The article presents a review of diocesan spatial organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina by placing it, in a narrow sense, in the context of geopolitical consideration. In the broader sense, observing it from the aspect of the role of the Vatican state and the Catholic Church in the geopolitical configuration of the Balkans, the article contextualizes this spatial organization in relation to the wider regional and European context. In theoretical sense, the article delves into theoretical aspects of political geography and geography of religion. In the methodological sense, the article initially explains the historical context of the emergence of diocesan spatial organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, based on census data, the article researches and cartographically interprets the discrepancies between diocesan borders and areas inhabited by Croats as the only predominantly Catholic constituent people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, the article confirms the hypothesis that, unlike the ethnic-based approach, the geopolitical approach is crucial in the spatial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**KEY WORDS:** Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catholic Church, dioceses, Croats, geopolitics
INTRODUCTION

Southeast Europe is a meeting point of various ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. This ethno-religious mosaic comes to the fore in a special way in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For centuries, three large religious communities have coexisted in this country – Muslims, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic Christians, whose mutual relations have been conditioned by numerous historical and political circumstances. Moreover, religious identities had a decisive impact in the process of ethnic differentiation of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina and classification into the Bosniak, Serb or Croat ethnic corps. Bosnia and Herzegovina has traditionally been marked by a distinct spatial mixture of the three dominant ethno-religious communities. Despite this fact, there are also areas with traditionally higher shares of particular ethno-religious communities. On the other hand, it can be clearly established that the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina based their administrative-territorial organizations mainly on a principle very similar to nodal-functional regionalization. Indeed, religious communities to a greater or lesser extent followed the existing administrative-territorial practices of the civilian authorities aimed at forming administrative units around larger urban settlements. This points to the conclusion that the territorial organizations of the leading religious communities were not closely linked to the exclusive zones of their ethnic or religious groups, but were present, at least nominally, in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even in those parts of this country where the particular religious community had a small number of followers.

Of course, in the case of territorial administration, the separation of religious communities from the framework of ethnicity, which is inseparable from religious affiliation in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian political and political science tradition, does not imply exclusively following a civil administrative-territorial organization, but also includes an important geopolitical aspect of ubiquity in the entire territory of this country. Bosnia and Herzegovina, after all, like Southeast Europe as a whole, is traditionally an area where numerous geopolitical interests intersect, starting from ancient times and the division of the Roman Empire into western and eastern parts by the formation of a border that soon became the border of Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity. In the centuries that followed, the border between the Ottoman Empire on the one hand and the Habsburg Monarchy and the Republic of Venice on the other was created on the northern and western borders of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, this border also represented the western boundary of the spread of Islam. In the middle of the 19th century, Southeast Europe become the scene of imperialist matches between Austria-Hungary and the Balkan states created on the ruins of the Ottoman
Empire, but in a broader sense also the geopolitical arena of European imperialist policies, including the Russian one. In parallel with such policies, the Catholic Church, through the establishment (or in some cases the renewal) of a regular Church organization, also tried to ensure its own presence in the space of the geopolitical vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Ottomans.

This article pays special attention to the application of ethnic and/or geopolitical criteria in the establishment of the administrative-territorial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Implementing the theoretical approaches of political geography and geography of religion, and based on the above, a hypothesis was formed according to which, unlike the ethnic approach, the geopolitical approach was crucial in the administrative-territorial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Taking into consideration the historical circumstances that conditioned the re-establishment of a regular church organization in this country in the 19th century, in methodological terms the article considers the spatial distribution of the Croatian population in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the indicative historical moment and the census year of 1895 and correlates it with the spatial organization of the Catholic dioceses in this country. Based on the findings, special thematic maps were made in order to confirm the hypothesis. Finally, as a kind of hypothesis test on a broader scale, the approach and participation of the Catholic Church in the political processes that marked Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider European regional and geopolitical context is explored.

