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Religion as a Conversation Starter

Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans

INA MERDJANOVA
AND PATRICE BRODEUR



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We dedicate this book to all the peacebuilders in the Balkans.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War political bi-polarization on a global scale and the consequent resurgence of various nationalisms and localisms have raised important questions about the new world order. The issue of the renewed role of religion in many national political developments and international relations figures prominently. It has received various scholarly interpretations, ranging from the exploration of religion as 'the missing dimension of statecraft' (Johnston and Sampson 1994), to an overt and frequently less-than-nuanced onslaught on the secularization thesis, to the notorious 'clash of civilizations' argument (Huntington 1996). Whatever the methodological and epistemological merits of each of those theories may be, they share the understanding of the importance of the religious factor in the contemporary world and bring culture and religion back into the centre of political science and sociology, among many disciplines.

Why, after all, did religion gain such importance in the last two decades – both locally and globally? There is no easy and straightforward answer to this question. Religious identities have acquired renewed salience in many parts of the world, and this inevitably has made the re-emergence of religion more visible and pronounced. Frequently, violent conflicts have been justified by various religious motivations. The use of religious symbols, discourses and mythologies has often been appropriated by exclusivist political projects and instrumentalized for nationalist agendas. In other words, religion matters in our highly politicized world not just because faith is an important motivation and source of personal integrity for so many people around the globe, but particularly because religion and politics have been closely intertwined on so many occasions in recent history. We can see this in the cases when resistance against

communism in the 1980s consolidated around religious institutions in the East European countries such as Poland and the former Eastern Germany. Social scientists related this development to the lack of other available venues for the opposition to organize (Haynes 1998), while theologically tuned minds like Pope John Paul II declared triumphantly that ‘God has won in the East’.¹ Most authors however agreed that such cases make for a positive example of how religion has contributed to the cause of democratization, at least in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, the cases in which religion has played a part in and has been instrumentalized for instigating socio-political intolerance and separation seem to prevail, as has been evident in the Middle-East conflict between primarily Muslims and Jews, Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and India more broadly speaking, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and Sudan, to name but a few. While many of these examples predate the end of the Cold War, the greater influence of religious discourses in most of these conflicts became salient from the 1980s onwards.

As scholars of religion, we consider the use – and misuse – of religion to be part of the fluidity related to religious diversity throughout religious history. For us, religious diversity is a historical reality and religious worldviews are socially constructed, rather than a transcendently pre-ordained condition. Human divisions along Abrahamic religious lines have evolved around: (a) different sacred scriptures and theological interpretations about the nature of the Divine and its revelation in the world, as well as about the relationship between human beings and God; (b) different religious laws concerning the way members of a given society relate to each other and to the Divine, as well as the ensuing structures and hierarchies of power; (c) different cultural and ritual practices and (d) last but not the least, different historical and geopolitical developments.

Overall, we contend that religious fluidity and diversity *per se* are neutral and can be viewed as a potential source for both positive and negative developments, depending on the geopolitical, economic, social and cultural context, recognizing of course that what is ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ is itself very relative to the worldviews and interests of various individuals and identity groups. Thus, under particular circumstances religious plurality can lead to competition,

confrontation and contest, while under others it can contribute to a tolerant and mutually enriching coexistence. This fluidity of religion is intrinsically linked to what Appleby (2000) has aptly called ‘the ambivalence of the sacred’.

The modern practice of interreligious dialogue² is one way of responding to the increasing religious diversity in the world with the intention of contributing to more social harmony. Indeed, the value of interreligious dialogue has been widely acknowledged, particularly with regard to its potential for prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts, on the one hand, and to fostering a better understanding between individuals within a society, on the other. Yet, no commonly agreed-upon definition seems to have emerged in recent years, the concept being invested with various meanings, many of which are described in our first chapter.

Rather than choosing one definition already in existence, we suggest first differentiating between a narrow and a broader definition – both being our own, before emphasizing the latter. In the context of the recent history of interreligious dialogue, a narrow definition of interreligious dialogue could be: *human communication between religious leaders (often excluding or greatly reducing the participation of lay people and particularly of women) for the primary purpose of clarifying theological/philosophical similarities and differences.* In many cases, these encounters have led to the writing of various kinds of declarations and public statements, with specific but often limited impact. A broader definition of interreligious dialogue could be: *all forms of human communication both through speech and shared activities that help mutual understanding and cooperation between different people who self-identify religiously.* The former definition is more popular; the second is the result of our own experience prior and during the research we carried out for this book. We choose the latter because it includes all the different kinds of interreligious dialogue we have encountered or know about.

Interreligious dialogue has various levels (it can be carried out at the top, middle and/or grassroots levels) and dimensions (it can be subdivided into interreligious, intra-religious and interworldview dialogue). In addition, it can be oriented towards a particular group, defined in terms of age (for example, youth dialogue), gender

(for example, dialogue between women) or occupation (for example, dialogue between theologians/monastics/clergymen/lay people/scholars of religion). All these forms and variations do not exclude, but rather complement and reinforce each other, often overlapping in various ways.

One of our basic assumptions is that the best exemplary practices of interreligious dialogue in the Balkans have been achieved when a top-down approach (prioritized by most of the international agencies promoting dialogue in the Balkans) has been complemented by, and creatively combined with, grassroots interaction between mid-level clergy and laity from the different religious communities, including in particular women and youth. Moreover, encounters among the leaders of the religious communities, however important the hierarchical structures of the major religions are, cannot bring about sustainable positive changes in the attitudes towards religious 'others' without systematic efforts to empower and include the laity.

The following theoretical points can thus be made. First, in principle, interreligious dialogue is a response to religious pluralism, and not just to situations of conflict along religious lines. It arises out of the necessity to understand people coming from religious traditions other than one's own, to communicate better so as to foster mutual respect and recognition, thereby contributing to peacebuilding. Clearly, plurality of identities is not a source of religious conflict; intolerance is, especially in the forms of dogmatism and fanaticism. Poor education and ignorance about one's own religious tradition after four decades of atheistic ideology have created a fertile ground for dogmatism and fanaticism within religious communities in post-communist countries.

Second, interreligious dialogue is inherently related to the principle of toleration. A distinction, however, should be made between negative and positive tolerance. We understand 'negative tolerance' to be a position of pragmatic non-interference and bearing with difference, while 'positive tolerance' means not just enduring and putting up with religiously others, but engaging with and respecting the others for the value of their differences.

Third, an important barrier to interreligious dialogue remains the inequality in social power and influence (for example, majority versus minority religions) and the construction of national identity

around religious identification. The latter provides a clear example of a powerful interplay between religion and politics. Nationalism constructed around and fused with a specific religion is more often than not a formula for disaster, particularly in religiously plural societies.

During and especially since the end of the wars of secession in Yugoslavia, interreligious dialogue has become a central tool in the continuous international efforts to promote multicultural and multireligious societies in the Balkans. Numerous Western, and particularly North American, governmental and non-governmental, denominational and non-denominational organizations and institutions have engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, often using interreligious dialogue as a primary method in their activities and projects. Plenty of local NGOs followed suit. A couple of independent interreligious councils have been established to help resolve problems between the religious communities and to facilitate interdenominational cooperation in the cause of peace. In short, in less than two decades, interreligious relations in the Balkans have followed an uneven trajectory from stigmatization to stagnation to resuscitation.

In spite of this rapid increase in interreligious programs in the Balkans since the early 1990s, scholarly analyses of these interreligious peacebuilding activities have remained limited in number and scope.³ In addition, the field of interreligious dialogue and conflict transformation lacks proper assessment tools (Garfinkel 2004). To redress the first lacuna, we carried a three-year research project (2006–08) whose aim was to analyse comparatively various interreligious dialogues for peacebuilding initiatives towards reconciliation that took place in the Balkans between 1990 and 2008. While not exhaustive of all such activities, our efforts have sought to provide the reader with a broad sense of their diversity throughout this region of the world. As for the problem with the lack of proper assessment tools, we are only able to propose at the end of this book a recommendation as to how to go about developing such tools for implementation in the region.

This study is the first attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the present state of interreligious relations in Southeast Europe. We have sought to find out to what degree the seemingly fragile gains in

creating new and constructive interreligious relations have taken root in the Balkans. Such analysis has become urgent as outside help has dwindled in recent years and successful local takeovers of these interreligious programs seem rare.

Our research therefore focused on three goals. First, we identified the key actors and activities in the field of interreligious dialogue. Second, we analysed these activities in order to single out what we decided to call 'achievements' or 'exemplary practices'.⁴ An exemplary practice is one which has had a positive and sustainable, long-term impact on the state of interreligious relations and interactions in the Balkans, promoting better understanding between religious groups and enhancing the practical results and strategic functions of interreligious engagements, as reported especially by the individuals we have interviewed qualitatively. Striving for a balanced research, we also sought to identify what we call 'challenges': those activities which have had either ambiguous or negative effects, or no effect at all, on the improvement of interreligious relations as well as on civic understanding and cooperation. Third, we sought to identify current and future needs that would hopefully guide sustainable interreligious peacebuilding policies for this region of the world. They are summarized in a set of policy recommendations in the last chapter of this book.

The methodology of our research project varied according to its three distinct phases: data collection, analysis and identification of needs. The data-collection phase included two tasks. The first was to assemble the data on the various kinds of interreligious encounters, with special focus on those promoting dialogue and peacebuilding. For example, the raw data included declarations of religious hierarchies concerning interfaith relations; the negotiating history of the Interreligious Councils in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia; reports on interfaith activities by the various organizations involved in the field and so on. The second task was to collect data in the form of interviews and survey questionnaires. This data-collection phase included fieldtrips to Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, as well as to the United States, in order to interview representatives of different religious communities, policy makers, scholars and activists concerned

with the issues of interethnic and interreligious tolerance in the Balkans over the last 18 years. We performed 65 semi-structured interviews and had 7 survey questionnaires answered via email. We interviewed both participants who are still active and others who had withdrawn or retired. Moreover, we sought to insure that our interviewees' pool reflected the variety within the participants in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding activities, according to various identity categories: religious, ethnic, national, gender, age and so on. Most of our informants served in leading positions in interreligious organizations throughout the region. We conducted almost all of the interviews together, except on a half a dozen occasions. In one case, the interview was carried out by our local assistant. Informants were selected partly through Internet research and partly through our personal and professional links. When interviewing and quoting them, we have complied with policies on research with human subjects.

Our analysis of the data we collected on major interreligious initiatives throughout the Balkans focused on two specific objectives: contextualizing each initiative and then comparing them analytically. To this end, we have used an interdisciplinary approach, combining sociology and anthropology with religious studies, peace studies and political science. Ongoing debates in the emerging disciplines of conflict transformation, peacebuilding and faith-based diplomacy provide the main frame of reference, supported by discussions in area-literature on the Balkans and intercultural interaction.

As for the identification of the present and future needs in the area of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans, it was a concern we carried out throughout the second analytical phase. It resulted in our suggesting a set of 8 principles of dialogue and 26 policy recommendations.

In short, our methodologically innovative as well as empirically grounded and policy-oriented research aims at mapping recent interreligious relations in the Balkans, throwing light on both the achievements and challenges of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in particular, allowing for a greater understanding of the local particularities and how they relate to broader trends transnationally.

During our work we faced our own various challenges, starting with the changing configuration of individual and collective actors

involved in this field as well as their often shifting motivations and interests. In some cases, it has been possible to talk about a specific ‘politics of interreligious dialogue’, skilfully played out by various individuals and organizations in the field and aiming at various kinds of ideological gains. In other cases, however, we have encountered people driven by a search for a spiritual experience, seemingly distant from any material or political interests. How to account for those two different groups of people, among others, is also part of the reason why it is so tricky to develop assessment and evaluation tools for measuring achievements in such a broad field as the study of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding.

Another challenge has been the scholarly neutrality we strived towards throughout this research project: to what extent can we distance ourselves emotionally from the people we get involved with as subjects of our research? How do we preserve the best possible academic framework when some of our interviewees prompt our emotional reactions – be they positive or negative? We had a very conspicuous case, when one of our prospective interviewees, with whom one of us had been on very friendly terms before, rudely refused to meet us and even to answer our questionnaire by email, only because we had chosen another organization as our local partner when carrying out one of our Youth, Interreligious Dialogue and Conflict Resolution seminars. In cases like this, the fact that we were two persons carrying out this research helped immensely, bringing two different perspectives on challenging issues under consideration.

The book is organized into five chapters. Chapter one deals with theoretical and methodological issues related to the new subfields of the study of interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding within the academic study of religion and applied sciences respectively. Chapter two sets a contextual framework for the subsequent analysis by presenting an overview of interreligious relations in the Balkans. Chapter 3 deals with the structural developments and issues of common concern in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in this part of the world. Chapter four focuses on major achievements and challenges in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans. Finally, chapter five outlines a number of policy recommendations

for actors who advocate, develop, and carry out activities and projects in religion-related spheres in the Balkans.

Our hope is that, through the presentation of our research findings in this book, we will contribute to better understanding the interdependent role of religious communities and interreligious NGOs, both local and international, as well as the importance of a variety of funding agencies and governmental sectors in the promotion of a culture of peace in the Balkans. By providing a set of policy-relevant recommendations for the various actors directly involved in fostering civil society through interreligious understanding and cooperation in this area of the world, we also hope to add incentives for better peacebuilding action on the ground both in the region and beyond.

Finally, a note on the title of this book: *Religion as a Conversation Starter: Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans*.⁵ Contrary to the evocative warning of Richard Rorty that religion turns into a ‘conversation-stopper’ for people of different religious backgrounds,⁶ we, as scholars of religion and as practitioners of interreligious dialogue, see religion-related issues as a good starting point for important conversations between people of different worldviews. Moreover, we also believe that such conversations can grow into crucial dialogues without which peacebuilding is difficult to imagine.

Chapter 1

Towards a Theory of Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding

Interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP) is an important approach that places the practice of dialogue at the heart of peacebuilding. It fosters the (re)building of trust relations and enhances social cohesion. It increases awareness about how to improve human interactions, both locally and globally, by recognizing the importance of integrating religious identities into intergroup dialogue. IDP builds on a century-long history of interreligious dialogue and merges it with the latest developments in the scholarly understanding of peacebuilding. IDP thus integrates into the peace movement the millions of people worldwide who have been involved in one form or another of interreligious dialogue.

The theory of IDP is the outcome of a particular historical trajectory that has come to combine two genealogies: one theoretical and the other methodological. The first is linked to the growing subfield of interreligious dialogue within the academic study of religions. The second is related to the methodology of research-action, itself the fruit of more recent developments within a variety of applied sectors in many scientific disciplines, including the applied academic study of religions as well as the peace and conflict resolution studies. Both genealogies will be analyzed later in the chapter after the presentation of our theory of IDP. Since theorizing builds upon actual practices of interreligious dialogue, we will start with a succinct outline of cornerstone developments in this arena.

Historical Overview of the Practices of Interreligious Dialogue

It can be argued that the practices of interreligious dialogue are both ancient and modern.¹ For our purposes in this chapter, we will

focus on the latter. In what seems like a rare case of academic consensus in the study of religions, scholars point to the two-week World Parliament of Religions that took place in Chicago in 1893 as the modern beginnings of interreligious or interfaith dialogue.² This modern practice is characterized, in part, by two aspects: a broad diversity in the religious composition of its main participants as well as an emphasis on understanding each other rather than converting one another. In other words, communication for better understanding was prioritized over ‘winning’ theological arguments. Informal encounters between some participants followed the Parliament, especially in Boston. The need for cooperation on commonly agreed-upon issues soon emerged, leading to the creation in 1900 of the first interreligious organization: the International Association for Interreligious Freedom (IARF). It focused on religious freedom, bringing together a number of liberal wings of various religions in different parts of the world. They had discovered at the Parliament and during the course of subsequent encounters how much they each struggled to be recognized by mainline, orthodox groups within their respective religions.

The modern interreligious dialogue continued to grow in the following decades, albeit very slowly. Institutionally, it was not until 40 years later, in 1933, that the World Fellowship of Faiths’ First International Congress took place also in Chicago. It was called unofficially the ‘second Parliament of Religions’ under the legacy of the first Parliament held in that city. This gathering had also been stimulated by another recent event, the ‘Religions of Empire Conference’ held in London in 1924. Subsequently, when after the 1936 Congress, the World Congress of Faiths (Continuation Movement) was established, WCF became an independent body.³ The socio-political dynamics for the emergence of this international interreligious organization were very different from those that had sparked the first World’s Parliament of Religions in the United States almost half a century earlier, which left a few traces but no organizational legacy. In the 1930s, Britain was an empire, yet the vision behind the World Congress of Faiths was greatly influenced by the mystical experiences of its founder, Sir Francis Younghusband,

who stressed that the one aim of the Congress was to promote the spirit of fellowship. He ruled out certain misunderstandings. There

was no intention of formulating another eclectic religion, nor of seeking the lowest common denominator, nor of appraising the value of existing religions and discussions respective merits and defects. It was not maintained that all religions were the same, nor equally true, nor as good as one another. The hope was to ‘intensify that sense of community which is latent in all men’ and to awaken a livelier world-consciousness. Sir Francis mentioned that through discussion and reflection, the conception of God grew greater and that by coming closer to each other, members of different religion deepened their own spiritual communion.⁴

To be sure, the World Congress of Faiths promoted a kind of intellectual and experiential dialogue that was very far from the activist language that was to develop another generation later, after most of the mainline Christian Churches embarked officially on the interreligious dialogue journey.

In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was established. It was itself the result of intra-Christian dialogue started prior to WWII.⁵ Yet, it was not until the Roman Catholics opened an official office for the promotion of interreligious dialogue in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 that the WCC followed suit by establishing its own office of dialogue with people of living faiths and, subsequently, ideologies.⁶ These two offices were key players in financing many interreligious dialogue activities worldwide, mostly theological in nature.⁷

It was partially in reaction of this form of dialogue oriented primarily towards theological understanding, whether official or unofficial, that other religious leaders, including lay people, of major world religions came to organize the World Conference on Religion and Peace that was held in Kyoto in 1970. This event was marked by a strong public reaction against the Cold War dynamics and growing militarization worldwide. It laid the grounds for what was to become the largest activist interreligious organization in the world, now renamed Religions for Peace – International. Its mission statement reads as follows:

Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace.

Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, Religions for Peace is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth.⁸

Other activist organizations soon appeared, to address the needs of a growing interest at the grassroots level. In New York City, the Temple of Understanding developed from 1968 onwards an international peace agenda specifically linked to its geographical proximity to the UN headquarters. In India, the World Fellowship of Interreligious Councils started in Kerala in 1981 to address growing interreligious tensions. In Chicago, to celebrate the centenary of the first Parliament of the World's Religions, a Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions was established in 1988, leading to a permanent office that continues to provide an umbrella space for interreligious dialogue organizations and individuals to meet every five years or so (Chicago: 1993; Cape Town: 1999; Barcelona: 2004; Melbourne: 2009). In San Francisco, following the organization of an interreligious event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, Religions Initiative Inc. was established in 1995, marked by a grassroots approach greatly facilitated by the new internet technology.

This brief overview of major worldwide interreligious dialogue organizations is not exhaustive by any means, other organizations having appeared over the last 40 years or so. It gives a taste of the initially slow and then more rapid increase in organizational structures, itself a result of the growing need for cooperation across religious and spiritual traditions. No doubt, the steady growth in both the number of participants in interreligious dialogue activities and in the number of organizations worldwide is remarkable.

As the practice of interreligious dialogue grew exponentially over the last few decades, the need to clarify organizational approaches became obvious. Many critiques of interreligious dialogue activities noticed that while they may promote interreligious understanding, dialogue for interreligious cooperation on a variety of issues does not necessarily follow, especially in situations of serious social conflict and war. While it is easier to talk across perceived enemy lines when

abroad, upon return, the dialogue is often very difficult to continue because of local pressures against it. Irrespective of the degree of social harmony or conflict in one's home context, this challenge exists whenever the home reception of the idea of interreligious dialogue and cooperation is negative. Whether it be for a major religious leader in tension with his own followers who oppose his participation in such meetings or for a young person who suddenly lived through a positive transformative interreligious dialogue experience she can not share readily with her local friends upon return, the challenge of continuing dialogue upon return home is almost always there. This reality raises the need to create and sustain more explicitly local interreligious dialogue activities and organizational structures to foster them.

The aftermath of September 11, 2001, only strengthened what can now be called a worldwide interreligious movement. This global endeavour actively promotes a closer link between older forms of dialogue for the sake of theological understanding and spiritual fellowship, and newer forms of dialogue for cooperation on a variety of issues both broad (peace or the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, for example) and narrow (local poverty alleviation or inter-parish visits, for example). At a grassroots level, hundreds if not thousands of interreligious organizations have emerged in the last quarter of a century. While they certainly need to clarify for themselves the purpose of their activities, a tension naturally arises between those organizational members who want to nurture the dialogue of mutual learning and search for common understanding and those who seek more 'action', more interreligious cooperation to foster peacebuilding. To be sure, the latter would hardly be possible without the former. Moreover, many religious institutions would not sanction the practice of various forms of activist interreligious dialogue if they had not first experienced the former. Finally, the reasoning that concrete action is more important than 'only' talking underestimates, and even neglects, the value of clear communication, which is absolutely essential for the development of better cooperation. Apart from discovering degrees of agreement or disagreement on particular concepts and ideas, the practice of interreligious dialogue leads to the realization that how we talk to each other crossreligiously is also a central concern of interreligious dialogue. In short,

interreligious dialogue and interreligious practical cooperation are not mutually exclusive; they rather reinforce each other. This point became obvious as more and more attention has been given to theorizing interreligious dialogue over the last few decades.

Defining Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding

In order to present our own definition of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, it is necessary first to define interreligious dialogue. Over the last 50 years, the study of interreligious dialogue unfolded in piecemeal fashion as practitioners endeavoured to clarify what they meant by ‘interreligious dialogue’ within the context of their specific and respective practices and disciplinary fields of expertise. Chronologically, the following sample of definitions gives an idea of the variety of scholarly perspectives on interreligious dialogue, providing a general academic framework for the presentation of our own definition further below.

The most popular, yet indirect, definition of interreligious dialogue is probably the one published by Leonard Swidler in 1983 as *Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue*⁹:

1. Dialogue to learn, to change, and to grow, and act accordingly;
2. Dialogue to share and receive from others;
3. Dialogue with honesty and sincerity;
4. Dialogue comparing ideals with ideals, and practice with practice;
5. Dialogue to define yourself and to learn the self-definition of others;
6. Dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions about someone else’s beliefs;
7. Dialogue to share with equals;
8. Dialogue in trust;
9. Dialogue with willingness to look at your beliefs and traditions critically; and
10. Dialogue seeking to understand the other person’s beliefs from within.

These rules hide a definition of dialogue which covers many important elements. Marcus Braybrooke (1992) explores some of them in his own words and adds important dimensions in the following excerpt from his book *Pilgrimage of Hope*, the first history of the development of modern interreligious dialogue:

There are various levels of dialogue and it is a process of growth. An initial requirement is an openness to and acceptance of the other. It takes time to build trust and to deepen relationships. This is why some continuity in a dialogue group is helpful and why patience and time are necessary – all of which are particularly difficult to ensure at an international level. Too easily, we find ourselves imposing our presuppositions on the conversation. [. . .] We have to learn to enter another world that may seem alien and which has different presuppositions. We have to allow our deepest convictions to be questioned. [. . .] It is important for those venturing into dialogue to be secure in their own faith. They need to beware of becoming marginalized in or alienated from their own religious tradition. Dialogue needs also to be of equals, that is to say of those with similar levels of scholarship and study. At its deepest, dialogue will raise questions of truth. [. . .] Dialogue does not necessarily produce agreement and, if it is a search for truth, there is no desire for easy compromise. Sometimes it makes clearer where essential differences lie, exposing the various presuppositions or views of the world with which partners in dialogue are operating. Sometimes, it can be painful.¹⁰

To define what he called ‘interfaith cooperation and dialogue’, Marcus Braybrooke referred to Diana Eck’s often-quoted definition entitled Six Forms of Dialogue:

The first is parliamentary style dialogue. Secondly, there is institutional dialogue, such as the regular meetings between representatives of the Vatican and the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultation. Thirdly, there is theological dialogue, which takes seriously the questions and challenges posed by people of other faiths. Fourthly, dialogue in a community or the dialogue of life is the search for good relationships in ordinary life. Fifthly,

spiritual dialogue is the attempt to learn from other traditions of prayers and meditation. Lastly, there is inner dialogue, which is 'that conversation that goes on within ourselves in any other form of dialogue'.¹¹

A few years later, in 1991, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican published its own set of guidelines for interreligious dialogue, outlining four kinds of dialogue: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange and dialogue of religious experience.¹² Recently, Fadi Daou, a Lebanese-French Maronite priest who teaches at the Université St-Joseph in Beirut and heads the Middle East Council of Churches' committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue suggested an updated classification: the dialogue of civilizations, intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue and spiritual solidarity.¹³ These four are interrelated and demonstrate how encompassing the dialogue movement has become in its understanding of what dialogue is, and what kinds of complementarity are necessary to reflect the broad variety of dialogue. Another author, Sami Aoun, has usefully emphasized that there is no 'pure' dialogue or ideal type. He has presented his own fivefold typology of ideological discourses underpinning interreligious dialogue: missionary, fundamentalist, ethical, consensual and institutional.¹⁴ The first four categories overlap to a large extent with the first three in Jane I. Smith's eight models: persuasion, ethical exchange, theological exchange, 'get to know you', classroom, ritual, spirituality and cooperative.¹⁵

Another important thinker who has greatly helped clarify vital nuances in our understanding of interreligious dialogue is the Indo-Catalan philosopher-theologian Raimon Panikkar. He distinguishes between dialectical and dialogical dialogue:

The dialectical dialogue supposes that we are rational beings and that our knowledge is governed above all by the principle of non-contradiction. You and I admit it as a given, and if you lead me into contradiction I will either have to give up my opinion or attempt to overcome the impasse. We present our respective points of view to the Tribunal or Reason, in spite of the variety of interpretations

that we may hold even on the nature of reason. [. . .] The dialogical dialogue is not so much about opinions as about those who have such opinions and eventually not about you, but about me to you. [. . .] In the dialogical dialogue the partner is not an object or a subject merely putting forth some objective thoughts to be discussed, but a you, a real you and not an it. I must deal with you, and not merely with your thought. And of course, vice-versa, You yourself are a source of understanding.¹⁶

The influence of identity and power dynamics in spaces of interreligious dialogue often transforms dialogical dialogue (implicitly expected in many interreligious dialogue activities), into dialectical dialogue (often linked to reductive value judgements). This situation occurs especially among individuals whose intellectual culture is shaped by modern rationality, which has privileged dialectic as a preeminent form of rationality.¹⁷ Yet, according to Panikkar, this dialectical dialogue is as fundamental and important as dialogical dialogue because of its ‘irreplaceable mediating function at the human level’.¹⁸ Therefore the two forms of dialogue are complementary. The tension between them is normal in human communication. The danger resides in emphasizing one at the expense of the other. On the one hand, the reduction of dialogue to only its dialectical expression leads to the unfair imposition of judgement onto others, with possible implications for reproduction of unjust power dynamics. Yet this dialectical dialogue is a necessary human dimension when it comes to passing judgements to form our own construction of self and worldview. On the other hand, the reduction of dialogue to only its dialogical expression can lead to in-depth understanding of others without cooperation with them on matters related to political and social exigencies, and even to daily community living. The first attitude carries the risk of prompting universalist impositions on the assumption of an alleged unity behind a particular aspect of reality. The second can result in individual relativist apathy and collective stagnation based on a perception of endless and irreconcilable diversity. Finally, Panikkar’s distinction and balance between dialectical and dialogical dialogue also helps define the concept of ‘dialogue’ when it is used in the expression ‘intercultural dialogue’.

Over a decade ago, Basset also pointed out how crucial interreligious dialogue is to the credibility of faith and believers' testimonies.¹⁹ He described interreligious dialogue as a challenge as important in our postmodern times as that of secularism, atheism and nihilism in the emergence of modernity. In our post 9/11 era of shared responsibility for a more secure world, Basset's description of the importance of interreligious dialogue turned out to be prophetic.

Basset presents an elaborate historical typology of dialogue.²⁰ In terms of Western heritage, he argues, the most ancient dialogues are literary in nature: they include dramatic, philosophical, polemic and didactic forms of dialogue. There are also several religious forms, such as the dialogue between master and disciples, God and messenger, as well as prophets and a variety of possible audiences. The three most recurring forms within Christianity are apologetic, theological and spiritual dialogues. These three are also common within both Judaism and Islam, with the addition of a juridical response. Basset points out that there is a 'profound accord between the philosophical approach and the dialogical structure'.²¹ He argues that it is not until the nineteenth century that dialogue between people began to be considered in European philosophy as a fundamental structure of human thinking, under the influence of Feuerbach who opposed the Hegelian model based on a dialectic mode of thought within the mind processes of the individual person. Dialogical thinking was further developed in Germany by such philosophers as Edmund Husserl and his disciple Martin Heidegger, as well as Martin Buber. Initially, Buber's famous book *Ich und Du* was received more enthusiastically in German Protestant circles than in Jewish ones; it later helped bring the idea of dialogue into the Second Vatican Council, transforming the nature of both ecumenical and interreligious relations between the Roman Catholic churches and other religious communities worldwide. Another branch of the dialogical current that helped sustain these momentous changes came from France, with the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier, the concept of dialogical communication developed by Karl Jaspers and the Christian existentialism of Gabriel Marcel.

As a Swiss francophone Protestant theologian and expert practitioner of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, Basset integrates these

two main European philosophical currents into his own definition of interreligious dialogue: 'an exchange of words and a reciprocal listening engaging on an equal footing believers of different religious traditions'.²² His definition is based on five essential elements: (1) the encounter of persons, (2) the exchange of words, (3) reciprocity, (4) alterity and (5) what is at stake.²³ He therefore anchors interreligious dialogue in the fact that it takes place between persons who are motivated by their own religious convictions and by the encounter with persons of other religious traditions. Basset's definition of interreligious dialogue is therefore eminently theo-philosophical.

A recent sociological approach worth taking note of is that of Anne-Sophie Lamine. Her analysis of the history and growth of interreligious dialogue in France during the twentieth century through the disciplinary lens of the sociology of religions uncovers the transformations of French *laïcité* on the ground. She noticed three transformational modalities. First, the diversification of religious identities in French society forces a rethinking of these identities, caught in a permanent tension between increasing identity affirmations and the recognition of alterity. Second, the spectacular increase in the number of interreligious organizations over the last 20 years points to the emergence of an interreligious movement. Third, religious institutions are also changing in contact with this new pluralist social reality. Lamine argues that all three modalities impact civil society and the relation between public and religious spheres. The increase in religious diversity and the ability to cooperate interreligiously has resulted in greater visibility for religious groups, especially for religious minorities. Public decision makers also call upon religious actors to participate and at times play leadership roles in public meaning-making and peacebuilding activities, especially after collective tragedies.²⁴ Finally, Lamine summarizes her findings on a more theoretical note, with the short phrase: from plurality to recognition. She argues that the rapid increase in interreligious dialogue activities in France reflects transformations in the interpretation on the ground of what constitutes the model of 'la *laïcité* française', in a direction contrary to the popular image of a 'closed' or 'rigid' *laïcité*. Her findings coincide with and reinforce the case being made by several Western philosophers that pluralism rooted in recognition of

differences is the best option for a better and more harmonious living together (*vivre-ensemble*).²⁵

The seminal studies of Basset and Lamine attest to the remarkable rise of both interest in the study of interreligious dialogue as well as the very scope and variety of interreligious dialogue activities, especially in the Western world, during the course of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first. Their research corresponds theoretically, albeit not methodologically, with those undertaken by lead researcher Diana Eck within the Pluralism Project at Harvard University.²⁶ All three authors articulate different understanding of the concept of ‘pluralism’, which coincides with and reinforces the late twentieth-century emergence of pluralist models in political philosophy.²⁷

The overview of these definitions and classifications, although by no means exhaustive, sheds light on the progress done to date in the new academic subfield of interreligious dialogue. Yet, it does not relieve us from the responsibility to define what we mean ourselves, for the purposes of this book, by ‘interreligious dialogue’ – something which we already did in the introduction and to which we will return at the end of this section. We will now proceed by defining ‘interreligious’ and ‘dialogue’ separately.

The meaning of ‘interreligious’ depends on what definition of ‘religion’ one implies. For our theoretical goals, this meaning needs to be made explicit. So we chose, among many others,²⁸ the postmodern scholar of religion Mark C. Taylor’s recent definition of religion to serve this basic purpose:

Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure.²⁹

By deduction, ‘religious’ is whatever relates to religion as defined above. As for ‘interreligious’, we define it as signifying *the links and interactions between human beings, their thoughts and feelings, as well as their physical and immaterial constructions, when they pertain to two or more*

religions. When these interactions pertain to the diversity of perspectives within what might be called 'one religion',³⁰ we use the term 'intra-religious'.

