POLITICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE RECEPTION OF ISLAM IN CONTEMPORARY EASTERN EUROPE:

THRESHOLD PROBLEMS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE BALKAN CONTEXT

An NCEEER Working Paper by

Patrick Hyder Patterson
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Principal Investigator: Patrick Hyder Patterson

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Executive Summary

This paper reports findings in connection with my ongoing research project investigating the treatment of Islam in the period since 1945 in the rhetoric and action of East European advocates of political Christianity (i.e., clergy, lay leaders, and members of explicitly Christian political movements). In particular, the project seeks to assess how Christian political activists, cultural commentators, and opinion leaders have judged Islam as a religious and political system, with special emphasis on the religion's asserted compatibility or incompatibility with European values, culture, and legal norms. First I briefly describe the aims of the project and its connections to the East European polities under consideration (Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina), moving on to discuss a number of the interpretative issues that have arisen in connection with the problem of determining whether the programmatic orientation of a given political party is, in fact, rooted in Christian values. Finally, the paper offers an overview of the broader general context of contemporary Serbian-language political discourse on Islam and explores how that context aligns with the emerging picture, developed through my research, of the views on Islam that have been expressed by Serb advocates of political Christianity.
Introduction

This Working Paper reports on a number of key findings and critical questions that have emerged from my field research and ongoing analysis in connection with my recent grant from the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. The research has been undertaken as part of a comparative book project that will explore new dimensions of Eastern Europe's increasingly problematic engagement with Islam in the aftermath of 1989, the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, and the events of September 11, 2001. My study focuses on the ways in which members of one critical sociocultural group—those who ground their politics in specifically Christian commitments—have welcomed or rejected the rising influence of Islam in Europe, and how these actors (referred to here in shorthand form as "political Christians") have at times in this process drawn on and mobilized for political purposes a potent collection of centuries-old images, fears, stereotypes, remembrances, and history-laden received traditions concerning Muslims and their religion.¹

At the outset of my research, I targeted four key polities selected for the intensity, variety, and importance of their new (and old) encounters with Islam: Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia. Three of these are EU members, although it bears noting that Croatia joined only in July 2013. One, Serbia, aspires to EU membership, though that path has been a bumpy one in terms of both domestic and international politics. The three states that are already EU members meet the new presence of Islam with domestic Catholic majorities of varying sizes, while Serbia brings a deep and dominant Orthodox culture to the relationship. As the investigation developed, I found it necessary to add a consideration of pre- and post-Yugoslav Bosnia to the investigation, ¹

¹ I wish to thank Joel Palhegyi, Josef Djordjevski, and Scott Kaufman for the valuable research assistance they have provided in connection with this project and the findings reported here. Except as otherwise noted, all translations from foreign languages are my own.
recognizing that the Serb and Croat political Christian traditions of Bosnia-Herzegovina
sometimes travel in their own distinctive channels and have not always meshed neatly with the
religious and political tendencies of Serbia and Croatia proper. Finally, to introduce the potential
for useful contrasts, I have further enlarged the scope of research anticipated in my initial grant
proposal to include the Czech Republic, a society that brings what is in many ways a more varied
and much more secularized, less "national" religious tradition to its encounter with Islam.

My research on these countries has sought to trace the shifting approaches taken as non-
Muslims have answered the disquieting question "Will Islam fit?"—in other words, are Islamic
views of society compatible with Europe's dominant liberal-secular and (post-)Christian
traditions of culture, politics, and law? I must stress that my work does not seek to provide an
answer of its own to that question, nor to advance any normative solution—Europeans
themselves, Muslim and non-Muslim, will have to work that out—but rather to determine,
through an interdisciplinary, historically-grounded inquiry, why political Christians have
responded as they have, how they have used what they understand to be "history" to do so, and
with what critical consequences. With these considerations in mind, my ongoing research
project pursues the following primary aims:

- To confirm the extent, sources, content, functions, and limits of pre- and post-1989
  patterns of hostility to Muslims and their religion among Islamoskeptic "Christian
  soldiers" in key polities of ex-communist Eastern Europe, that is, in sites selected for
  their critical role in these debates by virtue of the historical and contemporary salience of
  the engagement with Islam in the countries in question;

- To examine the longstanding historical and cultural traditions of the various East
  European societies under investigation, starting with their earliest contacts with Muslims,
in order to identify the most important historical antecedents that surface in—and structure—contemporary responses to Islam;

- To trace how contemporary patterns evidence critical continuities with these well-established historical and cultural traditions, and to assess the meaning and consequences of such carryovers of tradition and invocations of the history and "history" of the Muslim encounters of the past; and

- To find out, in contrast, what is new here as well – in other words, how pre- and post-1989 patterns may also, in fact, break with the past at times, by rejecting traditional elements or by grafting on new ones – and to establish the causes and significance of these ruptures and departures.

