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RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE FIRST BILATERAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE SERBIA–INDONESIA (2011)*

Introduction

Diplomatic relations and wide bilateral cooperation between Yugoslavia and Indonesia, established and promoted during the fifties of the 20th century, were starting point of fruitful connections in the fields of politics, military and economics, as well as science and culture in several decades. Yugoslav and Indonesian foreign policy coincided in support of decolonization, pacifism, anti-hegemonism and neutral position towards ideological blocs. It was clear then why Yugoslavia and Indonesia were among founders of the Non-Aligned Movement (1961) and presidents Josip Broz Tito and Sukarno in close friendship.¹ Nature of Yugoslav communist system didn't enable two countries to establish interfaith connections.

Civil war in western parts of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991-1995) led to creation of usual media stereotypes against Serbs even in friendly Indonesia. While Indonesian public had memory on Yugoslavia as ally and friend, picture of Serbia was different.² Also, with break-up of SFR Yugoslavia (1991) its former republics, Serbia as well (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), quit membership in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Where bilateral cooperation between Yugoslavia and Indonesia stopped, bilateral cooperation between Serbia and Indonesia started. Belgrade was a host of the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia (7-9 April 2011) on the highest state, religious and university levels.

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¹ Ljubodrag Dimić, "Yugoslav view on Indonesia", speech at the Interfaith Conference Serbia – Indonesia, Belgrade 7 April 2011. Short version of speech is published in the book: *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, 32-34.

² "Why Interfaith Dialogue has been held in Serbia?", *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, ii.

Religious picture of Serbia and Indonesia

There are interesting similarities in religious pictures of Serbia and Indonesia, but also huge differences in secular or religious character of two states.

1. Republic of Serbia is the most western country in the world with Orthodox Christian majority and with Serbian people in whole (Republic of Serbia, Republic of Srpska, Montenegro and other parts of former SFR Yugoslavia) border of Serbian Orthodoxy goes to the shores of the Adriatic Sea.

Ethnic population of the Republic of Serbia (official census 2002)						
Serbs	Hungarians	Bosniaks	Roma	Yugoslavs	Croats	Total
82,86%	3,91%	1,81%%	1,44%	1,08%	0,94%	7.498.001

Religious population of the Republic of Serbia (official census 2002)						
Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Protestant	Muslim	Judaist	Atheist	Total
84,98%	5,48%	1,08%	3,20%	0,01%	0,53%	7.498.001

Republic of Indonesia is the most eastern state in the world with Muslim majority. Its islands and shores are stretched from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

Religious population of the Republic of Indonesia 2011. ³						
Muslim	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Hindu	Buddhist	Confucian/ other	Total
86,39%	6,34%	3,36%	1,81%	0,93%	0,11%	237.566.363

2. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006), “Republic of Serbia is a secular state”, “churches and religious communities shall be separated from the state”, “no religion may be established as state or mandatory religion” (article 11), the state guarantees freedom of belief or religion (article 43).⁴

From 2006 Republic of Serbia has the Law on Churches and Religious Communities. This modern law recognizes traditional churches and religious communities “with centuries-long historic continuity in Serbia, having acquired legal subjectivity pursuant to separate legislation” in the Principedom of Serbia, Kingdom of Serbia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) and Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Those

³ Bahrul Hayat, speech at the Interfaith Conference Serbia – Indonesia, Belgrade 7 April 2011. Published in: *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, 84-85.

⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, number 98/2006.

being: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Slovakian Evangelist Church a.v., Christian Reformist Church and the Evangelist Christian Church a.v., the Islamic Community, the Jewish Community.⁵

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (1945) this country is based on five inseparable and interrelated Pancasila principles, which are the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state: 1. Belief in one and only God, 2. Just and civic humanity, 3. Unity of Indonesia, 4. Democracy led by wisdom through deliberations amongst representatives of the people, 5. Social justice for all Indonesia citizens.⁶

As a state ideology, Pancasila connects numerous ethnic, tribal, religious and geographical differences in wide Indonesian archipelago (1.027 ethnic groups, more than 13.000 islands). Pancasila (through the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia) guarantees “all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief” (article 29).⁷

Thus, in Serbia and Indonesia exists similar percentage of believers of the biggest religion: Orthodox Christians or Muslims. But, it is always wise to have in mind that Indonesia has 30 times bigger population than Serbia. The Republic of Serbia is a secular state, while the Republic of Indonesia is a “religious” state (but not a theocratic state).⁸ Both countries are democratic. These facts are important for better understanding of the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia.

