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Top story in this issue:

## **RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES, INTER-ETHNIC TOLERANCE AND NATIONAL MINORITIES**

Inter-ethnic tensions culminating in war among former Yugoslav countries at the beginning of 90's have been, according to many, also motivated by religious clashes. Of course, it wasn't a classic religious conflict or war, but many analyses point out the fact that national extremists found their "mission and justification" in religious politics and ideology. Such role of religious communities, their uncritical position on national politics and later war events led to them becoming a strong element of inter-ethnic divisions, spread of intolerance, keeping silent over drastic transgressions over human and minority rights - in general, uncritical relation to war events and their consequences. Considering huge influence of religious communities enjoy in former Yugoslav countries, consequences of such position are still with us. Still, today we witness the fact that official voices from the top of religious communities warn of unacceptable nationalistic (mis)use of religion and are sending ecumenical messages that can significantly contribute to aiding destroyed national relations, reconstruction of trust and peace. There are many people who claim that true coexistence and peace aren't possible at all without an active positive role of religious communities, emphasizing their great responsibility for normalization and stabilization of inter-ethnic relations and a better status and security of national minorities.

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# I BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

## 1. Minorities and Clericalism

### STRUGGLE FOR SECULARISM

**Dusan Babic**

Despite all declarative assertions to the advantage of secular state, with occasional dubious reserves: “secularism – yes, atheism – no!”, the behaviour of religious leaders and their religious officials undoubtedly indicates the domination of clerical mind, which cuts the road toward a clerical state. However, secularism has no alternative option in this area. The recent decade and a half has clearly confirmed the immeasurable harmfulness of political religiousness, with the worst harm inflicted to new minorities.

## 2. The impact of religion on inter-national relations in BiH

### CUSTOMS REMAIN AHEAD OF CONFESSIONAL DIVISIONS

**Namir Ibrahimovic**

The particularity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian case is in the fact that each of the three constitutive nations has its “own” religion: Bosniaks – Islam; Croats – Catholicism; Serbs – Orthodoxy. This identification of one religion with one BiH nation has become so explicit in character, that the notions of faith and nation have become interchangeable in the minds of common people. Quite often, you can hear older BiH inhabitants wondering: “People in Germany, are they Serbs or Croats?” What they mean to ask, is if they are Orthodox or Catholic Christians.

## 3. Serb Orthodox Church between religion and politics

### JOURNALISTS, CANNONS AND PRIESTS

**Katarina Panic**

It seems that, in Republika Srpska, the relation between spiritual and worldly has taken on the rule of a reversed ratio: the more secular an institution - the more church iconography. Whatever name we gave to this – politisation of church or sacralisation of society – it is nevertheless rather inconceivable that in schools, municipalities, police stations, courts, assembly halls and other institutions, you come upon crosses of all shapes and sizes, two-head eagles made of various materials, as well as the 4-S signs of diverse making, in more or less visible places.

## 4. Interview: Professor Dr Šaćir Filandra

### RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES SHOULD TURN TO CHARITY ACTIVITIES

**Namir Ibrahimovic**

Religion is in no way responsible for the war. The influence of religion at our times, in our society, is not so strong to be able to change the flow of events significantly. Religious communities did follow the war events and they did allow, under the influence of societal movements, certain segments of religion to be used or abused for the purpose of war justification, war target guiding, and multiplication of war. During the war, religion was used a bit more, or much more than in common situations in the society. The involvement levels of religion in daily lives also assumed a much stronger meaning.

## II CROATIA

### 1. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES MAY GIVE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO INTER-ETHNIC TOLERANCE

**Zoran Malenica**

There are many indications that national exclusivity and extremism which led to conflict in former Yugoslav countries searched their support, among else, at official and, even more, unofficial views of "their" religious communities. In its struggle to aid realization of national independence and own state, Catholic Church in Croatia used to, consciously or not, promote inter-ethnic intolerance against certain ethnic groups. It is important for religious communities to be able to spot the values of inter-ethnic tolerance because they can much contribute to it themselves, says author.

### 2. PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL RECONSTRUCTION IS SENSITIVE AND DIFFICULT

**Interview with Dalmatian episcope, mr.Fotije**

**Interviewed by Sanja Vukcevic**

Material reconstruction of objects owned by Serbian Orthodox Church is going well despite the lack of finances, but the process of spiritual reconstruction, Dalmatian episcope Mr. Fotije says, is much more sensitive and difficult subject, with the special role of churches and their mission to preach the gospels.

- If someone sides with one political ideology, it means that he has left the gospels and is preaching something else. It can happen at any moment and Church officials – preachers and priests – are always being tested, says episcope Fotije.

Improvement of position of Orthodox believers in Croatia is aided by positive trends from top Croatian officials, meetings between Catholic and Orthodox priests as well as cooperation agreement signed by Independent Democratic Serbian Party and the ruling Croatian Democratic Union.

### 3. WE NEED TO RISE TO LEVEL OF FORGIVENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

**Interview with bishop of Gospic and Senj dr. Mile Bogovic**

**Interviewed by Goran Vezic**

Bishop of Gospic and Senj dr. Mile Bogovic admires people who are restrained in their judgement, saying that there are those of „short fuse“ who think that the guilt rests simply with one side, complete innocence on the other.

- Between the two extremes is our reality and we need to know what position to take among both. I think much has been done during the war that is hard to forget and each of us who lived in the area is tested how to come out of it all as Christian, a student of Christ, because something in us rebels. Objective or not, each of us carries his own burden and we cannot think without it influencing our thinking. Of course, it is important to know that the solution doesn't lie in weighing everybody's guilt. We need to rise to a higher level, a level of forgiveness and understanding. Someone could do me evil thinking he does good, that it's his duty. So, if we go around measuring who did greater evil and trying to force out a judgement and justice, human or God's, there's never going to be an end to it, says bishop Bogovic.

### III SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

#### 1. RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

**Miroslav Kevezdi**

About 20 % of citizens of Serbia and Montenegro is ready to accept ethnocentric attitudes, by which intolerance towards others and own superiority is expressed. Ethnocentrism is represented more with individuals of Serbian nationality than with representatives of national minorities, and it is connected with religiousness in a specific way: the less ethnocentrism is represented with those people that declare themselves as not religious, but don't have anything against religion, and biggest- with those who declare themselves as religious and accept everything that their religion teaches.

The biggest religious distance is demonstrated towards representatives of small religious communities and towards Moslems. However, religious distance is still less from national one (in the sense of - less distance is towards Catholics in general than towards Croats, and similar- where it was possible to compare relations).

#### 2. ECUMENISM IN BUILDING TRUST

**Dubravka Valic Nedeljkovic**

This autumn has been signified in the region with interreligious meetings which testified of striving of churches and religious communities for, at least regarding manifested sphere, ecumenic behaviour to be the guiding idea in building of trust and making words of Christ certain «I give you my piece». In the text, there are quotations of dignitaries of Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelistic churches which all shown their ekumenic determination in traditional religious communities in this area today, and those determinations are put in context of daily-political practice, which is unfortunately made also with interreligious conflicts.