A good example of a definition of dialogue comes from the new programme on 'Ethics and Religious Culture' implemented throughout the primary and secondary school system in the province of Quebec in September 2008.³¹ This programme has three objectives, the third of which is to promote dialogical skills. It is interesting to note that 'dialogue' is the overarching concept, and that this programme distinguishes between seven kinds of dialogue: conversation, discussion, narration, deliberation, interview, debate and panel. It also presents five tools for elaborating one's point of view: description, comparison, synthesis, explanation and justification. It adds four ways to question a point of view: preferential judgement, prescriptive judgement, reality judgement and value judgement. It also teaches students seven kinds of mistakes that can easily break a dialogue: personal attack, appeal to popularity, appeal to clan solidarity, authoritative argument, conspiracy, stereotyping and caricaturing. Finally, students are taught attitudes that promote dialogue, such as: respecting the rules set in a particular form of dialogue, expressing correctly one's emotions and thoughts, listening carefully, paying attention to how our words affect the listeners, demonstrating openness and respect of other's expressed emotions and thoughts, questioning ourselves more than others, thinking before presenting one's ideas, verifying that one's ideas are well understood by others and vice-versa and so on. At the heart of this educational programme lies the understanding, of how important dialogue as such is for all kinds of human interactions.

We argue that these pluralist models in which dialogue plays an integral part are also the results of a paradox inherent to the process of secularization. It has given rise, first in the West but increasingly so today in many other parts of the world, to two opposing and co-dependent phenomena. On the one hand, secularization processes led to both the relativizing philosophically and weakening politically of absolutist religious discourses to make possible a philosophical and later institutional opening towards the other and search for dialogue rather than competition as a means of human communication.

On the other hand, secularization also prompted a rise in exclusivist religious discourses and right-wing ideologies. Both of these have contributed to the end of the Cold War and have become more prominent since September 11, 2001. They have also been widely evident throughout the post-communist countries in Southeast Europe. This process reflects a deeper binary opposition between two philosophical positions. The first position is a relativism in truth claims that is often imputed to interreligious dialogue because it emphasizes respect for the diversity of worldviews and forms of practice. The second position is an absolutism in truth claims that seek to impose unity of worldview at the expense of rights of conscience and belief. Balancing these two extremes is the most important challenge of dialogue today. Panikkar's earlier notion of complementarity between dialectical and dialogical forms of dialogue brings greater clarity as to how this equilibrium can be reached.

On the basis of this brief overview of key elements in the history of the academic subfield of interreligious dialogue, we will conclude this section with our own definition of 'interreligious dialogue'. As suggested in our introduction to this book, a narrow definition of 'interreligious dialogue' can be: *human interaction and communication primarily between religious institutions' leaders (often excluding or greatly reducing the participation of lay people and particularly women) for the primary purpose of clarifying theological/philosophical similarities and differences*. This definition is what is popularly understood by 'interreligious dialogue'. It however only reflects what Panikkar has called 'dialectical dialogue'. A broader definition of 'interreligious dialogue' that aims to be more inclusive of the wide array of interreligious dialogue activities practised by people whom Marc Gopin calls 'religious representatives' or 'spiritual peacebuilders'³² can be: *all forms of interactions and communication through speech, writing and/or any kind of shared activities that help mutual understanding and/or cooperation between people who self-identify religiously in one form or another*. This broader definition includes both the dialectical and dialogical dimensions described by Panikkar.

The reference to a narrow and a broader definition enables us to not only point to the different meanings which we have encountered in the Balkans, as well as in other parts of the world where we have

experienced interreligious dialogue first hand. It also allows us to recognize and articulate in our next section the need to integrate the conceptual approaches to interreligious dialogue that emphasize theory and the practical approaches that focus on cooperation on the ground.

A major function of interreligious dialogue is its contribution to peacebuilding, which we broadly define as *all social mechanisms a society develops in order to promote greater understanding and cooperation towards peace*. Since interreligious dialogue helps to increase social trust and integration, it generally contributes to a more peaceful society, with negative tolerance as a minimum expectation and positive tolerance and respect as a maximum ideal.

There have been various definitions of *peacebuilding* in scholarly literature. According to Mohamed Abu-Nimer, this is ‘an umbrella term that includes the full spectrum of conflict resolution and transformation frameworks and approaches, including negotiation, conciliation, mediation, facilitation, alternative dispute resolution, problem-solving workshops, education and training, advocacy and nonviolent resistance, among others’.³³ This more technical definition however does not directly include dialogue as a form of human interaction that promotes peacebuilding.

A more useful definition for our present task is that of *religious peacebuilding* developed by David Little and Scott Appleby, who use this term to describe ‘the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of *resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence*’.³⁴ This definition too does not include all interreligious dialogue activities since the purpose is centred on resolving and transforming deadly conflict. However, to the extent that all interreligious dialogue activities, at least in theory, start with the intention to promote an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence, Little and Appleby’s definition therefore includes most forms of interreligious dialogue activities. This point is further strengthened by the two authors’ acknowledgement that religious peacebuilding also includes ‘the efforts of people working at a distance from actual sites of deadly conflict, such as legal advocates of religious human rights, scholars conducting research relevant to crosscultural and interreligious dialogue and theologians

and ethicists within the religious communities who are probing and strengthening their traditions of nonviolence'.³⁵

This last definition of religious peacebuilding is particularly useful because it implies that peacebuilding activities can be carried out by different actors of various religious or non-religious worldviews, from grassroots to top positions in various forms of hierarchies across the many sectors of society. But when are these activities considered specifically as interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP)? If during a specific activity no one discusses their religious identities and links them directly to the project that brings them together, then this peacebuilding activity is not interreligious in nature even though some or all of its participants have a religious identity, in one form or another. However, if religious identities are put forward, the peacebuilding activity becomes a form of IDP.

We therefore define interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding (IDP) as *all forms of interreligious dialogue activities that foster an ethos of tolerance, nonviolence, and trust*. Our theory of IDP is constituted on the basis of three principles: self-conscious engagement in IDP, self-critical attitude whilst engaged in IDP and realistic expectations towards IDP results. The first principle of self-conscious engagement in IDP refers to the need to be aware of the fact that one's religious identity is actively involved in the dialogue process that contributes to peacebuilding. The second principle of self-critical attitude while engaged in IDP points to the importance of being critically aware of our own biases and limitations. Such attitude opens others to mirror our own behaviour, thereby increasing the chances for a more honest dialogue. The third principle calls on the need to be aware of the fact that IDP is a long and uneven, step-by-step process. It is directly related to Marc Gopin's fundamental notion of 'incremental peacebuilding'.³⁶ Together, these three principles constitute a foundation towards a theory of IDP.

The way we have defined IDP above is somewhat different from David Smock's concept of 'interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding', the title of his 2002 edited book where he provides a clear rationale for the link between the two:

The main assertion of this book is that interfaith dialogue can be used as an effective tool to advance peacebuilding, but anyone who

has engaged in interfaith dialogue in situations of serious conflict recognizes how difficult it is to organize and conduct meaningful interfaith dialogue. [. . .] The fact that this book focuses exclusively on interfaith dialogue does not imply that interfaith dialogue is the only means by which religious organizations can contribute to peace. Faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other religious organizations very effectively contribute to peace through conducting training on conflict resolution.³⁷

Smock clearly outlines the importance of interfaith (or interreligious) dialogue as a means towards peacebuilding. However, we suggest that linking the two more explicitly in the expression ‘interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding’ puts ‘dialogue’ at the centre stage of peacebuilding. Whether grassroots or top level, interreligious dialogue activities generally contribute to peacebuilding, even if the actors involved are not aware of this broader aim. Our broad generalization relies on the assumption that dialogical encounters tend to be better than no interactions at all, even though they may often be limited in effective outcomes towards peacebuilding aims.

On this point, it is worthwhile remembering the cautionary remarks of Richard H. Solomon, the current President of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP):

Interfaith dialogue can enhance mutual awareness, foster joint activities, and even transform relationships between members of warring groups. If we are to capitalize on religion’s ability to ameliorate or reconcile the very conflicts that it has helped to inspire, we must heed both the caveats and the endorsements. We must not let ourselves be carried away by unrealistic expectations or dismayed by unavoidable failures.³⁸

Unfortunately, many unrealistic expectations have accompanied the rapid increase of IDP in the Balkans in the last 20 years. One of these is the expectation that because an interreligious dialogue activity is presented with the aim of promoting peacebuilding, the result of such an activity must somehow directly and significantly contribute to peace where the activity takes place, in a way that is discernable to

its participants. Certainly, the direct impact of any peacebuilding activity, let alone an interreligious one, is notoriously difficult to assess.³⁹ These cautionary remarks can be mitigated if one follows instead Gopin's call for 'incremental peacebuilding'. After all, that is also how the subfield of interreligious dialogue emerged at the intersection of the academic study of religions and theology over the last quarter of a century. The following examination of its emergence will ground our IDP theory within a particular disciplinary landscape and help explain why conceptualizations of interreligious dialogue are to be seen as incremental theoretical steps within the growing field of peacebuilding.

The Study of Interreligious Dialogue: A New Subfield at the Intersection of the Academic Study of Religions and Theology

Theories and methods in the study of interreligious dialogue have recently developed into a subfield within the older field of the academic study of religions, often called religious studies, among other names given to this broad interdisciplinary field of study.⁴⁰ This subfield may be relatively new, yet the practices of interreligious dialogue it aims to study, as seen above, have a long history.

In disciplinary terms, where can we best situate the study of interreligious dialogue? In the context of our own research and IDP theory, we argue that the study of interreligious dialogue is best situated at the intersection of, primarily, the academic study of religions and theology and, secondarily, the applied academic study of religions as well as peace and conflict resolution studies. Both dimensions will be examined in turn.

The relation between the academic study of religions and theology has been marked by tensions that reflect a particular Western history in terms of church-state dynamics, leading to the gradual separation between the 'realm of the God' and the 'realm of Caesar', leading to the gradual loss of the 'sacred canopy' (to use the eloquent notion of Peter Berger) status of religion and the concomitant compartmentalization of the whole social life into different spheres. These historical

processes have been reflected in the development of various secular ideologies in competition with older Christian religious worldviews. The discipline of sociology, for example, emerged in nineteenth century France as a replacement of theological interpretations of social realities.⁴¹ Generally, the academic study of religions emerged as a scholarly discipline in West European universities in the late nineteenth century.⁴²

The development of an academic study of religions has gone hand in hand with the secularization process that has accompanied the modernization and democratization of Western societies from the late eighteenth century onwards.⁴³ In other parts of the world more recently engaged in democratization processes, including the Balkans, scholars in religious studies seek to define how the academic study of religions can be promoted at home without it becoming another area where a new and more sophisticated form of Western cultural imperialism gets implemented by intellectuals who use overwhelmingly secular and scientific languages to think about religion-related issues.⁴⁴ There are also opponents to the initially Western academic study of religions who argue for the primary importance of theology, understood as a confessional approach to academic scholarship on matters of religions. They strive to approach their own tradition with the same rigor and academic concerns as those found among non-confessional scholars in the sciences of religions. These ongoing debates have always been present in the modern Western academic study of religions. In the last years, for example, they resulted in a split between the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature, which until recently formed together the largest annual gathering of scholars of religions worldwide.

Nowadays, scholars within both the academic study of religions and theology recognize that they are not neutral; every scholar carries a set of assumptions about notions of time, intellectual constructs and subjective priorities over choice of language, research concerns and ideological interests fostered by a specific worldview with more or less direct links to particular networks of institutions, be they explicitly religious and/or academic. By the end of the twentieth century, the distinction between these two disciplinary approaches to the study of religions had often become so blurred, in part because of the growing

use of so many shared theories, definitions and methodological tools, that Margaret Miles, the then president of the American Academy of Religion, the largest organization of scholars in the study of religions, came to argue that:

the terms ‘theological studies’ and ‘the study of religion’ are distinctions without a difference. Theological studies, thought of as exploring a religious tradition from within, must also bring critical questions to the tradition studied. And the study of religion cannot be studied or taught without understanding the power and beauty, in particular historical situations, of the tradition of the author we study. Nor can religious studies avoid theology – the committed worldviews, beliefs, and practices of believers – by focusing on religious phenomenologies. Both theological studies and the study of religion must integrate critical and passionately engaged scholarship. I use, then, the providentially ambiguous term ‘religious studies’ to integrate the falsely polarized terms, ‘theological studies’ and ‘the study of religion’.⁴⁵

Miles’ last point is particularly important because it provides a potential avenue to help resolve this perceived polarization between the academic study of religions and theology, a distinction that is still very much alive in Southeast Europe, the region of our immediate focus in this book. Strong debates are currently underway in most of the post-communist societies, as to whether there is a place for Christian theology and Islamic studies in the local universities or whether it is preferable to introduce a more academically minded approach to the study of religions.⁴⁶

As one of us has previously argued with regard to Bulgaria⁴⁷ after the fall of communism, the academic study of religions ‘got caught in the crossfire between theologians and sociologists’. The former, from their position of a newly gained authority, claimed that the study of religion should be done exclusively in the form of Orthodox theology, while the latter insisted that the study of religion was unimportant in the context of the extremely secularized Bulgarian society. This struggle was reflected in the choice of names for the field, from ‘Orthodox theology’ to ‘sociology of religion’ in particular. These, in

turn, mirrored the comprehensive struggle for control over the religious institutions and over the discourse on religion (i.e. who speaks on behalf of religion and who are the legitimate interpreters and guardians of the respective religious traditions). This situation is arguably generalizable to the whole of Eastern Europe, where 'traditional' theologies compete with non-confessional approaches. The 'politics of religious studies' thus raises a number of issues, the major one being the question as to what theoretical, methodological and pedagogical approaches should be prioritized in this part of the world.

Often, an insider/outsider dichotomy has been put forward as a basis for distinguishing between theology and religious studies. However, as Alles has argued, it is 'misleading to distinguish theology and the study of religions in terms of insider and outsider perspective. The aim of the study of religions is knowledge about religions. The aim of theology is to formulate religious truth'.⁴⁸ Moreover, this distinction bears little relevance to the practice of interreligious dialogue, where both perspectives are present at once, often ambiguously intermingled. As it seems, people engaging in interreligious interactions are mostly 'insiders' speaking from within a specific religious tradition yet seeking knowledge and understanding of other religions as well.

Another important issue relates to the ways in which the academic study of religions influences the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue. As has been argued specifically with regard to Eastern Europe, the academic study of religions can raise the awareness and appraisal of the cultural and religious plurality in the increasingly diversified post-communist society. It can thus contribute immensely to the development of productive interreligious, and broadly intercultural, understanding, communication and interaction at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of society encouraging the acceptance of diversity as a positive challenge rather than as an ominous thread.⁴⁹

Equally important are the ways in which Christian and Islamic theologies also influence the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue. All theologies have an in-built relationship to outsiders, which is more or else explicit, depending on the nature of a particular

theological stance. Whatever the assumptions and positions regarding the 'other/s' might be, these theologies on religions other than their own have developed exponentially in the second half of the twentieth century under various names such as 'world theology',⁵⁰ 'theology of world religions'⁵¹ or comparative theology.⁵² These developments, as attested by the subtitle in W. C. Smith's book on world theology *Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* demonstrate how the development of Christian and Islamic theologies, by attraction or opposition, have gone hand in hand with the development of the academic study of religions; in fact, the two are interdependent of each other. We could go even further and argue that both sides of the modern study of religions coin (the academic study of religions and theology) symbiotically relate to, and reflect the challenges posed by, the secularization and democratization processes.

Discussions about the impact of theology or of the academic study of religions on the theory and practices of interreligious dialogue in the last 50 years have brought to the surface the need for greater clarity as to what the subfield of the study of interreligious dialogue has to accomplish, in the Balkans as well as anywhere else in the world. One way to go about it at the level of the practices of interreligious dialogue in particular is to argue that IDP also needs to be conceived of at the intersection of the applied academic study of religions and peace and conflict resolution studies.

The Applied Academic Study of Religions, Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies

IDP is a theory with praxis that reflects the integration of our two respective interdisciplinary backgrounds. It emerged from our experience with the interreligious dialogue seminars we led throughout the Balkans. This combination of theory and practice has prompted us to think about, on the one hand, how interreligious dialogue can serve the peacebuilding agenda in local and international relations, and, on the other, how it can contribute to the articulation of theoretical concerns in the academic study of religions as a whole, and the applied academic study of religions in particular.

IDP is a concept that also integrates social theory and applied religion. Indeed, our conceptualization of interreligious dialogue as ‘theory with praxis’ helps overcome a frequent, and in the case of interreligious dialogue, unnecessary dichotomy between theory and praxis, as mentioned earlier. In this regard, IDP is a new concept that provides the subfield of the study of interreligious dialogue with a way to link itself both theoretically and practically with the fields of peace and conflict resolution studies.⁵³

This integration of theory and praxis through the use of IDP seems a necessary prerequisite to understanding how the healthy tension between theory and praxis, as well as the narrow and broader definitions of interreligious dialogue, play out at the various levels of interreligious dialogue, from top to middle to grassroots, as well as in the three dimensions of dialogue (intra-religious, interreligious and interworldview). The complex interplay between the variety of differences that exists within a religious tradition (intra-religious dialogue), across religions (interreligious dialogue) and between religious and non-religious, mostly secular, worldviews (interworldview dialogue) reflects facets of what Western philosophers have generally called for the last three centuries the challenge of religious pluralism and toleration. Yet, we argue that the concept of ‘religious pluralism’ is limited since it fails to recognize the equally important role of non-religious ideologies and worldviews in shaping the plurality of worldviews today.

Along this line, at the outset of a study on interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding specifically in the Balkans, we must acknowledge that all interreligious interactions in the region have taken place within a broader setting of differences that goes beyond the challenges of religious pluralism. With its complex resurgence of religious identity dynamics, today’s post-communist era in the Balkans requires an understanding of the aforementioned triple dimension of dialogue as well as the intrinsic urgency of thinking and practising theory and praxis at once.

As one of us has argued, for many decades, the absence of an applied dimension in the academic study of religions, at least in official efforts at theorizing this field to put it on par with other sciences,⁵⁴ marked a real difference with theology, which had always kept a form of applied studies in the form of practical theology, pastoral care and

spiritual development.⁵⁵ More recently, the emergence of praxeology under the influence of liberation theology gave renewed impetus to the area of applied, practical or pastoral theology.⁵⁶

This historical idiosyncrasy in the development of the academic study of religions in comparison to theology and so many other scientific disciplines may be explained through a combination of three main factors. First, the 'leaving behind' pastoral work to theological seminaries was considered by some scholars the best way to ensure that the 'science of religions' would remain acceptable to scholars of other scientific disciplines unencumbered by ties with religious institutions and worldviews, at least explicitly. Second, the unique 'enlightenment' paradigm often forced scholars of religions to choose sides between religious faith and scientific rationality, or at least keep their personal faith private when they held on to one. Third, the increased secularization in many Western democracies changed the power dynamics between religious institutions and knowledge-producing ones (i.e. mostly universities). Indeed, the third quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the development of large public universities in many different Western countries, and the secularization process of previously religious ones, giving rise to an unprecedented number of religious studies departments outside traditionally theological institutions.⁵⁷

With the resurgence of the importance of religion in the aftermath of the Cold War in the perceptions of mainly Western or Westernized scholars and decision makers in the international community, especially after September 11, 2001,⁵⁸ the expertise of scholars specialized in the academic study of religions has become useful to policy makers in a variety of social sectors, from the local to the global. The resulting requests on scholars of religions have directed many of them into various fields of applied sciences, from education and health to law and especially politics, thus prompting these scholars to abandon the 'ivory tower' stance. This reality is not new. Previous generations of scholars were often very active publicly. But because of an often negative judgement about such activities, revolving around the alleged loss of objectivity,⁵⁹ its importance was probably underestimated in our historical accounts about the field's development over the last century and a half. Today, such practice has become more acceptable

in the eyes of many colleagues. This new attitude opens the way for the new subfield of the applied academic study of religions.⁶⁰

A second factor explaining the rapid increase in the public role of scholars of religions is the linguistic turn of the late twentieth century that demonstrated the centrality of personal subjectivities in the hermeneutical process at the heart of any scientific discipline. Consequently, the old judgement about 'loosing one's objectivity', linked to a positivistic understanding of the role of a scholar in society, seems to have lost the weight it once carried. Scholars of religions now openly get involved as experts in various aspects of their societies, and their activities in a variety of sectors fall in the scope of the applied academic study of religions.

In a global world with increased interdependency (transnationalism, transdisciplinarity, etc.), there is a growing need to anchor various areas of the applied academic study of religions (religion and: law, politics, health, education, architecture, economics, ethics, etc.) in the inclusive practices of interreligious dialogue. The incorporation of such practices could balance, on the one hand, the normal tension between pluralist and exclusivist worldviews and, on the other, the ambiguities of various ideological assumptions in human perceptions of reality. By definition, there is no area of the applied academic study of religions that does not include some level or form of the practice of interreligious dialogue, whether this is acknowledged openly or not by the actors involved. Therefore, increasing our theoretical and applied understanding of this pragmatic imperative is vital to ensure that interreligious dialogue remains a fully inclusive method to address societal issues of immediate concern. Moreover, while some interreligious dialogue activities remain confined to transforming individual understanding of self and other religious traditions as well as personal relations on a small scale (the impact of which is limited and hard to measure), a subset of its activities has been directly linked to peacebuilding, especially in areas of political tension and conflict.

In both cases, these interreligious actors have specific religious worldviews and are mostly involved in religious practices linking them to particular religious institutions, while interreligious dialogue almost always takes place in the practical arena of daily

life, from local to global. Therefore, interreligious dialogue can be directly linked to the applied sciences, whose aim is to apply the knowledge generated through various sciences to practical aspects of human life. In so far as the sciences of religions have increased our collective understanding about religions and how they function within and across cultures, the application of this knowledge to the practice of interreligious dialogue brings the latter into the purview of applied sciences in general, and the applied academic study of religions in particular. In addition, as already noticed, since a subset of interreligious dialogue activities is directly linked to peacebuilding interreligious dialogue falls at the intersection of the applied academic study of religions and the applied sciences of peace and conflict resolution studies in particular.

This intersection is conceptually complex to represent fully in this brief overview. There are numerous studies in both conflict resolution and peace studies suggesting a variety of definitions.⁶¹ We present here only one for each, to optimize the reader's understanding of how each of these fields intersects with the others. Conflict resolution is defined by Wallensteen as: 'a situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other'.⁶² For Wallensteen, 'Although conflict resolution in armed conflict has been part of the peace research agenda, it has yet to develop a consistent set of research-based propositions'.⁶³ The final section of this chapter will present one proposition in this direction. In the meantime, Wallensteen's argument is useful for our purposes because it directly links the field of conflict resolution studies to that of peace studies, or more precisely, peace research. According to this author, 'Conflict resolution is approached on the basis of the insights generated in contemporary peace research [. . . whose] ambition [has been] to understand the causes of violence and to find ways to reduce/remove violence'.⁶⁴

Obviously, both of these definitions directly relate to a variety of on-the-ground experiences that link both fields to the broader discipline of applied sciences, defined on *wordwebonline* as: 'The discipline dealing with the art or science of applying scientific knowledge to

practical problems'. This definition relates to both applied social and human sciences, thus focusing on the theories developed in the humanities and social sciences useful for solving problems related specifically to human behaviour and experience.

This area of applied knowledge production includes that of the applied academic study of religions. This branch of the academic study of religions concentrates on the social relevancy of this very discipline through its applications in a variety of areas where the following three kinds of people interact: (1) experts in the academic study of religions; (2) users of religious discourses; (3) civil inquirers of information about practitioners of religious discourses.⁶⁵ Implicit here is the encounter, directly or indirectly, between religious practitioners and a variety of other actors (be they religious or not). Obviously, when these actors self-identify themselves religiously, one can speak of a form of interreligious dialogue or interaction taking place. One subset of these interactions occurs when this interreligious dialogue takes place as a means to either prevent or resolve tensions and conflicts. In these limited contexts, interreligious dialogue can be understood as promoting, explicitly or implicitly, peacebuilding in general and conflict resolution in particular. In such instances, interreligious dialogue therefore falls within peace studies and conflict resolution studies, as well as the applied academic study of religions.

In closing this section, two examples are useful to set the stage for better understanding the role of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding activities. First, the dialogue component of any peace process is not always explicit. Yet, no peace process can occur without it. Dialogue is implicit in the first of the five criteria Darby outlined in the description of peace processes: 'that the protagonists are willing to negotiate in good faith'.⁶⁶

Second, as an increasing number of persons worldwide interact with ever increasing degrees of sensitivities to differences in worldviews, interreligious dialogue has gradually moved from the margins to the centres of power, with a sudden upsurge since September 11, 2001.⁶⁷ The General Assembly of the United Nations consensually adopted Resolution A/61/221 on 20 December 2006, entitled: 'Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding,

and cooperation for peace'. On 4–5 October 2007, this resolution began to be implemented through a two-day event as part of the activities of the UN General Assembly. This event was the fruit of a chain of events that has many sources. One of them is the Interreligious Roundtable of Religious NGOs working in partnership with various UN agencies. Another is the efforts of the Philippines delegation at the UN over the last few years to promote a UN resolution on this topic. A third is in the post 9/11 context in which the UN passed a resolution regarding terrorism and security as well as organized several dialogical events in New York and beyond.

It is worth noting that the UN also put in place the Alliance of Civilizations in 2005 to promote a form of intercivilizational dialogue, especially between the West and the Islamic world. The use of the term 'civilization' in this Alliance's initial mission reflected a reaction against the 'clash of civilizations' thesis,⁶⁸ whose reception especially among Muslims worldwide including in the Balkans still resonate painfully. In this vein, Hall and Jackson recently argued that 'a self-reflective research agenda for a fourth generation of civilizational analysis, within IR [international relations], should begin, and end, with a questioning of the precise relationship between IR and anthropology, and IR and philosophy of history as each of these disciplines involve themselves in mythistoricizing civilizations'.⁶⁹

Three theoretical points emerge from our analysis of these recent UN developments. First, the language used for this UN initiative reflects the Western heritage with its divided language of 'culture' and 'religion', going back implicitly to the ideational debates (and at many times outward conflicts) around the role of religion in the public sphere, especially that of politics.⁷⁰ Second, the cases chosen in the round-table of 4 October 2007 reflected a clear preference for talking about interreligious rather than intercultural dialogue. Moreover, a large number of national reports – over 70 – also focused on interreligious dialogue.⁷¹ A comparison of the first and second observations leads to a third: there seems to be a greater need on the part of many nation-states and individual experts to talk about interreligious dialogue rather than intercultural dialogue because of the role religion plays in the contemporary identity politics and thus the need to promote this particular kind of dialogue at this point in time.

This preference for interreligious over intercultural dialogue may reflect a shift in the language used in the international community away from a purely Western secular worldview, wherein the notion of intercultural dialogue has been the preferred language in policy matters especially, rather than the notion of interreligious dialogue. This seemed to be a result of the relegation of religion to the private sphere, minimizing its importance in international relations as well as in national interactions.

The gradual shift in interreligious dialogue activities from the margins to the centres of power mentioned above represents an example at the intersection between the academic study of religions and theology, as well as the applied academic study of religions, peace and conflict-resolution studies. This new reality, with ever increasing numbers of major interreligious dialogue practices affecting international relations calls for further methodological conceptualization in the study of interreligious dialogue.

Finally, a note on our own methodological approach to interreligious peacebuilding is in order. It combined not only traditional library and field research, but also included the conducting of the nine IDP seminars between 2005 and 2008 throughout the Balkans. Our IDP methodology thus included five dimensions. First, we not only sought information from practitioners in the field, but also contributed to giving back some knowledge to at least those individuals who attended our different workshops. As researchers, we were not only perceived as ‘takers’ of information from local interviewees; many of our workshop evaluations make it clear that we were also ‘givers’, by sharing our own knowledge and experience of interreligious dialogue. Second, because several participants in our workshops were potential or actual interviewees for our research, some of them told us that they felt more at ease responding to our questions because they had ‘seen us in action’ in the same field of action on which they were being interviewed. Third, because we often interviewed people who had been or were still linked to interreligious organizations, some of which acted as our local partners in doing workshops, a number of these activists felt that they were benefiting institutionally from their cooperation with us. Of course, in one instance in particular, our choice of collaborating with one organiza-

tion rather than another one in the same city had the unfortunate result of completely closing the door to the latter one. This point can thus be seen as a double-edged sword methodologically speaking. Fourth, the fund-raising efforts that were done by Ina Merdjanova to make these workshops possible also indicated to our interviewees that we were knowledgeable about the recent challenges of fund-raising in this field. Fifth, having one of us fluent in one local Balkan language and having a fair command of a few others, in addition to being linked to one local university also provided a relative sense of common Balkan identity, at least for several workshop participants. This sense of shared Balkan identity with at least one of the two workshop leaders was further solidified when we cooperated with a local interreligious organization to help us organize and host a seminar. This IDP approach thus provided an opportunity to practice what ethnographers call 'immersion' in the field of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans.

Our IDP theory thus implies a methodological approach that enhances the results of research in two ways. First, it increases understanding of the object of study through creating a higher level of trust with the interviewees. Second, it creates greater local impact on the various grounds where our workshops took place. IDP may thus be one example of how to improve ethics in research methodology when it comes to the particular field of interreligious dialogue.

Chapter 2

Interreligious Relations in the Balkans: An Overview

Interreligious dialogue in the Balkans cannot be understood outside the overall historical, economic, social and political milieu in which it has taken place. The centuries long coexistence and multiple interactions of persons from four major religious traditions in the Balkans – Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Islam and Judaism – has shaped and defined in important ways the perceptions of and attitudes to religious others. The coexistence of the different faith communities has created modes of peaceful negotiation of differences and a certain level of tolerance between them. The everyday interaction and frequent mutual support of people belonging to different religions has been expressively captured by the term *komşuluk* (a derivative from the Turkish word *komşu*, meaning ‘neighbour’). Within this model of coexistence, people of different ethnic or religious groups live peacefully and even cooperatively in close proximity, yet the groups preserve their structural and cultural differences and their boundaries remain well-sustained and generally unbridgeable.¹ Authors such as Hayden (2002), however, have pointed out that such coexistence does not necessarily indicate a positive valorization of pluralism. It is rather fragile and ambiguous, ridden by competitive impulses and structural opposition, and is best defined as ‘antagonistic tolerance’.

Under the Ottoman Empire, the region was administratively organized in the so-called *millet* system, whereby membership in a nation was determined by religious affiliation and not what the modern understanding of nation has come to mean: a shared language, common territory, a perceived common history, and – more often than not – a common ethnicity. This has powerfully influenced

the subsequent fusion of religious and ethnic identities everywhere in the Balkans. Generally, the close linkage between nation as ethnicity and religion in the Balkans persisted and became a key component of the nation-building projects of the states that emerged after the decline of the multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual Ottoman empire. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–41), renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, the intertwining of religious and national identities induced growing divisions between the Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Slavs. These politically manipulated ethno-religious divisions proved to be a powerful and unprecedented source of rivalry and antagonism, which culminated in fratricidal interethnic and intra-ethnic strife during WWII. The Titoist regime, which intended to create a new multinational state of South Slavs, succeeded in suppressing interethnic conflicts without resolving them. Most importantly, it failed to provide the political structure and the civic culture needed for the realization of the acclaimed ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ project. In Bulgaria, the creation of an independent nation-state in 1878 led to mostly repressive policies against religious and ethnic minorities, replaced at times by efforts for their accommodation. The case of Romania has been characterized by mostly intra-Christian tensions, in many cases also ethnically tinted, while the common Albanian ethnicity in Albania has overpowered and dominated identity differences along religious lines.

The contexts in which various religions in the Balkans operated during the Cold War varied significantly from one country to another, and underwent considerable changes over time. Consequently, the issue of religion was closely related to the way the questions of religious freedom and of church-state relations were treated and resolved in various communist countries. The end of the Cold War was significantly marked by the ‘return’ of religion in the public square. This renewed salience of religion was not necessarily a peaceful spiritual experience however. Because of the specific context of multiple transitions undergone by the post-communist societies, and particularly with regard to the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation into new nation-states, the Balkans experienced the instrumentalization of religious identities for various nationalist

projects as well as inter- and intra-religious tensions related to the newly emerged religious identity politics.

In what follows, we will provide a chronological overview of interreligious relations in the Balkans. We will describe these relations from the establishment of the communist regimes after WWII to the end of the Cold War in 1989, and proceed with brief country-by-country summaries on the religious situation in the individual post-communist countries of Southeast Europe from 1990 to the end of 2008.

