

the European project since the 1990s. The 1996–97 civic protests marked a symbolic embrace of European democratic values, epitomized by slogans like “Belgrade is the world.” EU support through diplomatic initiatives, aid programs, and post-2000 assistance—such as the “Oil for Democracy” scheme and the 2001 donors’ conference—reinforced this alignment. Licht notes, however, the persistent ambivalence: Serbia’s delayed accession to the Council of Europe, the imposition of neoliberal economic reforms, and contentious environmental issues like lithium mining have fuelled Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, EU humanitarian gestures, including aid during the 2014 floods, underscore enduring solidarity between Serbia and the Union.

Ivan Vejvoda, in *Transformative Power of the EU in Serbia and the Western Balkans*, situates Serbia’s democratization within broader European dynamics. Historically agrarian and authoritarian, the region has struggled to develop participatory political cultures. Since the 1990s, gradual democratization and market reforms have proceeded unevenly, with visible setbacks across Central and Eastern Europe. For Vejvoda, the Western Balkans’ economic and political viability depends on sustained

European investment, rule-of-law reforms, and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The region’s pro-European youth—symbolized by student delegations to Brussels—embody a generational commitment to European values despite political retrenchments.

Serbia and the Balkans: Three Centuries of Embrace with Europe presents a panoramic yet nuanced account of the continuous and multidirectional exchanges that have linked Serbia and the Balkans with Europe. Across five thematic units, the collection dismantles simplistic binaries—Europe versus Balkans, modernity versus tradition, periphery versus centre—revealing instead a complex web of interactions. From Enlightenment universalism to Romantic nationalism, from socialist internationalism to European integration, Serbia’s engagement with Europe emerges as an ongoing process of negotiation and reinterpretation rather than mere imitation. The contributors collectively portray Serbia not as Europe’s “Other” but as one of its many constitutive margins, whose intellectual and cultural transformations illuminate the broader story of Europe’s own self-definition.

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Edin Omerčić, *Brzina mraka: Politička djelatnost Srpske pravoslavne crkve u Bosni i Hercegovini 1989–1996*. Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2024, 495.

Faith and religious communities occupy a significant place in questions of identity and politics in the Balkans. Until now,

they have predominantly been the subject of various political science and sociological studies, while historiography has lar-

gely relegated them to the background. For precisely these reasons, the doctoral dissertation of Edin Omerčić, entitled *The Political Activity of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1989 to 1996*, constitutes a notable advance in their historiographical treatment. Based on that dissertation, the book *The Speed of Darkness* was produced and published in 2024 in Sarajevo, though in a substantially expanded and partially revised form. The very metaphor of the title—borrowed from Miljenko Jergović's *Sarajevo Marlboro*—signals the author's stance toward the institution whose activity during the turbulent wartime years in Bosnia and Herzegovina he examines: for Omerčić, the SOC represents a "darkness," understood as an agent of division, distrust, and chauvinism vis-à-vis other religious and ethnic groups in BiH—one distinguished moreover by the "speed of its spread."

At its core, *The Speed of Darkness* retains the subject of the author's doctoral dissertation—an examination of the political activity of the SOC in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the late 1980s until the end of the war—yet it brings important innovations. The author offers detailed treatments of the key concepts of "Svetosavlje" and the "Kosovo myth," which he approaches from a critical perspective, interpreting them as ideological constructs serving to incite nationalist sentiment with the aim of homogenizing the Serbian nation and mobilizing it for the realization of Greater Serbian political objectives. The politicization of the Kosovo myth is

traced through the attempt to link past and present by depicting Ratko Mladić as a new Obilić and Srebrenica as a new Kosovo, thereby granting the conflict the moral status of a decisive battle for the salvation of the Serbian people. In addition to these two concepts, the book introduces the notions of "religious politicization" and a more detailed analysis of the "culture of remembrance," both understood as mechanisms for the radicalization of the Serbian population in BiH. This new conceptual framework gives the work a broader interdisciplinary character. Compared with the dissertation, the source base has also been expanded: in addition to archival collections from Bosnia and Herzegovina, it now includes documentation from the Archives of the Republic of Srpska and ICTY materials, as well as new sources such as memoirs, diaries, and studies in the sociology of religion. Another difference appears already in the introduction, where the author, instead of employing a strictly academic approach, introduces a personal recollection and the literary metaphor of the "speed of darkness," thereby interweaving scholarly discourse with personal memory. The structure of the book also differs from that of the dissertation: whereas the dissertation was organized into five chapters, here the material has been expanded into seven thematic units.

