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РЕЛИГИОЗНОСТЬ И ОТНОШЕНИЕ К ВСТУПЛЕНИЮ В МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ (ЕС И НАТО) В СЕРБИИ

Аннотация. Сербские граждане (по сравнению с жителями соседних стран) известны прохладным отношением к вступлению в международные организации, такие как ЕС и НАТО. В литературе предложены разные объяснения этой тенденции. В данной статье мы рассматриваем религиозное основание противостояния вступлению в ЕС и НАТО со стороны сербских граждан. Исследование основано на опросе общественного мнения по национальной репрезентативной выборке, который был проведён после президентских и парламентских выборов в 2012 году. Опрос включал два индикатора религиозной ориентации: частоту посещения религиозных служб и самостоятельную оценку степени религиозности. Отношение к ЕС и НАТО исследовалось с помощью вопросов о том, как голосовал бы респондент на референдуме о вступлении в каждую из этих двух организаций. Результаты доказывают, что религиозность ассоциируется с меньшей поддержкой вступления в ЕС и НАТО, хотя связь небольшая.

Ключевые слова: религиозность, ЕС, НАТО, Сербия, политические отношения.

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RELIGIOSITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS JOINING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (EU AND NATO) IN SERBIA

Abstract. Serbian citizens are known for their meager enthusiasm, compared to those from neighboring countries, for joining international organizations such as EU and NATO. Various explanations of this tendency have been offered in literature. In this paper, we examine the religious basis for the opposition to joining the EU and NATO among Serbian citizens. The study is based on a public opinion survey of a national representative sample, conducted after the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections. The survey included two indicators of religious orientation: the frequency of attending religious services and self-reported degree of religiosity. Attitude towards the EU and NATO were examined by questions asking about the respondent's vote in case of a referendum about joining each of these two organizations. The results provide evidence that religiosity is associated with lower support for joining the EU and NATO, although the relationships is of modest magnitude.

Keywords: religiosity, EU, NATO, Serbia, political attitudes.

Introduction

Serbian citizens are known for their meager enthusiasm, compared to the citizens from neighboring countries, for joining international organizations such as the EU and NATO (e.g., Atanasović, 2007)¹. While in some other former communist countries NATO membership support was as high as above 90% (Zilberman & Webber, 2003), in Serbia it hasn't ever reached even 30%².

Various explanations of this tendency have been offered in literature. In this paper, we examine the religious basis for the opposition to joining the EU and NATO among Serbian citizens.

EU (EC in the earlier period) membership has been a major long-term political goal, already for a quarter of a century. Even parties and politicians that were in direct conflict with the EU institutions haven't rejected this goal, at least in principle. Explicit non-EU orientation has characterized mostly small parties, and particularly when they did not participate in government. During the 1990s, European integration was obviously a more abstract and distant aim, overshadowed by the then current clash with the EU and USA over conflicts in former Yugoslavia. At the time, government and opposition were clearly differentiated according to their degree of EU enthusiasm, the opposition being much more EU-enthusiastic. With the 'overthrow' of the 'Milošević regime' in 2000, the situation changed, though not unambiguously.

The so-called 'democratic opposition', now in power, was rhetorically very pro-European. In electoral campaigns, it argued that with them in power, EU integration would be within reach in the near future. As a result, on October 13, 2004 Serbian National Assembly adopted the «Resolution on joining the European Union», which says that «accelerated entry of the Republic of Serbia [...] into full membership in European Union [...] is a strategic and national goal»³.

However, the 'democratic opposition' came to power after the NATO aggression on Serbia/Yugoslavia, which lasted 78 days, from March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999. Although the aggression was mainly perceived as initiated and directed by the USA, it was obvious that the EU is a partner on equal footing in this action. Hence, the pro-European parties came to power at the time when the public mood was less than favorable towards both the EU and NATO.

