

Patterns of Society and Politics – The Perspective of Religion in Albania and North Macedonia



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Abstract

While the position of religion in modern society is a contested issue in public debates, scientific analysis focusses centrally on state institutions' intervention into the religious sphere. A dimension often missing in prominent studies is the perspective of religion as the central protagonist, while leaders of religious communities are accepted as normative multipliers within their group and additionally influence wider parts of society by public statements and symbolic behavior. The study presented here focusses on Albania and North Macedonia, and asks about the inner patterns of attitudes of religious leaders towards the preferred societal order and the role of religion in modern society. Secondly, potentials for religiously motivated integration and conflict in society within the types of attitudes are explored. The study employs a mixed-method technique for interview and analysis, q-method, and includes a total of 60 interviews of religious leaders of the major religious communities in Albania and North Macedonia. The results are twofold, as the majority of types have an integrative pattern, but show a wide distance between each other.

Key words: religion, religion and politics, Albania, North Macedonia, mixed-methods, q-method

Introduction

The position of religion in modern society is a contested issue in public debates as well as scientific discourses worldwide, including arguments that range from a total rejection of influence of respective institutions to a comprehensive involvement of them in politics, public affairs, and in individual identity and orientation. Scientific analysis is concerned with a broad range of stakeholders, but has a strong focus on state institutions' intervention into the religious sphere (Fox 2008, 2013), and the design of various patterns of the relationship from this perspective (Trautmüller 2012). Additionally, manifold descriptions, projections, and demands were ascribed to religions and organizations representing the various religious denominations – on the one hand how they support a collective and exclusive understanding of community and society (Ramet 1997: 59); on the other hand in which way they could contribute to a modern, plural, and integrative societal order, especially within the societies of Eastern Europe (Luxmoore 2017: 8/9). A dimension which is often disregarded in prominent studies of social sciences is the perspective of religion as the central protagonist in the field. This perspective is represented by the leaders of religious communities, who 'embody' religion for the adherents of the faith and speak for the respective religious confession for outsiders in society among the population and in politics (Hoge 2001: 581). They are accepted as normative multipliers within their group and additionally influence wider parts of society by public statements and symbolic behavior.

Within the societies of South-Eastern Europe, societal conflicts that developed during the last three decades were often connected to national and economic, but to a certain extent also to religious factors (Perica 2002; Velikonja 2003). Consequently, the study presented here asks about the inner patterns of attitudes of religious leaders towards the preferred societal order and the role of religion in modern society. Focusing on South-Eastern Europe and here on the two cases of Albania and North Macedonia, the second research question deals with the possibility of identifying potentials for religiously motivated integration and/or conflict within the types of attitudes obtained in the first step.

The societies of Albania and North Macedonia share significant similarities in various background variables concerning religion (plural religious sphere among the population) and have a reverse relationship of the qualitative characteristics of that field (Sunni Islam versus Orthodox Christianity as minority or majority religious denomination). The study employs a mixed-method technique for interview and analysis (q-method) and includes interviews with

60 religious leaders from higher and lower ranks of the major religious communities, 30 each in Albania and in North Macedonia.

Historical Legacies of Religion and State in Albania and North Macedonia

From the historical perspective, the territories of today's Albania and North Macedonia were situated in a semi-peripheral region during the last two thousand years—nevertheless, key settlements in the region marked important trade routes of these empires, like Rome and Constantinople, and later of the great empires of the Middle Ages. When the Ottoman Empire conquered the territories of present-day Albania and North Macedonia at the end of the 14th, beginning of the 15th century, there was another component added to the religious field, which was shared before by the two major Christian denominations (Catholic and Orthodox) since the 4th century, and subsequently became dominant in religious life, Islam. The rule of the Ottomans, which lasted for almost 500 years, meant the belonging to a religious state of Islamic character for the autochthonous population. Accordingly, the inhabitants of the empire were primarily defined and categorized from that perspective: Non-Muslim groups, if legitimized by the religious authority of the Ottoman Empire, the ulema of Istanbul, were assigned and organized in recognized religious communities, a system of so-called 'millets' (Zaffi 2006: 132), which was gradually developed and adjusted to the character of the groups governed. This administrative incorporation and subordination of different religio-ethnic groups instead of forcing their total conversion or initiating their persecution was traditionally practiced in Islamic principalities of the region of Anatolia which existed before and during the expansion of the empire of the Ottomans (Finkel 2005: 10).

