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# **Religion and the education system in Croatia: A multiple modernities view<sup>1</sup>**

First draft

## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the education system in Croatia with particular emphasis on the position of religion within the education system from a multiple modernities view.

In that, the paper analyses the education system in Croatia and primarily its primary and secondary education and the policy that regulates the content and values pupils should learn as well as the position of religion in regard to religious catechism and the position of religion in history textbooks.

The issue this paper is addressing is therefore the notion of modernity in Croatia. Modernity is here analyzed through the multiple modernities framework.

The questions this paper is analyzing are: what is the policy of Croatian authorities in the education system and what reception this policy receive in the society.

The general attempt is to see how the concept of modernity is understood by the state actors (through the educational legislative) and how this concept is understood by the civil society actors (through their views) and finally, how these apparently opposed views fit into existing theory on religion inside a multiple modernities theory.

**Key words:** education, religion, multiple modernities, history, Croatia

## **Introduction**

Education often serves as a battlefield for enforcing of the state oriented agenda (Topić, 2011). Because of that all countries in Europe are, in this way or another, trying to improve its education systems that should serve as a platform for creating European citizenship dedicated to goals of the common European project.

Modernization of education systems throughout Europe is therefore set to enforcement of the civic values while the religious and its role in the education system remains a contested issue.

This is the case for Croatia, a country scheduled to join the EU in 2013. Official curriculums are prescribing European oriented education that will create the European citizenship. But, on the other hand, a whole set of other laws and regulations, such as for example Teaching plan, are enforcing more nationally oriented agenda.

Additionally, religious catechism is introduced in schools and Catholic priests sit in committees for approving the history textbooks with which they are enforcing their religious views. Religion therefore has a significant position in the education Croatian pupils receive. This education is sometimes one-sided and too nationally oriented while the goal to create the European citizenship clearly fails.

Finally, the civil society opposes to these practices and envisages society freed from religion, at least to the extent one would be truly free to choose the level up to which religion will be present in his/hers life.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is deriving from my work on the 'Identities and modernities in Europe' project financed by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) (2009-2012). I worked as the main researcher in the Croatian team and this paper presents a part of the dissemination process. Individual references to work packages on which parts of this paper are relying on will be noted separately when necessary.

## Modernity as a Concept and the Multiple modernities theory

Modernity as a concept has been a subject of study since the emergence of Sociology and the so-called era of modernity that came with industrialization, urbanization and rationalisation (Bhambra 2011; Haralambos & Holborn 2002; Topić & Sremac 2012). Discussions and analysis on notions of premodern and modern dominate sociological researches up to today (Smith, 2006).

Modernity as a concept means

“believing in possibility of human progress, rational planning for goal achievement, believing in superiority of the rational thought in comparison to emotions, believing in capability of technology and science to solve human problems, believing in capability and the right of humans to shape their own lives and relying on industry in improving the life standard” (Haralambos & Holborn, 2002: 8)<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, modernity is often understood as diametrically opposite to notions of traditional and religious (Haralambos & Holborn 2002; Smith 2006) and this also means that the one who is modern is being rational and critical as well as detached from the traditional (Topić & Sremac, 2012).

The problem with the concept of modernity, as recognized by some authors, is that it largely centres on Western Europe that is seen as a starting point for every analysis and in that, the analysis is often centred on Western Europe as a dominant development model that does not exist elsewhere when different countries are compared with the Western Europe (Bhambra 2011; Mouzelis 1999; Topić & Sremac 2012; Eisenstadt 2000; 2002; Kaya & Tecmen 2011; Arnason 2006). Because of this view, non-Western countries often appear underdeveloped and as if they are not modern in a sense the modernity concept understands modernity. This is particularly the case when religion is concerned.

Theory of multiple modernities, on the other hand, emerged after it became apparent that the modernity theory does not apply to everyone and after it became obvious that the modernity theory does not give answers to problems humankind is faced with<sup>3</sup>. The theory has been coined by Israeli sociologist Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and recently it has been advocated by several academics working in the field (e. g. Spohn 2009; 2001). This theory offers a different view from the positivist modernity theory in that it considers itself to be a

*“civilisational analysis employed by scholars of comparative sociology and historical sociology in their attempt to understand the patterns of development of modernity as well as the relationship between the West and the East”* (Boldt et al, 2009: 9).

According to the multiple modernities theory, one has to consider modernity in plural and abandon the dichotomy between East and West in its explanatory attempt. This means that the theory argues we cannot look from the western point of view to explain the East because this is Euro-centrism. With this, Europe is seen as a plurality of different processes of modernization (Bhambra 2011; Martinelli 2007; Boldt et al 2009; Topić & Sremac 2012). All of these modernities then consider one European modernity and Europe, in this view, becomes one big multiple modernity in itself (Topić & Sremac, 2012).

Analysing modernity in plural means using comparative historical sociology and that reveals modernity paths in every European country just that what it means to be modern differs from case to case but being different from the West does not necessarily means not being modern (Eisenstadt 2000; 2001; 2005; 2005 a; Delanty 2006; Arnason 2006).

Additionally, “theory of multiple modernities constitutes different collective identities and these identities are then a subject to negotiation and re-negotiation” (Topić & Sremac 2012; Eisenstadt, 2000; Eisenstadt & Giesen, 1995).