Yugoslavia

The initial hostility and ban on religion in the Yugoslav Federation was gradually relaxed in favour of a cautious promotion of religious identities. Generally, the following stages in the restrictions against religion in the former Yugoslavia can be outlined: (1) radical restriction of religious liberty 1945–53, characterized by the complete separation of church and state with abolishment of religious education ingrained in the Yugoslav constitution of 1945; (2) gradual relaxation of restrictions 1953–65; (3) significant liberalization 1965–71; (4) re-imposition of selective restrictions 1972–82; (5) emergence of new opportunities for religious expression 1982–89 (Mojzes 1992: 344). Importantly, as Paul Mojzes has emphasized, if there had been Christian solidarity in Yugoslavia, the communist oppression of religion would have been seriously impeded (*ibid.*: 369).

The liberalization of official policy regarding the nationality question in Yugoslavia during the 1970s² led to a heightened awareness of the ethnic differences in society, which were *de facto* culturally and religiously based. In the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, prior to the war the population officially consisted of three peoples (*narod*) whose distinctions and boundaries were religiously determined. Croats were affiliated with Roman Catholicism, Serbs with Eastern Orthodoxy and Muslims with Sunni Islam. Therefore religion, even when not actively practised, remained an essential marker of identity and thus a source of differentiation.

Evidence of competition and antagonism based on religious difference is not difficult to find in historical records, particularly in

those related to the modern epoch of rising nationalism. For example, in the account of Srdjan Vrcan regarding religions in the area of the former Yugoslavia, the Catholic Church referred to the Orthodox Christians as schismatic until the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), when they were defined as ‘Christians in another way’. This view justified attempts to convert people to Catholicism. The Orthodox Church persistently viewed Western Christianity as a false religion. Likewise, the Orthodox and the Catholic Church claimed that the Slavic Muslims were, respectively, either converted Orthodox Serbs or Catholic Croats, which was often perceived as a legitimate ground for attempts at bringing those Muslims back to their ‘original faith’. Because of historic and geopolitical developments, a sense of ‘religions on the frontier’ has grown accompanied and strengthened by interpretations of national histories in strongly religious and tragic terms. Croatian history has been described as a Calvary, Serbian history in terms of martyrdom, while the history of the Bosnian Muslims has been depicted as a ‘century-long Holocaust’ (Vrcan 2001).

In the 1960s, everywhere in the Yugoslav Federation, religious expression came increasingly into the limelight. Building of new places of worship, numerous religious publications and massively publicized interreligious gatherings made main religious communities more visible and pronounced. As Perica (2001) points out, numerous ecumenical initiatives took place between 1965 and 1989 everywhere in the Yugoslav Federation. Following the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church in Croatia inaugurated in 1966 annual interfaith prayers, which initially brought together Catholics, Protestants and some lower Orthodox clergy, and were joined by Muslims in the late 1970s. Mutual exchange visits on occasion of religious festivals and main holidays were frequent occurrence for clergy and lay people of all faiths. The interreligious cooperation was seen as particularly successful in Bosnia, where people from different faith communities sometimes supported each other in the building of new places of worship. Yet, as Ramet (1998: 171) has emphasized, despite all talks of ‘unity’, the communist regime on a number of occasions hampered contacts between the three principal faiths in the federation, obviously seeing the increased interreligious interaction as a threat.

Moreover, the regime's shifting policies often boosted religion's nationalization and politicization. Tito's crackdown on nationalistic-oriented communist elites in Serbia and Croatia in the early 1970s enhanced the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia as representatives and guardians of their respective nations and thus the only available avenues for nationalist expression. This episode resembles to some extent the King's banning of political parties in the Royal Yugoslavia in the 1930s, as a consequence of which religious manifestations gained a political dimension and the churches overtook the function of a 'protector' of 'their' nations.

In the 1980s, growing economic and socio-political discontent in the Yugoslav Federation gradually came to be framed by reference to nationalist projects. The concept of nation-state became the dominant framework in the attempts at re-imagining and restructuring political space, wherein national religious organization was a central element. As Perica (2002: 78) has noted, this is true even for the official organization of Muslims in Bosnia, the Islamic Community which already in the late 1960s started a dynamic rebuilding of Muslim places of worship and expansion of its religious life. More importantly, it began to define itself not merely as a religious, but also as a national institution for all Muslims.

The newly established nationalist parties everywhere in the federation were backed by the mainstream religions. The Catholic Church in Croatia largely supported the Croatian Democratic Community (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, HDZ) which was founded in 1989 and led by the nationalist historian, Franjo Tudjman. While the Serbian Orthodox Church remained suspicious of Slobodan Milosevic, it backed Serbian nationalist parties and their leaders in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Muslims in Bosnia voted overwhelmingly for the Party of the Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*, SDA) led by Alija Izetbegovic in the 1990 elections. This newly emerged party promoted a re-Islamization of Bosnian Muslim identity and a nationalistic agenda evolving around Islam as a powerful source of mobilization.³

It can be argued that religious and cultural spheres reflected political trends and functioned as the arena where nationalist

discourses were played out. In turn, religion and culture influenced politics by shaping the public sphere and supplying the symbols, myths and rituals needed for the underpinning of homogenizing nationalist programs. Indeed, religion has had a great impact on the politics of nationalism everywhere in the Balkans. The developments in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia offer a striking example of parallel nationalist mobilization founded on economic and social grievances, yet powerfully expressed in terms of ethno-religious rivalry and coupled by the concurrent transformation of the major religious organizations in influential social and political forces driven by nationalist agendas. Proclaimed universalism yielded power to outspoken nationalist orientations: the Catholic Church, a supranational organization by definition, in Croatia championed the promotion of the national ideal and actively participated in the making of the nation–state.⁴

Surely, the power of religion to mobilize people around symbols and values with high emotional potential makes it a major resource for nationalist political elites. The discourse of nation in the former Yugoslavia was reinforced by the continuous reference to shared religious or broadly cultural symbols, as well as by the promotion of ceremonies and rituals buttressing the relevance of the ideologically manipulated past. Competing versions of history and theology appeared wherein the victimization paradigm occupied a central place. All sides resorted to commemorating selected past events that held great symbolic value and would reverberate in the mass consciousness. Shrines, pilgrimages, relics and martyrs were effectively used. The Serbian Orthodox Church endorsed the myth of Kosovo⁵ and the memory of the concentration camp in Jasenovac,⁶ while the Catholic Church in Croatia focused on the beatification of Zagreb's Archbishop Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac (who was accused and tried for taking a favourable stance to the Nazi-related Ustaša regime in Croatia in 1941–45) and the Great Novena celebrations organized in 1975–84 to mark the thirteenth centenary since the Christianization of Croats. In addition to the proclamation of certain saints and Church leaders as national heroes, both Churches canonized a number of new national saints, most of whom had been WWII victims of crimes committed by the other ethnic group. Clearly, the partisan

reconstruction of the past and the vehement production of new myths supported and legitimated the nationalist projects.

In Bosnia's multiethnic and multireligious society, religious beliefs and practices developed and were integrated into the public discourse along similar lines for the Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats alike, despite the fact that these three communities' religious organizations have played very different political roles throughout their history (Bringa 2002: 33).

With the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the ensuing wars, religion was increasingly politicized. While these wars were by no means defined and led in the name of religion, the latter was powerfully involved in deepening social divisions and exacerbating tensions. Certainly, the major responsibility falls on the political leadership – 'ethno-political entrepreneurs' in the phrasing of Brubaker (1998: 297) – who promulgated the misuse of religious traditions for their perilous political games. Yet religion, though not directly responsible for the escalation of crisis and the outbreak of violence, played an 'indirect role in inciting conflicts among South Slavs by shaping culture and custom, which in turn influenced political loyalties' (Djilas 1995: 87).

The concern of the nation-states-in-the-making to strengthen their cultural and religious differences was available as a basis on which political activists mobilized people for crimes against their neighbours during the post-communist Yugoslav crisis. The mainstream religious organizations clothed 'their' nations with a holy aura and this gave an almost sacred dimension to the resentment and the hatred. The wide and deliberate use of religious symbols in the armed conflicts increased the confrontation even more. Religious symbolism appeared in different forms on all sides – military weapons and vehicles were decorated with signs of the cross, church buildings were targeted, priests blessed weapons and soldiers. Later, as the warfare spread, a number of imams and Christian clergy were reported to have followed their troops into battle, blessing them and praying for their victory.⁷ Numerous churches and mosques were targeted and destroyed.

While it was perfectly reasonable that religious leaders supported their communities in the conflict, they failed in not using their

authority to discipline their flocks, to resolutely condemn crimes and, in the words of Srdjan Vrcan (2001), to defend ‘the universality of human rights at the level of everyday life, for all persecuted or threatened regardless of their nationality, faith and political orientation’. Religious officials often voiced strong condemnation of the brutalities and war crimes committed by the other side(s), while remaining silent about the violence and crimes committed by members of their own communities. If they admonished their flocks, it was mainly in the form of an abstract invitation to abstain from such acts (Vrcan 1995: 66). In fairness, the major religious bodies have been ‘neither monolithic nor undifferentiated in their approaches to nationalism, self-determination, human rights and the use of force’ (Powers 1996: 225–26). Moreover, there has been a significant shift in their position since the end of the wars. All parties have called for reconciliation and important efforts have been made to revive inter-religious dialogue. However, self-criticism and willingness to re-mythologize the past – a *sine qua non* premise for reconciliation – are by and large lacking in the postwar Balkan societies. While there have been numerous initiatives by various foreign mediators to encourage interreligious cooperation, these have not always produced the desired results.

We will discuss the challenges of interreligious peacebuilding in the Balkans in chapter 3, while the next sections of this chapter will provide a country-by-country overview of the religious demography and the major trends in religion-related issues in post-communist societies throughout the Balkans. When describing the religious make-up of the populations, we are using data from local censuses, wherever these censuses contain an indicator about religion, or data provided by other sources such as the International Religious Freedom Reports (IRFRs). We are aware of the shortcomings in most of the data regarding religious affiliation; when we speak about the percentage of ‘Muslims’ or ‘Christians’ we mean what in scholarly literature has come to be called ‘sociological’ Muslims or Christians (i.e. all the people affiliated by birth, ethnicity or tradition to the respective religions), rather than the practising believers, whose number is relatively low in most of the countries throughout the region.

The Post-Communist Balkan States

Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo⁸

With the collapse of communism in 1990, the Yugoslav Federation broke down. Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia declared independence in 1991, and Bosnia followed suite in 1992. The remaining Serbia and Montenegro formed the so-called Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which in 2002 was transformed into a confederate State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This union lasted until 2006, when Montenegro became an independent state through a nationwide referendum.

Both Serbia and Montenegro are significantly diverse in their ethnic and religious composition. Today, around 84 per cent of the 7.5 million population of Serbia and some 74 per cent of the 630,000 population in Montenegro belong to the Orthodox Church. Although not a state church, the Serbian Orthodox Church enjoys a considerable influence in the public sphere. Particularly in Serbia, it is largely perceived as the national church of the Serbs. Recent polls reveal that it is the most trusted institution in Serbia.

Muslims comprise around 5 per cent of the population in Serbia and 18 per cent in Montenegro, while Roman Catholics make up 5 per cent in Serbia and 3.5 per cent in Montenegro. Various Protestant groups represent 1 to 2 per cent of the population in these countries. The Law on Religion adopted in 2006 in Serbia singles out seven 'traditional' religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic and the Jewish communities. The recognized groups enjoy certain privileges, like the right to teach religion in public schools. The law has been criticized by governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as by smaller religious communities, particularly because of the burdensome procedures for registration of the so-called 'non-traditional' religions (IRFR Serbia 2008).

Interreligious relations underwent considerable improvement since the end of the post-Yugoslav wars, yet they are oftentimes tense. Intolerance towards minority religions and expressions of anti-Semitism

Table 1 Religion in the Balkans after the fall of Communism

Country	Religious demography	Law on religion	Restitution of religious communities' property	Confessional religious education in public schools
Albania	3.6 million 70% Muslims (55% of them Sunnis and 15% Bektashis) 20% Orthodox 10% Roman Catholics High degree of secularization.	No law on religion. Relations between state and religions are regulated by the State Committee of Cults through bilateral agreements with individual religious communities. No state religion, yet the four major religious communities enjoy a <i>de facto</i> recognition and privileged social status. 245 religious groups, foundations and organizations.	Slow and partial. Law on Restitution 2004: religious communities have the same rights as private individuals.	No
Bosnia-Herzegovina	4 million 45% Muslims 36% Serbian Orthodox 15% Roman Catholics 1% Protestants 3% other faiths Discrimination against religious minorities; segregated religious enclaves.	Law on Religious Freedom 2004. No state religion. In 2007 a concordat with the Vatican was signed, followed in 2008 by an agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Similar agreement with the Islamic Community is underway.	State Law on restitution underway. Return of religious property on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis, usually in favor of the majority groups in individual municipalities.	Introduced in 1994. The Islamic Community, Roman Catholic Church and Serbian Orthodox Church organize religion classes. Education is decentralized and managed differently in the two entities, and even in the 10 cantons of the Federation: in some places it is optional, in others, compulsory.

(Continued)

Table 1 Cont'd

Country	Religious demography	Law on religion	Restitution of religious communities' property	Confessional religious education in public schools
Bulgaria	7.7 million 82.64% Orthodox 12.2% Muslims (of which 7.7% Alevis) Less than 1% Catholics (including Eastern rite Catholics) Less than 1% Protestants	Denominations Act 2002. No state religion, yet Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as "traditional denomination." 100 registered denominations.	Slow and partial. Restitution Law 1992.	Optional classes introduced in 1997 for the Orthodox children and in 2000 for the Muslim children.
Croatia	4.5 million 87.83% Roman Catholics 4.42% Serbian Orthodox 1.28% Muslims Less than 1% Protestants	Law on Religion 2002. No state religion, yet the Roman Catholic Church enjoys particular privileges following the concordats with the Vatican. Fourteen religious communities also signed agreements with the state. 42 registered religious groups.	Slow and partial. Law on Restitution of Property Expropriated During Yugoslav Communist Rule 1996, amended 2002.	Optional classes introduced in 1991 for the Roman Catholic, Muslim and Serbian Orthodox children.

Kosovo	<p>2 million 90% Muslims 5% Serbian Orthodox 3% Roman Catholics Less than 1% Protestants</p> <p>High tensions between the Serbian Orthodox community and the Albanians (regardless of their faith); discrimination against Protestants.</p>	<p>Law on Religious Freedom 2006.</p> <p>101 faith-based or religious organizations.</p> <p>The wearing of headscarves in public education institutions prohibited by the Ministry of Education.</p>	<p>No legislation on restitution.</p> <p>Reconstruction and conservation of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries is a major issue of concern.</p>	No
Macedonia	<p>2.1 million 65% Orthodox 32% Muslims 2% Protestants 1% Roman Catholics</p> <p>Conflict between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Archbishoprics of Ohrid, as well as between the Islamic Community and the Bektashi Community.</p>	<p>Law on Religion 2007.</p> <p>The Constitution recognizes the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Community and the Methodist Church as “religious communities”, while the other registered organizations as “religious groups”.</p>	<p>Law on Denationalization passed 1998, implemented 2002.</p> <p>Almost all churches and many mosques, as well as all properties/religious facilities of the Jewish Community restituted; yet this is not the case with most of the other properties.</p> <p>Problems with the Bektashi Community’s property restitution because of conflicting claims by the Sunni Islamic Community.</p>	Optional classes introduced in 2001 (terminated in 2003) for the Orthodox and Muslim children. Introduction of non-mandatory religious education under way.

(Continued)

Table 1 Cont'd

Country	Religious demography	Law on religion	Restitution of religious communities' property	Confessional religious education in public schools
Montenegro	<p>630,000 74% Orthodox 18% Muslims 3.5% Roman Catholics</p> <p>Tensions between the Montenegrin and the Serbian Orthodox Church.</p>	<p>Outdated 1977 Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities.</p> <p>The Constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community and the Roman Catholic Church, yet all religions are separate from the state.</p>	<p>Slow and partial</p> <p>2004 Law on Restitution treats religious property as it treats private property.</p> <p>Conflicting property claims by the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches.</p>	No
Romania	<p>22 million 86.8% Orthodox 4.7% Roman Catholics 1% Greek Catholics</p> <p>Frequent instances of anti-Semitism. Law to combat anti-Semitism (2006).</p>	<p>Law on Religious Freedom 2006. No state religion, yet the Romanian Orthodox Church enjoys a <i>de facto</i> privileged position. Three-tier system of recognition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – recognized religions – religious associations – religious groups. <p>18 recognized religions.</p>	<p>Slow and partial</p> <p>Implementation of Law 501/2002 (religious property) began late, and is proceeding slowly. Greek Catholic Church claims remain unresolved.</p>	<p>Optional classes introduced 1990. In 1995 classes were made mandatory for primary schools and in 1997 for all grades. Recognized denominations allowed to offer religion classes.</p>

Serbia	7.5 million 84% Orthodox 5% Muslims 5% Roman Catholics 1.5% Protestants Instances of anti-Semitism.	Law on Religion 2006. Seven “traditional” religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic Community and the Jewish Community.	Slow and partial Law on Restitution 2006	Optional classes introduced in 2001 for the “traditional” religious communities. Students must choose between religion classes and civic education classes.
Slovenia	2 million 58% Roman Catholics 2.4% Muslims 2% Orthodox 1% Protestants Muslims still don’t have a mosque in the country.	Religious Freedoms Act 2007. 43 registered communities.	Law on Denationalization 1991. Bulk of communal property returned.	No Non-confessional, elective religions and ethics classes.

The statistical data are based mainly on International Religious Freedom Reports 2008, with small additions based on other sources, such as national censuses. The number of Jews living today throughout the Balkans is extremely low, below 0.1% of the population (Albania: 10, Bosnia-Herzegovina: 500, Bulgaria: 1,363, Croatia: 495, Kosovo: 50, Macedonia: 190, Montenegro: 12, Romania: 12,000, Serbia: 1,185, Slovenia: 75).

and Islamophobia are not a rare occasion. Also, tensions between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church have increased significantly since Montenegro declared independence. Recently, the Islamic community split into two groups with rival leaders in Belgrade (the capital of Serbia) and in the town of Novi Pazar (the capital of the province of Sandzak within Serbia), which caused tension and violent incidents in Sandzak.

In the newly proclaimed independent state of Kosovo, formerly administered by the UN, while being officially part of Serbia, 95 per cent of the population of two million is comprised of Albanians (95 per cent of whom are Muslims and some 3 per cent Roman Catholics; less than 1 per cent belong to various Protestant churches). The shrinking Serbian community in Kosovo has around 100,000 members belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The level of religious observance among Muslims in Kosovo is generally low and Islam has not been a significant factor in public life, while Serbs seem to be strongly linked to their Church, which at times has been the only institution representing them. Orthodox Christianity and Islam are widely perceived as ethnic markers by the Serbs and Albanians respectively.

After the abolishment of the province's autonomy in 1989 and the increase in a repressive Serbian control, the Kosovo Albanians established parallel institutions. The growing tension between the Albanians and Serbs culminated in the war of 1998–99 and the subsequent bombing of Serbia by NATO in the spring of 1999. In the aftermath, Albanians made strong claims for independence, which they declared unilaterally in February 2009. The souring of interethnic relations has usually had a negative impact on interreligious relations, because of the close intertwining of ethnicity and religion. Attacks against the Serbian Orthodox religious sites have continued and Serbs have been subject to various attacks and incidents. Other minorities such as Protestants have suffered discrimination as well. New operating procedures providing greater protection for Serb religious and cultural sites have been adopted recently, and the rebuilding of Orthodox sites damaged in the 2004 interethnic riots continues (IRFR Kosovo 2008).

Slovenia⁹

Slovenia emerged as a nation-state in 1991, being the first of the six ex-Yugoslav republics to declare independence. Its population of about two million is largely homogeneous ethnically, and to a certain extent religiously too. The Roman Catholic Church is the biggest denomination in this country. Under communism, the Catholic Church was marginalized but not strongly oppressed and it gained in prestige after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1970.

Surveys conducted in the 1990s revealed that around one-third of the population do not follow any religion, which led some authors to conclude that secularized Catholics form the country's majority population. According to the 2002 census, about two-thirds of the population belong to the Roman Catholic Church, followed by much smaller communities of Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Lutherans and others. Around 40 religious and spiritual groups and associations have an official registration with the State's Office for Religious Communities. The government has signed special agreements with the Catholic Bishops' Conference and with the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. An agreement with the Islamic Community has been signed recently as well (IRFR Slovenia 2008).

Public opinion surveys indicate a relatively tolerant attitude to the minority religions. An issue of concern has been the absence of mosques for the country's Muslim population, which has been holding its services in private homes. Plans for construction of the first mosque and Islamic cultural centre in Ljubljana have been under discussion for almost 40 years.¹⁰

Croatia¹¹

Having declared independence in 1991, Croatia fought a bloody war with Serbia, one of the products of which was the increase in the ethnic and religious homogenization of society. At the 2001 census, almost 88 per cent of the 4.5 million population of the country declared themselves Roman Catholics, 4.42 per cent of the population

indicated they were Serbian Orthodox, 1.28 per cent Muslims and less than 1 per cent Protestants of various denominations.

The Roman Catholic Church, although not a state church, enjoys special privileges as a result of the 1998 concordats signed with the Vatican. Later, another 14 religious communities also signed agreements with the state. The 2002 Law on the Legal Position of Religious Communities deals with religious communities' legal positions and with government funding, tax benefits and religious education in schools (IRFR Croatia 2008).

Under communism, the Roman Catholic Church was oppressed, yet its role as a guardian of Croatian national interests was strengthened from the 1970s onwards, particularly after Tito's crushing of the rising secular nationalism in the republic in 1971. Under the influence of the Second Vatican Council, in the 1960s, the Catholic Church in Croatia took the direction of interfaith dialogue. Since 1984, the Council for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the former Yugoslav and later the Croatian Conference of Catholic Bishops have organized prayer meetings for unity among Christians at various Christian communities in Zagreb. The course of ecumenism was continued after the Serbo-Croat war of 1991–92, although meetings with religious leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church continued during the war as well, and gained new momentum after the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1994. The Catholic Church has good relations with the Islamic and Jewish Communities in the country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina¹²

Bosnia was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire between 1878 and 1918, of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes until WWII, and the only republic in Tito's Yugoslavia without a constituent nation. With the process of Yugoslavian decentralization and the surfacing of ethnicity into politics, the Bosnian Muslims were officially recognized in 1968 as a separate nation alongside the Serbs and Croats. Despite the fact that all three ethnic groups have their origins in religion, society was fairly secularized, with religion being more of an ethnic marker rather than a practice defining people's life. For example, at a republic-wide survey conducted in 1989, 61 per cent of

the young Muslims said they had never entered a mosque, while only 14 per cent claimed to have religious convictions. The percentage was even higher among the Serbs: 70 per cent said they had never been to a church and only 3 per cent declared themselves religious, while for the Croats the percentage was 35 per cent for those who never entered a church against 33 per cent who considered themselves devout Catholics (cited in Bougarel 1995: 83).

Declaring independence in 1992, Bosnia suffered a three-year destructive war, which reconfigured its religious profile and prompted a significant politicization of the three major faiths, with frequent misuse of religious symbols and buildings for political aims. Ethnic cleansing during the war led to segregated ethno-religious areas, where intolerance and discrimination against minority believers on the part of the majority group has persisted. The present constitutional and electoral system in Bosnia preserves divisions along ethnic lines and religion obviously reinforces such divisions. The country consists of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (divided into ten cantons) and Republika Srpska, as well as one separate administrative district, Brčko.

Muslims constitute some 45 per cent of the around 4 million population, Serb Orthodox are 36 per cent, Roman Catholics 15 per cent, Protestants 1 per cent and other faiths 3 per cent. The State Law on Religious Freedom, adopted in 2004, administers the legal status and concessions to the religious groups (IRFR Bosnia and Herzegovina 2008). While interreligious relations improved considerably since the end of the war, a lot remains to be done.

Macedonia¹³

People's Republic of Macedonia was established in 1946 as a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. From the late 1950s onward, the Titoist regime supported the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the Serbian Orthodox Church, in line with the development of a Macedonian ethnic identity and language.¹⁴ The linkage between ethnic identity and both Christian Orthodoxy and Islam is strong among the ethnic Macedonians and Albanians respectively. Religion, however, seems to be a marginal

factor in the ongoing tensions between the two populations, centred around the status of the Albanians after Macedonia became an independent state in 1991.

Around 65 per cent of Macedonia's 2 million citizens are Orthodox Christians, 32 per cent Muslims, 1 per cent Roman Catholics and 2 per cent belong to other faiths, mainly various Protestant denominations. While interreligious and interethnic relations have been significantly improved after the eight months of armed clashes between the ethnic Albanian rebels of the National Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare*, UCK) and government forces in 2001, intra-religious tensions remain in place. The Macedonian Orthodox Church is struggling for the recognition of its autocephality by the other Orthodox Churches. Its conflict continues with the so-called Orthodox Archbishoprics of Ohrid, which is connected to the Serbian Orthodox Church and represents its interests. The Islamic Community theoretically represents all Muslims in Macedonia, yet the members of the Bektashi Order do not recognize its authority and grapple for their recognition as a separate community.

The 2007 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups replaced a widely criticized earlier law of 1997. It reinforces religious freedom provisions and eliminates previous legal restrictions on the registration of religious communities and organizations and their places of worship. The new law upholds the definition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Community and the Methodist Church as religious communities, and of all other registered faiths as religious groups (IRFR Macedonia 2008).

Albania¹⁵

Contrary to its role in the national development of the Slavic populations of the Balkans, religion has not been a dominant factor in the Albanian nationalist project. Religious differences in Albania have hardly ever prevented collaboration in the name of the 'national interests', and cases of interreligious unions for the defence of political autonomy are abundant throughout Albanian history. Ethno-national identity in Albania has thus subdued religious identifications

and has also bridged, although not erased, the divide between the Geghs of the north and the Tosks of the south.¹⁶ According to the official statistics on the religious make-up of Albania dating back to the time before WWII, about 70 per cent of the Albanians are Muslims (out of the 3.6 million total population today). The Muslim population is divided into a Sunni community (comprising about 55 per cent of the whole population) and a Bektashi community (about 15 per cent). In addition, there exist a number of Sufi brotherhoods such as Ri'fayya and Kadiriyya, Halvetiyya, among others. Around 20 per cent of the population belong to the Orthodox Church and some 10 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church. These numbers have been challenged as inadequate and obsolete by some of the religious communities. We refer to them here because of the lack of recent, more reliable polls.

After the breakup of communism and the abolishment of the old restrictions on religious freedom in 1990 (Albania was the only country where religion was completely banned in 1967 and which was proclaimed 'atheistic' by the 1976 constitution), the state opted to have no proclaimed official religion, following the traditional approach that considers Albania to be a 'country of three religions' rather than a Muslim state. According to the Constitution of 1998, all religions are equal, yet the four predominant religious communities – that is, including Bektashis as a separate community – enjoy a *de facto* recognition and privileged social status because of their long historical presence in Albania.

The considerable level of interreligious tolerance seems to be related to the long history of multiconfessionalism and the traditional pragmatic attitude of Albanians vis-à-vis religion, on the one hand, and to the considerable degree of secularization of society, on the other.

Bulgaria¹⁷

All religious communities in Bulgaria were heavily oppressed under communism. After the abolishment of the communist-time restrictions on religion, they sought to rebuild their spiritual and organizational life. Both the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the Islamic

Community underwent painful internal struggles, disputes and splits, with the setting up of alternative structures and rival leaderships. The rifts weakened enormously both communities and have proven difficult to heal.

At the 2001 census, 82.64 per cent of the close to 8 million Bulgarian citizens self-identified as Orthodox Christians and 12.2 per cent as Muslims. The Catholic (including Eastern rite Catholics) and the various Protestant communities make up together around 1.5 per cent. The Muslim population consists of a larger Turkish community and smaller groups of Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims), Roma and Tatars. Some 7 to 8 per cent of the Turkish Muslims are Alevi (called also Aliani or Kasilbashi) – a heterodox Islamic group considered by some authors to be Shi'ite. Muslims enjoy political representation through the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, an influential political party which has been present in every parliament since its establishment in 1990.

There is no state religion in Bulgaria, although the Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the 'traditional denomination'. The 2002 Denominations Act arranged the relations between the state and the different faiths, specifying the requirement for registration. Presently, there are around 100 officially registered religious groups in the country. In contrast to the generally intolerant attitudes towards the new religious movements, which came to the country after the fall of communism, sociological surveys have revealed a considerably high level of religious tolerance among and towards the so-called 'traditional religions'. Religious communities, however, remain relatively closed and concerned with their own problems. The seeming resurgence of religion in the early 1990s has been to a great extent reversed, and religious service attendance remains very low among the Orthodox Christians, and also among the Muslims.

Romania¹⁸

The Romanian Orthodox Church has participated actively in the building of the Romanian nation and has consequently benefited from a privileged position in state and society. Under communism,

while completely subjugated to the state, its activities were tolerated, while the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church¹⁹ suffered severe repression, the latter being dismantled and forced to merge with the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1948. The Soviet-dictated politics in the sphere of religion, and particularly the fear of the Roman Catholic Church and its transnational centre in the Vatican, were far from conducive to the development of the ecumenical relation between the Orthodox and the Catholics; they were rather pitted against each other.

After the fall of communism, the relations between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic Churches have been particularly strained; the latter has only received back from the Orthodox community a small part of its church buildings and other properties. Still, it was the solidarity of the Romanian Orthodox believers with the protest of the Hungarian Reformed community in Timisoara against the arrest of one of its local church ministers, Laszlo Tokes, which marked the beginning of the large-scale uprising throughout the country, eventually leading to the end of the Ceausescu dictatorship (Flora and Szylagyi 2005: 118).

According to the 2002 census, 86.8 per cent of the 21.7 million population belong to the Romanian Orthodox Church, 4.7 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church and less than 1 per cent to the Greek Catholic Church (although the latter claims 3.6 per cent of the population). The rest of the 18 denominations, recognized by the state, include various smaller Protestant communities, a 67,000 members Islamic Community and a Jewish Community of around 6,000 members (IRFR Romania 2008).

Inevitably, the majority position of the Church in society defines its standing toward major issues such as church-state relations, interreligious dialogue, and religious education in public schools – Romania is the only country in the region where the teaching of religion is mandatory for students of all grades. Whatever the actual level of religiosity of its members, it remains the most trusted institution in the country.²⁰ In 1991, the Orthodox, the Reformed and the Lutheran Churches launched the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania (Interchurch Aid-Department Romania, AIDRom), with

the support of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and this organization has been very active in promoting a better inter-Christian understanding in the country.

Certainly, the Romanian Orthodox Church has championed the ecumenical cause internationally. Thus Romania became the first predominantly Orthodox country to welcome the Roman pontiff with the 1999 visit of Pope John Paul II, which marked an essential step in a meaningful Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. Domestically, frequent attacks on Jews and Jewish property, despite the fact that the remaining Jewish Community is very small, have prompted the passing of a special law in 2006 to combat anti-Semitism. The Romanian Orthodox Church is reported to be often intolerant of Protestant and neo-Protestant groups (IRFR Romania 2008).

Conclusion

This concise country-by-country overview was meant to provide a glimpse into the overall context in which a plethora of interreligious initiatives, with their strengths and weaknesses, took place between 1990 and 2008. After having briefly surveyed the broader historical, socio-political and legal framework within which religious communities in the Balkans have functioned, we now proceed with a discussion on how these communities as well as various religion-related NGOs have engaged questions about values, diversity, tolerance and interreligious dialogue.

Chapter 3

Interreligious Peacebuilding in the Balkans: Structural Developments

The development of new structures for interreligious cooperation in the Balkans has been pivotal in the slow process of building a culture of dialogue and trust. Such structural developments are promoted and carried out by different actors, individual and collective, local and international. They evidently evolve through various stages and patterns, largely defined by shifting geopolitical, social and cultural contexts.

We differentiate between four types of organizational actors involved in promoting interreligious dialogue in the Balkans:¹ (1) international/transnational organizations funding and founding local organizations;² (2) local branches of international organizations;³ (3) local organizations established through local initiatives yet sponsored from abroad⁴ and (4) local organizations established and funded locally, through either private or public funds.⁵ In addition, a special case can be made for interreligious councils (IRCs) whose structures are the result of a combination of two or more of the above types.⁶

Interreligious Councils: A Comparison

One of the most important new developments in the region has been the setting up of national IRCs. The model has been advocated by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP, now called Religions for Peace) as part of a new strategy developed in the mid-1990s in a growing number of countries around the world. It was promoted as an alternative to existing structures in over 20 official WCRP national chapters that had emerged from the early 1970s onwards.

This international non-governmental organization (NGO) worked together with Mercy Corps and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), among others, in its efforts to break new grounds in the area of interreligious cooperation for post-war reconstruction mostly after various regional wars. The establishment of IRCs has therefore involved crosscutting collaboration between various local actors, local religious leaders and international NGOs.