In addition to the subordinated position of their members within the social system of the Ottoman Empire, these non-Muslim communities also enjoyed some privileges – i.a. the right to largely regulate their internal affairs in the field of religion by themselves (theology, rites, education) (Zaffi 2006: 134). Therefore, despite the slowly progressing majority takeover of Islam by the inhabitants of today's territories of Albania and parts of North Macedonia, Orthodox Christianity with its official recognition had the opportunity to hold itself as an identity-forming element in parts of the population within this framework. While conversions from Islam to Christianity were prohibited (Finkel 2005: 461), the fundamental state order of the Ottoman Empire allowed the different religious groups to live together

peacefully within the empire (Zaffi 2006: 152); however, a sustainable societal integration did not take place and late attempts failed with the reforms of the so-called 'Tanzimat' period in the 19th century (Finkel 2005: 525).

The several national movements of the (Greeks and) Slavs in South-Eastern Europe in the 19th century were often closely tied to a religious confession (mostly a Christian denomination) and consequently to a national church organization, thus developing the latter into a factor that would create identity and also become a political factor. On the territory of North Macedonia, it was the Bulgarian Orthodox Church which sought to gather the religious sentiments among the Christian population and affect their religious and ethnic identity, but also the Serbian-Orthodox Church would become a factor. The parallel development of national movements which encouraged the expansion and consolidation of national Christian-Orthodox churches (Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian) did not meet the goals of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, which in turn lost authority over wide parts of the church hierarchy in mentioned regions during that time.

In opposition to this trend, the idea of the nation in the case of Albania was based on that of an ethnic-linguistic cultural nation during that period; i.e. on an overarching understanding of the community beyond religious affiliation due to the multireligious structure of the inhabitants, which was added by the rather flexible individual handling of religious practice (Siebertz 1910: 107), and the predominant harmony between the four major religions during conflict with other ethnic groups over territory. In the course of the repression of the Ottoman Empire from the region of today's Albania with the beginning of the Balkan Wars in 1912, the country declared itself independent that year and was internationally recognized and established as a monarchy at the London Conference and with the Protocols of Florence in 1913. The occupation of Albania during and after World War I by the Central Powers resulted in the creation of a first independently created constitutional only in 1920.

However, due to the then weak central power, the regional identification of the population, and the feudalistic character of the social and economic structure, it was not able to achieve much. The text of the statute includes state recognition of the importance of four religious groups and their political influence in Albania, as the internal structure of the second important body of the state after the parliament, the High Council (*Këshilli i Lartë*), reserved seats for a high representative of each of these recognized traditional religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Christian-Orthodox and Christian-Catholic). After several changes of government, the great land owner and former prime minister Ahmet Muhtar Zogolli (also

Ahmet Zogu, 1895-1961) put himself in power in January 1925 and declared a constitution that provided for a presidential system. The text took only a general reference to religion: In Art. 5, the state was declared as separated from a particular religion and guaranteed freedom of religion and belief (Kryetari i Kuvendit Kushtetues 1925). In 1928, Zogolli finally erected a monarchy and installed a new constitution with an extremely extensive text comprising 234 articles. The developments affected the area of religious freedom only slightly: A paragraph was added to Article 5 which stated that religion should not be used for political purposes (Kryetari i Asamblesë Kushtetuese 1928). The first simple laws governing the practice of religion in Albania illustrate the path to a king's dictatorship: The law of 1922 on religious communities (Këshilli i Ministrave 1922) and the decree of Zogolli of July 9, 1929, on the formation of religious communities (Këshilli i Ministrave 1929). The first text guaranteed the freedom of belief of individuals (Art.2) and the freedom to practice the religion of recognized communities (Art.1), defined here as Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and Bektashi (Art.5).

On the other hand, the 1929 document, with its new articles requesting an Albanian nationality of religious leaders (Art.7), stating the obligation to develop the patriotic and national sentiments of believers in sermons (Art.25), and prohibiting the wearing of religious clothing without governmental permission (Art.26), gives the impression of functionalizing law on religion to build up a specific national cohesion among the population. After many years of confrontation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the unilateral declaration of independence of the Orthodox Church of Albania followed in 1929, which was confirmed by Constantinople only in 1937. Already before the beginning of the Second World War, Italy invaded Albania on 7 April 1939, forced the king into exile and ordered the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III. (1869-1947) as the ruler.

