

Sergej Flere
University of Maribor
Faculty of Arts
Department of Sociology

Ideological conflicts in Slovenia over religious issues

Abstract *Since attaining independence, Latin pattern (Martin, 1978) disputes and conflicts have characterized the Slovenian political scene, particularly as to relations between the state and religious communities. Slovenia adopted a law on the issue only in 2006, availing itself of the law from the 1970s. The 2007 Religious Freedom Act contained many privileges for the dominant Roman Catholic Church, including those of a symbolic nature and those of an economic one. The Constitutional Court declared the Act unconstitutional and void, departing from the European Convention of Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Thus, it set other beliefs at the same level with religious ones, did away with many privileges and obstacles in recognition and registration of new religious communities. However, this decision has legislatively been implemented only in a small portion, remaining to be fully implemented. However, the absence of substantive agreements with the Holy See and the absence of religious instruction in public schools indicate a predominance of liberalism on the public scene.*

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Keywords: *Slovenia, Church and State, Religious freedom, Roman Catholic Church, Latin pattern*

It may help to understand the crux of the Slovenian situation if we begin with the sociological analysis of David Martin who speaks of „Catholic monopolies“ or the „Latin pattern“, as the specific path to secularisation. Within this pattern, „the union of the Church with the political right“ is typical during entry into modern society, along with the Church demonstrating „official militancy“ despite having been truly relegated to a „subordinate posture“ in its relations to the right wing political forces in power (Martin 1978: 37–38). In such a situation, all cultural attempts at „cross breeding“ are understood by Catholic forces as „traitorous“ (ibid: 39). As a consequence, opposition to Catholic forces brings about „a split endlessly reproductive of itself“ (ibid: 40).

Slovenia clearly fits into Martin's category of „Latin pattern“ in terms of its political organisation of religious affairs. The Latin pattern arises in the absence of denominational plurality and with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) enjoying a position beyond the hegemonic one, being almost a monopolist. „Enlightenment and religion clash“ (Martin 2005: 20) is the crux of the pattern. This goes for practically all areas of social and cultural life and energizes political life. There has historically also been a Lutheran

minority, limited to the region of the country in the North East which historically belonged Hungary, and not impacting critically on the picture. In early modernity (from the 16th to the 18th centuries) the Habsburgs practically disallowed religious minorities (Vidic and Cvirn 1999).

Subsequently, in the development of modern society in the 19th century, there arose the pattern of Catholicism being the only „historical“ religion of Slovenians, as well as all its neighbours (Italians, Austrians, Hungarians and Croats). Catholicism was also the major institutional structure, since Slovenia was divided administratively into different Habsburg „crown lands“, it was politically disunited, which represented a major obstacle to its political and cultural growth.

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Modern political development began under the Catholic aegis, the first political party being the Catholic sponsored Slovenian People's Party. It was established in 1892, remaining the most influential party in Slovenia until World War II. The liberals followed by establishing the liberalist National (Progressive) Party in 1894, followed by the Yugoslav Socialdemocratic Party in 1896 (the two formed the political part of the anti-clericalist camp). Prior to World War II, the liberals, flanked by the Socialists (and Communists), never attained majority support. However, the cultural forces behind the two camps have fed the basic cultural and political conflict in Slovenia, dynamising and energising political life and raising issue that defined and articulated the matter of dispute on the public scene throughout the modern period, with the partial exception of the Communist period (1945–1990). Liberals were not necessarily atheists or proponents of atheism, their major goal was to diminish and sideline the public nature of Catholicism and to enable political discourse to be freed of religious and clericalist tutelage.