Although the anti-EU mood started unfreezing slowly afterwards (which was much less the case with the attitude towards the NATO), perception of

¹ Blic (on-line issue), 13.01.2014. «Srbija među evroskeptičnijim kandidatima za članstvo u EU» (<http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Politika/434199/Srbija-medju-evroskepticnijim-kandidatima-za-clanstvo-u-EU>).

² Stojić claims that «Serbia is one of the most Euro-enthusiastic countries, with approximately three quarters of the population consistently in favor of the European Union», which certainly hasn't been the case. In support of this opinion he quotes only a single source ('European Integration Office of the Serbian Government, 2005', which we couldn't verify (Stojic, 2006, p. 319).

³ http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/RS48-04.pdf.

the EU has remained strongly polarized. In addition to the aggression, new obstacles to the pro-EU sentiments quickly appeared, in the shape of various, ever expanding, conditions for starting accession negotiations with the EU (see Türkeş and Gökğöz, 2006). In the early 2000s, the most striking were requests for extradition of several military and civilian leaders from Republika Srpska and Serbia, for the trials in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in den Hague. Among the extradited persons, for instance, were former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and Vojislav Šešelj.

When the issue of extraditions had been absolved, the EU focus switched to Kosovo. Serbia has been basically expected to recognize Kosovo, a part of its territory, as an independent state.

In light of the continuing and expanding 'EU conditions', and increasingly negative public opinion in the EU countries concerning any further EU expansion, it is not surprising that Serbian public opinion has remained relatively EU-skeptical.

If there have been little reasons for the EU enthusiasm in Serbia, there has been even less reasons for enthusiasm for joining the NATO. In addition to the usual reasons for doubts concerning the NATO membership, such as the material and human price or participating in foreign military operations¹, Serbian public faced its direct aggression².

In light of such experiences, it is not surprising that Serbian citizens hold skeptical attitudes towards the EU and NATO. Although the 'average' opinion is critical of these international organizations, especially of NATO, it is also clear that such opinion is not unanimous. There are individual differences – some individuals are more positive, others more negative towards them. This paper deals with the explanation of such individual differences. The focus is on the question: What makes some individuals more or less likely to vote for joining the EU and NATO, in a hypothetical case of a referendum on this question.

Vote on these referenda, i.e. vote for or against joining the EU and NATO, is likely to be related to a variety of different social, economic, and psychological factors. Here the focus is on religiosity. Religion has been one of the major factors in contemporary democratic politics. According to the classics in political sociology (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) religious-secular divide is one of the major cleavages that have shaped European politics

¹ Politika (14.01.2014, on-line issue), «Koristi i troškovi članstva u NATO-u» (<http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Ekonomija/Koristi-i-troshkovi-chlanstva-u-NATO-u.lt.html>); Petrović (2007).

² Aggression against Serbia in 1999 was not the first military conflict between NATO and Serbs. Republika Srpska faced NATO in 1995, when their forces participated in the Croatian offensive called 'Storm'. As a result, some 200,000 Serbs were forced out of their homes into Serbia.

during the 20th century. In Western Europe, the religious-secular political divide has been associated with the loss of privileges of the clerical stratum. Secularism became associated with the working class, and generally left-wing parties. This cleavage has also had a social component, where religiosity is associated with conservative social and cultural preferences.

Religion has also been associated with various views on international relations. Of particular interest here is the relationship between religion and European integration. According to Minkenberg (2009), «It may be argued that the entire EU is a project inaugurated and pushed along primarily by Christian Democratic forces and inspirations» (p. 1190, abstr.). However, it seems that more recently Euroscepticism has appeared also associated with certain religious groups and institutions (Minkenberg, 2009).

