

ЦЕНТАР ЗА ПРОУЧАВАЊЕ РЕЛИГИЈЕ  
И ВЕРСКУ ТОЛЕРАНЦИЈУ  
Београд



CENTER FOR STUDY OF RELIGION  
AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE  
Belgrade



# Politology of religion

A BIENNIAL  
CONFERENCE 2018

Conference proceedings

Edited by

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Center for Study of Religion and Religious Tolerance  
University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Sciences

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**Miroljub Jevtić and Marko Veković**

**POLITOLOGY OF RELIGION:  
A BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2018  
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

Conference proceedings from an international conference  
“Politology of Religion: A Biennial Conference 2018”  
(November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018, Belgrade)

Belgrade, 2019

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**POLITOLOGY OF RELIGION: A BIENNIAL CONFERENCE 2018  
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

*Издавачи:*

Центар за проучавање религије и верску толеранцију  
Факултет политичких наука Универзитета у Београду

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*Прелом и штампана:*

Instant System

*Тираж:*

100 примерака

ISBN: 978-86-6425-057-3

Publishing of this conference proceedings has been supported by the project „Civil Society and Religion“  
(Grant no. 179008), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of  
Republic of Serbia

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UDC 2:37.014.523(497.7)

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## **ATTITUDES OF THE POLITICAL ELITE ABOUT INTRODUCING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN R. MACEDONIA**

### **Abstract**

According to religious representatives, religious education can only help improve the moral situation in Macedonian society. It can fill the moral vacuum that has opened up in the so-called transitional period due to the rejection of socialist moral values and the slow establishment of civic ones. Thus it can alleviate the moral panic that has spread among the population. This thesis received support from representatives of the political elite, and all this resulted in a "political agreement" between the religious representatives and the representatives of the state. The question about religious education is no longer whether it will be introduced, but in what form, for whom, and when. Starting from the multi-dimensional nature of this problem, we have carried out a study based on a qualitative methodological approach. We conducted 50 interviews with representatives of relevant Macedonian and Albanian political parties in the Republic of Macedonia. Uncontrolled religious education, especially in the mosques, can lead to unspeakable consequences for the state. What we have in mind is forms of fundamentalism and the possibilities that teachers might be members of foreign, anti-state organizations.

**Keywords:** religion; religious education; moral panic; moral vacuum; political elite

### **Introduction**

Religious education was implemented in public schools in the academic year 2001/2002. The subject was named catechism. It was non-obligatory, and there

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was no evaluation (grading) of pupils. It was confessional: The curriculum was directly connected to the basic theological categories of either Orthodoxy or Islam, the two leading confessions in Macedonia, and the teachers were priests from the two biggest religious organizations in the country: the Macedonian Orthodox Church and from the Islam Religious Community. The child only studied their own religion—Macedonian pupils studied Orthodox Christianity, while Albanian pupils studied Islam. None of them learned the basic principles of other world religions (Catholic Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.). The content of the curriculum was strictly dogmatic theology. The subject was one-dimensional, in that of the four disciplines that deal with the social phenomenon of religion (history of religion, sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, and theology), only the discipline of theology was studied. The target group were primary-school pupils from the third and fourth grade (nine- to ten-year-olds) and the seventh and eighth grade (13- to 14-year-olds).

Because of the large number of mistakes that were made, mistakes of a social, pedagogical, and cultural nature, the subject was terminated after one year of existence in 2003. These mistakes may be summarized by the following points:

1. No change was made to the Law on primary and secondary education or to the Law on religious communities and religious groups. Therefore, the Constitutional Court terminated religious education in accordance with Articles 7 and 13 of the education law, which makes it clear that religious education may be organized exclusively on religious premises (such as churches and mosques), outside of the public education system.<sup>3</sup>

2. Before the subject was introduced, there was no public debate and consultation that would allow all those concerned with the subject—social scientists, teachers, pupils, parents, politicians, and members of religious organizations—to contribute their views on how it should be implemented.

3. Perhaps most importantly, the pupils were segregated by national and religious identification. This of course does not improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. For that reason, this implementation of the subject was rejected by members of the international community. (This observation is based on the interviews given to the media by the officials of the international community).

4. No study was made to determine the most appropriate age group for this kind of education.

5. Most sectors of modern Macedonian society did not approve of the entry of religious representatives into public schools.