Generally, this model is based on a top-down approach to interreligious dialogue, aiming to follow two principles: the principle of representativity and the principle of subsidiarity. According to the principle of representativity, 'religious communities act as corporate bodies with formal organizational structures and hierarchies. The group or individual recognized as representing his or her constituent community should lead interfaith negotiations and dialogue'. The principle of subsidiarity means that 'planning and implementation of projects of a local scope are to be taken at the local level. National decisions are made at the national level and issues of global significance are made by leading international actors whose relations may be mediated by WCRP through its international advisory board'.⁷

Bosnia was the first country in which WCRP entered immediately after a war in order to build an IRC:

World Conference on Religion and Peace sought to convince both national leaders and the international community that religious institutions could again positively shape the culture of Bosnia-Herzegovina as they had done for over five hundred years. Coming together in dialogue, each community would overcome its own problems stemming from the effects of war and state-imposed atheism. WCRP agreed to assist the Bosnian religious leaders generate support from their respective communities worldwide and to advocate for national and local issues. In return, clerical authorities pledged to use their institutional presence in every community to encourage inter-ethnic cooperation and rebuild civil society.⁸

In its incipient form in Bosnia, WCRP sought 'to help the leaders and their religious communities to figure out ways that they could work together in concrete activities that would help in this reconstruction

process'.⁹ A number of preparatory meetings preceded the formation of this IRC, and considerable efforts were put into numerous meetings with both representatives of the major local religious communities and international lobbying, including WCRP's secretary general meeting with leaders not only of regional religious communities but also from beyond, such as the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican. The leaders of the four major religious communities in Bosnia (Reis ul-ulama Mustafa Ceric, Venko Cardinal Puljic, Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Nikolaj Mrdja and the Jewish Community President Jacob Finci) met for the first time in October of 1996 and signed a joint declaration two months later. When Pope John Paul II visited Sarajevo in April 1997, he met individually with all of them.¹⁰ In June 1997, a *Statement of Shared Moral Commitment* was issued, launching officially the Interreligious Council of Bosnia. The council started to meet on a regular basis in 1999, supported by WCRP's substantial logistical and financial support.

The IRC in Bosnia is a three-level organization. The first level consists of the religious leaders of the four major religious communities, who normally meet once a year. The second level – the working committee – comprises the four representatives of those communities, and they meet once or twice a month. The third level – the secretariat – includes four employees, appointed by the respective religious communities to deal on a daily basis with issues related to interreligious cooperation.

Gradually, five working groups were established by the IRC, dealing with legal issues, women, youth, religious education and the media. All of these groups include representatives of the major religious communities. The legal experts group, for example, was instrumental in drafting a new law on religion that was passed in 2004. In the meantime, the council organized a number of public presentations regarding this law and its modes of operation for priests, imams and other stakeholders, including representatives of the international community. Other activities comprise a forum bringing human rights scholars and theologians to discuss the right to freedom of religious practice and a series of conferences on religion and democracy building organized with the support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as various round-tables,

TV and radio programs and so on. The council published a glossary of religious terms especially useful for local journalists covering religious news, as well as a book on the customs of Muslims, Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Jews in Bosnia.¹¹

One of the difficulties in operating the IRC in Bosnia has been how to relate to the different status of the religious leaders in the country. Not all religious communities have the same structures, and what seems similar on the surface may not be the case in practice. The jurisdictional authority of the religious leaders is different in various religious traditions: neither the Sarajevo-based cardinal nor the metropolitan have the kind of authority over their respective constituents as is wielded by the Reis ul-ulama among Bosnian Muslims throughout the country.¹²

A number of our interviewees, both in Bosnia and in other Balkan countries, seem to perceive the IRC in Bosnia as too formal, with the gatherings of the top leaders of the four religious communities having resulted mainly in the issuing of common moral statements without great practical consequences. Disputes between religious officials of the various communities have crept up now and then. As a result of one of these, the work of the council reached a critical point between 2004 and 2005, after the leader of the Orthodox community withdrew and the leader of the Catholic community froze their respective participation.¹³ During this time, the Secretariat continued its activities through the various working groups. While the council has certainly played 'an essential role in rebuilding Bosnian society through its work on reforming the legal system, on facilitating interfaith dialogue, on reaching out to the media and on education projects that promote tolerance and understanding, on humanitarian assistance to vulnerable families through the women's working group and on the establishment and support of a nationwide multi-religious youth network',¹⁴ its uneven trajectory of development confirms the need for a multidimensional analysis on the accomplishments and drawbacks of ambitious international projects like this one.

In 2005, the council was registered as an NGO, independent from WCRP, which marked a new development for this organization: the transfer of power from international to national decision making,

in all areas, from fund-raising to drafting and implementation of various programs and activities. The work of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia has continued since then in different areas of inter-religious cooperation. Our impression during our last visit in July 2006 was that the paradigm shift, while challenging, had stimulated new energies and resources. According to the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Council has 'continued to operate despite occasional disagreements and funding constraints'. Moreover, the council published in 2008 its first country report on various forms of religious discrimination and violations of religious freedom, such as attacks on religious objects and religious officials, covering the period between November 2006 and December 2007.¹⁵

The Bosnian model was replicated for the leaders of the Kosovo religious communities through the active involvement of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and WCRP international staff. A more active interreligious interaction, which prepared the ground for the later involvement of WCRP, started with the Conference of Religious Leaders in Vienna on 18 March 1999, immediately before the NATO bombing. It was an attempt to prevent further escalation of violence. The conference was organized by the American Rabbi Arthur Schneider of The Appeal of Consciousness, with the sponsorship of the government of the Republic of Austria. The Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren, Qemajl Morina of the Islamic Community and the late Roman Catholic bishop Marko Sopi sent a powerful appeal to respect the rights of all communities in Kosovo, condemning violence, interethnic hatred and the destruction of religious sites. Unfortunately, this appeal had no bearing on the armed conflict in Kosovo.

In December 1999, the Seventh World Assembly of WCRP took place in Amman where, according to Jim Cairns, about 40 of the most senior religious leaders from the Balkans were present. As a follow-up of this meeting, in the aftermath of the Kosovo war, the Interreligious Council of Bosnia invited the Kosovo assembly delegates to develop joint interreligious partnerships. In February 2000, the Kosovo religious leaders (the Reis- ul-ulama Rexheb Boja, the Serbian Orthodox bishop Artemije and the Roman Catholic bishop

Marko Sopi) visited Sarajevo and agreed to issue a Statement of Shared Moral Commitment. In April 2000, the three leaders met in Prishtina on the occasion of a visit to Kosovo by the Interreligious Council of Bosnia.¹⁶ These three leaders formed a local interreligious council and signed a joint declaration condemning violence against innocent civilians during and after the war, committing themselves to work together for the building of a democratic society and to respect the rights of all citizens. A further meeting of Kosovo religious leaders in Oslo in September 2001 was organized and sponsored by the Norwegian Church Aid. At this meeting a plan of action was endorsed to promote dialogue and reconciliation among the citizens of Kosovo, which was to be overseen by the working committee of the IRC. A follow-up training seminar on peace and reconciliation for representatives of the major religious communities was held in Ohrid, Macedonia, in May 2002, yet not all participants arrived and the meeting was marked by tension. Thanks to the joint effort of WCRP and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), meetings between representatives of the working groups of the Interreligious Council of Kosovo continued with the support of the UN, OSCE and the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) until February 2003, when the participants concluded that they no longer wanted to meet unless their senior leaders could meet in Kosovo. The Serbian Orthodox Church objected particularly to some unjustified statements by the Catholic side that her monasteries in Kosovo were in fact 'Catholic monasteries'. The dialogue was marred by disputes and the lack of sufficient commitment by the religious leaders to work actively on the implementation of the agreed principles.¹⁷

Despite the official formation of an IRC in Kosovo, no substantial activities ensued. Unfortunately, the process leading to the desired outcome of establishing an IRC did not go beyond a few meetings. The main reasons behind the stalemate seem to have been the then unresolved status of Kosovo and the concerns of the minority Serbs about their situation. The violence in March 2004 in which some 30 Serbian Orthodox churches were damaged or destroyed deepened the rift between communities. While the violence was condemned by all sides, the senior religious leaders continued to accuse each other of not having done enough in the aftermath. To be sure,

since 2002, Bishop Artemije withdrew entirely from participating in any interreligious activity. David Steele shared that before the war of 1998–99, he was quite impressed with Artemije ‘because he actually challenged the Milosevic regime more powerfully than any other Orthodox bishop at that time’. He sent Serbian Orthodox participants to the interreligious workshops organized by Steele, beginning in 2000, yet in 2002 he refused to send people anymore. Steele surmised that ‘the Bishop came to feel that the Serbians had become so victimized, particularly after the war, that he had become totally disillusioned. He told me: ‘We can not participate anymore in this kind of dialogue process.’ I actually knew priests who disagreed but they would not go against the bishop’.¹⁸

In Albania, the process of dialogue regarding the establishment of the Interreligious Council of Albania started in 2006, when the head of the Orthodox Church in Albania, Archbishop Anastasios, was elected Honorary President of the World Conference on Religions for Peace. This process has included the four major religious communities in Albania: the Sunni Muslims, the Bektashis, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics. Although the process of establishing an IRC was initially slowed down within the Roman Catholic community because of concerns about it being reduced to an NGO status, the Interreligious Council of Albania started its work in the fall of 2008, although the official launch will likely take place in the fall of 2009.¹⁹ According to the statute, it consists of a presidential council comprising the four religious leaders, presided by a chairperson (appointed for a year on a rotation principle by each religious community). They meet once a year. An executive council with nine members (two representatives from each religious community and a secretary-general) meets at least once every three months.

In Macedonia, the process of building an IRC followed a different trajectory. WCRP initiated work in Macedonia after the 1999 Amman assembly, but it was only after the 2001 war that a willingness to build a national interreligious structure appeared. In this case, it was more of a local rather than an international initiative, particularly through the active involvement of the late President Boris Trajkovski. Yet international actors, such as Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler, have played a crucial role in promoting interreligious cooperation in this

country, with the vital support of USIP. According to Ratomir Grozdanoski, this IRC emerged after the war in 2001 out of necessity. During this conflict, interreligious relations had broken down. Even after the war ended, religious intolerance was growing. So the idea appeared of organizing an interreligious conference on peace in Skopje between the five most important religious communities in Macedonia: Orthodox, Muslims, Catholics, Evangelical Methodists and Jews. This conference was under the office of the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Boris Trajkovski. For the first time in a long period, the five leaders of these respected religious communities came together officially. It was organized with the support of Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler, funded in part by the USIP.²⁰ The papers of the conference were published in both Macedonian and Albanian languages. In the final conclusion of the book that came out of this conference, it was stated clearly that there is a need for the establishment of an IRC in Macedonia.²¹

When the new body was formed, they decided to call themselves a Council for Interreligious Cooperation rather than an IRC, perhaps in an effort to distinguish themselves from the WCRP model. Some people in the religious leadership of Macedonia considered the Bosnian model to be too formal, that is, too top-down. They insisted on a more flexible structure where the work of the council is carried out by official representatives from the five major religious leaders, rather than by the leaders themselves.²² The Macedonian religious leadership agreed to work for the fostering of interreligious dialogue at all levels, prioritizing the grassroots-top approach. Four major points of cooperation emerged: religious education, property restitution, drafting the law on religion and the inclusion of the Orthodox and Islamic theological faculties in the state university system. Major activities included theological conferences, yearly public meetings of religious leaders with the yearly rotation of the hosting community.²³

The immediate post-conflict context in which the Council for Interreligious Cooperation in Macedonia emerged explains the short time it took to establish this kind of interreligious structure. In addition, the two main religious communities in Macedonia, the Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community, feel challenged and

weakened transnationally. The Macedonian Orthodox Church has been overwhelmingly affected because of its isolation by the rest of the Orthodox world, which still refuses to recognize it officially, while the Islamic Community has been struggling not only with the local impact of growing European and international islamophobia, but also with internal disputes. These struggles include the contest over the Grand Mufti's post by various groups, the attempts at the infiltration of the Islamic Community (officially called Islamic Religious Community) by radical Islamist groups, complaints by minority Muslim groups of ethnic Macedonians, Bosniaks, Turks and Roma that the Islamic Community is dominated by ethnic Albanians, who make up around three-quarters of the country's Muslim population. This intra-religious fragility, for Orthodox Christians and Muslims alike, seems to result in greater openness and desire for interreligious dialogue by both communities. The two communities are thus natural allies when it comes to a number of issues, such as property restitution and religious education.

An important point of collaboration through the Council for Interreligious Cooperation has been the participation of the five major religious Communities in discussions regarding the draft of a new law on religion. At an earlier stage, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community aligned themselves behind the provision that only one religious denomination of any one religion can get legal status. This draft law would have meant the legal exclusion of the Serbian Orthodox Church's Ohrid Diocese as well as the Muslim Bektashi Community. After receiving criticisms from the OSCE and the Council of Europe, the draft of this proposed law was reviewed and passed in 2007 by the Parliament in a version in line with international religious freedom and human rights norms.

Attempts by the WCRP to promote an IRC in Bulgaria in 2001 fell through. According to Jim Cairns,²⁴ the lack of success was related to three reasons: the internal split in the Orthodox Church at that time, the fears by small religious communities that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has taken a hegemonic stance, and also funding restraints. After new recent efforts by the national Religious Affairs Directorate at the Council of Ministers, and despite the reluctance of some of the

leaders of the Orthodox Church, a new association called the National Council of the Religious Communities in Bulgaria was formed in August 2008. It includes representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Islamic Community, the Central Israeli Spiritual Council, the Catholic Church and the United Evangelical churches. The council pledges to represent the Bulgarian model of religious tolerance to Europe and to the Balkans, and to develop interreligious dialogue as a means towards better understanding and the preservation of religious peace as well as the prevention of possible cases of intolerance. It remains to be seen what impact this fragile initiative will have in the future.

Addressing Issues of Common Concern

Social reconciliation

Reconciliation is profoundly important in divided post-war societies, with acts of repentance and forgiveness being central to the process of post-conflict reconstruction of people's personal and communal lives. Sharing the trauma, confronting fears and rehumanizing the other are the basis for forgiveness and subsequent reconciliation, which are indispensable for any long-lasting peacebuilding effort. These different aspects of reconciliation have been at the heart of the activities of most interreligious organizations in the region and one of the primary ways of dealing with the past.

The nature of reconciliation has been widely debated. Some authors insist that only individual human beings can practice repentance and forgiveness, helping the process of reconciliation to come about. Others argue that reconciliation can also take place collectively through institutional acts of public contrition and request for forgiveness from the victims or their descendants that affect people's perceptions of the past. In both cases, the process allows for a new way of looking at the future in terms of new possibilities to think and imagine one's relationships with others who are often perceived as traditional enemies. Most authors seem to agree that reconciliation is a multidimensional and multi-component process.

We argue for the complementarity between the two approaches: a combination of individual repentance with collective admission of wrongdoings is crucial for peacebuilding in post-conflict society. Collective repentance of a social group through institutional acts of symbolic meaning can trigger a new openness to those affected by wrongdoing and allow a deep personal transformation to unfold because it becomes publicly sanctioned. Yet not all members will avail themselves of this healing opportunity. Some people will inevitably hide behind the collective repentance without any personal transformation. These individuals certainly cannot be personally exonerated by collective acts of public repentance, particularly if they have themselves contributed directly to the injustices sought to be redressed. The public acts can thus only hope to trigger the personal changes. They also allow larger institutions to move beyond the guilt related to the past and face the present and future with a renewed sense of hope and openness to cooperate with groups of people once considered the enemy or the inferior ones, unworthy of one's cooperation. It also marks an end to victimization discourses that seek to manipulate guilt for their own immediate interests, only perpetuating a state of victimhood.

Individual acts of repentance and requests for forgiveness are deeply transformative for the minds and hearts of those who struggle with guilt as well as for their victims. They allow for the humanizing of the other and, in time, for the normalizing of human relations. Individual acts of granting forgiveness are equally powerful, even more so as they free the victim from the weight of revenge or from gnawing feelings related to a state of victimhood.

In a recent account on dealing with the past in BiH, Croatia and Serbia, Ivana Franović notes that 'reconciliation' is not a very popular term in the region, in contradistinction to the term 'peacebuilding', which has gained popularity.²⁵ This reluctance towards the notion of reconciliation comes from the fact that many discussions link it to the notion of forgiveness, and people seem often to feel under pressure to forgive and thus make a compromise with their need for justice. Indeed, forgiveness is a 'very personal process and an act that cannot be demanded. It is a choice of the individual who has endured

a misdeed – only he/she has the power to decide. [. . .] If they don't want or cannot forgive, it is not decisive in the process of peacebuilding' (ibid.: 23).

One way or another, these individual acts do not seem to be carried out frequently: they come from particularly strong persons. They can also be triggered by transformative spaces being created for small groups of people from different sides of a conflict; thus the importance of funding such small initiatives on a much larger scale through local organizations. Yet in both cases, without public institutional and/or communal repentance and forgiveness, particularly when a considerable portion of the population is guilty (directly or indirectly) of unjust behaviour, most people never reach the point of seeking repentance and forgiveness on their own or through small intentional encounters aimed at addressing the ongoing pains of the past. The collective institutional or communal stance helps many individuals increase their consciousness about wrongdoings and enables a public language and space for individual acts of repentance and forgiveness to follow. Therefore the complementarity of the two forms.

Two examples from our interviews are illustrative in this regard. David Steele, who conducted a number of workshops on forgiveness and reconciliation in the region, noted the importance of acts of confession of sins, even when these sins were not done directly by the people who admit of them:

I would have groups, and would ask them to assess themselves. Serbs would be here, and Muslims there, and Catholics over there. I would ask each group to evaluate the actions of their own group. What has happened? What have you done you personally? What kinds of things is your group responsible for in your relationship to the others? Or, what kinds of things did you personally do? None of them had committed atrocities, but then they did hold prejudices against each other. I remember a Serbian soldier who was listening to angry Croats talking about the massacre in Vukovar. Instead of admitting anything that Croats had done wrong, they did not want to assess themselves at all. They were challenging the Serbs. Then the Serbian soldier said: 'You are right. The massacre in Vukovar

was absolutely wrong'. You could just hear the quiet after that. Finally, these Croats had heard the Serbian soldier say that it was a massacre (he was not involved himself, I am sure, but it was an acknowledgement of what had happened).

In another interview, the former Reis-ul-ulama of Kosovo, Rexheb Boja, recalled with bitterness that immediately after the war in Kosovo, his Islamic Community suggested to the Serbian Orthodox leader, Bishop Artemije, to issue a statement asking for forgiveness about the wrongdoing of the Serbs against the Albanians in Kosovo; such a statement was never released. To be sure, the Shared Moral Commitment signed by the three major religious communities in 2000 did not raise the issue of forgiveness for past wrongs and thus made no contribution towards reconciliation. In this sense the lack of reconciliatory mood is hardly to be blamed on one of the parties alone and it certainly has a freezing effect on the efforts of committed peacemakers on all sides.²⁶ Such missed opportunities remind us that recognition of wrongdoing and the subsequent forgiveness rarely come from responding to a simple request, even when it comes from a religious leader. Yet, such requests reflect an often deep need on the part of victims that the suffering inflicted on them be publicly recognized, which is also a precondition for making a later process of reconciliation possible.²⁷

It seems that most of the mainline religious organizations never reached an understanding about the importance of admitting fault for past wrongdoings as part of a true process of reconciliation, be it in the distant or recent past. The only church leader who stood up after 1989 and admitted to having collaborated with the communist regime was the Romanian Patriarch Theoktist. His gesture of contrition was highly appreciated by clerics and lay people alike, who refused to accept his resignation from the post of patriarch. Thus, the Romanian Orthodox Church continues to be the most trusted institution in the country.²⁸ The Roman Catholic Church in Croatia, according to Perica (2002: 187), was never prepared to learn from history and recognize as a mistake its clerical policies toward the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH). After the fall of communism, the Church sided with the nationalist

agenda of Franjo Tudjman. Similarly, the Serbian Orthodox Church never condemned any Serb criminal, not even those tried and sentenced at the Hague War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (Perica, 2002: 173). Our informal conversations with Croatians revealed that on a popular level two opposing kinds of discourses and demonstrations coexist in the public sphere in many Croatian towns: the first kind reinforces feelings of victimization linked to certain perceptions of WWII events while the second seeks to popularize new interpretations fostering reconciliation.

When discussing reconciliation and the resilience by some individual or collective actors to participate in acts of repentance,²⁹ it is appropriate to look at the socio-political context in which such acts are supposed to take place. In the case of Bishop Artemije, there were considerable shifts in his political stance over time and in his overall role in the complicated situation of Kosovo. Certainly his behaviour has been heavily influenced by the political developments, which fostered the feeling of victimization in most leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in addition to fortifying an already existing fortress mentality. As Jim Cairns observed:

[T]he Bishop was pulled into a political vacuum because after the NATO bombing, there were no credible political voices in the Serb community. He was there, he stayed, and he was the voice that the local Serbs trusted. His political role has subsequently made it very difficult for him to also play the role of a religious leader in the context of working with his Catholic and Muslim colleagues.³⁰

At the same time, one can find among individual clerics at various levels of the Serb Orthodox hierarchy sincere acts of compassion for the suffering of the Kosovo Albanians. In a gesture of empathy, Patriarch Pavle sent a letter of support to the protesting Albanian students in Kosovo in 1998, in which he condemned the brutal use of force against them by the Serbian police. A year later, in a speech on the occasion of the 1310 anniversary of the Kosovo battle delivered at Gracanica monastery (the headquarters of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo), Patriarch Pavle emphasized: 'If the only way to create a greater Serbia is by crime, then I don't accept that and let that Serbia disappear. . .'³¹

During the Serbian persecution against the Albanians in the province of Kosovo in 1998 and 1999, Father Sava Janjić sheltered and thus protected in the Decani monastery more than 100 Albanian refugees. In a reconciliatory effort in November 1999, he told the UN radio in Prishtina that he greatly regretted ‘everything which was done by members of the Serbian people and the Special Forces against the Albanian civilians, which is a very serious crime’.³²

Attempts at fostering better relations and interreligious understanding have been made by some Kosovo Albanian politicians as well. In April 2006, ethnic Albanian President Fatmir Sejdiu visited Decani monastery for Orthodox Easter and spoke with the clergy in Serbian, marking it the first time a president of Kosovo received and accepted such an invitation (IRFR Serbia and Montenegro 2006). Our interviews with representatives of the Islamic Community revealed much openness and desire for dialogue; indeed some leaders have continued to meet informally with open-minded Orthodox clergy in an effort to sustain at least some venue of communication. However, three other non-Muslim interviewees voiced the opinion that Kosovo Albanians, both Muslims and Catholics, are not really interested in dialogue. These different perceptions reflect the complicated majority/minority power dynamics on the ground.

In May 2006 a pioneering interreligious conference took place in Peja (Pec in Serbian), which also included visits to the Decani monastery, to a mosque and to a Roman Catholic church. This conference was organized mainly through the efforts of the local office of the NCA with significant support from United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The NCA considers this conference their best achievement in Kosovo. In the words of its office director, Francois Perez, ‘it was the first time when representatives of the different religions here were involved at such level officially. And the final declaration is encouraging and certainly a good basis for the future. It has many positive effects: on the population, on political level’. Perez pointed out that religious communities in the province could play a bigger role in the reconciliation process, as they also have closer contact with people at the municipal level. But there remains a lot of work to be done.³³ The interaction with the Orthodox Church remains limited, and plans for a follow-up of the Peja conference have been frozen because of the reluctance on the part of the

leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church to participate. The situation has been further complicated by regular instances of vandalism against Serbian Orthodox religious sites and symbols, deterrence of reconstruction work and other cases of interethnic and interreligious tensions. The Islamic Community has made some efforts to alleviate the situation. In 2007 the leader of the Islamic Community, Mufti Trnava, travelled to the Peja Kursumli mosque to make a special address in response to municipal authorities' attempt to halt the construction of an outer gate and security wall at the Peja/Pec Patriarchate, emphasizing the importance of practising interreligious tolerance (IRFR Serbia 2007).

The newly declared independence of Kosovo has no doubt affected interethnic, and by extension interreligious relations. International pressure on the Albanian government to comply with human rights norms and standards has resulted in constitutional provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination on religion. Whether these norms will be applied in Kosovo on a regular basis is still an open question. Recent reports by smaller Protestant denominations about cases of discrimination speak of the opposite as do numerous incidents against the Serb Orthodox community and many of its properties (IRFR Kosovo 2008).

The role of the media, particularly religious media, can not be underestimated when it comes to both fostering and combating stereotypes, fears and prejudices against the 'others'. It has been reported that in Serbia, for example, instances of vandalism often occurred soon after press reports characterizing some religious groups as sects (IRFR Serbia 2007). In Bosnia, attacks on religious objects increased significantly in the campaign months before the October 2006 national elections (IRFR BiH 2007). An important event in this regard has been a 1994 meeting of Christian and Muslim journalists from countries of the former Yugoslavia, where the participants expressed their understanding about the need for the media to contribute to reconciliation by emphasizing positive and reconciling news, providing information about other religious traditions and communities, avoiding 'manipulation' or 'instrumentalization' by governments and refusing to create or perpetrate 'enemy images', among others (Taylor 1997: 434–35). There have been conference sessions dedicated to the importance of both journalist training about

religion and media training for religious communities³⁴ as well as various educational sessions;³⁵ the need for further such educational events seem to be ongoing.

The path to forgiveness and reconciliation is definitely not an easy one. Religious communities in the Balkans are often entrenched in ethno-religious mythologies that are fraught with constructions of neighbours as enemies and with victimization paradigms. The already-mentioned myth of Kosovo, which plays a central role in the Serbian Orthodox Church's self-perception, as well as in the Serbian national project, is a good example in point. Yet Serbia is by no means the only country with such a problem. The Balkans is a place where the interests and the power struggles of three big empires intersected and often clashed over many centuries. Therefore, the healing of the divided memories which often go far back in the history – WWII, the centuries of imperial legacies (Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman, etc.) and even the medieval crusades – is crucial. Religious communities have an important role to play in this process of transforming historical perceptions from ones that divide and perpetuate the cycle of victimization and violence towards ones that can aim, at best, towards consensus and, at the least, towards a tolerant recognition of others' perspectives.

Efforts towards the demythologizing and reassessment of the past, particularly of historic events dominated by interethnic and interreligious strife, have not produced the desired result. For example, a 1995 project of the Austrian Catholic organization 'Pro Oriente' for the writing of a new church history of the South Slavs by representatives of the Croat Catholics, Serbian Orthodox and Bosnian Muslim leaders and scholars failed, because the leaders of the Catholic and of the Orthodox Church ignored the project (Perica 2002: 184). In Croatia, an international commission established to supervise the new Croatian school history courses found that the textbooks played down the WWII Ustaša crimes, while magnifying the number of Croat victims of Serb guerrilla Četniks, as well as the number of the people repressed by communism (ibid.: 188–89).

However, there are positive examples as well. In the framework of an initiative that exists since 1998, the Joint History Project of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, an international team of experts developed alternative teaching

materials for history teachers in the Balkans. The four workbooks were organized thematically and focus respectively on the Ottoman Empire, Nations and States in Southeast Europe, the Balkan Wars, and WWII. The workbooks present different points of view for different countries, challenging the notion of only one, national historical truth, comparing different versions of the same events and periods. The guiding idea has been that the process of reconciliation will be fostered through revising ethnocentric school history teaching, avoiding the production of stereotypes and identifying attitudes that encourage conflict. The workbooks have been published in English, as well as in the local Southeast European languages, and these publications are freely available online at: <http://www.cdsee.org/jhp/index.html>. The impact of this project remains to be measured. Obviously much work needs to be done by all religious communities of the Balkans in finding an agreed-upon understanding about their common history.

Ecumenical dialogue has figured prominently among the efforts at conflict resolution and reconciliation in the Balkans. One of the most detailed agenda for actions towards reconciliation has been drawn by Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians, who met in 1996 in Belgrade. In the 'Group Statement' which came out of this meeting, a number of concrete steps are listed, such as 'repairing or rebuilding destroyed places of worship, whether of one's own community or of one's neighbor', 'promoting multi-cultural education (including religious curricula), interreligious dialogue and common prayerful witness for peace', 'encouraging religious media to counteract the one-sided misrepresentations of complex situations which is so characteristic of much mass media coverage of Balkan events and which propagate fear and hatred' (quoted in Taylor 1997: 437). However, the practical implementation of the agreements reached at meetings such as those two quoted above is what remains to be further researched. This is not to say that none of these actions for reconciliation were absent altogether. Practical interaction increased considerably and 'the dialogue of life' – encounters related to the daily activities – resumed after the war.

The role of religious institutions in the wars of the 1990s has often been controversial. Although some of the Serbian Orthodox

theologians condemned the war, the Church as a whole backed it, characterizing it as defensive. It severely condemned crimes, yet interpreted those by the Serbian side as 'excesses' (Radić 2000: 72). A particularly infamous episode has been the blessing by Hieromonk Gavriilo of the members of the Serbian paramilitary police office called the Scorpions before the July 1995 massacre of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica. In 2005, the circulation of a video made public this episode. Some 10 days later, the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed its negative attitude to Gavriilo's action in a statement 'Our Lord, May It Never Happen Again'. Its response has been criticized by many as too little, too late.³⁶ Indeed, in the context of the post-communist wars, religious leaders on all sides severely criticized violence against their own community but were less vocal in condemning acts of violence committed against members of other communities. The role of religion has thus oscillated between 'ethnic captive' and 'reconciling agent' (Steele 2003).

A good example of institutional willingness to work on reconciliation is the first visit to Jasenovac by a Roman Catholic bishop in 2007. Bishop Antun Skvorčević led a delegation of 90 priests and deacons to Jasenovac to visit the exhibition of the newly opened Memorial Museum and pay respect to the victims. Importantly, he later announced plans for ecumenical prayers in Jasenovac with representatives of other religious communities (IRFR Croatia 2007). During the week of ecumenical dialogue in April 2007 in Bosnia, the heads of the Roman Catholic and the Serbian Orthodox Churches held services at each other's cathedrals. Also in 2007 in Mostar, the country's most segregated city, the leaders of the local Muslim and Catholic community met for the first time since the end of the war, which was an important step towards reopening new channels of communication (IRFR BiH 2007).

An interesting example of faith-based mediation and dialogue efforts is the activity of the St. Egidio community in Kosovo. The parallel state structures established in Kosovo after the 1990 referendum on independence had a disastrous effect on education, as the Albanian pupils did not attend the Serb-controlled state schools and pursued their studies in ad hoc set up sites without the necessary curricula and school materials. A step towards the solving of this

problem was made due to negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina, initiated and mediated by the community of St. Egidio. In early September 1996 Milosevic and Rugova signed an accord for the return of Albanian pupils and students to the state secondary schools in the coming academic year, marking the first official agreement of any kind between the Serb government and the Albanian community in the province. After various delays, the protocol of implementation was signed in March 1998 and the Albanians began to return to the public schools and universities (Morozzo della Rocca 1998: 13).

Another example of peacebuilding and mediation effort is the activity of World Vision in Kosovo. In 2001, World Vision founded the first multiethnic Community Council for Peace and Tolerance in the ethnically divided town of Mitrovica. The council consisted of local political and religious leaders, including the imam of Mitrovica and the mother superior of the Serbian Orthodox monastery in Mitrovica. It undertook various peacebuilding activities, trying to combat stereotypes among Albanians, Serbs and other minority groups living in the town (Roma, Bosniaks and Turks). The annual week of peace, for example, included forums and discussions between the different local groups. The tensions between Albanians and Serbs in 2004 brought the work of the council to a standstill, but the council restarted its work in 2005 (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana and Abu-Nimer 2005: 67).³⁷

While the story recounted by David Steele earlier gives an example of individual reconciliation (see pp. 74–75), the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions present examples of institutional/collective attempts at confronting past wrongdoing. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established in 1994 in The Hague, Netherlands, in order to investigate and prosecute war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. It handed down the first genocide conviction in 2001. Radislav Drstic, a Bosnian Serb general, was found guilty of killing 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995. The trial against Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, who was charged with crimes against humanity, began in 2001 and was terminated in 2006 with his death while in prison. Another major on-going case is that of the former Bosnian Serb

President, Radovan Karadzic, charged with genocide, deportation and killings of Bosnian Muslims and Croats (Karadzic was arrested in June 2008 after 12 years of hiding). By August 2008 the tribunal had concluded the proceedings against 114 accused out of the 161 indicted, and it is expected to conclude its work in 2010.³⁸ This number is considered extremely low, when compared with the estimates of those directly involved in crimes to be in the thousands. It has been reported that the court is considered ‘unjust’ and ‘anti-Serb’ by the majority of Serb people, inadvertently contributing to a massive support for the national parties in the subsequent elections. Moreover, some Serbian Orthodox clerics have openly expressed their support for the detainees (Perić 2004: 1–2).