Eisenstadt (2000: 2) sees the concept of multiple modernities through the vision of contemporary world as a “story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes”. In this, different social actors are undertaking actions and what modernity means to each of them differs and therefore the consequences are different but this does not eliminate the modernity of one country (Eisenstadt 2002; 2000).

When it comes to religion, modernity theories and theorists are usually hostile to the notion of religious for religion is seen as incompatible with modernity. This particularly applies to the sociological theories that

“believed that modernity was unavoidably destructive of religion, belief in spiritual realities and objective universals, non-naturalistic metaphysics, and “traditional” cultures and perspectives generally. Modernity always contained acids, it was widely believed, that are necessarily secularizing, disenchanting, and fostering of a naturalistic and materialist outlook. By theoretical

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<sup>2</sup> My translation.

<sup>3</sup> Postmodernists called modernity theory ‘a grand narrative’ due to its positivist character (see e. g. Lyotard, 1984).

definition, religious faith and belief in such things as natural laws became cognitively deviant, and were expected certainly to fade away with the progress of time and the advance of modernity” (Smith, 2006: 1).

Modernity and religion have therefore been discussed inside secularization theory that envisaged the decline of religious beliefs, privatization of religion and differentiation of the secular sphere or emancipation from religion (Casanova, 2006). In Europe, sociologists debated secularization through the first aspect: decline of religious beliefs, and related this envisaged decline with the process of modernization (Casanova 2006; Bruce 2002; Hefner 1998). Although Europe is generally less religious than the USA this does not mean that the US is not modern because of it (Berger 2001; Casanova 2006; Sherkat & Ellison 1999) nor that Europe is freed from religiously founded identity since this identity is largely intertwined with Christianity (Spohn, 2003).

The secularization theory, however, failed because religion proved to be a moving factor largely affecting human action and even some of its former advocates withdrew from supporting it (Berger, 1999).

Theory of multiple modernities, as also recognized by Casanova (2006), does not *a priori* reject religiosity as a concept that can be existent in a society with that society automatically being framed as not modern. In a contrary, theory of multiple modernities

“presupposed that western modernity is only one among other types of modernity evolving in the various civilizations of the world. The concept of multiple modernity thereby assumes that traditions are not simply dissolved by modernization or globalization, but rather that particularly religious and imperial traditions remain constitutive dimensions of modern societies” (Spohn, 2003: 268).

Eisenstadt (1994, 1999, 1999a, 2000) argues that it is possible to reconstruct religious tradition regardless of the secularization and that religion is a constitutive element of every society. This view is shared in the Sociology of religion (Bruce 1992; Casanova 1994).

If, however, looking from the multiple modernities view, Europe can be analyzed through multiple programs (political, socio-economic, religious, cultural) that differ from country to country (Eisenstadt 1987; Spohn 2009).

Spohn (2009: 361) argues that European collective identities “are not simply secular or post-secular but consist of multiple religious as well as secular components” (Spohn 2009: 361, see also Martin 2005; Casanova 1994; Davie 2000; 1994).

## **Educational policy in Croatia and opposition from the society<sup>4</sup>**

The education system has always served as a means for enforcing the nationally-oriented agenda (Topić, 2011) although the education system often got changed due to the modernization and/or, as is the case recently, because of the Europeanization or, what is claimed to be Europeanization. In this, the primary and secondary education bears special significance since the system of higher education has autonomy<sup>5</sup> and therefore, influence of the state is best seen in earlier cycles of education.

As for the education system, primary education in Croatia is compulsory and lasts eight years. High school education, which is not compulsory, lasts three or four years, depending on the type of education (vocational or general education - the latter is provided in Gymnasiums, which are specifically meant for pupils who plan to continue their education towards Colleges since they are not qualified for any other jobs). All public schools, both elementary and high schools are free of charge for everyone. Most of the schools in Croatia are public ones (99,5% in primary education, 93% in secondary education). In school year 2009/2010, there were 2070 public elementary schools, 9 private elementary schools and 2 religious elementary schools; there were 660 public high schools, 33 private high schools and 18 religious high schools).

All schools are open to all citizens and the Ministry of science, education and sports approves the programme. There are two Catholic religious elementary schools and one Jewish elementary school in Croatia, the latter being founded by the Jewish congregation Bet Israel Zagreb. Jewish school operates as a private school due to its low school population (59 pupils). As to religious high schools, most of them are Catholic Gymnasiums. There is also one Islamic Gymnasium and one Serbian Orthodox Gymnasium. Only Catholic schools are fully funded by the state. The others receive only partial funding: although there is no official regulation on this, the Ministry argues that a number of at least 150 pupils is needed to apply for full public funding (Tportal, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> This section relies on the *WPS report: Identity construction programs of the state and the EU: case study phase I* co-written by myself, S. Rodin and S. Vasiljević for FP7 IME project. I am the sole author of this part. The research has been conducted in 2010. For detailed report see Rodin et al, 2010. General information on the education system in Croatia is taken from the *WP9 report The place of religion in education in Bulgaria, Croatia, France and the UK* co-written by myself, A. Ichijo, G. Bozec and M. Hajdinjak for FP7 IME project and presented at the final project conference held in Kingston in March 2012. I am the sole author of the Croatian part of the report. For detailed report see Bozec et al, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Croatia's Constitution gives Universities autonomy to fully decide on all matters related to the academic system.