CATHOLIC CHURCH BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL MISSION

There is a very intense interrelation between religion and geography. Geography has to some extent shaped religious thoughts and attitudes, and religion has in turn shaped geographical space. Moreover, religion played a key role in the formation of civilization patterns, making it an indispensable element of the culture and identity of its followers. The area of interest of geography therefore coincides with issues more specific and central to the study of religion as an element of culture. Territorialisation of religion in the secular space stands out as one of the areas of contact between the areas of interest of geography and religious studies (STUMP, 2008, 17-19). The spatial organization of religious communities also has its political dimension, as it is a reflection of the presence of a particular religious community in a particular political space. However, such spatial organization is often a reflection of already inherited historical circumstances, and therefore it does not necessarily have to be a reflection
of ethnic and religious peculiarities. In the case of the Catholic Church, its administrative-territorial organization has an even stronger political dimension due to the fact that the spatial distribution of dioceses, as well as many other extremely important issues in running the Church, must be approved by the pope himself who has the role of both religious leader and head of state.

The importance of the spatial organization of religious communities, including the Catholic Church, significantly depends on the number of its members as a guarantee of impact on social and political circumstances in a particular territorial-political entity. The role and significance of the Church has been changing throughout history, but it has never reached a level of irrelevance. The secularization theory that modernization necessarily leads to a decline in religiosity, both in society and in the consciousness of the individual, proved wrong (Berger, 2008, 12-13). Moreover, religion experienced its own renaissance especially in post-communist countries where it was pushed to the margin years earlier. In the changed circumstances, religious communities exerted a strong impact on political elites and strengthened their own positions. The Catholic Church took the opportunity to better regulate its relation with states by invoking its own sacrifices and renunciations in the communist period and the role it played in changing the political system. However, the position of the Catholic Church differs significantly in countries where Catholics share their living and public space with members of other religious communities, as it is the case in Southeast Europe. In the case of this region, it is inappropriate to point to any proselytism on either side, since religious differentiation has long since been completed. Indeed, the loss of the religiosity of its members and their emigration for economic reasons is a more important concern for the Catholic Church than the fear of competitors when it comes to preaching. Therefore, a kind of competition among religious communities in this part of Europe can be more correctly recognized in regulating their relation with the state in which the number of believers and their position in society play a significant role.

However, as it is well known, Huntington insists on the clash of religions as the central topic of his thesis on the clash of civilizations. The author deepens his thesis on the example of the last war conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stating that on the one hand, Germany, Austria, Vatican, other European Catholic countries, and later the United States of America came together to support Croatia; on the other hand, Russia, Greece and other Orthodox countries supported Serbia; while on the third side, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Libya, Islamic countries and Islamists gathered to support Bosniaks (Huntington, 1998, 344). In contrast, as a representative of critical geopolitics, Ó Tuathail challenges Huntington’s thesis, arguing that the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s were caused by elite manipulation in the midst
of an economic crisis, rather than religious and ethnic diversity \textit{per se} (Ó Tuathail, 2007, 140). In addition, the extent of assistance provided by Catholic and Protestant cultural circles (Vatican, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States) to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bosniaks during the war also challenges Huntington’s assessment of the clash of civilizations in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Čurak, 2002, 50-51).

According to the political and geographical classification, Vatican has the characteristics of a quasi-state. It is therefore questionable whether a territory of 44 hectares, whose inhabitants are nationals of other states only, can be really called a state according to established definitions in political geography (Glassner, Fahner, 2004, 122-123). However, despite the questionable attributes of statehood, Vatican has retained its sovereignty and functions as a strict theocracy (Stump, 2008, 262). Today, 166 states make full exchange of diplomatic missions with Vatican, a single entity recognized in international law as the legal embodiment of the universal service of the Bishop of Rome as head of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to these bilateral relations, Vatican participates in the work of the United Nations and a number of other international organizations, and Vatican representatives have served as mediators in a number of international disputes (Weigel, 2008, 32-33). Therefore, due to the large number of members of the Catholic Church as a religious community, the role and strength of the Vatican is extremely disproportionate to the size of its political territory.

Although the role of statesman and religious leader is united in the person of the pope, Catholicism is very reconcilable with the principle of secularism. Despite historical struggles for political domination between popes and secular rulers, Jesus’ motto ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s’ inaugurates the principle of separation of religion and politics, so it is understandable that secularism eventually took root in the countries of the Christian West. The roots of the separation of spiritual from secular authority go back to the time of the emperor Constantine, who relocated the political centre to Constantinople, which enabled the development of an authority independent of the Roman bishop. Pope Gelasius I wrote to Emperor Anastasius that the unity of authority lies exclusively in Christ, who ‘separated the two functions so that no one would become arrogant’ (Ratzinger, 2013, 15). However, the power of the Catholic Church is not limited by state borders and extends to the entire Catholic world. As the Catholic or Universal Church, the Roman Church has a compelling need to act and be constantly present throughout the World, which in political terms would be its fundamental geopolitical conception. Active diplomacy traditionally helps in that.
GEOPOLITICAL ASPECT OF VATICAN POLICY TOWARDS BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

