IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS AND CONFESSIONAL DISTANCE IN THE SHAPING OF STUDENTS' IDENTITY IN KOSOVO & METOHIJA[1]

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Starting from the assumption that religious identification has increased its significance in the shaping of identity in the environments which have been in the ambience of "frozen conflict" on a long-term basis, the extent of significance ascribed to it by students in Kosovo & Metohija has been examined. It is assumed that, independently of how the students themselves identify regarding religion, and of the place of religious identification in the identity matrix, they manifest significant distance towards the religiously "other" because it is the area with the politicization of the church and religious feelings, whereas religion becomes a means, an instrument of empowering national identity. The importance of religious affiliation as an identity segment of the surveyed population has been seen through the comparison of self-assessments of the importance of a series of identity markers (both those regarding traditional identity structures such as national, religious and family affiliation, and the markers typical of modern identity, such as sub-cultural, professional and regional affiliation). Religious/confessional distance was examined on the Bogardus scale, adapted to the examined student population. The research was conducted by the survey technique in December 2016/January 2017 on the proportional quota sample of 997 students of the Albanian University in Priština and the Serbian state University

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in Kosovska Mitrovica. The research was aimed at measuring the value of religious/confessional distance of the students at these universities and exploring the importance of religion/confession in the structure of their identity.

Key words: religious identification, identity, religious/confessional distance, Kosovo & Metohija.

Introduction

Modern researchers indicate the trend that emerged in the last decade of the 20th century that is characterized by the secularization process being replaced by the wave of new religion revitalization. This occurs despite the fact that the loss of the significance of religion – particularly in European societies, for various reasons – seemed to be an irreversible process. While in Western Europe secularization was the result of bourgeois revolutions, particularly the French Revolution, to such an extent that in the draft of the rejected and unsuccessful EU Constitution France did not even allow the citation of European Christian roots[5], in East Europe it was the result of official atheism which was observed more or less consistently[6]. Transition that began with the decline of real socialism revived the suppressed religious feelings in the eastern part of Europe. On the other hand, Western Europe begins to face the fact that it is not *only* Christian, but Mohammedan as well. Its residents are Arabs and black people who have obtained the respective citizenships of their former colonialists for several consecutive generations. The Arab Spring in 2011 and the ensuing civil wars – which at one moment overthrew lay regimes from power in those countries and inaugurated Muslim extremists, before the

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[5] Former French President Valéry Marie René Giscard d'Estaing, who was in charge of the writing of this act, allowed the possibility of such provision being only in the preamble and not as a constitutional norm. However, neither that nor the draft Constitution was accepted. The currently valid Treaty on European Union does not contain such provision, although pursuant to Article 4, Paragraph 2, the member-states are entitled to their national identities, which in the extensive legal interpretation might also include Christianity that is not specifically mentioned (Ugovor o EU, 2016)

[6] Somewhere that application was rather "liberal", for example in Catholic Poland, where the church directly helped the activities of anti-communist union "Solidarity", or in the case of Yugoslavia, particularly in Croatia and Slovenia; somewhere it was moderate, such as in Serbia, while in Albania it meant the prohibition of religion. Contrary to such efforts, In Macedonia in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "not only are churches not closed, destroyed or used for other uses, but substantial resources for the renewal and improvement of the churches are given. This originates from the fact that the state started considering the church as a cultural heritage, which is important for the preservation of the traditional values of the Macedonian people" (Matevski, Matevska, 2017: 477). As a matter of fact, it was connected with the creation of the Macedonian national identity, in the same manner as the attempts are being made to establish the Montenegrin national identity.

