

Containing Balkan Nationalism: Imperial Russia and Ottoman Christians, 1856-1914 (Religion and Global Politics)

By Denis Vovchenko

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Containing Balkan Nationalism focuses on the implications of the Bulgarian national movement that developed in the context of Ottoman modernization and of European imperialism in the Near East. The movement aimed to achieve the status of an independent Bulgarian Orthodox church, removing ethnic Bulgarians from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This independent church status meant legal and cultural autonomy within the Islamic structure of the Ottoman Empire, which recognized religious minorities rather than ethnic ones.

Denis Vovchenko shows how Russian policymakers, intellectuals, and prelates worked together with the Ottoman government, Balkan and other diplomats, and rival churches, to contain and defuse ethnic conflict among Ottoman Christians through the promotion of supraethnic religious institutions and identities. The envisioned arrangements were often inspired by modern visions of a political and cultural union of Orthodox Slavs and Greeks. Whether realized or not, they demonstrated the strength and flexibility of supranational identities and institutions on the eve of the First World War. The book encourages contemporary analysts and policymakers to explore the potential of such traditional loyalties to defuse current ethnic tensions and serve as organic alternatives to generic models of power-sharing and federation.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[T]he great value of Vovchenko s work is that it demonstrates that there *is* an alternative to ethnocentric political and religious institutions. In a time when ethnic identity politics still play a major role on the world scene, Vovchenko shows how promoting Pan-religious identities can be a viable alternative to deeper state fragmentation over ethnic differences. Within the realm of Christianity, Vovchenko also details how the Orthodox Church adapted itself to ethnic differences, yet remained committed to the notion that ultimately Christianity trumps ethnicity, a point in which the American Church divided by white, Korean, Hispanic, and other ethnocentric groupings would do well to heed."--*Reading Religion*

"Vovchenko's timely and meticulously-researched new book highlights the centrality of religion for Eastern European national and supranational movements. He shows in fine mosaic how a localized movement for religious autonomy engaged Russian and Ottoman policy-makers in complex diplomacy at the highest levels. A fresh and valuable resource for scholars interested in the former Russian-Ottoman space, the book can also help us understand religious dimensions of the current conflict in Ukraine." --Mara Kozelsky, Associate Professor of History, University of South Alabama

"In this intriguing book based on sources in multiple languages, Denis Vovchenko delves directly into one of the most complex questions of nineteenth-century politics-the relationship between religion and politicized ethnicity. His investigation reveals striking tensions between the principle of Orthodox unity and the process of ethnic fragmentation in Balkan ecclesiastical politics in the decades after the Crimean War. Vovchenko insists on the stubborn persistence of religious and dynastic conceptions for the major players in Bulgarian church affairs and thus offers a compelling challenge to teleological narratives of modern nationalism. Remarkable for its attention to the multiple perspectives that informed this complicated story, Containing Balkan Nationalism provides valuable insights on Russian, Ottoman, and Balkan history." --Paul W. Werth, Professor and Chair, Department of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

"In this widely researched and highly original account, Denis Vovchenko reveals how Eastern Orthodox Christians worked together across borders to challenge and blunt nationalism in the Balkans. Scholars of Russian, Balkan, and Ottoman history and of international relations more generally will find Vovchenko's research informative and his perspective fresh and stimulating." --Michael A. Reynolds, Associate Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University

About the Author

Denis Vovchenko is Associate Professor of History at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK. He

is the author of articles and reviews in scholarly journals such as *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *Kritika*, and *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*.

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