In addition, my inquiry has worked toward a number of other, second-order objectives linked to the broader comparative purposes of the project. Along these lines, I have sought in my work:

- To assess the nature and impact of those particular antagonistic reactions that turn out to be specific to Islamoskeptics from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, in light of what my prior research and publications have shown to be a broader European constellation of Christian responses, including significant Christian efforts at inter-confessional peacemaking and dialogue;

- To interpret the full range of responses by political Christians from Eastern Europe and the Balkans in a wider comparative context, using selected evidence from Western Europe, so as to identify and trace the origins and effects not only of departures from Western European experience (signaling critical East European distinctions) but also of commonalities with the approaches found in the West (suggesting at least some elements of a genuinely "European" pattern of reactions); and
To ascertain, wherever possible, critical culture-specific variations embedded in distinctive national traditions (e.g., a traditional Serb and/or Croat hostility toward Islam as the "barbaric" warrior creed of centuries-long Ottoman oppression, a characteristic Hungarian condescension toward Islam as the foundation of an inferior and defeated non-Western culture-in-decline, or a widely-shared Slovak distrust of Islam emerging from the historical equation of Slovak-ness with Catholicism).

These, then, are the primary purposes of the investigation that I have undertaken with the support of the NCEEER grant.

The need for this sort of new and sustained focus on Christianity as a political factor is clear. To date, most academic attention to has focused on governmental, institutional, and policy responses, on public opinion, and on the experiences of European Muslims themselves, while journalistic and popular accounts have regularly hyped the incendiary, headline-grabbing acts of rejectionist West European political activists like Austria's Jörg Haider, the Netherlands' Geert Wilders, Italy's Umberto Bossi, and France's Jean-Marie Le Pen. Tellingly, though such anti-Muslim forces may sometimes invoke and instrumentalize Europe's "Christian heritage" (cynically, one suspects), they do not advance a politics that clearly proceeds from Christian commitments. With the exception of some treatment of the Vatican (typically driven by various, usually evanescent gaffes and crises), Christianity as a serious social and political force for the integration or rejection of Islam has gone largely unstudied in academic work. Yet the attitudes of political Christians, who in many instances turn out to be European Muslims' key negotiating partners and critical brokers of cultural and civic integration, may well determine whether Muslims end up welcomed as neighbors and fellow citizens or treated as unassimilable enemies.
Claims of an unbridgeable civilizational divide may seem to make it easy to see Islam as something that simply will not "fit" in the West, but such approaches are under serious challenge. Because the "civilizations" at issue are argued to be, ultimately, rooted in religion, my work promises to put the seductive Huntingtonian clash-of-cultures model to a rigorous—and sorely needed—empirical test, establishing how the civilizational view has, in practice, found ardent adherents in East European circles and, at the same time, explaining crucial instances in which political Christians have opted to become not soldiers but peacemakers, thus undercutting the thesis of the clash inevitable.

The most important primary sources for this project have included the institutional documents, publications, and statements of church and lay organizations and members of the clergy as well as similar materials from political groups with real or claimed origins in Christian principles. I have also examined major contributions to historical, political, and religious discourse by politically engaged individual Christians. Most sources have naturally come from the period of the keenest attention to Islam after the events of 9/11/2001, but my work has sought to go well beyond these to probe for evidence of Christian attitudes toward Islam under communism and, after 1989, the wider engagement with Islam in a democratizing Eastern Europe. While the hottest action has been fairly recent, a central premise of my inquiry is that, to a degree yet unrecognized, older received traditions of history and "history" matter


tremendously in these encounters: 9/11, in other words, has a pre-history (as does 1989). Accordingly, my research is alert to post-1945 deployments of much older accounts of Islam.⁴

**Knowing It When We See It?**

**Some Problems in Identifying Political Actors as Political Christians**

One of the central problems in undertaking a comparative project on this scale is the need to determine the set of relevant sources and subjects for analysis. We must therefore ask just which historical and political actors are, in the end, important enough to deserve serious scholarly attention. In other words, who have been the most influential political Christians in Eastern Europe and the Balkans? Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to determine to what extent certain political parties are indeed rooted in Christian commitments. That has been the case, for example, with such important formations as the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ), one of the country's dominant political parties in the years since the breakup of Yugoslavia. My research concerning this group confirms that, in general, it has seen a transition from an early, foundational, and independence-oriented right-nationalist tendency to a more self-conscious identification of the broader Christian Democratic movement in Europe. Though my findings on the actions and statements of specific HDZ members in this regard remain at this stage too partial and tentative to report here, based on these more recent rhetorical and philosophical moves by the party, I do plan in future work to evaluate the opinions on Islam expressed by the HDZ and its leaders as at least possible manifestations of Croat political Christianity. The party remains, to be sure, a large and broad-based political movement,