The territory of today's North Macedonia was split from the Ottoman Empire after the first Balkan War 1912 and became the southern part of the Kingdom of Serbia in 1913. It remained part of Serbia within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was formed after the First World War and transformed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. During the inter-war period, a specific '*Serbification*' of state and church institutions took place in this region until 1941, as the Slavic population adhered almost entirely to the Christian-Orthodox faith there. This was mirrored by the new constitution of 1931, with which the Serbian king and ruler of Yugoslavia Alexander I. Karađorđević (1888-1934) replaced the 1921 constitution and established a centralized dictatorship. The text was a key element of his efforts towards a transformation and unification of the identity of the population of Yugoslavia (Nielsen 2012), which was composed of various ethnic, linguistic,

and religious affiliations by its people: It stated that the official language of the kingdom is Serb-Croat-Slovene (Art.3), a newly created linguistic syncretism. Further on, the constitution mentioned freedom of religion and conscience for the citizens (Art.11), emphasized additionally that "*The enjoyment of civil and political rights is independent of the exercise of religion.*" (Blagojevic/Radonic 2012: 126), and prohibited political activities and statements by the religious communities.

The Second World War meant Bulgarian occupation and disastrous destruction. Due to the instrumentalization of religion in times of war and during the inter-war period of the first Yugoslavia (1919–1941), the sphere of religion experienced a significant loss of social significance in 1944-45, when the communist partisans came into power in Yugoslavia and Macedonia. They introduced a state-socialist system and designed a federal state structure for Yugoslavia, which intentionally curtailed the influence of traditional religions. Hence, the ruling socialist elite introduced a first phase of expropriation of church property, persecution, and measures seeking total control of religious communities after 1945. This was justified on the basis that a proportion of officials of religious communities had collaborated with the occupying forces in Yugoslavia during the Second World War (Ognyanova 2009:171). Within the framework of wider state reforms, this policy was changed in the second half of the 1960s: relations with the Vatican and the Holy See were eased by the 1966 and 1970 protocols (Črnič and Lesjak 2003: 356), and the opportunity to join a state register at the level of the republics and thereby officially function as a religious community after 1976. As in other socialist-governed states of Central and Eastern Europe, religious organizations in the country were generally met with mistrust and remained under close observation by state authorities. Nevertheless, the overall comparison between these countries shows that Yugoslavia adopted a more tolerant policy toward traditional religion following the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s (Buchenau 2005: 547; Ramet 1989: 327).

In the case of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia, some characteristics of the federal system and the change of policy can be reproduced when focusing on the policy towards religious communities. Following the logic that each of the six republics possesses its own distinct national identity with key political, economic, cultural, and religious characteristics, the federal and national political elite did not oppress the establishment of the Macedonian-Orthodox Church, Ohrid Archbishopric (MOC), after 1945 in opposition to the influence of the Bulgarian and Serbian counterparts, which was realized when the MOC officially declared autocephality in 1967. By these activities, the socialist elite sought to be able to meet two goals: Allowing a certain degree of articulation of national and

religious feelings; and at the same time enclosing these sentiments by the observation and division of spheres of the dominant (religious) communities in the federal state.

In comparison, the communist period in Albania between 1944 and 1990 meant a different treatment of religious communities by the state. As in Yugoslavia, the victory of the communist partisans in 1944 resulted in rapid control and containment of the activities of religious communities in the country. As a first measure, the Roman-Catholic Church – identified as being with the occupier Italy during Second World War – was defined a foreign organization and became target of harsh persecution, while all its spiritual personnel were either deported, detained, or murdered immediately (Tönnies 1975: 5). Secondly, the expropriation of the land property of all religious communities which was suitable for agriculture and forestry came to the focus of the communist leadership, which was enforced in August 1945 with an agrarian reform (Kryesija e Këshillit Antifashist 1945). The introduction of a new constitution based on the one of the Stalinist Soviet Union was enacted in 1946, which, on the other hand, officially took a liberal position towards religion according to the wording: Art. 18 allowed the organization of traditional religions and its exercise to all citizens, guaranteed freedom of belief, and separated religion from state and politics.

