This publication, originally published by Politorbis, is a result of the findings of a research commissioned by the Political Secretariat of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE). It aims to shed some light on relationship between Islam and political activities in the region of Western Balkans, having in mind that Islam is a traditional component of not only the religious life, but cultural and social life for a great number of people in the region since the end of the Middle Ages, and has cohabitated, to greater or lesser harmony, with Christianity, whether Catholic or Orthodox, or, rarely, with protestant Christian sects. Although the involvement in different religious activities has undoubtedly played role in the recent wars in the Balkans, because of the ability of religion to shape the collective identities and mobilize large segments of the population, it would be exaggerated to say that this was religious war. Furthermore, the majority in the former communist Yugoslavia (1943-1991) has declared to support the officially atheist ideology. It is true that the renewed interest in the religious fact, both individually and collectively, following the collapse of Tito's system, coincided with the beginning of a decade of wars (1991-2001), triggering numerous interactions between wars and religions. The latter was called in for defining the collective identity and for making distinctions between the former brothers of Marx, the new disciples of Mohammed from those of Christ, in order to emphasize the differences and to justify the elimination of the nearest and dearest with the alleged God's will.

However, the relations between the religions could not be played down to political manipulation, with exclusive, even warring intentions, because a number of examples may be given of good inter-religious relations which were preserved or where religion did not cause problems among the citizens of different faith, even in the most difficult war periods. In fact, the believers in such religion do not necessarily keep the same relations with the religion or do not reflect it in the same way in the political life, depending on the nationality, era or place of residence (differences between town and village, valley and mountain should be highlighted).

If this research is focused on the Islam, it is in the context of current international affairs, where the world attention is focused on the Islamic-inspired terrorism issue, as a result of the September 2001 attacks on the United States. A similar study may be conducted on the Balkans, on the political influence of Orthodoxy, Catholicism or Protestantism and other ideologies.

This is an attempt to bring closer an indigenous religion, which is traditionally less known in the Western Balkan, through its contribution for the migration at the end of XX century. For this purpose, we have two specialists Bashkim Iseni, PhD in Political Science from Switzerland, specialist in the issue of nationalism in Albanian language areas and author of religious researches in this region and Xavier Bougarel, PhD in Political Science from France, well-known of his work on the political development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with special focus on the religious factor.

A result of this is an abundant and diverse panorama of Islamic developments in the past 20 years in the main Balkan regions, in the parts where it is practiced as well as the mutual influence of these regions. Moreover, the conclusions refer to perspectives on the possible development of relations between Islam and Politics, taking into account great challenges, faced in that region (Kosovo's status, European integration, etc.). Unfortunately, due to lack of

time and resources, some important regions were left aside, particularly Albania, as well as the interaction of Islam with other religions in the region or how these issues are seen in the Diaspora, especially in Switzerland. We wish for this study to contribute for better understanding of one of the large traditional religions in the region of Europe and one of the most important political factors on the Balkans, for the recent fast and complex development.

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