

## RELIGION IN KOSOVO

31 January 2001

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# MAP OF KOSOVO





## RELIGION IN KOSOVO

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to describe the current position of the three major religious communities in Kosovo. In part, it aims to clarify misconceptions about the involvement of religion in the Kosovo conflict. It also proposes some areas where religion might serve as a means to encourage reconciliation among the peoples of Kosovo.

Three religions – Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism, have long coexisted in Kosovo. A large majority of Kosovo Albanians consider themselves, at least nominally, to be Muslim. A minority, about 60,000, are Catholic. Most Kosovo Serbs, even those who are not active religious believers, consider Orthodoxy to be an important component of their national identity. Nevertheless, despite this essential division of religious activities along ethnic lines, it cannot be said that religion per se was an important contributing factor in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians.

Kosovo Albanians do not define their national identity through religion, but through language and have a relatively relaxed approach towards the observance of the forms of the Islamic religion. Neither Islamic leaders nor Islamic theology played a significant role in either the eight-year campaign of non-violent resistance to the Serb occupation regime or the armed resistance of 1998-99. Islamic political and social fundamentalism, as that term is understood with respect to the Middle East, has very little resonance in Kosovo.

The image of Kosovo Serbs and their monasteries, usually portrayed as suffering harassment and persecution by the Albanian majority population, formed a part of the nationalist propaganda that Milosevic and his supporters used to manipulate popular emotions. The Serbian Orthodox Church, however, was always divided over Milosevic. It initially supported him in large part to end what it saw as the victimisation of the Serb nation under Communism and to reverse the decline of the Serb presence in Kosovo. But Milosevic's Communist career made the Church uneasy, as did his use of violence. By the early 1990s, Patriarch Pavle was publicly criticising Milosevic although some other members of the Orthodox hierarchy continued to support him. After the 1999 war, Bishop Artemije, the head of the Orthodox Church in Kosovo, assumed the leadership of those Serbs willing to work with the International community there.

During the war, Serb forces destroyed numerous Islamic facilities, including virtually all Islamic libraries and archives. After the war, Albanians replied by destroying scores of Orthodox churches. These acts of reciprocal vandalism seemed motivated on both sides more by the desire to eradicate the evidence of the other's presence in Kosovo than by religious fanaticism.

The Serbian and Albanian religious communities have been more willing to talk to each other than other sectors of Kosovo society. As early as March 1999, before the NATO-led intervention, representatives appointed by the leaders of the three main religious communities in Kosovo (Islamic, Orthodox and Roman Catholic) held a joint meeting in Pristina that was convened by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) to facilitate dialogue. The representatives expressed opposition to the misuse of religion for political reasons on all sides and called on all parties not to use religious symbols to promote violence or intolerance. They also expressed their determination to maintain direct contacts between the religious communities and to build channels of communication. An informal level of dialogue has continued on a regular basis between some members of the three main religious communities. These interfaith meetings still contain some risks for the participants, but they can be useful for facilitating a better climate of tolerance and understanding between the ethnic communities and might appropriately be the focus of greater international community support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UNMIK should immediately put a Kosovo Interfaith Council on a permanent footing.
2. The UNMIK Department for Culture should establish a program for protection, reconstruction and rehabilitation of all Kosovo religious monuments, of all faiths, on an equal basis, and with adequate funding.
3. UNMIK should immediately issue a regulation facilitating registration of religious communities as legal entities in order to resolve the communities' problems in recovering and maintaining property, financing reconstruction, and conducting relief efforts.
4. UNMIK should prepare a comparative handbook on religions for children's use, in Albanian and Serbian.
5. Public schooling for all communities in Kosovo should remain completely secular.

Pristina/Brussels, 31 January 2001



## RELIGION IN KOSOVO

### I. INTRODUCTION

Three religions – Islam, Orthodoxy, and Catholicism, have long coexisted in Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> A large majority of Kosovo Albanians consider themselves, at least nominally, to be Muslim. Most Kosovo Serbs, even those who are not active religious believers, consider Orthodoxy to be an important component of their national identity.

Nevertheless, despite this essential division of religious activities along ethnic lines, it cannot be said that religion *per se* was an important contributing factor in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. During the war, Serbs attacked Islamic structures, and in the aftermath, Albanians assaulted Orthodox churches and monasteries, but these acts were primarily motivated by the desire of each group to eliminate the presence of the other nationality, rather than by religious fanaticism.

After the suppression of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, Serbian authorities erected many large Orthodox religious structures as symbols of their domination. In Pristina, for example, Serbian authorities began the construction of a massive church next to the Islamic-influenced library in the centre of the town, which many considered the symbol of the Albanian cultural renaissance that began after Kosovo gained real autonomy in 1974. In Djakovica, a large Orthodox church, financed by a tax on all residents, including Albanian Muslims and Catholics, was opened in 1999. The partly completed church shell in Pristina stands empty under permanent KFOR guard. The church in Djakovica was destroyed by Albanian residents after the war.

Islamic involvement in politics is entirely unknown within the Kosovo Albanian political hierarchy. Orthodox religious leaders and Orthodox symbols were present in the early days of Serb nationalist euphoria, and Milosevic exploited them in his consolidation of power. But some Orthodox religious figures later became involved in efforts at Serb-Albanian reconciliation. Milosevic's claim that Orthodoxy is a defensive bulwark of Western civilisation against Islamic encroachment may have enjoyed a certain resonance among Kosovo Serbs. Nevertheless, most Serbs are unenthusiastic about the involvement of religion and religious figures in politics, as are the majority of Albanians.

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<sup>1</sup> An indigenous Jewish community of some 600 persons, with roots dating back at least three centuries, lived in Kosovo before World War II. Of them, some 250 were deported to Nazi concentration camps. The rest were rescued by the Kosovo Albanian authorities, who arranged their transfer to Albania where they survived, the great majority to emigrate to Israel after 1945.