Path to the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia

Interfaith dialogues (regional, bilateral, multilateral, inter-media) are “soft diplomacy” of the Republic of Indonesia from 2004. Aims of interfaith dialogues are: to strive against negative stereotyping of Islam versus West; to introduce the moderate strain of Islam in Indonesia; to manage religious diversity in ways that promote social cohesion, peace and sustainability; to promote both countries democratic respect for pluralism; to empower the moderates; to establish cooperation among civil societies in various aspects, particularly on global issues, such as education, good governance, poverty eradication, and social welfare.⁹

So far, the Republic of Indonesia had bilateral interfaith dialogues with: Vatican (2005, 2007), the Netherlands (2006, 2008, 2010), Canada (2007, 2008), Austria

⁵ The Law on Churches and Religious Communities, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, number 36/2006.

⁶ I Made Titib, speech at the Interfaith Conference Serbia – Indonesia, Belgrade 7 April 2011. Published in: *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, 37-42. Also: <http://www.embassyofindonesia.org/about/pdf/IndonesianConstitution.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bahrul Hayat, 84.

⁹ “General Information Interfaith Dialogue”, *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, 1.

(2009, twice in 2010), Lebanon (2008), Russia (2009), the United States of America (twice in 2010), Hungary (2010), the Czech Republic (2010), Bulgaria (2010), Germany (2010), Spain (2010), Serbia (2011) and Greece (2011), as well as the United Kingdom Islamic Advisory Group (2007).¹⁰

How it started with Serbia? Ministers of foreign affairs of Indonesia and Serbia, Marty M Natalegawa and Vuk Jeremić, agreed “on the importance of the interfaith dialogue” at the Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on the Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace (Manila, March 2010).¹¹

Official Indonesian proposal for bilateral interfaith dialogue with Serbia came after foundation of the Interreligious Council of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (June 2010). With the Interreligious Council institutional cooperation of the Serbian state with traditional churches and religious communities was lifted on the highest level. Head of the Interreligious Council is a Minister of Religious Affairs and members are the leaders and most valuable eminencies of the traditional churches and religious communities in the Republic of Serbia. Aims of the Interreligious Council are: affirmation of religious freedom and religious culture, statements on most important social questions, organization of meetings on contemporary topics, contribution to legal aspects, consideration and interpretation of public life, consideration of importance of religious freedom and religious culture in European context.¹²

So, paths and aims of regional and global interfaith dialogue promoted by Indonesia and of local interfaith dialogue established in Serbia mainly coincided. It was also important for the Republic of Serbia to host our friends from the world’s biggest Muslim country also due to the fact that Republic of Indonesia recognizes Serbia’s full sovereignty in Kosovo and Metohija. Furthermore, it was important to equate (or try to equate) Indonesia’s special historical appreciation of Belgrade as the capital of non-aligned Yugoslavia and Belgrade as the capital of neutral Serbia.

Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Prof. Dr Bogoljub Šijaković and Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia in Belgrade Samuel Samson agreed in February 2011 that the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia, on high state and religious level, should be held in April 2011 in Belgrade.¹³

¹⁰ “General Information Interfaith Dialogue”, *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011, 2.

¹¹ Letter from the Embassy of Indonesia in Belgrade to Aleksandar Raković, 28 February 2011.

¹² Minister of Religious Affairs Prof. Dr Bogoljub Šijaković established the Interreligious Council on 17 June 2010. With professor Šijaković, members of the Interreligious Council are: Bishop of Bačka of the Serbian Orthodox Church Prof. Dr Irinej Bulović, Archbishop of Belgrade of the Roman Catholic Church Stanislav Hočevar, Reis-Ul-Ulema of the Islamic Community of Serbia Adem Zilkić and Rabbi of the Jewish Community Isak Asiel. Coordinator of the Interreligious Council is Dr Aleksandar Raković, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

¹³ Documentation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Report from the meeting of minister Šijaković and ambassador Samson from 10 February 2011 (with Report from the meeting of their collaborators from 14 February 2011), number 337-00-3/2011-01 from 17 February 2011. – Minister and

Unfortunately, Ministry of Religious Affairs was cancelled in March 2011 and the Ministry of Diaspora was widened with the Sector for Religious Affairs to form new ministry – The Ministry of Religion and Diaspora.¹⁴ This change didn't interrupt organization of the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia.