In the 4th century, on the eastern borders of today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, along the rivers of Lim and Drina, the border line between the Western and Eastern Roman Empire was drawn, which became the border between Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. The establishment of this boundary fatefully determined the whole of Southeast Europe by its border position, not only in the religious, but also in the (geo)political sense. As a border area of two Christian denominations, this part of Europe in the Middle Ages became a battlefield of missionaries engaged by Rome and Constantinople. Joining one or another religious centre also meant entering the sphere of political influence of the Byzantine Orthodox East or the dominant political and territorial formations within the Catholic West. As a kind of attempt to resist such medieval version of the bloc division of the World, new religious sects with a more or less pronounced organizational structure appeared. One such phenomenon was the Bosnian Church which soon after the fall of Bosnia and Herzegovina under Ottoman rule disappeared from the historical stage. Along with the Bosnian Church, with the arrival of the Ottomans, a regular Catholic church organization withdrew from this country, whereby, as pointed out in the previous chapter, the freedom to preach the faith was allowed only to members of the Franciscan order. Thus, the frontier of Western Christianity in Ottoman times was shifting more and more to the west. However, with the withdrawal of the Ottomans and the Austro-Hungarian occupation, and then the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Catholic Church regained the opportunity to expand its influence to the east. In addition, through the regulation of relations with the authorities of Orthodox majority countries, the Catholic Church sought to ensure its universality through its presence throughout Europe. However, a significant blow to the Church’s positions in this part of Europe was dealt by the spread of communism and the establishment of a bloc division of the World after the World War II.

In the period after the Second Vatican Council, the diplomacy of the Holy See also directed its activities towards supporting the project of uniting Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals on the principles of democracy and outside of bloc politics. Pope John XXIII moved away from the earlier Vatican policy of hiding behind the NATO umbrella from the Soviet threat and began the process of opening up to the East, emphasizing that the Church must ‘be free from

1 Bearing in mind the recent forms of politicization of the origin, development or theology of the Bosnian Church, the intention of this article is not to deal in more detail with the meaning of this religious community, but to mention it in the context of a brief overview of religious circumstances in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Middle Ages.
the ideological and political blocks game’ (CVRLJE, 1992, 36, 60). A more pronounced offensive of the Catholic Church towards the East was followed by the election of the Archbishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyła, as pope, which heralded a kind of re-evangelization of post-communist Europe. John Paul II stood out as an advocate of a united Europe, similar to de Gaulle’s Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, but with an emphasis on Christian unity and a strong Slavic component (CVRLJE, 1992, 159-160, 205). The understanding of Europe not only as a geographical, but also as a cultural and historical area from the Atlantic to the Urals was firmly advocated by Pope Benedict XVI (Ratzinger, 2013, 11). The Catholic Church has established diplomatic relations with the institutions of the European Union, carefully and purposefully choosing the saints it has declared as patrons of Europe. In fact, the Catholic Church understood support for the process of European unification as an opportunity to regain influence in European society as an active participant in that process, but also as an opportunity to renew Christian spirituality (Cvitković, 2006, 28-29). Of course, due to numerous conflicting interests within the European public and political space, many of the set goals were ultimately not achieved, especially in terms of values, but the Church still did not stop supporting the idea of a united Europe.

The Catholic Church in the post-conciliar period around the World, even where Catholics are not the majority, is strongly active in the field of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Ratzinger believes that the task of true ecumenism, especially in the Balkans, should be to seek Christ’s peace together, to give it to each other and to have the capacity for peace as a measure of truth (Ratzinger, 2013, 88). Geopolitical changes and the collapse of socialist systems accelerated the processes of re-evangelization in Eastern Europe, so the influence of the Church in transition countries strengthened to the level of open interference and reinforcement of the impact on internal and external political processes. Although Catholics in the Balkans do not constitute a statistical majority, the Catholic Church’s interest in this area is by no means negligible. Vatican vigorously advocated the recognition of the independence of Catholic Slovenia and Croatia, but also of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Catholics make up less than one fifth of the population. Pope John Paul II told the then Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mate Granić, that ‘the conflicts between Croats and Bosniaks and the conflicts between Catholicism and Islam should be stopped at all costs,’ with a message to President Tuđman that he would visit Croatia in the same year if these conflicts stopped. The high clergy in Croatia, led by the then Archbishop of Zagreb, Franjo Kuharić, had a similar attitude (Granić, 2005, 89-92). The insistence of Vrhbosna Archbishop Vinko Puljić on remaining in Sarajevo throughout the war proves the decisive support of the Catholic Church for the territorial
integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, during the war, Catholic charitable organizations provided humanitarian aid to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation (SCHINDLER, 2011, 208-209).