The majority of the estimated 1.9 million residents of Kosovo<sup>2</sup> are at least nominally Muslims. These include Albanians, Muslim Slavs (currently defined as Gorans and Bosnians), Roma, and Turks. About 60,000 Kosovo Albanians are Catholic. Kosovo also traditionally had small communities of primarily Catholic Croats, who in recent years have largely left.<sup>3</sup> As in every situation where separate religious traditions exist within a single ethnic group, occasionally there is friction between Albanian Muslims and Catholics. Some of the smaller minority communities contain representatives of more than one major faith. For example, Kosovo Roma include Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox.

In general, Orthodoxy in Kosovo is associated with Serbian ethnicity. The Serbian Orthodox Church has historic title to hundreds of religious structures and related sites in Kosovo.

A poll commissioned by the NATO-led Kosovo Forces (KFOR) and carried out by the Gallup organisation found that Kosovo Albanians are "moderately religious." In a specific question, the poll asked, "Apart from special occasions like religious holidays, weddings, funerals, and so on, how often do you attend religious ceremonies?" The largest response, 28.9 per cent, was "several times a year," while 12.2 per cent replied "several times a month," indicating either the Friday jumaa or assembly prayer for Muslims or Sunday mass for Catholics. Only 5.8 per cent answered "regularly during the day."<sup>4</sup> No equivalent data is available for Kosovo Serbs.

## II. ISLAM

Although Islam is by far the largest religion in Kosovo, Albanians tend to take a relaxed approach toward Islamic religious observance and appear to have little sympathy for the involvement of religion in politics. Only one very small party has a religious label – the Christian Democratic party, the religious associations of which are quite tenuous.

The relaxed approach of Kosovo Albanians to Islam reflects the legacies of local history. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under both Tito's Communist regime and Milosevic's Serb occupation, Islamic devotion was discouraged. Islam in Kosovo was actively suppressed only during the early period of Communist rule. For most of the era, the Communist leadership simply sought to impede religious practice by discouraging the construction of new mosques and by excluding overt believers from successful careers in any important area of political and social life. Islamic Community representatives today say this continues to encourage a popular attitude of "benign neglect" towards religion. A number of new mosques were constructed during the brief window of local autonomy lasting from 1974 to 1989, often reflecting improved economic prospects for Albanians. However, the policy of economic and social discrimination instituted by Milosevic in 1989 struck Albanian Muslims no less harshly than other Albanians, dampening public expression of religion as well as other social activities.

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<sup>2</sup> There are no accurate figures for the population of Kosovo. The estimated population is 1.9 million. The current Serb population is estimated to be no more than 150,000.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Dr. Rexhep Boja, President, Islamic Community of Kosovo.

<sup>4</sup> Poll Among Kosovo Albanians, April 2000, Wave II.

The relaxed attitude of Kosovo Albanian Muslims also appears to express more deeply rooted traditions. The Islam of the Ottomans was generally less rigid than that of other areas of the Islamic world. It was especially moderate in the Balkans, on the edge of the empire, where millions of Christians and fairly considerable number of Jews lived. Many Kosovo Albanians retain a strong sense of family and ethnic roots in the past, including to the pre-Ottoman era when Kosovo was Christian. Reluctance to assume an Islamic identity completely also reflects the long Albanian resistance to Turkish domination.

Historically Albanians do not define their national identity through religion, but through language. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Albanian patriot Pashko Vasa Shkodrani, a Catholic who served as an Ottoman governor in Lebanon, made the oft-quoted statement, "The religion of the Albanians is Albanianism."<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary Kosovo, the centres of Islamic devotional activity are mosques and spiritual (Dervish) meeting houses known as teqes; the latter play a larger role in Kosovo than in any other Islamic community in the region, although they are also active in Albania, western Macedonia and the Presevo area of South Serbia. Prior to the 1998-99 war, 560 mosques were registered with the Islamic Community of Kosovo. Mosque leaders are known as imams or hoxhas, and teqe leaders as shehs (sheikhs) or babas. Before the recent fighting, all larger towns had mosques, but teqes, of which Kosovo counted 60 in 1982<sup>6</sup>, tend to be concentrated in the southern cities of Pec, Djakovica, Orahovac, and Prizren.

Islamic Community representatives told ICG that mosque attendance and general religious observance have declined since the war, motivated in part by dislocation and distress. They also mentioned regional differences in observance. For example, few in the Drenica area are actively observant, but much greater observance is noted in the south and south-eastern areas of Dragas, Gnjilani, and Prizren. Additionally, in the above mentioned southern cities where dervish teqes tend to outweigh mosques as centres of Islam, attendance at teqe services may be higher than at mosque services.<sup>7</sup>

Muslim higher religious education is presently mainly conducted by the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Pristina, which trains imams for the Albanian, Roma, and Turkish Muslim communities. The Faculty presently has 250 students from Albanian-speaking communities in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania proper. Women students are enrolled at the Faculty in preparation to teach children.

Islamic Community representatives said there is presently a lack of qualified teachers of religion for children, and attendance at mosque classes is low. The Islamic Community advocates establishing religious classes in public schools, beginning with the first grade, and offering Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox children the option to choose their own courses. Such a proposal was presented to the international community but, according to Islamic Community representative Resul Rexhepi, has not yet received an answer.

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<sup>5</sup> For an account of religion and Albanian national identity see Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians - A Modern History*, London, I. B. Tauris, 1998

<sup>6</sup> See Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, London, Hurst, 2000, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> See Duijzings, *ibid*.