Both delegations consisted from: ministers, ambassadors, government and ministry officials, the highest religious leaders and theologians (Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, Muslims, Hinduists and Judaists), university professors and other scholars (see footnote 15). Head of Serbian delegation was Prof. Dr Bogoljub Šijaković (State Secretary of Religious Affairs) and head of Indonesian Delegation was Andri Hadi (Director General of Information and Public Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).¹⁵

Republic of Serbia never before formed joint delegation with the highest officials from state and churches and religious communities. Just that would be enough for record. But, the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia was also a good chance for the Republic of Serbia to promote and underline the fact that interreligious relationships in Serbia are better than ever.

ambassador named coordinators of the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia: Dr Aleksandar Raković, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Zamardi, Political Counsellor at the Embassy of Indonesia.

¹⁴The Law on the ministries, *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, number 16/2011.

¹⁵ 1. Members of the Serbian delegation: Prof. Dr Bogoljub Šijaković (head of delegation), Prof. Dr Irinej Bulović (Bishop of Bačka of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade), Stanislav Hočevar (Archbishop of Belgrade of the Roman Catholic Church), Adem Zilkić (Reis-ul-ulema of the Islamic Community of Serbia), Isak Asiel (Rabbi of the Jewish Community), Samuel Vrbovsky (Bishop of the Slovak Evangelical Church), Árpád Dolinszky (Superintendent of the Christian Evangelical Church), Dr István Csete–Szemesi (Bishop of the Reformed Christian Church), Dr Porfirije Perić (Bishop of Jegar of the Serbian Orthodox Church), Muhamed Jusufspahić (Mufti of Belgrade of the Islamic Community of Serbia), Dr Aleksandar Raković (Coordinator of the Interreligious Council), Prof. Dr Ljubodrag Dimić (Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade), ambassador Radomir Živković (Head of Department for South-East Asia in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch at the Interfaith Dialogue was Prof. Dr Radovan Bigović (Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade), while the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs named ambassador Vladislav Mladenović (Assistant Deputy Minister) to speak on the behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. 2. Members of the Indonesian delegation: Andri Hadi (head of delegation), Dr Bahrul Hayat (Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs), ambassador Samuel Samson (Embassy of Indonesia in Belgrade), Prof. Dr Komaruddin Hidayat (Rector of the Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta), Prof. Dr I Made Titib (Rector of the Hindu Dharma Institute in Bali), Dr Margaretha Hendriks–Ririmase (Lecturer at the Moluccan Christian University of Indonesia in Ambon), Dr Heru Prakosa (Lecturer at the Sanata Dharma Institute of Philosophy in Yogyakarta), Adolfin Elizabeth Koamesakh (Orthodox Church of Indonesia), Zamardi (Political Counsellor at the Embassy of Indonesia in Belgrade), Abdul Fatah (Head of the Center for Interreligious Harmony at the Ministry of Religious Affairs), Trias Kuncayono (Deputy Chief Editor of the Kompas Daily Newspapers), Dr Ferimeldi Muslim Kudi (Head of Division in the Center for Interreligious Harmony at the Ministry of Religious Affairs), Riaz Januar Putra Saehu (Deputy Director in the Directorate of Public Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Elvis Napitupulu (Staff at the Directorate of Public Diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). – Names and further information from notes of Aleksandar Raković and book *1st Indonesia-Serbia Bilateral Interfaith Dialogue*, Belgrade 2011.

The First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia

The First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia (7–9 April 2011) consisted from three parts: **1.** The Interfaith Conference in the Palace of Serbia (7 April), **2.** University cooperation (8 April), **3.** Closing meeting at the Embassy of Indonesia (9 April). **First Day (7 April)** – After the bilateral meeting of two delegations in the Palace of Serbia, Minister of Religion and Diaspora Srđan Srećković opened the First Interfaith Dialogue and the Interfaith Conference Serbia – Indonesia. In the speech at the conference, Serbian Patriarch Irinej blessed the Interfaith Dialogue of two friendly countries.

At the Interfaith Conference Serbia – Indonesia there were more than 200 guests: domestic and foreign diplomats, university professors, scholars, theologians, media, members of the Association of Serbian-Indonesian Friendship Nusantara, and others. It is very important that the Interfaith Conference was held in the Hall of Yugoslavia (at the Palace of Serbia) which hosted the First Conference of Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade (1961).