As a result of these problems, the question of religious education was shelved for a long time. Recently, however, it has been reopened.<sup>4</sup> In 2008 the

<sup>3</sup> The decision was made on 5.11.2003 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No. 73/2003)

<sup>4</sup> Matevski Zoran, Aziri Etem, Velickovski Goce, *Introducing Religious Education in Macedonia*, In: *Religion and Pluralism in Education*, Kuburic Zorica & Moe Christian, Kotor Network, Oslo, 2006, pp. 139-160.

Ministry for education and science decided to introduce 2 new subjects from the field of religious education. One of them is "Ethics in religion" that was to be taught in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The subject "Ethics in religion" is an optional subject that students can choose with 2 weekly classes. Students that choose to study this subject in accordance with their parents are able to gain knowledge of the ethics that is based on Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism and the Evangelical-Methodist teaching; to develop their capabilities of moral values; and are encouraged to respect the humane relations between people. Subjects from ethics as a science of the good and moral are covered in the first part of this subjects' curriculum. The second part gives an overview of the common principles of religious teachings (orthodox Christian teaching, Islam Judaism, Catholicism and Evangelical-Methodist teachings). The third part gives students the opportunity to study the ethics of their choice of one of the most widespread religions in R. Macedonia (ethics of the orthodox Christian teachings, the ethics of Islam, the ethics of Judaism, the ethics of Catholicism and the ethics of the Evangelical—Methodist teachings).<sup>5</sup>

The second subject is "Meeting the religions" which was also to be taught in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>6</sup> The subject is an optional subject with 2 weekly classes. Students can choose the subject in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade (as an introductory study) and they can choose to continue with it in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (advanced study). This subject gives students the ability to learn the values of the various world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as the nature of religion, with its beginnings and its meaning for society.<sup>7</sup>

A basic characteristic of these two subjects is that they have a scientific/world character as opposed to a theological one. These subjects are taught by bachelors of sociology and philosophy. They also have a multi-confessional character, because multiple religions are studied, and not just Christianity or Islam, which is a characteristic of religious science of a mono-confessional character. The religions organizations of R. Macedonia are not happy with this solution, especially the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric. Because of this the religious elite is pressuring the political elite to bring back religious science in the primary schools of R. Macedonia.

These are the essential dilemmas that our present political elite in R. Macedonia faces. If we do not want to break the principle of secularization then we need to implement the study of religion in social studies such as Sociology, Philosophy, History, Ethics etc., as an important part of a well-rounded education. Fair and balanced study of religion includes critical thinking about historical events involving religious traditions. Religious beliefs have been at the heart of some of the best and some of the worst developments in human history. Every

5 Curriculum of the subject "Ethics in Religion"

6 Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia No. 51/07

7 Curriculum of the subject "Meeting the religions".

other approach leads to the demolition of the principle of separation between Church and State especially in the field of public education. This is the key problem that the present political elite is faced with, and the crucial question is asked if they want to implement scripture study in public schools.

### **Results of the survey**

In the next part of the paper, we will explain the attitudes of the members of the political elite towards all of the above-mentioned questions and dilemmas. We will do this by a qualitative methodological approach (deep interview) with the representatives of the majority coalition in the Macedonian parliament. In order to achieve the aims of this research we carried out interviews with 50 individuals (in 2018) from the Macedonian (SDSM, VMRO) and Albanian (DUI, BESA) political parties, which have the greatest number of Parliament members.

Below we will explain the attitude of the political elite regarding introducing religious education in state schools.

1. *Do you agree that scripture study should be a part of public education? If yes, give a detailed explanation why.*

The interviewed representatives from Macedonian political parties (MPP) all agree that the law on introducing scripture study in public schools will be adopted. There is complete consensus regarding this issue. Discrepancies, that are insignificant, do occur on the point why this law is necessary. Certain answers refer to the fact that this law is a part of the platform of the political party, as one of the priorities which are to be adopted during the first quarter of the new government rule. But, there is some doubt whether it would be possible for this law to be ready for its implementation so soon. The rest of the answers are based on the attitude that adopting this law would increase the quality of education and would offer to youth knowledge that they can use, no matter whether they'll continue to study religious sciences in the church schools or not.

Albanian political parties (APP), differently from MPP, still do not define how scripture study should work in practice. However, they agree that it should be introduced in primary and secondary schools. When and how this law should be applied seems to be yet undecided within the party. They seem to be waiting for the Macedonian Political Parties to express their attitude fully first before following it.