Croatia claims to Europeanize and modernise its education system and indeed, there are attempts to enforce these two goals in the legal system (Laws). But, when it comes to regulations then an apparent influence of the state becomes clearly visible. In the latter, the state is making an attempt to construct, what is perceived by the state as valid, identity that is European but still primarily national (Rodin et al, 2010).

This is primarily done through the control of the content when it comes to the primary and secondary education while the state in the field of higher education regulates only the procedure<sup>6</sup>.

However, by not controlling the procedure in primary and secondary education, the state enabled the failure of modernization and Europeanization that is obstructed by traditional methods of teaching and by inconsistent regulation. The education system can be therefore seen as an example of yet another conflict of traditional and modern where national identity is protected over European through a) content control and b) failed adherence by giving so-called freedom of acting to those that do not know how to implement changes and to those that might not be willing to do so (Rodin et al, 2010).

## *National Curriculum*

The first relevant document that needs to be analyzed when discussing primary and secondary education is the 'National Curriculum for pre-education Upbringing and basic mandatory Education in Primary and Secondary schools' (National Curriculum) since this document/regulation is a basis for all other education related regulations<sup>7</sup>. According to the definition from the document, National Curriculum brings

*"values, general goals and principles of upbringing and education, a concept of learning and teaching, defines upbringing-educational achievements on certain levels of pupil's development or, achievements for certain upbringing-educational cycles and upbringing-educational fields, establishes ways and criteria's of valorisation and grading"* (National Curriculum, 2008: 4).

One of the very important changes that can be linked with modernization is the desire to change the focus of education from content to competence. This is due to the recognition that the concept of learning through developing competences applies

*"holistic approach in choosing and organizing upbringing-educational values and goals and that also brings more transparency in work in achieving upbringing-educational values and goals, that is advancing upbringing dimension and as such is an assumption for valorisation and self-valorisation of upbringing-educational and school work"* (National Curriculum, 2008: 4).

National Curriculum is primarily a development document. In that sense, it clearly underlines that it will develop and change as the changes in the society will occur since it has been recognized that the approach to process of change is changing. The document also underlines the process of modernization and the need for interconnecting the modernization of education with changes in the society as well as a need for changes instead of previous passive content-oriented educational policies.

National Curriculum therefore attempts to start from the question on

*"what a pupil of certain age should and can know, which skills, capabilities and attitudes should and can s/he develop in the period of one development's cycle not strictly determined by the period of one school year"* (National Curriculum, 2008: 6).

This is an important change in terms of modernizing and Europeanizing the education since it has not been a practice before to look at pupils through the cycles of growing up but rather through the grade they were attending.

Development of National Curriculum is European oriented and this is something the Curriculum recognized when stating that it has been designed in line with a trend in Europe and the wider world. In this it refers to the instructions

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<sup>6</sup> Bologna reform introduced studying cycles and caused an earthquake in Croatian education system. The changes did not bring the change of content to the same extent as they brought the change of diplomas (degrees) and the way of studying. In that, while before students studied four years for a Bachelor degree with which they would get a title 'graduated' (for example graduated Journalist; in Croatian 'diplomirani') now they study three or four years and get a title 'first-leveller' (Croatian 'prvostupnik') which means they completed the first HE cycle and got a Bachelor degree. This brought problems in employability because the work market did not recognize this degree as Bachelor but as a former Associate degree that does not exist anymore. This is because the so-called second cycle is called Graduated study ('diplomski studij' in Croatian) that gives the Master degree at the end and this brought the confusion since the term 'diplomski' sounds as if the students are obtaining an equivalent of a former degree only after obtaining a Master (Rodin et al 2010; Topić 2011a; Kurelić 2009).

<sup>7</sup> The Curriculum is a foundation for every school curriculum in Croatia (e.g. subject curriculum, instructions for applying the curriculum, writing textbooks and other educational materials and for defining standards for valorisation of quality and pupil's achievements and the work of schools).

from the European Union (EU) explaining that these instructions are nowadays implemented in the national curriculums of the member states, and this implementation presents important goal in the European educational policy. The document then specifically underlines that for Croatia, as a European country, joining the EU presents one of the basic strategic goals and therefore, apart from the national educational tradition and needs, Croatia thus finds it important to define its educational policy in accordance with the basic EU educational laws and regulations such as 'Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for lifelong learning' (2006/962/EC).

With this the legislator clearly underlined Croatia's Europeanism and the need for modernization of the educational process in accordance with its European fellow states which shows the European discourse present in this document that serves as a basis for designing primary and secondary system of upbringing and education.

However, the National Curriculum underlines several most important values that need to be enforced and cherished in the education system in Croatia and these are: knowledge, solidarity, identity and responsibility.

In this sense, *knowledge* is defined as a moving force for development of the Croatian society. This category is largely related to the EU values that this Curriculum tries to enforce since the old Croatian curriculum was based on content rather than on competences. Therefore, this value can be considered as an EU influenced.

