, the ideological communists constituted considerable percentage (Sokolovic, 2005, p. 121). Yet, this unfortunately didn't prevent them from succumbing to the ethno-nationalist propaganda, so that Bosnia-Herzegovina became torn by base nationalism and political opportunism. Notwithstanding, one should not forget that the generation involved in fights included those from the so-called “inter-ethnic marriages/mixed marriages”, i.e. one of the parents was a Catholic, whereas the other Muslim, or both were Christians, but one of Eastern Orthodox rite, and the second following the Roman-Catholic doctrine. Therefore, it was difficult to explicitly determine the religious provenance of persons from such religiously heterogeneous socialization circles. Such diverse religious composition of the family socialization was also reflected in the ambiguity of expression of the religious identity, that in such view could not become a key issue of the initiated conflict. Other argument speaking for such optics concerns the claims laid by the involved parties to territorial (and political) aspects rather than appealing (be it only indirect and instrumental) to the rhetoric of the holy war or the need of converting “the heretics” (Abazović, 2015).

Taking into consideration the above, the objective of the article is to provide a theoretical characteristics of the unique religiously diverse landscape of the historical and contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina, revealing how, in spite of the political demagoguery in the region, followed by Europe-centric and Western-centric

interpretations of the religious Bosnian discourse, this area provides an unparalleled example of multiconfessionalism. Undoubtedly, the post-socialist reality and the crisis of identity followed by the return of nationalism and confessionalism could question such stance, yet in such view it is worth pondering over the issue, as raised by the professor of sociology of religion, Ivan Cvitković who asked “...did the war destroy the myth of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multicultural and multiethnic community whose population was characterized by spirituality, nobility, respect, understanding, and coexistence?” (Cvitković, 2001, p. 38). Answering this question requires to take a deeper insight into the history of Bosnian multiconfessionalism, the methodological paradigms utilized to research this issue, and the practice of everyday life in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina that could facilitate (or quite the opposite – disable) the intercultural dialogue.

### **Bosnian multiconfessionalism: now and then**

In ancient times the area of Bosnia was inhabited by Illyrian, Thracian and Celt tribes, yet in the half of the 1st century AD, when Illyria was conquered by the Roman Empire, it became a part of the Roman province, subsequently settled in the 7th century by Slavs. In the 10th century Bosnia became a self-reliant political unit, ruled individually through own *Bans*. One century later it temporarily became a subject to the influence of the Byzantine Empire, then Kingdom of Serbia, and from the 12th century Hungary. The latter, under the pretext of fighting with the Bosnian Church considered by the Vatican as heresy, imposed their control upon Bosnia. At the end of the 14th century (during the rule of Stefan Tvrtko) Bosnia temporarily regained the independence. Nonetheless, Tvrtko’s successors again became the vassals of Hungary, whereas Bosnia broke down into small feudal duchies. It was the time of coming into existence its south-west part. Takeover of power by Ban Kulin (1180 to 1204) marked a turning point for the process of facilitating multiconfessionalism, since it was when Kulin introduced to Bosnia-Herzegovina the Manichaean *bogomils*, whose presence in the cultural and religious sense provided a new self-identity framework for the Bosnian community (Meier, 2005, p. 194). This orientated Bosnians towards the processes of constructing own theological interpretative practices, resulting in the formation of the Bosnian Church (*crkva bosanska*) (Cirković, 1992, pp. 120-158). The latter was a movement of rather vague provenance, often referred to as having links to the Bulgarian *Bogomils* organization initiated in the 10th century, which appealed to Manichaean, dualistic theology propagating the equality of the devilish and divine power (Malcolm, 1994, p. 23). *Bogomils* became a part of the activities within the Bosnian Church, both recognised by the Pope as schismatic, thus delivering a crucial

argument to the Catholic Hungarians for undertaking armed struggle with the heretical Bosnia<sup>1</sup>. This “Balkan-Slavic Protestantism” had its deep social and ethical roots, and played crucial role in shaping the Bosnian diverse religious landscape.