Islamic secondary or preparatory education is normally conducted through madrasas. Although all madrasas in Kosovo were closed in 1945, an Islamic primary school was founded in Pristina in 1951. It grew into the Alauddin Madrasa, the only Albanian-language madrasa in the world during the period of extreme anti-religious activity under Enver Hoxha in Albania.<sup>8</sup>

Charitable activities are traditionally an important element in the Kosovo Islamic Community but efforts have been hampered by legal ambiguities. Islamic community representatives complained to ICG that UN authorities refuse to grant religious groups status as "legal persons." Finally, approximately 300-400 Kosovo Albanians make the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, according to representatives of the faculty of Islamic Studies.

#### A. Styles and Sects

The spiritual Islam of the dervishes, or Sufism, took hold in Kosovo very early, and Muslim observance in the region has, therefore, had a heterodox character. In such towns as Djakovica, which also has a large Catholic population, the majority of observant Muslims are said to be associated with Sufi orders. According to the Dutch scholar Ger Duijzings, in the southern area "the vast majority of the rural population either belong to or sympathise with one of the numerous (dervish) orders." Duijzings has also pointed out that in pre-1998 Kosovo, participation in the (dervish) lodges was virtually limited to Albanians and Roma, with almost no participation by Turks or Slavic Muslims; this offers one example of a common Albanian-Roma cultural phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

The Sufi or dervish orders in Kosovo are distinguished from "official" Sunni Islam in various respects. Sufi orders that elsewhere in the Muslim world are strictly Sunni show in Kosovo a mixture of Sunni and Shia belief. Kosovo is also a centre of the heterodox Sufi sect of Bektashis, which is widespread in Albania, Macedonia, and among Albanians in southern Serbia. The Bektashis, although generally Shia, are an unorthodox sect of Islam. Their members openly drink alcohol, and their rituals may be led by women, who do not wear coverings and are treated as equals.

Bektashis were pioneers in the Albanian patriotic movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and have retained a certain strength in Kosovo as the bearers of cultural resistance to Communist and then to Serb nationalist pressure. In the 1950s, for example, the Sufi orders were effectively suppressed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But although such a prohibition was decreed in Kosovo as well, it could not be carried out; in contrast with Bosnia, Sufis, although barred from meeting publicly in their *teqes*, retired to private homes where they remained a vital force in Kosovo Albanian culture, even under Communism.

The Sufi orders have historically maintained a separate institutional structure from that of the official Islamic Community of Kosovo (see below). They were seen by some Albanians as a more-religious and more nationally-minded counterweight to the state-sanctioned clergy in the official Islamic structure.

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<sup>8</sup>It was completely demolished during the 1998-1999 war. See the section on "Damage to the Physical Heritage of Religious Communities" below.)

<sup>9</sup> Duijzings, p. 115.

During the war, one of the most dramatic events for Albanians was the killing of Sheikh Myhedin, spiritual leader of the Helveti-Karabashi teqe, in the town of Orahovac on July 19, 1998. The sheikh, who had been a prominent figure in two Yugoslav trials of Albanian leaders, was slain with as many as 150 townspeople who had taken refuge in the teqe during extensive fighting between Kosovo Liberation Army troops and Serb forces.

Islamic fundamentalism, as that term is used in a Middle East context to describe the politically and socially strict observance of religious doctrine, has thus far had little resonance in Kosovo. This is demonstrated by a range of facts, some visible to the casual visitor. Kosovo Albanian women, especially older and village women, may wear headscarves or dress with accentuated modesty, but the veiling of faces is now unknown. Kosovo Albanian women have had considerable access to education for a generation, and many are represented in the professions. Although women may still be limited in their choices and subordinate in family roles, this represents the effects of a patriarchal cultural tradition. Only a small number of younger women have adopted Islamic head covering. Fundamentalist propaganda is not widely distributed, and there is no advocacy of it in the media.

Fundamentalist missionaries have recently made some minor inroads among Kosovo Albanian Muslims in two areas: training of imams and distribution of religious literature. This reflects gaps in the resources and activities of the established Islamic Community of Kosovo. Because that community has trouble financing the training of imams, many go for their religious education to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and other places where they may be exposed to fundamentalist teachings. In addition, because Kosovo Albanians are hungry for books of all kinds, fundamentalist literature translated into Albanian is often greeted with considerable interest.

A degree of fundamentalist influence may enter Kosovo through the activities of some Middle East relief groups. According to a press release issued on 9 September 1999 by the Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo (SJRCK), out of four million Saudi riyals (slightly more than \$US 1 million or £600,000 sterling) spent in the province, nearly half went to sponsor 388 religious "propagators," i.e. missionaries. At that point the Saudis had been active in Kosovo only some two months.

Nevertheless, there remains considerable resistance to fundamentalism among Albanian Muslims. Kosovo's extremely youthful population is western orientated and looks toward Western Europe and America for cultural influences. Kosovo Albanians do not feel hostility to America or the West; there is no tradition of local anti-Jewish prejudice that might stoke the fires of fundamentalism, and older Kosovo Albanian Muslims feel more of a historic connection with less-stringent Turkish traditions than with Arab Islam.

Islam was not a major element in the Albanian armed resistance to the Serbs. On December 29, 1999, the Kosovapress news agency, which was founded by the KLA, issued an extremely critical statement against the infiltration of fundamentalist activists into Kosovo. The statement declared:

"For more than a century civilised countries have separated religion from the state... [However,] we now see attempts not only in Kosovo but everywhere Albanians live to introduce religion into public schools... Supplemental courses for children have been set up by foreign Islamic organisations who hide behind assistance programs...It is time for Albanian mosques to be separated from Arab connections and for Islam to be developed on the basis of Albanian culture and customs."

It remains to be seen what effect the newly qualified imams returning from training in the Middle East will have on the religious life of Kosovo's Muslim Albanians.

## **B. The Culture Clash in Reconstruction Issues**

One issue over which differences between Kosovo Albanian traditions and more "fundamental" traditions have produced some tension within the community concerns mosque reconstruction, specifically the style of mosque architecture and decoration. Kosovo Albanians, like Muslims elsewhere in the Balkans, worship in Ottoman-style mosques with fairly rich internal decoration.