2. *Students in primary schools, instead of studying the Holy Scripture itself, are studying subjects such as "Ethics in Religion" and "Meeting the Religions". Is that a good approach?*

MPP examinees firmly defend the attitude that they'll continue with scripture study as a separate subject, outside of these two. So, there isn't vital or con-

tent problem for the philosophers or sociologist to teach the subject. The one and only problem would be of qualitative nature. According to them the clergy has the highest qualifications about this issue. As a conclusion we would say that most of the examinees don't consider that current approach is wrong on the point of its content, but on the point of quality. Introducing scripture lesson in the way it is scheduled by MPP would contribute to the incensement of the quality of state education system.

The interviewed representatives of the Albanian Political Parties have a positive attitude towards the introduction of scripture study in public education, but our interview, showed that their idea of scripture study does not have too much in common with the way it was implemented by the previous government. In their opinion, each ethnic and religious community has the right to learn the elements of its own culture. How this process will be realized will depend on the professional approach of those who teach the subject. But, regarding this issue, the European Union could have an important role. As member states of the European Union utilize this approach to teaching religious sciences, by adopting it, they would bring the state's values closer to those of the European Union.

3. *What are, in your opinion the basic reasons for introducing scripture study as a part of public education?*

MPP – As in the previous question, the examinees agree that it is necessary to introduce scripture study in public schools. The examinees' answers are almost identical and they differ only according to their quality, not content. They are completely sure that scripture study and a sacral approach to religious education are better and safer than a scientific approach. They defend their views by stating that religion is an extremely delicate issue, and only clergy members are well educated enough on the topic to be able to teach the students properly. Meaning, their ideal implementation of scripture study in public education is similar to the way it was implemented by the previous government.

APP – Here, religious and political interests cross. The interviewed individuals consider that under the previous government's influence, Islamic Religious Community (IRC) didn't accomplish its activities in a democratic and institutional manner. It tolerated sects (for example Wahhabism), which distorted the basic Islamic dogmatic principles. With introducing scripture study, students would be protected from the distorted principles of these sects, and only be taught the principles of Orthodox Islam.

4. *How would you explain the strong connection between the political and religious elite in the Republic of Macedonia?*

MPP – Regarding this question there is complete consensus among the in-

interviewed individuals. The only, minimal, differences are about the reasons for that closeness. The most frequent explanation is based on the historical closeness between the Macedonian Orthodox Church–Ohrid Archbishopric and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) as a political organization that had existed long before 1991 (the independence of Macedonia). That's explained with the almost identical attitudes of the church and both the historic VMRO and its modern successor, the political party VMRO-DPMNE related to the state's vital interests. Also, they emphasize the fact that the platform of all right-oriented parties in the world (including VMRO) is based on Demo-Christian principles, which further explains the strong connection. It is important to stress that none of the interviewed individuals from the Macedonian Political Parties commented on the relationship between the Albanian Political Parties and the Islamic Religious Community.

APP –There is a widespread public opinion that the Albanian Political Parties and the IRC have a strong connection. It is very explicit in the answers of the interviewed APP representatives. In front of the media representatives of both the Albanian Political Parties and the Islamic Religious Community state that they are working towards stamping out religious extremists from the IRC. However, the closeness of this relationship has largely declined as the IRC has become more and more decentralized.

5. *Is this close relationship a reason why the current political elite wants to satisfy the religious elite by introducing scripture lessons?*

MPP - The answers on this question, as well as on the previous one, are almost identical – no. Again, they insist on historical relations between VMRO, as a political organization, and the Macedonian Orthodox Church –Ohrid Archbishopric. Especially referring to the period of Ottoman rule when the activities of both organizations focused on protecting Christians from Islamization. As well as the simple fact that the attitudes of both organizations almost completely coincide regarding many issues of national interest. However the introduction of scripture study would not only satisfy the interests of the religious elite, but also a large part of the believers'. The representatives of the Macedonian political parties claim that the introduction of scripture study would be in a way following the voice of the people. It means that adoption of the law would satisfy state interests of separation of church and state. This interest is shared by the church.

APP – According to the answers we can conclude that members of the Albanian Political Parties and the IRC have similar, almost equal interests and attitudes. But, they are afraid that the opposition party and the abovementioned extremist Islamic sects would try to prevent the implementation of this, extremely sensitive subject. The IRC asks for support from the Albanian political parties regarding the problem of denationalization of IRC property, because there are many

Islamic objects that are announced to be cultural inheritance and are protected with law, but they are nonetheless demolished for the purpose of building apartment complexes in their place.