In fact, already by 1947, the main religious communities were without material basis. In the wake of the break with Tito's Yugoslavia in 1948, those regulations were also confirmed by the 1949 Act on Religious Communities (Presidiumi i Kuvendit Popullor 1949), which further limited the autonomy of these communities (Art.13 required approval of religious leaders and their co-workers by the Council of Ministers), as well as prohibiting their political activities (Art. 32-34). It was followed by other direct laws regarding the traditional four religious communities (1950, 1951) with which the state in fact took over supervision and control of them; in everyday life, however, the arbitrary persecution of religious activity remained a common situation (Tönnies 1975: 5/6).

With the policy of averting Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union beginning of the 1960s, the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) relied on cooperation with communist China. From 1966 on, Albania joined its 'cultural revolution' - henceforth, the country's leadership worked to tighten up and legalize the persecution of religions and their followers. Exemplary of this were the decrees on the final nationalization of land (Presidiumi i Kuvendit Popullor 1967a) and real estates (Presidiumi i Kuvendit Popullor 1967b) of religious communities of April 1967, as well as the decree for the cancellation of previous laws on religion (Presidiumi i Kuvendit Popullor 1967c) of November 1967, which amounted to a total religious prohibition. According to Enver Hoxha's logic, Albania should now be considered an 'atheist

state' (Tönnes 1975: 7), in which any religion had to give way to the ideology imposed by the communist state party. Additionally, the new constitution of 1976 explicitly stated in Art. 37 that the state does not recognize any religions and seeks to establish a 'scientific materialistic world view' among its citizens (Presidium i Kuvendit Popullor 1976). Religion and religious freedom continued to be limited by Art. 55, which prohibited "(...) *any form of fascist, anti-democratic, religious and antisocial organization.*" (Presidium i Kuvendit Popullor 1976). Thus, in communist Albania, under intense pressure of persecution, religious communities were deprived of any personal and material foundations.

Today's Societal Conditions of Religion

The situation of religion in society changed dramatically during the transition in Albania after 1990. In December 1990, the ban on practicing a religion or belief was lifted. The year 1991 was marked by the first free elections for the Republic of Albania, which meant a significant step towards democratization. However, the event was followed by instability in the political sphere in the 1990s: The first elections on 31 March 1991 could be won by the post-communist successor party PS (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë), while the second democratic polling just a year later in March 1992 saw the Democratic Party DP (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë), supported by Islamic leaders, as the winner. As a result, dual split in the party system evolved, which, supported by dependent family and patronage networks, influences the development of society until today. The new transitional constitution, which was adopted one month after the first parliamentary elections on April 29, 1991, only included short general statements about religion. Art. 4 confirmed that the state guarantees the fundamental human rights and freedoms as laid down in international documents. Art. 7 firstly defined the basic relationship between religion and politics ('secular state'), and secondly stipulated that 'the state supervises religious freedom and conditions creates for her exercise' (Kuvendi i Shqipërisë 1991).

Poverty, corruption and patronage networks connecting politics, economy, and crime did not only lead to social stagnation under the Democratic Party, but also into an implosion of social and state structures in February / March 1997. During the so-called 'lottery uprising', the state monopoly on guarantying security broke down temporarily, and even the major religious communities were exposed to looting unprotected (Elbasani 2016: 262). The early elections of 1997 brought a change in government, and on October 21, 1998, the Assembly of

the Republic of Albania voted for a new constitution (Kuvendi i Republikës së Shqipërisë 1998) and other laws, which “(...) *reversed the tight connections between politics and Islam that had marked Albania’s initial transition.*” (Elbasani 2016: 263) and increased the observation of the religious sphere by the state.

The new constitution of 1998 contains statements on religion in a number of passages. General references are to be found first in the preamble, within which the text is adopted ‘with faith in God and/or other universal values’ and ‘in the spirit of religious coexistence and tolerance’. Furthermore, the first chapter defines religious coexistence as a basic value of the state (Art. 3) and prohibits political parties from initiating or supporting religious or ethnic hatred with their respective programs or activities (Art. 9). Regulating individual and collective religious freedom, four articles are of importance. First the relationship between state and religion is defined (Art. 10; no official religion, state neutrality, religious equality, mutual independence). Art. 24 guarantees for individual freedom of religion, applies this principle also to collectives, and prohibits the compulsion to participate in a religion. Reference is made to the fact that no one is to be discriminated against on grounds of religion (Art. 18).