In Kosovo so far, the main specific item of contention involves the maintenance of Ottoman and Albanian graveyards on mosque grounds. The most recent of several incidents came in late July, 2000 during preparations for the restoration of the Hadum Mosque complex in Djakovica – an extremely important Islamic architectural treasure that was devastated, along with its library and madrasa, by Serb forces.

According to Gazmend Naka, an official of the Institution for the Protection of Kosova Monuments, representatives of the Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo (SJRCK), who had been authorised to reconstruct the Hadum Mosque, attempted to destroy the grave markers in the cemetery. They were prevented from doing this by local Albanians, who appealed to the UNMIK Department of Culture. The SJRCK representatives returned to the complex within days and although they left the graves alone, began wrecking the remains of the structure in such a way that Naka and others were convinced they intended to raze them. The Djakovica incident led to calls for the removal of those involved from all participation in the protection of cultural monuments in Kosovo. On 5 August 2000 it was announced in the Kosovo media that the Kosovo Interim Administrative Council Cultural Department had barred further involvement of the SJRCK in the rehabilitation of the Hadum Mosque.<sup>10</sup>

## **C. Organisations and Political Activities**

The central official Muslim institution is the Islamic Community of Kosovo headed by its Grand Mufti, Dr. Rexhep Boja. The Islamic Community also certifies clerics for the Turkish, Muslim Slav, and Muslim Roma communities. A Turkish-speaking imam is located in Prizren, and prior to the war numerous Roma imams were functioning. Many of these have since fled Kosovo due to persecution and

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<sup>10</sup> "Saudi Wahhabi Aid Workers Bulldoze Balkan Monuments," by Jolyon Naegele, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 4, 2000.

intimidation by ethnic Albanians. The Islamic Community of Kosovo maintains representatives in London and New York.

The Sufi orders are mainly grouped in the Community of Aliite Dervish Islamic Communities, the headquarters of which is in Prizren and directed by Sheikh Xhemali Shehu, who was the main public dervish in pre-war Yugoslavia. The Sufi orders also maintain informal relations with Islamic charitable organisations outside Kosovo.

Neither the official Islamic Community leadership nor the dervishes can be said to participate in party politics, although their leaders say they have access to political leaders. "Islam is above political parties," commented an Islamic Community representative interviewed by ICG. He claimed that some individuals had approached Islamic community leaders proposing the establishment of a Muslim-oriented party, but said the concept had been firmly repudiated. There is currently no Kosovo Albanian political party that professes any connection with or special concern for Islam as a political phenomenon. With almost 30 political parties having formed and registered for the October 2000 municipal elections, it can be assumed that if there had been any significant reservoir of support for political Islam among Kosovo Albanians, at least one party would have appeared to claim its votes.

### III. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN KOSOVO

Albanian Catholics now make up about 3 per cent of the population of Kosovo, or around 60,000. In addition, there are Catholic Roma and small communities of Croat Catholics.<sup>11</sup> The Catholic Church has 23 parishes, with 35 priests, all Albanians except for two Croats and one Slovene. The Catholic Church in Kosovo is subordinate to the diocese of Skopje and Prizren, headed by Bishop Mark Sopi, who is based in Prizren. Croatian and Roma Catholic congregations have long existed in the areas of Janjevo and Letnica, although both have been seriously reduced by emigration and flight. Bishop Sopi participates in the Kosovo Transitional Council.

The Catholic Church presently maintains no religious schools in Kosovo, although there is a desire to establish a religious high school in Prizren where the Church is attempting to regain control of its former property. Bishop Sopi described the situation of his constituency with great enthusiasm: "There has never been a more vital and dynamic Church than now. Believers are very active and most Catholics attend mass. Youth, in particular, are becoming more involved in the sacraments, prayer, and singing." He also said the attendance of children in catechism classes is increasing.<sup>12</sup>

The patriotic symbolism of Mother Teresa as an Albanian Catholic remains deeply significant for all Albanians. Catholics have played a prominent role in the Albanian patriotic movement since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Few Catholics joined the Communist Party, declaring their faith prohibited them membership in an atheist political movement. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, a

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the history of the Catholic Church in Kosovo see Gjini Gasper, *The Shkup-Prizren Diocese Through the Centuries*, Drita, Prizren, 1999

<sup>12</sup> ICG interview with Bishop Mark Sopi, August 2000.

Catholic-led movement, the Albanian National Democratic Party or PNDSh, conducted an armed campaign of resistance to Yugoslav rule. Its leaders, who were executed by the Yugoslav authorities, remain emotive symbols for Kosovo Albanians.

The political atmosphere for the Catholic Church was often difficult in the early Tito years. There was a great improvement, however, during the 1980s, in the period of Albanian dominance in the League of Communists of Kosovo. New churches were built, and a large evangelist movement was initiated. This accounts for the strong political link between the Catholic Church and many leaders of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) who rose to prominence during that period.

#### A. Social and Political Role

Catholics have undertaken and funded major educational and relief programs including care for orphans. One of the most influential Catholic clerics in Kosovo, Don Lush Gjergji of Binçë, in the American military zone, has initiated an effort to help mothers widowed during the war to retain care over their children. This represents a departure from custom, according to which a widow's children would be turned over to the grandparents to be raised while the widow sought remarriage. It is interesting to note that the recipients of this assistance, which Fr. Gjergji deems a success, are all Muslim.