Second value, *solidarity*, belongs to the category of Croatia's values that also wants to be maintained and kept in line with the Europeanization approach. Solidarity is meant through the education and upbringing that will enforce the sensitivity for others, family, weak, poor and those whose rights might have been violated, surrounding and life space marked by plurality of cultures, races, nations, religions, views, languages, etc.

*Identity* is explained as personal and cultural. In this sense, upbringing and education needs to help the pupil to build personal and cultural identity. This is to say that in today's world people need to "become 'citizens of the world', and by becoming so they should not loose their roots and their cultural, societal, moral and spiritual inheritance" (National Curriculum, 2008: 8). In this way, pupils should develop personal and cultural but also national identity and at the same time they should learn how to respect the others. The document therefore enforces the need to maintain the national identity by, in a certain way, implying that it is getting jeopardized by global and European identity.

*Responsibility* is a value prescribed by the document that relates to general goods, nature, work, life and human dignity. Education system in this sense needs to raise awareness for responsible acting and responsible behaviour that presents a meaningful relationship between personal freedom and personal responsibility. Upbringing and education have to enforce the responsibility of pupils towards themselves, towards others and towards everything that is surrounding them.

All this is to say that basic upbringing-educational values of Croatian National Curriculum are coming out from the declared dedication of Croatian educational policy towards full personal development of the pupil, for maintaining of the Croatian spiritual and material national inheritance, for European coexistence and for the creation of a society based on knowledge.

Following this, and according to the document, contemporary social-cultural surrounding assumes upbringing and education of the responsible person dedicated to the values of truth, honesty, peacemaking, tolerance, solidarity, person of creative spirit, with strong feelings for family and for maintaining the Croatian national inheritance but it also means that it is dedicated towards educating a person who respects values of other peoples and cultures.

Croatian authorities are, at least in the National Curriculum, through the foundation for the development of education, enforcing Europeanism and European values and the need for total Europeanization of the country.

## *Teaching Plan and Program for Elementary schools*

Teaching Plan and Program for Elementary schools (Plan) seems to be the problem for modernization and Europeanization of the primary education<sup>8</sup>.

A whole document is 370 pages long and it gives a detailed description of the educational process and the importance of upbringing and education and their interconnectedness. The Plan is also making an attempt to enforce modernization of education which will no longer be focused on quantity but quality in line with Europeanization of the education system. In this sense, the Plan is in line with Curriculum that was proposed two years after.

The Plan is however founded on Croatian National Educational Standard (Standard) enforced in 2005 which means that this Standard was an ancestor of the National Curriculum.

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<sup>8</sup> It firstly needs to be noted that the Plan has been enforced in 2006 (previous one dated from the 1990s and it was problematic for it was a hybrid of old communist teaching plan just that in the 1990s the Marxist doctrine was replaced with the nationalist one) and it is still used whereas the National Curriculum has been in procedure since 2008. Therefore, these two documents are presently in collision and also, the Curriculum as such makes no clear regulation on the enforcement of the new Plan and thus this issue has been left unresolved for the time being. This document is a some sort of means of control over the content the pupils will apprehend whilst in education process and therefore, even if there will be a new Plan written in line with Curriculum, these two documents together will be an effective means of maintaining the control over the content by the state authorities that will prescribe what pupils will need to learn and which values need to be enforced.

In this sense, the Plan is also enforcing European values with a goal of achieving European co-existence while at the same time maintaining national cultural and historical values and the national identity. In this sense, the Plan is also specific in keeping the national together with enforcing European however, the document does give a feeling of enforcing the national in a way as if it is jeopardized by the European.

The Plan states that the pupils should be taught to develop values accepted in the society and enforced by the upbringing-educational goals. In this sense, the Plan prescribes that

“contemporary societal-cultural surrounding assumes responsible, dedicated to the truth, tolerant persons who knows what solidarity means and persons of creative spirit with a deep sense for maintaining national and cultural heritage but also with respect to the values of other peoples and cultures” (Plan, 2006: 10).

Apart from the content, the Plan is enforcing four values that need to be enforced through out primary education: health education and upbringing; upbringing and education for surrounding and sustainable development; traffic culture and upbringing and education for human rights and democratic citizenship. These aspects should be enforced aside of content-regulated education through class meetings and extracurricular activities.

In terms of the content, the Plan prescribes what needs to be taught for all subjects. Among all subjects regulated in the Plan, four of them are particularly interesting. These are: Croatian language, Art culture, Music culture and History.

Croatian language is seen as a means of communication in the society but the Plan is enforcing the idea that, apart from having to know the language as a means of communication, the pupils also need to develop a sense of respect towards the Croatian language. The process of modernization here applies in a way that the language should no longer be taught through the theory of grammar and syntax but through practical speaking and thus enriching the language and expression basis. This is a step forward from the old system of education where pupils were taught the language rules in theory that were nearly impossible to apprehend and because of which Croatian language has been amongst the most difficult and frightening subjects<sup>9</sup>.

Art culture is meant to encourage creativity (which is a term from the Plan itself) but also an aesthetic value which is something prescribed in the Curriculum.

The same applies for Music culture that is also meant to encourage the aesthetic value but also develop strong sense for music culture. In this area, the modernization process is also strongly present because there are no longer textbooks and teaching notes. In a new Plan, music class should be a place of feeling the music where the children are meant to sing and dance with the teacher and their notebooks should be left in school and thus there should be no homework. This is because the teacher can choose what to listen in the class in a way that s/he has to present all music genres to the children and then decide, in accordance to pupil's preferences as well, what to focus on<sup>11</sup>.