6. *Scripture study exists in the church schools and in the maktab (where it is excellently organized by the IRC). Why, in your opinion, is it necessary to introduce it, in the state schools as well?*

MPP – Out of all the questions, with this one we had the most difficulties because most answers (if there was an answer, because most of them were: I don't know or no comment) were empty and unclear. However, we singled out an explanation that is at least understandable. The intention of the political elite is to make religion and faith in their source and pure meaning closer to the youth. Also, to acquire basic knowledge about the concepts of the personal confession, so that they can use that knowledge in case they are interested to continue their education in the church school and maktab. Simultaneously the goal is for the young students to understand that theological education would not be a reason for religious intolerance, but on the contrary, a reason for religious tolerance.

APP - Most of the examinees think that with the introduction of scripture study in public schools, they would have insight and control on the program and contents that would be presented to the students. That was not possible in maktab because the Muslim priests choose the topics, as well as the values that they would present to the students, by themselves. With firmly established syllabus, high quality and highly educated staff, young people will acquire essential knowledge about moral norms and values and it will satisfy the ethical function of the religion.

7. *Does it mean that by this, the present political elite wants to persuade the worshippers, who represent an important part of the electoral body?*

MPP – This is the only question where there are no differences at all since everyone we have interviewed believes that it is inappropriate to discuss any type of persuading now, when the elections have just finished and there is really no need of political marketing. On the contrary, this can be answered by the fact that introducing scripture study was one of the priorities in the party's political program which has obviously been well accepted by the wide population in R. Macedonia, no matter whether we talk about worshippers (for whom we undoubtedly think they consider the greater part of the Macedonians in the country) or about the rest of the citizens who do not belong to this category. So, the answer to this question is no. There is really no need of any kind of persuasion regarding this question.

The respondents from the Albanian Political Parties consider that with this

decision APP persuades the worshippers from the Islamic confession directly, since this law was not integrated into the political program of the party itself. The respondents believe that in that respect, it looks as APP follows MPP. According to them, the leading and directing role SDSM has in the government in relation to the other political parties that are part of the great political coalition is very obvious. Part of the respondents underlined the fact that IRC, as the highest representative of the Islamic worshippers is so political and profaned, that in certain moments it does not act only from the position of a religious organization but from the position of its own political subject.

8. *Do you think that introducing scripture studies would not escalate into further division between the students based on their ethnic and confessional affiliation, especially in the ethnically mixed primary and secondary schools?*

MPP – One more question on which the respondents were more or less unanimous concerning the answer and that is no. It is said that while implementing scripture studies in the primary and secondary schools, great attention would be paid that the students in mixed schools, where there is a need of parallel teaching of the orthodox and the Islamic dogma alike, acquire quality theological knowledge. With that, scripture study itself becomes a bridge for getting the students closer and not a reason for their further division due to ethnic and confessional affiliation. However, the problem is that besides stating that the subject should be confessional, none of the respondents offered an alternative solution, in case the introduction of the subject from a purely theological character fails to live up the expectations (be widely accepted) and in case it is chosen by a small number of students (as it is an optional subject).

According to the representatives of APP, the communities that are inhabited by people of different ethnic and confessional affiliations show a state of peace and tolerance. This is especially obvious when seeing the way they respect each other's religious holidays. The answer to this question is no. A problem may occur in the ethnically pure communities, areas where the ethnical and confessional population is homogenized. The theologians could give a distorted perspective of the other religion, which could bring to intolerance and hatred towards the "other". The students should first study about the mutual values that support mutual life in the multi-confessional and multiethnic society. The respondents from APP emphasized that scripture studies should be introduced not to experiment with the youth, because that could lead to great negative consequences. It is especially important that the curriculum is made by experts and the state itself controls its practical realization since it is a great responsibility for those who would be chosen to prepare the curriculum for this subject.

9. *In case scripture studies are introduced, one of the basic secularists' principles*

would be overturned: separation of the church from the state. What is your attitude towards this question?

MPP – This is one of the questions the respondents found difficult to answer. Once again we are looking for alternative solutions in order not to overturn one of the basic secularists' principles and that is: separate the church from the state. The most common answers were of the type that we should not see this principle so rigorously since it would not be overturned in reality because this is a solution with a primarily educational character. The attitudes of the other respondents were also similar, again without a specific answer how to implement it in practice while ministers of religion are entering schools and are in direct contact with the students. The only excuse they find is in the fact that the subject itself and the way it is going to be introduced have not been finally designed yet and these details are being worked on very hard so that all the inconsistencies of such nature are eliminated.