It was usually Catholic thought that articulated the subject of the contest: at the end of the 19th century, it promoted the ideas of society being established by estates, of the arts needing to promote Christian values, as interpreted by the RCC, of political life being defined by the Church, and of authority originating from RCC authority alone (Ušeničnik 1910). Liberal artists and thinkers were attacked and stigmatised in a drive for the „separation of spirits“, i.e. isolation of everything not under Catholic control became the main objective (an idea advanced and practiced under the leadership of Bishop Mahnič, around the turn from the 19th to the 20th century). The Catholic Church dominated all cultural-artistic societies, disallowing their becoming religiously neutral. The same went for the press. The liberals found ways to assert themselves, however, through

professional organizations. The teaching profession was focus of interest for both sides, as was public elementary and secondary education, which was continuously religiously permeated and controlled (Dolenc 1996).

On the sensitive issue of ethnic identity the authoritative and authoritarian Bishop Mahnič stated (allegedly speaking for all Catholic Slovenians): „German and all other Catholics are closer to us than Slovenian liberals“ (1888, as cited in Pleterski 1998: 38). This may sound convincing from certain varieties of Christian point of view, but the essence of the communication was to strip Slovenian liberals of any legitimacy. On the other hand, political Catholicism before World War I denied the possibility that ethnic Slovenians could be anything other than Catholics (Dragoš 1996: 136–137, analysing messages at the First Slovenian Catholic Meeting 1920). Setting aside the niceties and details of the debate on the strength of the Catholic hegemony was, we note only that in 1891 the liberal novelist Ivan Tavčar published in 1891 a satiric novel, *4000*, on how Slovenia would remain under Catholic authoritarian hegemony in the year 4000.

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During the first Yugoslav state (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), clericalist politics was still dominant in Slovenia, at home declaring its intentions to win autonomy for Slovenia, while conceding that it was not possible „at that moment“, whereas in Belgrade, the capital, where political life was concentrated, Slovenian politicians of the Slovenian People’s Party played well within the centralist governmental orchestras and even took positions of prime minister and minister of the police (Konstantinović 1998).

Indeed, during the entire period prior to World War II, the crux of the cultural conflict between the clericalists and anti-clericalists was muddled by the fact that Slovenia was not an independent state and both sides needed to present themselves as the true combatants for Slovenian emancipation (although it could not be said that Slovenia was in a subjugated position during Tito’s Yugoslavia). This issue was particularly acute where it involved the relationship towards the traditional hegemon, the Germans. Both the liberals and the clericalists considered themselves as true combatants for Slovenian emancipation. However, during the period ending with World War II, the clericalists were the dominant factor in the discourse, articulating it and defining the terms. Simultaneously, both sides needed to coalesce with extra-Slovenian political entities and to present that to the Slovenian public as acceptable. We shall not enter into the details of the history. The issue is well summed up by the historian Pleterski, himself evidently siding with one camp, in depicting the logic of the clericalist camp:

In the motto 'A Germanophile (*Nemškutar*) is preferable to a Young Slovenian (liberal), because Germanophily and Christianity do not exclude each other, whereas Young Slovenianhood means Atheism', the subjects are to have changed: the Young Slovenian is replaced by the Slovenian Partisan [member of Tito's armed forces during World War II – remark by authors], whereas the Germanophile is replaced by the 'Occupier' and in a new era (World War II and after) the old conclusion is adapted: fascism and Christianity do not exclude each other, whereas partisanhood means atheism (Pleterski 1998: 4).

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After World War II, during the Communist period, public discourse radically changed, and conditions for religious life for the RCC were severely limited. However, conditions for religious life continuously improved after initial attempts to radically suppress, although not completely to do away with religious life. A certain amount of suppression would be understandable, given that three major religions operated in the federal communist state, having also major shares in the population, amongst which interconfessional relations were inimical, at least until Vatican Council II in the 1960s (Alexander 2008). The history of relations between the three groups (in the wider region) was full of bloody conflict in modern times. With governmental privileging, the first Yugoslav state symbolically identified with Eastern Orthodoxy (via the dynasty) and genocide and generalized interethnic and interreligious strife during World War II (Dedijer et al. 1972). However, the initial suppression after World War II set aside such objective reasons and tended toward complete marginalization and persecution of religion, on the basis of an initial attempt to introduce communist totalitarian rule (Alexander 2008; Radić 2002).