After the conquest of Ottoman Turks in the years 1463-1878 Bosnia was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, and then Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which officially annexed this land in 1908. The new Ottoman state was theocratic, subject to the Islamic legislation, i.e. *szari'a*, what had a great impact on the policies pursued in the conquered territories, as “infidel Christians (referred to as *raja*) were outlawed, could not carry the weapon, ride a good horse, build new Orthodox churches and distinguished houses” (Fine, 2007, pp. 147-148). Nonetheless, *szari'a* policy at that time concurrently ordered to respect and “treat the infidel population kindly” (ibidem). Interestingly, “in the eyes of the conquerors imposing Islam by force was not the basic aim of the war [...] the conquered peoples were encouraged to convert to Islam in different ways, for instance through low taxes, yet no one had been forced to do so” (Lewis, 1995, p. 27), and although Muslims didn't require from the conquered population to convert, “they assumed that their subjects would make it at some time in the future [...]” (Armour, 2004, p. 63). The universal principle of good neighbourhood relations (*komşuluk*) was in force (Serdarević & Omanić, 2000, pp. 189-192). On the other hand, the *millet* policy, i.e. establishing districts inhabited by non-Muslim religious communities living in the Ottoman Empire, marked the beginning of junction borderlands (cultural meeting points) within which contacts between representatives of different religious groups was facilitated and launched.

Taking the above into consideration, it shall be acknowledged that followers of Islam rose from ethnically uniform, yet religiously heterogeneous group of the adherents of the Bogomil Church, Catholic and Orthodox faith, generating in the course of time a specific mentality and cultural identity. It might be due to the fact that religion often served as a community, or even ethnic identifier, hence some patterns of religious practice had been exercised solely within the framework of significant rites of passages such as birth, marriage, and death. Thus and so, given confessionalism Bosnia-Herzegovina emerged as a certain kind of transitional zone between the Balkans and the Mediterranean, making at this northern frontiers the transitional area to Catholic world of the mainland Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> It stemmed from the fact that this church belonged neither to the Latin, nor the Eastern Orthodox church, yet it performed in Bosnia the role of the “official” church, whereas its representatives and clergymen (so-called *djedovi*) financially benefited from *Bans* (landed grants).

Given the limited format of this paper, further analysis of the historical dynamics of shaping Bosnian multiconfessionalism shall concern solely the post-World War II period. The events which took place in the meantime were of great historical importance, however for the subject matter of the religious diversity, they are secondary.

Establishing of the Bosnian statehood was crowned by the recognition of the first National Constitution of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, dated 31 December 1946. As a result, constitutional frames enabled political, cultural, and social-economic development. Pursuant to the principles of the division between the state and the church, in first years after the war, a freedom of conscience and faith, propagated by The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Constitution and constitutions of the each of national republics, were sanctioned. According to the first census in Yugoslavia after the war, Bosnians could nationally “define” themselves based on own decision as belonging to other nation (Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins), or remain “unspecified”. The census of 1953 introduced a new category of “Yugoslav-unspecified” for all those “nationally unspecified”, a notion predominantly concerning 998 697 of Bosnian Muslims. For statistical purposes, in 1961 the government introduced the notion of “Muslim in the ethnic meaning”, which at that time embraced 972 960 people (in 842 248 Bosnia specifically). At the same time, in 1961, 265 731 of Bosnian Muslims declared themselves as “Yugoslavian - ethnically unspecified” (Imamović, 2007 p. 563). The above data display a certain flexibility of Bosnians in the approach towards ethnonyms, and the entailed semantics. Approach of the people of the Yugoslavian Bosnia can be therefore, in general, referred to as modernist, not to say secular (this of course changed prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia when religion became a tool of social division, national radicalization and ethnocentrism).<sup>1</sup> This, in turn, favoured the existence of religious borderland in the dynamic and full of tensions, yet not confrontational discourse, until the ethno-nationalistic propaganda took its toll.

