

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VARIETY AS A STRATEGIC STAKE OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT

ЕТНОРЕЛИГИОЗНОТО МНОГООБРАЗИЕ КАТО СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИ ЗАЛОГ НА СЪВРЕМЕННОТО РАЗВИТИЕ

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Abstract: *The article discusses the relationship between ethnic and religious differences through the prism of power, hate speech and national identity. The author concludes that ethno-religious variety in Bulgaria continues to be perceived passively, as something given, and not actively, as a resource for nation building. The author outlines certain problems engendered by the predominantly Muslim immigration pressure on Europe.*

KEYWORDS: ETHNICITY, RELIGION, INEQUALITY, ISLAM, POVERTY, MARKET SOCIETY, IDENTITY, DIALOGUE

1. Inequalities and Poverty

With time research is clearly confirming the hypothesis that the attitude towards ethnic and, even more so, religious difference is mediated and defined to a great degree by the problem of power. Concrete cases taken from the Bulgarian political environment prove the high degree of connection and mutual dependence between the forms and intensity of religious separation on one hand and access to power resources on the other. That is why every attempt at taking a partisan approach to the problem or using it for short-term political aims, essentially enhances the feeling of otherness in the Muslims, perceived by them as a situation of inequality, and hence strengthens the internal ties within the community and the search for new grounds of difference from the society at large [Bosakov 2010].

The topic of inequality has customarily been a prevalent one in public interest and is in fact an inevitable part of any economic debate due to its great social importance and also because the attitude towards inequality defines the frameworks of more general ideas on economic development. The existence of inequalities is to some extent understandable in view of the varying degrees of productivity of individuals. The misbalance in income and material status of the population should create incentives for more efforts at work, for striving to obtain a better education, and hence, for improvement of the general productivity of the population. Inequality of wealth and income is an issue that does not inherently involve injustice. The case of the developed economies has proven that the presence of inequality does not block sustainable growth. Some of the highlights:

- There is a very high share of people in risk of poverty or social exclusion: nearly half the population of the country is below the poverty threshold, suffers severe material privations or is incapable of finding a place on the labour market;
- The problem of income inequality occurs with various degrees of severity at regional level; in some regions of Northwest Bulgaria, inequality is far above the average levels for the country;
- The implementation of social policy in Bulgaria does not lead to the desired result with respect to reducing inequality;
- Social mobility in the country is relatively low. Factors such as education and social-economic status continue to be basic for determining the labour realization of people.
- There exists in Bulgaria a new kind of poverty that is not simply an element of the individual's life cycle but is rather a kind of social-economic dependence which has a very strong impact particularly on the Roma, a numerous ethnic minority. A large proportion of these people are excluded from the labour market for long periods of time and gradually drop out of all social spheres, including the economy, education, healthcare services, the cultural and political life of Bulgarian society. Poverty is inherited among the Roma, and ethnic segregation cuts short their possibility for realization and gradual integration within the social structures. Due to the prolonged and all-encompassing social exclusion of this minority and the rigid borderlines established by the ethnic majority, it is not the specific cultural content within the

ethnic boundary but the boundary itself that separates, consolidates and preserves this community.

2. Hostile Speech

Can religions be held under the control of the secular state, and by what means? Is the European secular model threatened and where does the threat come from? What are the enemies of the secular state? Can fanaticism and passionate religiosity be restrained without oppressing religions as such? Does freedom of speech, including its particular form as freedom of hate speech, a threat to the community ties in society and to the health of society? Is a society in which hostile speech generates fear and distrust of others a sick society? These numerous questions are given a variety of sometimes contradictory answers. Still, it is necessary to reflect on the issues.

Many crimes are incited by hatred. In times of economic, social and other crises (including war), it is a frequent practice to manipulate the population into hating the others, those who are different. Hatred is aimed at people who are outsiders or belong to different groups from ours. This is xenophobia. The others, the different, the strangers, are the target of negative qualifications, perceptions and identifications [Dimitrov 2014].

