

Role of Religion in the Western Balkans' Societies.

A greeting from Pastor Ylli H.Doci PhD, President of the Evangelical Alliance of Albania
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None of us would like for the predictions of Samuel Huntington to come true with regard to the “clash of civilizations” along religious lines because we would prefer peace and harmonious social relationships between all religions on earth, but we need to be honest in understanding the reality in which we live and thus welcome any controversial ideas to be respectfully discussed and tested rigorously for their truthfulness.

Politicians have a different role from the scholars and sociologists so they can afford to spin facts and spread interpretations in different visionary directions while serious students of society need to be brave to look at reality on the face and expose its underlying truths without fear of any consequences. I highlight this need for academic bravery because today there is a tendency towards self-censorship in order not to offend anybody in the age of twitter where anything can be misconstrued and misused to damage reputations and destroy careers.

This regional conference on the role of religion in society is welcome in Albania, the land where different religious communities flourish in social harmony with each other. I represent the youngest of the Albanian religious communities, the Evangelical Protestant community, and I want to point out to you that this simple fact of our existence in social harmony with religious others, while we are most obviously the community of free converts from the population of these existing religions in our country, is evidence of a general tolerant attitude among Albanians of different religions who recognize the social priority of togetherness as a nation while preserving their own religious priorities without seeking religious hegemony.

One verse of the Albanian National hymn, which we don't always sing, says: “Zoti vete e tha me goje, ‘Kombet shuhen permbi dhe, por, Shqiperia do te rroje!’ Per kete luftojme ne,” (“God himself spoke, saying, ‘Nations disappear from the earth, but, Albania will live!’ This is why [together] we fight.”) We have here one form of the convergence with religion in a unique way because there are both Muslims and Christians saying with one voice, “We belong to one nation,” while each in their understanding of God considers this to be His will as if expressed audibly in their hearing! It would be a very interesting discussion to delve into the complication of such a national unity with such a religious diversity, but the poem does capture the spirit of the Albanian national unity. There cannot be one Albania without both Muslims and Christians together, and both Muslims and Christians have held this one nation of Albania together as a distinct undeniable fact of political history for more than 100 years. If this can happen in Albania, there is hope it can be a reality in other societies, including our neighboring Balkan countries.

The Albanian inter-religious social harmony is worth exploring further, but in order to preserve this blessing and to multiply such a desirable harmony in every pluralistic society, every generation needs to do its hard work of cultivating a culture of tolerance, affirming equality of persons with different religious views and identities unified by a common vision for a democratic society with clear social goals. That is why the work of this conference and others like this is invaluable for the future of our societies. Thank you for bringing your contributions at this important time in our world so we may be able to see how Huntington can be proven wrong.