⁴ As I have shown in my earlier work, many influential Croats put Islam to precisely such political and cultural uses during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with profound effects. See Patrick Hyder Patterson, "The Futile Crescent? Judging the Legacies of Ottoman Rule in Croatian History," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 125-140.
and it no doubt continues to attract members whose orientations do not arise from Christian commitments; case-by-case evaluations of individual HDZ commentators and activists will likely be necessary. The opinions of its members will, in any case, inform my analysis of the broader rhetorical, intellectual, and political context in which Croat political Christians engage Islam.5

Similar problems arise in connection with the case of Hungary. The contemporary Hungarian encounter with Islam is one that goes forward against the backdrop of a long and painful, though ultimately proud, Magyar national tradition. Specifically, today's relationship is deeply stamped by the memories and received lessons of the Ottoman possession of various Hungarian lands, which lasted from the mid-16th century through the end of the 17th century. With regard to at least some actors and institutions participating in the recent discourse on Islam and its followers, it is easy enough to identify with certainty manifestations of clear and well-established political Christianity, and in their approach to Islam, it is obvious that the well-remembered Hungarian history with the Ottomans remains a vital force shaping contemporary political thought.

Post-socialist Hungary has seen the development of a number of explicitly Christian political parties. These were, however, more prominent in the earlier years of the post-1989 period, whereas their influence has waned to a significant extent recently, as more of the political space on the right has been claimed successfully by the Alliance of Free Democrats, or FIDESZ, led by the increasingly controversial Viktor Orbán, Hungary's Prime Minister from 1998-2002

and again from 2010 until the time of this writing in September 2013. Before the most recent resurgence of FIDESZ, however, self-styled Christian Democratic parties did seek, with some success, to position themselves as meaningful players in Hungarian electoral politics. And in the process, they occasionally pressed their case by advancing their specifically Christian views of the new salience of Islam in European society.

Along these lines, one party that has warranted significant attention has been the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Fórum, MDF). This group emerged in the last years of socialism and won a substantial plurality of the vote in the first democratic elections in 1990, with its leader József Antall becoming prime minister. While its electoral strength declined dramatically in subsequent elections, the party lasted, as a significant if small parliamentary force, until the dissolution of the party in April 2011. Following its dissolution, the MDF was succeeded by the Democratic Community of Welfare and Freedom (Jólét és Szabadság Demokrata Közösség, JESZ), with the MDF's last leader, Zsolt Makay, serving as the president of the new party.

Occasionally, political leaders in Hungary from the Christian Democratic tradition have suggested that Islamic culture and values present some fundamental incompatibility with European-ness and the norms and interests of the European community. Along these lines, for example, MDF president Ibolya Dávid expressed her party's disapproval of Turkey's candidacy for EU membership (while at the same time supporting Croatian membership) by calling specific attention to Turkey's Muslim culture. "Turkey," Dávid maintained, "is an Islamic country, and with its membership the European Union would not be a group of countries characterized by a Christian system of values, nor would it even be a geographical region, but instead merely a
political, economic, and strategic alliance of interests." In this view, "Europe" is and remains something fundamentally centered in Christian experience and Christian values, and Islam, even of the more moderate sort that has marked much of the experience of the modern Turkish nation-state, rather obviously does not "fit" in Europe. We see here a very clear example of the controversial notion of Europe, or at least the European Union, as a "Christian club."

In the main, however, it appears that these parties and their members have tended to maintain a somewhat circumspect profile with respect to Islam and issues of Muslim integration within Europe, at least as is evidenced in the public news sources and published party statements that my work has been able to uncover thus far. But my examination of the Hungarian record, including the statements of party leaders and positions advanced in parliamentary debates, is still continuing, and further research may yet reveal a more contradictory record.

There are no difficulties whatsoever in identifying the MDF and its successor as practitioners of political Christianity: these party organizations have typically attracted politicians who have embraced explicitly and enthusiastically the broader European tradition of


7 Another noteworthy representative of political Christianity in Hungary has been the Christian Democratic People's Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP). This party has often tended to argue for the need to hold Islam in check in European society, expressing doubts about the religion's ultimate compatibility with European values. See, e.g., "Védőbástya változatok," 9 December 2010, http://kdnp.hu/publicisztika/vedobastya-valtozatok. The prominent KDNP politician Zsolt Semjén, who has served as Deputy Prime Minister in Viktor Orbán's second term, has at times advanced somewhat skeptical views of Islam and its political potential, though his recent role in the cabinet may have placed him in circumstances requiring a more moderate tone toward Islam, particularly with respect to Hungary's own Muslim community. See, e.g., Christian Democratic People's Party,"Fontos az egyházak békés együttélése," 30 May 2011, http://kdnp.hu/news/fontos-az-egyhazak-bekes-egyuttelese; on Semjén's insistence on the fundamental Christian core of European civilization, see Patrick Hyder Patterson, "On the Ruin of Christendom: Religious Politics and the Challenge of Islam in the New West," in Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe, Bruce Berglund and Brian Porter-Szűcs, editors, (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 293-327, at 300.
Christian Democracy. But the party that has emerged over time as the dominant right-wing political formation in post-socialist Hungary, Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ, does indeed pose some special problems for the analysis of political Christianity and its engagement with Islam. In the earlier phases of Orbán's rise to prominence, FIDESZ typically positioned itself as a right-nationalist (its critics would say xenophobic) party, and as one without the great obvious reliance on Christian faith commitments that has marked those parties that work expressly in the Christian Democratic tradition in the country. In recent years, however, the party has become considerably more explicit and vocal in its invocations of Hungary's Christian heritage and culture.

