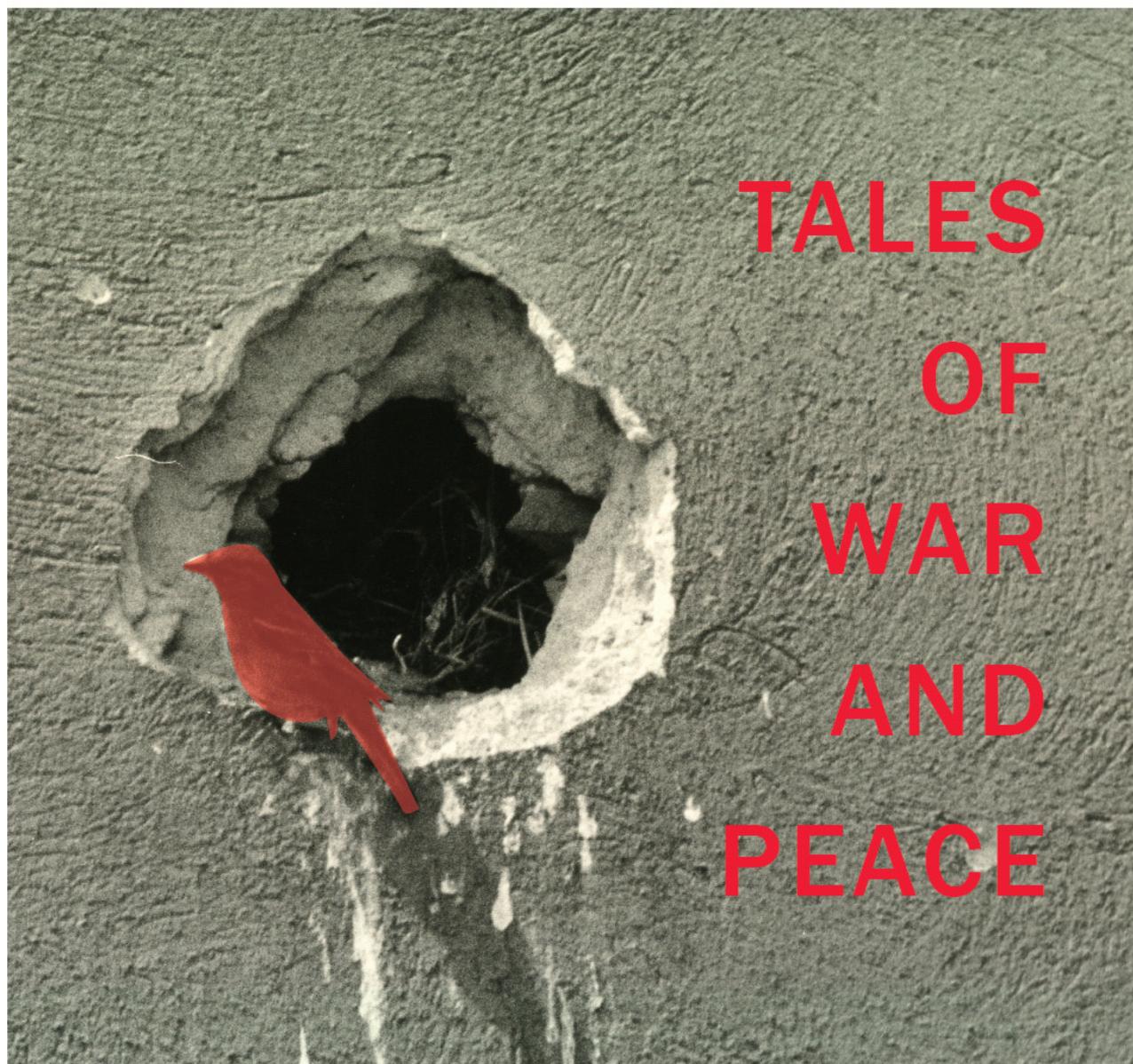


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Religious Leaders During and After the War  
in Bosnia and Herzegovina:  
Calculated Hypocrisy or Paving the Way for Peace?

# **TALES OF WAR AND PEACE**

## **Religious Leaders During and After the War in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Calculated Hypocrisy or Paving the Way for Peace?**

A case study  
for the Knowledge Forum on  
Religion and Development Policy

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Photo on cover, by Linda Graham: Tuzla, 1996. A bird nestling in a wall,  
damaged by a grenade shell

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## Summary

Religious leaders and their communities have great potential to mediate in a situation of conflict. But religion can also have a negative effect and contribute to the escalation of the conflict. This case explores the role religion and religious leaders played in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992 – 1995) and during the first years after that war.

Clearly, the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim communities as well as their leaders played important roles. They could not stop the war, and quite often even publicly supported nationalistic politicians responsible for the escalation of conflicts and war atrocities. Yet, sometimes religious leaders took on more positive roles, mainly in the field of inter-religious dialogue. A number of processes took place.

Religious communities and their leaders were instrumentalized by nationalistic political movements and their leaders; the Orthodox and Catholic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina gave up on the unity of the country at the beginning of the war, and later the Muslim community followed in the process of radicalization.

The Bosnian context was and is quite specific in the sense that ethnic and religious groups overlapped almost for the full hundred percent. This ethno-religious congruity was the basis for the alliances between the nationalists and most of the religious leaders.

Many religious leaders exasperated the problems by approving of violence and supporting nationalism. Even today, many emphasize religious (and thus ethnic) differences among groups. In general, religious communities have great potential in the field of interethnic community building, but over-all they sided and still side with the more conservative (and nationalistic) forces in society.

Diplomats and the representatives of the international governmental organizations largely failed to address the religious leaders in an effective manner. There was, and is, widespread lack of knowledge about religious communities, their traditions, and their role in society. Also, diplomats had great trouble establishing working relationships with religious leaders and other religious actors.

Even when outside actors, often the international religious bodies, facilitated direct dialogue between and among religious leaders, there was scarce to no implementation of the declarations drafted at such meetings. Further, at some points, outside actors acted as if dialogue was not a means, but an aim in itself. Critics have indicated that quite often the religious leaders did not practice what they preached at dialogue meetings.

Given the role of religious leaders in the recent past and in the present, the international community and promoters of inter-religious dialogue and tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina should have realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Practice shows that time is needed as well as thorough preparation of every step.

Against all odds, various interesting initiatives developed at the local, the national and the international level. Commitment, intrinsic motivation and perseverance of individuals are some of the key elements in all of these initiatives. We can learn from these experiences and must present such best practices to the wider audience. These concrete initiatives do deserve our attention and support.

In particular initiatives that relate to processes of truth-funding and European integration will be most interesting in the upcoming period. Altogether, there are

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more than enough reasons to continue working on inter-religious dialogue and co-operation.

### **Acknowledgement**

IKV Pax Christi and BBO would like to thank the respondents for their collaboration. Upon the basis of their contribution, this study hopes to contribute to the insight of policy makers, religious communities and NGOs into the role of religion in peace processes.

IKV Pax Christi and BBO thank Cordaid, Hivos and ICCO for their financial support for this research and report.

## **Preface**

This study is part of the work of the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy. The Knowledge Forum is a collaborative project of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several Dutch development and peace organizations. The Knowledge Forum aims to formulate recommendations for a development policy for the Ministry and NGOs with regard to religion.

Therefore, the policy makers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and various Dutch NGOs from the primary target group of this study. We will nevertheless also have a translation into Bosnian language. IKV Pax Christi is planning to have one or more presentations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the course of 2008.

Religion as a policy topic has long been avoided. Most western policy makers see religion as something that needs to be kept apart from public affairs. The term 'religion' is practically absent from policy documents of western institutions, governments and NGOs alike. This is remarkable, as religion and church institutions are exerting great influence on politics and culture in many countries. It is neither possible nor desirable to ignore religious feelings of citizens and groups. Yet, since the beginning of this century, western societies see a 'come back' of religion and spirituality in people's individual lives. Policy makers are coming to realize that religion can and should be acknowledged as a relevant factor. Whether one is dealing with a secular state or not, organizations and diplomats who want to work on poverty alleviation, sustainable development and peace will, in most countries, have to deal with religion as a determining factor.

The Knowledge Forum has carried out several studies that investigate the role of religion in different spheres of development policy. The aim of these studies is to gain insight into the effect of religion and religious leaders on development and peace processes and to formulate policy recommendations. This study investigates the role of religion during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular during the 1992-1995 war and the first years after the war. IKV Pax Christi has been active on the Balkans for almost twenty years. Through use of its network and experts in the field, its own background as an organization that was founded by churches and has been working within churches and religious communities ever since, IKV Pax Christi was able to facilitate the implementation of this study. BBO is one of the initiators of the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy. The BBO staff involved has good knowledge of the Western Balkans and research methodology.



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## 1. Introduction

Sarajevo, Mostar, Srebrenica, concentration camps ... The Balkan wars, raging just a decade ago, shocked Europe with the ethnic cleansing, the genocide, the massive destruction of houses and historical buildings, the endless flows of displaced people and refugees... The human suffering on television and in the papers, day after day, for many years... The violent outburst of nationalism on European soil had a tremendous impact! The Western Balkans are still recovering from these dreadful years. Even today, nationalists hold strong positions in society and politics and stability is fragile, still.

During the Bosnian war, 1992-1995, the religious leaders were visible as well. They met with soldiers who went to war and gave them their blessing. They met with political leaders and built alliances with them – even though it was clear and visible to everybody that they promoted hatred and nationalism. Innocent men, women and children fell victim to that nationalism and hatred. Then again, religious leaders also participated in dialogue meetings and spoke out against war crimes and in favor of dialogue.

This study will try to answer two questions:

1. What was the role of the religious leaders during and after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995)? Was it all **calculated hypocrisy**? Did they deceive the international community, as did many politicians? Or did they **pave the way for peace**, with their statements, their influence on politicians and their concrete initiatives of interreligious dialogue?
2. What are the main lessons we can and should learn from the experiences of dealing with the religious leaders during and after the war? Is it possible to list **recommendations**, for all actors involved – both within Bosnia and Herzegovina from the outside world?

Since the Second World War, but before 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina – one of the republics in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – was known as a place where ethnic and religious groups lived together in relative peace and great tolerance of each other's culture and religion. Inter-ethnic marriages were quite common. Neighbors used to visit each other during their respective religious holidays, showing that they not only tolerated the other's cultural and religious distinctness, but that they were willing to participate in the religious traditions of other ethnic groups. This was, by the way, common practice more than it was a political statement.

During the eighties, ethnic tensions started to increase in Yugoslavia. By June 1991, tensions had turned into bloody war. The violence first escalated in Croatia, after which it spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Spring 1992. Today, twelve years after the Dayton Peace Accords, people in Bosnia are still divided along ethnic lines, which shows in the geography and politics of the country.

This study investigates the role religion and in particular religious leaders played during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and in the years of the post-war period. This case offers insight into and a better understanding of the positive and negative roles religious leaders played and can play in conflict and peace processes. The study makes no attempt to come up with the ultimate explanation which party contributed most to the escalation of the conflict. Instead, this study tries to answer the more conceptual questions about the roles of religion and religious leaders during and after the conflict.

The following chapter gives an account of the methodology of the study. The third chapter describes the Bosnian context, within which the religious leaders acted. Chapter 4 presents general reflections on the respective religious communities and

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their leaders. Chapter 5 outlines the results of the analysis of the actual positive and counterproductive roles of religious leaders during the Bosnian War. Finally, in chapter 6, general recommendations will be presented, as well as recommendations for the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for the international community. Some concluding remarks will be presented in chapter 7.

## 2. Method

This study is based on interviews and a review of a limited corpus of relevant literature. It was decided to use interviews as the main source of information, since the specific roles of religious leaders during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina have not been given much attention in the literature. The literature was used to verify the findings of the interviews.

Interviews were held with 16 respondents and two resource persons. All 18 persons were either personally involved in the peace process or followed it closely. Ten respondents are originally from the Balkans and are living and working there; six respondents are from the Netherlands and were professionally active in the Balkans. The respondents were selected based on the literature and advice of IKV Pax Christi, a non-governmental organization that has been promoting peace in the Balkans for many years. The two resource persons are a current and a former member of staff of IKV Pax Christi. The interviews took place in the period September – December 2006. Some of the respondents provided additional information in the course of 2007.

It should be clear that this sample of respondents cannot be considered fully representative of the group of religious actors involved in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the sample is rather small, and only five representatives of the religious communities have been interviewed. Most experts were Dutch. They have been actively involved in various international initiatives, like the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. Further, there is an overrepresentation of moderate actors in the sample. The respondents from the Balkans were participants of a conference on inter-religious dialogue, which means they are to a certain extent convinced of the value of inter-religious dialogue and of collaboration with the international community. Yet, they were quite capable of giving a picture of general developments, beyond their personal opinions.

The interviews were semi-structured; all interviews were based on the questionnaire that is included in Annex 1. The questionnaire was based on literature findings and some preliminary analytical questions formulated by IKV Pax Christi and BBO. Other questions were added during the interview, depending on the expertise of the respondent and the accumulating insights from earlier interviews.

The Dutch respondents were interviewed either in person or by phone. The interviews with the Dutch respondents lasted approximately one hour and a half. Most of the respondents living on the Balkans were interviewed in person during a three-day conference on inter-religious dialogue held in Trebinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2006. The respondents in Trebinje were interviewed for about 20-60 minutes. These interviews were on average much shorter than the interviews with the Dutch experts, because quite often some sections of questions were irrelevant for that particular interview.

Even though the group of respondents was rather small, valuable information regarding the positive and counterproductive roles of religious leaders during and after the Balkan War (1992-1995) was collected. The recommendations are based on solid ground.

The obtained data were based on the subjective opinion of the respondents. The researchers tried to minimize the bias of the respondents by choosing people with some distance to the matter and to select equally from all religious groups. The results show that respondents regularly disagreed. This study is more of an exploration of the field surrounding the question of the role of religion and a 'matter of fact' account. Clearly, the respective religious communities still have very different assessments of what happened during the war, and many wounds are still fresh.

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Another difficulty results from the lack of impact the inter-religious dialogue had on the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study is probably most robust when explaining the lack of religious dialogue, since that was the empiric reality. Whether the recommendations will lead to more successful inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue can only be assessed in the future.

There are some limitations to the validity of the results of this study, especially concerning the extent that the findings and recommendations can be applied in other conflict and post-conflict settings. The information retained in this study applies to a specific context and cannot be automatically translated into contexts of other countries. However, the results and recommendations can guide policy-makers to verify certain observations in their working environment.

### **3. The context**

In this section the war in Bosnia will be presented briefly, followed by a description of factors that were strongly influential in the conflict. These factors are history, the main events during the *war itself*, the *economy*, and *religion and ethnicity*.

#### **3.1. History of the Balkans**

The people in the Balkans have a great awareness of their history and a strong sense of (perceived) historical injustice. History played a major role in the conflict and therefore a short account of Balkan history will be presented here. Different groups have different perceptions of what happened and why. This description is not meant to present the ultimate version of historic events, but only illustrates the elements of the complex historical context. These elements were not seen as history by the warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they were more felt as 'unfinished business'.

The Balkans have a history with long periods of tension and conflict between ethnic groups and some period of relative (inter-ethnic) stability. The Balkan countries have been separated at least since the Great Schism in 1054, when the Roman empire was split into the Western and the Eastern Roman empire, with the current territory of Croatia and Slovenia belonging to the Western empire, and the current territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo belonging to the Eastern Byzantine empire. The Great Schism coincided with a schism in the Christian church. Croatia and Slovenia became mainly Catholic and used the Latin alphabet, while Serbia and Macedonia became mainly Orthodox and used the Cyrillic alphabet. From this moment on, the religious identity of the populations remained the most continuous defining factor of their ethnic identity, throughout a history of different dominating ideologies and changing border demarcations.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Empire in most of South-Eastern Europe, was replaced by the Ottoman Empire. At the time of the Ottoman Empire, a large part of the Balkans witnessed a strong islamization process. Muslims were the preferred group to work for the state. This led to differences in socio-economic status between ethnic groups and many people converted to the Islam.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the Ottoman Empire started to wane as critical voices developed and economic problems were felt. Of course, differences in perspectives for economic development did not disappear and became most visible in times of economic recession. Nationalists from both Croatia and Serbia claimed the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where many Croats and Serbs were living. The end of the Ottoman period was near. In 1878, Bosnia and Herzegovina fell under the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Under the Habsburg rule (1878-1918), Bosnia and Herzegovina would have another period of economic and cultural development. The Muslim population was permitted to 'practice its faith freely', as stipulated in the "Convention between Austria-Hungary and Turkey, relative to the Occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina" (1879). In this period, the catholic Croats and orthodox Serbs, living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, got the possibility to strengthen their position in society, in the fields of economy, religion and culture. Nevertheless, none of the big communities were happy with their dependency of the new foreign rulers. By 1910, the three ethnic groups of Serbs, Croats and Muslims united in their stride against the Empire. The party that comprised and mobilized all three ethnic groups won the elections and installed a system that tried to balance the various religious and ethnic interests.