By the 1960s, the situation had changed and accommodation seemed on the horizon. Besides tolerating strictly religious activities (but not public ones, with a limited exception for charity), the situation changed by allowing the entry of new entities on the religious scene. Initially, these were mainly protestant groups originating from the United States, which availed themselves of religious liberty and the possibility of publishing brochures (Alexander 2008; Flere 2012).

Religious activities were governed as of the 1970s by republic and provincial laws, which limited their activities mainly to „spiritual affairs“, but this formed the framework in which religious activities and constructions grew and the press flourished.

Hereinafter, the paper will be structured in different sections: the structure of the religious scene, the legal position of religious entities within independent Slovenia being the central issue, followed by presentations

on the national reconciliation issue, religion and education, religion and family, financial and property issues of the RCC, meriting special treatment (because of the relevance of the issue, at that point insight into religiosity dynamics will be introduced), and a discussion. All issues will be presented taking into account that the RCC is the major, almost monopolistic religious player, and considering conflict between laicist and clericalist forces, as main axis of division.

However, this goes for the public discourse scene. At the in depth structure of Slovenian society, a sound secularization has been noted (Flere and Klanjšek 2007; Lavrič and Flere 2011).

Pluralisation of the Religious Scene

Since 1976, there has existed a register of registered religious communities operated and published by the Slovenian Government („Register“ 2012). At the beginning of 2014, 44 religious communities (43 of which are active) were registered in Slovenia. Most of these are historically new, both substantively and in terms of their presence in Slovenia. Besides the RCC, the Lutheran Evangelical Church, the Calvinist Reformed Church (now almost extinct) and marginally, the Serbian Orthodox Church, can be considered as historically rooted (Komac et al. 2013).

The communities indicate a wide variety, including some communities about which more information cannot be attained publicly (e.g., The Mithraic Gnostic Religious Community). Beside those which can easily be considered Christian, there are two Islamic communities registered and a number of faiths established internationally in the 20th century (The Unification Church, Church of Scientology), as well as Buddhist and Hindu communities.

Some of these groups substantively arrived from the United States, even though their roots and paths may be more complicated (the Christian Baptist Church, Christian Adventist Church, Jehovah's Witnesses). Sixteen groups were registered before the attainment of Slovenia's independence (1991), the majority being registered after. Demographically, the RCC, the Islamic communities, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Lutheran Evangelical Church are the most significant ones. The portion of Muslims was 2.2% in 2002. Numerically, the RCC remains approximately twenty four times more numerous than the second group, the Islamic Community. Thus, the scene remains not only a predominantly Catholic one, but almost a monopolistic one.

Legal Position of Religious Entities within Independent Slovenia

Slovenia attained independence and democratic pluralism rather gently, if not quite in a „velvet“ manner, with little conflict, particularly in comparison to the other Yugoslav successors (Ramet 2006). As to the position of religion, important factors were the newly adopted Constitution of 1991 and the Religious Communities Act of 1976, which remained in effect, with slight changes until 2007 (one provision is still in force).

The Constitution holds typical liberalist provisions on separation of church and state and on equality of religious communities. The Act of 1976, however, proved to be surprisingly adaptable to new conditions, with some supervisory provisions set aside and some considered irrelevant. This, along with the liberal spirit of the 1990s, enabled the establishment of a large number of religious communities in Slovenia. As Lesjak and Lekić state, this structural change did not basically alter the religious demographic picture of Slovenia, but enriched the religious scene (2013).