In the eve of the civil war that began in 1991, Bosnia-Herzegovina was inhabited by 4.5 million of the extremely diversified ethnic, national and religious communities. Based on religious classification, the population in 1991 was distributed as follows: Islamic: 42,76 percent, Orthodox: 29,39, Roman-Catholic: 13,56, Catholic: 3,31, Serbian: 0,69, Greek-Catholic: 0,0717, Croatian: 0,0668, Protestant: 0,0416, Islamic-Catholic: 0,0118, Members of Pro-Oriental cults: 0,0098, Jewish: 0,0052, Old-Catholic:

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<sup>1</sup> It must be also acknowledged that the comparatively tolerant theological landscape has been already disturbed by intercommunal troubles, which emerged already during the nineteenth century.

0,0028, Bosnian Roman-Catholic: 0,0024, etc. (Abazović, 2015, p.3). Perhaps owing it to the growing prosperity within the free market economy, the idea of the multinational state was reflected in the high percentage of the “mixed” marriages, which scale in the 1945-1990 years reached 47% or in the fact, that in 1980s every fifth Bosnian child came from such a relationship (Janjić & Shoup, 1992, pp. 32-33). Significant secularization of the social life in line with the Yugoslavian socialist slogan of *bratstvo & jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity) contributed to the harmoniously proceeding intercultural dialogue within Yugoslavian nationalities, whereas the Orthodox churches, mosques and Catholic temples were neither frequently, nor crowdedly visited<sup>1</sup>.

It is also worthwhile to bear in mind that prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia and certain economic and political processes proceeding this, Bosnian Muslims were one of the most secularized Muslim societies in the world, although some substantial group of clergy and the intellectual elite vividly stressed their religious provenance and alliances in Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Yet, strikingly, at the end of the 1980s 61% of young Muslims declared never having been to the mosque (Bougarel, 2001, p. 83). On top of that, Bosnian Islam was specific of its *sufi tarikat*, i.e. syncretic “folk” form, stemming from the centuries-old co-existence of Muslim Bosnians with the Christian adherents. Moreover, “the brotherhoods [...] within the centuries-old presence in multi-ethnic Balkan, lost [...] a lot of its former oriental-Turkish character. Albeit, the permanent features prevailed within the tradition of the Balkan mentality and spirit” (Hauziński, 2009, p. 25). Such tradition joints the elements of the Christian and Muslim culture, creating a specific content-related and cultural borderland stemming from the Greek-Byzantine (Orthodox), West-European (Catholic) and Ottoman (Islamic) provenance.

Therefore, Bosnia-Herzegovina as a multicultural republic, and a sovereign state from March 1992, functioned in specific “melting pot” of faith, forming its cultural, as well as religious, borderland. Such model was feasible due to the fact that religious identification never constituted a crucially determining factor in conceptualization of the cultural identity. This, however, does not prevent from the common process when religion is used as the most favourable tool of ethnic and nationalistic manipulation (Rekšć, 2009, p. 157), and Bosnia-Herzegovina is not an exception here. On the other hand, one should not also forget that, “in its political history [...] Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced periods which, from a present-day point of view, define it as the

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<sup>1</sup> There was a humorous cliché that the former Yugoslavian Bosnia-Herzegovina was inhabited by Boshniaks who didn't go to Mosques, Bosnian Serbs who didn't go to Orthodox churches, and Bosnian Croats who didn't visit Catholic temples.



substantial participant of certain integration schemes occurring within Central Europe” (Stankowicz, 2004, p. 72). Interestingly, such integrative projects took place at time when Europe was facing frequent tensions and divisions, whereas Bosnians tried to establish a joint paradigm in the complicated political mosaic, affecting the cultural shape of the reality of its participants. And although an administrative division separating the ethnic groups does not facilitate it, mentality of the contemporary residents of Bosnia-Herzegovina seems to reach beyond this strict, stiff political borders. It occurs that despite weak administrative and judicial system, and despite the fact majority of Serb Orthodox adherents live in the Republika Srpska whereas the majority of Muslims and Catholic’s in the Muslim-Croat Federation, the diverse religious make-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina is an inherent part of their collective memory, and forms an integral part of their cultural identities. To provide an example, Ministry of Education in Republika Serpska introduced to public school teaching curriculum courses such as Culture of Religions, in order to advance the understanding of the moral values based on civic attitudes, society–community engagement, and tolerance. Moreover, the leaders of the four traditional religious communities participate in the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continues to operate despite occasional disagreement in funding constraints.