Political role of religion in contemporary Serbia can be expected to differ in several respects. The current democratic system has not replaced a system where religious institutions enjoyed a privileged status. Instead, it replaced a socialist system, which was secular if not always openly anti-religious. Religion hasn't gained a prominent position in the democratic system either, although researchers have documented an increasing de-secularization of Serbian society of the last quarter of century (Blagojević, 2006). There haven't been any particularly successful religious parties, although most parties, especially of conservative-nationalist provenance, pay a lip service towards religion. However, it is generally recognized that Serbian Orthodox Church is an important element of Serbian national identity (e.g., Jević, 2008). But, in daily politics, most parties and politicians stop there.

Still, religion can be expected to influence opinions on various political matters, including those concerning international organizations (Blagojević, 2006). One path of influence probably works via general conservatism, of which religiosity is an important aspect. Another path is through the association of religiosity with national identification. It could be expected that political issues that involve national identity are also associated with individual levels of religiosity¹.

Both joining the NATO and joining the EU are clearly associated with national identification. Joining the EU implies giving up of a significant part of national sovereignty and transferring it to distant EU institutions. And, realistically speaking, for Serbia would also involve losing sovereignty over a significant portion of the national territory.

Joining the NATO involves basically all that is mentioned in connection with EU, plus it evokes memories of the 1999 NATO aggression, and therefore the question of national pride and national self-respect.

Given the fact that religion is generally an important element of national identity in Serbia, and that EU and NATO are negatively associated with national

¹ So, for instance, Euroscepticism is found to be associated with national identification in Belgium (Abts, Heerwegh, & Swyngedouw, 2009).

identification, the main hypothesis tested in this study is that religiosity should be associated with more negative view of these international organizations. Operationally, this means that indicators of religiosity should be associated with higher probability to vote negatively on a hypothetical referendum concerning joining the NATO and EU. This hypothesis is submitted to an empirical investigation in the following sections.

Method

Survey and sample

Data for the current study come from the Serbian Public opinion Survey 2012 (SPOS 2012). The 2012 SPOS is a post-election survey of public opinion conducted after the May 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia. The study was designed to be a nationally representative, high quality survey of public opinion, focused on explaining electoral behavior, and analyzing a broad set of attitudes, preferences, and opinions relevant to Serbian political life. It is based on a probability-based sample with multiple stages of selection.

The survey was conducted using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method. Data collection began on Saturday, December 21, 2012, and ran through Sunday, February 10, 2013. Incentives (a bag of coffee) were introduced to maximize both completions and response rate. The final data-set includes 1568 respondents. Statistical analysis presented below include a combined sampling, demographic and political weight. Respondents who declared Catholic, Muslim, or 'Other' denomination were excluded from the analysis (in total, about 3.5% of the entire sample).

Variables

Attitudes towards joining the EU and NATO were operationalized by the following questions:

Q19a. If there would be a referendum next week about Serbia's entry into the European Union (EU), how would you vote? Would you vote (1) for the entry of Serbia into the EU, (2) against the entry of Serbia into the EU, or (3) you would not take part in the referendum?

Q19b. If there would be a referendum next week about Serbia's entry into the NATO, how would you vote? Would you vote (1) for the entry of Serbia into the NATO, (2) against the entry of Serbia into the NATO, or (3) you would not take part in the referendum?

We operationalize religiosity using two indicators: self-reported level of religiosity, and frequency of religious service attendance. The former is intended to indicate more personal aspect of religiosity, independently of one's involvement into institutionalized religion. The later covers a more behavioral aspect and involvement in social and institutional aspects of religion.

Religiosity is taped with the following question:

How would you describe yourself – would you say that you have (1) no religious beliefs, that you are (2) not very religious, that you are (3) somewhat religious, or that you are (4) very religious?

Religious Services Attendance is estimated with the following question:
Apart from weddings, funerals and baptisms, about how often do you attend religious services – (1) never, (2) once a year, (3) two to eleven times a year, (4) once a month, (5) two or more times a month, or (6) once a week or more?

Demographic and socio-economic control variables include gender, age, urbanization level, and education.

Gender is a standard binary variable, higher number indicating female gender.