As has regularly happened with the work of right-wing political Christians in other East European countries, the effort by FIDESZ to place Christianity at least nominally at the forefront of Hungarian politics and so-called national renewal has met with strong approval among some members of conservative circles abroad. And here, too, the assumed connections to the new presence of Islam in Europe are often clear. As seen by one conservative commentator for an English-language online journal with a largely paleo-conservative, traditionalist orientation, the insistence of FIDESZ on a reference to Hungary's Christian heritage in the new 2012 state constitution showed just the right defiance toward the spread of Islam in Europe:

But what if Hungary succeeds in saving herself culturally and demographically and her neighbors follow her lead? What if she ceases to be a bugbear to her former subjects and becomes an inspiration? . . . Upsetting as all this may be to our rulership, it is by far the best possible outcome for us. If the nations of

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8 For an example of the MDF's foundational relationship with Christianity and with Christian Democracy as a broader historical and contemporary political phenomenon across Europe, see the party position statement "Európai keresztény kultúra," http://www.mdf.hu/index.php?akt_menu=92 (downloaded 16 June 2006).
Europe do not reclaim their past and safeguard their future—which is what the Hungarian Constitution and the views of likeminded Europeans around the continent is about—then only two futures remain. Either—as Pat Buchanan and sundry others have predicted—our nations of origin will be under sharia law in a century or less, or else their desperate denizens will turn for protection to new leadership with the will to resist creeping Islamization.9

Rightly or wrongly, then, at least some outside observers, including those with connections to broader global circles of Christian politics, are beginning to treat FIDESZ as a banner-carrier for the Christian tradition in the struggle against the perceived threat of Islam.

In my judgment, however, it remains difficult to determine the extent to which Christianity has lately served as a genuine point of origin for the FIDESZ philosophy or whether, conversely, it has functioned as a sort of instrumentalist window-dressing meant to cultivate an even greater appeal for the continuing nationalist-traditionalist party line. On this point, additional research will clearly be needed, but the recent direction of FIDESZ rhetoric means that it should for now at least be deemed a candidate for inclusion in the context of European political Christianity's engagement with Islam.

Some Preliminary Findings from Southeastern Europe:

Contemporary Serb Cultural and Political Approaches to Islam

As the discussion above suggests, the range of issues raised by this research project is of such broad scope that I will be able to address most of the questions presented only within the more expansive bounds of a complete monographic analysis. In this Working Paper, my aim

must be considerably narrower, as the format allows me to set forth just a limited selection of my initial findings with respect to East European political Christians' engagement with Islam and their approaches to the perceived possibilities or impossibilities of full integration of Muslims in European society. Given the special importance of the Balkan cases, I wish to focus here on certain key issues arising from the broader political and intellectual context in which the debate over Islam in the former Yugoslavia has gone forward.

In particular, the perspectives expressed in Serb political Christianity are, I conclude, of great interest and great significance. As important as they are in their own right, however, these explicitly Orthodox views of Islam must be understood against the backdrop of what turns out to be an extraordinarily interesting and indeed often quite animated public discussion of Islam among the broader community of Serbs in Serbia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A strong argument can be made that the public engagement with Islam as a religious system is all the more meaningful in the Serb case due to the evident high importance of religion as such in Serbian history and in contemporary Serb society. Serb identity has been and remains in many ways strongly bound up with the Orthodox tradition, and the Serbian Orthodox church itself and individual writers and commentators from the religious community have continued to propagate the idea and societal ideal of a "heavenly Serbia" in which the community (and indeed often the state itself, at least when it is fulfilling what these believers understand to be its proper mission as a representative of that community) is meant to pursue an inspired calling of witness to and defense of the Orthodox faith.10 Moreover, Serbia in recent years has been marked by a

10 On the specific divinely-connected historical mission of the Serb nation and its state see, for example Vladimir Dimitrijević, ed., Nebeska Srbija: kako su Srbi služili Hristu (Slanci : Manastir Svetog Arhidakona Stefana, 2002). For a critical, and controversial, interpretation of this ideal and an argument concerning its connection to the violence of the 1990s, see Branimir
high level of at least nominal adherence to religion and affirmation of a belief in God, with an unusually small number of self-identified atheists according to some recent survey data. All these factors make the Serb experience especially compelling as an object of scholarly investigation.