Shifting the focus to the anchoring of religious beliefs within the population, an ambivalent attitude of the Albanian people towards religion is to be noted. In a survey conducted in 1998, a majority of citizens (53.7%) considered themselves non-religious (Inglehart et al. 2014, *V182*), while in the same survey they somehow saw themselves almost entirely as belonging to a religious group (70.7% Muslim, 20,4% Christian-Orthodox, 7% Christian-Catholic, 1.8% other; Inglehart et al. 2014, *V179*). Even the last census of 2011 does not provide a more precise information, as it is questioned by several religious communities (OAC 2012). According to the census, the religious structure of the Albanian population is dominated by the ones who attribute themselves to the Sunni branch of Islam (56.7%; Instituti i Statistikave 2012). The second largest group after the Sunni Muslims are the Orthodox Christians, who traditionally accounted for between 20-25% of the population in the 20th century, but in this census in 2011 showed a remarkably low number of 6.75%. Furthermore, Catholic Christianity is represented by about 10% of the population, followers of the Bektashi Order by 2.09%, and other religions combine just over 8%.

The most important religious communities in Albania are the Muslim Community of Albania, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church in Albania, the Catholic Church, the Bektashi Community with its World Headquarters, and the Evangelical Brotherhood. The KMSH as the largest religious organization is organized in 34 muftiates, established seven Islamic schools

and the University of Bedër since 1991. Belonging also to the Muslim spectrum, the Bektashi religious group is a Sufi order originating from Ottoman Empire, until it was banned from Turkey after the abolition of the caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Pasha (1881-1938) in 1925 and established its world centre in Tirana in 1931. The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, traditionally strongly represented in the south and east of the country, has eight church districts, one covering the entire north of the country. The Roman Catholic Church, as the fourth important religious community, was traditionally more active in the north and west of Albania. This also reflects their internal structure of six church districts in the country, where one covers the entire south of the country. The last socially relevant organization presented here is the Evangelical Brotherhood of Albania, an umbrella organization that includes a large number of Christian-Protestant communities in the country. The organization dates back its roots in Albania to the 1870's (VUSH 2018). The relationship between religious communities is generally characterized by harmony; regular meetings at national level, as well as regional forums ensure a respectful approach.

The Republic of Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in September 1991, the constitution of the independent state was implemented in November that year. The country also experienced deep divisions of the party system; not only the common social-democrat – nationalist one, but also between ethnic associations. The text does not give religion a central place, as the preamble highlights the Krushevo Republic (1903), decisions of the Antifascist People's Liberation Assembly of Macedonia (1944/45), and the Referendum of September 8, 1991, as constituting points of reference of the state. The constitution was amended substantially during the 2001 reform process and later on (Töpfer 2016: 331/332). Today's version mentions religion in three central articles. First in Art.9, which declares that a religious belief cannot be ground for discrimination in freedoms and rights of the citizens. Secondly, the freedom to choose the individual confession is guaranteed in Art.19, and thirdly, Art.48 states that 'Members of communities have a right freely to express, foster and develop their identity (...).', and 'The Republic guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all communities.'

The third and last paragraph of Art.19 was subject to reform process in 2001, since it named 'The Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious communities and groups' as being free to build up social organizations in the 1991 version. This was seen by other groups as favouring the MOC, and the 2001 text was opened to the Islamic Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Methodist Church, and the Jewish community, being also named in the paragraph. Furthermore, there are no special mutual agreements by the state

with major religious communities, albeit an extensive 'Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups' was implemented in 2008, naming further restrictions in the field of organized religion in the country. Here, Art.10 limits the activities of new religious communities in the way that 'The name and official marks of each new church (...) shall be distinguished from the names and official marks of the already registered churches, (...).' (KOVZRG 2018a), which depends on interpretation. Additionally, a register for religious organizations is established, where a registration is required for obtaining legal status (Art.9).