The first chapter, "Political Preconditions and Theoretical Framework," establishes the political context and focuses on the process of the "disintegration of religion" and the transformed ide-

ology of Svetosavlje. It presents the controversies surrounding competing conceptualizations of Yugoslavia and the disputes concerning the affirmation of the national identity of Bosnian Muslims, which created the conditions for a revival of religiosity during the 1980s.

The second chapter, "The Activity of the Serbian Orthodox Church during the 1980s," analyzes the change in the political perception of the SOC, which, following Tito's death, began an ideological campaign to return to the socio-political stage. Large-scale religious gatherings in BiH are presented as the continuation of "the happening of the people" under a religious guise, with emphasis on the aggressive manifestation of nationalist aspirations during the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo.

The third chapter examines the politicization of the restitution of nationalized church property, as well as the politicization involved in the construction of new religious buildings and preservation of existing ones. The SOC continued its political activity through the "sacralization" of public space and the political appropriation of Svetosavlje, manifested in celebrations marking the anniversary of the Great Migration of the Serbs of 1690 and the anniversary of Ustaša terror against Serbs in 1941.

The fourth chapter demonstrates how the SOC provided ideological and political support for the process of the "regionalization" of Bosnia and Herzegovina, explaining its endorsement of

the creation of mono-ethnic territorial entities, and discusses the establishment of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992.

The fifth chapter explores the relationship between the Serbian political elite and the SOC and the Church's position toward peace proposals and negotiations from 1993 to early 1996, analyzing the Church's political interpretation of the decisions of the international community concerning the constitutional and territorial organization of BiH.

The sixth chapter addresses the "symphonic" relationship between Church and State in the Republika Srpska. The author analyzes the close connection between the SOC and the leadership of the Republic of Srpska, pointing out that the Church viewed the war as a struggle against communism and an "international conspiracy," while supporting the leadership of RS, which perceived the contested territories as "pan-Serbian monastic lands" and "a third Kosovo." The book argues that the Church sought to lend legitimacy to the political and military actions of the Serbian authorities through initiatives such as the founding of the seminary in Foča and the engagement of clergy within the military, even though it formally condemned atrocities.

The seventh chapter focuses on the change of stance that emerged within the SOC during the final phase of the war, following military defeats. A gradual shift occurs in which the SOC leadership begins to rely more on Slobodan Mi-

lošević rather than Radovan Karadžić, enabling the Church to participate in negotiations and accept the peace process under conditions dictated by *realpolitik*.

In the book's conclusion, Omerčić articulates claims that were more cautiously formulated in the dissertation, arguing that the SOC, through its rhetoric and symbolic practices, was one of the key actors in the process of dehumanizing the non-Serb population—an assertion he connects with the crimes committed during the war. This conclusion is the most contentious part of the book and opens space for debate: some will view it as a scholarly well-grounded analysis, while others will argue that it represents a generalization of statements by individual Church actors to the institution as a whole. The fact that the author employs terms which are, to a certain extent, derogatory and indicative of his antagonistic attitude toward the SOC calls into question the fundamental presumption of impartiality and objectivity expected of scholarly inquiry. For example, he insists on formulations such as “aggressive conduct” and “political abuses.” Particularly controversial are expressions such as “a distinctly conservative and regressive force” and “a crude intrusion into fundamental human rights,” which describe the activities of the SOC at the beginning of the 1990s crisis. Here he refers to the political misuse of national sentiment and history for the realization of Greater Serbian aspirations. Regarding the “aggressive conduct,” the author has in mind the sta-

tements and views expressed by individual members of the Serbian clergy concerning alleged revivals of Ustaša ideology and purported conspiracies against Serbs, attributed to members of the other two constituent peoples—Croats and Bosniaks. Such statements by individual clergy or hierarchs stemmed from relatively fresh memories of crimes committed against Serbs during the NDH regime in BiH. These statements were never adopted by the Holy Synod or the Assembly of Bishops of the SOC, and therefore never formed part of the Church's official policy.

In this context, it is important to highlight an alternative interpretation: the process of “religious renewal” in the late 1980s was not necessarily initiated by the SOC for purposes of political hegemony, but rather emerged as a reaction to the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of the communist regime. Controversies also arise in the interpretation of Svetosavlje: while Serbian historiography understands it as a spiritual and cultural identity intertwined with Orthodoxy, Omerčić presents it primarily as an ideological construct serving nationalist mobilization. Similarly, the presence of bishops at sessions of governmental bodies in the Republika Srpska may be viewed as a legitimate expression of the institutional perspective of a community of great identity importance to the Serbian people, rather than solely as political interference.