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With the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (June 28, 1914), the First World War started, in which Slovenia and Croatia fought against the other Balkan countries. After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established, in 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It consisted of an area made up of the present-day states of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and most of present-day Slovenia and Croatia. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia existed until the outbreak of the Second World War (the occupation took place in 1941). The Balkans were divided again. A complicated period started, with Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as autonomous states, largely siding with Germany, and numerous Serbs fighting the puppet government in Belgrade and the Germans.

This situation continued until 1943, when the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia was founded, which later became the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1946-1963) and then the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963-1991). Yugoslavia consisted of the six constituent republics: Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Kosovo and Vojvodina became autonomous provinces within Serbia.

After World War II, Tito, the leader of the socialist Yugoslav state, tried to balance the access to state jobs among the various groups; loyalty to him and his policy were more important than ethnic background. At the same time, however, the existing socio-economic differences were exploited and aggravated by a process of specialization, making each region responsible for certain parts of the production processes of end goods. While Slovenia concentrated on high-level processes in terms of added value, Bosnia for example supplied the resources, with much lower revenues.

During Communism, Yugoslav citizens in urban centers got used to living with other ethnic communities. In rural areas of Yugoslavia, citizens had less opportunity to experience multi-ethnicity. A Croat living in Sarajevo had more in common with his Muslim neighbor than with his compatriots in rural Herzegovina. Consequently, values of the city were in general not transferred to rural areas in Yugoslavia. Up until today, the differences between cities and countryside are quite big – in life style and with regard to interaction with 'the outside world'.

Under Tito, nationalist tendencies and religion were actively suppressed, because they were seen as a threat to the nation and to socialism. Nevertheless, the ethnic feelings of the various communities became stronger and in the eyes of Tito the unity of Yugoslavia was at stake. In 1968, in order to counter nationalist tendencies within the Muslim community, Tito changed the status of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: they used to be considered a religious group, but were now given the status of a (constituent) nation.

After Tito's death in 1980, nationalism got stronger once again. Practically no politician was able to mobilize more than one ethnic and religious group. They were all seen as Serb, Croat or Muslim and thus automatically identified as promoter of the interest of that particular ethnic group. Distrust and conspiracy theories flourished and tensions were on the rise.

During the eighties, political leaders became aware of the risk of violence and asked the international community for economic assistance in order to ease the tensions. The requests were denied, partly because the international community did not foresee excessive risks of escalation. By the end of the eighties, there was hyperinflation in Yugoslavia, which had devastating effects on the population. The economic crisis deepened existing differences between the regions even further. The economic superiority of some regions increased the longing for autonomy. A wave of

nationalism, strongly rooted in the rural areas, triumphed over the multi-ethnic values of the city. Politicians seeking to strengthen their position made use of this nationalism and started mobilizing the countryside from their own agendas.

### **3.2. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

At a secret meeting in Karadjordjevo, in March 1991, Croatian president Tudjman and Serbian president Milosevic agreed that Bosnia and Herzegovina should best be divided between Croatia and Serbia. Both politicians wanted to gain more territory, but they were unable to come to an agreement about the exact delimitation of the longed-for new and ethnically pure 'Great-Serbia' and 'Great-Croatia'. They may have agreed on the principle of carving up Bosnia and Herzegovina, but Milosevic and Tudjman clearly disagreed about the best future borders of Croatia, and Tudjman detested the way in which Milosevic tried to rule the whole of Yugoslavia. After the declarations of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in June 1991, fierce fighting started in Croatia, in particular in the regions where large Serbian communities lived. Various parts of Croatia ended up under Serbian control and Dubrovnik was shelled. The UN sent in blue-helmets to try and prevent further bloodshed.

In Fall 1991, the EU Commission-Badinter listed the criteria for acknowledgement of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, and stipulated that all Yugoslav republics should be given a similar treatment in case they would express a wish to become independent. A majority of citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not seek independence at that point in time, but the EU approach (Badinter Commission) strengthened the position of both the radical pro-independence and radical anti-independence politicians within the republic. A referendum on the issue of independence for Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in March 1992, was boycotted by the Orthodox Bosnians (Bosnian Serbs) who feared life as a minority in a Muslim-dominated republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Provocations led to escalation, and in April 1992 the eruption of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a fact.

The Serbs want to add large parts of the country to Greater Serbia, and the Croats have a similar wish to add large parts of the country to Greater Croatia. Thousands of people will be killed in the war, many hundreds of thousands will leave their home and end up living somewhere as refugee or displaced person. Churches and mosques will be destroyed, libraries set on fire, historical buildings shelled and destroyed. The war will have a huge impact, first of all on the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina of course. But also on 'Europe', confronted as it is with again a terrible war on its soil. Most politicians and citizens throughout did not see the war coming and could not understand the character and level of the violence.

***Timeline of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995)***

March 1992	Start of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina
1992-1993	Serbs gain control over up to 70% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina
1993	Several interventions of the international community fail, like the Owen-Stoltenberg Plan, and the Vance-Owen Plan
1993	The United Nations Security Council decides to install six UN Safe Areas in the country (Sarajevo, Tuzla, Bihac, Zepa, Gorazde and Srebrenica). The situation on the ground nevertheless remains very problematic
1994	The war between the Croats and the Muslims formally ends with the Washington Agreement (March 1994). Although the military co-operation between HVO (Croatian army) and the Army BiH (army of the Bosnian Muslims) remains problematic, they manage to push the Serbian troops back slowly.
Spring-August 1995	The Croatian Army regains control over two of the three regions in Croatia which have been under Serbian control since 1991. Tens of thousands of Serbs flee to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia. The Serbian military positions in Bosnia weaken.
Summer 1995	The killing of more than 7,500 Muslims in Srebrenica (July 1995) and the bombing of the central market in Sarajevo (August 1995) mobilise the international community, in particular the US government. The violence has gone too far now and finally, after years of lobbying, the willingness to have a firm international reaction is there.
Fall 1995	The Croats and Muslims regain control from the Serbs over various areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with help from the NATO air force. In military terms, some sort of balance emerges, with Serbs holding about half of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Muslims and Croats together holding the other half.
1995	The deadlock on the ground and the US involvement finally help to bring the warring parties to Dayton for negotiations that lead to the Dayton Peace Accords, signed in December 1995.

**3.3. The economy**

During the eighties and nineties, Yugoslavia was plagued by great regional differences in wealth. The income in Slovenia was three times as high as the income in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Serbia, the income was three times as high as in Kosovo. This was the result of the productive system (the model of regional specialization) as well as of history. Economic differences were also instrumentalized by the nationalists to emphasize the 'injustice' done to their ethnic group. The religious leaders often followed the politicians in their economic assessment of the development. Given the fact that many citizens feared the consequences of economic recession, they were receptive towards this political-economic analysis.

After 1995, the international community gave great importance to the economic rehabilitation of the region. However, the war economy was not completely decomposed and the links between nationalists and businessmen making fortunes with smuggling and illegal economic activities were not broken. Nationalist parties continued to get most votes in the elections. Many of the functionaries and politicians had held high positions in the nationalistic parties and many had even been part of the ruling class under Tito as well. They remained in place, making it difficult to implement changes in the political and economic systems, which mainly served this ruling class. Business men and politicians were important for the functioning of the religious communities after the war. Money was needed, for humanitarian aid and for the restoration of churches and mosques. Donations and grants from the business

sector, political parties and state bodies clearly had an impact on the beneficiaries (the religious communities and their leaders).

It did make a lot of sense that the international community placed great emphasis on the economic factor in trying to prevent violence from erupting again after the war, although more conditionality could have helped in bringing about more economic and political changes. And consequently, it might have helped to reduce the dependency of religious communities of nationalist forces in politics and the economic sector.

### **3.4. Religion and ethnicity**

Religion started playing a more central role in the course of the eighties. The communist regime had previously restricted the religious communities in all aspects of communal life. Under Tito, the government outlawed religious festivals, religious clubs and unions were shut down, and properties of religious communities were claimed by the state. But even under communism, religious services continued, and though suppressed, all religious communities felt united in their strife for freedom of religion. Yet, the influence of the religious communities during this period was very limited. As described above, Tito not only suppressed tendencies towards building a religious identity, but also the building of an ethnic identity. Nationalist tendencies were outlawed as a threat to the Yugoslav state as well.

Nevertheless, tensions increased, which Tito tried to counter by giving the Muslims the status of a (constituent) nation, with a position equal to – among others - the Serbs and Croats. Within the Bosnian context, this explicitly confirmed the relation between ethnic and religious identity. All three ethnic groups, the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Croats, were now mentioned in the constitution of Yugoslavia, and were therefore by definition national ethnic groups. Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks are not distinguishable by physiognomy and they speak dialects of one and the same language, Serbo-Croat. The most important distinguishing feature of those three groups is their religion. Religion was one of the few stable factors throughout history: while political systems and border delimitations changed several times, religion remained a constant factor. This led people to define groups within society by their religion. Bosniaks are almost exclusively Muslim, Bosnian Serbs are almost always Orthodox Christian, and Bosnian Croats are practically always Catholic Christian. Paul Mojzes uses the term 'ethno-religiosity' to describe such a close relation between an ethnic and a religious identity. This nevertheless did not mean that all believers lived according to the rules of their religion.

Tito's death in 1980 and the consequent demise of the communist system created a power vacuum that was quickly filled by nationalist leaders from various ethnic groups. During this time of instability, people looked to their leaders more than ever. Both nationalist feelings and religious feelings increased. Part of the power vacuum that came about after the fall of communism was filled by the religious leaders and their communities. Most people welcomed the freedom to be able to define themselves according to their ethnic and religious identity.

However, the question is to which extent the religious leaders were up to this new task. Given the profound changes, this was already difficult in term of leadership of their own community – let alone their new role vis-à-vis the society at large. Did they not think too exclusively of the advancement of their own religious community - thus ignoring the risks of destabilization, disintegration and war? As Finci, from the Jewish Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, explains: "many religious leaders had a quite simple approach, linking ethnic to religious identity: 'what is good for my ethnic group, is good for my religion – and vice versa.'" Only a few groups of intellectuals and human rights activists were aware that these developments bore the threat of

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disintegration and war. They saw that leaders were more concerned with their own political power than with emancipation of the citizens and the development of democracy.

So after Tito's death, the demise of his totalitarian regime made space for the rise of nationalism and religious movements. Nationalist and religious leaders had something in common: they were gaining power. And the people of Yugoslavia were looking for leaders capable of restoring stability and providing identity. Religious leaders enormously gained influence, and they were determined not to be marginalized again. With 'the enemy' gone and freedom of religion more or less in place, they lost their unity. They start lobbying for the interests of their own religious community. But after such long suppression, according to political analysts and human rights activists, religious leaders were far from up to the task of leading their people into a modern European society.

Some argue that religion was part of the problem, and therefore cannot be part of the solution. However logical this argument might seem in theory, Johnston and Eastvold (2004a) do not agree: "Rather than exhorting religious people to stop fighting because their differences do not matter, it will be far more productive to work within each tradition to show that peace is necessary, precisely because their beliefs do matter." Religion needs to be taken seriously if ethnic tensions are to be resolved.

Other researchers argue that religion only served as a vehicle for the ethnic conflict and cannot be considered a major underlying cause of the conflict. As such, it could only be a minor part of the solution. For example, Moree thinks that inter-religious dialogue had little impact, because religion was not the root cause of the conflict. "There were other causes of the war, mainly territorial interests, that kept the conflict going."

The use of religious symbols also played a role in how the conflict developed. Religion was an important part of the identity of the warring parties. Religious symbols were used by soldiers, religious buildings were the target of the destruction of war, there were numerous cases reported of religious leaders who blessed the weapons of soldiers before the fight. According to Bremer, "religion added an emotional aspect to the conflict. As soon as soldiers wore a religious sign, it was increasingly difficult to reach a compromise. You could say that the force of the war became stronger, because of the symbolic influence of religion." Religious symbols added a 'sacred label' to the war activities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. In the census of 1991, the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina counted 4,354,911 people. The largest ethnic group was the Bosnian Muslim community with 43.7% of the population, while Serbs consisted 31.3% of the population, Croats 17.3%, and people considering themselves Yugoslavs 5.5% of the population. According to data of the CIA World Factbook of 2000, Bosnia and Herzegovina, five years after the war, was ethnically mixed with an increase in the percentage of Bosniaks to 48%, an increase in the percentage of Serbs to 37.1% Serb, and a decrease in the percentage of Croats to 14.3%. Other ethnic groups now only form 0.6% of the population. Though the figures for the country as a whole show a multi-ethnic picture, most towns and villages are de facto mono-ethnic. There are only few cities with a multi-ethnic composition.

Great portions of the minority groups were driven from their homes. In total, the number of refugees or internally displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina is estimated to have been about 2,2 million people.

## **4. Roles of the religious leaders**

As described previously, religion became an important part of the identity of people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and as such played a major role in the conflict. In this chapter the respective religious communities and their leaders will be described, in rather general terms. In the next chapter, the actual positive and negative roles of religious leaders will be discussed as well as the factors influencing religious leaders to behave in a certain way.

### **4.1. The respective religious communities**

All religious communities were politically active during the war, yet in different ways. For each, the role of the religion and their leaders in the war will be discussed. Here, we will briefly try to characterize the various religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### **4.1.1. The Orthodox**

After their arrival to the Balkans, the Serbian tribes, originally of pagan background, became Christian. They developed strong ties with the Ecumenical Patriarchat in Constantinople. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Sava united the Serbs and convinced the Constantinople Patriarch to grant the Serbian-Orthodox Church with an autocephalous status. In the Ottoman period, many orthodox as well catholic believers in the region that is now Bosnia and Herzegovina, converted to Islam, to avoid taxes and have better job opportunities. As of 1878, the Serbian-Orthodox Church again got its own patriarch (and regained its status as autocephalous community). Unlike in the Roman-Catholic Church, there is no strict hierarchy. Each of the autocephalous churches enjoys great autonomy. The leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is not authoritarian, but primarily moral.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighboring countries, the majority of orthodox clergy live secluded from their communities; they mostly reside in monasteries outside the villages. Belgrade-based patriarch Pavle had and has a big influence on society and politics. The Serbian-Orthodox Church under his leadership covers Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro (in some countries like for instance Macedonia, this leadership is contested.)

During the war, some local orthodox communities got involved in initiatives of inter-religious dialogue, but the over-all picture is that the orthodox leaders voiced active support for the Serbian soldiers, not only the local defenders but also the most brutal paramilitary groups. Patriarch Pavle and various bishops participated in many inter-religious meetings, often initiated by outside actors, but they did little to nothing to influence the political and military leadership during the war.

#### **4.1.2. The Catholics**

Christianity rooted in the region that is now Bosnia and Herzegovina before it arrived in many other parts of Europe. Despite of periods of prosecution (by the Ostrogoths) and internal fighting within the Catholic Church, the Catholics stayed in Bosnia and Herzegovina for many centuries. After the Turkish conquest of 1463, many Catholics left, mostly against their will. The Franciscans were allowed to stay and freely exercise their belief and to offer their services to the catholic community.

The Franciscans, one of the oldest Catholic orders, have been present in Northern Bosnia and Herzegovina for 700 years. They report to the Vatican, but between the local Franciscan priest and the Vatican there are no further hierarchical layers. This

means that the Franciscan priests are quite autonomous. The Franciscans are close to the local population: their religious officers live among and interact closely with the local population. They were one of the few factors providing continuity in the region and were able to build a relationship of trust, upon the basis of their long-term commitment to the local community they serve.