Among influential Serb analysts of and commentators on Islam, there has been a strong tendency to see this non-Christian religion as a particular threat to European and Christian culture and values, or at the very least to the Serb variant of that culture and those values. Among the most severe and most prominent critics of Islam in Serbian intellectual circles has been Miroljub Jevtić, a professor of political science at the University of Belgrade, Islam specialist, and frequent contributor to the public debate over the role of the religion in world, European, and regional affairs. Jevtić's writings on Islam have occupied a highly visible place in Serbian political and media discourse for years. And the views he advances are by no means charitable toward the Muslim religion. Commenting on the nature of Islam in world history and contemporary politics in the context of a broader discussion of political scientist Samuel P. Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, Jevtić has suggested that Islam does indeed typically engender conflict:

if dogmatic, holy war of conquest is a form of international rights for the Islamic state, it is therefore clear that all who carry that sort of ideology are potential aggressors against their non-Muslim neighbors, and this is a fact which, as we see, Muslims themselves underscore. . . . Since this is grounded in the Koran itself and in the example of Mohammed, the denial or alteration of this theory would


make the person doing so an apostate, and for an apostate, according to Islam, there is no other penalty except death.\textsuperscript{12}

The obvious implication of this conclusion is that conflict with non-Muslims is an all-but-inescapable consequence of Islamic doctrine—that such violence is, in other words, a product of Islam \textit{as such}. In this contribution as elsewhere, Jevtić’s argumentation is, to put it mildly, almost unremittingly polemical. At its core, his work appears to amount to deep Isamoskepticism in support of the Serb national cause, and he has tended to opt for a decidedly critical and defensive (not to say alarmist) view of Muslim law and theology, repeatedly downplaying the variety and range of contemporary Islamic thought in favor of an interpretation that is sure to provoke an unsettling response. This is a religion that, Jevtić's work frequently suggests, is bent on \textit{jihad} in the sense of conquest, dominance over other faiths, and violent struggle where necessary to achieve those ends.\textsuperscript{13}

While there seem to be no indications that Jevtić himself is expressly self-identified as a practitioner of political Christianity, his own work has advanced the conclusion that, in the case of Islam, explicitly religious politics has been powerfully at work in the contemporary Balkans. Along these lines, he has emphasized the Muslim character of Bosnia's \textit{Stranka Demokratske Akcije} (Party of Democratic Action, SDA), asserting that the group earned its victories at the ballot box as an avowedly religious, that is, Islamic, political movement. By contrast, Jevtić has


noted, early post-Yugoslav attempts at an expressly religious electoral politics in the Christian tradition translated into very little success at the ballot box for the Christian Democratic parties in Croatia and Macedonia and for Serbia's *Svetosavska Stranka* (Party of Saint Sava).\(^\text{14}\)

Interpreting Bosnian political developments of the 1990s in this vein, Jevtić has recapitulated an argument frequently encountered in Serbian political discourse, insisting that the SDA openly pursued a core agenda that aimed to convert the country into nothing less than an Islamic Republic on the Iranian model. That purpose, such writers and commentators have maintained, is evidenced in the politico-religious thought of leader and Bosnian president Alija Izetbegović, and especially the mid-1980s Islamic Declaration in which Izetbegović outlined his vision most distinctively.\(^\text{15}\) For example, we encounter a similar reading, anchored in the vision of a looming, virtually inevitable Muslim threat, in the work of Serb public intellectual Mihailo Marković, who has asserted that through the Islamic Declaration, Izetbegović's movement has made the goals of Islam in this region [*prostori*] completely transparent. The state may not be separated from the church in territories where Muslims are the majority. When the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina exceeds 50%, they will, using democratic procedures, win the right to organize the state according to the principles of the Koran and the law of Sharia. . . . Until that


time, it is necessary to preserve the unity of the state under the cloak of multi-
religiosity, multi-culturality, and multi-nationality.  

The idea that the country might soon become an Islamist state was no distant threat, Marković insisted, because of the Muslims' "militancy" and their "cunning use of demographic processes for political aims," that is, a reliance on their higher birth rate. And in a similar spirit, other writers and commentators have warned that what the Serbs were facing in the waning years of the Yugoslav federation was merely one part of a much larger, global threat, a danger that should have been more obvious to the Western powers and caused them to side with the Serbs in what was, in this view, their effort to limit the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.