Avoiding conflicts with political elites and other religious communities at all costs is one of the fundamental strategies for the survival of the Catholic Church in the Balkans, even in circumstances where the actions of the Church hierarchy for the same reasons were not welcomed with enthusiasm by the Catholic population, who interpreted such behaviour of the Church as absenteeism of supporting the interests of their own believers. For example, the wise balancing with the political and religious elites in Belgrade is reflected in the fact that since 1980, not a single Croat, but as many as three Slovenes, have been appointed Archbishop of Belgrade. With these gestures, the Catholic Church placed itself above ethnic or national categories, insisting on its universalism. The Church implements a similar policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not allowing closure in narrow Croatian national framework, not because of ignoring the needs of Croats in this country, but because of insisting on the authenticity of its universal mission. At the same time, it is certainly necessary to point out once again that the diocesan borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike in neighbouring Croatia, have not changed since the time of the Austro-Hungarian administration, nor has the centre of gravity of the church administration moved towards the centre of gravity of the Catholic population in this country. Such a strategy of the spatial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina confirms that the official policy of the Church, which is inseparable from the official policy of Vatican as a state, is still more guided in its actions in this country by its own geopolitics than by political concepts determined by the ethnicity of its followers.

Of course, the above does not imply that the Church elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina are deprived of their own ethnic identity and national affiliation. It is indisputable that the discipline within the Church is binding for the Bosnian-Herzegovinian clergy, but it does not necessarily cause absolute enthusiasm for all the moves of Rome. For example, although the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been actively participating in providing assistance to migrants since the beginning of the migrant crisis, the messages of Church dignitaries in this country are significantly more restrained compared to the messages of the Holy See. The identity dimension of the attitude towards migrants in this country is even more pronounced in the case of Catholic believers, since there is a strong correlation between the attitude towards migrants and their religious affiliation (BOTIĆ, KOTLAR, 2020, 32). Therefore, Catholic religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a great obligation and responsibility
in harmonizing the interests of the Catholic Church in promoting its universality and the interests of the Croatian people, who represent the majority of Catholic believers in this country.

DIOCESES BORDERS AND SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF CROATS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

During the Ottoman rule, the Franciscans were the only Catholic clergy to perform religious services in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the departure of the Ottomans and the entry of Austro-Hungarian troops into this country in 1878, the regular Church organization was gradually restored. The introduction of a regular Church organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. the organization of dioceses, called into question the monopolistic position of the Franciscan order among Catholics in the country. With his bull Ex hac Augusta, on July 5, 1881, Pope Leo XIII established the Vrhbosna ecclesiastical province with the archdiocesan seat in Sarajevo and the diocesan seats in Mostar and Banja Luka. Josip Stadler, a university professor from Zagreb, was appointed the first archbishop of Vrhbosna. With the renewal of the regular Church organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the old diocese of Trebinje-Mrkanj came under the auspices of the Vrhbosna metropolis, although it temporarily remained under the administration of the bishops of Dubrovnik. In agreement with the Jesuits, and with arguments about the strong Catholic identity of Central Bosnia and the fact that Travnik was the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1851, the first Catholic gymnasium was opened in this city (Pranjić, 2006, 7).