In the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Franciscan priests have played very different roles. In the North, where the Catholics form a minority, they were very actively involved in initiating peace processes and inter-religious dialogue on the ground. In the South in turn, where Catholics form the majority, their role was much less constructive.

### **4.1.3. The Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks)**

The Bosnian Muslims, nowadays referred to as Bosniaks, date back to the Ottoman era, when many orthodox and catholic citizens converted to Islam (in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries).

The Muslim clergy is organized in a hierarchical and decentralized way. The muftis (Muslim religious leaders) have a relatively high degree of freedom to determine the content of their preaching. At an international level, there is no collective body of representation. The Ra'is-ul-Ulema is the highest religious leader in a country and represents the Islamic community abroad.

The Muslim population and clergy of Bosnia and Herzegovina lived in a multi-religious tradition and were known to be 'liberal Muslims'. Before the war, the Muslims even wanted to develop a European centre of theology. Selimovski explains the openness to inter-religious dialogue of the Muslim community as follows: "The Muslim population had no defined national status for a long time. It was always caught in between the Serbian and the Croatian interests. Therefore, they always strived for peaceful and democratic solution in order to protect and confirm their identity."

The Muslim society was also the most secularized religious group. More than the other religious groups, they identified with the state of Yugoslavia (Johnston and Eastvold, 2004a). In 1991 and 1992, they at least wanted to preserve the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Selimovski: "The Muslims, in 1992, were the only ones who wanted to maintain the unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina whereas the others were in favor of its disintegration. This is why it was felt that the Muslim Community was in a way a part of the defensive system of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Not only were the Muslims caught in between the other constituent nations (the Serbs and Croats, both Christian), they were also, in military terms, ill-equipped to fight a war. Selimovski: "At the beginning of the war, the Muslims were the only people in former Yugoslavia who had no single country or military structure who would support them, except for some voluntary and self-organized units armed with conventional weapons, hardly capable of resisting the well-organized military units of the other subjects. Because of this position, the Muslims had to look for political solutions [...] and were supportive of the search for democratic solutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina". Although starting without army and arms, the Muslims did manage to set up an army (ABiH), with assistance from within western states, the diaspora and Muslim countries.

The Muslim community stood quite isolated, especially at the beginning of the conflict. Selimovski explains: "Unlike the Serbian Orthodox and the Catholic Church, the Muslim community [...] has no internationally organized institution. Therefore, the influence of the Serbian Orthodox and the Catholic Church was bigger. "The Muslims established contact with Muslim organizations later in the conflict, like the Islamic

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League and the Islamic Conference These organizations supported general messages of peace and did provide solidarity and material support (along with, in some cases, missionary programs to enhance the Muslim identity of the Bosniaks).

The Muslims suffered most throughout the war. Of all civilians killed, 84.7% (32,723) were Bosniaks, 4.9% (1,899) were Croats, 9.2% (3,555) were Serbs, and 1.2% (466) were others (International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia, 2004). Finci thinks that "the international community made an important mistake by not supporting the Muslim communities; Muslims were opposed by both Croats and Serbs, and were the main victims of the war." Nevertheless the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia (ICTY, 'Hague Tribunal') indicted and tried (alleged) war criminals from all three ethnic communities.

The Muslims were relatively late with their political involvement. Why? Selimovski: "We believed that the Muslims should not fall behind the other religions' involvement in the political debate. [...] The Muslim Community did not foresee the war nor did it have any wish to engage in war. On the contrary, it engaged in finding a peaceful solution for the conflict."

### **4.1.4. The Jews**

The Jewish community is a minority religious community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jews have been present in the region for more than 500 years and have a long tradition of engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Because of their minority position, it was in their own interest to maintain good relations with the other (bigger) religious communities. They even took on a role as mediator among conflicting parties during the Bosnian war and organized humanitarian assistance for all citizens, in particular through an organization called *La Benevolencija*. Minority groups often take the first step to engage in a dialogue, more easily than majority groups (see § 5.1.). Indeed, this is precisely what the Jewish community in Bosnia and Herzegovina did during the Bosnian war. They also helped mobilizing international attention for the atrocities committed during the war; in various European countries, initiatives were set up to support *La Benevolencija* in Sarajevo, and to lobby for more international involvement to help stop the war.

### **4.1.5. The atheists**

A group that should not be forgotten in this context is the atheists of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Atheists were in a difficult position during the war. Because a religious identity was seen as identical to an ethnic identity, it was difficult to escape the identification with a religious group. In some cases it was even dangerous. Not only the citizens were expected to identify with a specific ethnic group or religion, organizations delivering international assistance were expected to identify themselves as well. Most humanitarian aid was organized along religious lines.

Yet, among atheists, one could find various groups of citizens: former communists unwilling to adhere to any of the ethno-religious communities, but also many human rights activists – putting citizenship above any collective identity. As they refused to exclusively identify with one ethnic identity, atheists felt uneasy within any of the religious communities. In the census of 1990, these two groups had largely registered themselves as 'Yugoslavs'. As they were not organized as a group, atheists as such did not have a big impact on the conflict dynamics – although some individuals, known to the public as atheists, participated in the political discussion.

Ever since the war, the position of atheists has not become easier. As a rule, citizens are expected to have a certain ethnic and religious background or affiliation. Atheists are ignored and often considered second-class citizens and immoral individuals.

Among intellectuals and the open-minded clergy, a need is felt for so-called theist-atheist dialogue.

### **4.2. General reflections**

Religious leaders enjoyed great trust among their followers, as religion had been one of the few stable identity-defining factors throughout the years. From all three large religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious leaders started developing partnerships with strong, mainly nationalist, political leaders. The Catholic and Orthodox leadership paved the way, the Muslim leadership followed. To nationalist politicians, this link with religion was a welcome legitimization of their ideology.

Many political leaders used this strong legitimization in mobilizing the population against the other ethnic groups. From the short-term perspective, this was a clear-cut win-win situation. The outbreak of the war only enhanced the links between the political and religious elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Propaganda distorted historical facts, setting people up for the national and religious cause. It was the combination of the sacred label of religion and the political propaganda that led people to commit severe atrocities, and even genocide, against people they used to call their neighbors.

Yet, religious leaders often claimed that they stood for their believers' interests and that they were not manipulated by nationalist politicians. Most religious leaders would say, with hindsight, that religion was instrumentalized by the politicians. For example, Selimovski thinks that "the politicians used religion for their own purposes. [...] In the beginning, this war was a kind of aggression by the former Yugoslav Army, which transformed into a servant to only one republic. Further on, this war took on the character of an inter-ethnic war, but this war was never an inter-religious war. The war did not begin as a result of the misunderstanding between the religious communities, but it was provoked by the political and nationalist movements seeking disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina."

There was a notable difference between the inter-religious dialogue at the national and at the local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Bremer, before the war, there was hardly any contact between religious leaders at the national level. The dialogue on a national level increased slightly during the war, under influence of external actors, like the Christian Churches. These initiatives became stronger and more numerous after the war. Even though there seems to be some improvement over the last decade, Zivanovic thinks the activity that is taking place today at a national level is still insufficient. He qualifies activities like the inter-religious conference held in Trebinje, organised by Forum of Tuzla Citizens and IKV Pax Christi, in December 2006 as 'exotic'. "We have not reached the critical mass yet to initiate change." Inter-religious dialogue is developing because some religious leaders consider it useful and necessary, but the over-all support for these initiatives should not be overestimated. Building trust is always much more difficult than following stereotypes and prejudices.

At the local level, inter-religious dialogue became less intense throughout the course of the war. Local leaders had frequent contact before the war, mainly about practical issues that concerned the common good of the local community. Such contacts declined during the war. According to many respondents, inter-religious meetings in most cities and villages remain at an extremely low level today. Some even say that common believers are as divided nowadays as they were directly after the war. Their growing awareness of their religious identity resulted in growing distance between them. War-related resentment is making inter-religious dialogue at the local level rather difficult, in particular because people got involved in fighting also upon the basis of their religious identification and interests. This makes it difficult for believers

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to plead for dialogue or reconciliation. The few civic activists working on truth-finding, inter-ethnic dialogue, democratization and human rights see little willingness within the local religious communities to get involved in inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. And where people do have this willingness, it is quite a bumpy road to go from wish to action. Often there is lack of capacity in the religious communities to foster and develop such processes. Often initiatives stagnate or lose momentum due to process-related problems.

Whether religion was part of the root causes of the conflict or not, the impact of religious leaders' opinions and activities in societies in a situation of conflict is potentially enormous. Religious leaders often have networks that reach far into the smallest and most remote local communities. Leaders are and have always been important in the Bosnian society (the political culture and traditions). According to an anonymous respondent, who was a diplomat in Bosnia and Herzegovina a decade ago, the hierarchical character of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is what makes leaders so important. Gregorije, the Orthodox bishop of Trebinje, agrees that people rely very much on their leaders. The influence religious leaders can have on society is exemplified by the great impact symbolic activities of religious leaders have, such as a Muslim and an Orthodox religious leader publicly having a cup of coffee together, or a Catholic priest being present at the inauguration of a mosque. Religious leaders in the Balkans enjoy great status, which allows them to exert great influence.

Religion and politics in the Balkans are generally more interwoven than in Western Europe. This is especially notable for the Orthodox community. Van Beek: "In the Orthodox world view, there is no division between the worldly and the spiritual." In general, the respondents and literature underline that in particular the religious elites were in very close contact with the political elites and that they supported the nationalist views and policies. Moree is less critical. In his opinion, religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina tried to maintain a certain distance from the politicians, but this distance was far smaller than in a stable secular state. Selimovski agrees, with regard to his own religious community. In reference to the war period he says: "The Muslim community was in fact very active during the democratic changes; (...) it even prompted these changes." He also believes religious leaders did draw a clear line between politics and religion: "Religious leaders contributed a lot to the creation of an atmosphere that was conducive towards political discussions, although they did not take part in it. I think that the religious leaders did not even request to be part of those meetings."

Religious leaders on the eve of, during, and after the war were only just emerging from political suppression. As a result, they found themselves in a spiral of political events, having to make delicate decisions, while for years they had only been exerting their influence in secret, at least not in public, and on a very minor scale. Bremer thinks that religious leaders really did not want the war; many genuinely saw it as their obligation to provide leadership to their communities. Bremer quotes a religious leader who thinks that some religious groups even might have vanished if it had not been for the war. Though history proved this fear ungrounded (big religious communities never disappear in just a few years time!), it does indicate how uncertain religious leaders were after a long period of suppression under Tito.



## 5. Factors influencing religious leaders' roles

From the interviews and study of literature, it becomes clear that religious leaders played both positive and negative roles in the Bosnian War of 1992-1995 and the post-war years. In this Chapter, positive and negative influences and determining factors will be discussed. As the text will show, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a certain aspect or dimension is over-all negative or positive. What facilitates inter-religious dialogue in one context might have a clear negative impact in another context. Any assessment will thus have to be a nuanced one.

### 5.1. Positive influences

Respondents differed greatly in the extent to which they thought that religious leaders contributed to a political solution. Some think religious leaders were in direct contact with politicians and had a very imminent impact on the development of the war and the peace process. For example, Bremer emphasizes that Irinej, the Orthodox bishop of Novi Sad, encharged Milosevic to speak on behalf of all Serbs in order not to involve Karadzic in the international peace negotiations that led to the Dayton Peace Accords. Another example is Jakub Selimovski, who tells that he and the Catholic Archbishop Pulic, nowadays the Cardinal of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "went through a lot of trouble in order to bring the Muslim and Croatian political leaders together and to influence their political actions".

Van Dartel thinks that interchurch contacts did contribute to a detente, but only after the Dayton Peace Accords and the liberation of the territory in Croatia that the Serbs kept occupied since Summer and Fall 1991. As an example, Van Dartel refers to Patriarch Pavle, who in his opinion often spoke out against hate speech. Selimovski thinks that "all the activities of inter-religious dialogue had their own impact on the political subjects in Bosnia and Herzegovina." He mentions the example of a meeting in Istanbul in 1994, organised by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, where the participants "came to the conclusion that there was a genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina," and the participants appealed to the international community to end the violence.

Selimovski thinks that "all these activities helped in finding a political solution for the conflict several years later". He even believes that "if it had not been for the contacts between the Ra'is-ul-Ulema and the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pavle, and the Cardinal Kulic, then the politicians would have never come to the negotiating table. I believe that the religious leaders were the ones who prepared the field for political discussions and dialogue, because the politicians were afraid of being misunderstood or even misinterpreted."

There were some informal contacts among those religious leaders who started inter-religious dialogue. For example, the Franciscan Marko Orsolc set up the International Multi-religious and Intercultural Center in Sarajevo to give backing to the idea and practice of inter-religious dialogue. He had involved some other religious leaders in advance, to secure their participation in the activities.

Within and outside of the religious communities, people still feel that the ethnic differences in fact can and should represent, as civic activist Branko Todorovic put it, "our mutual treasure. Parts of the tradition of the Bosnian Serbs are both the Catholic cathedral and the Muslim mosque, and vice versa. I perceive that religious object in our country as something that belongs to us all, something upon which no one has the exclusive right. We are one nation in our essence, although the ethnic groups can be distinguished" (interview in *Oslobodjenje*, August 28, 2007). Even though many people would support this view, not so many will express it publicly.

### ***Minority groups support inter-religious dialogue***

According to Bremer, the most important determining factor of participation in an inter-religious dialogue is the position of minority versus majority religious communities. Mostly representatives of minority religious communities were willing to initiate dialogue, for the sake of their own survival and to gain more influence or support for their cause. Minority groups' leaders can much easier take on a role in inter-religious dialogue, because their community is far less of a military or political threat to leaders of big antagonistic communities. Religious leaders of minorities are more predisposed to promote political solutions in situations of conflict and can therefore be a strategic partner in peace building processes. Van Dartel gives an example: "There is a big difference in the position of Catholic religious leaders being a minority or majority in the several parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Catholics in Herzegovina are nationalistically oriented as they are the majority group, while this is not the case in Banja Luka, parts of Central Bosnia or Sarajevo; Catholics form a minority there and are much more willing to contribute to dialogue." This is also the experience of IKV Pax Christi: minorities are more inclined to any type of dialogue than majorities. This is not only true for religious communities, but also for ethnic communities, most political parties and all type of citizens' initiatives and self-organizations.

Bremer comments that "representatives of minorities are usually the braver defenders of human rights. For example, Franjo Komarica, the Catholic Bishop of Banja Luka, dominated by Serbs, defended his own people, as well as members of other ethnicities. It was decisive that he was bishop of a (Catholic) minority." Leaders of the Jewish community played a similar role in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Minority groups might even mediate among antagonistic majority groups, as they make the first step much more easily and are more willing to make concessions.

### ***Hierarchy of religious structures***

The presence of a hierarchical structure in a religious organization can influence the behavior of religious leaders. The presence or absence can both work positively in supporting religious leaders in engaging and promoting inter-religious dialogue. First of all, a strong hierarchy can work positively: according to Bremer, the Roman-Catholic Church is more hierarchical than the Orthodox Church and the Muslim community. "Catholic bishops were obliged to be obedient to the pope and to propagate ecumenical dialogue, even when personally they had their own agenda."

Secondly, a lack of hierarchy can be helpful for local religious leaders with an open mind, as is clear from the example of the Franciscans in Northern Bosnia. The Franciscans have a very flat hierarchical structure. They are directly accountable to their own order's leadership and ultimately to the Vatican. According to Orsolich, himself a Franciscan, it was the lack of hierarchy that prevented the Franciscans from becoming elitist; the Franciscan priests see themselves as closer to the common believer than to the religious elite. For the Franciscans, the lack of hierarchy was not an obstacle for the active development of an international network. To the contrary! At the same time, the Franciscans' autonomy was highly relevant in the national context, because it meant less control by the bishop and more freedom for their own policies and initiatives.