Jevtić and his opinions have found an expansive audience in the broader Serbian-language mass media, where he is promoted and widely acknowledged as a leading Serbian expert on Islam, if not indeed the leading expert. And perhaps most importantly for the particular questions at hand in my research project, where the focus is primarily on the stances toward Islam taken by Europe's political Christians, it is noteworthy that Jevtić's ideas have been given a sympathetic forum in official publications of the Serbian Orthodox Church, where they have been featured prominently and reported with little if any critical distancing.

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No discussion of Serbian-language analysis of Islam would be complete without reference to the scholarly work and mass-media contributions of Darko Tanasković, another Serbian academic and Islam specialist who has established a reputation as one of the country's foremost and most knowledgeable experts on Muslims and their religion. The assessments presented by Tanasković typically do not read as nearly so polemical or so dire as those in the more alarmist mode represented by Jevtić, but they are nevertheless marked by substantial doubts about Islam's capacity to be reconciled with modern secular-liberal society, by an abiding concern for the implications of the concept of jihad and the limits of Islam's tolerance of non-conforming faith commitments, and by an insistence on the ways in which Islamic values and Muslim conceptions of politics, rights, and justice diverge from those of Christian or post-Christian European society. They, too, offer a vision of Islam that suggests it likely cannot accord well with European culture.

On balance, then, the evidence suggests that the public discourse on Islam among writers and commentators not specifically identified with or proceeding from Christian religious commitments has been marked by a profound skepticism toward Islam, especially with regard to the compatibility of the Muslim faith, and its attendant social and political worldview, with

prevailing domestic conceptions and norms (regardless of whether or not those Serb conceptions and norms are understood by the observers in question to be wholly "European").

But it must be noted that despite the prominence of a number of quite Islamoskeptic public intellectual figures, Serb opinion has by no means been monolithic with regard to these questions. Indeed, among some commentators, and especially those with political commitments that place them in circles more explicitly identified as reformist and progressive, there has been a noteworthy degree of pushback against the frequently encountered view that Islam is at its core alien to Serb culture and values (and/or European culture and values) and that it represents an essentially irreconcilable danger, based on a supremacy-oriented imperative that is asserted to be inherent in the religion.

Along these lines, for example, it is well worth considering the range and variety of opinions—some of them remarkably moderate and accommodating—appearing in a special issue of the Serbian cultural journal Habitus devoted to questions of Islam, interconfessional relations, and mutual tolerance, with emphasis on the Balkan and East European context. Here we find more often an inclination to reject the Islamoskeptic approach, with a specific reference to what was perceived to be the erroneous (if not perhaps indeed deceptive) analyses disseminated so frequently by the prominent Islam specialists Miroljub Jevtić and Darko Tanasković, whose work has been discussed above. Proceeding from a set of conclusions about the implications of the Muslim religion fundamentally at variance with those that Tanasković and, especially, Jevtić have advanced, one Habitus piece took aim at the work of these experts directly, identifying these opinion leaders by name and challenging their authority, insisting to the journal's readers

21 For a Serbian legal specialist's assessment of the often difficult relationship between the concept of universal human rights and Islamic understandings of law, see Milan Petrović, "Univerzalna prava čoveka i islam," Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Nišu 26 (1986): 125-143.
that "they have not informed us about Islam as it exists empirically here." Though this comment was ostensibly offered as a "collegial criticism," it is not hard to detect in such a statement some intimation that the leading Serbian analysts might be engaging in argumentation that, unintentionally or otherwise, has had the effect of misleading the public about the nature of Islam and its implications for non-Muslim European society.

In a similar attempt to counter the conflict-centered views that have found so much prominence in Serb opinion on Islam, Serbian historian Predrag J. Marković has taken aim at Samuel P. Huntington's thesis and argued that Serb culture itself gives the lie to any notion of sharp, reliable, and determinative civilizational distinctions. Marković sees it as a fundamental strength of Serb society that it is historically multicultural, that it has encompassed elements of not only Orthodox, but also Western and Islamic civilization. "An acceptance of the 'fate' of forming into camps on the bloody border of wars between civilizations, in the closed circle of a single civilizational tradition, is not in the tradition of the Serbs," Marković has insisted. Critically, Marković sees not the civilizational longue durée but rather the short-term political context as the more meaningful political and cultural frame; he suggests that the present-day choices made by members of social and political elites can move their societies in directions not foreordained by grand Huntingtonian religio-civilizational essences. In this view, the more

22 Dragoljub Djordjević and Dragan Todorović, "Religijska svest Roma muslimana (i pravoslavaca),” *Habitus* no. 8 (August 2002): 147-168, at 166 [special issue on Cultural Dialogue between Islam and Central and Eastern Europe].


momentary, pragmatic, and programmatic decisions that political leaders make can, indeed, matter tremendously.

In broadest terms, my research project seeks to identify the extent to which political Christians have found Islam to be compatible or incompatible with a complex of values, norms, practices, and orientations that (following for purposes of argument and analysis the pattern typical of public discourse in both Eastern and Western Europe) I have described under the rubric "European." And in the main, for most polities, this effort to focus on the nature and implications of Islam vis-à-vis some putatively "European" tradition does hold up well enough.