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The Religious Freedom Act (RFA) Adoption

On the legislative front, under Vatican pressure, the Slovenian Government entered into an agreement with the Holy See in 2004. The Agreement does not stipulate substantive obligations on either party but envisage entering into other agreements and there are practically no commitments on the part of the state. However, there are agreements between two states, creating a special situation. The Slovenian Constitutional Court interpreted the Agreement as valid in so far as it is interpreted in accordance with Slovenian Constitution article 7, i.e. religious communities being equal before the law and the state and the RCC observing the Slovenian legal order (Constitutional Court 2003). Basically, it was a test to see how far Slovenia would go in conceding to demands for RCC ideological hegemony.

After attaining independence, it was 2007 before Slovenia adopted a statutory act on religion, the RFA. This was undertaken under the rightist government led by Janez Janša, with Lovro Šturm being the Minister of Justice in charge of the matter. In fact, the first draft was prepared by a private institute previously headed by Šturm. There were some public discussions on the draft, mainly promoting liberalist objections to the draft, but the Ministry held strong to its original positions. The RFA was adopted with a slight majority: except for deputies belonging to rightist

parties, the votes of the national minority deputies were needed, a rare situation in Slovenian parliamentary history, indicating a division in Parliament and in society, as well.

The main provisions, also the ones that would become contentious, are the following:

- On the symbolic level, the RFA systematically adopts the wording „churches and religious communities“, although not granting to the former any particular legal advantages, it symbolically differentiates between the two.
- More substantial discrimination is to be found in Article 5, where the RFA states: „Churches and other religious communities promoting spirituality and human dignity in private and public life, also promoting extending meaning to existence in the area of religious life and simultaneously also having a significant role in public life by developing their educational, charitable and other activities in the area of the welfare state, enriching national identity, thus discharging a significant social role, shall be generally beneficial organisations.“ This „generally beneficial nature“ of certain „religious organisations“ does not automatically imply any specific privileges. Nevertheless it is a provision symbolically granting precedence to certain organisations. The legislator does introduce a difference summing it up as „a general social beneficial nature“ of some, evidently the traditional ones. Except for the Lutheran Church, it can hardly be expected that the legislator would be prepared to designate any other as such, along with the Roman Catholic Church. The Act allows for these „generally beneficial organisations“ to receive further state aid, within a discretionary supplementary concept (Article 29, para. 3).
- The Act governs provision of organised religious services in „total institutions“, in particular in prisons, hospitals, police units and within the military (The RFA does not deal with the situation in education, which had previously been governed in statutory manner). The solution is a novel one (not a continuation of previous regulations). Articles 24 and 25 provide for the employment of priests by the respective ministries for tending those hospitalised and incarcerated, meaning that the state would also pay their salaries, where an appropriate number of people needed such care. Similarly, the state would take care of the religious needs of policemen and the military, particularly with a view to duty abroad.

The provision dealing with providing policemen with such services is particularly vague, as they would be entitled to such state provided services whenever „the practice of religious freedom becomes difficult“, not indicating whether this would be at services abroad only (Article 23).

- The Act provides for new requirements as to registration of religious communities. Article 13 provides for registration of a new community if 100 members have subscribed, the members being citizens or permanent residents of Slovenia, and for the community to have operated for 10 years (without registration, i.e. without the capacity of a legal entity). The applicants also need to submit a large number of supplements to the request for registration, including a description of the community's teachings in the Slovenian language, its rituals and its „worship of God“, thus presupposing a monotheist notion of religion. Although there are European countries with stricter conditions, in the Slovenian situation these conditions are rather strict, as evidenced by a lack of registration on the basis of this Act (Lesjak and Lekić 2013: 159).
- The Act, to some surprise, left in force one portion of the 1976 Act. This is the portion dealing with payment of retirement, disability and health protection insurance by the state to priests and monks of registered communities (The history of the state's accepting the burden of these payments is a lengthy one, involving the attempts of Tito's regime to domesticate the major religious communities; see Alexander 2008). The 1976 Act in Article 20 allowed for state discretion in financial support for religious communities, in a provision which did not define either the limits or the intent of the funds. Upon independence, the Slovenian state continued to extend such support, although without undertaking any legal precisions (Lesjak and Lekić 2013: 159). This provision remained in force after the adoption of the 2007 Act. However, the Act envisages taking care of these benefits within a „reasonable proportion“ of 1 priest/monk per 1000 registered community members (Article 27, para. 4).