Bremer: "Because the Franciscans were reporting directly to the Vatican and were not part of a big national hierarchy, like the Catholic Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they had more freedom to lay out their own line of policy." This makes the Franciscans relatively free to act according to their own conviction, for better or for worse. In the case of the Franciscans in the Northern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this meant that they promoted and worked on inter-religious dialogue. On the other hand, in the region of Herzegovina, where the Catholics form the majority religion,

most of the religious leaders were very much in favor of the nationalistic politics and here Franciscans in general opposed inter-religious activity. Apparently a lack of hierarchy does not necessarily lead to an inclination towards interreligious dialogue. It might however increase the impact a religious leader has on the local population.

### ***The minority return***

After 1995, the prospects for inter-religious dialogue slowly improved, also due to the process of minority return (dialogue cannot take place in a mono-ethnic environment). Religious leaders who went back along with returnees had a clear interest in contacts with religious leaders of the majority religion, in the direct interests of their own believers (such as proper housing, access to municipal services, security and job opportunities). Such local inter-religious contacts did develop, and overall without too many problems, but these contacts can only qualify as a vulnerable start of inter-religious dialogue. Even where such contacts developed, most of the leaders of the bigger religious community did not go public with them, aware as they were of possible negative consequences, both from the level of common believers ('why co-operate with the enemy who tried to kill us?') and from the hierarchy ('we have to be consulted about such sensitive issues. It should not be done without our explicit approval').

In some cases, religious leaders stepped in to help the returnees. Bishop Hristom, the Serbian Orthodox bishop of Bihac-Petrovac, accompanied refugees when they returned to their homes, in order to prevent violence against them. Similarly, the head imam of Fojnica, advocated for the return of Croatian displaced persons.

### **5.1.1. The religious communities, at the local level**

Altogether, only very few initiatives in favor of dialogue and peace were taken during the war, by local religious leaders and their communities. After the war, the situation slightly improved. Very slowly, more and more local religious communities are getting involved in modest initiatives of dialogue and co-operation.

An example from the war period is Franciscan Mirko Majdancic. During the war, he was a religious servant in Sarajevo, and he transported injured people to hospitals without asking what their name was or which religion they adhered to. He also organized various activities to build inter-religious understanding: "for example religious celebrations with all three religious groups represented, football games between Muslim military and Serbian-Orthodox priests, a soup kitchen for all citizens in need and a multi-ethnic and multi-religious school for some 400 school kids. (...) Education is the basis for what we do, also for our inter-religious dialogue initiatives. In my education and upbringing I got the message that we are all human beings and that we are all equal." He was a student of various religious scholars, and was happy that he had been able to learn from all of their experiences and wisdom.

In the paragraph above, the examples were given of religious leaders in Bihac and Fojnica who assisted in the return of refugees and displaced persons. In the post-war period, corruption was a problem as well. Participants in a seminar held in Sipovo, March 2000, went public, together, stating that corruption should come to an end and advocating for higher moral standards.

Yet, most of the concrete examples focus on the post-war period. After the war, the pre-war custom of local religious leaders visiting each other during the religious holidays was revitalized in some cities. Even though these visits are not always visible to the wider audience, they can form the basis for communication and dialogue.

Over the years, various seminars and training programs were organized for and with religious representatives. Reports and comments show, that participants are positive

about such initiatives. In general, there is very little knowledge about the other religious communities and people feel the need to improve the general knowledge of religious issues and historical contexts. Even though at such events topics can only be touched upon superficially, participants are motivated to use the information and experiences in their own religious community.

Often the minority groups play a key role in the initial phase of a dialogue and integration process. It can be an Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim community, or a Jewish community. When in a minority position, they all develop openness towards the bigger religious communities. Interesting is the case of the Greek Catholic community in Prnjavor (ethnic Ukrainians). After the war, this religious community played an important role in creating conditions for all of the religious communities to meet. They felt that better communication between the three major religious groups would also be in their interest, and as a small religious community they could take that facilitating role, because they were not seen as a threat by the others. In Prnjavor, the Greek Catholic church and the mosque have been restored by now, and the relations among the religious communities are relatively good.

### **5.1.2. The religious communities, at the national level**

Given the fact, that the organization (hierarchy) of the religious communities did not follow the borders of the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is difficult to speak of initiatives at the national level.

It was shortly after the war, that with outside support of the WCRP (see § 5.1.7.) the Inter-Religious Council was set up (IRC). The three big religious communities and the Jewish communities played the central role in the development of the IRC. The IRC held a number of high-level meetings that facilitated the exchange of opinions, and provided the international community – in particular OHR and OSCE – with a platform for contact with the religious leaders. A number of working committees started working, among others to give input in the new law on religious freedom. The fact that the IRC was set up and is still functioning does give a signal to the believers and the public at large that communication and dialogue is possible and can be fruitful.

### **5.1.3. The religious communities, at the international level**

During the war, the Vatican tried to influence the Roman-Catholic bishops in Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage in inter-religious dialogue and according to Van Beek, this did have an influence on the discussion within the Catholic Church. Bremer agrees that such an impact existed, but thinks that such top-down approaches have limitations as well: "Catholic bishops were obliged to (...) propagate inter-religious dialogue, while personally they might not have been convinced of the value of it." Bishop Komarica in Banja Luka is a good example of a Catholic religious leader who supported the request for inter-religious dialogue, as voiced by the Vatican. He maintained contacts with the Orthodox Bishop of Banja Luka and the imam Ibrahim Halilovic during the war. After the war, he used the contacts to lobby for the return of refugees and displaced persons to Banja Luka, now the capital of Republika Srpska.

Within the Eastern Orthodox Church, various patriarchs as well as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople gave statements favoring peace and dialogue and condemning war crimes.

### **5.1.4. The international religious bodies and institutions**

Contacts with an international religious network meant that religious leaders had access to information they could trust. The international religious networks also

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provided them with an opportunity to voice their concerns and interests. Those outside actors in turn were in a unique position to influence religious leaders. This happened in several ways.

First of all, a strong connection with international religious networks helped religious leaders to speak up for inter-religious tolerance. Especially the (organized international institutions within the) Christian community tried to mediate (see Annex Nr. 2 for an overview of activities of the World Council of Churches).

The Conference of European Churches, a fellowship of 126 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches along with 43 associated organizations from all countries on the European continent, provided support and helped to make contact with donors. The CEC was involved in a series of international meetings in which religious leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina participated.

Both the WCC and CEC did not only organize conferences with and for the religious leaders, they also organized a series of working visits to the former Yugoslavia, during and after the war. The conferences and working visits provided the WCC and CEC with a lot of first-hand information.

Franciscan Marko Orsolc was one of the energetic promoters of inter-religious dialogue, and during and after the war he travelled regularly to various West European countries. He started an inter-religious centre in Sarajevo during the war and managed to attract publicity and some financing by paying international visits. "What the international community can do is to give financial support and to contribute knowledge. It is also important to help the religious leaders in a conflict area not to deny when their own priests fail to engage in inter-religious dialogue. They can give a good example in showing solidarity in the engagement in inter-religious dialogue. The international religious networks must try to gain a deep understanding of the local and regional context instead of trying to intervene from a distance or in a top-down manner."

Apart from their influence on religious leaders, some international communities also tried to influence the peace process more directly. In this respect, Bremer qualifies the engagement of the international Roman-Catholic Church in mediating the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina as historically remarkable: "During this war, the Roman-Catholic Church at least tried to influence the war. This is a new development for the Catholic church."

### **5.1.5. The international community; Embassies and International Governmental Organizations**

An anonymous respondent, a high-ranking diplomat, claims that during the war there was close collaboration with religious leaders, including many encounters and consultations between the international community and religious leaders. Selimovski verifies that in his own words: "Our contacts with the representatives of the International Community were largely of a consultative character. They asked us for opinions, suggestions and information. They were nevertheless not completely frank with us and they did not reveal their political positions and opinions." Apparently, this contact changed throughout the conflict. Selimovski: "In the beginning of the conflict, there were contacts with diplomats, though some were established only to show respect towards religious communities. But as the situation was getting worse, the contacts were no longer just formal, but they were established in order to contribute to the solving of the problems."

Many respondents have indicated that the international community representatives played an important role in preparing and organizing meetings for and with religious

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leaders during, and in particular after the war. Hadzi Seid effendi Smajkic, during the war mufti in Mostar, is positive about the initiatives from the part of the international community in his city: "The meetings started immediately after the war, initiated by the international community. Later, it was maintained by the religious leaders themselves. I did not encounter any problem with the representatives of the international community, although Europe did not speak with one voice."

Van Beek finds the signing of the Dayton Agreement a good illustration of how the negotiators understood the positive role religious leaders could have played, when patriarch Pavle was asked to sign the agreement. "If the European Community would have understood the role religious leaders like Pavle could have played, more could have been achieved."

The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), mandated with the promotion of democracy and human rights at Dayton, developed a working relationship with many religious leaders, after the war. The OSCE mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina used the suggestions of the so-called Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion, set up by the ODIHR (the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) after the war, to develop a legal framework for religious associations. OSCE also worked with the Bosnian Inter-Religious Council on various issues and occasions.

The local OSCE offices often established working relations with religious leaders in the local communities. Whether such contacts helped foster interreligious dialogue and a contribution to the process of peacebuilding depended largely on the openness from both the OSCE officials and staff and the local religious leaders. In most cases, the local religious leaders were willing to have meetings with the OSCE staff.

In particular after the war, topics of security and economic development were also discussed with the religious leaders. In the opinion of the anonymous respondent, security and economic development prevail over inter-religious dialogue. If people feel insecure and only struggle for survival, there will be no energy for interethnic and inter-religious dialogue. Most religious leaders welcomed the opportunity to address issues of security and economic development with the diplomats.

### **5.1.6. NGOs**

Several faith-based NGOs were involved in emergency humanitarian aid, from the early nineties, such as World Vision, Catholic Relief Services and the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Clearly there was great need for the goods delivered.

Nevertheless, only few of the emergency aid organizations involved in any initiative of interreligious dialogue). The ones who did were among others the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW). Their resources were very limited in comparison with the organizations mentioned above, but their working style was highly appreciated by the local staff and the beneficiaries. They did put emphasis on empowerment strategies and were known for supporting various local initiatives, not necessarily implementing their own preplanned programs. These emergency aid NGOs worked in general with all local religious groups. Of course, there were only a handful Mennonites and Quakers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, they could easily relate to all religious communities.

During the war, also Muslim and Orthodox NGOs were active, such as the Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) and the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). These organizations – although largely focusing on their own religious community – also incorporated empowerment strategies in their work, small employment projects and support for local NGOs.

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A series of Summerschools for Interconfessional/interethnic/intercultural Dialogue and Understanding (SIDU) were organized during the Bosnian war in various countries of the former Yugoslavia by the Dutch peace organization IKV: in Novi Pazar (Sandzak/Serbia, 1993), Struga (Macedonia, 1994) and Ulcunj (Montenegro, 1995). After the war, more SIDUs would follow. These meetings tried to promote dialogue and interaction at a number of levels: between religious leaders and students, among religious communities, also between religious leaders and civil society advocates. The summerschools were intense, challenging and full of sincere debate.

Most NGO initiatives would only start after the war. The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), an organization founded in the USA in 1970, is active in more than 50 countries. The WCRP, as multi-religious NGO, focuses on conflict and post-conflict countries and has set up Interreligious Councils in a number of countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. A field office was set up in 1996, and after a few high-level meetings with the four main religious leaders (Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish), the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (IRC-BiH) was established. Numerous topics were discussed in this council and working committees. The WCRP continued to provide advice and assistance. One of the working groups prepared the draft for the law on freedom of religion and the religious associations. Spring 2001, meetings were organized in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar and Tuzla to present this document. OHR and OSCE staff were involved in these meetings as well. Spring 2004, the law was accepted in parliament. This was an important result of the IRC-BiH. Nevertheless, many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina were and remain critical of the Council. In their opinion, words are most of the time not followed by action, and religious leaders participate to advocate their own community's interest rather than to help build a joint platform for true dialogue and truth-finding, democratization and reconstruction.

The Appeal of Conscience Foundation (ACF) was the motor of another interesting program of interreligious dialogue. ACF is a U.S. organization founded in 1965 by a holocaust survivor, Arthur Schneier. High-ranking clergy from various religious backgrounds participate in the work of the foundation. ACF is convinced that interfaith dialogue "can best be accomplished by the good offices of a neutral third party". ACF organized big conferences with and for the religious leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina: in Berne (Switzerland) in November 1992, in Istanbul (Turkey) in February 1994 and in Vienna (Austria) in March 1995. It was not an easy process. Schneier on the Berne conference: "We attempted to build on the conference declaration, but we soon recognized that cooperation among the religions had not yet advanced beyond the rhetoric and that another attempt at religious cooperation was necessary. The killing in Bosnia did not stop and, despite the best efforts of all involved, the religious were still not cooperation successfully anywhere in the former Yugoslavia." The Bosphorus Conference in Istanbul, co-organized with Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was "a partial success". With more countries (and conflict areas) represented, the discussion was less focused. Again with the Vienna Conference, the focus was on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Schneier on the declaration signed in Vienna, March 1995, nine months before the Dayton Peace Accords: "Basically, the declaration that was signed by the religious leaders who were present in Vienna was very similar in tone to Dayton and very likely could have influenced the negotiators in Dayton." (The negotiators themselves have never made a reference to this possible influence.) So far, the religious leaders who participated in the 'elite conferences' organized by WCRP, ACF, WCC and others, have given little insight in how they perceived these events, and to which extent it changed their thinking and actions.

In addition to the 'elitist approach', there were bottom-up initiatives as well. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, based in Washington) set up a

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special project on religion and conflict resolution. The project director, David Steele, held 35 seminars in the period 1994-2001, often organized in co-operation with local partners, throughout the former Yugoslavia. Steele distinguishes a number of intervention roles for both individuals and institutions from abroad: the observer's role, the educator's role, the advocate's role and the intermediary's role. He concludes that the education role has been most important (Steele 2002). In his seminar practice, Steele took the Abrahamic tradition as starting point. "That forms the basis of all the faith communities found in the former Yugoslavia, there are some universal values that should inform any peacebuilding efforts. (...) The rebuilding of community is the crucial beginning point in religiously motivated peacebuilding." At the seminars, many of the held in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the involvement of 'middle-level people' (local clergy, but also key leaders in the community such as educators, journalists, lawyers and so on) was very important – especially when they came as individuals and not as representatives of any organization. In the CSIS project, the model of storytelling was used – inviting people to start from their own experiences. Steele: "One must begin with people where they are, not where one might wish them to be." Following storytelling, participants were challenged to identify basic human needs and express solidarity with one another, given the fact that all individuals are entitled to basic needs such as security, identity, food and shelter. A next step in this process is acknowledgement of wrongdoing, followed by forgiveness, as "the process by which the victim endeavors to free himself from the bondage of revenge (asking people to recount times they have received forgiveness and then move on to times when they have offered it)". Steele: "This step-by-step process is much more likely to bring results than a highly publicized statement about minority rights made by a group of high-ranking religious officials." One other of the conclusions of the CSIS project was that it is crucial to build supportive institutional structures in the region itself. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to provide adequate assistance to any follow-up activity. Following the CSIS seminars, the Center for Religious Dialogue (based in Sarajevo) was set up.

In general, the Bosnian NGOs working on a multi-ethnic (and thus multi-religious) and pro-peace agenda, had very little contact with the religious communities. These NGOs were often run by individuals who were either atheist or unwilling to pronounce their personal religious identity. In a number of cases nevertheless, local NGOs working for peace and dialogue had good contacts with the religious leaders. In Tuzla, the chief imam, Muhamed effendi Lugavic, was an important person during and after the war in the struggle to preserve the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the city. He openly spoke about the need for tolerance and dialogue and had a good working relationship with the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, the main local NGO active in dialogue initiatives and peacebuilding. Within the Islamic community, Lugavic was criticized for this position, and in 2000 he was discharged as chief imam. Forum of Tuzla Citizens and many other NGOs, on their turn, openly protested this decision. Lugavic continued his policy of dialogue and co-operation, meeting regularly with the Orthodox and Catholic religious leaders.

Forum of Tuzla Citizens was also the main organizer of the Conference on Inter-Religious Understanding, organized in co-operation with IKV Pax Christi and with the financial support of the Mott Foundation, that was held in Trebinje in December 2006. Also other similar NGOs have started to work with religious communities the last years, such as the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska (HCHRRS), based in Bijeljina. They started organizing a number of local seminars in places such as Bijeljina, Prnjavor and Doboj. The participants were young believers from the respective local religious communities. Preparations have been thorough and HCHRRS also provides assistance in follow-up activities. These are promising local initiatives.