Age is measured in years at the time of the survey.

Urbanization level has four categories

1. Rural area or village
2. Small town or medium size town
3. Suburb of a large city
4. Large city

Education is operationalized in 8 categories, intended to follow the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) model:

1. Incomplete primary school
2. Primary school (8 years completed)
3. Incomplete secondary school
4. Completed occupational H.S.
5. Completed 4 years H.S.
6. Higher school
7. University (BA degree)
8. Specialization, Master degree or doctorate

Results

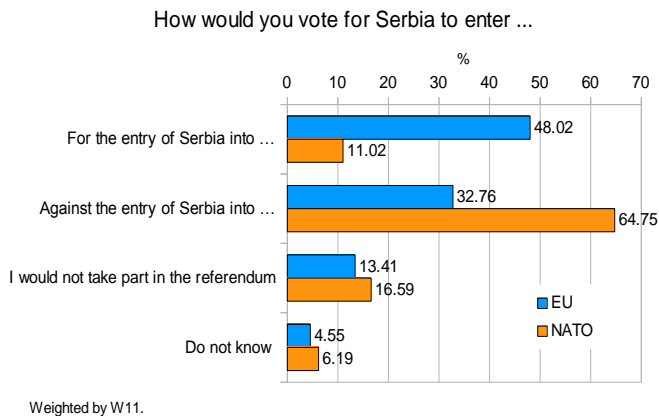


Figure 1: Distribution of the answers to the questions about voting in referendum for joining EU and NATO

Distribution of the answers to the questions about voting in referendum for joining EU and NATO is displayed in Figure 1. In case of joining the EU, nearly

half of the respondents would vote affirmatively, thus indicating a relatively widely held positive attitude towards this international organization. Still, about one third of the public would vote against EU membership¹. Membership in NATO is clearly much less supported by the Serbian public². Nearly two thirds of the respondents say that they would vote *against* the membership. While only 11% is certain to support it, which is lower than reported in some studies (Atanasović, 2007). Referendum abstainers and the uncertain are in fact twice more numerous than the supporters (in total nearly 23%). In general, while the Serbian public is mildly supportive of the EU membership, the rejection of NATO is still overwhelming.

Although the level of support for joining these two international organizations clearly differs, not surprisingly, there is a certain commonality in the attitude towards them (Atanasović, 2007). Correlation coefficient between these two attitudes (treating the variables as binary) is $r=.38$ ($p<.001$). Given the close connection between the two organizations, it is in fact noteworthy that Serbian attitudes towards them are weakly associated. It demonstrates that the Serbian public clearly differentiates them.

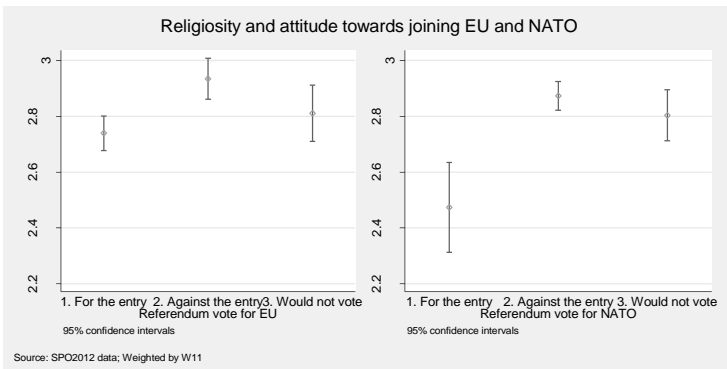


Figure 2: Association between religiosity and hypothetical referendum votes

Bivariate associations

The following step is examination of bivariate associations between the religiosity indicators and hypothetical referendum votes. Figure 2 shows arithmetic means and associate confidence intervals of religiosity according to different answers to the hypothetical referendum questions. The first panel shows results for the EU vote, and the second one for the NATO vote. Concerning the former, votes ‘for’ and ‘against’ statistically significantly

¹ The results are very close to what was obtained in another survey conducted at the time, see EurActiv Srbija (www.euractiv.rs), «Opala podrška građana Srbije Evropskoj uniji» (17.10.2012).