History, which is generally speaking the most problematic area, starts in fifth (out of eight) grade. The goal of history classes, as stated in the Plan, is to chronologically teach pupils about processes and events that framed the development of the human society. History is divided to general and national and it is suggested that history classes should more focus on social and cultural history rather than only political (which was the case before). History is, by the Plan, seen as a tool to help pupils to understand their cultural and national roots and to cherish their national identity as well as building respect towards the culture and identity of others. By understanding other peoples, according to the Plan, the pupils will get prepared for living in multi-ethnic and multicultural society.

This document, when it comes to history, is however contradictory. This means that the Plan at the same time states that more attention should be given to cultural and social history rather than political however, when going through the Plan it appears that cultural and social history is still pushed aside in favour of the political history. Also, the proportion of general and national history is not equal regardless of the recommendations of the EU and supposed modernization and Europeanization of the education system. Finally, topics are still very much in favour of the

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<sup>9</sup> Modernization is also seen in the form of media studies. In this sense pupils are also supposed to learn how to approach, read and understand different media genres which has also not been the case before. A part of the prescribed literature can also be considered as a modernizing factor. Therefore, whereas before there were only certain books prescribed as mandatory now there are only two in each grade that are mandatory and for the rest, there is a list out of which the teacher can choose according to his/hers preferences and the needs of pupils s/he is teaching. This is very much in line with the Curriculum and some values from the Curriculum are found in other subjects.

<sup>10</sup> The plan also respects Constitutional rights of national minorities to study in their mother tongue however, it advises them to learn Croatian to be able to fully integrate in the society. For those pupils who still prefer to study in their mother tongue the documents rules that schools have to find the way to teach children in their own language but to ensure they will speak Croatian language up to the standard of those who study Croatian as their first language.

<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the classes are not meant to enforce usual way of sitting in classes but the pupils should freely move around the classroom, talk, discuss, sing and dance and they should not be burdened by the class whatsoever. The songs prescribed by the Plan are suggestions only and the teacher is obliged merely by the number. It is very questionable if all of this is working in practice due to the fact that teachers from the old system are over the night supposed to perform fun and easygoing classes unlikely from previous theoretical teaching of notes and similar. It is also questionable if the music classes are so flexible and easy to get a good grade in, as it is prescribed.

Croatian people only and not on the minorities whereas surrounding countries from the region are nearly not covered at all.

With this policy, Croatia presents typical post-communist state that regulates this field. This is because textbooks are subject to approval of the Ministry and this is often seen as means of maintaining the political control (Höpken, 2006; Marković 2006).

Problems with history textbooks firstly arose in 1990s during the war when there was only one textbook in use while after the 1996 the market liberalised and nowadays there are more textbooks on the market and teachers can choose which one they want to use (Agičić & Najbar-Agičić, 2007).

But, the problem remained in the field of controlling the content of the textbook and this particularly applies to history. The change of regimes was strongly felt in history textbooks since communist ideology got replaced with the statehood ideology insisting on a thousand-years-old statehood that Yugoslavia interrupted (Rodin et al 2010; Najbar-Agičić 2001; Najbar-Agičić & Agičić 2006; Turkalj 2007).

The first history content in textbooks after independence was the

*“problematic of mutual perception, which was, often, conflict, based on mechanisms of ethnical marginalization and differentiation, which were visible in bases of images in school textbooks, and on pictures of enemies and stereotypes”* (Karge, 2001: 21).

Open censorship was the major problem since the very beginning of introducing the history textbooks (Höpken, 2006) and in particular the status of Croatia that is being placed on the position of a martyr. This means that only crimes against Croats got their place in history textbooks which includes the alleged crime of Bleiburg massacre that has never been proven and that keeps diving the society<sup>12</sup>. Bleiburg massacre became a mandatory topic in history textbooks and this narration was often written in an emotional way (Grahek 2005; Najbar-Agičić 2001). At the same time, atrocities committed by Croats, most notably those by the Croatian Nazi (Ustasha) regime were neglected and/or undermined. This particularly applies to the mentioning and describing Jasenovac concentration camp and the number of victims (Goldstein, 2001). In sum, the main “lieux memoire for Croatian identity in textbooks was not Jasenovac but Bleiburg” (Höpken, 2006: 167).

Additional problem of textbooks is that they are still approaching history in a positivist manner as well as that they are taking Croatia out of the context while the whole history of Croatia appears to be the history of conflict and jeopardized status. The textbooks are, predominantly, ethnically oriented (see Rodin et al 2010; Agičić 1998; Höpken 2006; Najbar-Agičić & Agičić 2006).

New textbooks (after 1996) approached history with more illustrations (Karge, 2001) and somewhat modern approach but obstacles when it comes to the national minorities remained (Agičić 2001; Höpken 2006). Although the state made some progress in terms of liberalizing the market obstacles remained in terms of the above mentioned problems as well as of the fact that religion bears too much influence over the history textbook’ field, as it will be explained in the sub-section below.

