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powers is the key to explaining the choice between assimilation, accommodation, and exclusion. When it comes to exclusion, however, one can easily list many crimes of mass atrocity that have more to do with host state/non-core groups relations than with host states and external powers. Very often host states, engulfed by totalitarian ideas and the fear of the “internal enemy”, have referred to conspiracies between non-core groups and external enemies as an excuse for justifying the adoption of exclusionary policies. Perhaps the history of the persecution of the Jews, more than any other, best illustrates how host states engage in genocidal policies regardless of the presence of external enemies. Even Mylonas’ opening conundrum, the question of why Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were accommodated until 1875 but targeted with exclusionary policies thereafter, could be explained by the domestic rise of a nationalist discourse influenced by the European nation-state model rather than, as Mylonas argues, by “the increasing Russian, and later French, military and diplomatic support of the Armenians” (9). Despite some debatable statements, on balance this book is likely to become a standard reference work for nation-building literature, and it is well-worth a close reading.

Roberto Belloni (Trento)

Arlinda MERDANI, *Das Verhältnis der Religionen in Albanien: Neue Perspektiven für die Europäische Union*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2013. 174 S., ISBN 978-3-531-19838-5, € 34,95

Religion is an extremely complex and sensitive issue in Albania, and the body of original scholarly studies on the topic remains small. In principle every new contribution is to be warmly welcomed, espe-

cially if it includes new empirical data. To some extent, the book by Arlinda Merdani, M.A., Head of Global Operations at the Christian college Nehemiah Gateway in Albania, does that. However, while Springer VS claims to stand for “high-quality content” and the book cover says “research”, neither can be found in this publication.

According to the introduction, Merdani’s interest is freedom of religion and the related legislation, EU integration, and her homeland Albania’s role in these fields. Her point is that Albania is an exemplary model of religious tolerance which offers a valuable example to the EU. The context is the efforts of the Vatican and several EU member states to formally recognize Europe’s “Christian roots” a question closely related to the prospect of predominantly Muslim countries joining the EU.

Merdani adopts such Christian definitions of “Europe” (16). In her view, Albania is essentially Christian and thus “European” because ancient Illyria is mentioned in the New Testament and because Islam is no longer the majority religion in Albania (17, 114). The latter claim has been refuted in two recent surveys.¹

The author approaches the question of religion in Albania by probing the attitudes of two Muslim representatives, one from the Muslim Community and the other a Bektashi, and four Christian representatives, one Orthodox, one Catholic, and two Protestant, from the Evangelical Alliance and the Apostolic Church, respectively.

¹ See the IPSOS survey 2011: Symbolic Nation Building in West Balkan States, Nation-Building: Albania, October 2011, 38f., available at <http://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/forskning/prosjekter/nation-w-balkan/dokumenter/nb_albania-wine-summer.pdf>; and INSTAT 2012, Censuri i popullsisë dhe banesave. Pjesa 1. Rezultatet kryesore, 71, available at <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/178070/rezultatet_kryesore_t_censusit_t_popullsis_dhe_banesave_2011_n_shqip_ri.pdf>.

These interviews, generously quoted by Merdani, are the strength of the book and provide important information about religious concerns in Albania. There are also interviews with representatives from secular state institutions and diplomats, whom she uncritically uses as experts instead of relating her study to relevant research. In general all the interviews paint a rosy picture of the religious climate and praise good interreligious relations as being a great Albanian tradition.

The book does not contain an index or a glossary, apart from a chapter with definitions, half of which are of "God", "the Lord" etc., with no attention to theological differences. Terms like "religion" or "tolerance" are not defined, and the definition of "secularity" does not refer to any secularisation theory. A methodological chapter gives a good description of the author's data collection process. Unfortunately Merdani does not reflect on her own position and her book is permeated by a pro-Christian, pro-Protestant, and slightly anti-Islamic bias.

The historical parts make up the first half of the book. These chapters are not enlightening, but follow the traditional Albanian nationalist narrative, albeit with a pro-Christian, Protestant twist. Merdani reproduces the Albanian-Illyrian continuity thesis and the Pelasgian theory (30), claims the existence of an Albanian nation state in the 13th century (31), a continuous nationalist struggle for Albanian independence under Ottoman rule (32), and the superficial character of the conversion to Islam (51). Albania's half millennium as a part of an Islamic empire is dealt with in just one sentence (32).