Developments upon the adoption of RFA

Upon the Act's adoption, the State Council, a chamber adjoined to the Slovenian Parliament, immediately (March 21, 2007) submitted a motion to the Constitutional Court alleging several unconstitutional provisions

in the Act. The State Council contested all provisions of the Act that could be considered suspicious from the point of view of a strict understanding of separation of church and state: financial support of religious groups, since the Act allegedly introduces no criteria for such support, differentiation among religious groups in employment by the state for the purpose of religious services, as being at variance with the principle of religious freedom; the failure to clarify which religious group deeds would be inadmissible as intervening in state sovereignty, the imprecise definition of the „general beneficial nature“ of certain religious groups; State dialogue only with registered religious groups would be at variance with the principle of equality of all religious groups; religious officials being dutiful to observe their highest ecclesiastic authority, but not also state regulations in „mixed areas“ – all this is considered to have offended state sovereignty. Not long thereafter general elections in 2008 brought into power a leftist government, headed by Borut Pahor. Aleš Gulič, a colourful liberal personality, was appointed head of the Office for Religious Communities. By itself this is of little relevance today, but it is instructive how the RCC reacted. „Even the [Communist] Party would not dare such a provocation!“ as with this appointment, stormed Cardinal Rode, then the head of the Slovenian RCC (as cited in Slovenian Press Agency 2009). Furthermore, on this behalf, the Slovenian Prime Minister was not received in the Vatican by the Pope. Both these events are indicative of how arrogantly the RCC attempted to regain its hegemonic position.

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The Constitutional Court (CC) passed a decision on the move by the State Council in a grand manner, contributing decisively to a swing of the pendulum as to ideological hegemony, although (at the beginning of 2014) the decision is yet to be fully implemented in legislation. The decision tackles the issue of constitutionality of the Act radically, in terms of technical conformity of the Act with the Constitution, but also with European Court of Human Rights case law and standards (Constitutional Court 2010).

The basic point of departure of the CC is to deal with religious matters as part of world view matters, i.e. religious beliefs are placed on the same level as irreligious and „philosophical“, i.e. world views. It pursues from this premise that religious and irreligious groups are all of the same nature; thus all should be granted legal entity status. On the other hand, the state has no obligation to finance or otherwise support any of them, particularly not without specific criteria. Furthermore, the „beneficial nature“ of religious and irreligious groups should be granted to all of them

and in no way should the state be called to judge their nature in this respect (pt. 131 of the Judgment). By this, the most important building block of the RFA was knocked down. Registration should not be the criterion for awarding funds (nor the „general beneficial nature“, now generalized to all communities), but other criteria should be set, pertaining to the purpose of the funds (pt. 134). As to total institutions, the state is obligated to tolerate and to facilitate religious activity, as this is a right, but it has no duty to finance it and even less to allow identification of state and religion by employing priests to discharge religious services. In criticising the legislator, the CC stated: „The legislator’s inclination towards (financial) support of individuals’ religious life may not reach the limits set by the principle of separation of religious communities and state, particularly the guarantee of state neutrality“ (pt. 146).

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The CC did not accept all the State Council’s objections, but it did make considerable inroads in the philosophical discourse on the position of religion in public life, particularly state-church relations, more so than ever in Slovenian history. This is the second such instance where the CC moved Slovenian public life into new grounds of human rights affirmation (the first being the issue of the „erased“). The Leftist Government in power at the time planned to adopt major changes to the Act, to achieve conformity with the CC Decision. Owing to situational circumstances, the draft was proposed by some of the parties in the governing coalition (Zares, Liberal Democracy, and Pensioners’ Party). However, neither this nor other drafts to replace the voided Religious Freedom Act was ever adopted by the Parliament (Lesjak and Lekić 2013: 160).