### **Bosnian multiconfessionalism and the Europe-centric paradigms**

During the war in Bosnia (1992-1995) a theory by Samuel Huntington concerning the clash of civilizations gained its momentum, forecasting that the 21st century would be an era of clashes between civilizations built on separate religious systems (Huntington, 1997). Admittedly in the course of the war each party instrumentally used the religious discourse, yet the U.S. involvement on the Muslim side, followed by the Western support for the Bosnians cause, prove that the Bosnian war cannot be recognized as a conflict of classical, Huntington’s clash of civilizations, and it should be rather considered as a symbol of xenophobic aggression against the idea of multiculturalism.

In the context of the Islamic discourse undertaken within the scholarly world of western Europe and the USA, Edward Said pointed to the practice of western intellectuals in combining the image of the Balkans with orientalism, posing a rhetorical question whether it is possible “to divide the mankind – as in fact it is divided – into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and to survive, in the humanistic meaning, consequences of such a division?” (Said, 2005, p. 85). By implying such stance, Said reveals the ontology of divisions, difference and the otherness. Epistemological incomprehension of the specificity of Orient, or the

Balkans, entailing the issue of Bosnian Islam, is depicted within the Said's concept of self-essentialisation of the West: "[...] residents of the West define [...] Orient in categories of the West, but also the Others describe themselves in categories of the West, the same as everyone determines the West in categories of the Other (...) of course the way, in which I depicted it, puts the West in the privileged position, as the standard according to which all Others are defined, what is equivalent to a both historical-political and economic majority of the West" (Said, p. 207). What's more, given the discourse of the approach of the Balkans to the alleged West and the discourse concerning the Orient, a specific parallel relation takes place, empowering the tendency of treating the Balkans as the structural form of the orientalism, thus Balkanism and the orientalism become variants of the same kind" (Bakić-Hayden, 1995, pp. 917-931).

Maria Todorova aptly notices that "while seeking the roots of the Western thought leads us in general to Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and the Hebrew Bible, the social and political organisms which developed these traditions, had been skilfully sent to the other, third world. This part of Europe, which as the first one bore this name<sup>1</sup>, became deprived of it, and received, at best, in the purely geographical context, the south-east attribute, whereas in almost all remaining areas it was linked to the *Schimpfwort* discourses of the "Balkan", lacking the attribute of the "European" (Todorova, 2008, p. 341). It is therefore distinct, that that image of the Balkans (and of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its religious diversity) as the form of the self-determination of residents in this area, does not correspond with its perception through the lenses of the Western world. Thus, it is worthy to pose the question whether the previously recalled conjecture concerning the alleged "eternal hatred of Balkan nations" is a legacy of the Balkan self-reflection, or - perhaps - constitutes an independent product of the Western thought, making this area subject to "orientalization" in accordance with the Said's discourse. Such stance evidently portrays the divergence between the actual cultural potential of the Bosnian multiconfessionalism, and the European discourse on multiculturalism, the latter clearly marginalizing the Balkans and stigmatizing this area. As a result, it reflects a certain "epistemological trouble" with the Balkans and the specific complex of the Old Continent. The already quoted Todorova, a Bulgarian historian lecturing on the contemporary history of the Balkans at University of Illinois, gives a harsh judgement concerning the demonization of the Balkans by the "civilised world", as repercussions of such approach entail the feeling of cultural inferiority of the Balkans. She also pays attention to the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Greeks made reference to the Balkan land on the other side of islands as 'Europe'.

stereotypes on the Balkans are not “produced” by the residents of the Balkans themselves (Todorova, 2008).

