

Islamic traditions and the challenges of European modernity in the Balkans

The fact that Islam has long been part of Europe has become a largely accepted fact. Besides citizens originating from former European colonies, guest-workers, political refugees and others who have, in millions, integrated European societies since the 20th century, Muslims in the Balkans and in Eastern Europe have been part of a much longer European history.

A lesser known fact is that Balkan Muslim communities have also been involved in European modernisation processes and that they have given various responses to modernity, be it through legal thought, religious governance, theological discourse and or social and religious thought.

The experiences of Balkan Muslims are plural and complex. Muslims of the Albanosphere and of Bulgaria have emerged from radically secularist regimes in the 1990s and reconstituted their religious institutions since. Bosnian Muslims on the other hand have faced the challenges of modernity for more than a century. They have withstood a “civilisational shock” after the involuntary integration to the Austrian Empire since 1878, navigated the disintegration of several state forms and formulated responses to cope with radical Yugoslav secularism. Facing the challenge to preserve a living religious tradition in processes that put a lot of the historical constants of community norms and spiritual life in question, Bosnia Muslims have developed original institutional, intellectual and religious responses to social and political secularisation, religious pluralism, and the development of reformist thought, contextual hermeneutics and modern political ideas.

The Islamic religious governance and educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been discussed as possible inspirations for other Islamic communities in Europe. Balkan Muslim communities have indeed accumulated a long and varied experience of maintaining and reviving religious in relation to various forms of secularity, in the context of growing religious pluralism and inside changing state forms. Yet European and Islamic modernities are also challenging processes that elicit adaptations, but also criticism and reactions. Hence the above experience has forced individuals and institutions to negotiate the demands of modernity, the attachment to a religious tradition and identity, and the challenges of religious traditionalism and fundamentalism.

Today, Balkan Muslims insist on their combined Islamic and European identity and increasingly develop localised Islamic traditions. The workshop seeks to explore this double character in the Balkans in general and in Bosnia in particular. Its intention is particularly to debate the relation of modernity and tradition in religious discourse, institutional governance, intellectual and political thought and critically discuss the development of localised Islamic traditions.

Possible topics involve:

- Localised Islamic traditions in the Balkans
- Specificities of Islamic theology at the periphery of the Muslim world
- Relations to Islamic scholarship in Islamic centres of learning and emerging European institutions
- Islamic norms in a secular state
- Islamic conceptualisations of secularity in legal, social and political contexts
- Religious discourses on modernity
- The meanings of European identity of Balkan Muslims
- Traditionalist reactions to modernisation and secularisation
- Transformations of religious authority
- Dealing with religious pluralism
- Experiences with religious governance

The conference will be held in the Academic Conference Centre at the Czech Academy of Sciences (Jilská 1, Prague 1, Czech Republic) on May 7th 2020. Contact to organisers: Zora Hesová, hesova@flu.cas.cz

You can send your abstract of up to 250 words to: hesova@flu.cas.cz before **March 1st, 2020**.