The religious structure of the population of North Macedonia is dominated by the ones who attribute themselves to the Orthodox Christianity (64.8%). according to the last census of 2002 (DZS 2002: 334). The second largest group are the Muslims (Sunni), who account for 33.3%, other groups represent 1.9% of the population. Generally, there is a high support for religious identification in quantitative surveys, while in-depth studies of religiousness indicate a high level of indifference among the population (see Črnič and Lesjak 2003: 351). These findings correspond with theoretical considerations of macro-sociology of trends of differentiation/individualization, and indicate a loss of social significance for religion.

The most important religious communities are the Macedonian-Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric (MOC-OA), the Islamic Religious Community in North Macedonia, the Roman-Catholic Church, the Christian-Protestant community of the United Methodist Church, and the Bektashi, which are registered in two independent groups in the country (KOVZRG 2018b). Although there is a large number of local initiatives to foster inter-religious cooperation, a certain scepticism of religious communities towards governmental organized forums is to be noticed today, since they were also used for political purposes in the past.

Findings: Types of Attitudes among Albania's and Macedonia's Religious Leaders

On the basis of considerations of respecting subjectivity and cultural differences, the survey design employed the 'Q' mixed-method technique. Q is a standardized mixed-method procedure used widely in the social sciences in North America, but significantly less in Europe (Zabala 2014:163). It originates from the combination of findings from early survey research in the social sciences, and from experiences of interviewing in the discipline of

psychology (Brown 1993:93–94). By avoiding preconceived frameworks and questions, Stephenson described the method as “*correlating persons instead of tests*” (Stephenson 1935:17). The first objective is not to produce representative results, but rather to explore types of thinking among a specific group of persons (Brown 1993:104/106).

Therefore, the procedure is described (Brown 1993; Zabala 2014) as follows: Firstly, central statements are collected from the target group concerning a certain topic. Secondly, a final selection of statements (‘q-set’) is made from the large pool of recorded information, in accordance with guidelines on content analysis. In this study, 36 central statements made by religious leaders were selected, each printed on an individual card. In the third phase, the interview, this q-set was presented to the respondents, who were asked to sort the phrases according to their preference using a numerical Likert-type scale (range -4 to +4). In total sixty, for each case thirty dignitaries from all major religious communities in Albania and North-Macedonia were interviewed between 2016 and 2019, thereby meeting the number of participants (Müller and Kals 2014:4) required for a q-study. By scoring the statements on the scale, respondents each create a ‘q-sort’, which in the fourth phase are analysed via quantitative methods. The q-sorts are processed using software; after a factor analysis and rotation (Brown 1993:113), it presents types of attitudes and their representative respondents. The fifth and final phase is concerned with labelling the types. In order to provide a coherent description, the characterization should be based also on statements and comments articulated by the highest-loading respondents during the interviews (Brown 1993:123).

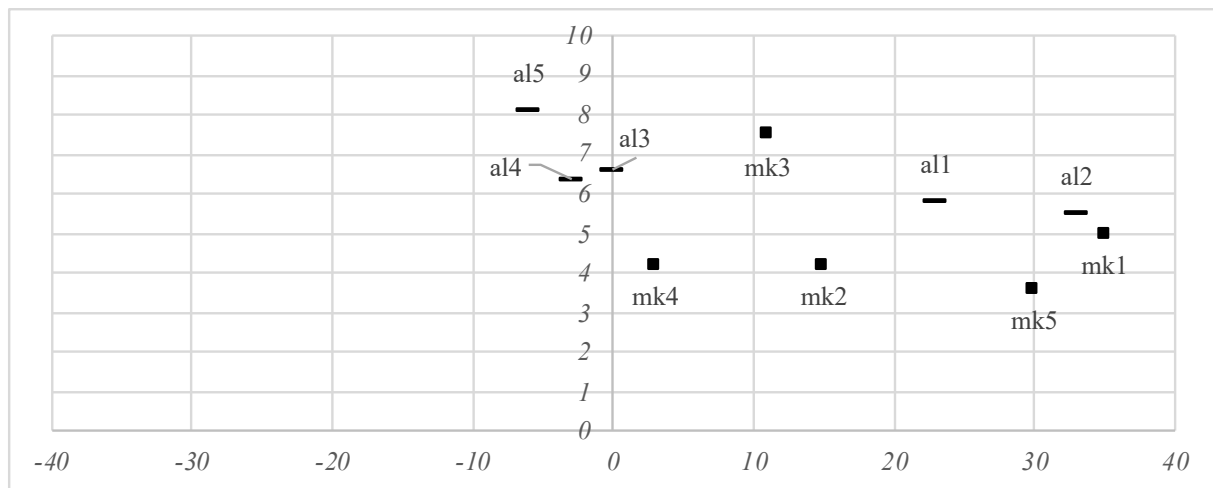
The religious and confessional composition of the participant group reflected the one of the populations of the two countries: In total, 23 Muslim (Sunni), 21 Christian-Orthodox, five Christian-Catholic, four Christian-Protestant, four Bektashi, and three from alternative, minor religious communities were interviewed. The group was composed of 16 high-ranking religious leaders (e.g. mufti, bishop), 17 from medium ranks (‘gate-keepers’ and those engaged in theological education), and 27 low- ranking members (e.g. priest or imam of a commune).