APP – According to them the secularists' principles should not be overturned. However, it would be good, that the political parties have greater influence, especially in the sphere of education. This is based on the fact that within some religious schools, certain teachings and religious practice that are opposite to the Islamic basic principles have occurred. The present political elite has an intolerant attitude towards the Islamic fundamentalists and extremists in order to strengthen the position of the IRC in Macedonia. By introducing scripture study into the public schools the same would be under the state's wing (Ministry of Education and Sciences) and would be under its total control. However, according to them, Republic of Macedonia would not become a shariatic (theocratic) country because the educational sphere is only one segment of the social life.

10. How will MPP and APP deal with this question in case they support the idea of introducing scripture studies?

MPP – Identically with the previous question, they justify it with the necessity of introducing such a subject into the public schools. And once again they refer to the fact that amongst the priority tasks of the party's program is the task of introducing scripture lesson into the public education. They also emphasize the fact that the majority of the citizens supported them and their program. That speaks for itself and there is no need to justify this attitude in front of the citizens. But again without a real answer to the question of whether the part of the Constitution concerning education will be changed, in case the subject scripture study is introduced like this. The only answer that could be received is that it should be approached very carefully with introducing this subject and that it would not come into force until all the eventual anomalies are eliminated.

APP – The interviewed people are united in the attitude that in case the basic



secularists' principles are endangered, the problem can be settled by "inserting" sociologists and philosophers who would teach the subject after undergoing education by the IRC. Besides, they think that teachers from the secular universities should be included in making the syllabus, especially concerning the ethnic function of the religion.

11. *According to you, should this subject (scripture study) be obligatory or optional?*

MPP – It was very interesting and unexpectedly, there were many differences in the consideration whether scripture studies should be introduced as an obligatory or as an optional subject. The ones who believe it should remain optional justify their opinion by saying that faith and religion should not be imposed – it has to remain a right of choice; while the others state that if the lectures are from an ethical aspect, and the students are introduced to the basic concepts of scripture studies, it is for the benefit for all students that they are present for these lectures.

APP – There are different opinions regarding this question. The number of those who think that this subject should be obligatory is smaller. They justify their opinion with the fact that according to them all the children should visit scripture studies, no matter whether they are believers or not, in order to acquire basic theological knowledge which will help them to grow into positive moral persons. Starting from this, they believe that in order to achieve its effects, the knowledge in this subject should be evaluated. Nevertheless, most of the respondents think that scripture study should be an optional subject, stating that they can learn about the basic moral principles from other subjects, too. In fact, the whole educational system has integrated in itself the upbringing-ethical component that is added to the educational.

12. *The representatives of the MOC-OA and IRC insist on religious education taught strictly by priests. What do you think about that?*

MPP – Having in mind the close relationship between the MPP and MOC-OA the affirmative answer to this question is not surprising at all. The justification of this attitude is very simple. According to them it is completely logical that scripture studies should be taught by those who have studied it themselves. And again, there would be no problem if this is done by philosophers and sociologists but the teaching would be the safest with the ministers of religion.

APP – This comes out of two moments. The first one is that, on the one hand, there is a strong connection between APP and IRC. The representatives of the political elite have promised the religious elite that this subject will be taught by priests. On the other hand, they emphasize the socio-economic effect by helping

the graduated Islamic theologians find a place of employment. This is according to them especially important from the aspect of employing Islamic women who would teach scripture studies in the primary schools.

13. *If the Macedonian students only study Orthodox dogmas, while the Albanian students only study Islamic teachings, how is the current political elite going to solve the problem with religious tolerance?*

MPP – The answer to this question can be concluded through a careful analysis of the statements that the interviewed persons gave. They insist that the young people would become more open and without prejudice towards their peers through becoming acquainted with their religion and accepting the ethic elements and rules of behavior. After receiving this knowledge they will realize that the religion by itself is not and can not be a reason for any kind of conflicts between them. But again, as with many other questions, without an alternative answer: what if a contra-effect is accomplished? According to them, there is no chance of such a thing since; on the one hand, the law will be worked out and on the other hand, because both parties (MPP-APP) have agreed on the necessity of it.

The representatives of the APP are united in their attitude that learning about the basic principles of one's own religion, at the same time they will understand the religion of the others (especially the Christians). They support this with the fact that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have the same "source". In the Koran, not only are the teachings of Mohamed as a herald of Islam represented, but also the teachings of Jesus Christ, Moses and other prophets. Since the Koran has its own historical order where the teachings of all the important prophets are explained, the Albanian students will learn the basic principles not only of the Islam but of all the other religions. That is why not only will religious tolerance not be endangered but on the contrary, through learning about Islam, the children will learn about the multicultural and multi-religious principles. With that, the cultures in the region will get richer and the sense of religious coexistence will develop.