armies of those countries managed to consolidate and take over power[7] – brought about lines of refugees heading to former European metropolises. Some authors, it seems quite rightly so, indicate that Europe could be lay only while it was *only* Christian, but now, with the increasing power and number of the members of Mohammedan religion, the situation has changed substantially (Bhargava, 2014; cf. Ilić Duhadžija, 2017). Such conclusion about the return of religion on a large scale is supported not only by the data of numerous studies of religiosity throughout the world, reporting an increased share of people who assert positively/ on the indicator or religious and confessional self-identification, but also by the increased interest in religious topics and ideas (such as creationism ones). It is also indicated by the results of the research of new religious groups and considerations of the so-called new post-Christian religiosity (Петровић, Шуваковић, 2013: 246). However, the desecularization process involved the return of religion with modified cultural functions in the contemporary society. According to Peter Berger's interpretation, there are two main trends when it comes to the inclusion of religion in the global society, which are manifested particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. The first one is privatization of religion, strengthening of its significance as a formation element of personal identity. The other tendency is politicization of the church and religious feelings when there is close connection of ethnic and religious identities, where religion becomes a means, an instrument of empowering national identity, turning into a special kind of civil religion with the properties of the symbolic authority empowering the state authority[8] (Berger, 2001; see also: Casanova, 2001; Bogomilova, 2003).

There are some theoreticians who frequently tend to believe that in the background of this return process to the sacred there is an identity crisis deriving from the process of globalization and dissolution of national identity. Hence the search for a new type of collective identity – which is reconstructed again through religious and confessional identification, thus reducing modern man's frustration due to betrayed expectations from ideas brought by the modern society[9], which is defined by some theoreticians within an even more general syntagm "crisis of modern nationality" etc. (Malešević, 2007, 18; Живковић, 1995: 71–78); this argumentation is also supplemented by the fact that modern European secularism itself emerged on the roots of Christian tradition which has, although pushed to the background, never ceased to be one of the foundations of Western culture, part of its cultural being, by reproducing itself through, so to speak,

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[7] Here we refer primarily to Egypt, Syria and Libya where there is an ongoing tribal war though.

[8] However, that it is not only the specificity of modern era is supported by the description of religious beliefs and practice among Serbs at the beginning of the 20th century. Famous "Reiss (Archibald) observes several characteristics of "confession of faith" among Serbs. He asserts that, first of all, Serbs are not religious, that they do not accept God "in the way he was shown in the Bible" and they do not regularly attend church services, in particular men; secondly, they transformed their religion into "a national church or, rather, national tradition", by adding the cult of their national heroes and saintly characteristics, with the aim of preserving patriotism" (for details see Шуваковић, 2012).

[9] Such as the enlightenment, democratic society, social equality etc.

all elements of cultural life, from the ethical dimension to the culture of celebration (Malešević 2007, 20). In other words, the omnipresent religious base of culture has only changed its appearance, adapting itself to human needs in the era of global connectivity. Some theoreticians, however, see primarily profound anthropological reasons in the renewed strengthening of religious feelings, primarily, man's attempts to devise and morally justify his own choices. Therefore, revitalization of religious beliefs is associated with man's search for safety and meaning (Bell, 1978), but also with a new type of legitimacy on the part of the community. Namely, today's community perceives religiosity manifested also through various types of religious participation as a form of not only socially acceptable but desirable behaviour as well (Cvitković, 2009: 15–23), in a manner of exerting pressure in that direction. That the return to the sacred is evident, independently of its underlying reasons, is documented not only through empirical findings of religiosity of population (Blagojević, 1995; Kuburić, 1996; Kuburić, Gavrilović, 2012; Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, 2006), but also through the pronounced presence of the Church in the social and political space, seen by some authors as a manifestation of the beginning of the clericalization of the Serbian society (Đorđević M., 2005).

Method

The study, the results of which are represented here, was realized within broader research of student population periodically conducted by the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Kosovska Mitrovica (for previous studies see Шуваковић, Петровић, 2016). It was conducted in December 2016/January 2017 on the proportional quota sample of students of the Serbian State University in Kosovska Mitrovica and the University of Kosovo Albanians in Priština, including a total of 997 respondents. It should not be emphasized that the survey showed completely different ethnic and religious/confessional structure of the students from these two universities (Table 1).