The measurement of the potential for integration and conflict was derived from theoretical considerations on modernization. Since modernization points to societal developments characterized by differentiation and individualization, the rationalization of organizations, the spread of instrumental activism, and a certain but coherent degree of universalization of value-normative systems (Genov 2010:27–36), the statements were classified accordingly: 18 statements each were identified as either adopting/managing or else contradicting/rejecting processes of modernization. From the possible orders of the q-sorts on

the list of preferences, a specific integrational index for the types of attitudes was developed, ranging from -40 to +40 (see Graph 1, x-axis). Furthermore, a politicization-index was developed from the classification of the q-set: 12 statements mainly concerned the relationships between religion and politics or with national politics itself, and 24 had no dominantly political meaning. The intensity of politicization was measured by how strongly participants scored their agreement/disagreement with the 12 political statements. The index was normalized within the range 0 to 10 (see Graph 1; y-axis).

The 60 interviews ('q-sorts') were coded and input to *PQ-method* software, creating five types of attitudes for each country. After the factor analysis and rotation, the results show a high number of respondents for each country, Albania and Macedonia (n=23), that load on one of these five factors, which also explain a wide range of the discourses represented by the set of statements ('explained variance'; AL: 61,3 per cent, MK: 57,3 per cent). The subsequent interpretation of the types of attitudes is limited here to the most integrative (al2, mk1) and disintegrative (al5, mk4) type for each country (see Graph 1). For the following description of types of attitudes, the five most- and least-favoured statements are of particular interest.

Graph 1. Attitudes towards the Societal Order and Potential for Integration



The most integrative type of attitude in a modernizing society for Albania and North Macedonia were the factors (al2) and (mk1), which both emphasize the field of politics on a medium level and are characterized by the strongest agreement with the statement that 'Positive freedom of religion is an individual human right.' (sta_14). Furthermore, the

statement that 'All religious communities should be treated equally by the state.' (sta_2) was preferred, as well as a generally favoured separation of the religious and political spheres in the preferred and rejected statements. Additionally, the statement that 'The followers of my religious community should have knowledge about other religions.' (sta_29) was among the most preferred in both cases. This type of attitude is open to equal positioning, treatment, and entitlements of other religious actors, essentially favouring a pluralistic society. This was emphasised by respondent A30, who belongs to the type of attitude (al2) and stated that "*I see Jesus as non-political, (...) and we know about the political discussions, but these are not ours. Belief is something private, a personal relationship to god.*"

For proponents of this perspective, the characteristics of the background variables are rather heterogeneous for both cases: A variety of religious confessions are represented; also a wide range of age, locations, and status: from lower ranks to the highest-ranking heads of religious communities, and from small villages to the capital. When ranking the statements, the associated reasoning, and participants' personal comments on the topics, both types of attitudes (al2, mk1) can be labelled as the 'pluralistic-oriented dignitary'. For both countries, the most integrative type consists of representatives of the major religious communities.