In discussing the challenge of promoting peace between Albanians and Serbs, Fr. Gjergji recently commented, "when we were resolving blood feuds, we told people that revenge is fratricide, which is the same as suicide. We have suffered more from the killing of our own people by our people than from murders by the Serbs."<sup>13</sup>

Fr. Gjergji has started an informal inter-religious effort by meeting alternatively with the Sunni Muslim hoxha or priest in the Vitina region and with Father Kyrilo Djurkovic, a Serbian priest in nearby Gjilani, who has also been active in peacemaking efforts. These activities are supported by the U.S. military chaplain at Camp Bondsteel and the Evangelical group World Vision.<sup>14</sup>

Although Bishop Sopi has stated that he "does not want to involve the Church in politics," Catholics play a major public role in communities where they have large representation, such as Djakovica. Father Ambroz Ukaj of St. Anthony's Consecratory in Djakovica told ICG that Catholics view themselves as obliged to act politically. Catholics have been prominent in the formation of the Albanian Christian Democratic Party of Kosovo (Partia Shqiptare Demokristiane e Kosovës) even though this party has in fact recruited as many or more Muslims. (A representative of the Islamic Community pointed out that the party is active in some areas of Kosovo that have no significant Catholic presence.) Mark Krasniqi, leader of one faction of the PSHDK, participated in the July discussions at Airlie House, which were organised with the support of the U.S. Institute of Peace in an effort to improve relations between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians. It

<sup>13</sup> Nexhat Buzuku, "Attacks Harm Those Who Carry Them Out," *Koha Ditore*, August 20, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> ICG interview with Fr. Gjergji, July 2000.

is also widely believed that the secret Catholic organisation Opus Dei has been active in Kosovo Catholic émigré circles for many years.

#### B. The Albanian Franciscan Link to Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia

Most Kosovo Albanian Catholic priests are brothers of the Franciscan order or were trained by it. The majority studied in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the facilities of the Franciscan Province [district] of Srebrena Bosna, which is headquartered in Sarajevo. Others studied in Croatia and Slovenia. Nearly all Albanian Catholic clergy are, therefore, proficient in Serbo-Croatian and maintain a link with Bosnia or Croatia. A Slovene priest, Father Jozha, presently ministers at the Catholic church of St. Anthony in Pristina.

In addition, there remain small Croat Catholic parishes in such locations as Janjevo, once a thriving Kosovo Croat town, and at Letnica, the site of devotions to the Virgin Mary, formerly well-known for pilgrimages by Croat and Albanian Catholics as well as Roma of both Christian and Muslim faith. Fr. Matej Palic, the Croat priest at Janjevo, has been one of the most active proponents, along with Fr. Gjergi in Binçë, of interfaith dialogue with remaining local Serb Orthodox clerics.

However, in Janjevo, which had more than 3,500 Croat residents before the break-up of Yugoslavia, there are presently no more than 370 Croats, according to Fr. Palic. He has taken 220 Roma, 30 Turks, and five Goran families under his wing and ministers to some 100 Catholic Albanians as well. Fr. Palic estimated that there are approximately 1,000 Muslim Albanians in the town.

Letnica, which formerly had a Croat population of 4,500, now has only 56 Croats. Masses are now held in Albanian only, and in Spring 2000 the Croat Catholic priest was preparing to turn the parish over to an Albanian.

#### IV. THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

About 15 per cent of all Albanians in the Balkans are Orthodox Christians. However, there has not been a strong Albanian Orthodox presence in Kosovo in recent times, notwithstanding the existence of a few Albanian and Roma Orthodox families in the area of Prizren.<sup>15</sup>

The Serb Orthodox Church is a national religious community that claims to embrace all Serbs. For Serbs, Kosovo and its Orthodox monasteries and churches remain the ultimate symbols of their ethnic identity. These include 1,400 locations listed as cultural heritage of importance to the Serbian people, 500 cultural monuments, and 162 sites classified as "cultural heritage of extreme importance." The latter include important monasteries and related foundations. Three sites in particular are crucial to Serbian history. These are Pec, the location of the Serbian Orthodox patriarchy for the medieval and early Ottoman period, which was re-founded in 1894 at the beginning of the modern period of Serb colonisation of Kosovo; Decan, the site of the monastery housing the

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<sup>15</sup> ICG interview with Dr. Partizan Shuperka, economist, August 4, 2000.

sarcophagus of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Serb ruler Stefan Decanski; and, Prizren, the resting place of Decanski's son, Emperor Stefan Dušan.<sup>16</sup>

The overwhelming majority of Serbs consider that they belong to the Serbian Orthodox Community - in a cultural or historical if not religious sense. Unlike the Islamic Community, the Serbian Orthodox Church has always been a factor - although generally a subordinate one - in the politics of Kosovo. It played an important role in the wave of nationalist euphoria in Serbia in the late 1980s, which Milosevic partly stimulated and partly exploited to consolidate his power.

The image of Kosovo Serbs and their monasteries, usually portrayed as suffering under harassment and persecution by the Albanian majority population, formed a part of the nationalist propaganda that Milosevic and his supporters used to manipulate emotions. The Serbian Orthodox Church, however, was always divided over Milosevic. It supported him in large part to end what it saw as the victimisation of the Serb nation under Communism and to reverse the decline of the Serb presence in Kosovo. Milosevic's Communist career made at least some members of the Orthodox hierarchy uneasy, as did his resort to violence to achieve his aims. However, the Serbian Orthodox Church has never wavered in its view that Kosovo is holy ground for Serbs and must always belong to Serbia.

The Serb journalist Jasminka Kocijan, in a perceptive and authoritative account of the evolution of the Church's situation, wrote in 1998 that the "nationalist reincarnation of the new Serb politicians began ten years ago exactly in Kosovo. At the same time the Serbian Orthodox Church appeared in public. Precisely in connection with the Kosovo problem, the Church offered itself as a stronghold of tradition and national security. The awakening of the nation poured new energy into Serb bishops of whom a majority then believed that Serbia had finally found a true leader in Slobodan Milosevic."<sup>17</sup>

In 1990, the former Orthodox bishop of Raska and Prizren (i.e. of Kosovo), Pavle, was elected patriarch of the Serbian Church. In addition, the Orthodox bishops held their council (Sabor) meetings in Kosovo, at the Pec Patriarchate, in 1987, 1989 and 1990. During this period, Pavle journeyed to the United States to lobby for the Serb position in Kosovo.