Unlike the Serbian Orthodox Church, the other two major religious

communities were not the subject of equally extensive analysis, though they are mentioned in their interactions with the SOC. The author's perception of the Islamic Community and the Roman Catholic Church differs significantly from his view of the SOC. These differences become evident in discussions of questions of BiH's sovereignty, national rights, and the so-called "ecumenical dialogue." The Serbian side is framed within the context of mythologizing history for the purpose of realizing Greater Serbian objectives, whereas the Islamic Community (IC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) are depicted in the opposite manner. The former is cast as a guardian of BiH's sovereignty and of the national identity of the Bosniaks, while the latter plays a similar role for the Croat population. In short, the IC and RCC are portrayed as actors sincerely committed to reconciliation through dialogue, both ostensibly sharing the same goal—the preservation of a unified and sovereign BiH. The Serbian side, by contrast, is depicted as entering negotiations insincerely, while secretly aiming at the partition of BiH and the incorporation of its largest part into a Greater Serbia. Such formulations reveal the author's own predispositions. It is evident that the book attempts to portray the role of the SOC as illegitimate; the other two communities function as points of comparison, serving as counterweights to the SOC's activities. In other words, they are presented as models of how a religious community ought to position itself with

regard to questions of BiH statehood and the identity of its citizens.

Despite advancing conclusions that may be the subject of debate, the book's scholarly value is undeniable. As a revised and expanded version of a dissertation, it represents a pioneering attempt at a systematic examination of the relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and politics in the Bosnian wars of the 1990s. Through the enrichment of its theoretical apparatus, the expansion of its source base, and its conceptual interventions, Omerčić has produced a work that transcends the boundaries of a conventional dissertation and becomes a standalone scholarly monograph. It should nevertheless be noted—as indicated above—that in several places, including the very title of the book, the presence of the author's personal narrative becomes evident, at moments giving an impression of partiality.

Within the regional scholarly community, the book has been received as an important contribution to historiography, while in a broader context it will undoubtedly be the subject of extensive debate. Its value lies in the foundations it lays for future research and in the new questions it raises concerning the role of religion in political processes. A key methodological strength of the work is its multiperspectival approach, exemplified by the use of archival documents from both Bosniak and Serbian institutions, thereby enabling readers to view the same events and processes through the lenses

of both sides. Furthermore, by providing the general context in which it explains the transformation of religious communities' modes of operation on the eve of communism's collapse, the book allows the reader to understand how religious institutions acquired the opportunity to become consequential actors in subsequent developments. Through its scope, structure, and analytical additions—expressed in

two extra chapters devoted to the philosophical underpinnings of the SOC's approach to wartime developments—*The Speed of Darkness* reveals itself as a serious and mature scholarly work, one that is likely to retain weight in academic debates for a long time.

Predrag DRAGOVIĆ

Б. Оташевић, И. Крстић Мистрицеловић, Ф. Вучетић, Б. Оташевић,
Прећућани злочини. Муслиманска милиција у Андријевичком срезу 1941–1945.
Документи, Цетиње – Београд, 2024, 942.

In mid-2024, a collection of documents entitled *Prećutani zločini. Muslimanska milicija u Andrijevačkom srezu 1941–1945* was published by the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Institute for Recent History of Serbia. As stated in the Preface, the editors' intention was to publish archival documents concerning crimes committed during the Second World War against the Orthodox population in the specified area by Muslim collaborators, members of "vulnetari units, the Albanian gendarmerie, the regular Albanian army, Albanian units attached to the Italian army, German SS troops," as well as by "various outlaw bands owing allegiance to no one." According to the editors, the publication of archival documents "appears to be the best way to respond to recent attempts by revisionist-minded historians to relativize the cri-

mes committed against the Orthodox, Serbian, and Montenegrin population by individuals of another religion and/or nationality, while simultaneously seeking to substantiate the thesis of genocidal Serbian intentions toward Muslims by insisting on crimes that were undoubtedly committed against them by Serbs and Montenegrins."

The introductory study, entitled "Crimes of the Muslim Militia in the Andrijeva District, 1941–1945," first outlines the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the brief April War of 1941, the partition of its territory among the Axis powers and their allies, the establishment of occupation regimes, and the creation of puppet states on Yugoslav territory. Particular attention is devoted to the formation of the so-called "Greater Albania" under Italian protection, whose territory—alongside other Yugoslav regions—included the Andrijeva district.