### *Religious catechism and religion in history textbooks<sup>13</sup>*

Regarding the issue of religion and education in Croatia, there is a gap between the Constitution on the one hand and the legal system and the practice on the other hand. While the Constitution enforces secularisation, this rule is not respected in practice or, in some instances, in the legal system regulating the religious issues<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> After elections in December 2011 that brought Social Democrats to power (only second time in 21 years since the independence) the Croatian Parliament cancelled auspices of the Bleiburg commemoration which caused the right-oriented scene to complain and it is reasonable to expect that this decision will bring national turmoil in the country in the years to come since this issue severely divides citizens. Bleiburg commemoration is usually a place where people come wearing the Ustasha signs and where that notorious Nazi regime is glorified. Catholic Church always attends this commemoration and participates in this glorification (Topić & Todorović, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> This sub-section relies on the WP9 comparative report written by myself, A. Ichijo, G. Bozec and M. Hajdinjak entitled *The place of religion in education in Bulgaria, Croatia, France and the UK* for FP7 IME project and presented at the final project conference held in Kingston in March 2012. I am the sole author of the Croatian part of the report. In comparative report (WP9) we did not include the direct quotations due to the length requirements. In this paper, I have included some of the direct quotations from the fieldwork stage or WP6 report (Identity construction programs of the state and the EU: Case study phase II) and WP7 report (Identity construction programs of the state and the EU: Case study phase III) (Topić & Vasiljević 2011; 2011a). Comparative, WP9, report is based on these two phases of the fieldwork (WP6 & WP7).

<sup>14</sup> Croats make up almost 90% of total population in Croatia, whereas the rest falls to the national minority corpus. The largest minority are the Serbs (4.5 %) followed by Bosniacs (0.5 %) and Italians (0.4 %). According to the 2001 census, there are 88% of Catholics (Roman Catholic Church), almost 1% of Orthodox Christians (Serbian Orthodox Church) – which means that Serbs in Croatia remained largely not religiously affiliated as during the Yugoslav regime – 1.3 % of Muslims, 3% who are agnostic or without religious affiliation, and 2.2 % not religious at all. Minority religious groups are not seen separately but altogether as faiths



The Constitution strictly bans any encouragement of hatred based on ethnic, racial or religious characteristics and any intolerance (Article 39) while at the same time guarantees freedom of faith and its public expression (Article 40) as well as equality of all religious communities before the Law and their strict separation from the state (Article 41). The Constitution also guarantees the right of all religious communities to publicly perform religious rituals as well as to found schools, Universities, institutes, social and charity foundations and to freely manage their institutions as well as to demand protection and help from the state (Article 41). Therefore, the Constitution as the highest legal act defines Croatia as a secular state that has no official religion. Particular religions are not even mentioned in the Constitution that declares strict separation of the state and the religion.

However, Croatia's relationship with the religion has never been of secular nature. Throughout history, the Croatian state maintained strong ties with the Catholic Church that has always been seen as a founder of Croatian nationhood (see Rodin et al 2010; Topić et al, 2009; Topić & Vasiljević 2011; Topić & Vasiljević 2011 a; Topić & Todorović 2011; Topić 2011). This strong relationship took its most devastating form during the WWII. During the second Yugoslavia, religion has been strictly forbidden in the public sphere. However, once Croatia declared independence from the former Federation, a revitalization of religion occurred and the Catholic Church took a leading role in the national unification process, insisting on the historical legacy of its involvement in the creation of the Croatian nation. Through that, the Church has drawn a division amongst citizens between ethnic Croats and 'others' (Kesić 1994; Bijelić 2006; Topić 2009).

Church officials have positions in various state authorities, including the Ministry of science, education and sports where they form members of the committees for approval of the history textbooks. The Church is also a prominent actor in public debates. Due to the increased presence of the Church in the public space, there has also been a significant increase in the level of religiosity and of religious practices in Croatia since the 1990s (Skledar & Marinović Jerolimov 1997; Črpić & Zrinščak 2010; Topić & Todorović 2011). Although, new figures tend to show a small decrease in religious practices, the level of religious observance is still significant.

Although Constitution as well as the Law on the legal position of religious communities guarantees equality between religions in Croatia, Catholic Church is, in practice, given a significant advantage. Due to the specific arrangements, Croatian state grants money to both the Croatian Catholic Church and to the Vatican. Such agreements with the Vatican are not well known among the general public. Such links between the Croatian state and the Vatican have been one of the most serious debates in Croatia in the past couple of years (see Topić & Vasiljević 2011; Topić & Vasiljević 2011a). The visit of the Catholic Pope to Croatia during 2011, financed by the state, reopened the discussion: there have been debates on whether there is in Croatia a 'hidden official religion'.

Religious education is provided in public schools as a part of the curriculum. Parents can opt to enrol their children to a course in Ethics instead of religious education. Only the Catholic Church has no problems with holding its classes in public schools, whereas other religions face obstacles. This especially applies to the Serbian national minority that faces problems with school principals that do not want to organize Christian Orthodox classes although legal requirements are fulfilled (see e.g. US embassy report 2009; 2010; Topić & Vasiljević 2011; Topić & Todorović 2011).

### *Opposition from the civil society<sup>15</sup>*

According to the research conducted during 2010 and 2011<sup>16</sup> on the issue of the place of religion in education, there seems to be a consensus of all civil society actors that there should be no catechism in schools, especially since only the Catholic catechism is fully available.