Participants at the Interfaith Conference gave speeches from the fields related to theme *Building Collaborative Communities: Strengthening Civil Society and Interreligious Cooperation for Development*, and sub-themes: *Framing the Questions of Interfaith Dialogue: the Perspective of Serbia and Indonesia; The Role of Religious Communities in Promoting Mutual Respect, Understanding and Peace: Recognizing Common Concerns; Education: Establishing Civil Society and Interreligious Cooperation*. However, there were other topics of discussion: history of diplomatic relationships between Yugoslavia and Indonesia, economic and cultural cooperation of Yugoslavia and Indonesia and Serbia and Indonesia, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Sharia banking system in Indonesia.

First day of the Interfaith Dialogue was very successful. It showed that relationship of Belgrade and Jakarta still has emotional bond pulled from the time of fruitful Yugoslav-Indonesian cooperation.

Second Day (8 April) – Before second part of the Interfaith Dialogue, the Indonesian delegation visited the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. Their hosts were Parliamentary group for Friendship with Indonesia led by MP Meho Omerović and the Deputy Chair of the National Assembly Gordana Čomić.¹⁶ During the meeting at the National Assembly, head of the Indonesian delegation Andri Hadi said that the Interfaith Dialogue with Serbia „was the best so far“ because „we had impression that we were speaking to entire Serbia“.¹⁷

The Interfaith Dialogue continued with official visit to the Islamic Community of Serbia. The Indonesian delegation and the Islamic Community of Serbia signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Islamic State University Syarif Hi-

¹⁶ Delegation of Indonesia in the National Assembly, Radio-Television of Serbia, 8 April 2011. – Present were also MPs Gabor Lodi and Zoran Antić.

¹⁷ Notes of Aleksandar Raković.

dayatulah in Jakarta and the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Belgrade. During this visit, Muslims in the Indonesian delegation and Muslims in the Serbian delegation held common prayer at the Bajrakli Mosque.

Furthermore, members of the Indonesian delegation were guests of Prof. Dr Branko Kovačević, Rector of the University of Belgrade. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatulah in Jakarta, the University of Belgrade and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade was signed at the Rectorate.

Finally, the Indonesian delegation visited the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, welcomed by Dean Prof. Dr Irinej Bulović. Members of the Indonesian delegation Prof. Dr Komaruddin Hidayat, Dr Margaretha Hendriks–Ririmase and Dr Heru Prakosa provided the lectures to professors and students of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology and students of the Faculty of Islamic Sciences. At the end, Apostolic Nuncio in Belgrade Orlando Antonini gave a speech at the very successful meeting hosted the Faculty of Orthodox Theology.¹⁸

It is to be noticed that Yugoslav-Indonesian and Serbian-Indonesian friendship were underlined at all meetings during the second day of the Interfaith Dialogue.

Third Day (9 April) – The Indonesian delegation were guests of Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević and Princess Katarina Karađorđević at the White Palace in Belgrade. After that, guests from Indonesia visited the House of Flowers (Mausoleum of Josip Broz Tito) and the Museum of Yugoslav History. It was a good chance for the Indonesian delegation to learn about Yugoslav history from creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918) to disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1991).¹⁹

During the closing meeting at the Embassy of Indonesia, head of the Indonesian delegation Andri Hadi once more stressed that the Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia was the best among all interfaith dialogues Indonesia had from 2004 to 2011.²⁰ Two months later, President of the Republic of Serbia Boris Tadić said that Serbia “will cherish multicultural and interfaith dialogue”.²¹

Success of the First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia gave basement for further interfaith cooperation between two countries. The Second Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia (Indonesia – Serbia) is expected in spring of 2012.

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The First Interfaith Dialogue Serbia – Indonesia was a meeting of geographically distanced civilizations and cultures of two historically friendly countries. Both delegations highly evaluated the Interfaith Dialogue.

¹⁸ Notes of Aleksandar Raković.

¹⁹ Notes of Aleksandar Raković.

²⁰ Notes of Aleksandar Raković.

²¹ *Politika* daily newspaper, 8 June 2011.

Indonesia has the fourth biggest population in the world and is a global leader in interfaith dialogues. Thus, Serbia cannot compare itself with Indonesia, but can see its leading regional role in interfaith dialogues.

Churches and religious communities in Serbia have constant, several decade long dialogues on religious and social topics. However, the Interfaith Dialogue with Indonesia first time gave possibility for creation of joint Serbian delegation composed by the most valuable persons from state and church and religious communities.

That fact the state, churches and religious communities can form joint interfaith delegation of the Republic of Serbia underlines that interreligious harmonization in Serbia was never stronger.