In the light of the above, the Bosnian multiconfessionalism seems to breach that orientation axis stipulated within the notion of the European culture differentiating *West versus East*. It is worthwhile to see how this dynamic, authentic and full of tensions borderland corresponds with the dichotomous Huntington’s notions of “the Davos man versus homo balcanicus”, where the Davos man embodies the rational, technocratic approach to problem solving, stressing the significance of individual leaders minimizing the emotional effect of the nationalism and historical experience, whereas “homo balcanicus” is a “child of the romantics”, for whom acquiring mass and nations is of greatest importance (Bardos, 2003, pp. 128-133).

When analysing Bosnian multiconfessionalism it is therefore worthwhile to apply a certain level of methodological prudence, remembering that the research projects on the Middle East or Islam are often involved in the so-called “Eurocentric”, “ethnocentric” or “oriental” discourses. Such approach allows to, for instance, put emphasis on the fact that “military conflicts between the adherents of Christianity and Islam, lasting for the first centuries of the existence of the latter, after taking a deeper insight in terms of its cause and course often lose their definitely religious character, assigned to them uncritically” (Nalborczyk & Grodź, 2003, p. 148). Quazi-historical stereotypes of the supposed eternal Balkan hate between religions and nations “live” according to their own narratives, while “cultures of each of nations (i.e. Bosnian Muslim, Croats and Serbs) have been subject to the permeation along with their characteristic features upon confrontations, contacts and interactions, at times changing its position towards the Other, yet never at cost of annihilating one of them” (Miočinović, pt. 53). Thus, the religious diversity of Bosnia-Herzegovina can provide a point of reference not only within historical and intercultural analyses, but for the real-life agenda of intercultural and educational nature.

## **Conclusions**

Bosnian religious diversity comprises Catholic-Croatian, Orthodox-Serbian and Islamic culture, which “through the similar language and mentality creates ethnic, cultural, confessional and civilizational area” (Lovrenović, 1989, p. 9). And although religion is becoming an aspect of public practices, whereas “its rituals succumb to politicization, its institutions become pillars of the power and hub of intolerance, as it is the most straightforward, primitive and most evident way of codifying distinctive features for an given ethnic group” (Miočinović, p. 53), the Bosnian religious diversity seem to exist against political demagoguery. Such diversity is feasible due to number

of historical and social conditions that favour the existence (even mentally) of this symbolic borderland, including linguistic, cultural-historical, regional elements, followed by some geographical and political factors (Imamović, 2010, p. 40). Notwithstanding, given the words of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian writer Ivan Lovrenović, shall such religious diversity flourish and “become a wealth and cease to function as a curse” (Lovrenović, 2000, p. 119) Bosnia-Herzegovina needs a society driven by spiritual and individual dimension of the religious identity, not its ethnic nor national collective identity (Ibidem). Such stance is also reflected in the Abdulah Šarčević’s argumentation, highlighting the possibility of epistemological agreement between the adherents of Islam, Christianity and Judaism stemming from the shared history, acquaintance of the variety of local traditions, as well as the joint Balkan daily culture (Šarčević, 2000, pp. 224-254). Such essential points of reference can empower the creation of the biographies and the everyday life narration based on cooperation, openness, empathy, or gestures of the friendship and kindnesses. Bosnia-Herzegovina could provide a unique model of an informal cross-cultural education, functioning despite the political visions of the balkanization, nationalist antagonisms and the trauma of the conflict that have been all a part of the existence and experiences of few generations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Bosnian multiconfessionalism is a result of the centuries-old permeation of the influences of folk traditions, cultural patterns, and political aspiration of the dominance. Indeed, as Magdalena Reksć highlights, Bosnia-Herzegovina was “a kind of a kaleidoscope framing within a mosaic of ethnic groups” (Reksć, 2009, p. 162), however all at the same time the Bosnian example proves “[...] how easily the peaceful existence can transform into bloody fights; it is therefore worthwhile to ask a question what steps one should take in order to prevent the potential causes of conflicts” (Reksć, 2009, p. 172). Taking such issue into account all initiatives which objective is to “get the individual beyond the isolated limits of ethnic community” (Flowers, 2007, p. 42) is of paramount importance, as it orientates toward joint, common goals, needs and hierarchy of values negotiated between the participants of such inter-religious reality on a daily basis. Such social and educational agendas relay on dialogue as the driving force for the interactions which, as stressed by the Pope John Paul II, “is born out of the everyday experiencing and co-existing one next to another, within the same community and culture” (John Paul II, Eugeniusz Sakowicz, 2001, p.73). Consequently, dialogue as a tool and key mechanism of intercultural potential “allows to notice that the diversity is a capital, and motivates others towards mutual approval, leading to the authentic cooperation, in accordance with the primal call of the entire human family to unity” (Ibidem, p. 68).