Surveys in Serbia have revealed that more than half of Serbian citizens are inclined to blame the breakup of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars on outside factors like Croatian nationalism, interests of the United States or NATO and Muslim “separatism, while only about 41 per cent point to Serbian nationalism (Ilic 2004: 4). It has been noted by some authors that ‘most of the current discourse on guilt and responsibility in Serbian society is marked by high levels of misunderstanding and superficiality’ (Perić 2004: 5). Both domestic advocates and opponents of the tribunal have sought to minimize the concept of collective responsibility by arguing that individuals rather than entire ethnic groups or states were responsible for the war crimes (Bjelakovic 2002: 165).

While the tribunal was formed and is working under the auspices of the UN, the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions purport to be national efforts to deal with the past. A closer look, however, reveals that these commissions are also internationally modelled and supported. There have been two such commissions in the Balkans: in Serbia and in Bosnia. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Serbia (2001–03) turned out to be a short-lived and practically unsuccessful attempt for national reconciliation. The efforts in Bosnia have also turned abortive at the initial stages despite considerable international support, including by the USIP. This failure has been related to the lack of political will, in addition to the ICTY opposition out of fear that such commission would overlap with its own mandate (Franovic 2008: 33).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Serbia drew on the South African model. It was established through a state decree by the then-president Kostunica and organized with the active involvement of the Open Society Institute linked to the Soros Foundation in Belgrade. However, the South African model seems to have been applied without a proper adaptation to the local context (Ilic 2004: 7). Apart from lay people, the commission included also representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Muslim Community and the Roman Catholic Church in Serbia. Professor Radovan Bigovic of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who was a member of this commission, argues that the reasons for the failure were the

different approaches as to the goal of that commission; its members had very different expectations. For example, we had historians who said that we need twenty to thirty years in order to get objective facts as to the causes of the war, before we can embark on such a commission. It was very utopian to embark on this commission so soon. Then, we had juridical organs that had hardly changed from the previous regime who were enabled to call people and to investigate them early after the war and regime change. The third approach looked at this commission as a moral institution that would act as moral legitimacy for giving the direction to the state. [. . .] We were supposed to have representatives of the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim communities. Their representatives refused to participate in this commission. But the question of reconciliation can not be pressed by force, from the outside. Reconciliation is a very personal act for every individual. If we talk about reconciliation as a form of ideology, then it has the opposite effect. Here, everything was politicized, instrumentalized by politics. So we had an odd situation: no one really cared to know the truth. The case was to produce the truth, shape the truth for the needs of centers of political power.³⁹

On the whole, 'the commission neither got closer to any truth nor achieved any reconciliation' (Ilic 2004: 2). This, however, is not to say that Truth and Reconciliation Commissions do not have a place in the efforts to achieve national reconciliation in post-war societies.

In fact, one can learn a lot by the failure of the first such body in European history. According to Bjelakovic, the best approach to the issues of responsibility, guilt and reconciliation seems to be a multi-institutional one whereby different institutions deal with different aspects of recent Yugoslav history, thus fulfilling different but complementary tasks. The ICTY, which is internationally perceived as a democracy-building test for the Yugoslav successor states, has been dealing with specific episodes of crimes, while the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions are to deal in theory with broader issues related to each national context. As for the more popular need for interethnic and interreligious reconciliation, it is to be met by the NGO community, according to Bjelakovic (2002: 166).

It seems that reconciliation in the region to date has been promoted exclusively at the level of civil society. An important and substantially different approach initiative has been a recent joint initiative by three NGOs: the Research and Documentation Center (Sarajevo), Documenta (Zagreb) and the Humanitarian Law Centre (Belgrade). Their ambition is the establishment of a regional commission at the governmental level of the three countries. The rationale is that since the post-communist wars in these countries have been closely linked, the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes have to be interrelated too. Sobering voices of experts however have warned that governments are not yet ready for such endeavour, and this will produce an inhibiting effect.⁴⁰

Finally, to our mind, 'civil' reconciliation can hardly take roots in societies without a 'political' reconciliation, propped by stabilized and transparent economies, sustainable states and inclusive democratic institutions.

Property restitution

A major issue of concern and contest in the relations between religious communities and the state after the fall of communism has been the question of property restitution. With the reappearance of religion in public life, the issue of the restitution of or compensation for their properties confiscated by the communist regimes came into the limelight. Evidently the restitution of the different types of

buildings and land properties is crucial for the financial stability of these religious communities as well as for the successful carrying out of their various activities: religious, educational and charitable. Moreover, a regained financial stability would allow autonomy from both the state and various foreign sponsors, on which most of the religious communities in post-communist countries are heavily dependent.

Property restitution is certainly an issue where cooperation between religious communities can help strengthen their collective claims to the government. In most countries, religious communities have already developed such cooperation in order to speed up the return of their properties. In Macedonia and Bosnia, this issue has been channelled, to a great extent, through their respective IRCs. Consequently, in Macedonia today almost all churches and many mosques have been returned to the ownership of their respective religious communities – yet other properties still remain disputed. The Jewish Community's property in the country has been fully restituted, while the Bektashi Community has been the least successful in getting back what it once possessed, because of competing claims by Sunni Muslim organizations.⁴¹

Property restitution was also referred to as an issue of common interest in the newly built Albanian IRC, but its existence is too recent to have been able to do any work on this specific issue yet. Such cooperation has not always been possible everywhere in the region, particularly in the light of the communist legacies. All religious communities have encountered serious economic problems, as the state has been too slow to pass new legislation that guarantees the restitution of property confiscated by communists. Consequently, all the religious communities, broadly speaking, depend heavily on foreign aid. In some cases, claims of religious buildings have resulted in contests between two or more religious communities, only exacerbating inter-religious tensions when cooperation instead might be the best way to secure better restitution results from the respective states for all religious communities concerned.

In Serbia, a 2006 Law on Restitution of Religious Property confiscated in 1945 or later has been criticized, particularly by the Jewish and Islamic Communities, who also lost land prior to 1945

(IRFR Serbia 2007). In Montenegro, the 2004 Law on Restitution treats religious property in the same way as privately owned property. With the independence of Montenegro, tension has mounted in the case of those properties that are claimed by both the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church, registered as an NGO, asserts ownership on all Serbian Orthodox religious facilities in the new country, claiming that the Serbian Orthodox Church forcibly occupied them after the country united with Serbia in 1918 (IRFR Montenegro 2007).

There are various categories of property claims: (1) religious community claims for properties owned by the state; (2) religious community claims for properties owned by other religious communities; (3) religious community claims on properties that are with or without a purpose already agreed upon between them and the state; (4) religious community claims on properties with or without funding from the government or from outside sources, especially for reconstruction purposes; (5) religious community claims that affect more than one country, which may be called transnational claims. These are only some of the broad categories that can be distinguished between the many different kinds of religious community claims, and it is beyond the scope of this book to deal with the complexity of the post-communist property restitution. To help understand this complexity, here are a few examples.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, the Greek Catholic Church in Romania was banned by Ceausescu in 1948, and consequently went underground. Most of its properties were given by the state to the Romanian Orthodox Church. With the beginning of the democratic reforms, the Greek Catholics re-emerged from forced clandestinity and regained their legal status. However, the state did not provide any legal arrangements about the restitution of church property and largely left these two denominations to resolve this issue between themselves, which was hardly a good option. The joint committee which was set up to deal with this issue in 1990 terminated its work in 2004, without any significant results. The Greek Catholic Church received back fewer than 200 out of its 2,600 confiscated churches and monasteries. The unsettled property return unleashed struggles between priests as well as between congregations and the Romanian

Orthodox Church continued to obstruct the building of new Greek Catholic churches.⁴²

Despite these real tensions, attempts at reconciliation between these two Churches are not altogether missing. One of our interviewees mentioned how a newly elected Romanian Orthodox Bishop invited the local Greek-Catholic Bishop for a meeting during his first week in office to discuss and resolve problems between the two Churches, because he did not want disputes on these issues in his diocese.⁴³ Another interviewee pointed out the appearance of some syncretic practices out of the anomalous situation of the Greek Catholic Church under communism, which, to our mind, attests to people's unwillingness to be further involved in the politicization of their religious identities and therefore to a grassroots inclination for the issue to be resolved in an ecumenical way.

There are regions in Romania, for example, Maramures, where there is a long specific local tradition. It is a syncretic practice, and it involves both Catholics and Orthodox influences and it remains so, despite of the fact that for 40–50 years it was only Orthodoxy. Even in Orthodox communities they were doing the way of the cross, for example [a Roman Catholic prayer], so for those people it really didn't matter who owned the buildings . . . It mattered that they had their church, which was the church they go to.⁴⁴

A different case is the restitution in Bosnia which has been left largely to the discretion of municipal officials and done on an ad hoc basis. It has been often used as a tool for political patronage and has rendered religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities (IRFR BiH 2007). Another dimension is when a religious community overlaps more than one national territory, as in the case of Bektashis in Albania and Macedonia; the restitution of their property in Albania is being coordinated with other religious communities, while in Macedonia, however, they are excluded by the competing claims of the Sunni Muslims.

In general, property restitution has been painful in part because of the slow process it entails, both with respective governments and between religious communities themselves. However property

restitution remains vital for the survival of these communities and is an opportunity for interreligious dialogue.

Destruction and reconstruction of religious buildings and sites

During and after the armed conflicts in the successor states of ex-Yugoslavia, there was an overt competition over religious sites and large-scale demolition of each other's places of worship often ensued. As Sabrina Ramet has emphasized, attacks on religious targets served strictly political purposes – 'to destroy the architectural sites that established other peoples' history in the area and that helped members of other nationalities remember their past and hold on to their cultural identity' (Ramet 1995: 79). Because of their powerful symbolism, religious sites seemed to be favoured targets during the war.

During the summer of 1991, Serb insurgents destroyed hundreds of Catholic churches in the areas under their control (Perica 2002: 153). In Bosnia alone '1,024 mosques and other Muslim religious sites – almost all Muslim historical and cultural landmarks located in the areas occupied by Serbs and Croats – were destroyed. In addition, 182 Catholic churches were destroyed, mostly by Serbs, while Muslims and Croats were responsible for the destruction of 28 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries' (ibid.: 166). According to a 2002 report by Riedlmayer, between 1992 and 1996, 277 mosques and 57 Roman Catholic churches were completely erased. In another article, he gives a total number of 1,186 destroyed or damaged mosques in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, plus 87 Qur'anic schools (*mektebs*), 9 dervish lodges (*tekkes*) and 44 shrines (*turbes*). The centuries-long tradition of Bosnians of different faiths living, working and building together was challenged significantly during this three-year war, when 'the destruction of houses of worship became one of the hallmarks of 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia' (Riedlmayer 2002: 99). The catalogue of losses includes also the destroyed and looted monastery, church and library of the Franciscan Theological Seminary in Sarajevo and the set-ablaze library of the Roman Catholic bishoprics of Mostar by the Serb-led Yugoslav army, as well as the burning and bulldozing of the 16th century

Serbian Orthodox monastery of Zitomislic, south of Mostar by Croat extremists, plus hundreds of Muslim religious building targeted by Serb and Croat nationalists (*ibid.*: 114–15). Apart from religious buildings a number of historic landmarks were shelled in Sarajevo, such as the National Library, the Oriental Institute and the National Museum, in an obvious effort to eradicate Bosnia's cultural memory (*ibid.*: 112–13).

After the war, more than 100 destroyed Orthodox churches were rebuilt in Republika Srpska with financial assistance from Germany and Greece, while 'Muslims and Croats were stopped from rebuilding their shrines by Serb police and angry crowds incited by clergy'. In some places, Croats applied similar tactics against Serbs and Muslims (Perica 2002: 173). In Banja Luka, all mosques were destroyed. Efforts by the Islamic Community to reach an out-of-court settlement failed because the city would not make the requested admission of guilt (IRFR BiH 2007).

In Kosovo, the Islamic Community claims that 218 mosques were destroyed after Serbia increased its control of the province and fuelled violence. The Serbian Orthodox Church claims that, in the short period between June and October 1999, some 76 churches were destroyed and desecrated.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Serbs consider Kosovo of the greatest symbolic significance because it includes more than 1,300 Serbian Orthodox religious sites, some of them dating back to the 12th century. Obviously, the destruction of Serbian Orthodox sites by Albanians was aimed at not only effacing Serbs' religious heritage, but putting an end to their political control of Kosovo.

During the 2004 riots in Kosovo, another 30 religious sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo were destroyed or attacked.⁴⁶ The mosques in Belgrade and Nis were targeted as a reaction to this, although they belonged primarily to Bosniak Muslims and not to ethnic Albanian Muslims. During the night of 17–18 March, the mosque in Belgrade was looted and set on fire by a mob with thousands of youths, while Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Amfilohije and some followers attempted to protect the mosque. In the same night, the mosque in Nis was also set on fire. The next day, the violence increased and expanded its targets to include a Protestant Bible Cultural

Center, which was burned by a mob throwing Molotov cocktails (IRFR Serbia and Montenegro 2004).

Unfortunately, efforts at the reconstruction of the destroyed buildings have been carried out with mixed success. Yet, their reconstruction remains central to the reconciliation process in any society and thus a condition for the emergence of a democratic civil society. In Croatia, the reconstruction of Serbian Orthodox churches demolished during the war is ongoing, while in Kosovo KFOR continues to protect Serbian Orthodox churches. In 2006 UNMIK and UNESCO signed a memorandum of understanding on reconstruction and conservation of both Muslim and Orthodox cultural heritage sites. The negotiations related to the protection of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage, in which the Serbian Orthodox Church religious leaders were actively involved, are considered the most productive. The multiethnic Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo funded by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and chaired by the Council of Europe is considered to be the best example of multiethnic cooperation in Kosovo. It has renovated a considerable number of the Serbian Orthodox sites damaged in 2004 (IRFR Serbia 2007). These examples corroborate in terms of real action on the ground what our Muslim interviewees in Kosovo had said about their commitment to dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox minority in Kosovo. The protection and restoration of damaged religious sites is an important condition for the improvement of the interreligious and interethnic relations.

During our field trip to Kosovo we came across a great example of interreligious cooperation: the reconstruction of a mosque in the village of Jablanica. The village, almost entirely destroyed during the 1998–99 war, was rebuilt in 2001 through funds coming from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Roman Catholic Church. After these reconstruction efforts were done, its community leaders asked whether some help with the rebuilding of the mosque could not be provided. The funders agreed, and the local mosque was rebuilt. A plaque attests to this exemplary practice in interreligious cooperation for reconciliation through reconstruction of a religious building.

The teaching of religion

The teaching of religion in public schools in various Balkan countries has been a source of heated debates. Religious communities often see the teaching of religion in public schools (that is, the teaching of their own religion) as a way of protecting their survival after the state-imposed ban on religious education that prevailed under communism and the ensuing common ignorance about the basics of their respective creeds. Pressing for a catechetical instruction, they have been supported by nationalist politicians and opposed by human rights organizations and a few scientific scholars of religions. Consequently, attempts at the introduction of non-confessional religious education in public schools have been met with various reactions on the part of religious communities, mostly negative. The teaching of religion has thus prompted both cooperation and contest between different religious communities. There are instances of cooperation specifically between mainline religious communities insisting on a confessional approach to their respective governments. There are also cases of contest between the proponents and the opponents of confessional classes. As for smaller religious communities, they have normally sided with the idea of a non-catechetical instruction, so that their own minority perspectives can be integrated in a more inclusive and balanced academic study of religions approach.

The tensions around what kind of religious education is to be taught in public schools have been resolved differently in each Balkan country. A comparative overview⁴⁷ reveals that confessional religious education has been introduced in Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, and shortly Macedonia, while Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Slovenia have opted to keep religion classes out of state schools altogether (see Table 2.1 on p. 49.). Among the first six countries that have opted for a confessional approach to the teaching of religion, one can differentiate between regions where the religion classes are obligatory, such as in primary schools in Romania and in some cantons in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in Republika Srpska, and the rest where those classes are optional.

In Bosnia, confessional religion classes have been taught since 1994 by each one of its three major religious communities. A new course

called the 'Culture of Religion' has been introduced since 2000 as a pilot project in a few public schools through the systematic efforts of the OSCE. Although it has been explicitly clarified that the subject is not meant as an alternative to confessional religious education and aims at teaching objective knowledge about various cultures and religions, the Culture of Religion programme has been rejected by most of the schools under the pressures of various religious leaders who fear that the new subject may weaken their own confessional religious education. While it has been accepted in some schools with a majority of Muslim or Orthodox children, the new subject met the strongest opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, whose curricula and textbooks are, interestingly, the most ecumenically oriented and tolerant towards religious 'others' as will be discussed further below (Popov et al. 2006: 97–98). As our interviewee Msgr. Mato Zovkic put it, the three main communities perceive the culture of religion subject 'as a secret weapon to kick religion out of the school system'.⁴⁸ The religious leaders thus dissociated themselves from the project, seeing it as a secular paradigm to the traditional religious instruction carried out by their clergy. Consequently, they keep teaching religion in religiously divided enclaves. Though religious classes are not mandatory everywhere in Bosnia, about 90 per cent of children in the different religious communities attend them.

Confessional religious education does not necessarily exclude teaching about religious others, however. Tentative steps in the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious tolerance have been underway in the Roman Catholic and Muslim religious education classes. For example, Mato Zovkic emphasized that in these classes they also teach about other religions, trying to avoid erroneous representations. 'We have asked Muslims to read our textbooks in order to avoid any misconception about Islam. They, in turn, have also shown us their textbooks to avoid misconceptions about Roman Catholicism'.

Yet the teaching of religion has intersected with the issue of ethnic segregation throughout the schools in Bosnia because of the close linkage between religion and ethnicity. In addition to the general education being carried out in three languages – Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian – that replaced the pre-war unified Serbo-Croatian language, Croat and Serbian children use separate curricula and textbooks for the school subjects, often imported from Zagreb or Belgrade respectively.

In Romania, confessional instruction has been present in public schools since 1990. Moreover, religion classes in this country were made mandatory for students in primary schools since 1995 and for all students since 1997. Attempts by deputies, human rights activists and intellectuals to challenge the mandatory character of religious education remain unsuccessful.⁴⁹

In Croatia, where religious education was introduced already in 1991, the non-confessional approach, supported by minority religions and intellectuals, has been completely marginalized, and a segregated, mono-denominational approach (with some multid denominational aspects) has predominated instead of won the rule of the day (Bobinac et al. 2006: 67–68).

In Serbia, after a process of negotiations with the traditional religious communities in the country, the government agreed in 2001 to introduce elective catechetical classes in the curriculum of the elementary and secondary public schools.⁵⁰ Presently, students are required to choose either between classes from one of the seven ‘traditional religious communities’ or classes in civic education. It has been reported that the proportion of students registering for religious education remained approximately equal to the proportion registered for civic education courses (IRFR Serbia and Montenegro 2006). It should be pointed out that the right of the traditional religious communities to conduct religious education in public schools was granted only to the nationally or ethnically based religions. In 2003, this confessional model initially introduced throughout the country survived a constitutional challenge by human rights activists, lawyers and secular intellectuals, whereas proposals for a subject oriented towards a multicultural, comparative religious studies approach were defeated (Kuburić et al. 2006: 133).

In Macedonia, there is a strong disagreement between, on the one hand, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community and, on the other, smaller religious communities, regarding the kind of religious education that should be available in the public school system. The former insist on a confessional approach, and the latter, on an objective, ‘history of religions’ approach. A third approach yet is that of the government that seems to prefer an ethic education course.⁵¹ Electives for strictly confessional religion classes

for children of Orthodox and Islamic families were introduced in 2001 and terminated in 2003, after the Macedonian Constitutional Court struck down the subject, which incited heated debates regarding the form and content of religious education in state schools. Both the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community argued that a confessional subject should be reintroduced, though its curriculum should not overlap with the strictly catechetical instruction offered in the churches and mosque. Both communities claimed that religious education would improve personal and social morality and seemed to agree with politicians that state control over religious education in public schools would prevent the spread of fundamentalism and dangerous religious ideologies (Matevski et al. 2006: 150–51). Presently, the introduction of non-mandatory religious education is underway.

In Bulgaria, a similar argument for the introduction of mandatory confessional religion classes has been made by the Islamic Community who fears an increase in Qur'anic courses that remain beyond its control. Religious instruction in this country has been introduced in 1997 for Orthodox Christian students and in 2000 for Muslim students. It has been regulated by the law on national education, according to which religion can be taught one hour per week as an elective subject to the students from the first to the twelfth grade. Changes in this regulation have been the subject of various discussions, as have been the advantages of religion classes in public schools. While the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, alongside with the Islamic Community, have pushed strongly for mandatory confessional education claiming that it will cure social ills, the highly secularized society seemed to remain largely indifferent to the benefits of religious education. The data from the Ministry of Education and Science reveal a decrease in the number of students opting to study Christianity: while during the 2002–03 academic year about 20,000 students attended classes on Christianity and 3500 attended classes on Islam, in the year 2006–07 the number of students attending classes on Christianity decreased to 13,000, while the number of those studying Islam slightly increased to about 3600. On the whole, the Bulgarian state lacks a coherent policy regarding religious education.

In Kosovo, although there is no religious education in public schools, we came across an interesting example of shared moral values between Muslims and Roman Catholics. Muslim parents send their children gladly, particularly daughters, to the boarding Catholic gymnasium in Prizren, because they trust not only the quality of education (the diplomas from this school are recognized in Germany), but also the strict supervision of the Catholic nuns that help prevent their daughters from having premarital sexual relations.⁵²

Some authors have argued that religious education, in the form it has been introduced in Bosnia, Croatia and also Romania, may reinforce 'narrow confessional and even sectarian identities' instead of encouraging openness towards other religions (Taylor 1997: 434). Even when the classes are optional, children are often pressed by teachers and peers to attend. A report by the Bosnian human rights ombudsman points to religious education in public schools as a source of violation of children's rights – understandably so, as in most of the cantons religious education is taught only to the majority national/religious group and children from minorities, mixed marriages and atheistic/agnostic/humanist families are discriminated against (Popov et al. 2007: 74).

To sum up, approaches to the teaching of religion vary from one country to another depending mostly on the religious demography of the population. When a given religious community makes up the majority of the population, in the country as a whole or in large areas of a country, it normally has a vested interest in promoting traditional confessional schooling. Smaller communities often see such demands as a threat for the multicultural and multireligious consensus in society and insist on an objective, non-catechetical approach. No doubt, the stakes regarding the methodological approaches to the teaching of religion in public schools are high, as they concern the shaping of attitudes and behaviours in increasingly pluralistic Balkan societies as well as the raising of a new generation of community leaders as to their ability to interact across communities and groups of individuals of any worldview, religious or otherwise.

Chapter 4

Major Achievements and Challenges in Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding in the Balkans

After having dealt in the previous chapter with major structural developments in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, we now turn to outlining various achievements and challenges faced by people and organizations that have been involved in such dialogue in the Balkans.

Achievements

Our research only scratched the surface of the many activities that have taken place in the Balkans, especially since 1990. As in many other regions of the world, interreligious initiatives in the Balkans have rapidly expanded to include such activities as official and informal meetings, seminars, training sessions, roundtables, media presentations, issuing statements of shared commitments, publishing, research on tolerance in interreligious relations, women's initiatives, youth activities, artistic endeavours and so on. Among them, there are many examples of what can be considered to be achievement, depending on how this concept is defined. One may argue that in a post-communist environment, especially those areas which were affected directly by war, the simple fact of bringing together people of different religious identities can be said to be an achievement in and of itself.

Our definition of the term 'achievement' is flexible in order to ensure that what is a major achievement in one instance may not constitute any new one in another similar case. Achievement, for us,

includes a combination of elements, not all of which need be present at any given time. These comprise: novelty, efficiency, creativity, sustainability, meaningful results by virtue of the human and/or social (including political) transformation of a given group of people or society, endurance in sustaining interreligious human relations in the face of social and/or political conflicts, viability of the organizational mission and leadership qualities in those fostering interreligious dialogue, whatever the shape of the activities may be. Of course, this is not an exhaustive list; it is meant to serve as a broad frame of reference for those seeking to assess various endeavours and activities in the field.

Although we do not purport to claim that our observations and findings are definitive, the value of this research and the exercise of talking about specific cases of 'achievement' in the way in which we define the term above is that it allows a kind of comparative analytical framework to survey interreligious dialogue activities across many different contexts throughout the Balkans. Such an effort is bound to be somewhat impressionistic and even superficial by the very nature of its breadth and the limited time we have been able to spend on it. Yet, we do hope it provides useful categorizations for the field.

Another difficulty related to identifying cases of achievement is how exactly to gauge the extent to which the criteria listed above are present. To measure them appropriately involves a lot of time and necessitates working with the organizations that are being assessed. In addition, we need to agree eventually on the measuring tools, which themselves depend on the kinds of activities and organizations being assessed, particularly in post-conflict societies. It is also clear that such assessment would always reveal a certain degree of bias related to the evaluators' own subjectivities. While this seems to be normal, it also complicates the whole process of identifying and naming a particular activity or organization an 'achievement'. Evidently, we cannot have a 'one size fits all' assessment kit that works for all programmes and activities developed in the field of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans because of both the variety of activities and the diverse contexts. Yet, a good test of whether a programme has been successful is the personal and/or social change it has generated, however small the scale of this change may be.

But how can this degree of change be measured? Having followed the major developments and trends in the field in the last three years, it is our understanding that there is only a limited credibility attached to any form of suggested evaluation by actors on the ground.

For this reason, it is more realistic to say that we have ‘mapped’ rather than thoroughly ‘assessed’ developments and activities related to inter-religious dialogue by discussing what we see as major achievements and challenges. Because of logistical and time constraints, we had to drop initial plans to develop assessment and evaluation tools, which is a new area of exploration worth a special research of its own. We decided rather to focus more systematically on exploring strengths and weaknesses of the interreligious dialogue movement in the Balkans and on the policy recommendations ensuing from our analysis.

In the end, it seems that such achievements are much less numerous than the challenges that we will discuss in the second part of this chapter. Yet, these achievements we will be pointing to are important insofar as they demonstrate just how far many persons and organizations have been able to go in practising interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding on the often difficult grounds of the Balkans.

Growing awareness

An important achievement to begin with, given the recent wars in the region as well as the post-communist record of intolerance and social tensions, is the growing understanding that ‘there is no alternative to dialogue in our world today’.¹ In our eyes, this achievement comes from the fact that so many of our interviewees, directly or indirectly, said or resonated with that point. It can also be coupled with the other fact that there is a serious search for spiritual and/or historical evidence in favour of tolerance and mutual respect in the specific religious traditions themselves. Pragmatic understanding seems to be gaining momentum throughout the Balkans. It is becoming clearer for an ever increasing number of people that hatred and rivalries are detrimental to social and individual well-being, while cooperation is a promise for reconciliation, peace and more harmonious coexistence. Gradually, most religious leaders in particular have come to collaborate with the Balkan and Western peacemakers. Numerous

public statements and joint appeals for interreligious understanding and tolerance have been released in the region, particularly with reference to the emerging Interreligious Councils (IRCs). Importantly, tentative steps have been undertaken towards the demythologizing and reassessment of the past, particularly of historic events dominated by interethnic and interreligious strife.²

The participation of women

Considerable accomplishments have been registered in the interreligious cooperation among women of different religious communities,³ as well as in the coping with problems generated by mixed marriages. Examples of this could be found particularly in the work of the International Multicultural Interreligious Center (IMIC) in Bosnia, which has put a special emphasis on joint projects of women of different religious communities. We were told by some of our interviewees that when interreligious interactions came to a standstill in Kosovo during and immediately after the war, Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic women continued to meet occasionally. In 2005, the Lutheran World Foundation sought to bring different ethnic groups in Kosovo together by training local women to take on responsibilities for creating opportunities for dialogue. The foundation set up 22 women's centres in village enclaves for minorities, and these centres were attended by more than 2,000 women. The dialogue sessions held at the centres were subsequently joined by an increasing number of men.⁴

Our personal experience during the seminars we held to foster interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding among youth and young adults in various Balkan countries between 2005 and 2008 confirmed the fact that women across all religions in the Balkans do not shy from involvement in various public interreligious activities and often take leading positions.

This new grassroots situation, however, seems not particularly welcome by some men in official leadership position within their respective religious communities. The active participation of women in non-official interreligious activities parallels the growing evidence that women now constitute a considerable part, and in some settings

even the majority of students in many religious institutions of higher learning in the region. In Bulgaria, for example, two-thirds of the students in the Orthodox Theological Faculties were female a few years ago.⁵ Our interviewee Afrim Tairi, Secretary of the Islamic Community of Macedonia, mentioned that 60 per cent of the graduates of their Faculty of Islamic Studies had been women, and the number would have been even higher if the *medreses* had not been open only for men until recently (the graduation from a *medrese* is required for acceptance into the faculty). ‘Many women came to us saying that they had studied Islam privately. Now we accept women in the *medreses* in Tetovo and Skopje and if this big interest on the part of women continues, it will threaten us’⁶ – the ‘us’ obviously means here the male-dominated establishment in the Islamic Community of Macedonia.

Paradoxically, although many women are involved in interreligious activities, their participation often remains less noticeable than that of men. As one of our interviewee put it, ‘If you would count, there are more women involved [in interreligious activities than men]. But in Croatia, one of the more visible activists is a man. On the grass-roots level, women have often been the first’.⁷

The participation of youth

Many interreligious projects have focused on various forms of youth interaction and cooperation, and those projects seem to have been particularly successful. Our own experience with the seminars we held across the region from 2005 to 2008 has corroborated our findings in the interviews and surveys we carried out. These seminars have been enriching and inspiring personally, but also intellectually stimulating especially in regards to this research project. The evaluation we did after every seminar (a combination of oral assessment and anonymous written evaluation) showed that the opportunity for those young people of different religions to meet, to get to know each other and to engage in productive discussions was valued as much as the new knowledge they had acquired during our four sessions on: the history of interreligious dialogue, the history of youth’s involvement in interreligious dialogue, religion and conflict resolution, and the

specificities of interreligious dialogue in the Balkans. Such statements as ‘your seminars helped people change their attitude to the religious “other” by breaking stereotypes and prejudices’ or ‘I have been inspired to engage further in interreligious activities’ were not unique to our youth-training seminars: they were also found in other similar youth interreligious dialogue activities. These reactions may reflect a thirst for meeting across religious identity differences, which is both hopeful and a kind of achievement on a broad social level. When we hear that many youth participants stayed in touch with each other afterwards, contributing to the emergence of a new informal interreligious youth network in the Balkans, we are inclined to see this as another example of limited, yet hopeful, regional achievement.

There are several exemplary practices in youth-related interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding projects across the region. Face to Face (Bosnia) has organized ‘interreligious walks’ in Sarajevo – visits to houses of worship of the major religions – for more than 1,000 children from different faiths from around the country.⁸ As Entoni Seperic from Face to Face shared:

One of our goals is working with children; making their parents sensitive to the issue. They are catalysts for change but they are under enormous social pressure. So we ask some members of the respective communities to take children to visit other communities. The opportunity to meet others will reduce the animosity transferred through their parents.⁹

The Orthodox Church in Albania has put a particular emphasis on its work with young people. One of its most successful projects has been the organization of summer camps in Kosovo for Orthodox youth from Albania and both Orthodox and Muslim youth from Kosovo. In 2007 alone about 2,000 people participated in these camps. This annual activity originated in refugee camps of Kosovo Albanians in Tirana in 1999, when the Albanian Orthodox leader Archbishop Anastasios raised more than \$10 million from the World Council of Churches and other Christian organizations for the maintenance of camps for about 33,000 refugees from Kosovo, most of whom were Muslims. After the end of the war, contacts with refugees

were kept and expanded into these very successful youth summer camps.¹⁰

In her article about the Youth-to-Youth project funded by USIP, which has trained high school students in the former Yugoslavia in conflict resolution, leadership and communication skills, Branka Peuraca points out the merits of such programmes.¹¹ At the same time, she usefully warns about the potential harm that ‘humanizing the enemy’ trainings may do, if participants return home to unreceptive friends and families without similar experiences with the ‘enemy’.

Education, research and publishing

Important initiatives have been carried out in the sphere of education, research and publishing. Various Western embassies throughout the region (among the most active being the Norwegian, Dutch and U.S. embassies) have a long-term record of engagement in the educational sector, particularly supporting projects that bridge ethnic and religious divides and thus foster the overcoming of segregation in public schools.

A three-year project for Educational Partnership in Religious Studies between Arizona State University and the University of Sarajevo started in 2005. Two years later, it launched an MA Program in Religious Studies at the Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies (CIPS) at the University of Sarajevo. The external evaluation of the project in the spring of 2008, carried out by one of us, revealed that the initial suspicion and reservations on the part of theological institutions and religious communities in Bosnia has been successfully overcome and professors from the Islamic Studies Faculty and the Franciscan Theological Institute in Sarajevo now teach in the course. There is a widespread understanding about the value of this programme addressing religion-related issues from a new academic perspective: a degree programme in the comparative study of religions at the University of Sarajevo, which remains independent of the religious communities’ own educational programme for priests and imams.