In some cases, the outside support was more crucial, from the very beginning. Representatives of a few catholic and protestant parishes in two Dutch cities established contacts with some religious leaders during a big international peace conference held in Tuzla (Assembly of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa), October 1995). They continued to pay regular visits and established relations with religious leaders representing the Muslim, catholic and orthodox communities in Tuzla. Their group, called Grupa Most, started working along the lines of 'encounter, reciprocity, encouragement, clarification and assistance'. They focused on regular working visits and youth exchanges. In September 2001, the three religious leaders visited the Netherlands. Following this visit, the religious leaders developed a plan to start the International Multi-religious Centre Most (IMCM). Grupa Most asked IKV to be a partner in this project as well. Spring 2003, the pilot phase started with a small office and a staff of three. Unfortunately, this initiative was not successful. In the eyes of the Dutch partners, there was a lack of visible output, partly because the religious leaders were not capable or willing to give a proper mandate to the IMCM staff. In the eyes of the religious leaders, the Dutch partners tried to 'export' their own working methods and lacked trust in the religious leaders. The initiative stranded, although the initiators from both sides still share good memories of the activities they undertook together. This example shows two things. Travelling of young people as well as religious leaders, has great and positive impact. It also shows how difficult it is to go beyond dialogue meetings.

For multireligious initiatives to succeed, you need a group of interested and preferably capable people. Initiatives do not necessarily need (a lot of) support from abroad. The Sarajevo-based International Multireligious Intercultural Centre (IMIC), an initiative of Fra Marko Orsolc, was founded in 1990, as an academic institute, with participation from all three major religious communities. IMIC has involved many people in its work and co-operated among others with people and groups with an open-minded cultural orientation. A group of activists, of various religious backgrounds, set up the Abraham/Ibrahim Group, emphasizing the common roots of the three major religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the same circle, a multi-religious choir was established (Pontanima), as part of the Oci u Oci (Eyes to Eyes) project. All of these initiatives, although largely ignored by a majority of religious leaders, have kept the flame of inter-religious dialogue alive. Initiated by citizens and critical groups, various organizations from abroad provided some financial assistance and helped organize participation of representatives of these groups in numerous international seminars and conferences.

### **5.2. Negative influences**

Notwithstanding the ideas about positive roles of religious leaders during the Balkan war, most respondents do agree that religious leaders did little to de-escalate the violence. In general, there was a great lack of criticism on political leaders from the part of the religious leaders and communities. Indeed there are numerous accounts of religious leaders that used their influence to support the nationalist cause.

Especially at the local level, many religious leaders legitimized violence and contributed to the feelings of hatred and aggression towards their opponents. Van Dartel thinks that "hate speeches of religious leaders have a disastrous effect, because of the great authority religious leaders have in society." For example, the former Orthodox bishop Vasilije Kacavenda of Tuzla is known to have engaged in hate speech. The group of his more radical religious followers felt their cause legitimized by their religious leader. Nevertheless, quite some Orthodox citizens (Serbs) stayed in the Muslim-dominated city of Tuzla throughout the war, despite of the fact that the city endured shelling on a daily basis, by Serb forces. Their loyalty towards Tuzla as a multi-ethnic city was for many Serbs stronger than their loyalty to their own bishop.

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By attending the gathering of one million Serbs at Kosovo Polje and Gazimestan in 1989 at the 600 years celebration of the battle of Kosovo Polje, key Orthodox leaders associated themselves with the politics of Milosevic and eliminated almost every possibility of a dialogue. This event, though taking place in Kosovo, logically also had an impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A clear majority of the religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina sent a contradictory message to their communities. They expressed support for dialogue and understanding in general and abstract terms at international conferences, while back in Bosnia they defended the interests of only their own ethno-religious group and expressed completely different views. These religious leaders (a majority, not all of them!) made their statements on peace, dialogue and tolerance look rather hypocritical.

### ***Lack of commitment***

Bremer thinks that religious leaders tried to please the international community with their statements, but that they often lacked commitment to the cause. "They were not active supporters nor spoilers. There was no inner conviction to do so from any of the religious leaders". Most of the international respondents nevertheless are of the opinion that the religious leaders did play, and even deliberately, a negative role. Moree emphasized that especially during the last phase of the conflict, certain communities believed that religious leaders pleaded for inter-religious dialogue because they had to, not because they meant it. "It was some sort of calculated hypocrisy." Orsolich is equally critical: "I am disillusioned by the high level leaders, because they failed to engage in inter-religious dialogue. They meet but they are not truly motivated to make a difference." In his opinion, the absence of inter-religious dialogue at the national level made the local initiatives more important, even "indispensable for peace building". Modern theology, according to Orsolich, must take the form of dialogue. By means of modern theology, one can call on the responsibility of religious people for all people.

Goodwin (2006) says: "Religious leaders are rather capable of promoting tolerances toward outsiders, including the religious or ethnic other. But they are not really committed. Too many religious leaders continue to pursue narrow sectarian or ethnic agendas, think only of the needs and rights of their own people, and fail to oppose the demonization of the other". Others do wonder whether the religious leaders are indeed capable of promoting concepts of tolerance and dialogue – given the fact that most of them never had any training or education outside the own religious framework. Orsolich: "The religious leaders lacked the courage and knowledge to engage in inter-religious dialogue. Theological knowledge is an important basis for engagement in inter-religious dialogue. Religious leaders have more power than knowledge. On the Balkans, some religious leaders are viewed as kings and are not open to criticism. Then, the combination of religion and nationalism is an extremely dangerous one. We differ along religious lines, but we must not be separated by religion."

Having committed themselves to the nationalistic agenda, religious leaders' roles in the community were and still are too much linked to the position and (electoral) success of the nationalist leaders. In a way, this assessment seems still valid in 2008 in the Western Balkans, given for instance the response by religious leaders with regard to the declaration of independence of Kosovo, February 2008. In various Orthodox churches protest meetings took place, and religious leaders joined in the rejection of the independence in Kosovo.

Yet, some respondents underline that it is difficult to stand up for tolerance in a situation of conflict. Peter Moree stresses that in time of conflict, tolerant voices face

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enormous trouble to make themselves heard. "They ran a great risk to become victims of the conflict if they took on a prominent role."

Some respondents think that leaders were nevertheless positively committed to dialogue but just had little impact. Respondents holding positions in any of the religious communities, sometimes referred to as the 'religious elite', tend to be more positive about the commitment of the religious leaders than the respondents not involved in the elite circles. The respondents and the literature show that most inter-religious activities started after the war, when the open violence had resided, and that most initiatives did not go beyond ad-hoc meetings and ad-hoc statements.

Even twelve years after the war, the situation is still grim – according to the leaders of some of the most prominent domestic NGOs in cities such as Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka and Bijeljina. Meeting in Banja Luka, in April 2007, they concluded, among other things: "The language of hatred and the nationalistic rhetorics threatens to shatter the laboriously achieved reconciliation and faith in quality coexistence of all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (...) The language of hatred that could be heard lately clearly indicates that there is no political culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that the dialogue culture is an unfamiliar element in local communication. (...)." In their opinion, these observations relate to politicians and religious leaders alike.

### ***Lack of leadership capacity***

In the eighties, there was a great lack of leadership capacity among religious leaders. After years of playing a marginal role in public life, many religious leaders lacked the experience, the contacts or even the education to be effective in public life. Therefore, it was easy for politicians to use certain religious leaders for their cause. Few religious leaders had the great courage that is needed to resist nationalism. Further, many of the religious leaders were very eager to have such an alliance with political leaders, because it would strengthen their position and would help prevent a possible new state policy of suppression of religious life. According to one respondent, the (intellectual) quality of religious leaders was at best mediocre, suggesting they lacked capacities to develop a genuine leadership role within their religious community and the society at large.

### ***The segregation of the religious communities***

While Bosnia and Herzegovina before the war was a culturally and religiously heterogeneous republic, the war basically turned it into three sectors, segregating the ethno-religious communities. Religious communities thus became geographically separated, which in itself formed an obstacle to inter-religious dialogue. If there was physical contact (meeting face to face), engaging in inter-religious dialogue often meant facing life-threatening circumstances. Hadzi Seid effendi Smajkic, the Mostar mufti, could not stay in contact with other religious leaders in his city: "After the war, it were the representatives of the international community that initiated the first meetings for the various religious leaders in Mostar. Later on, we managed to have such meetings upon our own initiative."

In some regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, staying meant facing danger to their lives. Peter Moree: "Many religious leaders of minority religious groups fled their villages and went to places where they were safe. During the war, they ran a great risk to become victims of the conflict if they stayed and took on a prominent role." Van Beek explains that smaller churches often irritated the majority religion with their demonstration of religious tolerance. The majority felt that these small churches were gaining respect and status by helping displaced persons and refugees, people the majority regarded as their enemies. This changed after the war, when leaders of minority churches (and in particular of the smallest religious groups, such as the Jews or Greek Catholics) were in a better position to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

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In some cases the situation was so bad that practical reasons impeded contact with other groups. For example, Sarajevo was under siege for more than three years. Selimovski: "The Muslim Community was in a highly insignificant position, because its head-quarters in Sarajevo [...] had no freedom of movement or communication, which resulted in not having the influence the other religious communities had."

An additional problem, according to the Mostar mufti Smajkic, was that the main religious leaders were not living in the same city, and that the main leaders for the orthodox and catholic communities not even lived within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A survey held in Autumn 2007 by het Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska (HCHRRS), based in Bijeljina, shows that religious intolerance is still a big problem. Especially among young people, there is an alarming level of religious intolerance. "That is the outcome of the last war, upbringing, education and the current political situation", stressed Branko Todorovic, president of the HCHRRS.

### ***History and perception of historical events***

History is of great importance to the peoples of the Balkans. They actively draw on knowledge of historical events. The image ethno-religious groups in the Balkans have of each other, is partially determined by historical events in the far past, more so by the analysis and presentation of such historical events by their leaders. History influenced the war in two ways.

First of all, in the course of history, the peoples of the Balkans were repeatedly in conflict with each other (see § 3.1.), which caused deep mistrust on all sides. Bremer stresses that those tensions were never reconciled, but even aggravated by a lack of open discourse during communism. In the opinion of IKV Pax Christi and many of the respondents, open dialogue about historical events is impeded by a lack of objective historical knowledge and, even more importantly, by a lack of willingness to establish a satisfying level of commonly defined history. Todorovic, executive director of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, sees three reasons for the lack of successful truthfinding: the lack of authentic civil initiatives, lack of strength in society at large to face the challenge of truthfinding, and the lack of commitment among religious leaders. Todorovic: "The religious communities and the religious leaders have declaratively implied support to development of the dialogue in the past, but in practice they have done almost nothing to provide support to the genuine dialogue and to make it subsist for somewhat longer period of time." Van Dartel explains that Yugoslavia was not open for professional historical investigations, and therefore many historical facts are simply not known. As a result, religious leaders and their communities almost always have different and conflicting interpretations of the war and the historical events leading to the war.

Moreover, when talking about reconciliation, the religious leaders are implying different things. It is difficult to envisage a sustainable process of reconciliation without truth-finding. Yet truth-finding was, and still is, a very problematic phenomenon in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finci: "the religious communities cannot carry the truth and reconciliation processes because, theologically, the different religions have different conditions for forgiveness." It is only in the recent years that interest in and intrinsic motivation for both inter-religious dialogue and truth-finding developed – and still the promoters of these processes are the exception to the rule.

Secondly, during the nineties, old tensions and stereotypes could easily be used by nationalists, and religious leaders close to them, to mobilize the people against each other. Van Dartel explains: "People were motivated to pick up their weapons by fear. Reconciliation never happened in the Balkans. Each ethnic and religious group in the Balkans has its own trauma, Serbs and Croats just like Muslims and Albanians." For example, the presence of Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina is associated with the

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time of the Ottoman Empire, a period in which Catholics and Orthodox were often considered second-class citizens.

Before the war, the Serbian population was convinced through propaganda that there was a conspiracy complot going on against the Serbs with the goal of cultural and political domination by the Muslims. Milosevic was the first important ruling politician to open old wounds when he gave his famous speech in Kosovo Polje in 1989, in which he revealed his nationalist Serbian agenda. The failure to reconcile old conflicts, made it possible (for nationalists) to use the general feeling of historical injustice to mobilize people for war. Neither politicians nor religious leaders were willing to support a more balanced version of history.

### ***Hierarchy in religious structure***

As explained above, the hierarchy of religious structures (Catholics) or the absence of them (Franciscans) can work positively for leaders willing to work for peace. However, both the presence and the lack of hierarchy can be problematic as well. While hierarchy made it easier to encourage interreligious dialogue in a top-down manner, criticism from below was discouraged by a strong hierarchical organization. Bremer: "The common believers were very uncritical; because of the clerical organization, they were unable to criticize their church." Hierarchy hinders participation and open dialogue within the religious communities. More criticism from the believers' communities might have made a difference in the behavior of the religious leaders.

First of all, the benefit of a hierarchical religious community can be questioned, if the leaders in charge do not give any incentive to foster and support inter-religious dialogue and peace work. There is little virtue in hierarchy of a belligerent religious community. For example, Roman-Catholic parish priests have a whole hierarchical structure they have to answer to. Catholic parish priests were often seen by the local community as being sent by the hierarchy. Most of them stayed only for a limited number of years and were then assigned to another parish.

Secondly, as Van Beek states: "As World Council of Churches, we always felt the problem of a lack of hierarchy within Muslim structures. One does not know who's in charge." The Muslim Community did not have one religious leader, whom the WCC could contact in its international efforts for dialogue. Selimovski agrees: "After 1924, when the institution Halifa was suspended by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Muslim world lost its international identification in a single figure. That is why the Muslim world has only local leadership; everyone solves his problems in his own way." According to Selimovski, this lack of leadership, a general lack of organization compared with other religious communities, and the fact that there was no international leadership, made the influence of the Muslim community weaker than that of the Catholic and the Orthodox communities. Van Beek stresses: "The opinion of a church leader should be clear within a hierarchical church; otherwise leaders from a lower level do not dare to speak out."

### ***Lack of experience***

A number of respondents observed that many religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina lacked experiences that would have made them more open to inter-religious dialogue. These include experiences that would have helped them to place their situation into a broader and national and international perspective, and that would have made them aware of and familiar with other forms of belief and other ways of life in general. Many respondents noted that religious leaders would have benefited greatly from inter-cultural and inter-religious education. Van Beek finds that what sets Irinej (bishop of Backa, in Northern Serbia) apart as a cooperative leader "is that Irinej had more international experience, that he was used to speak with Christians of other churches."

Lack of knowledge was not only a problem for the religious leaders in the former Yugoslavia. When international church bodies, such as the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches got involved with the conflicts and wars in the region, they regularly misunderstood events and positions, due mainly to wishful thinking, and a lack of background information and proper analysis of developments. Radical non-Muslim religious leaders were quick to refer to problems in Western Europe with Muslim communities to 'prove' the threat the Muslims pose to Christian Europe. According to IKV Pax Christi, some religious representatives from Western countries turned out to be sensitive to this type of reasoning, especially during working visits to the region – during and immediately after the war.

Urban regions are often more multi-ethnic and multi-religious than the rural areas. Cities seem to be more open to heterogeneity of religion and culture. For example, Sarajevo has tried to rebuild a tolerant elite after the war. A multi-ethnic society is more accepted in Bosnia's capital than in for example more rural Herzegovina. Both the big cities and the rural areas need to be reached by the peace process. It is tragic that during the war most peace efforts of the International Community concentrated on the centre of the country, namely besieged Sarajevo, due to the amount of information coming from it, and the lack of information coming in from the periphery. It took a while before the International Community started focusing on the periphery of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well.

### **5.2.1. The religious communities, at the local level**

Bremer suggests that an explanation for the opposing trends of intensity of inter-religious dialogue on a local and a national level is the strong impact the numerous funerals had on the local priests. The priests had to explain to the families why they had to suffer such loss. "The victims were declared martyrs by the priests. This is one way in which the conflict made the priests nationalistic." National leaders were less aware of the effect the conflict had on the population. Local religious leaders were directly exposed to the atrocities of war, which made it harder to resist nationalism.