The idea of equality between people with all beliefs was at the centre of the actors' argumentation and was expressed in different ways. NGO representatives and the national minorities focused more on the presence of the Catholic Church in the public sphere and on religious catechism in public schools.

A Jewish NGO actor argued that the advantage of the Catholic Church in terms of religious education is a nonsense since all Croatian citizens pay taxes for public schools:

*"Everything should be emphasized except religion. Religious classes should be abolished because it is only a Catholic class. As Croatian citizens we are obliged to pay taxes for the Catholic Church which is a non-sense"* (FP/ZGS-2, Jewish representative).

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other than the Catholic one, through the national minority corpus. This partially reflects the assimilation of ethnicity and faith in Croatia that is being enforced throughout history up to today (Topić & Todorović 2011).

<sup>15</sup> This section also relies on the WP9 report.

<sup>16</sup> We conducted 12 interview with NGO representatives and 29 interviews with civil society encompassing so-called lay people, teachers (history and Croatian language) and students. For more on detailed research results and on methodology see Topić & Vasiljević 2011 and Topić & Vasiljević 2011a.

Several interviewees stated that families who do not want to opt for religious education are being stigmatized; they interpreted more generally the current situation in Croatia as discriminating for people with beliefs other than Catholic.

One representative of the Muslim community stated that if religion is to be a public matter then all religions should become public. A peace activist firmly denounced the assimilation of those who criticize the Catholic Church to 'Communist' and 'Yugoslav'.

Private actors (teachers, students, lay people) also rejected the presence of religion and religious catechism in public schools. They however rejected this through the discussion on history textbooks. The issue of Catholic catechism always came up during the discussion on history textbooks that are recognized as a problem in the society. The role of the Catholic Church is immediately recognized as problematic because actors reject influence of the Church in educational process as illegitimate and unjustified. There is no polarization here. All actors, Croatian or from the minority corpus, agree on this and it seems therefore that the state is still under an influence of the historical discourses that have overall presence in the Croatian society.

Civil society particularly recognized that the Catholic Church is enforcing nationalism and historical revisionism via their influence on the education system.

Muslim minority representative thus relates Catholic faith with the national identity that she considers unacceptable for multicultural and modern society that should allow visibility for all religions.

Actors focus their views on the national history, particularly on the WW II and crimes committed by Croats on the one hand and crimes committed by the Communists on the other. In this, the first is being undermined and the second is being overemphasized and this is considered as historical revisionism.

The actors particularly agree that religious people should not be part of history textbooks. For example, student of Croatian ethnic origin specifically stated that:

*"cardinals and bishops as religious people should not be mentioned in history textbooks unless they have written something, something secular"* (FP/ZG-5, Student, Croat)

The interviewees said that crimes committed by Croats are being underemphasized while the responsibilities of Communists are put at the forefront as well as that the pondering of atrocities committed over Croats and atrocities committed by Croats do not bear the same significance:

*"This is vulgar and it is seen in number of pages dedicated to both topics in textbooks. You can see, without analysis, how much pondering does Bleiburg has in comparison to Jasenovac. And even when something is written this is done very carefully and with dignity whereas when Jasenovac is concerned this is written politically. It is coldly analyzed, there is always something relative, for example 'in the end it was like that, but because of this and that'."* (FP/STŽ-1, Publicist and activist, Jewish)

*"The problem is that the Church is constantly talking about Communist crimes, but very little about the crimes of Nazism, Fascism and the Ustasha movement. The assumption is that such a reaction of restraint at the time of Communist rule and the attitude that preceded Bleiburg Jasenovac. But one crime can not justify another, nor to be equated because Jasenovac is a crime of genocide, a mass killing of civilian members of the three peoples - Serbs, Roma and Jews - and the crime of terror against political opponents from among their own people; Bleiburg was the war crime of mass killing of disarmed prisoners of four armies - the armed forces of NDH, a German Weirmacht, Slovenian White Guards and the Serbian-Montenegrin Chetniks"* (FP/ZGS-3, Serbian minority representative).

Cardinal Stepinac is also particularly cited as an example of the Catholic Church's historical revisionism: a Jewish publicist stated, for example, that even a neutral description of this figure in a textbook was criticized:

*"If someone tries to write what s/he thinks it should, that textbook is immediately discredited (...) According to the opinion of those commissions, that is not sufficiently nicely written on him [Stepinac] or (...) the wrongdoing was the she has written neutrally. And how else should historian write but neutrally? Otherwise, s/he is not a historian. Historian has to have a certain distance when writing on any topic. She had a complaint that she didn't engage in showing his, I don't know which, good sides but that she rather balanced his work. She replied that she will rather, instead of author-censoring, delete the whole part on Stepinac which caused rage of the Commission. For them, he is so important historical figure that cannot be avoided in textbooks for schools"*. (FP/STŽ-1, Publicist and activist, Jewish)

Civil society actors emphasized the fact that the Catholic Church assimilates religious and ethnic identity; religion was seen as serving as a distinction from the 'others' (see US embassy report 2009; 2010; Topić & Vasiljević 2011; Topić & Vasiljević 2011 a; Topić & Todorović 2011). The interviewees denounced this since this influences pupils in their identity construction. This situation shows the importance of historical discourses in Croatian politics up to today.