Interdenominational and interreligious student-exchange visits represent important cases of interreligious cooperation. We came

across a few such cases. In Macedonia, through the support of the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), the Islamic faculty and the Orthodox faculty have been regularly organizing exchange visits for both professors and students.¹² In Serbia, the IRC organized a three-day visit of students from the Orthodox Theological Faculty to Zagreb, where they met Catholic theological students to exchange experiences and ideas. A student from the Orthodox group became later a priest in the Republica Srpska in Bosnia, where he had been active in organizing meetings of people from different religious traditions.¹³ These cases reflect the important potential rippling effects such interreligious youth dialogue programmes can have in the medium- to long-term future, especially for seminary students who will later play active social roles as leaders of local religious communities.

Among the major research projects carried out by local interreligious NGOs, which we came across during our field visits were 'Place for Others in Our Faith and Life' by the Sarajevo-based NGO Abraham and 'Cultural and Religious Tolerance in Serbia and Montenegro' by the Centre for Tolerance and Interreligious Dialogue in Belgrade. The first project consisted of two phases. During the theological phase, views on the place for others in different sacred texts was explored by Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, Jewish and Protestant theologians, presented at three conferences and subsequently published in a volume. The second phase included research on the present state of interreligious coexistence and cooperation in Bosnia through field surveys and written questionnaires, and the findings were also published in a volume.¹⁴ It seems, however, that these two publications remained in closed circulation and did not reach a wider audience, as was the initial aim. The major reason may have been related to other factors that later led to this association's closing down.

The 'Cultural and Religious Tolerance in Serbia and Montenegro' study, according to its lead organizer, Zdravko Sordjan, General Secretary of the Centre for Tolerance and Interreligious Dialogue, shows how the majority churches see religious minorities.¹⁵ This project was executed in cooperation with the Belgrade Institute for Research. Its results were published as a booklet in 2001 and subsequently sent to

a great number of governmental and non-governmental institutions, religious leaders and people involved in policy making. It produced a considerable impact, particularly in changing generally hostile attitudes towards Protestant communities in Serbia. At the time of our interview (July 2006), the centre was looking for funds to carry out a second study, this time on the way in which minority religions see the majority churches in the country.¹⁶

We came across various local language publications in the field of interreligious tolerance and dialogue throughout the region. We consider publishing activities a particularly successful area. Although the overwhelming number of books remains translations of foreign, mainly Western authors, there are impressive examples of locally produced interreligious calendars, manuals and books on different religions and their celebrations.¹⁷ Among those examples is the 2004 publication of a manual *Tolerancija i Religijski Principi* (Tolerance and Religious Principles) by the organization 'Forum Bosnae'. The manual represents the ideas of religious tolerance in Islam, Christian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Judaism, and is a collective work of four experts in the field: Mile Babic, Mirko Djordjevic, Suzanne Last Stone and Ruzmir Mahmutcehajic. It was subsequently translated and published in Bulgaria by the DEMOS Foundation in 2006. Other publications include a manual *Hristijanstvo i islam: osnovi na religioznata tolerantnost* (Christianity and Islam: Basics of Religious Tolerance), published by the Center for Interreligious Studies and Partnership (Sofia 2007), a study on *Međureligijski dijalog iz katoličke perspective u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Interreligious Dialogue from a Catholic Perspective) by Mato Zovkić (Sarajevo 1998), a 2002 volume on *Religija, Veronauka, Tolerancija* (Religion, the Study of Religion, Tolerance) and the magazine *Religija i Tolerancija* (Religion and Tolerance), both published by the Center for Empirical Study of Religion in Novi Sad, Serbia.

We consider particularly useful the publication *Običaji muslimana, pravoslavnih, rimokatolika i Jevreja u BiH* (The Customs of the Muslims, Orthodox, Roman-Catholic and Jews in BiH), which describes and explains customs related to those religions' feasts and rites of passage. It was published by the IRC in Bosnia in 2005. Good periodicals included the Abraham magazine and the Abraham brief; they

were published for several years between 1998 and 2006. Interreligious calendars like those published annually by the Interreligious Center in Belgrade and MCIC in Skopje contain brief information on the religious feasts and customs of the major religious traditions. Such calendars are quite relevant in the increasingly multireligious Balkan societies.

These are just a few examples among many others. It is beyond our task here to discuss Western publications of authors originating from the region, although one can find important works in the field of interreligious relations in the Balkans, written by such authors as: Paul Mojzes, Miroslav Volf, Vjekoslav Perica and Mitja Velikonja, to name but a few.

Grassroots interactions

Cases of good grassroots interreligious interactions can be widely observed: at this level the dialogue is a genuine reality.¹⁸ Many people today seem to be interested in learning more about their neighbours' religious feasts in order to be able to at least 'greet each other correctly', as noted by a number of individuals we met during our research. Exemplary practices in this regard include the cases of local interreligious help in the reconstruction and/or building of churches and mosques, although such cases remain extremely rare in post-conflict societies.

One such case took place between 1991 and 2001 in Kosovo: 'The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) has helped organize former enemies in Kosovo, including Albanian Muslims, Serb Orthodox, Jews and Protestants to work together over the past two years to rebuild seven Albanian mosques destroyed in the war'¹⁹ During our field trip to Kosovo in May 2007, we visited one such mosque in Jablanica, as described on p. 91.

The arts

Artistic initiatives seem to be particularly encouraging venues for interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding. An exemplary practice is the Bosnian interreligious choir Pontanima (from Latin, meaning Soul

Bridge). It was established in 1996 in Sarajevo by the Franciscan priest Ivo Markovic.²⁰ People from the different religious communities in the country – Jewish, Christian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Muslim and Protestant – perform a repertoire that includes songs from each religious community. By singing each other's songs, members of Pontanima attempt to better understand and respect each other. Pontanima has faced many challenges. In the beginning, some of the choir members found it difficult to sing the songs of their enemies. They also faced criticism by friends who thought they were betraying their own people or religion. Some religious leaders have opposed this choir arguing that it promotes syncretism. Nevertheless, the group has grown (it has today around 60 members) and is now internationally recognized as an innovative peacemaking project, using a creative and original method of dialogue. It has performed worldwide and has received a number of awards, including The Common Ground Reconciliation Through the Arts Award in 2004. According to one of our interviewees, a long-term Franciscan member of the choir, a specific theology emerged as a result of Pontanima's singing.²¹

We came across another incipient interreligious musical cooperation. During one of our field trips to Macedonia, the Chamber Choir of the Jewish community and the University Choir were organizing a joint concert in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Skopje, which had attracted much interest in the city.²² Although our experience with interreligious artistic initiatives in the Balkans has been limited, these two cases give hope in and of themselves, but also come as close as can be to what might be called 'exemplary practices' in the field of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding.

Three exemplary organizational practices

Open and supportive groups within respective religious communities, while not always widely influential in their communities, sometimes generate sustained efforts for interreligious cooperation. We found a number of organizations whose activities have had important bearing both nationally and regionally. They too live up to 'exemplary practices' in the field of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding. We will briefly refer to the work of three such organizations,

without implying that these are the only ones that deserve to be singled out. For various reasons, we had the opportunity to observe their work during a longer period of time and in different capacities than we could other organizations. We met people involved in them on more than one occasion, leading to our understanding them better than others.

The International Multireligious and Intercultural Center (IMIC)²³ in Sarajevo, Bosnia, was established in 1991 by the Franciscan Marko Orsolc, who is also one of the country's leading intellectuals. IMIC is a religiously inspired grassroots peacebuilding organization that includes people from all three Abrahamic religions, yet works independently of the religious communities. In an informal conversation with one of us, Marko Orsolc said: 'I work with people, not with institutions'.²⁴ Until 1997, IMIC focused predominantly on humanitarian activities. Afterwards, it worked on reconciliation and interreligious dialogue, emphasizing grassroots activities. The organization's leadership defines interreligious dialogue as a hope for a better future in Bosnia and beyond. It regards as its best achievements the increase of participation by women as well as the establishment of good cooperation with organizations in Republika Srpska, which is a prerequisite for the advancement of future peacebuilding efforts in Bosnia. Important projects completed by IMIC include: 'Multireligiosity and Reintegration in BiH', 'Gender in Religious Discourse', 'Youth in Action', the cooperative project with Arizona State University on the establishment of a religious studies course at the University of Sarajevo, numerous interreligious dialogue workshops, lectures, joint prayers and meditations, among others.

The Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights²⁵ was established in 1992 in the war-torn Croatian town of Osijek. It has focused on community-based peacebuilding, protection of human rights and freedoms and promotion of creative methods of conflict resolution at individual, group and political levels. Its work has gradually encompassed activities that have reached out to participants in all of the former Yugoslav countries. Peacebuilding is specifically understood as the developing of structures and culture of democratic and non-violent resolution of conflicts in the cause of improving civil society and social security. The centre's major programmes include

community development, culture of non-violence, human rights, civility development and education. The centre draws upon four pillars of peacebuilding: non-violence, reconciliation, empowerment and sustainable development. The centre has done considerable work on dealing with the past as a part of peacebuilding and community development in Croatia since 1998. An impressive three-year project 'Building Bridges' was completed in 2006. It included a series of workshops on faith and non-violence in different Balkan countries and trained 60 active members of various religious communities. The centre also carried out an active listening project in parts of Eastern Slavonia and worked with veterans' groups on opening up certain taboo issues. Its work in this direction is presently being expanded to other post-Yugoslav countries in the search for a regional approach to dealing with the past, particularly through the activities of one of the centre's founders, Katarina Kruhonja, who is involved in setting up a regional Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Macedonian Center for International Cooperation²⁶ was established in 1993 with the support of the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), the Danish Church Aid and the World Council of Churches. Today, approximately 30 people are on staff, while the number of volunteers is much higher. From the very beginning they had support from the Council for the Humanitarian Organizations and the Religious Communities in Macedonia. The 2001 conflict between the Macedonian and the Albanian ethnic populations put on the agenda the potential role of religion for the resolution of conflict situations, as well as the need for cooperation between different religious communities. Since then the organization started focusing on activities in this direction, and has been involved in the setting up of the Council for Interreligious Cooperation, the Macedonian equivalent to the other IRCs in Southeast Europe. Between 2003 and 2005, MCIC developed a pilot programme for exchange of students and professors between the Islamic Faculty and the Macedonian Orthodox Theological Faculty. Another important activity for MCIC has been their interreligious summer camps.

The work of the above three organizations encompasses a wide range of activities. While we are not able to judge whether all of their interreligious dialogue activities are exemplary practices, their

sheer number point to the social impact they have had over time in their respective local contexts and beyond, as well as to their proven long-term sustainability as organizations. In that sense, all three organizations represent exemplary practices for the ensemble of their interreligious dialogue activities promoting peacebuilding.

Challenges

Interreligious dialogue in the Balkans has evolved in the double context of multiple transitions (from communism to democracy, from war to peace, from state dominated to liberal market economy, etc.) and of enormous shifts related to the place and the role of religion globally, regionally and locally. Most people of the different religious communities in the Balkans have faced the need to come to terms with those new developments. For example, they are re-examining aspects of their practices as well as of their internal diversity and commonalities with other religious traditions within national societies that are secularly orientated or comprise a significant portion of non-religious actors. Consequently, a number of challenges related to interreligious dialogue have emerged in the Balkans. They are presented here under four more general themes: legacy of communism, the link between religion and politics, the weak tradition of interreligious dialogue, and the role of international organizations.

Legacy of communism

Without meaning to blame religion's post-communist quandaries on realities inherited from the communist time and to thus overstate the impact of resilient habits and old-time mentality,²⁷ there are nevertheless issues related to communist regimes' policies towards religion that can be traced in different areas of social and political life since 1989.

First, the forced atheization under the various communist regimes in the region seriously undermined the role and value of religion. The return of religion in the public sphere after the fall of communism has been marked by sectarianism and intolerance to the religious others by a large number of people. Internal instability and

insecurity of religious institutions related to how those institutions were manipulated, repressed and/or co-opted under communism has also represented a serious obstacle to a more open attitude to other religions. As already noted, examples of what has been called 'negative tolerance'²⁸ seem to overwhelmingly dominate the post-communist Balkan societies. In addition, in many cases religious communities remain focused on their own problems and are plagued by internal disputes and rivalries. Therefore the positive resolving of their intracommunal tensions is of primary importance for their own sustainable development. At the same time, their continued introversion carries the risk of reinforcing a specific 'besieged fortress' mentality inherited from the communist period and seriously threatens attempts at fostering interreligious openness and cooperation. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is particularly known for its anti-ecumenical stance; it even withdrew its participation in the World Council of Churches in 1998. The Serbian Orthodox Church has frequently displayed anti-ecumenism and anti-Westernism.²⁹

Second, another serious obstacle is the generally poor level of religious education in post-communist societies. Large segments of the population lack basic knowledge not only about the religious teachings and practices of others, but about their own religious tradition as well. This relative ignorance is even found among some of the clergy, having started their religious education with little themselves. Such a social milieu is prone to different forms of manipulation. For example, some religious leaders can easily exploit the ignorance of their own community members and over-exaggerate fears about the others, especially at times of political and economic tensions. Such a situation creates a ripe environment for the potentially inflammatory role of the media in fuelling negative attitudes and intolerance by selective and tendentious reporting. Prevailing religious ignorance, coupled with manipulative, sensationalist and oftentimes also religiously un(der)educated media reporters and news decision makers can in the long run prove to be a formula for interreligious tensions and even conflicts.

Third, the rural versus urban divide seems to persist throughout the region. Historically, rural settings have been much more conservative to religious others, which may be related to the worldwide

problem of access to good education in rural areas. Particularly since the time of communism, urban centres have experienced much greater diversity and higher rates of intermarriages. As one of our interviewees shared: ‘Most villages in BiH are not multi-ethnic, only the cities are places with a potential for dialogue. [. . .] We did many concerts [with Pontanima] throughout BiH and we saw that we were much better received in the cities. Small enclaves are hostile to the idea of interreligious dialogue’.³⁰ Peuraca has also noted that reconciliation in Bosnia has been easier in cities than in rural areas.³¹ Yet, the case we mentioned earlier of the interreligious reconstruction of a mosque in the village of Jablanica in Kosovo is a reminder not to generalize too quickly. Obviously, smaller enclaves can also generate forms of dialogue and cooperation if relevant approaches and mechanisms are in place.

Obviously, these legacies of the communist period make interreligious dialogue a particular exigency because it fosters new experiences and perspectives, which can help resolve post-communist religious communities’ internal controversies and often tensed relations.

Link between religion and politics

First, religion in the Balkans has almost everywhere been correlated with ethnicity. Religious symbols, myths and ideologies have been significant components in various nationalist projects. Consequently, interreligious dialogue is often seen as disruptive by nationalist agents. Promoters of megalomaniac and often incompatible nationalist projects, such as Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia, for example, have made use of religion in various forms and to various extents because religion wields enormous symbolic capital and provides for substantial markers of identity. The recycling of historical myths in support of exclusivist nationalist claims has also been widely present, as already discussed in chapter 2. The trajectory of interreligious relations has thus been more often than not determined by the fluctuation of interethnic relations. Accordingly, interreligious relations have deteriorated with the worsening of interethnic relations and improved with the subsiding of tensions. The secessionist Yugoslav wars exacerbated divisions and enmity between the three

major religious communities in the post-Yugoslav countries. Added to this is religions' inequality in terms of social power and influence (majority versus minority faiths), as well as the differences between the three mainline religious communities in post-Yugoslav countries in terms of their institutional structures. As Jim Cairns, a long-term international activist in Bosnia, pointed out, the jurisdictional authority of the three religious leaders in Bosnia

was very different from the national boundaries and it differed between religious traditions. This meant that it was much harder to convene a meeting of all muftis and bishops in the country, as we kept getting in this situation where the Metropolitan in Sarajevo and the Cardinal basically had no authority over their colleagues. They could not compel them to come. Then you had the situation where they and their bishops did not see the muftis as their equals. We constantly played this game of who is my partner in dialogue. Who can we invite and who we can not?³²

In short, religion in the Balkans has been overwhelmingly dependent on politics, which has heavily restricted its potential role(s) in civil society given the particular instability in the post-war political sector itself. In the words of Jim Cairns, one of the biggest challenges in working in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been the fact that 'the political environment would continually throw up problematic events [. . .] the constant challenge of being under the influence of events which were out of our control'.³³ In Kosovo the situation is very much the same: 'Everything is consistently linked to the political development and religious issues are decided by politicians'.³⁴

Second, in most of the Balkan countries, Church-State relations have set the framework for the specificity of interreligious relations. Sometimes, interreligious cooperation has been promoted by the state or by the majority community in the respective countries. In Slovenia, for example, interfaith tolerance and dialogue have been promoted by the Government's Office for Religious Communities through regular consultations with representatives of all religious communities and a variety of programmes (IRFR Slovenia 2006). In Bulgaria, the recent formation of the National Council of the Religious Communities was

initiated by the Religious Affairs Directorate at the Council of Ministers. In Romania, interfaith cooperation has been developed mainly through church-related bodies, such as the AIDRom and the Ecumenical Institute in Iasi, as well as through initiatives by individual priests and university professors. The situation in Croatia is similar – the dominant Catholic Church has been a major initiator of a number of interfaith initiatives already since the 1970s, and in 1994 it established the Institute for Ecumenical Theology and Dialogue in Zagreb. The Osijek Evangelical Theological Seminary, established as early as 1972, has also been active in promoting mainly intra-Christian dialogue in Croatia, yet, because of the minority situations of Evangelicals, this has been done on a much smaller scale. In our opinion, it is rather difficult to develop interreligious dialogue in the specific post-communist setting when such cooperation is not among the priorities of the state. Social perceptions that new religious movements present a threat to political and social security,³⁵ fears of Islam or suspicions that smaller Protestant groups are agents of the West can be a greatly impeding factor to interreligious dialogue in the region.

Third, the lack of a tradition of strong civic engagement and grassroots activism magnifies significantly the influence of the religious leaders (Peuraca 2003: 4). Under specific conditions religious leaders can take up political functions, directly or indirectly, as has been the case of Bishop Artemije during and immediately after the Kosovo war of 1998/99, when the Serbian Orthodox Church in the province came to be the only representative of the Serbian minority there. Moreover, the disproportionate roles played by personalities rather than institutions everywhere in post-communist societies makes the field of interreligious dialogue somewhat unpredictable.

Religious officials seem to often fear that the improvement of interdenominational and interethnic relations would curb their exclusive power over their respective communities and endanger their authority. Because of the hierarchical structure of the mainline religions in the Balkans, NGOs that have focused much or part of their efforts on interreligious dialogue often cannot exert serious influence in the wider society without the support of religious leaders. The possibilities for interreligious interaction can thus be

seriously hindered, if the leadership takes a negative stance and refuses to 'bless' the third sector's activities in the field. As one of our Bosnian interviewee has noted, the main difficulties in her work 'were related to the contacts with religious communities. All of them are very strictly organized and not so open for activities that were taking place outside of their own supervision'.³⁶ Sometimes, religious leaders have even attacked openly lower-ranking clerics in an effort to control interreligious peacemaking entirely.³⁷

Weak tradition of interreligious dialogue

First, the lack of a strong tradition of interreligious dialogue can seriously affect the efforts to establish and consolidate its practice, in a kind of vicious circle. One of the comments we often heard throughout the Balkans was the failure of religious communities to make a positive change during the post-Yugoslav wars. Three of our interviewees ascribed this failure to the lack of a tradition of interreligious dialogue: 'We are still waiting for that dialogue [between Christianity and Islam] to happen', shared Radovan Bigovic³⁸ 'We think that we know each other well, that we are capable to live together, but real interreligious dialogue never existed in BiH. This was a problem in the former Yugoslavia but particularly in BiH being the most diverse republic', noted Entoni Seperic.³⁹ 'The reason why religious people here get along peacefully, is because there are no Albanian politicians of the type of an Ayatollah Khomeini or a Milosevic, using religion to foster hatred against other groups. This is part of the tradition that has created that history of tolerance. But let us not satisfy ourselves with mere peaceful tolerance', told us George Frendo.⁴⁰

In fact, events and processes of interreligious cooperation were put in place during the 1970s already as a result of broader trends, such as the Second Vatican Council's decision to develop and promote interreligious cooperation throughout the Catholic Church worldwide. The World Council of Churches soon followed with its own impetus to promote interreligious dialogue too, involving both majority Orthodox and minority Protestant communities in the Balkans. These initiatives brought about a relative increase in ecumenical relations within Yugoslavia in particular. However, the often not-

so-impressive results of the more recent substantial international efforts for the promotion of interreligious cooperation in the Balkans raise the question whether mainline religious communities in the Balkans could have developed an interest for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue independently, without incentives and pressures from abroad to join forces in activities that could prevent conflicts in the future. Evidently, the legacy of weak interreligious cooperation throughout Balkan history needs time and effort to be overcome.

Second, there exists no unanimous understanding about the promises and benefits of interreligious dialogue within the various religious communities, making the participation of their respective individual members an often haphazard reality. Certainly, important segments of believers in all the three major religious communities (Islamic, Roman Catholic and Orthodox) are open and prepared to engage in serious discussions and cooperative activities. In many cases, however, those people do not exercise significant and far-reaching influence. Their voices often remain unheard and unattended to, and they easily get isolated and marginalized by the 'hard-liners' who seek to dominate and speak for their respective communities. In other cases, there is a serious discrepancy between the way religious leaders and interreligious dialogue activists talk 'outside' their respective communities versus 'inside', leading to accusations of 'double standard talk'. Such double standards may be in part the result of international pressures to participate in various forms of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, which may be perceived by the locals as discrepant. This point is developed further below.

Third, directly related to the previous point is the awareness that 'interreligious dialogue is still on the surface, we haven't gone into depth', as was pointed out by Ahmet Alibasic from the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo.⁴¹ Mato Zovkic also emphasized: 'Interreligious dialogue needs to reshape mentality. We are still here in BiH at the level of solemn meetings and our dialogue does not touch real problems'.⁴² According to George Frenco, 'We [in Albania] are living primarily at the level of interreligious cohabitation only'.⁴³ Rasim Gjoka noted, too, that 'different religions in Albania have very good communication, yet there is no real dialogue. [. . .] It is crucial to

develop this good dialogue'.⁴⁴ The two last quotes are particularly important because they point to the limits of the popular notion among almost all Albanians we met, that Albania is a unique country of great interreligious harmony. On the basis of such attitude, there often seems to be a dismissal of the need for interreligious dialogue training, as two of our interviewees pointed out. Recalling his difficulties in organizing interreligious training courses, Rasim Gjoka, mentioned that they were 'contested because many say there are no problems between religions here. I answered that it was to prevent them'.⁴⁵ One of the organizers of the Balkan Building Bridges project, the Croat Nena Arvaj, noted: 'Albania is a different society than ours. We arrived there with an idea to promote dialogue, non-violence and reconciliation between the churches. They said that they do not have any problems between churches. Why do we want to transfer our problems because of the war onto them? [. . .] I saw from our contacts that they are not very open among themselves for cooperation'.⁴⁶ To balance the picture, we ourselves had a very positive experience with the training we held in Tirana in July 2007. It must be added that our previous visits to this country and meetings with the leaders of all four religious communities in Albania was most likely a crucial factor in gaining their willingness to send young people to our workshop.

Fourth, interreligious dialogue has often been perceived as a political and pragmatic endeavour, a pursuit of private interests rather than work for the 'common good'. Because of the considerable engagement of religion in the exacerbation of social conflicts that led to the secessionist wars, as well as due to the visible presence of religious symbols during the warfare itself, the important role of religion in the political processes in the region has often been taken for granted. Consequently, there have been substantial international efforts and significant funds for the promotion of better interreligious understanding after the war. However, it is our impression that the role of religion in Balkan societies seems to have been often overemphasized by those seeking to engage in interreligious activities. Sometimes interreligious dialogue has been pursued in and of itself, without a broader consideration for how it could bring about reconciliation and social change in the respective local and national contexts. Unfortunately, in its extreme form, this trend seems to be

running into the risk of interreligious dialogue becoming a profit-oriented endeavour, pursued by some NGOs and 'experts' for their own benefit, rather than for the high goals stated in their projects.

The role of international organizations

While recognizing that international donors and organizations have been instrumental in encouraging interreligious peacebuilding and reconciliation throughout the Balkans, both logistically and financially, we would like to share our observations about specific shortcomings in the approaches dominating international intervention in this field.

First, international donors in the Balkans have often promoted their own interests or visions about the importance of particular activities over the interests or visions of those they purport to serve. In some cases this has led to ad hoc execution of projects and activities perceived as irrelevant by people on the ground.

Peuraca,⁴⁷ for example, has reported that the initial efforts to rebuild the destroyed mosques in Banja Luka and Trebinje led to riots by non-Muslims and one death. Many local people attributed those difficulties to international pressures to reconcile before the local communities had been ready for such reconciliation. This case reveals that painful unresolved interreligious issues often persist despite joint statements by top religious officials claiming support for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. They often represent formal acts performed under the pressure of outside factors, producing limited reconciliation within their own respective societies. Even when such interreligious initiatives are not the result of outside pressure but of genuine willingness to promote reconciliation through dialogue, if top religious officials do not seek structural ways to sustain cooperation with a variety of actors at all levels of society, their efforts result in limited impact at the grassroots level. This is why the principle of interdependence and complementarity across levels of society and sectors of interest is so crucial for sustainable interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding.

During our field trips to Albania we were told that USAID had recently invested over \$1 million in projects fostering interreligious

tolerance in this country.⁴⁸ According to one local informant, most of the activities seem not to have been adequately planned. In particular, one activity seems to have lacked understanding of cultural differences when it came to representatives of different religions building a public toilet together. Members of at least one community refused to participate in what they saw as a weird interreligious activity. According to one of our local interviewees, it was the holding of so many of these projects' events in five-star hotels that was criticized as unwise spending. In short, poorly designed initiatives or unprepared participants are more often than not counterproductive and a waste of time and energy, not to mention the damage it causes to the perception of both interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding and certain funding agencies.

Second, some international NGOs apply naïve multiculturalist approaches in the Balkans. The idea that one can export models of interreligious cooperation as if these models are not related to the particular socio-political and cultural contexts in which they first developed is counterproductive. There are simply no universal templates for interreligious dialogue. It seems that interreligious peacebuilding in the Balkans has been to a great extent imported through various means by international organizations. Often, this situation has forced competition over funds, rather than cooperation. Lazar Markovic shared his observations about a lack of interest in inter-organizational collaboration, which he encountered when touring the region in order to establish a network of NGOs working in the field.

In reality, every NGO is somehow self-sufficient, not genuinely interested in networking. They do not look further, being busy running their own projects. They perceived me and other people of the Peace Gateway as a potential donor. But when they discovered that we are interested 'only' in networking but not in funding their projects, their self-sufficiency emerged. [. . .] There is a feeling that they are competing with each other for the same donors. [. . .] It requires a lot of time and organizational self-knowledge to identify what their common grounds are. But in practice, on the ground, they do not have much to offer and do not know what is possible.

[Sometimes] local NGOs feel endangered by these international NGOs.⁴⁹

Third, more often than not, political – and after 9/11 increasingly security related – rather than spiritual considerations have been major incentives for the extensive Western support for the developments of interreligious dialogue. This point invites a deeper question as to what extent interreligious dialogue has simply been a means for implementing Western interests and power in the Balkan region. Their involvement in interreligious dialogue, especially since September 11, 2001, may have become a sort of ‘politically correct’ activity. In the word of Alibasic, ‘due to the enormous pressure that is put on the religious communities in the region and their leaders to show their pro-dialogue orientation [. . .] the original purpose of the dialogue has been perverted and purchase of time and scoring political points in public became its main aim [. . .] In other words, to be involved in the dialogue is politically correct in Southeast Europe’.⁵⁰ In addition, there have hardly been any serious attempts on the part of either local or international NGOs to develop a common platform or strategy for concerted actions in the field. The cooperation has been mostly occasional, and carried out on an ad hoc basis. Specific church policies propped up also by the state and often based on a ‘Mother Church’ approach to religious communities in neighbouring countries, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church’s influence over the Serbian populations in Republika Srpska and Kosovo, or the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia over the Croats in Bosnia, have enormously affected interreligious interactions. Whenever the ‘Mother Churches’ have demonstrated a vested interest in promoting interreligious cooperation, this has brought about a parallel opening in the kin religious communities abroad and vice versa. In short, it is very important to take into consideration transnational dynamics in interreligious peacebuilding.

Fourth, although the contribution of international NGOs in the sphere of dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Balkans have been crucial, the impact of some of these NGOs on the development of civil society in general and the third-sector organizations related to interreligious dialogue in particular has sometimes been

detrimental rather than positive. It has unleashed local competition over material resources rather than fostered cooperation for the 'common good'.

In an illuminating study, Ruth Mandel points to the emergence of two peculiar types of NGOs in the post-communist countries: DONGO (donor-organized) and GONGO (government-organized).⁵¹ This classification departs from what has come to be considered as a standard model for Western NGOs, yet it has a clear relevance to the way most of the Balkan religious-related NGOs operate. We came across a few examples of DONGO organizations, one of which was the Center for Religious Dialogue in Sarajevo, directed by Vjekoslav Saje. It was founded in 1999 by the Center for International and Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, as a local partner to help with the implementation of various interreligious projects. By 2001, a gradual transfer of administrative responsibilities had been completed. However, their capacity to continue independently proved difficult. 'The activities were much reduced and they did not get enough money to support an independent office. [. . .] My sense is that funding is the key', shared David Steele.⁵²

In another case, about which we were asked to keep confidentiality, the major foreign donors of a small-scale organization witnessed in it a severe internal crisis. They however refused to get actively involved to help solve the crisis at a stage when a healing operation would still have been possible. They seemed not particularly interested in the fate of the organization they had sponsored over several years, being reluctant to take the responsibility of a mediation process to help an initially promising NGO overcome its internal crisis in order to continue its valuable activities in the future.

The above example is by no means exceptional. Many international funding agencies convey the impression that the distribution of their funds is prioritized above any close monitoring and possible addressing of the difficulties confronted by their grantees. Little wonder that several local informants expressed bitterness and resentment about this kind of international intervention in the field. Such irresponsible international approaches encourage exactly the opposite of what they pledge to promote. This behaviour sends a clear message that they regard local organizations plainly as grant-receivers and not as

partners. This lack of true cooperation reflects an unhealthy power dynamics that is not helpful for long-term peacebuilding.

Another drawback is the seeming lack of understanding about the importance of the promotion of sustainable regional platforms for interreligious collaboration. Indeed, no such platforms have originated in the Balkans – exactly the opposite: the interreligious scene has been often dominated by open and hidden rivalries, enmity and partisan interests. The closest example of a regional platform would be that of the Balkan IRCs that interrelate with the European Council of Religions for Peace. Yet this initiative remains the prerogative of one international organization, Religions for Peace, although a number of other organizations have also taken part, financially and logistically, in setting up such councils across the Balkans. To be sure, this initiative is not locally driven nor does it represent a well-developed platform for inter-organizational cooperation. Cooperation between NGOs is often seen as a tactical and/or strategic means for obtaining grants which are preconditioned on such cooperation. This is particularly evident in Bosnia, where a subculture related to international funding has developed because of the massive international investment that has taken place there for over two decades.

One discontinued organizational practice

We conclude our analysis of challenges with an example of one organization that we had the opportunity to observe more closely, and even work with on the implementation of one of our seminars, and that unfortunately closed down during our research period – the Abraham Association. It is not our intention to single out this particular organization as an example of bad practice, since we have already mentioned earlier several of its achievements in terms of specific activities. We rather see this case as a source of learning of how to improve our understanding of the challenges faced by interreligious-dialogue NGOs, many of which are applicable to other organizations too.

The Abraham Association, popularly known as simply Abraham, was a grassroots NGO that was trilaterally Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian and Muslim).⁵³ It was established in Sarajevo in 1998 to

build mutual trust and to promote a culture of reciprocity, coexistence and non-violence. Their major activities were training, publications, interreligious theological conferences, informal gatherings of people of different faiths and research on the place of the religious others. While the association did not have any official support from the major religious communities, they nevertheless kept ‘informal declarative support from all religious leaders representing the religious communities of the country’.⁵⁴

Abraham was very successful in its early years. The last few years, however, proved difficult probably because of a combination of both internal and external reasons. The reliance on one or two predominant funders from the very beginning turned this organization, in some way, into a donor-oriented rather than programme-oriented NGO. This decreased its long-term ability to survive, especially when this funding was discontinued. As reported by two of our interviewees who had previously worked with Abraham, a lack of accountability added to the problem of not having expanded its projects and sources of funding earlier on. There seems to have been a lack of creative and sustained leadership as well, given its too-rapid turnover.