On the other hand, the church-related organizations dealing with humanitarian aid and social support strongly focused on the members of their own community, instead of helping people who were most in need. In this way, even emergency aid that was channeled through the religious communities ultimately strengthened the ethno-religious identity of people.

The effects of nationalism are, many years after the war, still very clear and people still do not trust each other. In Banja Luka, all mosques were destroyed, even though (or because?) some of them were many centuries old and unquestionably part of the country's cultural and religious heritage. When the Human Rights Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina had ruled that Muslims had been discriminated against, the international community (in particular OHR, the Office of the High Representative) urged the authorities in Republika Srpska to allow the reconstruction of the once famous Ferhadija mosque. When the rebuilding of the mosque (at a smaller scale) started, in May 2001, riots followed and one Muslim died of head injuries. Orthodox leaders did little to nothing to calm down the population.

Problems occurred in other cities as well. During a Catholic outdoor mass in Derventa, in 1998, local Serbs attacked the buses of Croats traveling to participate. Norwegian SFOR soldiers had to intervene to prevent escalation. In Srebrenica, controversy developed over plans to build a new orthodox church on the site where the survivors of Srebrenica planned to build a large cemetery and memorial site. By OHR decision, the site was secured and indeed the cemetery and memorial have been put in place.

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In various cities, large catholic crosses were erected along the road and church bells are used to the maximum. Electric muezzin is equally loud in the same and other cities. In general, churches and mosques have been among the first buildings to have been rebuilt. In some cases, this was the explicit wish of the (potential) returnees, but quite often they also complained because the costs for these reconstruction projects were high – and they themselves had difficulties collecting money to have at least one or two rooms in their old house properly restored. These examples show that still in many cities and towns problems occur and that the local religious leaders do not step in to ease the tensions. Restoration of religious buildings and religious sites often not only serve a religious purpose, but also give a political signal.

The United States Institute of Peace identified three obstacles to reconciliation and inter-ethnic dialogue: the lack of tradition of grassroots activism, the reluctance of local religious leaders to get involved, and the direct action of 'militants' in the religious communities – such as the radical Islamic organizations (USIP, 2003).

### **5.2.2. The own religious community, at the national level**

In the first years after the war, there were more initiatives for inter-religious dialogue than nowadays. Van Beek thinks the main reason for the decline in inter-religious dialogue at the national level was the lack of visible results and the fact that most inter-religious meetings ended with frustrating conclusions for most participants. A consequence of the conflict is that all sides, including religious communities, radicalized and consequently these meetings were stopped until mediation came from the outside by the World Council of Churches and the European Churches Conference. These two organizations took the initiative to bring religious leaders together frequently, mediated the meetings, and kept the conversations going. Van Beek: "There are also examples of Orthodox bishops who gradually became more open and took several initiatives by themselves within their own diocese."

Peter Moree underlines that promoters of inter-religious dialogue were under pressure by people within their own communities not to criticize the nationalist leaders. Religious leaders were sensitive to this, because, according to Moree and other respondents, they were scared to become the aim of violent attacks by members of their own community and feared to lose influence in their communities. Van Beek notes: "I do not believe that external pressure influenced the extent of participation in inter-religious dialogue of religious leaders. But I do believe that they feared a loss of influence and status when becoming too critical."

Thomas Bremer: "Religious leaders did not speak up for peace, because they feared to lose power. Leaders that did support the peace process were usually persons without influence; dissidents were marginalized by their churches and mosques." According to Bremer, this influence of (the religious part of) society on religious leaders was stronger than the influence of politicians: "They were influenced more by the mainstream societal standpoint, not so much by the politicians. If they were influenced by politicians, this was because the contact with politicians meant that they were granted societal influence."

The increasing awareness of a national and ethnic identity, which was linked to a religious identity, caused the power of religious communities to increase during the conflict. Politicians needed the support of the religious leaders, and such a religious-political partnership made the religious leaders influential opinion leaders. According to Bremer, the public position of the Orthodox community was much weaker before the war than after the war.

Even today, religious leaders are afraid to be marginalized again in an overly secular state and to lose their societal influence. Up to today, the religious leaders and their

communities normally do not participate actively in democratization processes and initiatives to introduce models of citizenship. They fear that this would also weaken their position in society. Also the media affiliated to the religious communities are altogether not very critical or professional.

Further, Bremer points to the gap between religious leaders at the top level and the local level and the fact that signed documents often had little to no impact. "There is a text from 1993 where leaders strongly appealed for a cease-fire without condition and for release of prisoners. This document had no influence whatsoever on the war. The reason for this is that although the papers were signed and published, the appeal was not mentioned in sermons and was generally not supported by local religious leaders." Often, such documents were not used by the signatories themselves for an active lobby. Warring politicians signed documents and ignored them, and so did religious leaders: they signed documents and ignored them.

### **5.2.3. The religious communities, at the international level**

Another source of outside pressure against inter-religious dialogue was the influence of the diaspora. In particular the Serbian and Croatian communities were influenced by the diaspora (Hockenos, 2003). In the case of the Muslims, the (Bosniak) diaspora was not so relevant, but groups of Muslim fighters – mostly from the Arabic countries to come to Bosnia to fight for the interests of the Muslim community. The Serbian diaspora was initially taken by surprise by the events of the late eighties and nineties, but the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, effectively used alliances with the Croatian diaspora to strengthen his position and to support and co-finance the build-up of the Croatian self-defense and army. Croatian emigrant Gojko Susak returned from Canada to Croatia to become Minister of Defense. Susak played an important role in the development and war operations of the HVO (Croatian army in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The involvement of the diaspora also had an impact on the religious communities, through their political role and their financial support that was partly channeled to the religious communities themselves.

In the case of the Muslims, conservative and sometimes radical streams supported and influenced their struggle against the Orthodox and the Catholics. While the Muslim community before the war was described as relatively secular and moderate in its ideological and missionary performance, the war with its violent outbursts led to the arrival of foreign Muslim fighters and a stronger involvement from the part of Muslim states and Muslim donor agencies. Their support was linked to quite a strong missionary religious presentation. Selimovski: "The Muslim Community had to bring this war situation out into the open and to make it known outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina by making contacts with the world, especially with the Muslim world."

As a reaction to the nationalism of the other ethnic groups, and through the influence of Arab fighters who came to help the Bosnian Muslims, bringing with them their views and customs, a part of the Muslim community assumed a much more radical view than the one prevailing in the Muslim community before the war. A shift towards more conservative customs followed in that part of the Muslim community. Selimovski tells the following about the role of the Arab community: "At the beginning of the conflict, the Muslim Community tried to alarm the European Union about the problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We tried to inform them through institutions of the Muslim world, like the Islamic Conference, the Islamic League, even Turkey. During the war, Muslims defended Tuzla, Zenica and other places with their own forces. However, when the conflict took on its barbarian character, and when we realized that this war was trying to destroy one ethnic group, Muslims established contacts with 'illegal' movements in the Muslim world. However, these links were never the basic force of the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

Most Muslims initially welcomed the support. In a later stage of the conflict, the presence of foreign fighters led to tensions within the main-stream Muslim population. This was mainly due to the fact that foreign fighters actively promoted wahhabism, a radical version of Islam that was not popular among the majority of the Bosnian Muslims. Some foreign fighters married Bosnian women and stayed in the country. They now possess the Bosnian citizenship. During the last few years, Muslim leaders have given clear statements that their version of Islam is a different one, and they are actively fighting the rise of religious Muslim radicalism in their country. Wahhabist ideology, if it would gain ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina, could pose a threat to the (vulnerable) stability of the country and could function as a bridgehead for radical Muslim groups throughout Europe. Nevertheless, this is not the case yet, and Wahhabist influences are now mainly challenging the pro-European attitude of the vast majority of Bosnian Muslims and their religious leaders.

### **5.2.4. The international religious bodies and institutions**

The initiatives of the international religious bodies and institutions were regularly critically assessed. An example: IKV and Pax Christi repeatedly asked the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches to monitor more critically how the religious leaders neglected the very agreements reached and promises made at internationally sponsored gatherings. At a certain point, peace organizations even suggested suspending the membership of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but this proposal was largely ignored.

Van Beek: "It was not a religious war, but it was a conflict in which religion was very important. The international community should have involved religious leaders more prominently in the negotiations and should have put more pressure on them to act towards a more peaceful resolution of the conflict. As an ecclesiastical organization, the WCC could only make an appeal on the moral obligations of religious leaders, but international politics could have used political pressure."

Other respondents do not agree with Van Beek's stance that international church bodies could not exert political pressure. Partners of IKV and Pax Christi have indicated that more pressure could and should have been exerted; anti-war groups felt ignored by the religious leaders and pointed out that the religious could have done more than they did. And the decision not to exert political pressure was a decision had a clear political impact. In the opinion of the anti-war groups, it would have been better if the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches would have taken a more firm position and would have given stronger and visible support to the ones fighting nationalism from all parts, from all religious and ethnic communities.

Indeed, the dialogue-oriented approach of the World Council of Churches and others was frequently criticized for its refusal to openly criticize and if need be cut the ties with the Serbian-Orthodox Church during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main focus was on the Serbian-Orthodox Church, because the over-all assessment was that the Serbian politicians and military were the ones responsible for most of the fighting and for most war crimes committed.

There are several factors that might have contributed to the lack of impact of the few initiatives that did develop. Most initiatives were launched and fostered from the outside and were implemented in a top-down process (labeled by Steele as 'the elitist approach'). Especially the international bodies of the Christian Churches tried to intermeditate between the opposing actors. Especially at the meetings during and immediately after the war, there was hardly any real dialogue between the opposing actors, but mere statements.

### ***The Inter-Religious Council***

The Inter-Religious Council was mentioned above (see § 5.1.6.). It was established after the Bosnian War upon initiative of the World Council of Religions for Peace, is composed by the Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and the Jewish community. The other religious communities, such as the protestant churches and the Greek Catholics, were not invited. Among respondents, opinions on the Inter-Religious Council are divided. Some respondents think the work of the Inter-Religious Council is very important, as it represents the only body where the main religions of the Balkans are represented. However, many respondents think that the Council is mostly cosmetic and has no real impact. As they see it, genuine interest in inter-religious dialogue is lacking and the task of the Council is restricted to the distribution of money. Another line of criticism is that the Inter-Religious Council mainly works at the high level of church officials. Ordinary citizens do not often have the chance to talk to representatives of the church on the higher level.

According to an anonymous respondent, former high-ranking diplomat in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was and still is only extrinsic motivation for inter-religious dialogue. The respondent states that there is altogether very little the international community can do when the intrinsic motivation of religious leader is lacking.

A top-down approach makes it less likely to have effects on the ground, where nationalism manifests itself most strongly. According to IKV Pax Christi, even though the religious leaders meet at the national level, most of them do not undertake, encourage or support initiatives for inter-religious dialogue at the local level. Smajkic thinks that the Inter-Religious Council could serve as a model, but "such a forum should not only be functioning at the national level. It should be set up at the local and regional level, so that concrete policy can be made, in a decentralized manner".

### **5.2.5. The international community; Embassies and International Governmental Organizations**

Throughout the war, the international community exerted great diplomatic effort by bringing political leaders to the negotiation table in the aim of ending violence. In this process, there was, occasionally, some attention for religious leaders but there was no clear-cut international strategy to promote inter-religious dialogue and mobilize the religious leaders' support for peace proposals and peace processes. On the eve of the disintegration as well as during the war, the international community often displayed half-hearted and naive reactions. This was primarily the case in the response to the processes of political and military escalation, but it also troubled the establishment of a good working relationship with the religious communities.

In the discussion on the position of religion of society, it is important to make a distinction between a 'secular state' and a 'secularist approach'. In a secular state, one respects that division of religion and state, there is freedom of religion and religious communities are treated equal. In the realm of the secularist approaches, one tries to eradicate religion from all public spheres. Then preferably religion as a phenomenon will vanish. Orsolc is of the opinion that many diplomats misunderstood and misunderstand the role of religion: "The international community did not advocate a secular state, but a secularist state where religion does not play any societal role. But religion does have a public role in society, like sports and music. It is not merely a private function it fulfills." The anonymous respondent, former diplomat, agrees that most diplomats favored a secularist model for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Logically, this made the communication with religious leaders rather difficult. Finci underlines that secularism is not an option for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but laicism would: "There should not be a state religion. That is a risk where one

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religious group has a majority position and can establish a sort of religious control over the country.”

In a secular state, the religious communities and their leaders still have a role to play, in terms of moral leadership (this, by the way, does by no means imply that atheists and non-religious organizations would not be fit to embody a similar moral leadership).

Twelve years after the war, respondents noted that inter-religious tolerance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still almost as weak as during the first years after the war. Primarily, the inter-religious tolerance and dialogue is a process that the communities themselves have to foster and develop. Nevertheless, one must conclude that after many years of efforts of the international community, results in this respect are very poor.

Respondents criticized diplomats for a general lack of intercultural sensitivity as well as a lack of personal commitment to the cause of working with the religious communities. Majdancic got the impression that many representatives of the international communities were only in Bosnia and Herzegovina for their career, and that they were not really devoted to their tasks.<sup>1</sup> Diplomats are transferred to the region for short periods of time, too short for them to become personally devoted to their task and to gain sufficient insight in the complex situation at hand. For example, Van Beek thinks that the international community did not sufficiently take into account the world view of the Orthodox community: “To be Serb is to be Orthodox. Religion symbolizes the nation. The international Community made the mistake and is still making the mistake of not being aware of the impact of the Orthodox worldview, which does not make the division between the religious and the worldly as western people do. (...) In order to deal with this difference in world view, it is important to build a relationship of trust. This way, one can feel when it is the right time to ask difficult questions. Diplomats all too often lack the time to build such relationships.”

While some respondents underlined that there may be circumstances – especially in a situation of conflict – that one cannot wait for the slow development of trust, respondents generally shared the impression that many diplomatic interventions were undermined by a lack of time investment, a lack of continuity, a lack of commitment, and a lack of knowledge and insight.

The lack of cultural insight and sensitiveness was also manifest on the over-all policy level. Respondents felt that approaches that had worked in other contexts were applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina without proper investigation of the specific context of the Balkans. The international community was very fond of instruments that promised quick results. However, no quick fix, let alone sustainable positive change, was achieved. Respondents also felt that the International Community had no long-term policy. Zivanovic: “The international community acts on an ad-hoc basis”. These observations not only relate to the international governmental bodies and the diplomats working at the embassies, but are also valid for the international bodies of the respective religious communities.

Communication between diplomats and religious leaders was often far from optimal. This is caused by the differences in behavior and roles of religious and political communities and their leaders. On the one hand, according to the respondents, religious leaders have, to a certain extent, other interests than diplomats and are not – or at least less – interested in finding solutions for the concrete questions diplomats

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<sup>1</sup> He is less critical of the commitment of the media and NGOs, and remembers genuine interest in his work and financial supports for among others the soup kitchen he set up.

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generally seek to resolve. On the other hand, diplomats often do not understand what religious communities are interested in. Diplomats have too little insight into the traditions and the internal organization of religious communities and institutions.

What adds to the confusion for the international diplomats is the character of the close link of religious leaders with the political field: religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina do interfere with politics, but unlike politicians, they can withdraw more easily from the (public) political context and retreat to their (less public) religious fields.

Selimovski believes that "the International Community did not make a good analysis of the crisis, that is of the transformation process of former Yugoslavia. I think that the International Community did not have a single view on the crisis [...] but was divided between different interests." Diplomats and other executives were assigned for short periods of time, leading to a poor institutional memory. Respondents especially recall the divided approach of the European Union. Each European diplomat came with instructions of his or her own government; each country had different ideas about what had to be done. Hadzi Seid effendi Smajkic, mufti in Mostar: "Europe did not speak with one voice". He also felt that diplomats were not neutral in the conflict. "Depending on which country diplomats represented, they had sympathy for different parties in the conflict." This was also reflected in their relation to the respective religious communities. Some countries were less critical of the (catholic) Croats, whereas Greece was less critical of the (orthodox) Serbs.