The degree to which the Orthodox hierarchy supported Milosevic may be gauged by a statement of Bishop Amfilohije Radovic, metropolitan of Montenegro and Primorje, in 1990 to the Belgrade weekly *NIN*: "Milosevic and other leading politicians in the Republic of Serbia should be commended for understanding the vital interests of the Serb people at this moment....If they continue as they have started, the results will be very impressive."

By 1992, however, the Orthodox Church had begun to show signs of internal dissension over Milosevic. Throughout most of the 1990s, Patriarch Pavle was a consistent, although understated, opponent of Milosevic's aggressive adventurism. On 6 October 1992, he made the following statement during a visit

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<sup>16</sup> *Crucified Kosovo, Destroyed and Desecrated Serbian Orthodox Churches in Kosovo and Metohia*, II expanded edition, published by the Orthodox Diocese of Raska and Prizren, November 1999.

<sup>17</sup> "The Serb Orthodox Church During the Past Ten Years," by Jasminka Kocijan, *Naša Borba*, Belgrade, April 8-10, 1998.

to the United States: "I have come to America to appeal for an end to suffering, for an end to this mindless war."<sup>18</sup>

Other members of the Orthodox hierarchy remained committed to the Serb nationalist agenda, and most of Milosevic's Orthodox opponents tended to criticise him for being too soft toward the West rather than for the war and war crimes. In 1993 a Bosnian Serb Bishop, Amfilohije, helped persuade the Bosnian Serb Assembly to reject the Vance-Owen peace plan for Bosnia. Later, Bishop Atanasije of Zahumlje-Herzegovina attacked both Milosevic and Serb opposition leader Vuk Draskovic for proposing the establishment of a United Nations protectorate over Bosnia.

At the beginning of 1998, Albanian students in Kosovo initiated a round of demonstrations demanding the return of the structures that had previously housed the University of Pristina. Serbian police in Kosovo repressed the demonstrations with considerable brutality. At that time, Patriarch Pavle made an extraordinary gesture toward the Albanians. He sent a letter to the "student movement for the Albanian University in Kosovo" in which he expressed understanding for their peaceful protests and condemned the police use of force: "To beat and arrest students is a grave sin not only against one's duty but also the honour of the country in which we live."

At the same time, Bishop Artemije, who had succeeded Pavle as the leading Orthodox religious figure in Kosovo and had previously been viewed as a hard-liner in the hierarchy, along with Amfilohije and Atanasije, assumed a more moderate posture. The background for this was growing anxiety that Milosevic's adventurism would produce a disaster for the Serbs in Kosovo and for the Serb Orthodox Church's stewardship over the monasteries and churches that constitute the physical representation of Serb collective memory. Artemije was supported in this new stance by Father Sava Janjic, deputy abbot of the Visoki Decani Monastery, who commented in an interview with the Serb opposition weekly *Vreme* early in 1999, during the Rambouillet talks: "Our relations with the Albanian neighbours are quite good. The monastery of Decani has been distributing humanitarian aid to both Serb and Albanian refugees from the start of the conflict. Besides humanitarian activity our main goal is to build confidence and create a foundation for the future common life of our two communities."<sup>19</sup>

Before and during the NATO intervention, Sava, with other monks at Decani, sheltered Albanians and Roma, according to Serb opposition media. In 1998, "the head of our monastery, Abbot Teodisije, and the brethren organised assistance for those Albanians who remained in Decani, who were frightened and afraid to leave their homes. We took food and medicine to them," Sava said.<sup>20</sup>

After the end of the war, Artemije and Sava assumed the leadership of those Serbs who were willing to work with the international community in Kosovo. Sava advocated recognition of Serbian atrocities against Albanians in Kosovo. In an interview in the Belgrade magazine *NIN* in July 1999, he declared: "Together with the regime from Belgrade, [local Serb authorities] systematically carried out violence against Kosovo Albanians, as well as against the Serbs, who were also

<sup>18</sup> "Several Statements, Prayers and Appeals of Patriarch Pavle," at [www.decani.yunet.com/pavle.html](http://www.decani.yunet.com/pavle.html)

<sup>19</sup> "Deaf Ears in Belgrade," by Dejan Anastasijević, *Vreme*, February 27, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> "Villages are burning in the distance...", by Zoran B. Nikolić, *Vreme*, November 20, 1999.

mistreated and robbed at the very end... [Milosevic's supporters] participated in forced expulsions of the [Albanian] population which otherwise would not have fled the province. In most cases they did not flee because of the bombardment, but because of systematic deportations, looting and other sorts of violence. We have been finding daily bloody tracks of that violence, and the unfortunate Serb people in Kosovo must now account for it." Sava went further in condemning the Milosevic regime: "Simply, there is no future for the Serb people, nor the whole region of South Eastern Europe as long as such dictatorship survives in Belgrade."<sup>21</sup>

Artemije and Sava thus became prominently identified as proponents of reconciliation with the Kosovo Albanian population, above all to preserve a Serb civil presence in Kosovo. Indeed, they have led a Serb National Council of Kosovo and Metohija (SNV) from Gracanica that has become the outstanding exemplar of this. Artemije has, at various times, participated in the Kosovo Transitional Council; he and Sava agreed to sit in the Interim Administrative Council as observers, pulled out in June 2000, but returned after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding regarding security in the Serb enclaves on 29 June 2000. In addition, the Gracanica group publicly identified themselves with the anti-Milosevic *Otpor* (Resistance) movement in Serbia.