14. *Do you think that the students should only learn about their own religion or about the religion of others as well?*

MPP – Regarding this question, we got identical answers to the ones we received for the previous question. Concerning the Christian or Islamic priests entering the classes, they do not see any problem, since at that age; the students already have an idea about their work and importance. Although the chance that the students attend lectures for both religions at the same time are minimal, in case this does happen, after a short period of adaptation, it will become a normal part of education. According to what was said so far, we can undoubtedly

conclude that the most possible variant is - the Christian students will study their own religion and the Muslim students will study their own.

APP – According to the interviewed persons, although the Islam clergymen are competent enough to teach about other religions (not only about Islam), it would be nice if for certain topics in this subject, orthodox and catholic clergymen have lectures, because of the multicultural character of the Macedonian country. In any case, the attitude that students should learn about other religions as well as their own religion, is shared above all because of easier mutual communication, socializing and cooperation. Through this, the basic principles of citizen coexistence are learnt.

### **Conclusion**

Generally, there are no essential differences between the attitudes of the representatives of the Macedonian and the Albanian political parties. Both of them are based on the opinion that introducing religious education in public schools would give satisfactory results and would achieve the wanted effect, especially in improving moral norms and values. That would lead to a decrease in the percentage of deviant occurrences among the youth. Furthermore, the students would become acquainted with the religious principles that surround them.

However, religious education should be carried out on a purely confessional principle (Orthodox and Islam dogmatism). The subject should be mono-confessional (either Christianity or Islam) stressing the historical development of the religion and its ethical character. Interviewed individuals support this attitude with the following arguments:

- This is clearly stated in the platform of the government of the Republic of Macedonia.
- Introducing scripture studies in the public schools precisely stated in the platform of VMRO-DPMNE as the second largest political party in R. Macedonia.
- It is insisted that scripture studies be taught by the clergymen, as people who are the most competent regarding this topic.
- Introducing scripture studies in public schools would prevent the extremist Islamic sects from influencing students, whose teachings are not in accordance with the religious practices and theological postulates of Orthodox Islam.
- Even though the Albanian Political Parties do not have a clearly defined opinion about this issue as a part of their platform, generally the attitude of the Macedonian political parties is accepted.

As a general conclusion we could emphasize the fact that an informal agreement exists between the religious and political elite regarding the introduction of religious education in primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia. The Mace-

donian political parties (especially VMRO-DPMNE) are becoming more and more interested in this, under the pressure of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This is due to the fact that Christian scripture studies are have a very low attendance by Macedonian children. Because of this, the church insists on it being moved from the churches to the schools. The Macedonian Orthodox church's argument that there is a need for such a subject in schools is passed on the fall of the moral norms and values in contemporary Macedonian society, which in many ways has the characteristics of anomie. The Macedonian political parties are aware of the fact that believers make up a large part of the electoral body and that without their votes it is practically to gain both parliamentary and presidential elections.

On the other hand, Albanian political parties don't seem to express a large interest in this matter. This is due to the excellently organized scripture studies in the mosques which is attended by the majority of Albanian children. They, even before starting to go to school, attend scripture study because of their parents' insistence. They continue to attend scripture study up until they finish primary school, while some of the even continue after that. Despite this, it goes without saying that the Albanian political parties have nothing against the introduction of scripture study in primary schools. With this they wish to aid the Islamic Religious Community to protect itself from the penetration of the radical fundamentalist priests in their ranks.

What is most important for the political elite in R. Macedonia is finding the best way to introduce scripture study, especially when it comes to legislation. Especially if we keep in mind the fact that scripture study was deemed unconstitutional in 2003 by the constitutional court. Given that secular principles in R. Macedonia are more myth than reality, the political elite have no problem regarding this. Especially if we consider the fact that the biggest majority of European states have scripture studies as a part of their public education. The political elite has to keep in mind the leading principles of teaching religion given by OSCE and ODIHR. They state that knowing religion and the different religious beliefs strengthens religious rights and freedoms and creates a democratic society wherein religious and cultural differences are accepted. Consequently, scripture studies positioned and organized in the right way in public schools can strengthen multiculturalism and promote one society for all.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> OSCE & ODIHR, Toledo: Vodeća načela o podučavanju o religijama i vjerovanjima u državnim školama, Ured za demokratske institucije i ljudska prava, Varšava, 2007, pp. 72-75.

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