Respondents' answers differ regarding the question whether religious leaders were sufficiently consulted during the peace process. Mufti Smajkic feels that the religious leaders were not sufficiently involved in the peace process during and after the war. He thinks that religious leaders are being consulted more since the end of the war, but his complaint is that they are still not being invited to contribute to policy making. While one can debate to what extent religious leaders should be involved in policy issues, most respondents claim that the international community in general underestimated the importance of religion, and failed to incorporate religious leaders into the peace process.

Peter Moree: "Before and during the conflict, there was among diplomats a general cluelessness about how to deal with religion and religious leaders. The idea that religious leaders need to be involved in the peace process was not accepted in the political and diplomatic circles. The assumption of the international community at large that religion is a private matter and should not play a role in policy making has been a great mistake."

Institutions like the United Nations and the European Community had difficulties to find the right balance between involving religious leaders in the peace process at the right time and keeping them at a distance when needed. Respondents indicated that if the international community favors a certain leader, they in general favor him without the necessary critical view, while other less obvious leaders are sometimes completely ignored. This is another example of lack of policy and strategy.

After the war, many international governmental bodies and big donors focused their activities on reconstruction and economic recovery without taking into account the inter-ethnic issues still unresolved. Their strong involvement in humanitarian aid in some cases made the religious institutions that traditionally deal with humanitarian needs (temporarily) redundant. To a certain extent, the international community undermined the social task of the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Religious leaders are quite wary of western diplomats tending to impose the western secular model. While Bosnia and Herzegovina is still searching for the right position of

religion in society, it is clear that religion (in particular religious identity) in the upcoming decades will take a much more central role in this society than in western European countries.

### **5.2.6. NGOs**

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) analysed how faith-based emergency aid NGOs (see § 5.1.7.) did their work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the war. The reach quite a critical assessment: The emergency aid NGOs "were generally deemed inflexible, operating according to their own standard codes of practice rather than responding to local situations. Their decision making was seen as top-down, while local skillful and educated staff were undervalued. They measured their achievements quantitatively, with a focus on tangible outcomes rather than such goals as empowerment. Funding was for short, discrete projects not necessarily conducive to long-term social reconstruction. (...) The attention to material infrastructure was important; the inattention to human factors was problematic." The faith-based NGOs started training local personnel, but conflict resolution and reconciliation were not on the agenda.

The USIP criticized the bad planning of some of the restoration projects for churches and mosques as well. They were "not well conceived and counterproductive". Citizens indicated that they felt ordered to reconcile, and that is not possible. In particular where the local community was not involved in the restoration plans problems occurred. NGOs from abroad, as well as the big donor organizations, all too often make to make a statement and see results at short notice, whereas a more participatory approach would ultimately lead to better results – in terms of support for the rebuilding of religious buildings, but also in the field of inter-religious dialogue.

In many European countries, one can find faith-based peace organizations. It is therefore quite remarkable that only few of these organizations started working in Bosnia and Herzegovina with religious communities. They may have been reluctant because of the radical positions taken by the religious leaders in Bosnia. They may have given priority to other partners in the country, with whom they could more easily develop a common agenda.

Altogether, NGOs from abroad did develop a number of initiatives, in particular in the post-war period. What is interesting, is that these initiatives were either very much top-down (or better: elite-oriented) or rather exclusively bottom-up. There was little consultation and co-operation among the NGOs intervening in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Little to nothing was done to bridge the elitist approach with the grass-roots work and works towards a more integrated approach and added value.

### **5.2.7. The 'War on Terror'**

The 'global war on terror' has quite an impact on political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It led to substantial pressure on the Bosnian government, in particular on political parties and institutions affiliated to the Muslim Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As of September 11, 2001, some European and many US politicians started seeing Bosnia and Herzegovina as an Al Qaeda-stronghold in the heart of Europe.

In response to international pressure, the Bosnian government has recently stripped a few hundreds of these former foreign fighters of their Bosnian citizenship, despite of protests of human rights organizations. To make things worse, Bosnian Serbian politicians have recently started to play the religious card again. In May 2007, Milorad Dodik, Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska government, gave a number of disturbing interviews and speeches during a visit to the United States of America, in

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which he portrayed the Republika Srpska as 'Christian' and a protection against Muslim extremism. Dodik warned that Muslim Bosnia has become "a platform for attacking the United States and Europe using 'white' Al Qaeda members who look like Europeans". Dodik: "When I was asked by former State Department official Bob Gelbard why we have to stay in Bosnia, I said it was to prevent the creation of a Muslim state in the heart of Europe". He also warned of the involvement of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran in Bosnia. "The Saudis have funded and built more than 1000 new mosques" and "these mosques serve as bases for training Muslim extremists." (...) "Thirty percent of the Bosnian Muslims approve of or are directly involved in the Wahhabi movement."

It is true that as a consequence of the donor support from Islamic countries and organizations, the more radical interpretations of Islam are stronger now than before the war. Nevertheless, many independent observers underline that the war on terror clearly 'colors' the perception by Western states, and that unfortunately the Bosnian government, in order not to lose support from the USA and European countries, is willing to comply with wishes to intervene and strip citizens of their citizenship even though there is no proper legal basis for it.

## 6. Recommendations

This section gives recommendations that are relevant for religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the various actors within the international community.

### 6.1. General recommendations

#### ***The need for more self-critical approaches***

Not only the religious *leaders* in Bosnia and Herzegovina failed to stop the war and to promote peace. The same goes for the national politicians, the international community and the international bodies of churches and religious communities. Also in the interviews held for this report, many respondents underline the mistakes made by and problems created by others. They are, in general, not as self-critical as one would hope. It is very much needed that actors develop a more self-critical approach, because that will avoid manipulation by political leaders and will enhance their credibility in other religious communities. In other words: a self-critical approach makes people more reliable actors in peace-building.

#### ***Truth-finding at all levels***

All actors involved should critically evaluate their own actions and interventions and go public with such findings. Truth-finding is not only a challenge to politics and military, but should also apply to the religious leaders and communities and the international community. Rather than developing initiatives at the national level in a politicized setting (the elitist approach), local projects should be developed in which religious leaders participate alongside other local actors (politicians, media representatives, local NGO's, opinion leaders in general). Over the last few years, such truth-finding meetings have been held, also in some places that witnessed some of the most severe war atrocities (among which Trebinje and Velika Kladusa), with remarkable positive results.

#### ***Education of religious leaders in dialogue initiatives***

One of the problems with the development of inter-religious initiatives was the lack of experience in such activities on the part of the religious leaders. Education and capacity building of religious leaders is needed. Not so much on the core and contents of the other religions, but in particular on the principles, methodology and practical management of dialogue initiatives. In terms of conflict prevention and facilitating (post-war) community-building, this might be a priority activity. Classical training models (teacher – pupil style) are not desirable. More appropriate would be a process of international visits and small seminars, facilitating a process of 'organic capacity-building'. Organic capacity-building serves a double aim. It is also very useful that religious leaders and communities from other European countries to gain more knowledge and get a better understanding of the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

#### ***Acknowledging fears of religious communities***

When looking at Bosnia and Herzegovina through western eyes, there is reason to be critical of the influence the religious communities try to have on politics and the state, through lobbying for or against national legislation and setting-up private (often rather elitist) schools for their own religious community. When discussing the division of religion and the segregation in the educational system, we have to keep in mind that religious groups in the Western Balkans have a profound fear of being marginalized again. This fear needs to be acknowledged and understood in its historical context.

***Promotion of the exchange of opinions, at all levels***

How to make religious leaders fit for their role as leaders of their communities? One way is promoting the exchanging of view points between local religious groups and international religious groups. Another way is sensitizing religious leaders of the perspective of minority groups. Diplomats in turn can profit from being familiar with the role religious groups play in a society. Such exchange of opinions should preferably start when the tensions are not yet at the brink of escalating. With an escalation at hand, the religious communities most likely will tend to withdraw and concentrate on their own position.

**6.2. Recommendations for the religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

***The need for new activities at the national level***

During the first years after the war, religious leaders often met upon the instigation of representatives of the international community. Such initiatives, like the Inter-Religious Council, became almost routine, to a large extent based on an extrinsic motivation. Religious communities need to reflect on their role in the community, which goes beyond their own religious constituency, and revive initiatives of inter-religious dialogue upon the basis of intrinsic motivation.

***Wider community-building approach, in the perspective of European integration***

Inter-religious dialogue and co-operation is not only of importance for the religious communities involved, but for the society as a whole. In that respect, it is part of the process of European integration. Religious leaders should have the opportunity to become aware of the roles religious communities play in the various EU countries in general, and specifically of the different models of the division of religion and state. [MH: EU as leverage for change]

***Facilitating the return of displaced persons and refugees***

Local religious leaders can play an important role in the return of displaced persons and refugees. When people return to their place of origin, the atmosphere in the local community is very important. Local religious leaders can meet and discuss this issue. If they go public with a common understanding of the needs to support people who return to their place of origin, they will give a clear and positive signal to all citizens involved.

***Partnership with civil society organizations***

Most of Bosnia's CSO are non-religious. Yet, over the last few years the attention for religious communities and the role they can play in the revitalization of the local community has been growing. Models of co-operation and consultation should be supported, in a practical and constructive way. Religious communities should be more active in developing models of partnership with civil society organizations (and vice versa). So far, most religious leader has had a rather negative opinion of civil society organizations working on inter-ethnic dialogue and democratization. Once contacts are established, both religious communities and NGOs will see that there are joint interests, and possibilities to co-operate.

***Dialogue between religious communities and atheists***

Atheists are often considered immoral, second-class citizens. Due to the fact that life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is organized along ethno-religious lines, atheists are generally ignored. Dialogue between atheists and theists should help to bring the focus on universal human rights to the agenda and should challenge a more inclusive approach of developments in society.

### **6.3. Recommendations for all those providing international assistance**

#### ***Taking hierarchy of religious groups into account***

The degree of hierarchic structure of an organization has not simply a positive or negative effect on a religious community in terms of openness for interreligious dialogue. It should, however, be a factor that is taken into account. Where hierarchy can be used to get a larger group of clergy and believers involved in interreligious activities and peace-building, it should be done – preferably in a non-compulsory way. Where hierarchy is an obstacle, ways are to be found to foster initiatives without provoking any disturbing intervention from the part of hierarchy.

#### ***Developing cultural sensitivity***

Cultural sensitivity can only be acquired with time and commitment. In situations of conflict, these factors are especially vital to the task of a diplomat. Peace building and building up a society takes time and patience, more than the international community is often willing to invest. It is important to understand certain dynamics regarding the role of religious communities and their leaders in society. It may be logical to plea for a secular state, but secularist lobbying will inevitably make a constructive working relationship with religious communities impossible.

#### ***Religious communities as spoilers***

The international community and promoters of inter-religious dialogue and tolerance cannot afford to focus exclusively on the protagonists of peace-building and inter-ethnic community-building. The religious communities are potential spoilers and therefore have to be addressed, in all phases of the conflict.

#### ***Intra-religious dialogue as precondition of inter-religious dialogue***

Inter-religious dialogue and co-operation is still problematic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but there are individuals and small groups in all of the religious communities who stick out their necks and try to develop such dialogue and co-operation initiatives. In most cases, they first of all face a struggle within their own religious community. Under the given circumstances, the intra-religious dialogue is a precondition for the strengthening of the willingness of religious institutions and religious leaders to embark in processes of inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. This intra-religious dialogue therefore is very important and must be supported where possible. This can be done by means of providing international 'backing vocals' (working visits, publications) that can help underline that what may look strange or ignorant in the context of the religious community is often common practice in many other European countries.

#### ***Allies for intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue***

Potential partners and allies for intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue are often not the religious leaders that are most visible. Nevertheless, in all larger communities one can find people who are open to the opinion of others and willing to voice their wish for dialogue publicly. One may find such allies in circles of young people, in particular young theologians, who are active within the institutional bulwarks of their religious community and still have an open mind. Within the Catholic Church, specific orders and congregations (such as the Franciscans) can play a positive role. Within universities and educational institutes, professors and teaching staff (not only the ones dealing with theology) may have built up some maneuvering space without losing formal or informal ties with the religious leadership. And sometimes, local religious leaders have 'experimented' with inter-religious dialogue, with and sometimes without the consent of the religious hierarchy. Less visible actors deserve support.

***The need for interactive models of learning***

In most religious communities, the leadership focus is still quite strong. Believers are not often challenged to take responsibility themselves, they are not invited to express their own views on relevant topics. Especially when dealing with young people, interactive models must be put in place, to gain and secure their involvement and commitment.

**6.4. Recommendations for the international religious bodies and institutions**

***Act on time!***

When the conflicts escalated, it was clear that religious identity played an important role. Nevertheless, it took a long time for the international religious bodies to initiate dialogue with churches and religious communities and start attempts to promote inter-religious dialogue. The discussion also focused too much on internal unrest within the own international setting ('open conflict with certain religious communities will also harm our own institution and network'). A timely response is essential.

***Provide alternatives for alliances with nationalists***

In particular in the pre-war phase of rising tensions and escalation, an involvement of international religious bodies could have had a positive impact. On the eve of the war, a stronger international network could have helped to prevent radicalization, might have supported peace-oriented layers within the religious communities. It would have provided the religious communities with an alternative (international partnership) to alliances with nationalists and (sometimes self-chosen) isolation. This opportunity was missed. The lesson is clear: provide alternatives for alliances with nationalists, and international partnership can be part of such an alternative.

***How to balance the dialogue with religious communities with solidarity with victims?***

International church-related bodies have a possibility and role to facilitate intra-religious dialogue and inter-religious dialogue. Yet, there is a risk that the wish to have such a dialogue prevents the international religious bodies from taking clear-cut positions on war atrocities (many say that the World Council of Churches should have been much more outspoken in criticizing the position and role of the Serbian Orthodox Church). Dialogue can be misused by politicians and religious leaders alike, when words of peace remain idle and without implementation. Condemning nationalistic statements and warmongering of religious leaders, expressing solidarity with the victims of nationalism, should not only remain an option as well, but has to be seen as a precondition for dialogue, as dialogue without solidarity with victims will be considered hypocritical and shallow by the ones most effected by the war.

***A long-term investment***

Inter-religious dialogue is still in its infancy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yet, the international church-related networks are not very active in the country. Their attention has shifted (global war on terror, Iraq, Afghanistan, the future of Africa, climate change, etc.). We urge these networks not to forget Bosnia and Herzegovina and to develop substantial long-term programs to foster intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighboring countries.

**6.5. Recommendations for the international community, Embassies and International Governmental Organizations**

***Act on time!***

When the conflicts escalated, it was quite clear that religious identity would play an important role. Nevertheless, it would take a long time for the Embassies and IGOs to

make contacts with respective religious communities and support attempts to promote inter-religious dialogue. Yet, in particular in that phase of escalation, a closer contact with religious leaders could have had a positive influence. The lesson is that international governmental organizations have to act on time, and develop a strategy on how to relate to and work with religious communities in the earliest conflict phase as possible.

### ***Build expertise on religious communities***

At the level of Embassies and IGO bodies, there is often little knowledge about the position and role of religious communities in the given context. Diplomats and politicians frequently underestimate the influence of religious leaders and do not know which deep-rooted dynamics drive religious communities. It is important that IGOs and embassies acquire this type of knowledge. Useful knowledge includes the 'religious language'. Even though religious leaders take political positions, they are not politicians and therefore need to be addressed in a specific way.

### ***Add religious communities to the assessment framework and context analysis***

We recommend that special attention be given to religious communities in the assessment frameworks and context analysis that INGOs and embassies make on a regular basis. Underlying dynamics of religious communities should be understood and analyzed and opportunities for intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue should be assessed in a structural way. Experience shows that religious leaders do have the potential to play positive, sometimes even decisive roles in all phases of the conflict.

The international community can prepare proposals for certain positive interventions by religious leaders, not only in prevention of escalation and in peace-building, but also to prepare society and politicians for negotiations and political settlements. A common vision and planning could increase the effect of the efforts of the donor community.

### ***Establish working relations with religious communities***

Given the role of religious communities, diplomats should not only gather relevant data and analyze dynamics, they should also develop a working relationship with religious leaders. Others in and around the religious communities can also play key roles in the intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue. In order to become familiar with the behavior of religious leaders, diplomats can profit from building long-lasting relations and keeping constant and continuous contact with religious leaders. Such relationships are relevant throughout all conflict phases. A functional relationship will help address certain issues in times of possible escalation. Of course, diplomats have to be sensitive to the specific legitimate fears and needs of the religious communities and should not hesitate to support religious communities in their promotion of legitimate demands.