The most non-integrative types towards modern patterns of society for Albania and North Macedonia are the attitudes (al5) and (mk4), which both are located around the middle spectrum on the dimension of societal conflict-integration (see Graph 1, x-axis). Also in these cases, integrational attitudes are articulated when the five most preferred statements include that religious leaders should not influence politics (sta_13; sta_16), the state should treat religious communities equally (sta_2), and a mutual understanding between religions is welcome (sta_18; sta_29). The non-integrational issues are centred around the perception of functions of religiousness, which, in sharp contrast to the two most integrational types of attitudes, are interpreted as a public issue and a guideline in the design of state legislation (sta_10: 'A family has mother and father, homosexual couples should not be legally equal. '; sta_11: 'The state should have strong leaders.'). Although these can be labelled rather non-integrational, it cannot be observed that the overall answering pattern of the respondents defining the types of attitude have an only tendency towards a potential for societal conflict (see Graph 1). Since the positioning of the statements direct towards a high level of attention towards the fields of politics and an interpretation of functions of religiousness, both groups (al5; mk4) can be labelled as religious types ranking political issues on a high level.

Comparing all types of attitudes among the interviewed religious leaders in Albania and North Macedonia, a great consensus can be observed for the rejection of the statement

that 'The religious community should be the main social focal point of people.' (sta_19), a slight agreement that 'Single-religious education is a basic element of education.' (sta_34), and a high acceptance for the statement that 'It is a crucial requirement to see other faith leaders regularly and create relations cordial.' (sta_25). The most disagreement is about if 'The religious faith of politicians should drive their political decisions.' (sta_9), and if 'Founding a religious community should have the acceptance of the majority of citizens of a state.' (sta_36). Keeping in mind the historical path-dependencies of the religious communities in both countries, this could be interpreted as reflecting the wide range of options and opinions towards the role of religion in modernizing societies of Eastern Europe. Among the statements that gained consensus across all attitudes, the statement 'Positive religious freedom is an individual human right.' (sta_14) gained the greatest support in Albania and North Macedonia. Individual freedom of choice as the basis for authentic religiousness and belonging to a religious group was mentioned by the majority of respondents during the interviews in both countries.

Conclusion

The first major finding from studying attitudes among religious dignitaries in Albania and North Macedonia is that types of attitudes are generated that generally support a modern, pluralist society in various dimensions. This conclusion is fostered first of all by the comparison of the most and least integrative types of attitudes for both countries, by which the first group, according to this measurement, has a high potential for societal integration, and the second group is located around the middle spectrum on the dimension of societal conflict-integration (see Graph 1, x-axis). Secondly, the two most integrational types account for a high share of the positions articulated in the framework of the survey (al1 and al2: 28,4% / mk1 and mk5: 22,9%) than the non-integrational (al4 and al5: 19,6% / no case for North Macedonia). Since the integrational positions of the types of attitudes for both countries prevail in their representation, it can be concluded that a pluralist society is generally accepted and supported.

Secondly and focussing on the political aspects, there is strong support among all factors for a democratic system of governance and a separation of state and religion. This can be explained by the socialist past of the countries, when religion was suppressed or controlled on a high level and which was experienced by most of the religious dignitaries interviewed.

Additionally, the position of a higher level of distance between state and religion is fostered, when a broad consensus on the notable desire to depoliticize religious communities can be identified, which was often emphasized by spontaneous conclusions of the respondents outside the framework of the statements of the q-sort. Here, patterns of closer cooperation between dominant religious communities and political associations after 1991 were mentioned in various interviews as being un-beneficial and rather harmful experiences for the religious sphere as a whole, but especially for the dominant religious communities, as they also lost reputation during the period of transition and democratisation in both countries.

Apart from such attitudinal differences that are rooted in historical legacies, the statements that produced polarized responses relate to highly contemporary issues. The religious field in both countries experienced pluralization during the last 30 years, involving new communities and pre-existing organizations. This may explain the divergent evaluation of the authority of their own communities. Also, the divergent responses to sta_10 ('A family has a father and a mother; homosexual couples should not be legally equal.') can be linked to the current discourse, and reflect the breadth of the debate in Europe. The identified attitudes indicate a classification ranging from a 'pluralistic-oriented' to those supporting greater acknowledgement of religion in other spheres of life, defined as 'political-oriented religious'.

Thirdly, it seems that the formation of religious leaders' attitudes toward their preferred societal structure cannot be derived by analysing solely objective variables. Nor do leaders' religion, religious confession, age, status, or the location of their religious activity account for their adoption of particular attitudes. Viewed within the broader context of research into the societal and political attitudes of religious elites, the key findings from this study are that a politicized religious elite is existing in Albania and North Macedonia, which is further characterized by a generally liberal orientation.

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