The Draft was consistently separation motivated, allowing for some limited relations of cooperation. The potentially most hurtful issues for the RCC was the envisaged provision on state financing: it would not be limited as to areas of financing, in comparison to the present, but it would pursue only from explicit income tax apportionments by individuals, of 0.5% of the income tax with which all individuals dispose of, indicating, a voluntary, charitable purpose (Urad Vlade 2010: 31). Taking into consideration that most people do not avail themselves of this discretionary power, this would mean a substantial decrease in the subsidies received by the RCC.

The tensions caused by attempts to govern the issues in a more liberalist manner were always met by strong statements on the part of the RCC and rightist parties. For example, Jože Jerovšek, on September 8, 2011, considering this draft at a Parliamentary commission, stated: „The more I listen to the discussion on issues from the Draft, the angrier I feel, discerning

how literally Stalinist sediments have remained in our space [Slovenia]. Ideological hatred, intolerance are typical forms of Stalinism still active.“ (as cited in Kolednik and Grm 2011). On the other hand, there are a few or no individual objections to the constitutionality of the draft, just a generalized expression of disgust. Bypassing the basic fact that the Act had been found unconstitutional, Archbishop Stres pleaded for „legal stability“ and „safety“ in an attempt to stop the legislative initiative, even before the draft was entered, again warning about „the great quantity of intolerance against the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia“ (as cited in Mavsar and Weilguny 2010).

The present situation

At present (2014), Slovenia is still awaiting full implementation of the 2010 CC decision. A small portion of the Act was amended in 2013 (Act on Amending RFA), mitigating conditions for registration of new religious communities. Now, 10 subscribers of the appropriate age and citizenship would suffice, and the documents describing faith and practice submission have been omitted. However, full implementation is yet awaiting sufficient political resolve. However, by itself the declaration of the invalidity of the provisions privileging the RCC turned the ideological hegemony pendulum toward a stricter understanding of separation as the only legitimate option.

Of course, as many authors cite, some degree of state-church cooperation is inevitable in contemporary circumstances (Fox 2006), and one can hardly expect the implementation of the provision covering social security payments by the state to be withheld after 50 years practice under very varied political regimes. Šturm is right in claiming that this has become an „acquired right“ (Šturm et al. 2004), despite its contravention of the separation clause. The same goes for the presence of the RCC in public media, to a certain extent, i.e. considering its majority nature. All these issues may be raised anew, however, under the pressure of economic exigencies and possible anti-clerical parliamentary majority.

Primljeno: 21. maja 2014.

Prihvačeno: 15. jula 2014.

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Sergej Flere

Ideološki konflikti oko religijskog pitanja u Sloveniji

Sažetak

Od sticanja nezavisnosti, Latinski obrazac (Martin, 1978) svojstven je za Sloveniju, posebno za odnos između države i verskih zajednica. Slovenija je usvojila zakon o tom pitanju tek 2007, služeći se do tada odredbama odgovarajućeg zakona iz 1970-ih godina. Zakon o verskoj slobodi iz 2006. sadržao je brojne privilegije za preovlađujuću Rimsko-katoličku crkvu, uključujući simboličke i ekonomske. Međutim, Ustavni sud Slovenije ubrzo je utvrdio protivustavnost i poništio taj zakon, polazeći od Evropske konvencije o ljudskim pravima i pravne prakse Evropskog suda za ljudska prava. Time su druga verovanja postavljena u istu ravan sa religioznima i uklonjene brojne privilegije i prepreke kod priznanja i registracije novih verskih zajednica. Međutim, ta presuda nije u celosti zakonodavno primenjena. Ipak, odsustvo sadržinskih sporazuma sa Svetom stolicom i veronauke u javnim školama ukazuje na prevlast liberalizma na javnoj sceni.

Ključne reči: Slovenija, crkva i država, religijske slobode, Katolička crkva, latinski obrazac