### ***Limit the religious influence in the field of education***

The religious communities today have quite some influence in education and the school system. Even when there is a rather neutral approach in the curriculum, local religious leaders ask and get access to the teachers and pupils. There is hardly any objective teaching on religion and religions. The international community should support projects introducing more balanced teaching materials in the class rooms and should (continue to) monitor in the teaching tolerance and dialogue prevail over nationalism and ethnic hatred.

### ***Accept Islam in Europe***

The influence of radical Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina is rather overestimated, in particular in Western Europe and the USA, where there is a recent tendency to perceive every radical or mission-oriented Muslim as a potential terrorist. Within the

Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an overwhelming majority of believers and functionaries are rejecting the Wahhabist ideology – even though many mosques have been rebuilt with donations by more radical Muslim organizations and governments. Muslim leaders resist radicalization within the Muslim community, both publicly and behind closed doors. The international community can best support the non-radical representatives of the 'European Islam'.

The international community can provide some support to that process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by supporting moderate interpretations of Islam and by refraining from paranoia with regard to Muslim fighters who now hold Bosnian citizenship. A fundamental contribution to fighting radicalization would be to criticize the black-and-white approach of Islam in the European countries themselves, and to disassociate the global war on terror from the presence of Muslim communities in Europe. It is wise and logical to accept Islam as part of Europe's past and heritage, its present and its future.

### ***Protest against re-instrumentalization of religion in the political discourse***

The international community should clearly protest against the way in which politicians regularly try to re-instrumentalize the religious communities. One can see such tendencies in all major religious communities. Just one example is how some Bosnian Serbian politicians again mobilized religion in the political discourse on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina and topics such as police reform in the country.

### ***Build expertise on interreligious and intra-religious dialogue***

The international community is not traditionally involved in models of interreligious and intra-religious dialogue. Working with religious communities and their leaders is quite different from working with political parties or governments. Embassies and IGOs should build and share expertise on the dialogue dynamics involved in the interreligious and intra-religious dialogue.

## **6.6. Recommendations for the international community, NGOs from abroad**

### ***Third-party facilitation***

Models of 'third party facilitation' can help national and in particular local religious leaders take initiatives in inter-religious dialogue. Support for such initiatives from the outside world can provide religious leaders with an extra legitimacy in the eyes of their own community, as well as other religious communities. Third-party facilitation, logically, is not about a one-time event, it can only lead to good results in case of long-term involvement and adequate knowledge and skills of the facilitator(s).

### ***Equal partnership***

Outside support for inter-religious dialogue should best be based on an approach in which the foreign partner has an equal relationship with all, or at least more than one of the religious communities involved. In case of a special relationship with one of the religious communities, the maneuvering space for third party facilitation is much smaller.

### ***A long-term investment***

Reaching a sufficient level of intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue will take quite some years. When embarking in such a project with partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has to be done upon the basis of a long-term commitment. This commitment has to be visible for the partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well.

### ***Travelling***

Isolation is still a big problem for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Internet does provide good opportunities for communication and learning, but nothing is as

## Tales of War and Peace

effective as travelling and meeting people face to face. To invite mixed delegations (religiously mixed, gender-mixed) for working visits to EU member states can be a very effective and encouraging tool by giving participants access to information and experiences in EU member states, and by providing them with a type of team-building exercise. When travelling together, they not only speak *about* each other, but also *with* each other.



## 7. Conclusions

We started this research with two questions. How can we best qualify the roles of the religious leaders during and after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as calculated hypocrisy or as paving the way for peace? And can we derive recommendations from the analysis and the research?

We must conclude that in the case of the religious leaders we came across both calculated hypocrisy and initiatives paving the way for peace. It is not a black-and-white picture. Nevertheless, support for nationalism and even protection for war criminals was more the rule than an active contribution to interreligious dialogue, diplomatic initiatives to end the war and peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, the positive roles constitute the exception, negative roles the rule!

Still, religious leaders got involved in interesting initiatives, from which we can learn a lot. Of course, we must and can also learn from failed initiatives, from short-sighted approaches, from dynamics that make it so difficult for religious leaders to side with the peace-makers and so easy to ally with nationalists. We have listed the recommendations in Chapter 6.

The analysis of the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina leads to the conclusion that the process of rebuilding society would greatly benefit from integrating religion, specifically by taking into account the spiritual and cultural needs of its populations. While religion can certainly contribute to the building of a democratic and tolerant society, a solution for the pressing problems that Bosnia and Herzegovina faces today calls for a broad approach in rebuilding society on all levels and in several sectors. Religion in itself does not present a ready-made solution. Rather, it needs to be embedded in a greater framework of a functioning state that is carried by a strong civil society. Religious leaders and religious communities now have the chance to define their position in a new society and to make a great contribution to a heterogeneous and strong society.

Many religious leaders sided with the nationalist forces during and after the war, and only slow progress is visible in processes promoting inter-religious dialogue and co-operation. Yet, slowly actors involved gain a better understanding of the dynamics of inter-religious dialogue. At all levels initiatives can be undertaken or supported, from the inside and from the outside.



## Interviewees

Interviews took place in the period September – December 2006, with the following persons. In some cases, they provided additional information in the course of 2007. In alphabetical order:

1. **Dino Abazovic**, professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences Sarajevo
2. **Mile Babic**, dean of the School of Franciscan Theology, Sarajevo
3. **Huub van Beek**, former head of the Europe working group of the World Council of Churches, responsible for the relations of the WCC with its member churches and ecumenical organizations
4. **Dion van den Berg**, senior policy adviser IKV Pax Christi
5. **Karel Blei**, former secretary-general of the Dutch Protestant Church, member of the management board of IKV
6. **Thomas Bremer**, professor of Ecumenical Theology and Peace Studies at the Ecumenical Institute in Münster, Germany
7. **Geert van Dartel**, director of the Catholic Association for Oecumene Athanasius and Willibrord
8. **Jakob Finci**, representative of the Jewish Community Bosnia and Herzegovina, member of the Inter-Religious Council of BiH
9. **Bishop Grigorije**, the Orthodox bishop of Trebinje
10. **Albert van Hal**, political adviser for BBO (in 2006/2007, now Afghanistan program leader for Cordaid)
11. **Muhamed effendi Lugacic**, mufti of Tuzla
12. **Fra Mirko Majdancic**, the guardian of the Franciscan Monastery in Fojnica, Sarajevo
13. **Fra Ivo Markovic**, head of the Sarajevo-based 'Oci u Oci' inter-religious service
14. **Peter Morée**, researcher at the Department of Church History at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University in Prague
15. **Fra Marko Orsolic**, Franciscan priest, founder of the multi-religious centre IMIC in Sarajevo
16. **Hadzi Seid effendi Smajkic**, mufti of Mostar
17. **Miodrag Zivanovic**, professor at the Philosophy Faculty Banja Luka
18. **Jakup Selimovski**, head of education department at Muslim Community of Macedonia in Skopje, former Ra'is-ul-Ulema, head of the Muslim Community of former Yugoslavia
19. **Anonymous respondent**, member of the international community, who worked in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a few years

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## **Annex 1: Questionnaire (standard version)**

Location:

Date:

Interviewers:

Respondents:

### **Introduction:**

Knowledge Forum of Religion and Development

This study must ultimately lead to policy suggestions for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Dutch NGO's

Introduction of the interviewers

We would like to start talking about the conflict that took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1991 and 1995.

### **Actors:**

Which leaders have had most impact on the inter-religious dialog?

Which leaders have had a constructive role in facilitating inter-religious dialog, and which have had a destructive role?

### **Activities:**

Which constructive activities concerning inter-religious dialog have the religious leaders undertaken?

Which destructive activities?

By which leader?

### **Development over time**

Did the frequency of activities related to inter-religious dialogue increase or decrease during the period between 1991-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

How did this development differ on a national level from the local level?

What was the cause of this difference?

What is the effect of the intensity of the conflict on the inter-religious dialogue?

### **General role of religion:**

Generally speaking, what would you say was the effect of religion on the conflict?

For example in terms of intensity?

Are religious communities part of the problem or of the solution?

### **General impact**

Generally speaking, what was the impact of inter-religious dialogue?

Is there any worth in inter-religious dialog?

What can you expect from a religious leader in an ethnic conflict?

### **Spoiler versus supporter**

Which factors lead a religious leader to be supporter versus a spoiler?

- Minority versus majority
- External pressure
- Perception of history

- Fear of losing influence
- Hierarchical structure
- Support from the international community

**Local context:**

What is the effect of dependence on politics of religious leaders on the inter-religious dialogue?

What is the effect of the relationship that the religious groups had before eruption of the conflict on inter-religious dialogue?

What is the effect of a leader being a national versus a local leader inter-religious dialogue?

What is the effect of a religious leader being the leader of a minority or a majority group?

What is the effect of a humanitarian unit within a religious group on inter-religious dialogue?

**International community:**

How can religious leaders be externally supported in order to initiate change?

Which external actor can best support religious leaders as drivers of change?

What is the effect of an international organization as mediator inter-religious dialogue?

How can the international community best respond to spoilers?

What can the diplomats do? Is the religious identity of the NGO an advantage or a disadvantage?

## **Annex 2: Examples of activities of inter-religious dialogue realized by the World Council of Churches**

The World Council of Churches listed the information on activities related to inter-religious dialogue on the Balkans during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-1995). The listed activities thus represent an example of activities to illustrate the meetings and other activities that took place. An exhaustive list was beyond the scope of this study. Great thanks go to Mr. Huibert van Beek who went through the trouble to make this overview.

### **Activities of inter-religious dialogue on the Balkans (1991-1995)**

#### 1991

Two appeals for a peaceful solution of the conflict between Serbia and Croatia signed by Patriarch Pavle and Cardinal Kuharic (check the dates).

#### 2.7.1991

Letter of the WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Emilio Castro to Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Hodosi of the Christian Reformed Church (Voivodina) and Bishop Beredi of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church (Voivodina) expressing deep concern at the outbreak of the war between Serbia and Croatia and offering WCC assistance.

#### September 1991

At the invitation of the WCC, visit of a delegation from Serbia (Bishop Irinej, Orthodox, Bishop Hodosi, Reformed, Bishop Beredi, Lutheran) and Croatia (Bishop Koksa, Catholic) to Geneva at the time of the meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC. The delegation addresses the Central Committee and has a confidential meeting with WCC leadership. Observation : all call for end of violence and peaceful solution but deep-seated mutual accusations between the Orthodox and Catholic representatives e.g. referring to the events during World War II (for the first time since more than forty years things are being said openly).

#### December 1991 – January 1992

First WCC visit to Serbia (Novi Sad and Belgrade). Meetings with representatives of the Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and Methodist churches.

#### 23.1.1992

At the initiative of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) the Commission for Encounter and Dialogue of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the former Yugoslave Conference of Bishops (Catholic) meet in St. Gallen, Switzerland. The meeting is held in the spirit of the First European Ecumenical Assembly on « Peace with Justice » in 1989 in Basel in which the two churches took part and which affirmed strongly the non-violent resolution of conflict.

#### June – July 1992

WCC visit to Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia

#### September 1992

CEC visit to Serbia

#### 23.9.1992

At the initiative of CEC and CCEE, Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Cardinal Kuharic of the Catholic Church in Croatia meet at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the WCC, near Geneva. In spite of many efforts the Ra'is-ul-Ulema Jakub Selimoski is unable to attend. This is the third time Pavle and Kuharic meet each other (previous meetings in May and August 1992 in Yugoslavia). They issue a call to 1) stop violence, 2) release prisoners of war, and 3) cessation of ethnic cleansing.

#### December 1992

Ecumenical Women's Team visit to Croatia. Meetings with church-related and secular women's groups.

#### 26.1 – 2.2.1993

Visit of a team of the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland to Serbia and Croatia.

#### February 1993

WCC – CEC visit to Serbia and Bosnia. Report : Their Homeland a Desolation.

#### March 1993

Visit of a church delegation from Norway and Sweden to Serbia and Croatia.

#### 24.4 – 11.5.1993

WCC – CIMADE Team visit to Bosnia. Aim : contact the churches and other faith groups in Bosnia and gather information (CIMADE is the ecumenical agency of the Protestant and Orthodox churches in France).

#### May 1993

Visit of the General Secretaries of the WCC (Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser) and the CEC (Mr. Jean Fischer) to Serbia.

#### 8 – 10.12.1993

Meeting in Pécs, Hungary, of Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim leaders organized by the Conference of European Churches with the support of the CCEE and participation of the WCC. The Muslim delegation from Bosnia is unable to attend. Issues discussed :

- protection of minorities
- reconciliation through the media and multi-cultural education
- practical humanitarian cooperation
- inter-religious prayers for peace
- spreading of information and knowledge of the international humanitarian and human rights instruments

This meeting is part of a broad, long-term effort of the CEC to set up an Ecumenical Round Table for former Yugoslavia which would include Muslim and Jewish representatives.

#### January 1994

Second CIMADE visit to Bosnia.

#### During 1994

Cooperation of the WCC with the Balkan Peace Team of the Historic Peace Churches (Mennonites, Brethren etc). The Balkan Peace Team organizes training sessions with local community groups.

#### 25-27.2.94

Meeting in Montreux, Switzerland organized by the Commission on International Affairs of the WCC. Aim: bring together a high-level group of individuals from various

backgrounds to reflect on 1) the nature of the conflict, 2) solutions for the settlement of the conflict, and 3) the role of the churches and the WCC. Present among others : Dutch Ambassador Edy Korthals Altes, Lous Joinet (Elysée), Bertrand Ramcharan (UN Human Rights Commission), Jan ter Laak (Pax Christi). Korthals Altes presents his call for a special initiative of the European Union aiming at a durable solution guaranteed by economic viability for all parties. Follow-up meeting on 2.5.1994 in Geneva.

#### 17.5.94

Meeting of Russian Patriarch Alexei II, Serbian Patriarch Pavle, Archbishop Cardinal Franjo Kuharic and Bishop Koksa at the airport of Sarajevo. Ra'is-ul-Ulema Dr Mustafa Ceric refuses to join the meeting for the following reason : Patriarch Pavle blessed the Serbian military and did not condemn the crimes committed by them in Bosnia Herzegovina. The meeting results in the appeal for peace called the « Sarajevo Declaration » which insisted that « this was the last moment to understand that only a peaceful and just solution can bring happiness to the people ». Cardinal Kuharic goes to see the Ra'is-ul-Ulema on the next day, 18<sup>th</sup> May to report to him on the meeting.

#### 10 – 14 May 1994

WCC staff visit to Serbia. The report points to a growing concern about the pro-Serbian government attitude of some of the leading Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the subsequent tensions between these leaders and the Protestant leadership in Germany, the Netherlands, UK and Switzerland.

#### 30.5 – 2.6.1994

Women's Consultation on Peace in Former Yugoslavia jointly organized by the WCC Women's Desk, Lutheran World Federation Women's Desk and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

#### 24.6.1994

The Dean of the Catholic Theological Faculty of Ljubljana takes an initiative to resume the meetings between the Catholic Theological Faculties of Zagreb and Ljubljana and the Orthodox Theological Faculty of Belgrade which began in 1972 and of which the last one was held in 1992. The Dean of the Orthodox Faculty in Belgrade responds positively.

#### 12 – 18.10 1994

Joint CCEE – CEC delegation of Bishops to Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. The Communiqué calls on the churches and faith communities to 1) respect their neighbors, 2) refuse all violence, 3) promote dialogue, and 4) seek and accept reconciliation.

#### 12 – 14.11.1994

Confidential meeting organized by the WCC and CEC with a delegation of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Ecumenical Partners (Nordic countries, Germany, UK, Switzerland, USA etc.) to discuss controversial issues and the nature and role of the ecumenical fellowship.

#### November 1994

Ecumenical Women's Team visit to Serbia (Sandzak, Kosovo).

#### 3 – 5.12.1994

Roundtable in Pecs (Hungary) on Multicultural Education (follow-up of the December 1993 meeting in Pecs).

27 - 29.11.1995

Ecumenical Dialogue meeting on Reconciliation, organized by the CEC and the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade.