

6-1999

Muslim Community in the Republic of Croatia

Neven Duvnjak

Institute of Social Sciences Iva Pilar- Center Split (Croatia)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Duvnjak, Neven (1999) "Muslim Community in the Republic of Croatia," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol19/iss3/2>

This Article, Exploration, or Report is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Muslim Community in the Republic of Croatia

by Neven Duvnjak

Mr. Neven Duvnjak is Junior Assistant at the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar - Center Split (Croatia). Currently he is working on the project "Religious Communities in Croatia and Their Role in Integrative Processes". He is an M. A. Candidate in Sociology of Religion at the University of Zagreb. Mr. Duvnjak is a member of World Conference on Religion and Peace - Europe (Croatian Chapter), and Association for Religious Liberties in Croatia. His professional interests are Sociology of Religion, Religious Freedom and Human Rights, Religious Communities and Social Justice, Inter-religious relations, Relations between Church and State.

1. A brief history

The first mention of Muslims on Croatian territory dates back long before the Turkish invasions. Hungarian historic sources mention the presence of Muslims in the region of East Slavonia and West Srijem at the beginning of the XIIth century, while an Arabian-Persian chronicler *Biruni* mentions Muslims living in Dalmatia, in the area between the cities of Šibenik and Zadar in the XIth century¹. It should be mentioned that the Muslims inhabiting parts of Croatia before the Turkish invasions were few and that Islam started spreading over Bosnia and, to a lesser degree over Croatia, at the time of the Turkish invasions.

When speaking of the process of Islamization in the area of ex Yugoslavia (especially in Bosnia), at the time of the Turkish invasions, the sociologist of religion Esad Čimič mentions that before the arrival of the Turks, there could be talk only of a religious, never of an ethnic division, so he goes on to mention the division into three main confessions that existed in this area, the division between the Catholics, Orthodox and the Bogumils. After the arrival of Turks, a number of adherents of these confessions,

¹ See more about this in: Ševko OMERBAŠIĆ, *Najstariji islamski zapis o Islamu i muslimanima u Hrvatskoj (The oldest Arabian written document on Islam and Muslims in Croatia)*, Behar 37/1997.

for various reasons and motives, accepted Islam. The most intense process of Islamization took place immediately after the arrival of the Turks.²

Dr. Adem Handžić points out three major moments in the Islamization of Bosnia: a) chaotic political and general social circumstances found by the Turks on occupied territory; b) economic benefits based on religious Muslim laws and canonical rules imparted to new Muslims; c) dissatisfaction and resistance of the followers of the Bosnian Church towards Christian Orthodoxy to which they belonged formally during the takeover by the Turks.³ According to Muhamed Hadžijahić, the Muslims (Bosniacs today) stemmed from the ancient Bosnian Bogumils, new arrivals from surrounding Croat and Serb territories, from Orthodox and Catholic converts from Bosnia and from non-Slavic new arrivals from various Islamic countries.⁴

The first official data on the number of Muslims in Croatia comes from a registry of inhabitants in 1910 where only 204 Muslims were recorded, mainly in larger towns like Zagreb, Osijek, and Karlovac. During the First World War (from 1914 to 1918), their number increased to 3,145, while in 1931 Croatia registered 4,750 Muslims.

The year of 1912 is of great importance for the history of Muslims in Croatia, because the Austrian Imperial Council brought a special law granting Islam the status of a religion equal to all others in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Not long after that, this decision was confirmed by the Croatian Parliament, which passed a law on April 27, 1916 granting Islam the status of a recognised religion in Croatia. This law made it possible for Muslims to practice their religious beliefs in public, organise religious, cultural, educational and funding institutions, as well as providing the right to manage

² Esad ČIMIČ, *Socijalno-duhovni doseg islamizacije – Skica sociološkog promišljanja povijesne retrospektive (Social-spiritual reach of Islamization – A sketch of sociological reflection on a historic retrospective)* in: Mustafa Cerić (ur.), *Problems of a contemporary approach to Islam (The Second Symposium Anthology – 1409/1989), The Islamic community Zagreb, Zagreb, 1990, page 128.*

³ Adem HANDŽIĆ, *Tuzla i njena okolina u XVI vijeku. (Tuzla and its surroundings in the XVI century)*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1975, page 122.

⁴ Muhamed HADŽIJAHIĆ, *Od tradicije do indentiteta. (From tradition to Identity)*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1974, page 90.

these institutions independently. The Islamic community was unorganised in Croatia until 1915, when the Military Imam came to power. As Ševko Omerbašić points out, it was this institution of the military Imam, which later grew to form the structure of the Islamic Community in Croatia. After the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in Zagreb in 1919, the Islamic Office was established, headed at the time by the military Imam of the period, Ismet Muftić. This office started the first religious instruction in Zagreb, while the prayers were conducted in a large military barracks. In 1935, within the Zagreb County Court, a religious Muslim Judge started working on family and inheritance problems in line with the Muslim religious Law. The Judge was assigned his own quarters the same year in Zagreb, which was later to be turned into the first Zagreb Mosque, a place for the Imam's living quarters and for religious instruction.

When the independent state of Croatia (NDH) was established, the head of state Ante Pavelić, ordered a new location to be found for building a new mosque. Soon after that it was decided that it would be the Art Pavilion, a building in the very centre of Zagreb. The building was reconstructed; three minarets were added and, according to Š. Omerbašić, the most beautiful European Mosque came to be.⁵

With the end of World War II and the coming of Communists to power, the attitude towards religion and religious communities drastically changed. In 1947, the minarets of the Zagreb Mosque were brought down, and the building was turned into the Socialistic Revolution Museum. After several unsuccessful attempts, finally in 1979 the Zagreb City Hall suggested several locations for the new Mosque. The construction was started in 1981 in a new part of the town and was ceremoniously opened in 1987. It is one of the largest Mosques in Europe (3,000 believers can attend prayers) and of exquisite architectural beauty. Aside from this magnificent mosque in Zagreb and another mosque in the village of Gunja, there are only prayer places elsewhere in Croatia.

Among other historic events, it is important to mention the one in 1987 when the Council of the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia reinstated

⁵ Part of history quoted from: *Hrvatski leksikon*, Svezak I. (*The Croatian Lexicon*, Volume I), Naklada Leksikon, Zagreb, 1996, pages 508-509, remark: Islamic Community, author Ševko Omerbašić.

the office of Imam for Croatia and Slovenia, electing Ševko Omerbašić as Imam. The High Council in ex Yugoslavia brought a new Constitution of the Community enabling it to establish the Meshihat in Croatia and Slovenia. This made the Islamic Community in Croatia independent, chaired by the Islam Community Board, the Council and the Meshihat as the main religious bodies. Still, as the Muslims in Croatia are mainly descendants of Bosnian origin, the Islamic Community follows in the footsteps of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Community, and their religious authority, the *reis-ul-ulema*.

1.1. The number of Muslims in Croatia as registered between 1931 and 1991

As we stated in the introduction, according to the census updated in 1931, there were 4,750 Muslims in Croatia. In Zagreb 1,239 were recorded. The first count after World War II that took place in 1946 recorded only 1,077 Muslims. According to the population data dating from 1953, their number grew substantially and reached 16,185 only to fall down to 3,113 in the population count of 1961. This decrease in number in the period between 1953 and 1961 can be explained through the fact that at the time, a substantial number of Muslims by faith proclaimed themselves Croats or Yugoslavs by nationality.

At this point it is necessary to mention an event of crucial importance for the status of Muslims in ex Yugoslavia. In 1971, communist Yugoslavia recognized *Muslims by faith as Muslims by nationality*, thus making a move without precedence. Dr. Smail Balić believes that this, in a sense, meant the recognition of the Bosnian identity, but in an extremely irritating form, because -- in his opinion -- this was an abuse of the religious name. The mentioned change was conducted without consulting the Islamic Community. This unusual fact that religious affiliation automatically became one's nationality was reflected in the increased number of Muslims in the following population counts:

- In 1971 there were 18,487 persons of Muslim nationality recorded.
- In 1981 the number grew to 23,470.
- The last count in 1991 shows 43,468 Muslims in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

Currently the Islamic Community estimates that 28,000 families in Croatia belong to Islam, so that the number of Muslim believers is estimated to be above 100,000.

The Serb aggression on Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, beside enormous loss of human lives and great destruction has caused great migrations and changes of residence. A great number of Bosniacs were exiled and found refuge in Croatia, mostly in refugee centers. This is why it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of Bosniacs residing temporarily or permanently in the Republic of Croatia. An accurate picture can be painted only by a new population count, which is planned for the near future.

2. The status of Bosniacs in the Republic of Croatia from 1990 till today

In this section I would like to reflect on the current position of Bosniacs permanently in residence in Croatia, specifically their ethnic and religious rights. Although at this point I have no wish to get involved in the ethnogenesis of contemporary Bosniacs, it is necessary to point out that, in various historic circumstances, the Muslims were claimed by both the Croat and the Serb side as members of the Croat or Serb nation, but practising a different religion. Depending on political interests, this thesis was, more or less publicly emphasized. To illustrate, during the independent state of Croatia in the Second World War, the Muslims were proclaimed to be "the blossom of the Croat people". Similar statements were heard in the early nineties, to be exact, during the pre-election campaign of certain Croatian political parties, like the Croatian Democratic Community and the Croatian Rights Party. It was not unusual at such gatherings to see the Croat and the Muslim flags tied together in a knot, supposedly symbolising the union of Croats and Muslims in the midst of the political turmoil.

This political union to a certain extent existed during the Serbian aggression on Croatia, when a significant part of Bosnian-Muslims enlisted for the defence of Croatia. The situation changed fundamentally when the war started in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. In 1993 a short, but an exceptionally brutal war erupted between the Croats and the Bosniacs with tragic and lasting consequences for both peoples and both states.

Regardless of the fact that I personally consider this the greatest strategic mistake of Croatian politics, I do not wish to engage in a political discussion of who is to blame for this conflict. What should be pointed out is, that Croatian politics did not show a consistent and clear attitude towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. The establishment of the Croatian Community of Herzeg-Bosnia, with all the attributes of a state, in the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina mostly populated by Croats, was viewed by both the Bosnian and the international community, as well as parts of Croatian public and Croatian opposition, as an attempt to divide the territory of an internationally recognized state and as an attempt to change the borders. That is how Croatia started losing the status of a victim of aggression in the eyes of the international community and gradually came to be called to justice for its policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. This policy brought great political and economic loss not only to Croatia, but also to Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in mixed communities in the central parts of Bosnia, so that a great number of Croats had to move out.

With the end of atrocities, after the Washington and Dayton agreements, and after the establishment of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, things simmered down, although political tension and distrust remained on both sides. A lot of effort will be needed by both sides to ease this relationship into an improved and a permanently safer coexistence among the Bosniacs and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The tragic events in Bosnia were reflected, in a way, on the position of Bosniacs-Muslims in the Republic of Croatia. I will, therefore, reflect on the main problems that they, as a national and religious minority, have to face in Croatia today. First of all, it is necessary to say a few words about the constitutional status of Bosniacs-Muslims in Croatia, because this has become one of the greatest problems in the relationship between the majority -- the Croat people -- on one side, and the Bosnian minority on the other.

The fundamental parts of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia passed in 1990 say on this topic: *"The Republic of Croatia is founded as a national state of the Croat people and other peoples and minorities which are their citizens: Serbs, Muslims, Slovenians, Chehs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews and others. All are guaranteed equality with the citizens of Croatian nationality in practising their national right in*

accordance with democratic norms of the UN and the other free countries.” So, in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia from 1990, the Muslims were mentioned as a separate autochthonous national minority living in Croatia. Alas, on December 12, 1997, the Croatian Parliament proclaimed the law on changes and additions to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. Among others, a change was made to the third item of the fundamental provisions so that the changed Constitution mentions only the following minorities: Serbs, Chehs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Rusins, and others. The Muslims and the Slovenians were not listed among the minorities any more. This change induced a negative reaction among the members of the Bosniac national minority and the Islamic Community, with official reactions of their representatives soon to follow. For example, the high Imam of Zagreb, Dževad ef. Hodžić gave an interview⁶ where he offered his opinion that the authorities, by removing the Muslim (or rather Bosniac) name from the Constitution delivered a message to the effect that Bosniacs-Muslims in Croatia cannot survive as a national minority and are faced with either an assimilation or return to Bosnia and Herzegovina. He used the opportunity to express wonder at such a change because, after the Serbs, the Bosniacs constitute the second largest national minority in Croatia.

A reminder is necessary at this point concerning the Bosniacs Council held on September 29, 1993 in Sarajevo. The name Bosniac was introduced then, referring to the Bosnian people, and this was confirmed by the Bosnian Parliament, later to be entered into the fundamental law of the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina. I believe that Croatia too should accept this important change and honor the existence of a Bosnian nation and the right of people to feel and pronounce themselves as Bosniacs, regardless of whether they live in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Croatia. That would be a major contribution to improving the relationship between the two states, as well as between the Croats and those Croatian citizens who feel they belong to the Bosnian nationality and accept that name. It will be interesting to see, at the next population count, how many Croatian citizens, who had proclaimed themselves to be Muslims in 1991, now accept the name Bosniacs, and how many of them will claim to be Croats practising Islam.

⁶ *Feral Tribune* dated March 2, 1998, page 11

Beside the mentioned Constitutional change which had erased the Muslims as a national minority, certain problems and misunderstandings occurred on other levels of public and religious life. The building of a mosque in town of Rijeka, for example, stirred up public opinion somewhat. The local authorities, namely, insisted that the mosque be built without the minarets, which was absolutely unacceptable to the Islamic Community. The President of the Islamic Community Meshihat in Croatia Ševko ef. Omerbašić remarked that a mosque without minarets would be the same as a Catholic Church without a belfry and refused to consider building a mosque as requested by the local authorities. In his opinion, the future mosque should be a Mediterranean type of a mosque which would best blend into the city skyline and would in no way disrupt its looks⁷. It seems that this dispute will soon be resolved to the satisfaction of both sides.

Besides the problem with the building of the mosque in Rijeka, which has drawn a lot of public attention and was discussed in numerous Croatian media, the Islamic Community representatives in Croatia point out some other problems concerning the religious and secular life of Bosniacs in Croatia. Namely, the Islamic Community has offered its own set of proposed contracts with the state, but has not yet received a reply from the relevant institutions, the State Committee for Relations with Religious Communities to be precise. The Catholic Church is the only one that has resolved its relationship with the state so far so that the Islamic Community points out that it cannot accept the excuse of the state that it is busy solving the relationship with the Catholic Church and therefore cannot settle the relationship with other religious communities functioning in Croatia. The Islamic Community wants to sign the contracts with the state as soon as possible to legalize its existence and work, so that it can provide its followers with the services they require.

Because of this unsettled relationship between the Islamic Community and the state, numerous matters remain open, for example the legalisation of the Muslim secondary religious school in Zagreb. The relevant institution for this is the Ministry of Education, but it has not yet solved the mentioned problem. Furthermore, there is the matter of a permit for changing a building owned by the Islamic Community in the town

⁷ *Feral Tribune* dated November 28, 1998, page 38

of Sisak, into space for religious practice. According to city authorities the problem of the permit is due to proposed changes in the urban plan of the city.⁸

Certain representatives of the Islamic Community point out that when workers are laid off, Bosniacs are underprivileged, but I think this is something that should by all means be verified because in the complex economical situation Croatia is in now, a lot of people have lost their jobs. The next problem is even more delicate and is tied to the already mentioned constitutional changes that have resulted in the erasure of Muslims as a national minority. According to imam Hodžič, new-borns are refused registry in the population records as members of the Bosnian nationality with the explanation given that "Muslims" were erased from the Constitution, so that they do not exist as such in Croatia. Another problem seems to occur in the Croatian Army. Namely, in accordance with the contract signed between the Holy See and the Croatian Government, Catholic priests look after the spiritual needs of soldiers. Also, when the oath is taken, the priest blesses all the soldiers, Muslims included. There are reports of situations when Muslim soldiers are not permitted to attend prayers on religious holidays.

In ef. Hodžič's opinion, religious freedom is limited in hospitals, prisons and similar institutions where no provision has been made for the religious practice of Muslims. A similar problem appears in elementary and secondary schools in Croatia where confessional religious instruction has been introduced but no provision has been made for conducting the specific Muslim prayer rituals. Since the greatest number of children in schools are Catholics, there are cases of Catholic songs being sung and Catholic holidays being celebrated with children of other religions, including Islam, participating and nobody warns them that they do not have to participate in such activities. Eating in public restaurants sometimes becomes a problem if occasionally there is no alternative to pork, which is forbidden to Muslims.⁹

In a word, the representatives of the Islamic Community in Croatia point out that the Muslims in Croatia today do not feel well, are worried about their existence, their

⁸ *Slobodna Dalmacija* dated February 11, 1999, page 7

⁹ This topic is discussed in some detail by Dževad ef. Hodžič. See *Feral Tribune* dated March 2, 1998, page 11

identity and their future. They feel deprived and sometimes even scared and point out that this is mainly the result of being erased from the Constitution as a national minority. Bosniac representatives believe that the deteriorated relationship between the Croats and Bosniacs is the result of wrong political decisions taken by the current Croatian government, which has insufficient understanding for Bosniacs and which still has an unclear and often a negative attitude towards the Bosniac nation and its name. Almost all agree that the true source of all these disagreements lies in the unfortunate and unnecessary Croat-Muslim confrontation in Bosnia & Herzegovina in 1993 mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, the Bosniacs in Croatia point out that they will not accept the current situation and place at the top of their list the demand to return the Bosniacs as a national minority to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. The Bosniacs in Croatia claim that they are deeply rooted in the Croat society where they have been living for many years now. Many Bosniacs-Muslims have an important role in society and participate greatly in the industry, culture and science of Croatia. A point of interest is the fact that 10% of all the Croat scientists are Muslims. Imam Hodžić claims that the Bosniacs built Croatia, invested in it, defended it, and will not give it up as their homeland.

There are also positive examples from the Croat side in regard to Bosniacs. Despite the mistakes of the current Croat government and its policies towards the Muslims and the Bosniacs, it should be stressed that Croatia gave shelter to thousands of Bosniacs and provided for them throughout the great Serbian aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina and during the whole war. Even during the Croat-Bosniac conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosnian refugees in Croatia did not have major difficulties and the state continued to care for them.

Regardless of the described problems, it should be said that there are grounds for hope of a better relationship between Croats and Bosniacs in the near future. This optimism is based on the nature of Islam as we see it in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. First of all, this region has a tradition of several centuries of co-existence between Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox, or Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs. Living together meant continuous interaction between them, so that the Islamic culture had an influence

on Catholic culture and vice versa. This point is stressed by Esad Čimić who claims that with the passage of time the Muslims and the Catholics were directed to each other more and more, not only so that they could protect themselves from a mutual enemy, but to make use of whatever they could learn from each other's civilization and culture¹⁰. When describing the nature of this Islam, the same author believes that this religion is no intruder in Christian Europe; on the contrary, it should be considered a social benefit, one more civilisation and culture enriching its surroundings. Therefore, religious, cultural and civilizational pluralism should be considered as a treasure, a rare gem, not the source of tension and conflict.

So, the Muslims who live surrounded by Christians in this part of Europe have the advantage of being open to each other and the influence of the European cultural context in such a way as to enrich their own culture with new elements, and yet – simultaneously – as to maintain their essence and their religious concept intact. Or, as Prof. Čimić says: "... remain Muslims in the full meaning of the word, and yet be Europeans."¹¹ A possible harmony of the Islamic faith and the European cultural context could bring a new quality, which could be accepted as an example by Muslims living in other parts of the world.

It is encouraging to hear the high representatives of the Islamic Community in Croatia speak. For example, Ševko ef. Omerbašić continuously and consistently promotes the acceptance of certain values that are fundamental in modern western societies, such as honoring human rights and the necessity of a democracy as an order with no alternative. Speaking of democracy in Muslim countries, he believes that the Muslim world has lost the most in the area of democracy because in numerous countries of the Islamic world there are autocratic and dictatorial regimes in power. Omerbašić says: "If democracy were introduced in the Islamic world, it wouldn't be long before all the outdated in that world would disappear and the breach between East and West and

¹⁰ Esad ČIMIĆ, *Bosanska raskrižja. (Bosnian Crossroads), Društvena istraživanja 6/1994*, page 618

¹¹ Ibid. page 618

between these two civilizations would diminish.”¹² As far as the Croats and the Bosniacs are concerned, he believes that their relationship, throughout history, shows that there is no deep inter-religious inter-national intolerance rooted there, and that the disagreements are the result of the Croat-Bosniac war and the atmosphere of intolerance which existed then and which was enhanced by the media and the politicians.

This is why the appearance of Islamic Fundamentalism, which was known to appear in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and which is feared by many in Europe, should be viewed as an incident that does not belong to the Islamic tradition and culture as we see in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is the context within which Dr. Smail Balič mentions the appearance of Fundamentalism in Bosnia first of all as a result of the struggle for survival. Namely, some of the Islamic organisations providing humanitarian aid brought such ideas and had a certain influence on the population. Still, Balič believes that such events will disappear with the development of industry and the rise of the standard of living among the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina because fundamentalistic ideas are not inbred to Bosnian Muslims.¹³

It is obvious that there are more uniting than separating elements between Croats and Bosniacs, or between Catholics and Muslims. That is why it would be good to forget the language of hate on all levels of society, and especially in all the media, because it is intolerance which separates. Instead, numerous civilizational, cultural and religious values which unite these two peoples and these two religions should be pointed out. Mutual life is possible only if mutual differences are accepted.

3. Results of a socio-religious survey: relationship between Croats-Catholics and Bosniacs-Muslims and Serbs-Orthodox

In this section I will reflect on the results of a survey conducted and processed for the *Franciscan Institute for the Culture of Peace* from Split. The survey was

¹² *Feral Tribune* dated November 28, 1998, page 39

¹³ Dr. Smail BALIČ, *Povijesni značaj islama za jugoistočnu Evropu (s poebnim osvrtom na Bosnu)*. (*The Historic Value of Islam for Southeastern Europe*) (with a separate reflection on Bosnia), *Behar* 37/1997.

conducted among the Catholic population in seven Franciscan provinces in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, encompassing **498 believers**. The questionnaire was extensive and consisted of 125 questions relating to different aspects of religious life. For this occasion, I have extracted several questions relating to the relationship between Croats-Catholics and Bosniacs-Muslims and Serbs-Orthodox, as well as the opinions on the role of religious communities in the war on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina. It should be noted that this was one of the first surveys in Croatia after the war ended, so that the data is very significant.

The following questions and replies refer to the attitude of Catholics toward the Serb Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community, as two leading religious communities functioning on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, as well as the believers of the named religious communities. The opinions and attitudes of Catholics on this topic become even more important and valuable in light of the recently finished war and the fact that there are two different opinions existing in public about the role of religious communities during the war in Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, as well as the fact that much is expected of them in the after-war period when it is necessary to preserve the peace and rebuild the trust among people.

The relationship of Catholics towards members of the Serbian Orthodox Church: every other polled Catholic (51.2%) believes that their belonging to the Orthodox Church should be respected, every fourth believer (26.1%) believes that they deserve respect as human beings. If we look at these facts together, we see that the majority of Catholics (77.3%) has a principally positive attitude towards Orthodox believers. 8.2% of the polled believers think that the Orthodox believers are not to be trusted, 6.2% of them are indifferent, and 6.8% avoid them. An unmistakably negative attitude is present in 1.0% of the believers who have stated that they hate Orthodox Church believers. Men are more tolerant towards the Orthodox than the women because 57.6% of the men believes that their religion should be honoured, while a somewhat smaller number of women (48.2%) believe the same. At the same time 3.8% of the men claim that they avoid believers of the Orthodox Church, while the same is done by 8.3% women.

The relationship of Catholics towards members of the Islamic Community: their religion is respected by 43% of the polled Catholics, 31.7% believe that they should be respected as human beings. 7.8% believe that they are not to be trusted, and 8.2% are indifferent. 6.8% avoid them, and 1.8% hate them. Here too men are more tolerant than women: 48.7% men respect their religion, compared with 40.2% women. Twice as many women (10.1%) than men (4.4%) state that they are indifferent towards members of the Islamic Community.

Those polled in most cases are not prepared for marriage with believers of the other religions. 73.7% would not like to have for a spouse a member of the Orthodox Church, and every fifth believer replied with a “don’t know”. Men are more ready to marry an Orthodox (12.0%) than women (only 3.3%). Age relative data is interesting:
Table 1

Would you choose a member of the Serb Orthodox Church for a spouse if his/her other features were satisfactory?

Age	Yes	No	Don't know
between 18 and 30 years of age	6.0%	66.8%	26.6%
between 31 and 40 years of age	4.8%	85.5%	8.4%
between 41 and 50 years of age	5.4%	75.3%	19.4%
between 51 and 60 years of age	7.4%	77.8%	13.6%
61 and more	5.8%	73.1%	17.3%

The youngest group of believers has the least negative attitude towards marrying a member of the SOC, but it is also interesting to notice that the greatest number of them does not have a firm opinion, so they have the greatest number of “don’t knows”.

The distance is somewhat greater when it comes to Muslims, so that 81.3% of the polled would not marry a member of the Islamic Community, 13.3% is undecided

and has replied with “don’t know”, while only 3.8% would enter marriage with a Muslim.

Men are, once more, more tolerant. Although the total number of Catholics who are prepared to marry a Muslim is very small, there are more men (8.3%) than women (1.8%) willing to do so.

Something more should be said about the replies according to age:

Table 2

Would you choose a member of the Islamic Community for a spouse if his/her other features were satisfactory?

Age	Yes	No	Don't know
between 18 and 30 years of age	2.7%	77.0%	18.6%
between 31 and 40 years of age	3.6%	94.0%	2.4%
between 41 and 50 years of age	4.3%	79.6%	16.1%
between 51 and 60 years of age	3.7%	84.0%	11.1%
61 and more	5.8%	78.8%	9.6%

Compared to others, the Catholic believers between 31 and 40 years of age have the most pronounced negative attitude towards mutual life with a Muslim, while again the greatest indecision and a certain tolerance is shown by the younger believers (between 18 and 30 years of age) and older believers (61 and more).

The next question refers to the opinion of believers on the role of the three religious communities active in the area infested by the war.

Table 3

What part did the religious communities play in the war on our territory, in Croatia and B&H?

	Catholic Church	Serb Orthodox Church	Islam Community

No part what-so-ever	15.1%	6.0%	8.2%
Calmed the conflict	70.3%	3.2%	6.8%
Stirred conflicts	2.0%	55.0%	32.3%
don't know	12.0%	34.9%	51.4%

The Serb Orthodox Church did not fare well among the polled believers, so that more than half of them think that it instigated conflicts. The same negative opinion about the Islamic Community is present with every third believer, but it is interesting to note that more than half chose to reply with “don't know”. This could indicate that they are not well informed (especially believers in Croatia) about the role of the Islamic Community in the events of war, especially in the territory of B&H. Finally, it is necessary to point out that the polled believers have a very positive opinion on the Catholic Church and mostly believe that it was instrumental in simmering down the war conflict (70.3%).

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to provide a short historic introduction and to show what the position of Muslims – Bosniacs is like in contemporary Croatia. It was my major concern to point out the problems which they, as a national and religious minority, are faced with in Croatia, as well as to reflect on the comments of representatives of the Islamic Community addressed to the current Croatian government and politics. Although the picture drawn might look somewhat simple and pessimistic, I believe that it is necessary to stress the fact that the position of Bosniacs and Muslim believers in Croatia today is worse than it was, for example in the early 1990s at the time of the formation of the Croat state.

It is my belief that the relationship between Croats and Bosniacs in Croatia should be improved, but the same applies to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Croats and Bosniacs have lived side by side for centuries and the geopolitical location of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that these two states are directed one towards the

other not only because of territorial, but communicational, economic and security reasons as well. In this light, the bases for improving the relationship should be the Washington and Dayton Agreements, as well as the tradition of living side by side for so long.

It is to be hoped that the changes in Croatian politics and further democratization of Croatian society will create a different political and social atmosphere and that the attitude towards Bosniacs and Muslim believers will change, so that the trust and mutual respect damaged today will be restored once again.