Table 1: Ethnic and confessional structure of the surveyed population (%)

Ethnicity	University students from Kosovska Mitrovica	University students from Priština	Religious / confessional affiliation	University students from Kosovska Mitrovica	University students from Priština
Albanians	0.0	**99.5**	**Muslims**	5.8	**95.0**
Bosniaks	5.3	0.3	**Orthodox**	**91.3**	0.0
Gorani	0.5	0.0	**Catholics**	0.0	4.5
Roma	0.5	0.0	**Buddhists**	0.5	0.3
Serbs	**91.2**	0.0	**Other**	0.3	0.2
Montenegrins	1.5	0.0	**Atheists**	1.0	0.0
Do not want to make a statement	1.0	0.2	**Do not want to make a statement**	1.3	0.0

The research was conducted by the survey technique. Religious/confessional distance was examined on the Bogardus scale, adapted to the surveyed population. Religious/confessional distance[10] was observed as a degree of distance/closeness of the members of different confessions manifested in the willingness to establish social relations in a certain social space with a member of another creed and/or confession[11]. Each social relation could be accepted or rejected, whereas total distance at the level of subsamples was shown by calculating the average value of the total number of rejected social contacts with the members of certain creeds/religions by which it was measured.

It should be noted that after many years of attempting to conduct a study among the population of Albanian students, the researches finally succeeded in 2017.

It was assumed that religious identification had increased significance in the shaping of identity in those environments which were in the ambience of "frozen conflict" on a long-term basis. That is why the significance ascribed to it by the students in Kosovo & Metohija was explored. Moreover, it was assumed that independently of the extent to which the students ascribed significance to religious identification, they manifested certain distance towards the religiously "other". This hypothesis is based on the fact that this is a region where the church and religious feelings are politicized, thereby rendering religion an instrument of national identity empowering.

Due to the limited space, we will show only the final result of the research.

Results

The results of the research have confirmed our assumption about students manifesting certain distance towards the members of other creeds/confessions, when it comes to the subsample of students from the Serbian State University. As it may be seen from the data, the average value of confessional distance towards the members of "other" creeds/confessions is substantially higher than when it comes to the members of one's own confession (in this case, Orthodox Christianity). Mean values of the confessional distance score are approximate to those of the members of other creeds/confessions (Figure 1).

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[10] The distance was researched towards members of three confessional groups: Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant confessions, as well as towards the members of the Islamic religion, Judaism and Buddhism.

[11] For the purpose of the research, the results of which we list here, the following relations among the groups were measured: kinship through marriage, friendships, accepting members of other religions/confessions as professors or teaching fellows, accepting a colleague at the same faculty, for living in the neighbourhood, co-existence in the same town and accepting representatives of a religion/confession as residents of the respective country.

Figure 1: Score value of religious/confessional distance measured on the Bogardus scale
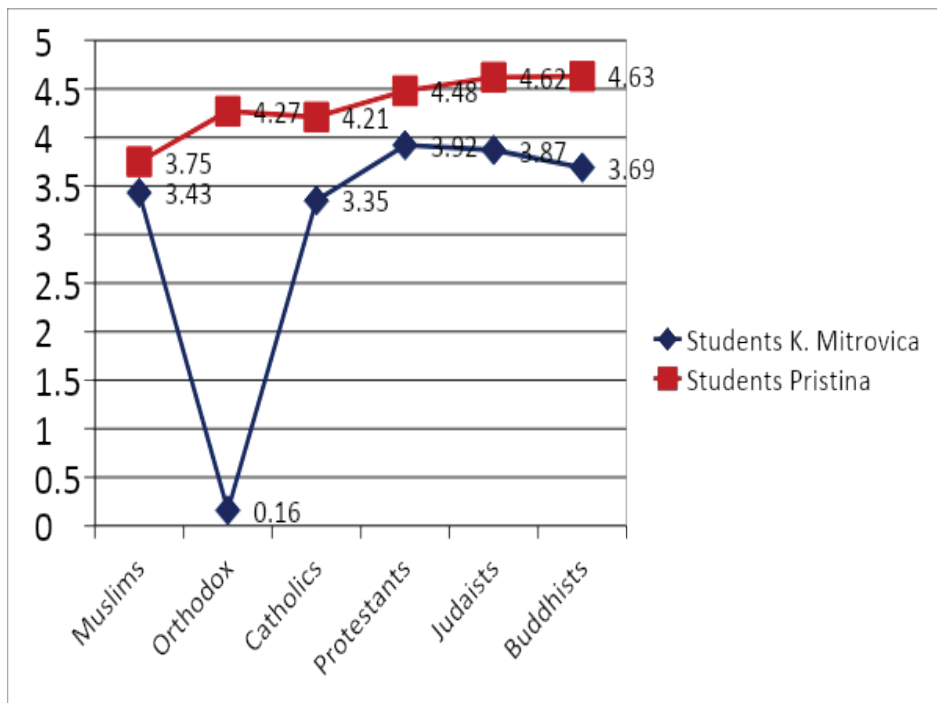
An interesting result was obtained when it comes to the students from the University of Priština. First of all, substantial part of the surveyed population did not want to answer the questions about confessional distance (in certain cases up to 56%). Among those who answered, substantial part shows distance towards the members of their own religion. As a matter of fact, it turns out that the students of the University in Priština show a higher degree of distance towards the members of their own religion, i.e., Islam, in comparison to the distance of Serbian students towards the members of Islam. (Figure 1)