The established diocesan borders were undoubtedly not shaped in accordance with the spatial distribution of the Croatian population as (almost the only) members of the Catholic denomination. On the contrary, areas with a significant concentration of Catholic population were without exception divided into several dioceses and related to equally divided parts of the territory with a pronounced deficit of Catholics in order to establish a kind of spatial balance needed to ensure the presence of regular Church organization throughout entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, it is precisely for this reason that the diocesan territorial organization followed the logic of nodal-functional regionalization by placing diocesan centres in the most important regional centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only exception is Trebinje, which never fully developed the importance of a real diocesan centre, as was the case with Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. However, by applying the nodal-functional principle during the establishment of a regular Church organization, there was no complete linking and equating of the administrative presence of the Catholic Church with the presence of the state.
administration throughout the entire country (Fig. 1). Indeed, the number of Austro-Hungarian districts in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still higher than the number of dioceses in the country. Regardless of the above, while on the one hand such a spatial organization indicates the universalist character of the Catholic Church which as a ‘universal’ Church tends to be present always and everywhere, on the other hand the establishment of a regular Church organization throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina is undoubtedly a reflection of a significantly more favourable position enjoyed by the Catholic Church under the rule of the Dual Monarchy in relation to the earlier position during the Ottoman rule.

**SLIKA 1.** Austro-ugarsko administrativno uređenje i granice biskupija u Bosni i Hercegovini 1895.

**FIGURE 1.** Austro-Hungarian administrative organization and diocesan borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1895

Izvor: prilagođeno prema URL1, URL3 / Source: adapted according to URL1, URL3
In addition, the linking of diocesan centres with the most important regional centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina is also understandable due to the fact that at the beginning of the Austro-Hungarian administration Catholics were the absolute majority in only one (Fojnica) and the relative majority in only two (Jajce, Bugojno) out of a total of 51 districts and county towns according to the Austro-Hungarian census from 1895. (*Main results of the Population Census*, 1896, XCVI-XCVII). None of these settlements had the capacity of a significant regional centre. Such data are not surprising if we take into consideration that Bosnian-Herzegovinian urban settlements during the Ottoman rule were almost exclusively inhabited by Muslims, while the Christian population mostly lived in suburban and rural settlements. The only exceptions were the neighbourhoods with members of other religions within larger regional centres, where non-Muslims covered specific activities, but still without the possibility of building places of worship within cities with clear features of a Muslim urban settlement. This claim is supported by the fact that many urban settlements in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a majority Muslim population in the immediate vicinity have rural settlements with a majority Christian population. In the case of the Catholic (Croatian) population, it is sufficient to point out more typical examples, such as the case of the religious structure of the population of Ljubuški in 1895 with a majority Muslim population in the town itself compared to the mainly Catholic rural settlements in its immediate vicinity (*Main results of the Population Census* 1896, 541-547).

Unlike neighbouring Croatia, where diocesan borders have changed several times over the last 150 years, the administrative-territorial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina remained unchanged despite the numerous and significant changes that this country experienced in the same period as in administrative-territorial sense, as well as in terms of spatial distribution of the three dominant ethnic and religious communities. The most significant changes in the national and religious structure of the population in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina occurred as a result of the war during the 1990s when there was a pronounced national homogenization in terms of space as a result of persecution and ethnic cleansing. In support of the above, it is necessary to look at the national structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the municipality level before and after the last war. Although a more detailed insight into the national structure of all settlements would best illustrate these phenomena, for the purposes of this article we will present at least changes in the national composition of diocesan centres that can be considered indicative. The data are presented at the municipal level.
According to the 1991 census of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo, the seat of the Vrhbosna Archdiocese, the majority, i.e. 49.23% of the population, were Muslims,2 29.82% Serbs, and only 6.62% of the population were Croats. In Banja Luka, the seat of the Banja Luka diocese, the majority, i.e. 54.59% of the population, were Serbs, while Croats accounted for 14.83% and Muslims for 14.59% of the population. In Mostar, the seat of the Mostar-Duvno diocese, the share of Croats was significantly higher and made up 33.99% of the population of this municipality, which was only slightly less than the share of Muslims who made up 34.63% of the population, while the share of Serbs was 18.83%. Finally, in Trebinje, the seat of the Trebinje-Mrkanj diocese, the largest percentage was Serbs (68.88%), while Muslims made up 17.97% and Croats 4.02% of the population of this municipality. However, it should be noted that at the time of the 1991 census, some respondents declared themselves to be Yugoslavs in the national sense, whose ethnic origin we therefore cannot determine (Census of Population, 1993). These data point to the fact that Croats as a Catholic people do not form an absolute majority in any diocesan seat according to the 1991 census, while in relative terms they are almost equal to Muslims only in Mostar, which is easily explained by the fact that Mostar is on the edge of Western Herzegovina as an area with an absolute Croatian ethnic majority (Fig. 2).