² Regardless of the efforts to the contrary by various NGOs (see Petrović, 2007).

differ according to the associated levels of religiosity. Those respondents who would vote against joining EU report higher level of religiosity. Those who would not vote are in-between, and overlap according to the level of religiosity with the other two groups.

Most striking difference concerning the results for the NATO vote is the low level of religiosity among the respondents supportive of the NATO membership. Level of religiosity associated with this group of respondents is significantly lower even than religiosity of the EU membership supporters. Levels of religiosity of the other two groups, those who are against NATO membership and abstainers, are higher, but very close to the corresponding groups concerning the EU membership.

Obviously, secular respondents are more in favor of joining the EU and NATO, but this is especially striking concerning the latter organization. Apparently, in Serbia even a modest religiosity makes one more anti-NATO disposed.

Turning towards the behavioral and institutional indicator of religiosity, i.e., ‘church attendance’, we can observe a very similar picture (see Figure 3). Respondents supportive of the EU membership are, on average, less frequent church-goers than the respondents who oppose it. NATO membership is again more polarizing. Opponents of the NATO membership are again similar to the EU opponents. However, respondents who would support NATO membership are significantly less often attending religious services, even compared to the average supporters of the EU membership.

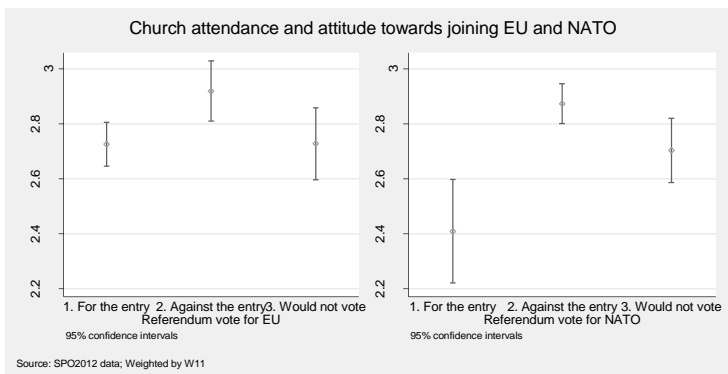


Figure 3: Association between religious service attendance and hypothetical referendum votes

The results presented thus far show that supporters and opponents of membership in EU and NATO clearly differ in their religiosity. This is especially the case with the hypothetical vote on NATO membership. Those who would ‘yes’ appeared as the least religious group, both according to self-

reported religiosity, and according to frequency of religious service attendance. Obviously, religious affiliation and identity have important political consequences, despite the wide secularization in Serbia.

However, bivariate associations are subject to issues spuriousness. Hence, in the final part of the analysis we examine a multivariate model, where in addition to the indicators of religiosity, we add a set of relevant control variables. These include four variables: urbanization level, education, age and gender. They are relevant for the present model, as they can all be expected to be associated both with the dependent variables (attitudes towards NATO and EU), and to the main predictor variables, i.e., religiosity indicators.

Urban residents are more likely to be more positive towards joining these organizations since potential benefits are more likely to affect urban populations. Also, conservative, traditionalist, and also nationalist attitudes are more typical for rural population. Education, likewise, through more liberal orientation, is likely to lead to more open attitudes towards international integration, as longitudinal research of 12 core EU states show (Hakhverdian, 2013; see also Abts, Heerwegh, & Swyngedouw, 2009). Education is also associated with greater mobility, which would bring benefits in case of joining the EU. Older respondents generally tend to be more conservative, and nationalistically oriented, and therefore more skeptical towards both the EU and NATO. In case of gender, expectations are not very clear, as gender differences are inconsistent in this area. In Belgium, for instance, males tend to be more Eurosceptical (Abts, Heerwegh, & Swyngedouw, 2009).