Regardless of the fact that a low share of the students of the University in Priština ascribes significance to religious affiliation when introducing themselves or meeting other people, in their specification of the attitude towards their own religion, as many as 74.2% of them declare as believers, 41.4% of whom determine themselves as convinced believers who accept everything taught by their religion. Religiosity is even more pronounced among the students from the University in Kosovska Mitrovica, 2/3 of whom claim that they are convinced believers and, together with those who consider themselves religious, with a certain reserve regarding the contents of their own religious teaching, they account for as many as 86.1% of the surveyed population.

The significance of religious affiliation as a segment of the identity of the surveyed population was seen through the comparison of significance self-assessment of a series of identity markers (both those regarding traditional elements of identity structure, such as national, religious and family affiliation, and the markers characteristic of modern identity, such as sub-cultural, professional and regional affiliation). Identity structure is seen through the questions directly assessing the significance of 11 identity markers, whose importance is determined by the respondent by putting himself/herself in a "real" situation of communicating with others. Two of the questions posed to the respondents are complementary: what they consider important to communicate to the other person when introducing themselves (Figure 2), and what information they want to obtain when meeting the other person (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Distribution of the answers to the question how important it is for you to communicate the following about yourself to someone else … (option: I find it important in %)
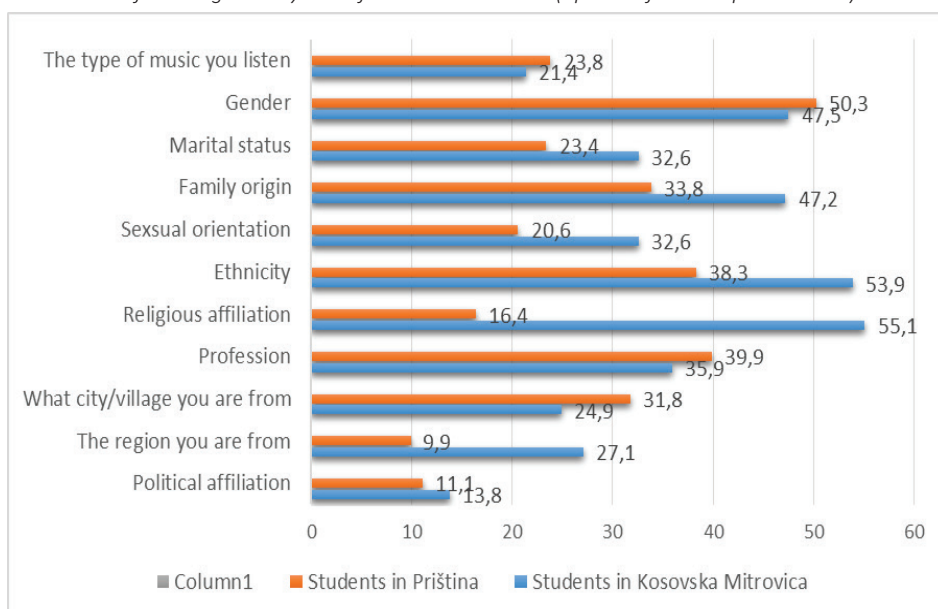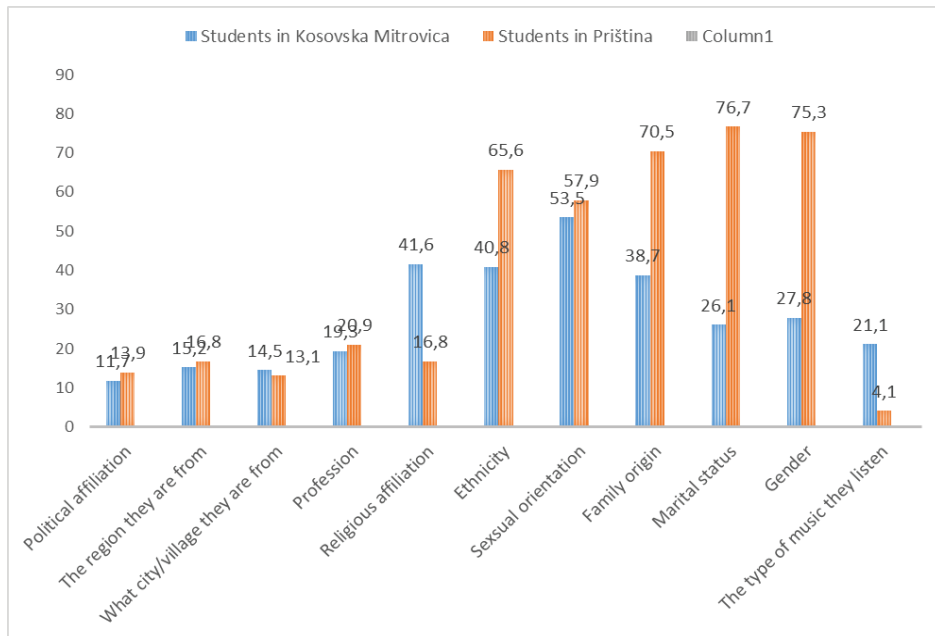
Figure 3: Distribution of the answer to the question how important it is for you to find out the following about the person you have just met ... (option: it is important to me - a finding in %

Discussion

Regarding the value of religious/confessional distance, the score is indubitably the lowest in relation to the members of one's own religion. However, the difference was established and it is significant: while there is almost self-identification with Orthodox Christianity among the students in Kosovska Mitrovica, the students in Priština show a high level of distance towards Mohammedanism, and the score is even higher than among the students in Kosovska Mitrovica. Despite the fact that we bear in mind that half of the students from Priština refused to state their opinions about this, in comparison to the identity markers (how they want to present themselves and what they find important in other people), among the students in Priština there is evidently higher significance ascribed to national than to religious affiliation. This may be explained as a confirmation of the old thesis, now among the student population, that being Albanian is more important than belonging to Islam[12] (Šuvaković, 2015; cf. Jevtić, 2013), as well as a protest against recruiting young people from Kosovo & Metohija for fanatic warriors of the so-called Islamic State (Mijalković, 2016: 61), on a rather large scale. Since we obtained

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[12] Despite the fact that the vast majority of the students in Priština declared themselves as members of Islam, it should not be forgotten that Albanians in general are a nation with three religions.

similar answers when examining ethnic distance (Šuvaković, 2019), this finding could also be interpreted as a form of political mimicry deriving from extremely strong control in the domain of political attitudes and practices of the Albanian ethnic community. In other words, a question may be posed whether Albanian students hide their attitude towards other ethnic and religious groups out of fear of expressing it openly.

In the analysis of identity markers, the students in Kosovska Mitrovica are mainly traditional and unambiguous in terms that they find it important to see those characteristics they want to present to others in other people they meet. Practically, there is compatibility and, in both cases, the most important are religion, nation, gender (sexual orientation being important in the other person[13]) and family origin. All these markers are important to approximately 1/2 of the student population and, as we can see, only one from the group of "modern" ones. In the structure of self-identity among the students from Kosovska Mitrovica, somewhat less important are – at the level of about 1/3 – marital status and profession, i.e., at the level between 1/4 and 1/5 when their importance is perceived in other persons. In both cases, every fifth student from Kosovska Mitrovica includes the type of music they listened to in self-identification and local affiliation, which are also some of the "modern" markers.

The situation is different among the students in Priština. For them, gender is the most important in self-identity structure[14] – for 1/2 of the respondents, followed by professional and national affiliation, family origin and local determination (town/ country), which are all self-identity markers present as important among approximately 1/3 of the respondents. The answer of between 1/4 and 1/5 students is that important characteristics they want to show to others also include the type of music they listen to, marital status and sexual orientation, while the share of the remaining markers in self-identity structure is below 1/5. Therefore, regarding the structure of self-identity markers among the students in Priština, it may be said that "traditional" and "modern" identity indicators are almost equally represented. However, when it comes to what they expect is important for others to present about themselves, in the range from 3/4 to a little more than 1/2 respondents listed the following characteristics: marital status, gender, family origin, ethnic affiliation (slightly below 2/3) and sexual orientation. The importance of profession was emphasized by only 1/5 of the respondents, while all other characteristics are below that share. In this case, there is no concurrence in the order of values or in their share. So, in the self-identity structure, the importance of national affiliation is emphasized by 38.3% students, but when it comes to the importance of this value compared to others, it is important to 65.6% respondents. In both cases, the share of those who find religious/confessional affiliation important is the same (low), but some traditional values expected from others are important two or even to and a

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[13] It is the most important value expected in someone else, even more important than religion and nation. This actually refers to the expectation that someone "is not homosexual"?

[14] It is important that someone is male? In the Albanian patriarchal family, the question about the number of children was regularly answered in reference to the number of sons.

half times more than compared to the self-identification[15] of the students in Priština. In other words, they attempt to present themselves as modern, but ask for the presence of the traditional in others, which quite clearly indicates mimicry when it comes to the importance of the values they favour.

Towards a Conclusion

1. The students from both subsamples show moderate (bordering with high) distance towards the members of all other surveyed religions and confessions.

2. The students studying in Kosovska Mitrovica (Serbs) show almost complete self-identification with Orthodox Christianity.

3. The students from the University in Priština (Albanians) show a somewhat higher level of religious/confessional distance towards the religious "other" than their counterparts from the University in Kosovska Mitrovica, while it should be noted that among them substantial distance was established towards the members of their own religion, as well as a large number of rejections to answer these questions. It may be interpreted in several ways: orientation to giving more significance to nation in comparison to religion (the "Albanian" idea), resistance to recruiting young people for fanatic warriors of the Islamic State, as well as the result of political mimicry due to pronounced social control. The last option is also supported by the fact that 3/4 of the Albanian students claim that they are believers. In any case, in a repeated study further efforts should be made to examine the above-mentioned dilemma in more detail.

4. The students from the University in Kosovska Mitrovica most frequently declare themselves as convinced believers. Above average attachment of the students to the sacred (having in mind the findings of other research into religiosity in general population) is likely to be explained partly by the overall political and social situation in the region where the majority of the surveyed population studies and lives. Moreover, one should know that the Serbian Orthodox Church had and still has the pronounced role of social integration, culture and tradition preservation when it comes to the Serbs in Kosovo & Metohija, particularly those living in the territory south of the Ibar River. Strong religious identification is also connected with the fact that many religious buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo & Metohija, including Orthodox (but also Catholic and Jewish) graveyards, were completely destroyed or desecrated by Albanian terrorists in the past years. It is probably likely to use it to justify the pronounced marker of religious affiliation (with other traditional identity elements) in the respondents' identity structure and its

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[15] When the value of marital status is compared in the self-identity structure, it is considered as important by 23.4% students, but in as many as 76.7% cases they think it is important if others express it. The frequency of the importance of gender in others is higher by as many as 20%; the importance of family origin of others is double in comparison to one's own; the importance of sexual orientation is almost triple. One fifth of them find it important what music they listen to, but they do not care at all about the music others listen to.

primacy in comparison to other modern identity markers, such as affiliation to a certain profession, sub-culture, regional or local community.

5. Religious self-identification among the students from the University in Priština (Albanians) is not a pronounced identity marker, despite the fact that a substantial share of this population sees themselves as convinced believers or believers who partly accept the principles of their religion. In the structure of their self-identity, traditional and modern identity markers are intertwined. However, when insight is made into what they find important as a value in others, then traditional markers dominate, which makes us suspect that even the self-identity markers are the result of their need for mimicry. This definitely leads to a conclusion that further research is necessary.

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