For the specific political and cultural discourse generated by Serb exponents of political Christianity, however, some caveats are in order. For the Serbian Orthodox view of "European-ness" has itself hardly been uniformly positive. In the rhetoric of the Serbian church and of its most ardent followers, "Europe"—and by this what the Orthodox sources clearly mean to indicate is a Western Europe marked by Catholicism, Protestantism, and the secularist and secularized societies that Catholicism and Protestantism have either encouraged or the very last allowed—is frequently seen as having lost its way. European society is, from this perspective, mired in a crippling relativism. That relativism is, in turn, born of the rejection of the very moral principles, grounded in Christianity, that would have allowed Europe to resist more effectively the onslaught of secularism, multiculturalism, and the muddled moral reasoning that has made, in this view, effective resistance to and competition with Islam almost impossible. Along these lines, for example, it is worth considering the statement of Montenegrin Orthodox metropolitan Amfilohije, issued in 1994 in the context of the ongoing war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, supporting the Serb-national enterprise of the breakaway Republika Srpska, and lambasting both the allegedly godless government of Milošević-led Yugoslavia and the actions of a self-styled
"civilized Europe" apparently so divorced from its traditional, religiously-derived roots and values that it had proven unable to recognize the righteousness of the Serb national cause.  

During the Bosnian conflict, Yale historian (and, later, Croatian political activist) Ivo Banac argued that Serbian Orthodoxy had with time become immersed in what he called an *ideologija svetosavlja* (the term might well be translated as "the ideology of the way of St. Sava"), an integrative worldview that holds out an approach to religion marked by a powerful equation of Serbdom with Orthodoxy. Significantly, this particular historical identification is one that has also managed to link Serbian-ness, *srpstvo*, with resistance to Islam. (St. Sava died before the force of the Turkish invasions swept over the lands of the emergent Serbian state, but he became a symbol of Serb resistance in later battles with the Ottomans.) The discourse of Serbian Orthodoxy in recent years has indeed been laden with contributions that stress the work of St. Sava as both a religious and political figure, that is, as a formative steward of the Serbian state (*državotvornik*) and at the same time (and in no less national a way) as an Orthodox saint, moral exemplar, and object of devotion. In the rhetoric of the clergy and its publications, the heroes and martyrs of the Church are presented as the heroes and martyrs of the nation. In turn, it is strongly suggested in this Orthodox discourse that those who have struggled and suffered in the course of the Serbs' long struggles against a long series of alien intruders and oppressors—Turks, Habsburgs, Germans, Croats, the Muslim Bošnjaci of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the largely 


Muslim Kosovar Albanians, and NATO—are themselves heroes and martyrs in the greater cause of the Church.

Echoing some of the same themes advanced by Banac, Bogdan Đurović has pointed to similar elements at work in Serb political and religious culture, speaking of the creation of a "specific social mentality" of the Serbs that "has distinguished itself through a special sort of fatalism and a disinclination toward economic enterprise and rational economic management. Fused with the Kosovo mythology among the Serbs, Orthodoxy has directly participated in the construction of this mentality, offering as a model of asceticism in the world [unutarsvetovna akseza] a heroic death for the interests of the nation ('for the venerable cross and for golden freedom' [za krst časni i slobodu zlatnu] or the stoic behavior of the victim of subjection to slavery (following the example of the Christian martyrs).”

In engaging with analyses along these lines, of course, we must be careful not to veer toward generalizations that repeat overly narrow, stereotyped generalizations about Serb political and religious culture. That said, however, it can defensibly be asserted that there are distinctive characteristics of the historic and contemporary admixture of Orthodoxy, politics, and the national among Serbs, and some of those particular dynamics do indeed seem to be at work when it comes to the Orthodox engagement with Islam. The themes of the virtue and nobility of resistance—and specifically military resistance—to which Banac and Đurović call attention do, in fact, crop up repeatedly, and vividly, in Orthodox-sponsored media. Alongside the recurring

theme of martyrdom, the official church magazine *Pravoslavlje* has with a notable regularity honored, or perhaps it would even be fair to say glorified, a warrior culture of resistance.  