According to the definition of the Council of Europe, hate speech includes all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin [Wikipedia].

“Language is the house of Being”, said the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Speech is a mechanism for production of meaning. In fact, speech produces the meaning of our lives. The world we live in is as meaningful as we make it through the language we use. That is why the media environment is so important. Public speech, which can have a strong influence on society and on the production of the social meaning of our world, carries great responsibility. Freedom of belief provides the freedom to speak publicly, but it is impermissible to offend the dignity of the people about whom one is talking. The opposite of hostile speech is integrating speech. The latter integrates differences into a common community. The opposite of hostile speech is not tolerant speech, which is simply a general norm. Since hostile speech is an active verbal strategy that intends to achieve something, it should be countered by a different active verbal strategy – integrating speech. Tolerance should become an internalized value. Instead, we resort to “hostility as therapy”. When you have a problem you cannot solve, you construct an enemy and lay the blame on him. But this does not solve your problem. This is a kind of therapy that makes the problem insolvable by only increasing it [Discussion, club Obektiv 2013].

Concerning the wave of refugees coming into the country, public statements were made in which the refugees from Syria were described as cannibals, criminals, mass murderers and/or Islamic fundamentalists fleeing justice. A survey conducted for the Association of European Journalists showed that in 8439 online publications, the keywords equated *refugee* with *threat, disease, danger*.

Bulgaria must investigate and prosecute hate crimes in order to put an end to the instigation of fear. The failure of the state to do this fosters fear, discrimination and ultimately violence. Even though legislation that permits legal indictment of hate crimes related to racism and xenophobia does exist in Bulgaria, in the majority of cases the authorities fail to investigate such violations, as pointed out in the Amnesty International Report presented at the BTA National Press Club (09.02.2015). The report also states that, in Bulgaria, victims of hate crimes are not provided access to justice due to the refusal of investigators and prosecutors to identify discriminatory motives in these cases. Usually, such crimes are classified as cases of hooliganism. People subjected to violence do not receive legal support. That is why in most cases the victims refrain from reporting to the police. [Novinite].

3. Ethnicity, Religion, National Identity

The image that the Christian, and later on the West European rationalist, tradition had formed of Islam has been undergoing a many-sided transformation in the last decades. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc, the changes that took place at the geostrategic and political levels transformed in a dramatic way both the *visibility of difference* and the scale on which difference can be assessed and defined. The global scale of the changing visibility of, and attitude to, Islam, and the political dimensions of this change as yet remain insufficiently understood. Even now, the prevailing viewpoint on these facts is limited to declaring various standpoints regarding the strategic orientation of the globalization process. Perhaps that is why difference (which is increasingly becoming synonymous with Islam) is distinctly seeking to side with the opponents of globalism despite the endless variety of ideas, motives, and interests that go into, or are prepared to go into, this doctrine. The processes we designate as globalization tend to provoke resistance, which arises ever more often as an effort on the part of various ethno-cultural and religious traditions to preserve their own identity. In this context, ethnic and religious affiliations become centers of meaning in the striving towards a separate identity in the global debate regarding the quality of human development.

Achieving a national community and building new norms of coexistence under the conditions of ethno-religious variety are becoming a strategic goal of contemporary development. Contemporary civilization faces the need to respond to the critique and resistance of various forms of religious fundamentalism, and especially the critique formulated in the tradition of Islamic fundamentalism.

The problems related to national identity have been far more often described and discussed in the context of nationalist fears of difference than in terms of the effort to overcome the crisis of identity amidst the imposed similarities. Under Bulgarian conditions, ethnic and religious diversity continues to be perceived as an established fact that we must take into account, and not as a resource for nation building. Achieving a national identity should be the result of joint effort. The first and most difficult part of this effort is to recognize that this common meaning exists in a diversity of forms. The coming years will be marked by a search for new grounds of one's own identity, a search for the spaces that define parts of ourselves. The great challenge facing Bulgaria is to rediscover the values and meaning of the national community. Only thus will our genuine, full presence in Europe become a fact.