As to private actors, although they overall develop the same argumentation line as the NGO actors, there are some polarization and tensions between the interviewees. Two groups can be identified, along a majority-minority line. Ethnic Croats tend to recognize the devastating role of the Catholic Church in the education system as well as in the

general society. However, they see this as an obstacle towards modernization and Europeanization (Topić & Vasiljević 2011a; Topić & Sremac 2012a). The EU member-countries are seen as more modern and Croatia should adjust as much as possible to European experiences and patterns. The involvement of religious people in the writing of textbooks is seen as at odds with European standards. The Catholic Church's policies are not directly criticized.

As to the minority interviewees, they directly denounced the Catholic Church's historical revisionism and the fact that it assimilates national identity and Catholicism. They see the role of the Catholic Church as devastating for the peaceful co-existence and progress towards liberal, European-oriented society, meaning that Europe has a positive connotation within the minority corpus as well. Thus it seems that the same issues are recognized by both minority and majority however these issues are seen through different lenses (Topić & Vasiljević 2011a). However, it is notable to mention that Croatian ethnic majority does not express hostility to the national minorities but rather the lack of understanding which is, certainly, coming from policies described above (Topić 2012a).

Additionally, the majority and the minority groups did not consider the meaning of being European in the same way. Minority private citizens were positive when it came to feeling European. Ethnical Croats tend to desire Europeanization but a large part of them, when asked if they felt European, stated they felt Croatian first:

*"...I think that all of us who are minorities definitely feel more European than Croatian" (FP/Ajla, retired, Jewish).*

*"Absolutely. Let me give you an example: if one day I get a chance to take European passport, I will never do it, I will always maintain my Croatian passport" (FP/Šib., Student).*

In this sense, it seems that the discourse of the ethnic majority tends towards the Church and the state that are enforcing nationally oriented policies, especially regarding the education system (Rodin et al, 2010). This again brings us to the views of both minority and majority that recognize the crucial role of history and education system in identity formation process; however this is recognized in different ways.

## **Croatia's modernity?**

When summarizing all of these discourses, where this brings us?

It seems as if Croatian state is enforcing functionalist educational policy where it wants to treat the society as an organism just that it fails on the consensus part (which is the aspect of the functionalist theory) since the civil society opposes to its policies.

The educational policy and the position of religion in education and in the wider society is clearly of premodern nature where the state is trying to impose the national and religious over European to legitimize its policies.

Although education system has changed due to the modernization and Europeanization there is a strong influence of the state in regulating the content and values pupils should accept during their education. European is strongly emphasized in the founding educational document which is in line with the Europeanizing aspect and the policies enforced in the EU (changes from content to competence, etc.).

However, when values are in stake then there is a set of values prescribed in line with the goal of creating European-oriented citizenship that will be tolerant towards others and turned towards the joint European future. But, there is also a strong emphasis on maintaining the national. The same applies with Teaching plan that particularly emphasizes the national over the European.

The role of religion is crucial in this policy of maintaining and fostering of the national due to the fact that the Catholic Church actively participates in the national election processes (Topić & Vasiljević, 2011) and this shows that, when Croatia's official discourse is in stake, secularization is nowhere near although Croatia, nominally, is a secular country. Due to the fact these policies were successful in the past 20 years, this also shows the significance and the influence of the religion in the country and a historical discourse of keeping strong ties with the Catholic Church.

The civil society clearly opposes to the policy of the Government in both education and when the position of religion is in stake in general terms. The majority of criticism is directed towards the position of religion in history textbooks and towards historical revisionism enforced by the Catholic Church.

On the other hand, it is notable that the civil society is under the influence of religion but not to the absolute extent or, not to the extend to blindly listen to what the religious institution say.

This is best visible in the polarization between majority and the minority. In this, both groups tend to see problems and critically asses them. The only difference is in the position each group is taking however, this is largely interest-oriented due to the fact Croatian majority does not suffer the same consequences from discriminatory policy. But, even from that position the majority tends to notice problem that the too influential religious position is causing to the country.

On the other hand, minority feels jeopardized and excluded from the society with this policy and therefore places particular emphasis on it and because of it expresses more attachment to the notion of European while the majority expresses more attachment to the notion of national. In the latter, a problem might be in the indoctrination process

performed during primary and secondary education that clearly has influence on the majority while it cannot influence the minority.

When looking into the multiple modernities framework, as suggested for analysis in this paper, it appears that what it means to be modern in Croatia largely means to Europeanize the country in numerous of its aspects but, in particular, when it comes to the removal of religious from the public. In that, civil society in Croatia tends to interconnect strong position of religion with premodern practice whereas removal from tradition and religion is seen as a modernising aspect. With this they clearly present Croatia as a modern society if classic definition of modernity is taken into account, i.e. the one hostile to religion and tradition.

It can also be observed that religion is considered as a constitutive element of the society but its role in politics is challenged. With all of this it appears that Croatia is modern under its own terms, whereas it is the state politics that is in stake or when it comes to the civil society that apparently expresses a lot of criticism when it comes to Croatia's official politics largely centred on preserving the national while civil society envisages more true Europeanization and modernization.

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