Immediately after the war, Artemije and Sava enjoyed considerable credibility with the Kosovo Serb public. *NIN* reported, " 'All the politicians ran away a long time ago. If the Bishop were the same, that is, if he were a politician, he would not suffer here with us but move his seat to somewhere in Serbia,' says Nebojša Lekic from Caglavica." Artemije himself insisted, in a diary published after the war, "We remained with our people. We shared every evil with them because there was no good."<sup>22</sup>

However, the increasing desperation of the Serb position in Kosovo, as well as political agitation by Milosevic supporters who had remained in or infiltrated into the territory, began to undermine the religious leaders' position. Mitrovica Serb leader Oliver Ivanovic, the director of a rival Serb National Council of Kosovska Mitrovica, emerged as a polemical opponent of the churchmen. Today, the continuing politicisation of Orthodox Church activities in Kosovo has made it by far the most divided of the religious communities active in the province.

Although few Kosovo Serbs publicly criticised the politicisation of religion during Milosevic's ascendancy, many assailed the roles of Artemije and Sava in co-operating with representatives of the international community in Kosovo.<sup>23</sup> One striking example came at Orthodox Easter 2000 when townspeople in Gracanica boycotted the Easter mass at the monastery in a clear repudiation, doubtless motivated by Milosevic followers, of the political activities of the bishop. Similarly, Sava complained that a Greek proposal to build a new hospital in Gracanica village had been thwarted by promises from Belgrade that Yugoslav authorities would soon return to Kosovo and erect a new and better facility.

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<sup>21</sup> "Bloody Tracks," by Svetlana Djurdjevic-Lukic, *NIN*, July 8, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> "Planned Chaos, Journal entries the Bishop of Raška and Prizren, Artemije," *Danas*, June 10-11, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Father Sava has now retired back to Decani Monastery.

Attacks on the position of Artemije have also come from within the Serbian Orthodox hierarchy. In May 2000, *NIN* reported that at a Serb Orthodox Synod, Bishop Irinej Bulovic of Backa, who is considered an extremist, presented "a whole list of accusations" against Artemije, but that the majority of the bishops refused to discuss the matter and decided merely to take note of the submitted information. Irinej's criticism had been motivated by a letter Artemije had issued commenting on Patriarch Pavle's and Bishop Irinje's attendance at a "Republic Day" reception hosted by Milosevic. Media observers, however, argued that the criticism represented a veiled attempt to remove Artemije from his diocese.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, the Serbian Orthodox Church shares in the crisis that afflicts Serbs in Kosovo. The future of the Church will be reflected in the fate of its flock. Artemije's and Sava's criticism of the actions of the Milosevic regime in Kosovo - even if belatedly and carefully hedged - has helped restore moral credibility to the Church. Their willingness to co-operate with the international community in Kosovo has opened a path for Serbs to continue to maintain a presence in Kosovo, should they choose to follow that example.

## V. JEWS, PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES, AND OTHERS

A Jewish Community of Pristina, consisting of seventeen individuals, operated until the end of the 1998-99 war. However, it was considered by foreign Jewish authorities to be a propaganda creation of the Milosevic regime, and its claim on the title "Jewish Community" was repudiated. After the departure of Serb forces from Kosovo, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a relief organisation with considerable resources and strong backing from the Israeli government, signed an agreement with KFOR for the protection of Jewish property. Nevertheless, the seventeen members of the former Jewish Community fled to Belgrade.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1990s, a small Albanian-speaking Jewish community had been discovered in Prizren, headed by Nexhat Fetah. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee met with this group, numbering 38, and it was subsequently constituted as a new Jewish community of Kosovo, independent from the authorities in Belgrade. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has been extremely active in relief and reconstruction activities, including financing of computer centres at 27 public elementary and middle schools in Kosovo.

There has been some Missionary activity in Kosovo especially by Evangelicals, Seventh Day Adventists, and other Protestants, and some marginal Islamic sects. Although it is difficult to assess the number of Christian missionaries active on the ground, their presence is noted and at times resented among the Albanian population.

The Evangelical group World Vision has promoted interfaith dialogue among the Albanian religious communities. A World Vision representative met with the president of the Islamic Community, and World Vision also facilitated interfaith

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<sup>24</sup> "Advance in Reverse," by Konstantin Trojicki, *NIN*, May 25, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> ICG discussions with representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

meetings in Gnjiliani involving the local Serb Orthodox priest, Father Kyrilo Djurkovic, and the Catholic leader, Fr. Lush Gjergi.

## VI. DAMAGE TO THE PHYSICAL HERITAGE OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

With the onset of serious fighting in 1998, Serb authorities noticeably targeted Islamic religious institutions for deliberate destruction. While some mosques of historical and political significance were destroyed, recently-built mosques were more vulnerable since they were viewed as evidence of the dramatic demographic advances by Albanians in Kosovo.

According to documentation prepared by the Islamic Community, Serb forces destroyed 218 mosques. The homes of 302 imams were devastated, sixteen imams were killed, and fifteen were missing or imprisoned following the start of NATO air strikes in March 1999.<sup>26</sup>

Of significant note was the Alauddin Madrasa in Priština, which was completely razed. Dr. Boja's office was sacked by Serbs, and the community records were obliterated in a day-long fire set on June 13, 1999 by Serb police. The flames were visible on television screens world wide as a backdrop to the entry of NATO soldiers into Pristina. The archive held by Dr. Boja's community was originally established as an Ottoman provincial archive for the records of religious endowments, or *awqaf*, along with Islamic clerical and educational documents. The catalogue of the collection was also destroyed, as were six regional archives of the Islamic Community in Pec, Djakovica, Srbica, Glogovac, Suhareka, and Lipljan.