The closing down of this Bosnian NGO in 2006 raises a few important points about the dynamics of interreligiously oriented organizations within civil society building. The following extract from our interview with one of its former directors, Entoni Seperic, provides a firsthand insight into the nature of various predicaments plaguing valuable initiatives like this one:

Ina Merdjanova: What do you think are the major reasons for a very successful organization to be closed down?

Entoni Seperic: Their internal history, it’s not always about their mission but rather about the implementation of the ideas. With Abraham, at some point people turned from that part of the mission to internal problems. The failure of Abraham came from the lack of a real vision and strategy. No capacity building. People in Bosnia tend to internalize problems and all, including myself, we don’t listen very well. There is no self-criticism. These are reasons for failures and especially when it comes to inter-religious dialogue where people are tending to relate every problem to the issue of

being different. Lack of internal and external evaluation. [. . .] Most of the people who have worked with Abraham now don't have any wish to be involved with any kind of NGO activities. Abraham was a very brave initiative with very good ideas behind it but as far as I am concerned, through my experience with Abraham I learned that we have wrong ideas about our coexistence in BiH.⁵⁵

This quote gives a glimpse into the complicated nature of interreligious dialogue through the eyes of one local Bosnian activist. It touches on several important points. Abraham, like almost all NGOs we came in contact with during our research in the Balkans, was heavily dependent on international sources of funding. Given the sea-change that affected international granting agencies following September 11, 2001, with the redirection of funds to other areas of the world, many organizations in the Balkans faced the reality of dwindling funds for their activities. No organization was shielded from this situation and many had problems coming to terms with this broader transnational trend. However, the fund-raising difficulties can be mitigated when an organization is flexible and experienced, and its leadership is sufficiently committed to find ways to overcome such major external challenge by either finding new external funding sources and/or by focusing on locally sustainable activities.

Chapter 5

Policy Recommendations

It can be argued that peacemaking and peacebuilding in the Balkans expanded into the most massive operation of this kind in the history of humanitarian work. In Bosnia alone, the international support between 1992 and 1998 amounted to more than \$5 billion.¹ By 2003, the U.S. investments in Balkan peace surpassed \$24 billion.² This great financial and logistical support, however, did not yield the desired outcomes. As Perica pointed out: ‘Numerous projects aimed at promoting reconciliation either collapsed or produced ambiguous results.’³ Given the importance of this investment in human and material resources over the last two decades, it would be useful to assess on a broader scale the impact of this wide range of efforts in peacemaking and peacebuilding so as to learn from it for the future, not only for the Balkans but for many other regions around the world too.

Our task in this concluding chapter is more specific and modest: to present a set of policy recommendations that can help promote better future results, specifically with regard to interreligious peacebuilding. These recommendations emerged from our reading of the relevant literature in the field and especially from our analysis of 65 semi-structured interviews and 7 focused survey questionnaires on interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans implemented between December 2005 and July 2008. They come from a combination of three elements: first, practices and strategies that have already proved productive in other regions of the world; second, practices and strategies that need to be reinforced in the region as a whole or in particular countries and third, new suggestions developed specifically for the Balkans.

We first present below the principles of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding that underlie our policy recommendations. They are

relevant for all those who advocate and carry out organized interventions in religion-related spheres in the Balkans: actors in various governmental sectors, international, regional, national and local NGOs, as well as institutions of various kinds, especially those that define themselves religiously. We then address our specific recommendations to particular actors – international, governmental and local – keeping in mind that some recommendations (such as those related to education for example) involve multi-actor and multilevel cooperation.

Eight Principles of Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding

One general principle that fosters exemplary practice is when **a top-down approach** (prioritized by most of the international agencies promoting dialogue in this part of the world) **has been complemented by, and creatively combined with, a grassroots interaction**. This is particularly true for interreligious cooperation that has included or is happening among women and youth, as well as lower-level clergy. Interreligious encounters among the leaders of the religious communities, however important the hierarchical structures of the major religions are, cannot bring about sustainable positive changes in the attitudes towards religious ‘others’ without systematic efforts for the empowerment and inclusion of laity. Although most initiatives, by their very nature, can be both top-down and grassroots at the same time, it is very important for actors in the field to recognize that their efforts are part of a broader complementary whole. Too often, those prone to dialogue in one form or another tend to view their own approach as the only valid one, or definitely superior. What matters most, at the end, is the complementary coordination of the different social components that use a variety of dialogical approaches, so as to foster sustainable interdependence across all spheres of society.

In most of the Balkans, however, efforts at interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding have been overwhelmingly focused on basic post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding through repairing broken links in interreligious relations and fostering acceptance and trust. This has been a fundamental necessity in the aftermath of the

secessionist wars, yet the focus now needs to shift to other forms and ways of doing interreligious dialogue. In addition, the interreligious dialogue in this region has been too religiously insular, when it should include a fuller range of citizen actors. Consequently, another principle for planning and implementing exemplary interreligious peacebuilding projects is that of **aiming towards as broad an inclusion as possible**. In other words, when developing a project to address a particular need, are all people affected included in the project? If the terms of the project are too narrowly conceived,—such as focusing on one group only (as in the case of minorities or refugees) without thinking of including others in a local setting who may also be affected by this situation—what has started as a good intention to improve one group’s situation may in fact increase local intergroup tension.⁴

Having sought to distinguish what is specific to the Balkans from what is generalizable internationally, and, wherever useful, to juxtapose the two perspectives, **we caution against too-optimistic a view about quick, straightforward and measurable results for an internationally fostered (and sometimes even imposed) interreligious cooperation** – be it in the Balkans or elsewhere. **Equally important is to resist falling into the trap of pessimism when the time, energy and money spent did not produce the desired results**. In the words of Richard H. Solomon: ‘We must not let ourselves be carried away by unrealistic expectations or dismayed by unavoidable failures.’⁵ Our analysis of the achievements and drawbacks in the Balkans’ interreligious peacebuilding in the previous chapter has provided a number of examples about the complexities of this process.

A sensitive and delicate area of policy recommendation revolves around cultural and religious specificities in interpreting universal sets of ethical guidelines, such as those expressed in the UN declarations of political, civil and individual rights, particularly when it comes to religious ideas and visions of peace and security.⁶ Certainly, **more attention to local forms and norms of intercommunity interaction is necessary**. More often than not, interreligious dialogue activities, in the forms promoted in the Balkans by outside organizations, seem to reflect Western, rather than local approaches.

Generally, we identified **an ongoing need for international agencies to contextualize their understanding about the specific roles of**

religion in the different Balkan countries. It is equally dangerous either to neglect the religious element or to assume its power beyond what it really is. Major religious communities in post-war Bosnia, for example, saw themselves as powerless while the international community tended to perceive them as invested with authority and influence because of their intimate connection to their respective national communities. For example, religious leaders in Bosnia have often been perceived as yielding political power. In the words of Jim Cairns, ‘When they spoke, even if they spoke as religious leaders, they were heard as political, national leaders.’⁷

Another principle that emerged from our research is the need to **avoid both paternalistic approaches of foreign NGOs towards local ones as well as attitudes of either dependency or false independency on the part of the former.** Relations between international and local actors that are explicitly or implicitly driven by patronizing or dependency-dominated attitudes prove to be unhealthy, counterproductive and even destructive in the long run.

Finally, we end this section with a problem shared by all sides: that of essentializing identities, including organizational identities. **On the one hand, international donors need to avoid essentializing ethno-religious identities by not representing them as static or monolithic; on the other hand, local persons and organizations also need to avoid essentializing the identities of foreigners and outside organizations.** Investment in non-essentialist educational training and building spaces for open-dialogue encounters can greatly decrease this problem in human communication and self-other perceptions.

Eight Policy Recommendations for International Organizations

The question of human and institutional sustainability emerged from our study as a leading regional challenge. Our **first** policy recommendation for international organizations is therefore: **to encourage long-term sustainable investments**, particularly in the face of the fluctuating presence of international NGOs in the Balkans due to their shifting strategic priorities to other regions in the world and the attendant rechanneling of international funds. **A long-term commitment**

by international donors in the cause of sustainability of various programmes and initiatives should not be solely based on grant making.

Our second policy recommendation is thus: **to support the development and institutionalization, particularly through appropriate legislation, of efforts to encourage local philanthropy**, rather than letting local organizations rely on donors' sources alone or predominantly. The danger to avoid is the imposing on local NGOs the implementation of what the internationals perceive as priority without having taken enough time to consider locals' exigencies on the ground.⁸ Without a negotiated balance between the visions of the two sides, the medium- to long-term sustainability of local organizations is jeopardized.

The creation of national IRCs in most countries of the Balkans, with varying degrees of help from the international NGO Religions for Peace, is one example that, to some degree, reflects this balance. The impetus for the creation of these national infrastructures came from abroad, but managed to earn the buy-in from most national religious leaders. To the extent that these IRCs have the freedom to make their own decisions, they can find the ways to sustain themselves in the long term by seeking local, national, regional and international sources of volunteer help and funding. Yet, these IRCs generally require more links to grassroots initiatives. We therefore propose a **third** policy recommendation: **the sponsorship of initiatives that are part of a long-term strategy for national peacebuilding that is inclusive of all religious groups and all peacebuilding-oriented religious persons, not only the major and most senior ones.**

Our **fourth** policy recommendation flows from the previous one: **to increase the physical long-term presence of representatives of international NGOs in the region to help develop deeper, more sustainable, and more equitable power relations between foreigners and local partners.** Such an approach would also bear more fruit when emphasis is given to local grassroots long-term employment and participation in project development and implementation together with foreigners. For example, Marijana Ajzenkol shared how important the physical presence of the Mennonite Central Committee team workers in the region has been for building better relationships with ordinary believers from different faith communities.⁹ This recommendation may

help contextualize the interreligious peacebuilding activities of Western organizations in the region by working with local partners trusted by the religious communities' leaders rather than on their own. Indeed, Western involvement is often seen as threatening by conservative religious clerics. For example, David Steele pointed out that he had worked in Serbia for two years before even holding an event in order to gain any credibility as an American and as a Protestant.¹⁰ This long-term presence can also increase links with mid-range leaders, both religious and NGO related, who are more numerous and often more flexible than those at the highest levels of religious institutions.

Our **fifth** policy recommendation also relates to this area of institution building: **to create local peacebuilding offices in the countries across the region through a collaboration of major funders and organizations in this field.** These offices would include minimally two full-time persons: a local citizen of that country, fluent in the local language(s), and a foreigner from outside the region, working for one of the agencies or organizations funding the office. Both individuals would be hired for contracts that aim to secure their long-term employment in order to provide continuity in the local community and strong institutional history. This balancing in the number of locals and internationals may change as each office grows according to its needs and effectiveness in implementing peacebuilding activities nationally. All submissions to any of the grant-making agencies involved in co-funding these offices would first go through a local office in order to coordinate better national strategies in sponsoring peacebuilding efforts. Such efforts would reflect the objective of promoting just interdependent practices between funders and fundees, and greater cooperation between major international organizations already involved or interested in getting involved in a particular area.¹¹

Our **sixth** policy recommendation revolves around the need to **consider more carefully the social and political implications of international organizations' involvement in the region.** For example, we did not come across any analysis of how the fact that many international organizations expanded or even shifted their initial focus on charity, humanitarian and reconstruction programmes to interreligious dialogue (World Vision and NCA, for example, among others) has influenced local perceptions and practices. Another is the shift,

after 11 September 2001, away from funding interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding activities in general towards those that were believed to foster security more directly. These shifts, which have primarily been the result of a radical change in the political context of one major source of funding, the United States, have consequently affected other funding agencies in Europe too, causing much local resentment towards international funding agencies in general. This particularly grave situation in the general Balkan public perception of many international efforts raises the need for greater local-international dialogue with the express aim to promote awareness and transparency as to local agendas in comparison to those of sponsoring agencies that directly affect funding priorities.

Our **seventh** policy recommendation pertains to the area of project development and management: **to make international donors and engaged activists more careful about the incentives used for the stimulation of local involvement in interreligious dialogue as well as the often negative results from indiscriminate or unaccounted distribution of funds.** Distribution of funds should prioritize the full-time workers in the field and their logistical needs to organize meetings, events and so on. Funding should not go towards one-time honoraria especially to participants in seminar and conferences, because this not only creates expectations that can not be met in the long run, but often causes hypocrisy (attendance for money's sake). For example, one of our Bosnian informants mentioned what seemed to him to be an indiscriminate distribution of funds, considerable for the standards in this country, by an international activist for the organization of a conference. Another informant referred to an internationally funded series of workshops, where participants from the previous workshop were expecting honoraria for their participation in this workshop too and were upset when they did not get anything. Such expectations and hypocritical attitudes are detrimental to the very ideal of interreligious dialogue. For invited lecturers, these honoraria remain appropriate, with amounts proportionate to local standards of living. The amounts saved from the difference between what would be considered appropriate in the United States, for example, and the local needs, can be reinvested in activities that require hiring or giving honoraria to a larger number of people, thereby increasing the

impact of the project, at least in theory. One way to achieve this is by ensuring that a project activity is not conceived as a one-time event, but rather as a series of annual activities over three years, with a commitment on the part of the receiving institutions to find ways to implement these activities locally for another two or three years after the funding for the project has ended. Many activities can become part of existing institutional programmes and need not require major external sources of funding once the benefits of such activities have become clear to their leaders and turned into local institutional needs. To ensure such development, leaders must be included in the organizational process as well, as much as possible.

In post-conflict societies, international agencies have often played a key role in starting women's initiatives on all levels. However, illuminating research on women's participation in the public sphere in Bosnia¹² and in Kosovo¹³ has revealed that many international organizations have been blind to gender dynamics, reproducing entrenched patriarchal structures, while at best paying lip service to issues of gender equality through special programmes directed at women. Moreover, in the observation of Elissa Helms (2003), women have been often charged with the roles of peacemakers and 'natural' agents of ethnic reconciliation, while in fact those gender essentialisms marginalize them from formal political power. Although we found out that various 'women' projects in the sphere of interreligious peacebuilding have been particularly successful in the Balkans, one should not forget that religion is so often used, especially in the Balkans, to justify traditional patriarchal values which strictly divide gender roles and spheres of life. In light of this problem, our **eighth** policy recommendation is that **international organizations address gender inequalities and encourage women's participation, with an eye to avoid the essentialization of gender roles.**

Nine Policy Recommendations for Governmental Actors

Formal education

Formal education is an important area for policy recommendations that falls predominantly under the responsibility of governmental actors. In the Balkans in particular, they play the leading role in

carrying out changes and improvements when it comes to education about religion. This is why we felt the need to address many of our education-related policy recommendations directly to them in this section.

A **first** recommendation is **to create, improve and increase local university trainings and programmes in the field of comparative religions (or religious studies) as well as applied academic study of religions, with a special focus on peacebuilding in order to strengthen local expertise.** More initiatives to establish programmes for the academic study of religions in Southeast Europe are needed.¹⁴ There seems to be a link, indeed, between the development of a democratic and tolerant religiously diverse society and the vibrant presence of an academic study of religions. Commitment to sustainability of the newly introduced programmes should be prioritized because the impact otherwise is minimal for the cost investment. For example, an USIP-supported project of the Bulgarian Center for Intercultural Studies and Partnership for the parallel teaching of a course on Christianity and Islam at the Theology Faculty of Sofia University and at the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia in 2006/07 did not unfortunately become sustainable after the end of its one-year funding period. A lot of time and energy, let alone money, was invested into developing such a project. The intentions of funders may not be explicit and realistic enough if they expect such a new programme to become part of local practice after only one year. It may also be that local organizers may do it primarily for pecuniary reasons given their often very low salaries. Some activists may be very committed but, after a few unsuccessful attempts, they give up feeling isolated from institutional decision makers. Others may not be truly committed to finding ways, both at home and abroad, to continue such activities locally after the external funding has dried up. Unless the individuals involved have been truly transformed personally and efforts at sustaining local groups have been included beyond the immediate project per se, it is naïve and unrealistic to expect follow-up activities to occur locally. This is particularly the case for educators, especially in formal institutions.

A **second** recommendation in the area of formal education relates to public schools, a terrain where much tension has arisen since the end of the communist period both between government agencies

and religious communities, as well as between religious communities among themselves and with non-religious people. Larger religious communities in all Balkan countries have made strong calls for confessional teaching of religion to be provided by their respective national ministries of education,¹⁵ where parents would decide which religious education their child would attend. They often do not think about parents who may not wish to have their children educated confessionally in any one religious worldview. There is also minimal attention given to the administrative headaches and psychological damage such divisions may cause to class dynamics, when students are separated from each other for these confessional classes on at least a weekly basis. We therefore recommend **the prioritizing of both local and international funding in order to develop national curricula for the teaching about religion in a way that goes beyond confessional boundaries, so as to provide basic religious literacy to all citizens, irrespective of their personal commitments, beliefs and ideologies in this regard.**

As a **third** recommendation, we suggest that a first step in this direction is to **hold a Balkan-wide conference that brings together religious leaders, ministers of education and religious education teaching experts, as well as teacher organizations and related NGOs** to discuss specific pros and cons of both confessional religious education and what has been called either the teaching about religion or the cultural approach to religion, sometimes linked to ethics education. The fears and misperceptions that presently exist among protagonists on all sides fuel unnecessary tensions. For example, confessional teaching of religion may not be as closed minded and negative about other religions as feared: the confessional Roman Catholic education developed recently in Bosnia has called upon Muslim theologians to ensure that its textbooks passages on Islam are respectful of local Muslim understandings of Islam.¹⁶ The reverse is equally true: an academic approach to the study of religion in public schools does not necessarily teach distorted information about religions or assume that they are all equal thereby promoting a relativistic worldview feared by many religious leaders.

Albeit not from the Balkans, the example of the overwhelming acceptance by Catholic bishops in the province of Quebec, Canada, of a new compulsory programme on ‘Ethics and Religious Culture’

for all grades by the Ministry of Education proves that religious leaders may find correct information about their own tradition in such textbooks, to the extent that they are involved in the dialogue prior to finalizing the programme and the resource book materials. The challenge is to ensure that the interests of local religious communities are shared across religious and non-religious lines, so that national educational agencies can make decisions in the interests of the vast majority of its citizens, in consultation with as many identity groups as possible.

Linked to this point is our **fourth** recommendation that **more attention be paid to the process of revision of textbooks, particularly in the area of history and religion**, and for sponsoring systematic surveys on the ways in which religion is represented in these textbooks.¹⁷ A particular task in this direction, which requires a trilateral cooperation between ministries of education, subject experts (both university and NGO based) and religious communities, is that of developing inclusive context-specific educational material and tools. By inclusive we refer to the importance of including the perspectives of all identity groups who will be affected by this material in order to avoid sentiments of exclusion, which can later turn, to one extent or another, into a socially destabilizing omission.

There is no doubt that Christian and Muslim religious leaders, for the most part, play an important social role across the Balkans. A **fifth** recommendation in this area is **to develop particular educational programmes addressed to Christian and Muslim religious leaders and officials so that they can be more actively engaged in peace-building**. Such programmes can take the form of permanent education modules, long-distance courses or inter-seminary exchanges for students of various Christian and Islamic Studies institutions across the region. This is one area where cooperation between governmental actors and religious educational leaders and specialized NGOs can be particularly fruitful.

The media

The next three policy recommendations relate to the growing transnational power of the media, which is affecting all regions of the world. Certainly, ill-informed, distorted and/or sensationalist

journalistic reports about religious groups and activities have often unleashed social tensions and divisions, as was briefly discussed in Chapter 3.¹⁸ To reduce the media's potential for being used for partisan politics that often fuel conflicts rather than help bring greater understanding, we suggest three more specific recommendations. Our **sixth** recommendation is that **journalists and news editors receive training about religions, so that their coverage may be more accurate and sensitive**. Such training programmes can be an occasion for cooperation between journalism schools and different religious faculties at university, with the assistance of both religion and media-related NGOs. Our **seventh** recommendation is to **develop media training programmes for religious officials who want to improve their communication skills when interacting with journalists or presenting their views in various media**. Our **eighth** recommendation is that **public schools incorporate what is now called media education into their general curriculum so that the younger generation is less-easily manipulated because of increased critical skills**. These three subareas require the funding of projects that are best achieved through multi-sectoral cooperation, including interreligious dialogue organizations.

Postconflict psychological healthcare

One specific area for policy recommendation pertains to cooperation between various health institutions and related government agencies, as well as specialized NGOs and experts. The fact that most citizens in many Balkan nation-states have experienced war directly or indirectly means that many suffer from various aspects of post-traumatic stress. Our **ninth** policy recommendation to governmental actors in particular is that **interreligious and interethnic dialogue programmes be developed to help participants overcome their own particular psychological situation, which is probably the most important way to stop the long-term cycle of violence**. But it requires a large investment in local leadership capable of sustaining this training on a large scale, in local languages. Moreover, local activists that have already played a role in providing psychological training need psychological support because of the challenges of their work with traumatized people. As one of our interviewees emphasized, 'burning out is a problem in the

former Yugoslavia and a lot of activists are facing this. I also, because we are working with traumatized people without any supervision. This is very dangerous, when you are listening to these stories or have experienced a trauma of your own. All of this is affecting people's motivation and capacities and you have to replace those who burn out.¹⁹

Nine Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Local-International Cooperation

Another area to strengthen is that of local-international cooperation. Our **first** policy recommendation here is **to increase the number of jointly planned and implemented projects between international and local NGOs, based on local needs for improving interreligious tolerance and harmony**. Projects for religion and conflict prevention/resolution need joint strategic planning, advocacy and networking, as well as discernment of creative options for addressing the needs of specific societies in terms of interreligious cooperation. There is also a need to acknowledge both the limitations of external aid fostering interreligious reconciliation and peacebuilding and the need for interdependency by bringing greater clarity to what each party contributes to interreligious cooperation. Finally, beyond the control of specific individuals involved in these activities, we must also recognize that the success of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding depends heavily on the social, political and economic stability of a given society, as well as on a variety of global and regional factors.

We have come to realize by the end of our analysis of the interviews and readings that developing assessment and evaluation tools deserve to be the entire focus of one or more specific studies. Our **second** policy recommendation is therefore **to develop and administer assessment and evaluation tools that can be coordinated by a team made up of both local people heavily involved in the field and experts in evaluation techniques, whether they are locally based or not**. The assessment and evaluation tools can then be used in a broad range of interreligious activities throughout the region (and even beyond, whenever applicable) to help weigh up those activities in perspective, as well as to allow comparing the results yielded by them. On a more narrow scale, our **third** related recommendation is that, **in the**

evaluation process linked to interreligious dialogue seminars in particular, participants who officially represent a religious institution need to write a letter to their leaders in order to express how important (or not) such an activity has been to them personally and how it can affect the development of their institution positively in the future. This final assessment, looping back to the local religious leaders, is important in order to make them more aware of just how useful these activities are, hopefully, to the development of their own respective communities.

A **fourth** policy recommendation concerns the majority/minority balance that seems to be so often overlooked in the process of planning and implementing interreligious activities in the Balkans. We thus recommend **to increase awareness of how marginalization of any ethnic and/or religious minorities can become a potential threat to stability and peace.** In other words, dialogue among some groups cannot be conducted in such a way as to exclude other groups, unless of course a particular activity is designed bi- or tri-laterally. Even then, participants need to be aware that in their comments, exclusion or discrimination of others not present is not acceptable. In aiming at accommodating both majority and minority group sensitivities and demands, funders and leaders of interreligious dialogue activities for peacebuilding must seek to transform the skills of organizing, managing and leading such activities for peacebuilding into what John Paul Lederach (2004) calls the ‘moral imagination’, or ‘the art and soul of building peace’.

Another area for increased local-international cooperation is that of informal education. While formal education is primarily a governmental responsibility, informal education, especially in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding, is an area that falls mostly under the responsibility of NGOs, both local and international. Therefore, our **fifth** recommendation is **to develop more permanent training programmes in different relevant areas, for example, on capacity-building for local religion-related NGOs, or about religion in the local context for members of embassy staff and other international organizations present in a host country and so on.** The first will be taught in local languages, while the second will be normally carried out in English. To the extent that local individuals speak English well

enough, and there are many who obviously do, including them in the latter kind of courses can only improve the quality of interactions in the educational space created by such training programmes.

The increasing demand, not only by younger students but also from retired people, for meaningful internships and satisfying work points to another area for local-international partnership. In this context, a **sixth** recommendation is **to improve the networking between local and international organizations that provide such internships, and to create an Internet database of such organizations and opportunities**. They can become motivating agencies for encouraging people from different countries to undertake internships, both volunteer and paid jobs, in various local contexts throughout the Balkans. These internships would be developed with the acquisition of local language and cultural skills in mind only possible with longer assignments and appropriate training.

The power of art and its potential contribution to interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding has been generally underestimated by all actors, but especially by local and international organizations. Our **seventh** recommendation is thus **to increase investment in programmes that include artistic dimensions, which would increase appeal among many strands of the population, especially the youth that may not always be so interested in activities of a more intellectual nature** (which is the case for most interreligious dialogue encounters). The results of these activities may also be visually more appealing to attract media attention in covering them, a problem that more traditional forms of interreligious dialogue initiatives share with many kinds of peacebuilding activities that do not attract much journalistic reporting. Another advantage of artistically orientated interreligious endeavours is that they provide means of interaction that often cut across religious and non-religious identities in a way that fosters human relationships that can help bridge more traditional identity divisions.

Finally, an important area for policy recommendation to local and international actors is how to strengthen and consolidate, through effective and coordinated strategies, regional interreligious cooperation in the cause of peace, stability and development of democratic societies. Our **eighth** recommendation is therefore, where

relevant, **to prioritize cross-regional networking and cooperation between both international donors and local actors, rather than work on a country-by-country basis alone.** For example, a regional report about the Quaker Peace and Social Witness's programme on Dealing with the Past in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro²⁰ reveals that there had been much more intensive regional networking and linkages between different groups between 1992 and 1995, than nowadays. These links were often supported and encouraged by external facilitators and donors, yet over time these actors' attention shifted to in-country projects.

Ultimately, this regional interreligious cooperation is key to the process of reconciliation, which is the most sensitive area of peacebuilding after the perpetration of injustices. Reconciliation requires the involvement and cooperation of all peacebuilding actors: local, national, regional and international, as well as governmental and non-governmental. We mentioned earlier an important recent multi-institutional initiative, still in its preliminary stage, for the creation of a regional Truth and Reconciliation Commission by several Balkan NGOs.²¹ The idea behind this endeavour has been that since the wars in the former Yugoslav countries were all related to one another, then true reconciliation can only happen through a coordinated cross-regional effort.

Our **final** policy recommendation addresses this reconciliation process directly. We recommend **a combination of broader-scale social and institutional reconciliatory gestures together with the active promotion of person-to-person reconciliation. This combination is vital to break the cycle of violence in the Balkans, as elsewhere in the world.** For example, greater funding is needed for smaller-scale projects that involve dealing with the troubled past by sharing different perceptions of and perspectives on it, with the expressed aim to seek a more consensual way of understanding it. This consensual representation of the past can then be included in public discourse (political and otherwise) as well as in educational textbooks, for long-term transformation of old stereotypical perceptions of one another. These peacebuilding activities, especially when they aim to provide a transformative space that might enable persons to seek forgiveness for wrong doings, are the most powerful means to enact effective

peacebuilding. Religious people in particular can often more easily extract from their respective traditions the symbolic and emotional language necessary for such forgiveness to happen at the heart of the reconciliation process.

Conclusion

In this book, we examined various developments in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in Southeast Europe, particularly in post-conflict societies. These developments did not occur in a vacuum; they explicitly or implicitly touched upon issues like postwar reconciliation, post-communist transformations of religion, and social change. We thus also sought to explain the broader historical, political, and social frameworks within which religions in the Balkans have functioned. Finally, we engaged questions about diversity, reconciliation and tolerance.

The development of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in the Balkans has taken place in time of significant shift from state-based to religious-NGOs-based conflict resolution in many places in the world. This shift has been triggered by a global overhaul in the assumption about the increased importance of religion in the public sphere. In other words, there has been a strong international political will for reconciliation through interreligious dialogue, demonstrated specifically through the massive involvement of Western European and North American governmental and non-governmental agencies in the peacebuilding processes since the 1990s secessionist wars in the region. This newly emerged context has been an important precondition for interreligious peacebuilding, because, as Mona Siddiqui (2005) has usefully noted, without such international political will and determination, attempts at reconciliation through religious dialogue will have very limited impact.

A plethora of activities have been carried out by governmental and nongovernmental agencies, both international and local, promoting peaceful coexistence of religions. Although the results have often

been much less impressive than the built-in expectations, there have also been important gains in the field, as discussed throughout the book. These achievements are important and they should not be underestimated, although the challenges outlined in Chapter 4 certainly counsel against overoptimistic expectations about the promises of interreligious dialogue as an universal tool for peacebuilding.

Most likely, a considerable number of all those NGOs that appeared in the region in the wave of the postwar international interventions will gradually vanish from the scene with the rising security importance of other regions in the world and the subsequent rechanneling of international funds. Perhaps this is for the better: interreligious dialogue carries an incommensurably richer promise when the major motivation of those involved in it is not directly linked to making a living out of it, or, in the worse case, turning a profit from organizing its activities. Yet, the idealism that sustains the exemplary practices in interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding discussed in this book does not live of air alone. These activities require a material base, a minimum of economic and political stability. Both local and international resources need to be conceived in careful complementarity to one another so that interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding can play its part in the construction of more harmonious and equitable societies in the Balkans. To be sure, without the development of broad-scale personal and social motivations, as well as tolerant and, even better, respectful attitudes at individual, social and political levels, sustainable interactions across religious and other identity divides will remain highly uncertain.

From our research, we conclude that interreligious dialogue in the Balkans has had a generally promising beginning, and the process is currently open-ended. And yet this is not a satisfactory outcome. Indeed, the fledgling process in the Balkans has the potential to move *beyond* 'mere' interreligious dialogue, and become a new, exacting and exciting method of interreligious dialogue *for peacebuilding*. Through our analysis and recommendations, we have delineated the steps that must be taken if this transformation is to be effected. Accordingly, we end this book with the earnest hope that the actors in the Balkans – and elsewhere – find our analysis and recommendations

useful to help mobilize greater resources within both religious and other sectors of society for a truly effective, long-term engagement with all religious and secular counterparts. In this way, all peacemakers, religious and otherwise, will be poised to contribute even more significantly to the building of a sustainable peace throughout the Balkans.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Quoted in Vrcan (2001).

² Throughout this book, the expression ‘interreligious dialogue’ is used. For immediate and practical purposes, it is synonymous with ‘interfaith dialogue,’ which many other authors have preferred (see our bibliography for several examples). A proper history of where these two terms come from and whether they signify differences that are sufficiently important to make a note of them in the future of this subfield still awaits to be written.

³ We came across only one study (Bouta et al. 2005) that is similar yet at the same time substantially different from ours. It is much broader in focus, and only partly concerned with the Balkans. It is based on email surveys and telephone interviews while our analysis is based mainly on personal interviews and field visits. Its authors recognized in their own work the advantage of the methodology we have used: ‘Field research is critical for more thorough information gathering, and reaching to less visible groups and individuals that have no access to internet or other resources as such, but have great credibility and have been doing critical peace-building work in their communities. The danger with relying too much on information from self-assessments, donor reports, and web searches, etc., is that other smaller groups which can be very effective in their communities go unnoticed’ (Bouta et al. 2005: 9).

⁴ Initially, we referred to these achievements as ‘best practices.’ At a later stage of the research we decided to call them ‘good practices’ in response to the critical input of two expert-practitioners from Croatia, Ana and Otto Raffai. We subsequently opted for ‘exemplary practices,’ or ‘achievements’ as least value-loaded designations.

⁵ Throughout this book we use the name ‘Balkans’ interchangeably with ‘South-east Europe.’ We are aware of the sensitivities often evoked by the former designation (see particularly Todorova 1997), yet we disagree with attempts by some politicians and scholars alike to replace completely a historical appellation with a neutral geographical name.

⁶ Rorty (1994: 3).

Chapter 1

¹ For an overview of the first 100 years of the modern history of interreligious dialogue, see Braybrooke (1992).