A culture that is different but shared, most often serves as a "marker" of the individual and group uniqueness that lies at the basis of ethnic identity. Of defining importance is the presence of a dynamic system of ethno-differentiating factors united into an integral whole by collective memory. These factors may acquire different significance and be restructured depending on the concrete social conditions determining the process of ethnic identification. The greater the number of these specific characteristics that the members of the community define as such, the more distinctly expressed and strong is the ethnic identity, and the greater are its chances of surviving and developing in the future.

The triple structuring of "production" of ethnic identity in terms of the coordinate system of space, functions and inequalities determines the similar structure (at the historical-logical level) of the knowledge of ethnicity, while the identity, continuity and consistency, as basic qualitative characteristics of identity, are infringed under conditions of a social conflict that devalues the meaningful whole of the ethnic life world.

Security is a necessary condition for dialogue between cultures. Without this condition, cultures would have little chance of opening to each other and engaging in talks that may enrich them and enlarge the universal element in their coexistence. Past and present experience has shown that the ethnic concept of nation and its related ethnic nationalism may have disastrous consequences for a society; they may lead to intense conflict and opposition. That is why the concept of political nation should obviously be adopted, in which every citizen has equal rights and is not discriminated in any way in society [Bauman 2003].

4. Islam: The European Scale of the Problem Situation

In most cases, the abstract representation of the dimensions of Muslim presence in the present-day multi-dimensional and complex modern societies remains inaccessible to public opinion, which orients and shapes its attitudes primarily with reference to concrete examples of incompatibility, or conflictive toleration, generated by concrete demands, which are justified on the basis of religious affiliation but, at the same time, represent a specific type of social expression that puts in doubt the secular character of institutions. Islam is a structural element of world identity. Just as a Muslim cannot profess some other religion concurrently with Islam, neither can he simultaneously be a Muslim and a nationalist. There is no place for national feeling in Islam. This is a matter of identity – Islamic identity rejects every other kind.

The immigration pressure that is exercised on Europe – the prevalent component of immigration being Islamic – generates problems in the social sphere, in education, interreligious relations and security. The trends related to the increasing numbers of immigrants are the following:

- ❖ Inability to integrate into Western societies and ghettoization of those who are "different";
- ❖ The formation of separate societies in parallel with the main ones and a growing number of so-called "sensitive zones";
- ❖ The decreasing attractiveness of the so-called multi-cultural model;
- ❖ Radicalization of Muslims;

One of the major problems related to research on Islam continues to be the degree of legitimacy of its representatives and the measure of shared meanings and symbols interpreted in a communication context. The question is: who is actually speaking on behalf of Islam – in Europe, throughout the world, and in our country? How valid is the exchange of thoughts and the mutual understanding in the space of public debate? Is there a double perspective, a

specific communication strategy of the Muslim community, which may be sending out certain messages outside and different messages inwardly, to the brothers and sisters in the community? Could this double meaning be part of the reason for the lack of mutual understanding, or does the reason lie mostly in the various dimensions of the phenomenon that we traditionally define as a crisis of identity?

Part of the images of present-day Islam are formed not in the framework of the House of Islam, but in places where the religious community is forced to coexist with others. The transformation of the representations regarding the so-called European Islam can be identified in Bulgarian reality. The willingness to accept and obey certain rules of behaviour typical for fundamentalism grows according to the variety of the immediate social environment. In fact, the spaces of fundamental interpretation of the religious canon are formed not where the traditional Muslim community exists and develops, but at the borderline of its active contacts with other cultural and religious models.

In Europe, the Other is primarily the Muslim. The latter is most often an immigrant, whose social position is defined almost entirely by his/her limited access to resources. The Muslim is viewed as part of the risks involved in the modern European way of life and security. But the moral defect of the modern society is greed – a greed that allows market values to penetrate the lifeworld of people that has traditionally been guided by nonmarket norms. As a result of this expansion, social relationships come to be shaped in the image of the market. The trends dictated by our times are manifest in a great variety of areas: in consumption, technological standards, mass popular culture, youth subcultures and counter-cultures, the media and advertising, and even in elite forms of art, science and philosophy. But they all have one thing in common: directly or indirectly, these trends stem from the advance of the all-powerful global market. In recent decades the financial levers and formalized vocabulary of the market have been imposed as a kind of social algebra in widely different areas of life: the neo-liberal mantras such as efficiency, accountability, strategic planning, the project principle, optimized use of resources, maximized profit, etc., have colonized spheres of life that are quite remote from the economy, including education, healthcare, creativity, innovation, knowledge, the art market, and have oriented these spheres to results that are “immediately measurable” in an economic and managerial perspective. But is this neo-liberal religion not turning democracy, the liberal ideals, the freedom of the individual, the arts, the quality of life, etc., from values in themselves, into conditions, “dependent variables”, that are important only insofar as they influence economic development?

The difference between market economy and market society is this: a market economy is a means – a valuable and important means – for organizing our productive capacity. The market society, to the contrary, is a way of life where market values permeate all aspects of human striving and effort. It is a place where social relations are molded in the image of the market. The only escape from this apocalyptic situation lies in the transformation of modern democracy by means of civic control, prevention and indictment, which might put a stop to the escalating loss of legitimacy of the procedures of representative democracy and of the figures of the politician, the scientist, the expert and the judge. In this precise aspect, the fourth wave of the European Values Study [Bosakov 2009] can serve to orient us to a deeper and more subtle understanding of the importance of religious morality and of the answers it provides in the face of the daily challenges of secular life. Of determining importance for the problems we are concerned with here is the general correspondence between shared moral principles and the degree to which religiousness and religious morality serve in structuring certain value attitudes among Muslims. The comparison between the results obtained for Eastern Orthodox Christians and for

Muslims show different profiles for the two groups as regards the strict obedience to moral principles. The greatest share of Christians is that of respondents who indicated they have a relativistic perspective on morals, so that the qualification of good and evil entirely depends on the circumstances. This view is least supported by Muslim respondents. Among them, the largest percentage indicated they judged good and evil categorically. It is in the context of this general moral perspective that the respondents' attitude to the other religion and the correctness of their own religion can be inscribed. What serves as a basis for religious tolerance here is, to a far greater degree, the view that there are clear criteria of good and evil, combined with an understanding that specific circumstances can lead to deviations from these moral norms. In the context of the growing importance of Islamic religious morality and the relatively low degree of Muslims' civic participation, it may be presumed Muslims would give greater attention to the religious education of their children. The findings show that among the younger generations of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria there is now a more active and meaningful relation to religious practice and a clearer willingness to follow its rules. . The study of Islam and its active preaching are becoming the norm for a righteous life, a norm that must be shared with the others. Through knowledge of the principles of the faith and understanding the rules and restrictions imposed on the faithful, Muslims here begin to build a new Islamic culture that, as in other European countries, is based on active maintenance of differences and consolidation of the community's notions that Islam is the correct religion. The present-day forms of religious mobilization in the Muslim community are significantly different, especially as regards the willingness to strictly obey canonic requirements and preach the values of Islam through them. The achievement of a dynamic equilibrium between religious morality and social changes will continue to be a fundamental issue, with reference to which all other research perspectives can find a place [Bosakov 2015].

Instead of a conclusion

The religious world of the Other provokes us to rethink the foundations of our own faith. In view of the fundamental difference of the unfamiliar faith with respect to our own, we cannot but problematize the justification of our own religiousness. Sociological studies of religious relationships in our country point to the significance of power as a decisive factor of the registered stereotypes and levels of tolerance in society. The capacity of preserving and transmitting values has become a basic argument in the multi-dimensional debate between the religious and the secular grounds for constructing a community identity.

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