Sufi teqes were also targeted. The Bektashi teqe complex in Djakovica, the largest and oldest Bektashi teqe in Kosovo, was burned in May 1999, with the loss of 2,000 rare books and 250 manuscripts from its library. According to Sheikh Adrihysen Shehu of the Kosovo Community of Aliite Dervishes, a Helveti Sufi teqe in Has was destroyed; A Rufai Sufi teqe in Peja and two in south Mitrovica were also wrecked by Serbs.<sup>27</sup>

Serbian attacks on Albanian Catholic structures included expulsion of the priests and nuns from St. Anthony's Church in Pristina and the installation of anti-aircraft radar in the steeple.

Unfortunately, as soon as the war ended and Serb forces left Kosovo, Albanians began their own revenge attacks against Serb religious buildings. *Crucified Kosovo*, an illustrated account of the devastation of Serb religious architecture, lists 76 incidents between June and October 1999. The first serious attacks occurred at the Orthodox religious complex of Musutiste near Suhareka between 10 July and 17 July 1999. The Holy Trinity Monastery there, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was completely destroyed by dynamite and fire; soon after the nearby Holy Virgin Church, built in 1315, was blown up. A report in the Serbian opposition newspaper *Nezavisna Svetlost*, on 21 July 1999, stated that the

<sup>26</sup> Serbian Barbarities Against Islamic Monuments in Kosovo, Islamic Community of Kosovo, Pristina, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with ICG, August 2000.

monastery's destruction had been a reprisal for the murder of the Albanian imam and burning of the entire Albanian village nearby.

To cite other notable examples of destruction, the St. Mark of Korisk Monastery, erected in 1467, the St. Uros Monastery and the Presentation of the Holy Virgin Church, built at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and the St. Stefan Church in Nerodime, also dating from that time, were blown up. Many recently constructed Serbian churches were demolished, since, parallel to Serbian views of new mosques as signs of Albanian demographic dominance, they were seen by Albanians as symbolic of Serb political rule.

## **VII. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

Relatively little has been done to promote an interface between the numerous foreign religious humanitarian agencies active in Kosovo and the local religious groups, or to create interfaith co-ordination of Kosovo religious communities. OSCE employs a theological expert as a consultant on religious affairs in its Department of Democratisation. It planned to publish a handbook on Kosovo religious life at the end of 2000.

Bishop Artemije and Father Sava have received considerable attention from leading figures in the international community. Albanian religious leaders, in contrast, feel more distant from the international community. Albanian Islamic leaders resent that the international mission in Kosovo - which has occupied the choicest buildings in Pristina - has been unwilling to give the Islamic Community even temporary use of a structure to replace its headquarters destroyed during the war by Serb forces.

## **VIII. RELIGION AND RECONCILIATION**

Obviously, the main interest for the international community in Kosovo's religious life involves the potential for effective work toward reconciliation of the Albanian and Serb communities. Efforts in this direction have taken place for some time. Representatives of the three main religious communities, Orthodox, Islamic and Catholic, assisted by the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), met in March 1999 as war was breaking out between NATO and Milosevic. Informal meetings organised by the local representatives of the three religions have continued on a fairly regular basis in Pristina and Gnjilani.

Bishop Artemije, Dr. Boja, and Catholic Bishop Sopi held a joint meeting prior to the NATO intervention, in Vienna, on 29 November 1998. Later, under the stimulus of Bosnian Franciscans and the WCRP, they made two declarations with the intent of establishing an Interfaith Religious Council of Kosovo on the model of the body functioning successfully in Bosnia-Herzegovina. These were issued on 8 February 2000 in Sarajevo and 13 April 2000 in Pristina.

Father Sava, who believes activities favouring a new relationship between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo may be facilitated by religious leaders, has commented, "I believe that religious communities can help create a better climate for understanding between ethnic communities. Of course that would

not be any kind of religious or ecumenical co-operation. Simply, all of us would make an effort to influence our faithful to respect the integrity and freedom of every individual and every ethnic group."<sup>28</sup>

However, religious leaders must pursue this mission with great delicacy. The experiences of Bishop Artemije and Father Sava illustrate the pitfalls that exist when religious leaders are perceived as injecting themselves into politics.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The bitter divide between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs has many political and social aspects, but religion as such is not, as is often thought, a major contributing factor. Indeed, in the post-war era, it may provide some limited possibilities for bridging that divide. Since the end of 1998, representatives of Kosovo's three main religious communities have demonstrated a greater willingness to enter dialogue than other parts of the fractured society. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties they currently face, religious leaders continue to meet occasionally on an informal basis. They believe that they can play a crucial role in the urgent task of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians.

The international community should assist these efforts in every way possible, including by itself meeting regularly with all the main religious leaders in Kosovo and routinely including Albanian religious leaders, as well as Serbs, in major consultative meetings. UNMIK and OSCE should provide financial assistance in order to put the interfaith meetings on a more regular basis through establishment of a strong, permanent Kosovo Interfaith Council on the Bosnian model. This would raise the profile of the dialogue and provide a positive example of inter-ethnic dialogue to the wider community.

Burnt-out ruins of mosques and churches are scattered across Kosovo's landscape, stark reminders of the hatred and violence of recent history. It would assist in removing this important psychological barrier to reconciliation if the UNMIK Department for Culture would establish a program for protection, reconstruction and rehabilitation of all historic Kosovo religious monuments, of all faiths, on an equal basis, with adequate funding.

In some instances, legal obstacles have hampered the religious communities from making their full contribution to this process. To address this situation, UNMIK should immediately issue a regulation facilitating registration of religious communities as legal persons.

Education is a particularly important aspect of any middle and long term plan to restore ethnic tranquillity to Kosovo. It would be useful, therefore, for UNMIK to prepare a comparative handbook on religions for children's use, in the Albanian and Serbian languages, so that young people can be helped to gain an objective understanding of other religious communities. Given that each religious community possesses sufficient resources to provide religious instruction privately to children, public schooling for all communities in Kosovo should remain completely secular.

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<sup>28</sup> See note 23.