Multivariate model

Since our dependent variable is categorical, we employed multinomial logistic regression, in order to determine the significant predictors of the hypothetical referendum vote. The referendum vote variable has three substantive categories, so we defined the 'yes' vote as the reference category. Results of the multinomial logit analyses are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

The included variables are able to predict responses to the referendum vote question on the EU (Table 1). We can observe that three of the four control variables are significant predictors of the EU vote. Those who would vote against the entry into EU are more likely to come from rural environment (this variable is coded so that higher score refers to more urban setting). More surprisingly, however, younger respondents proved to be more *against* the EU in this model. It should be noted that the bivariate association between age and EU vote is insignificant, showing that age differences appear only when the influence of the other variables is controlled for. Although in the core EU countries education has been a consistent, even increasingly strong, predictor of Euroscepticism (Hakhverdian, 2013), education apparently does not differentiate vote choice on EU integration in Serbia. More in accordance with the expectations, male respondents proved to be more EU-skeptical.

Table 1

Multinomial logit model of hypothetical referendum voting on joining the EU

Dependent variable: Referendum on EU	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p
DV category: 2. Against the entry into EU				
Religiosity	0.289	0.093	3.11	0.002
Church attendance	0.018	0.067	0.27	0.790
Urbanization level	-0.123	0.057	-2.16	0.031
Education	-0.043	0.041	-1.05	0.293
Age	-0.007	0.004	-1.95	0.051
Sex (Female)	-0.276	0.122	-2.25	0.024
Constant	-0.005	0.410	-0.01	0.991
DV category: 3. Would not vote				
Religiosity	0.103	0.126	0.81	0.416
Church attendance	-0.047	0.095	-0.49	0.621
Urbanization level	-0.150	0.082	-1.83	0.067
Education	-0.238	0.057	-4.16	0.000
Age	-0.011	0.005	-2.14	0.032
Sex (Female)	0.101	0.172	0.59	0.558
Constant	0.248	0.570	0.44	0.663
Reference category: 1. For the entry into EU				
N=1368				
LR chi2(12)=57.34				
p<.0001				
Log likelihood=-1318.9				
Weighted by W11.				

Table 2

Multinomial logit model of hypothetical referendum voting on joining the NATO

Dependent variable: Referendum on NATO	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p
DV category: 2. Against the entry into NATO				
Religiosity	0.361	0.134	2.70	0.007
Church attendance	0.194	0.108	1.81	0.071
Urbanization level	0.065	0.088	0.74	0.459
Education	-0.195	0.066	-2.96	0.003
Age	-0.001	0.006	-0.20	0.845
Sex (Female)	0.283	0.190	1.49	0.136
Constant	0.869	0.600	1.45	0.148
DV category: 3. Would not vote				
Religiosity	0.320	0.158	2.02	0.043
Church attendance	0.075	0.125	0.60	0.548
Urbanization level	-0.082	0.105	-0.79	0.432
Education	-0.236	0.077	-3.08	0.002
Age	-0.010	0.007	-1.44	0.151
Sex (Female)	0.526	0.222	2.37	0.018
Constant	0.411	0.711	0.58	0.563
Reference category: 1. For the entry into NATO				
N=1357				
LR chi2(12)=57.93				
p<.0001				
Log likelihood=-1027.4				
Weighted by W11.				

Concerning the main predictor variables, religiosity remained a significant predictor even after introducing the control, suggesting that the association is robust and non-spurious. Coefficient for church attendance, however, fell below statistical significance. This is mainly due to collinearity between religiosity and church attendance variables rather than to the influence of the control variables. If religiosity or church attendance are entered into the equation separately, each of them individually appears as a significant predictor. We also constructed a composite religiosity indicator by combining the two variables into a single index, but the conclusions remain substantively the same.