Therefore, contrary to the pessimistic political forecasts, it is of greatest importance to support and preserve the wealth of such religious diversity, which in Bosnia-Herzegovina is constituted by:

- shared spiritual matrix<sup>1</sup>;
- Islamic and European set of the core values that do not exclude each other entirely (it is possible to be a Muslim and a European<sup>2</sup>);
- developing of the idea of tolerance understood as openness towards the Other through systematic interactions with the Other on the basis of the organization of social life in contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina;
- cross-cultural communication lacking barriers embodied by the influences of Eurocentrism;
- openness, sociability, cordiality, confidence, helpfulness, cognitive curiosity, and emotional closeness revealed in the course of intercultural communication (Cf. Pilarska, 2014);
- doctrinal similarities (monotheistic religions entailing similar set of the core values)<sup>3</sup>.

Since pluralism (also religious one) inevitability involves conflict (Kekes, 1996, p. 30), intercultural efforts for the dialogue are particularly important for the cultural life, as they provide with new opportunities, and incentives for the mutual recognition and cultural inspirations (Kekes, 1996, p. 30). Some of the positive highlights to the Bosnian multiconfessionalism entail the Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina established in 1997, actively participated by the leading professors of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo (promoting moderate religious discourse), and *reisu-l-ulema* of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Husein ef. Kavazović, sworn in the 15 November 2012. Establishing the council in June 1997, representatives of the clergymen of Islam, Orthodox Church, Catholicism and the Judaism signed the Declaration of Moral Common Values, committing themselves to the cooperation in favour of the peaceful education. Thus, Bosnian religious diverse borderland forms an axiological context, in which educational, intercultural values can be exercised. Above all, it shall be remembered that Bosnia-Hezegovina was and still can be “ a land of unique religious pluralism – certainly not idyllic, as unquestionably resentments did exist, and did

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<sup>1</sup> As Abazović implies, the “pseudo-religious identification can result in social situations in which religion is merely a referent for group identity” (Abazović, 2015, p. 4).

<sup>2</sup> The Balkan civilization enabled development of thee key system processes, i.e. feudalization, Christianization and ethnic consolidation, hence the Balkan civilization circle is compatible with the Western system of values, providing a ground for the social and cultural dialogue of the Balkan peoples.

<sup>3</sup> Out of the five pillars of Islam, i.e. main points of reference for the faith and religious practices of Muslims, three elements are shared by the Christian doctrine as well, i.e. prayer, fasting and alms. Cf. Armour, 2004.

erupt from time to time – but one that was remarkably stable, nonetheless, prior to the advent of nationalism during the nineteenth century” (Wynne, 2011, p. 1).

Making reference to the question posed by Cvitković, i.e. whether the war destroyed the myth of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multicultural and multi-ethnic community whose population was characterized by spirituality, nobility, respect, understanding, and coexistence, it can be concluded that a multi-ethnic society is an on-going, dynamic concept that is shaped not by the imaginary myths or historical concepts, but by everyday life experiences. The more the latter are of dialogic and cross-cultural nature, the bigger the chances for preserving this unique multiconfessional makeup of the contemporary Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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