2 At the time of the census, a Muslim was a national category.
According to the results of the 2013 census of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo Canton,\(^3\) in whose central settlement of the same name is the seat of the Vrhbosna Archdiocese, the majority, i.e. 83.8% of the population were Bosniaks\(^4\), 4.2% Croats and 3.2% the population consisted of Serbs. In Banja Luka, the seat of the Banja Luka diocese, the vast majority, i.e. 73.2% of the population were Bosniaks, 15.6% Serbs and 5.1% Croats.

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\(^3\) The data are presented at the level of Sarajevo Canton, since the city of Sarajevo is administratively divided into several municipalities.

\(^4\) After gaining independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Muslim population accepted the Bosniak name as their national name.
89.6% of the population, were Serbs, while Bosniaks accounted for 4.2% and Croats for 2.8% of the population. In Mostar, the seat of the Mostar-Duvno diocese, the share of Croats is again significantly higher and makes up a relative majority of 48.4% of the population, which is only slightly more than the share of Bosniaks who make up 44.2% of the population, while the share of Serbs is only 4.2%. Finally, in Trebinje, the seat of Trebinje-Mrkanj diocese, a convincing absolute majority are Serbs (93.5%), while Bosniaks make up 3.4% and Croats only 1% of the population (URL 4). These data indicate a significant national homogenization of these urban settlements, which are also diocesan seats. Compared to 1991, the share of Croats in Sarajevo almost halved, in Trebinje it significantly decreased, while there was a dramatic decrease in the number of Croats in Banja Luka. The only exception is Mostar, where Croats make up a narrow relative majority (Fig. 3). It should also be noted that certain changes in national proportions in relation to the results of the 1991 census are the result not only of persecution and ethnic cleansing, but also of changes in the administrative-territorial organization of local self-government units, especially in areas near the entity border, such as a case of Sarajevo.
From the data above it can be concluded that the official policy of the Catholic Church from the time of the reestablishment of the regular Church organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the second half of the 19th century until today still does not insist on positioning diocesan seats in areas with Catholic or Croatian majority, but insists on a presence in the most important regional centres of this country. This enables the spatial presence of the Catholic Church in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the organization of parishes,
without linking its activities to the focus of the population of Croats as a predominantly Catholic people, nor to the seats of their political power. This administrative-territorial organization of the Catholic Church is a significant reflection of the Vatican’s attitude towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the Holy See treated with special attention given its border position in civilizational, geostrategic and religious terms.

CONCLUSION

The attitude of the Holy See to Southeast Europe has been determined for centuries by the border position of this part of Europe in relation to the rest of the Catholic world. Therefore, the Catholic Church approached this area with particular attention during its turbulent history. It was Croats who actually had the role of the predominantly Catholic border nation in this region, which is particularly evident in the case of that part of this people that has been living in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries. After centuries of Ottoman administration, the introduction of Austro-Hungarian rule in the country led to the restoration of the regular Church organization, which with its organization sought to ensure the presence of Catholic Church authorities on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of the spatial concentration of the Croatian Catholic population. Insistence on this approach is also manifested through the constancy and immutability of diocesan borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina despite numerous changes in the civil administrative-territorial organization of this country, as well as in the spatial distribution of dominant national and religious categories.

The presence of the Catholic Church on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina through administrative-territorial organization does not represent any exception in relation to other countries of Southeast Europe where the share of Catholics in the total population is significantly lower compared to their share in this country. The spatial organization of dioceses in Bosnia and Herzegovina is therefore oriented towards larger regional centres, and not towards centres of population of Croats as the only people with a Catholic majority in the country. In this way, the Holy See skillfully avoided potentially attaching an ethnic attribute to the activities of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The desire for its presence stems from the universal character of the Catholic Church, and the presence can only be guaranteed within the framework of political stability and good relations with local authorities. For the above reasons, the Vatican was an unquestionable supporter of the statehood and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the best framework for the permanent presence of the Catholic Church in the entire territory of this country, not only in the area with
a majority Croatian Catholic population. This indisputably confirms the hypothesis according to which, in contrast to the ethnic approach, the geopolitical approach was decisive in the spatial organization of the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, the foreign policy of the Holy See is confirmed as constant and essentially geopolitically determined. Therefore, Berger's conclusion is fully justified that those who ignore religion in their analyses of contemporary events do so to their own detriment (BERGER, 2008, 30).

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