For Serbs, of course, the violent national encounter with Muslims did not end with the Dayton peace accords of 1995 and the resolution, however partial or unsatisfactory, of the Bosnian conflict. It continued, and indeed still continues, in Kosovo. The Kosovo question has been one of the most troubling concerns of the last three decades. Because of the high level of Muslim self-identification among the Kosovar Albanian population, it is difficult if not impossible to remove Islam from the cultural, social, and political calculus, and this has certainly been the case for commentators proceeding from commitments rooted in the Serbian Orthodox tradition. Church-related publications have, not surprisingly, devoted enormous attention to the plight of the Serb minority in Kosovo, with special focus on the repeated vandalism and destruction of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious sites. Interestingly, these incidents have not typically been attributed to attackers motivated by Islam as such. But viewed alongside occasional references to what is claimed to be the existence of Muslim extremism in the region (including, for example, a suggestion from the Raško-Prizren Eparchate that the region had become a theatre of operations for a "Balkan Taliban"), we must at least wonder about the extent to which mainstream Orthodox clerical opinion may see Islamic competition with Orthodoxy, and the cultural and doctrinal implications of Islam as such, as a root cause of the violence and property damage.  

On this point it must be acknowledged that the picture that emerges from the


record available in published sources on the Kosovo question is not entirely unequivocal, and this is an issue that will be the subject of further questioning in my ongoing research project. Occasionally, deeply distrustful readings of Islam have surfaced in Serbian Orthodox clerical commentary. In the mid-1990s, for example, during the Bosnian conflict, the Belgrade seminary's student journal *Logos* published a number of articles strongly disapproving of the Muslim faith. 30 One *Logos* contributor, for instance, took issue with suggestions that there might be serious opportunities for interfaith dialogue in the midst of the violence, suggesting that Islam actually did not, all wishing to the contrary notwithstanding, offer any substantial basis for a monotheistic common faith that could be shared with Christian believers. 31 The official Church literature of this period is, moreover, marked by a general absence of sustained and serious invocations of interconfessional tolerance, insistence on the convergence of values between the two faiths, calls for rapprochement and harmony, and the like.

Against this picture of a generally dim view of Islam's prospects for harmony with Christian cultural and social values, it must be noted that Orthodox sources also have, at least on occasion, offered up more hopeful assessments of Islam and its potential for harmonious integration in the European context. The Christian Cultural Center (*Hrišćanski kulturni centar*)


in Belgrade, for example, published in 2005 an assessment of Islam (in translation) by
Anastasios Yannoulatos, the Orthodox Archbishop of Tirana in Albania. In this wide-ranging
survey, Yannoulatos offered up what has to be seen in comparative context as in many ways a
much more charitable reading of the Muslim religion, one that suggested that the Orthodox
concepts of God and society were, perhaps surprisingly, closer to those of Islam than to the
Western Christian traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism. Here, in contrast to much of the
prevailing Serbian discourse on Islam (and to a considerable part of the Serb Orthodox
commentary), there were strong suggestions that the two traditions actually did have some
significant basis for cooperation, that Islam need not always be interpreted as a threat, and that it
might indeed be possible to integrate the Muslim religion into the prevailing structures of
European/Christian values, culture, and norms. An important aim of my ongoing research will
be to determine the extent to which views such as these have found echoes in the work of Serb
writers explicitly identified with Orthodoxy as the basis of their political commitments.

32 Anastasije Janulatos [Anastasios Yannoulatos], Islam (Belgrade: Hrišćanski kulturni centar,
2005) [originally published in Greek in 1975].
33 Future research will carry the analysis of Serbian Orthodox Church sources concerning Islam
forward to the present and back as far as possible into the period of the socialist Yugoslav
federation. I plan to do the same for sources reflecting the views of Croat Catholics. While my
analysis of the views of Croats in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is not yet complete, I am able
to offer a preliminary, tentative finding that the images of Islam presented in the official
publications of post-Dayton Roman Catholic Church in Bosnia-Herzegovina offer a decidedly
mixed picture, with occasional upwellings of Islamoskepticism interspersed with a certain degree
of respect accorded to Islam as a monotheistic tradition with various points of contact and
correspondence to traditional Christian moral values. For example, the pages of the leading
public outlet for official and quasi-official Catholic views in Bosnia, the Sarajevo-based
Katolički tjednik [Catholic Weekly] published by the Archbishopric of Vrhbosna, have often
delivered reports in this vein, with coverage presented in a notably approving tone and, it would
appear, efforts taken to continually include photographs of Muslim religious leaders (and
especially Grand Mufti Mustafa Cerić) in their distinctive clerical garb, and thus immediately
recognizable as a sign of Muslim involvement in these Church-endorsed projects. The
comparatively warm or at least delicate treatment of Islam in the discourse of Bosnian Croat
Catholic writers and speakers in recent years may come as something of a surprise given the
sometimes dubious public image of the Catholic Church and its Croat followers during the wartime violence. In that period, Church officials and other Croats were often criticized for their strong association with the military forces seeking to partition Bosnia with an eye toward future union with an independent Croatian state. With the rules of political engagement now confined and restricted to a large degree by the Dayton settlement, and with new and growing aspirations, or pressures, to conform to "European" norms and expectations in anticipation of some future accession to the EU, the range of acceptable positions appears to have changed, and moderation appears to be the new prevailing mode.