The author does not have a firm grip on Albanian history or religion, and particularly not on Islam. In one instance she even translates "Islam" with "Islamism" (154). This religion is treated as socially and historically irrelevant, and although

this view originates in Christian wishful thinking, it has some political leverage in contemporary Albania. Merdani rightly points out that Protestantism has a tradition in Albania which has been forgotten by many. However, the way she explains that Evangelical Christianity "complies with the Albanian will for independence from other authorities" (82) is illustrative of the way she often slips into a normative religious discourse or into ethno-philosophical speculation. Today Protestants make up less than 0.2% of the Albanian population and Muslims around 60-70%, but the text gives the impression that Protestantism is more influential in Albania than Islam.

Chapters 6 and 7 are more focused and informative. Here Merdani discusses the role of religion in the development of civil society and describes the various activities of the religious actors.

As many experts on Albania have rightly pointed out since the 1990s, research on Albanian culture has often been hampered by ideological bias. Although Albania remains understudied, research on the country must nevertheless comply with the academic standards employed in the study of other societies. Unfortunately, this book does not do that. It is conceptually weak, thematically unclear, unstructured, and lacks a theoretical backbone. Furthermore, like many other studies on Albania, it is also speculative, normative, anachronistic, and teleological. A major drawback is the author's lack of a critical examination of her written sources, which tend to be inadequate, irrelevant, or one-sided. She does not sufficiently take into consideration research on Albania or on religion that would have enabled her to analyse the material free of ideology.

The interviewees religiously influenced interpretations of society and politics also hint at the existence of tensions and prejudices, but these aspects are not discussed. At the same time, the religious communi-

ties support democracy, human rights, and secularism and even give them a theological basis. Particularly the Muslim representatives' Quranic defence of a separation between state and religion is remarkable. So are the relatively humble, commonsensical, humanistic approaches to religious "others", especially at a time when religion in general has become rougher around the edges and fundamentalist versions of Islam and Christianity are on the rise globally.

It is not clear how the Albanian model can assist EU integration. To a great extent, the EU countries already have religious freedom, relaxed interreligious relations, and / or secular institutions. In fact, other studies show that many Albanian ulama think that the EU is, in this respect, superior to Albania. And if Merdani's point is that secularism is an Albanian concept, her emphasis on Christian roots would be irrelevant.

The novelty of the perspectives can also be disputed. "Religious tolerance" is a buzzword, and Albanian politicians have already managed to convey the message to the EU that "Albania continues to provide a valuable example of religious harmony in the region".² Moreover, religious actors often use it as a rhetorical device to define their own tradition as morally superior, and Merdani's book is part of this discourse.

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Claire GORDON / Marko KMEZIC / Jasmina OPARDIJA (eds.), Stagnation and Drift in the Western Balkans. The Challenges of Political, Economic and Social Change. Bern et al.: Peter Lang 2013. 325 S., ISBN 978-3-0343-1152-6, € 83,80

Stagnation and Drift in the Western Balkans. The Challenges of Political, Economic and Social Change is the tenth volume in the textbook series of Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe. It was presented and discussed at the third annual Regional Research Promotion Programme (RRPP) conference in Budva, Montenegro, in Spring 2011.

The book's eleven chapters are divided into four parts: (I) Perspectives on the State of Democracy; (II) The Challenges of State-building in the Western Balkans; (III) Youth in Transition in the Western Balkans; and (IV) The Problematic of Social Reform: Balancing Equity, Efficacy and Economic Viability. The overall aim of the volume is to provide an analysis of particular political, social, and economic challenges in the Western Balkans in a historical and contemporary context of post-conflict and post-communist transformations. These challenges are also implicitly explored in relation to EU enlargements in the region – 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania) and 2013 (Croatia) – and to the contemporary political and economic difficulties (enlargement fatigue, Euro-crisis) facing the EU which leave it with less leverage in the Balkans.

The Balkan region, it is argued, consists mostly of fragile states with dysfunctional institutions that face major challenges in the effort to transform former authoritarian political and command economy structures into democratic market economies. Instead of identifying democratic and economic progress in the Western Balkans, the volume argues that the region has had a decade of political, economic, and social stagnation and drift, marked by ethnically

² Commission of the European Communities, Commission Staff Working Document. Albania 2006 Progress report, SEC (2006) 1383, Brussels, 08.11.2006, 11, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/nov/al_sec_1383_en.pdf>.