- ² For a representative selection of the more than 194 papers, speeches, poems and sermons delivered during the 1893 Parliament, see Seager (1993). Another useful compilation of articles is Beversluis (1993).
- ³ See the history section of World Congress of Faiths' website: <http://www.worldfaiths.org/Beginning.htm>.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Rouse and Neill (1986).
- ⁶ Ariarajah (2002: 311–17).
- ⁷ Basset (1996).
- ⁸ See the website of Religions for Peace: <http://www.wcrp.org>.
- ⁹ Beversluis (2000: 127).
- ¹⁰ Braybrooke (1992: 310–11). For a more recent history, see Forward (2002). For the first 20 years of the history of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, see Jack (1993).
- ¹¹ Eck (1987: 5ff.).
- ¹² Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (1991).
- ¹³ Fadi Daou published two follow-up articles in the Lebanese Arabic newspaper *An-Nahar* on 18 and 25 January 2009.
- ¹⁴ Aoun (2007: 101–02).
- ¹⁵ Smith (2007: 63–82).
- ¹⁶ Panikkar (1984: 208–09).
- ¹⁷ Ibid.: 207: '[When people use the word 'dialectic'] they also mean a technique which empowers one to pass judgements [sic] on other people's opinions and not a mere art of conversation. In this sense the Dialogical dialogue lies outside of the sphere of dialectics. Dia-logical here would stand for piercing, going through the logical and overcoming – not denying – it. The dialogical dialogue is in its proper place when dealing with personal, cross-cultural and pluralistic problems'. And on p. 209: 'Dialectics have an irreplaceable mediating function at the human level. The dialectical dialogue cannot be brushed away in any truly human exchange. We have the need to judge and to discriminate for ourselves – not necessary for others – between right and wrong. It would amount to sheer irrationalism to ignore this essential role of dialectics'.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.: 200.
- ¹⁹ Basset (1996: 410).
- ²⁰ In this paragraph, we draw on Basset (ibid.: 13–22).
- ²¹ Ibid.: 18.
- ²² Ibid.: 27.
- ²³ Ibid.: 23.
- ²⁴ This double transformation is also the case in many other Western countries. A similar process has begun to unfold also in the Balkans, as we will demonstrate in chapters 3 and 4.
- ²⁵ Lamine (2004: 275).
- ²⁶ See its website: <http://www.pluralism.org> and Diana Eck's main publication (2001).
- ²⁷ For example: Kymlicka (2007); Seymour (2008); Taylor (1994, 2007).
- ²⁸ For one possible history of how the term has been defined in Western history, see Smith (2004: 179–96).

- ²⁹ Taylor, M. C. (2007: 12).
- ³⁰ To be sure, the boundaries of 'religion', however defined, are notoriously fluid and ambiguous.
- ³¹ A description of the Ethics and Religious Culture Program of the Ministry of Education in the province of Québec, Canada can be found on: <https://www7.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DC/ECR/>.
- ³² Email communication with Marc Gopin, 26 March 2009.
- ³³ Abu-Nimer (2003: 22, endnote #1).
- ³⁴ Little and Appleby (2004: 5).
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Gopin (2009).
- ³⁷ Smock (2002: 8–9).
- ³⁸ Solomon (2002: ix).
- ³⁹ A decade ago, the study of evaluation tools in the broad area of peacebuilding was characterized as 'anarchic'. To help remedy this situation, Kenneth Bush introduced, in 1998, the concept of 'Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment' (PCIA) to the rapidly growing community of researcher-practitioners in the field of development and conflict transformation (Bush 2001). More recently, Bloomfield, Fischer and Schmelzle (2005) reflected on the ongoing international dialogue between researcher-practitioners in the field of conflict transformation in a study called *New Trends in Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment*. Today we are moving constructively away from the chaos of 10 years ago. Most importantly, there are new manuals for practitioners that reflect these advances in our understanding of assessment as well as the standardization of the lexicon, simplifying its on-the-ground usage (e.g. Paffenholz 2004). The theoretical concept of PCIA has matured into a second phase reflected in the words 'new trends'. This second component of the action circle (planning, assessing and evaluation) is now clear enough to take its rightful place between the much more developed 'planning' and the least understood 'evaluation' components. The recognition that evaluation studies lag behind planning, for example, is particularly important for this book's purposes, as interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding with the specific aim of promoting reconciliation is a highly subjective concept to evaluate. In addition, from our interviews, it has become necessary to clarify the distinction between assessment and evaluation before we can analyze how interreligious peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts differ from those carried out within the Development and Conflict Transformation field and whether those differences can enhance or not the dialogue on PCIA.
- ⁴⁰ Other names have included: the academic study of religion/s, the scientific study of religion/s, the science of religion/s, sociology of religion/s, the sciences of religion/s, the science of religions, religious sciences, the history of religions (Despland 1979), comparative religion (Sharpe 1975), history of religions and so on, not to mention various translations. These various names reflect the struggle by scholars to define this area of study as a *sui generis* field, some arguing for calling it a 'science' of its own because of the uniqueness of its object of study. However, a careful examination of this field's history, however defined, reflects constant interdisciplinarity, a term that has come in

vogue around the early 1980s, as reflected in the publication of a UNESCO reader (1983).

⁴¹ Wilson (1992: 1).

⁴² It was not until the late 1960s, however, when this discipline took roots in the U.S. universities, to a considerable extent as a response to the Cold War challenges. For an interesting argument about the link between Cold War era politics and the shift in the United States from confessional to tax-supported academic study of religions, see McCutcheon (2004).

⁴³ Alles (2008: 307).

⁴⁴ Filoramo (2007: 141–42).

⁴⁵ Excerpt from the presidential address of Margaret Miles at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Nashville, TN, United States, in November 2000.

⁴⁶ These include, from our many interviews, the universities in the following cities: Belgrade, Bucharest, Prishtina, Sarajevo, Skopje, Sofia and Belgrade.

⁴⁷ This paragraph draws heavily on Merdjanova (2006).

⁴⁸ Alles (2008: 5). See also McCutcheon (1999).

⁴⁹ Merdjanova (2006).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Smith (1989).

⁵¹ See, for example, Martinson (1987) and Rommen and Netland (1995).

⁵² See, for example, Clooney (1993).

⁵³ See especially Abu-Nimer (2003: 13–23).

⁵⁴ Brodeur (2005b).

⁵⁵ See the introduction of Pattison and Woodward (2000, esp. pp. 4–7). For one of the earliest works in the English language, see Rogers (1912).

⁵⁶ See both Nadeau (1987) and Hillau (2006). The term ‘praxeology’ is now used in a variety of other disciplines too.

⁵⁷ Kitagawa (1992).

⁵⁸ Norris and Inglehart (2004).

⁵⁹ Said (1978).

⁶⁰ This paragraph draws on Brodeur (2003).

⁶¹ Here are a few publications that relate interreligious dialogue to peace-making and peacebuilding and that provide various definitions: Appleby (2000); Gopin (2000, 2004); Smock (2002, 2006, 2008); Coward and Smith (2004); Thistlethwaite and Stassen (2008); Smock and Huda (2009). See our bibliography for a more extensive list of other relevant examples.

⁶² Wallenstein (2002: 8).

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Brodeur (2005b: 208).

⁶⁶ Darby (2007: 3382).

⁶⁷ Brodeur (2005a).

⁶⁸ Huntington (1996).

⁶⁹ Hall and Jackson (2007: 204).

⁷⁰ Habermas (2005).

⁷¹ Many useful documents on this major event can be found on: <http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/hld-interreligious.shtml>

Chapter 2

- ¹ The practice of *komsuluk* in the Balkan countries dates back to the Ottoman period and can be found practically in all settings with mixed population. Bringa (1995), for example, has observed it during her anthropological study in a Muslim-Croat Bosnian village just before the recent war in Bosnia. According to Bringa, while following clear obligations of reciprocity and mutual help on a number of occasions, the two ethno-religious groups strictly preserved their distinctions. An important way of sustaining their boundaries was by prohibiting intermarriage between members of the two groups.
- ² As one author has noted, the 1974 constitution promoted the republics as almost fully sovereign states, thereby sacrificing the goal of Yugoslav unity (Djilas 1995: 91).
- ³ About SDA, see Bougarel (1997); about the re-Islamization in Bosnia, see Sorabji (1994) and Bougarel (2000).
- ⁴ For a discussion on the role of the principal religious bodies in the nation-building processes in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, see Perica (2002), particularly chapters 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10. Here and in the next paragraph, we draw on those chapters.
- ⁵ During the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Ottoman Turks defeated Serbian Prince Lazar and his Balkan allies, which also included Albanians. The event received a mythical aura in Serbian popular imagination, being subsequently reinterpreted as the battle that ultimately halted the expansion of the Ottomans and Islam into Europe. Moreover, in the popular imagination, the Albanians have often been rendered in the role of the Turks.
- ⁶ Jasenovac was the largest concentration camp in Croatia during WWII, established by the Croatian fascist (Ustaša) regime in the independent interwar state of Croatia (1941–45). Around 700,000 people were exterminated there, the majority of whom were Serbs.
- ⁷ About 48 imams had died in battle by September 1994, according to official figures of the Islamic Community. See Ramet (1996: 254).
- ⁸ About religion in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo see, among others, Ramet (1996), Radić (2000), Bougarel and Clayer (2001), Duijzings (2002), Perica (2002) and Vukomanović (2005).
- ⁹ On religion in Slovenia, see Kerševan (1989), Ramet (1998), Smrke (1999) and Crnic and Lešjak (2003).
- ¹⁰ About the mosque debate, see Vrečer (2006).
- ¹¹ On religion in Croatia see, among others, Zrinščak (2004), Črpić and Zrinščak (2005) as well as Bobinac and Jerolimov (2008).
- ¹² For the sake of brevity, Bosnia hereafter. About religion in Bosnia see, among others, Donia and Fine (1994), Bringa (1995), Mojzes (1998), Bougarel and Clayer (2001), Fine (2002), Perica (2002) and Velikonja (2003).
- ¹³ For the sake of brevity, we use the designation Macedonia instead of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We are aware of the ongoing international debates on the name of this country. About religion in Macedonia see, among others, Dimevski (1989), Ramet (1996), Brown (2003) as well as Bougarel and Clayer (2001).

- ¹⁴ The Macedonian language was codified in 1944 on the basis of a specific Slavic dialect and in connection with the establishment of the so-called Vardar province, most territory of which was transferred two years later into the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The new republic was built by Tito as a means to curb the claims over this province by Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks.
- ¹⁵ About religion in Albania see, among others, Clayer (1997), Ramet (1998), Clayer (2003), Zhelyazkova (2000), Gjuraj (2000) and Doja (2000).
- ¹⁶ All of our informants and interlocutors during our field visits (Merdjanova in 2003 as well as Brodeur and Merdjanova in 2007 and 2008) said that their Albanian national identity is more important to them than their religious identification.
- ¹⁷ About religion in Bulgaria see, among others, Raikin (1988), Zhelyazkova (2000), Eminov (1997), Anderson (2002), Neuburger (2004) and Merdjanova (2007).
- ¹⁸ About religion in Romania see, among others, Ramet (2003) as well as Stan and Turcescu (2007).
- ¹⁹ The Greek Catholic Church was established in 1700 in Transylvania, then under Habsburg rule, when Orthodox priests accepted Catholicism and papal authority, while preserving the Eastern Orthodox rites, in order to acquire equal status with the other four (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed and Unitarian) recognized religions in Transylvania (Flora and Szylagyi 2005: 114).
- ²⁰ According to a 2006 nationwide poll, 6 per cent of those polled said they went to church several times a week; 22 per cent, once a week; 23 per cent, several times a month; 34 per cent, only at Christmas and Easter; 12 per cent, once a year or less and 3 per cent not at all. However, another poll in the same year indicated that 85 per cent of the respondents trusted the Church most of all institutions (cited in IRFR Romania 2006).

Chapter 3

- ¹ The listing of various organizations in the notes 2–5 below is meant to provide examples for each of the category we outline, and does not purport to be an exhaustive catalogue of all of the actors involved in the field.
- ² A large number of organizations of different kinds form part of the international community active in the Balkans, particularly from the early 1990s onwards. They include governmental organizations, such as the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia, the USIP, the OSCE and embassies throughout the region, such as the American, Norwegian and Dutch embassies. The many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be divided into four subgroups:
- (i) Religiously based NGOs, such as the Baptist Union, the Council of European Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences, the Inter-Church Council in the Netherlands (IKV), the Pax Christi in the Netherlands (these two last organizations merged into IKV Pax Christi Partnership Foundation

in 2006), International Orthodox Christian Charities, the Jesuit Refugee Service for Southeast Europe (headquartered in Ohrid, Macedonia), Justitia et Pax (the Netherlands), Mission Department, ICCO & Kerk in Actie (the Netherlands), Communicantes (the Netherlands), Lutheran World Federation, the United Methodist Committee on Relief and so on.

- (ii) Intra-religiously based NGOs, such as Church World Service, the Conference of European Churches, Dutch Interchurch Aid, Merhamet, Red Crescent, the World Council of Churches and so on.
- (iii) Interreligious NGOs, such as the WCRP (now called Religions for Peace) and so on.
- (iv) Civil NGOs, such as the Center for International and Strategic Studies, Conflict Management Group, Mercy Corps, the Nansen Dialogue Network and so on.

³ There have been a number of local branches of international organizations in the Balkans active between 1990 and the present, such as: Bread of Life, Caritas, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps, Merhamet, Mennonite Central Committee Norwegian Church Aid, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, World Vision and various branches of the World Council of Churches, such as the Ecumenical Women's Solidarity Fund and the Southeast Europe Ecumenical Partnership (both headquartered in Omos, Croatia).

⁴ Many local organizations emerged and developed through local initiatives with various degrees of foreign sponsorship. Here is a list of the principal ones by country:

Albania: Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (Tirana) and so on.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: Abraham (Sarajevo), Center for Nonviolent Action (Sarajevo), Center for Religious Dialogue (Sarajevo), Forum Bosnae (Sarajevo), Forum of Tuzla Citizens (Tuzla), International Multireligious and Intercultural Center (Sarajevo), Interreligious Choir 'Pontanima' (Sarajevo), Face to Face (Sarajevo), Mirna Luka (Banja Luka), MOST (Tuzla) and so on.

Bulgaria: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (Sofia), Center for Intercultural Studies and Partnership (Sofia), Center for Interreligious Dialogue and Conflict Prevention at Sofia University (Sofia) and so on.

Croatia: Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights (Osijek), Agape (Osijek), Evangelical Theological Seminary (Osijek), RAND – Regional Address for Nonviolent Action (Sesvete, near Zagreb) and so on.

Kosovo: Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Economic Development (KIPRED, Prishtina), Civic Dialogue (operates in Kosovo and Serbia) and so on.

Macedonia: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (Skopje) and so on.

Romania: The Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania (AIDRom, Bucharest), Liga Pro Europa (Tirgu-Mures) and so on.

Serbia: Center for Religious Studies at the Belgrade Open School (Belgrade), Centre for Tolerance and Interreligious Dialogue (Belgrade), Christian Cultural Center (Belgrade), Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (Novi Sad), Interreligious Center (Belgrade), Novi Sad Theological College (Novi Sad) and so on.

⁵ Here is a much smaller list of organizations that were established and funded locally, mostly either through private funds: Christian Peace Circle (Zagreb, Croatia), Center for Interconfessional Dialogue and Cooperation (KIFA; Skopje, Macedonia), Information Center for the Study of New Religious Movements (Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria), Treasury of Religions (Bucharest, Romania) and so on.

⁶ Outside of this typology fall what we call 'religious communities'. These are bodies related to the major religions found in all Balkan countries. While they have developed structural dimensions through various kinds of institutions and hierarchies, we prefer not to think of them simply as 'organizations' in the modern sense of the word, as their histories predate the emergence of civil society organizations, or what has come to be widely known as non-governmental organizations ('NGOs'). Yet, many religious institutions, but not all and not in the same ways, have changed in modern times to become similar to organizations, with often new structures to carry out activities that parallel those of NGOs. So in seeking to assess the role of religious communities in the Balkans, through their various institutions that can function at times like modern organizations, it is crucial to understand how their internal structures vary greatly from one religion to another, from one subreligious group to another, from one country or region to another. These differences come, almost always, from their very specific histories. Throughout the book, we use upper case (for example Islamic Community, Jewish Community) when we speak about official institutions, and lower case (Islamic community, Jewish community), when we speak about people following specific faith.

⁷ *Interreligious Cooperation in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Proven Model of Partnership*, 2002, WCRP Internal Document, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States.

¹⁰ Truesdale (2000).

¹¹ Interview with Olivera Jovanovic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo; and informal conversations of Ina Merdjanova with Emir Kovacevic, 17 June 2004, Sarajevo and with Božana Katava, 21 October 2005, Sarajevo.

¹² Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States.

¹³ Metropolitan Nikolaj withdrew because the other religious leaders did not support his protests against the attack on an Orthodox priest and his son in Pale, who were beaten up in their home at night by the NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR) soldiers on unproven charges of hiding war criminals. Cardinal Pulic froze his membership, because the Concordat with the Vatican, proposed by the Roman Catholic Church in Bosnia, was rejected by the other faiths. As a matter of fact, in 2007, Bosnia's presidency ratified a concordat with the Holy See, which arranged the public juridical status of the Church in

this country and granted it certain rights. It was followed by a similar agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2008. The Islamic Community is now preparing to sign a similar agreement too.

¹⁴ Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General of the WCRP, statement on the occasion of the official opening of the new office of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 23 April 2004 (Vendley 2004).

¹⁵ The report 'Izjještaj o stanju prava na slobodu vjere u Bosni i Hercegovini' is available on the council's website: <http://www.mrv.ba/site/> (last accessed 10 February 2009).

¹⁶ Rexhep Boja pointed out the unsafe conditions in which this visit and the following trips to various religious sites in Kosovo took place. The UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) has been instrumental in supporting the event and providing security escort. Interview with Rexhep Boja, 29 May 2007, Prishtina, Kosovo.

¹⁷ History of the Inter-Religious Dialogue in Kosovo, on: http://www.kosovakosovo.com/view_file.php?file_id=61 (last accessed 11 February 2008).

¹⁸ Interview with David Steele, 2 July 2007, Maynard, MA, United States.

¹⁹ Interviews with Bishop George Frendo, 25 May 2007, Tirana, and 1 July 2008, Tirana; and with Bishop Andon Merdani, 26 May 2007, Tirana, Albania.

²⁰ In the account of Mojzes, 'The WCRP's lack of success in influencing the Macedonian religious leadership to cooperate by bringing in a small group of outsiders convinced us that an entirely different approach was necessary. Hence, we abandoned our own format of previous Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogues (of an equal number of scholars from the three traditions) and decided to bring a very impressive group of international scholars in which the ratio of Jews, Christians, and Muslims would more nearly approximate the religious configuration of Macedonia . . . We found that as long as we spoke to the Macedonian religious leaders in general terms, they did not commit themselves to any significant participation. However, when we sent them the list of international participants, they, predictably, responded, feeling that if such an important international gathering was going to take place, they better match or exceed the number of guests. At first we were not successful at creating a local organizing committee. But we persisted, and finally when the local organizing committee was created (which was another first, as the religious communities had previously not cooperated on *any* local project!), it was our list of internationals (and the promise to provide honoraria to local participants) that prompted them to invite the nearly fifty participants'. Report on International Scholars Dialogue, Skopje, Macedonia, 10–14 May 2002. We thank Paul Mojzes for sending us this report.

²¹ Interview with Ratomir Grozdanoski, 1 June 2007, Ohrid, Macedonia.

²² In the words of Grozdanoski, 'It was decided that lower ranking officials of the different religious communities would be the ones with the active role to play in this council. If only religious leaders would have been present, it would have been too formal and maybe not as effective' (ibid.). This perception seems to forget that the Interreligious Council of Bosnia also has a more flexible working committee made up of mid-level representatives of the senior

religious leaders that works together with a permanent secretariat. A closer examination of the differences may be necessary before a final assessment of this sort can be done.

²³ We draw on the interviews with Jacob Selimoski, 31 July 2006, Skopje, Macedonia, and with Ratomir Grozdanoski, 1 June 2007, Ohrid, Macedonia.

²⁴ Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States.

²⁵ Franović (2008: 18).

²⁶ This restrained also the activities of Orthodox peacemakers such as Father Sava Janjic (Little 2007: 138).

²⁷ This is certainly the case in both Australia and Canada, where recent official apologies have been made by both governments regarding their treatment of indigenous communities in the past, especially in regards to residential school policies that forced children to be separated from their families at a young age in order to be put into boarding schools, often run by various religious institutions. Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized to the stolen generations of Aboriginal peoples in February, 2008, as part of a ten-year-old movement called Sorry Day. Canadian Prime Minister Harper apologized on 11 June 2008, soon after putting in place legally a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission that started its work officially in the fall of 2008. Official apologies and symbolic acts of repentance normally take years to happen, and they respond to a large grassroots need that also requires years to be articulated.

²⁸ The Serbian Orthodox Church is also the most trusted national institution (see Peuraca 2003: 8). We discuss briefly in the next pages individual reconciliatory acts on the part of some Orthodox clergymen.

²⁹ It is not our task in this academic analysis to either accuse or exonerate the behaviour of religious leaders throughout the conflict-ridden post-Yugoslav settings. We simply want to call attention to the complexities of every situation and what has prompted a particular behaviour, rather than advancing outright normative judgements. This approach, to our mind, is a preparatory step towards offering more concrete ways of advancing reconciliation and thus peacebuilding.

³⁰ Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States. The Serbian National Council of Kosovo and Metohija, established in 1999 under the leadership of Bishop Artemije, has been the only institution representing Serbs in the province (Memorandum 2004: 81).

³¹ Quoted in Steele (2003: 150).

³² Agence France-Press, 9 November 1999. About Farther Janjic's peacemaking efforts see 'The Cybermonk' in Little (2007: 123–47).

³³ Interview with Francois Perez, 30 May 2007, Prishtina, Kosovo.

³⁴ See, for example, Leban (2001).

³⁵ About an initiative organized by the Nansen Dialogue, see Lisosky (2004).

³⁶ RFE/RL Balkan Report, Vol. 9. N. 20, 1 July 2005, p. 5.

³⁷ We were not able, however, to obtain a more up-to-date information about this council.

³⁸ For more information, see ICTY's website (<http://www.un.org/icty>), particularly its 2008 annual report (<http://www.un.org/icty/rappannu-e/2008/AR08.pdf>).

- ³⁹ Interview with Radovan Bigovic, 17 July 2006, Belgrade.
- ⁴⁰ We first learned about this initiative by our interviewee Katarina Kruhonja in 2007, who has been one of the key actors behind the initiative. More recent information can be found in Gaffney and Alic (2008).
- ⁴¹ IRFR Macedonia 2006.
- ⁴² IRFR Romania 2007.
- ⁴³ Interview with Alexandru Stan and Remus Rus, 3 March 2007, Bucharest, Romania.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Vlad Naumescu, 7 March 2007, Bucharest, Romania.
- ⁴⁵ A catalogue of these destroyed churches can be found on the website: http://www.rastko.org.yu/kosovo/crucified/default.htm_catalog.
- ⁴⁶ For details about the destruction of Orthodox churches and monasteries in Kosovo, see Memorandum of Kosovo and Metohija (2004).
- ⁴⁷ For an informed discussion on religious education in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Macedonia, see Kuburić and Moe (2006). For the case of Bulgaria, see Ilchevski (2007), and for the case of Romania, see Stan and Turcescu (2005). For an argument about the need for an academic study of religions in Bulgaria see, Merdjanova (2006).
- ⁴⁸ Interview with Msgr. Mato Zovkic, 20 December 2005, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ⁴⁹ In 1995, immediately after the adoption of the legal arrangement on the mandatory religious education in primary schools, 57 deputies asked the Constitutional Court to examine its constitutionality. The Court interpreted the term 'mandatory' in the sense that religion should be present as a subject of study in primary schools, but students, with the consent of their parents or legal guardians, may choose not to study it. Since 1997 religion classes have been mandatory for all pre-university students, with a possibility for exemption upon a written request by parents or legal guardians. Thus religious education in public schools was made the default option and the right of exemption from religion classes has been difficult to be pursued (Stan and Turcescu 2005: 389–92).
- ⁵⁰ For details about the negotiations preceding the government's decision to allow the so-called traditional religious communities to conduct religious education in public schools, see *Susret države i crkve* (2002).
- ⁵¹ Interview with Ratomir Grozdanoski, 1 June 2007, Ohrid, Macedonia.
- ⁵² Interview with Fr. Stjepan Kushan, S. J., 3 June 2007, Ohrid, Macedonia.

Chapter 4

- ¹ Alibasic (2002).
- ² About some efforts at de-mythologizing the past, see chapter 3, pp. 79–80.
- ³ We are aware of criticisms against inadequate representation of women by women's NGO activists and their foreign donors in post-war reconstruction initiatives. For an illuminating account of how women are often charged with the roles of peacemakers and 'natural' agents of ethnic reconciliation, while in fact those gender essentialisms marginalize them from formal political power, see Helms (2003).

- ⁴ Peace Gateway: 28 March 2005. We thank Lazar Markovic for sending this information along.
- ⁵ Very few of these women, however, work in the field of theology after graduation. Normally they take a second major, so they can find a job after leaving university. This is only to confirm that an open-to-women religious education training system does not necessarily mean a more than symbolic and rather fragmented female presence in the religious job market.
- ⁶ Interview with Afrim Tairi, 7 June 2007, Skopje, Macedonia.
- ⁷ Interview with Katarina Kruhonja, 22 July 2006, Osijek, Croatia.
- ⁸ Peace Gateway: 27 December 2004. We thank Lazar Markovic for sending this information along.
- ⁹ Interview with Entoni Seperic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Anton Merdani, 26 May 2007, Tirana, Albania; and informal conversation with Ana Kërçyku, 2 July 2008, Tirana, one of the organizers of these summer camps.
- ¹¹ Peuraca (2003: 43–47).
- ¹² Interview with Aneta Jovkovska, 31 July 2006, Skopje, Macedonia.
- ¹³ Interview with Marijana Ajzenkol, 17 August 2006, Belgrade, Serbia.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Jelena Jovanovic, 29 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ¹⁵ The booklet entitled '*Da li smo tolerantni*' (Whether we are tolerant) has been put together by Novak Popovic. Interestingly enough, in this predominantly Orthodox milieu, Roman Catholics were seen as a potential problem more often than people of any other faiths. 70 per cent of the approximately 1,500 interviewees said that the social intolerance is fostered by politics (interview with Zdravko Sordjan, 17 July 2006, Belgrade, Serbia).
- ¹⁶ Interview with Zdravko Sordjan, 17 July 2006, Belgrade, Serbia.
- ¹⁷ There have also been publications considered intolerant or offensive by other faiths. For example, the translation of certain foreign Islamic books in Bosnia that contained intolerant or offensive views about Christians was deemed inappropriate and counterproductive (interview with Mato Zovkic, 20 December 2005, Sarajevo, BiH).
- ¹⁸ Interethnic/interreligious trade has not attracted much scholarly attention, although crossreligious economic interaction is perhaps the quickest area to take off after social conflicts. In the words of a Croat working in Bosnia: 'Money has no ideology. Profit is the only goal. Within 24 hours of the Washington Agreement interethnic trade started with all groups conducting business with each other' (quoted in Demichelis 1998: 7).
- ¹⁹ Smock (2001: 7–8).
- ²⁰ About Fra Ivo Markovic's peacebuilding efforts, see Little (2007: 97–119).
- ²¹ Interview with Entoni Seperic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ²² Interview with Miodrag Todorovic, Avi Kozma and Zaklina Mucheva, 7 June 2007, Skopje, Macedonia.
- ²³ Information based on informal conversations with Marko Orsolc, in addition to the Survey Questionnaire IMIC, 26 May 2007, and to our interview with Zilka Siljak-Spahic, 27 June 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ²⁴ Interview with Marko Orsolc, 15 May 2008, Sarajevo, BiH.

- ²⁵ Information based on interviews with Katarina Kruhonja, 21 July 2006, Osijek, and with Nena Arvaj, 21 July 2006, Osijek, Croatia.
- ²⁶ Information based on interviews with Aneta Jovkovska, 31 July 2006, Skopje; Jakob Selimovski, 31 July 2006, Skopje; Gjoko Gjorgjevski, 31 July 2006, Skopje, Macedonia; Paul Mojzes, 17 November 2006, Washington, DC and Ratomir Grozdanoski, 01 June 2007, Ohrid, Macedonia.
- ²⁷ Burawoy and Verdery (1999: 1–7) have aptly challenged the understanding of negative trends and phenomena in post-communist society as ‘remnants’ from the socialist past. Both these authors have argued that what are often seen as legacies inherited from the socialist order are rather ‘an entirely novel configuration of disorder’.
- ²⁸ Merdjanova (2007).
- ²⁹ For example, in 1997, 280 monks and 40 priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church published an ‘Appeal against Ecumenism’, which claimed that inter-religious dialogue was a weapon of Western missionaries’ proselytism (Perica 2002: 181). On Serbian Orthodox Church’s anti-ecumenical and anti-West stance, see also Vukomanović (2005: 16–23).
- ³⁰ Interview with Entoni Seperic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ³¹ Peuraca (2003: 3).
- ³² Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Interview with Francois Perez, 30 May 2007, Prishtina, Kosovo.
- ³⁵ For a detailed account on the post-communist social controversy over new religious movements, see Merdjanova (2002: 49–67).
- ³⁶ Interview with Jelena Jovanovic, 29 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ³⁷ For examples from Bosnia, see Perica (2002: 182).
- ³⁸ Interview with Radovan Bigovic, 17 July 2006, Belgrade, Serbia.
- ³⁹ Interview with Entoni Seperic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with George Frenzo, 25 May 2007, Tirana, Albania.
- ⁴¹ Informal conversation with Ina Merdjanova, 16 July 2004, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ⁴² Interview with Mato Zovkic, 20 December 2005, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ⁴³ Interview with George Frenzo, 25 May 2007, Tirana, Albania.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Rasim Gjoka, 25 May 2007, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Nena Arvaj, 21 July 2006, Osijek, Croatia.
- ⁴⁷ Peuraca (2003: 4).
- ⁴⁸ The amount is over \$1.3 million, as quoted in a one-page online report by the World Learning for Development in 2006 published on: http://www.world-learning.org/WLID_documents/Albania_Fostering_Religious_Harmony_Project_Brief.pdf (last accessed 13 February 2009).
- ⁴⁹ Interview with Lazar Markovic, 17 July 2006, Belgrade, Serbia.
- ⁵⁰ Alibasic (2002: 83).
- ⁵¹ Mandel (2002).
- ⁵² Interview with David Steele, 2 July 2007, Maynard, MA, United States.
- ⁵³ Our description is based on the results of a survey questionnaire we handed to Abraham Association 16 August 2006, as well as an interview with Jelena

Jovanovic, 29 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH and several informal conversations with Jelena Jovanovic, Ernest Jovic, and Samir Beglerovic between June 2005 and July 2006.

⁵⁴ Survey questionnaire, Abraham Association 16 August 2006.

⁵⁵ Interview with Entoni Seperic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.

Chapter 5

¹ Hurtic, Sapcanin, and Woodward (1999: 11).

² Serwer (2003).

³ Perica (2002: 183).

⁴ A similar point, although not with a specific focus on religion, has been made by Demichelis (1998: 1) in her set of recommendations regarding peacebuilding in Bosnia's ethnically divided cities: 'Aiding only refugees or minorities increases local tensions. Help the whole community to improve conditions'.

⁵ Quoted in Smock (2002: ix).

⁶ Bouta et al. (2005: 11) emphasized that 'the religious laws and ideas developed on peace and security often appeal more to religious communities than universal sets of guidelines such as expressed in the United Nations' declarations on political, civil and individual rights. They may better encourage religious communities to work for peace than other guidelines. Yet one must take care that they do not replace these universal rights'.

⁷ Interview with Jim Cairns, 29 June 2007, NYC, United States.

⁸ Croatian peacebuilding activist Katarina Kruhonja (2002: 144) aptly emphasizes the importance of requests for support coming from the receiving end: 'If that is not the case, it is necessary to take time for achieving a mutual understanding of your entrance, even if it is only a fact-finding or exploration mission. I would hesitate to enter this sort of situation without being asked: you might be helpful, but you might also be one of those many people whose coming is an additional burden for local people'.

⁹ Interview with Marijana Ajzenkol, 17 August 2006, Belgrade, Serbia. For a detailed account on Mennonite interreligious activities, see also Puljek-Shank (2007).

¹⁰ Interview with David Steele, 2 July 2007, Maynard, MA, United States.

¹¹ The Canadian International Development Agency, for example, is in the process of shifting a number of its employees from Ottawa to the field, because local salaries are much lower and because hiring more local people is a direct way of helping to provide economic growth and stability to local expertise.

¹² Helms (2003).

¹³ Abdela (2001).

¹⁴ See chapter 4, p. 103, for the description of the exemplary practice 'The Educational Partnership in Religious Studies between Arizona State University and the University of Sarajevo'.

- ¹⁵ For a succinct country-by-country overview of the confessional religious education in public schools throughout the Balkans, BiH, see Chapter 2, Table 1.
- ¹⁶ Interview with Mato Zovkic, 20 December 2005, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ¹⁷ A UNESCO initiative in this regard has been under way worldwide for about a decade already. See, for example, Pingel (1999).
- ¹⁸ See pp. 78–79.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Adnan Hasanbegovic, 28 July 2006, Sarajevo, BiH.
- ²⁰ Stubbs (2003: 15).
- ²¹ See Chapter 3, p. 85.

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