Referendum abstainers, similarly as in the bivariate analysis, are not significantly differentiated by their religiosity. Only the control variables are relevant here. Education proves to be particularly important, showing that cultural capital tends to transfer into political participation as usually (Smets & van Ham, 2013). In fact, all the variables that significantly differentiate potential non-voters from those who would support joining the EU (rural settings, lower education, younger age) are variables that usually predict vote abstention, not only in hypothetical cases like the present one. The resource theory of electoral participation, arguing that social, economic, cognitive and other resources are crucial for understanding individual differences in voter turnout (Brady et al., 1995; Smets & van Ham, 2013), therefore fits the obtained results.

A corresponding multinomial logit model of hypothetical referendum voting on joining the NATO is shown in Table 2. Here, both indicators of religiosity significantly differentiate 'yes' from 'no' voters on the NATO referendum. Respondents against joining the NATO tend to be more religious, and are more frequent church goers. In addition, education appeared as a significant predictor. Better educated respondents are more in favor of joining this international military organization.

Non-voters, in this case, are also more religious, as well as relatively less educated. Finally, women showed a tendency to abstain from voting concerning NATO membership, demonstrating a frequently observed tendency for women to be less active politically.

Discussion and conclusions

In order to examine the religious basis of public attitudes towards joining the EU and NATO we performed bi-variate and multivariate analysis of survey data from Serbia. In bivariate analysis, religiosity, operationalized as a self-reported level of religiosity and frequency of religious service attendance, proved related to the intentions to vote on hypothetical referendum about joining the EU and NATO. More religious respondents appeared more likely to vote against the membership. In case of the NATO vote, even the abstainers demonstrate higher levels of religiosity. In multivariate models, where a set of relevant control variables are introduced, the associations with religiosity indicators proved to be robust, i.e., they are not spurious.

The results show that even in a secularized country, where daily politics

is generally dissociated from religion, individual religiosity has important political consequences. Membership in international organizations such as the EU and NATO is a highly symbolically salient issue which touches on the core of national identity generally, but perhaps particularly in Serbia. Serbia's intention to join the EU has been plagued with numerous difficulties and ever expanding conditions¹. Serbia gave up of supporting Serbs in neighboring countries, extradited its former president and several other political figures, and is still expected to recognize secession of a highly symbolically important part of its territory. Finally, EU fully took part in the NATO aggression against Serbia in 1999. Yet, NATO is still much more negatively viewed by the Serbian public. Perhaps, the public perceives important benefits of joining the EU, but in case of the NATO such benefits are much more unclear (Todosijević, 2014).

There are probably various factors that contribute to the observed associations between religiosity and attitudes towards joining the EU and NATO. We believe that an important connection is in the national identity. Religiosity often tends to be associated with national sentiments. It is certainly the case in Serbia and in the Balkans more generally, since in this context religious and national identities are intertwined (e.g., Iveković, 2002). The disagreements and conflicts with the EU and NATO, on the other side, clearly touch on issues relevant for national identity. Not only that membership in the EU involves relinquishing certain aspects of national sovereignty, but these institutions are strongly associated with the national pride and self-respect. For many Serbs it appears to be psychologically difficult to support joining an organization that attacked the country and caused vast material and human losses.

There are certainly other factors that affect the connection between religiosity and support for joining the EU and NATO. The infamous 'losers of transition' are often observed to be against joining these organizations (e.g., Abts et al., 2009; Gabel, 1998), as they are more likely to fair poorly in the new economic circumstances. This segment of populations, in addition to lower socio-economics status tends to be more religious as well. Also, general conservatism is likely to be important. It is both associated with religiosity and probably with distrust in these organizations. However, additional analysis is needed to substantiate these speculations.

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¹ Writing on the 'Western Balkans', Türkes and Gökgöz (2006, p. 569) argue that 22 «EU's strategy [...] has been one of neither total exclusion nor rapid integration of the Western Balkans into the EU».

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