Intercultural policies and intergroup relations

Case study: Zagreb, Croatia
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About CLIP

In 2006, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the city of Stuttgart and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) established a ‘European network of cities for local integration policies for migrants’, henceforth known as CLIP. The network comprises a steering committee, a group of expert European research centres and a number of European cities. In the following two years, the cities of Vienna and Amsterdam joined the CLIP Steering Committee. The network is also supported by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and has formed a partnership with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR).

Through the medium of separate city reports (case studies) and workshops, the network enables local authorities to learn from each other and to deliver a more effective integration policy. The unique character of the CLIP network is that it organises a shared learning process between the participating cities, between the cities and a group of expert European research centres, as well as between policymakers at local and European level.

The CLIP network currently brings together more than 30 large and medium-sized cities from all regions of Europe: Amsterdam (NL), Antwerp (BE), Arnsberg (DE), Athens (EL), Barcelona (ES), Bologna (IT), Breda (NL), Budapest (HU), Copenhagen (DK), Dublin (IE), Frankfurt (DE), Helsinki (FI), Istanbul (TR), İzmir (TR), Kirklees (UK), Liège (BE), Lisbon (PT), Luxembourg (LU), L’Hospitalet (ES), Malmø (SE), Mataró (ES), Newport (UK), Prague (CZ), Strasbourg (FR), Stuttgart (DE), Sundsvall (SE), Tallinn (EE), Terrassa (ES), Turin (IT), Turku (FI), Valencia (ES), Vienna (AT), Wolverhampton (UK), Wroclaw (PL), Zagreb (HR), Zeytinburnu (TR) and Zürich (CH).

The cities in the network are supported in their shared learning by a group of expert European research centres in:

- Bamberg, Germany (european forum for migration studies, efms);
- Vienna (Institute for Urban and Regional Research, ISR);
- Amsterdam (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, IMES);
- Turin (International and European Forum on Migration Research, FIERI);
- Wroclaw (Institute of International Studies);
- Swansea, Wales (Centre for Migration Policy Research, CMPR).

There are four research modules in total. The first module was on housing – segregation, access to, quality and affordability for migrants – which has been identified as a major issue impacting on migrants’ integration into their host society. The second module examined equality and diversity policies in relation to employment within city administrations and in the provision of services. The focus of the third module is intercultural policies and intergroup relations. The final module (2009–2010) will look at ethnic entrepreneurship.

*The case studies on intercultural policies were carried out in 2009.*

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1 See also http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/populationandsociety/clip.htm.
Acknowledgements

The researchers at the Institute for Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) in Vienna are responsible for this report on Zagreb. In March 2009, a city visit was undertaken to Croatia’s capital, where interesting and insightful interviews were conducted with representatives of some national minorities, mainly the Bosniak minority, and journalists. Interviews were also held with city officials or representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox or Islamic community. The authors are deeply indebted to the Head of the Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development, Elizabeta Knorr, and especially to her colleague, Jana Radić, who provided interesting information and organised the city visit.

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Introduction

This module of the CLIP project explores the multinational, multiethnic and multi-religious structures of urban populations which challenge the ability of municipalities to establish or maintain peaceful relations among the different segments of the population. In present day political discourse, relations between different ethnic and religious groups, immigrants and natives are predominantly discussed in terms of ‘intercultural dialogue’ and/or ‘interreligious dialogue’ – both of which are the theme of this third CLIP module.

Two dimensions of intergroup relations are of particular interest in this CLIP module: firstly, conflict between groups and, secondly, policies to avoid or solve conflict between groups – in other words, conditions conducive to social cohesion in a city. Relevant groups are the city administration, the city council, political parties, church organisations, trade unions, welfare organisations, local media and anti-immigrant movements in the majority society. In relation to minority groups, they include religious groups and national minorities. Among the religious groups, Muslim communities warrant particular attention. Where Muslims are not the most relevant group, another faith-based community is of interest in the research. It is noteworthy that most of the religious groups are organised on an ethnic basis (see Heckmann, 2008).

The central topics of this report are intercultural dialogue in general, as well as dialogue with Islamic communities, and the problem of political and religious radicalisation. Intercultural dialogue is a normative framework that describes certain principles for establishing peaceful relations between different cultural and religious groups. In terms of the research questions of intergroup relations studies, this research also appears to be motivated by interests in peaceful relations between groups and individuals. These religious groups, which were more recently established in Europe, are a result of immigration processes. Some of the CLIP cities – such as Budapest, Prague and Zagreb – have not yet experienced much immigration, but have national minorities within their population that originate from the multiethnic structure of their country’s population. Thus, ‘old’ ethnic minorities also form part of the focus of this third CLIP module.

Issues concerning intercultural relations and interreligious dialogue in Croatia in general – or in this specific case in the country’s capital city Zagreb – cannot be viewed separately from the more recent historical context. The homogenous population structure that resulted from the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), on the one hand, and the relatively old tradition of living together with certain national minorities, on the other hand, has shaped national policies on intercultural and interreligious issues as well as everyday life.

In Croatia, it is possible to distinguish between ‘old’ and ‘new’ national minorities: Jews, Hungarians, Italians, Ukrainians and some other smaller minorities have their specific settlement regions dating back some hundred years ago; on the other hand, Serbs or Bosniaks can be seen as ‘new’ national minorities resulting from the War of Independence.

The proportion of ‘other’ foreigners is very low in Croatia and therefore it seems reasonable to focus on national minorities in this case study. In this context, the most important issue at the political and diplomatic level is probably the relation between Croatians and Serbs – the two main protagonists in the War of Independence. Even though 300,000 Serbs left Croatia during the 1990s and only half of them returned to the country after the war, Serbs still constitute the biggest national minority. Thus, there may be some issues that could be relevant in the context of this CLIP module, such as problems concerning restitution questions. However, it seems much more fruitful to focus on the second largest group, the Bosniak minority, because of their Islamic denomination.

The term ‘Bosniak’, which goes back to the medieval Bosnian kingdom, was revived after the Yugoslavian War in the 1990s. In the former Yugoslavia, Muslims were officially distinguished according to Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian and Slovenian Muslims, and, as a result of Yugoslavia’s breakup, the ‘Bosniak’ identity emerged once again. Today, this term is an expression of the newly-won identity of the Bosnian Muslims – not only within Bosnia and Herzegovina but also within the whole west Balkan region.
Brief history of migration to Croatia

Due to the breakup of Yugoslavia and the war, Croatia was a country of emigration in the early 1990s before it became a main destination for immigration over the last 10 years – either of refugees who went abroad or of people displaced by the war, such as Croatians from Bosnia. Compared with some of the other nations of the former Yugoslavia, the governmental structure of the young nation of Croatia can be seen as constantly stable since the Dayton-based peace agreement in 1995. Nevertheless, the country’s total population is not growing, since the rate of immigration only matches the natural decrease in the population (-2.1%). Over the last decade, the total number of new immigrants to Croatia each year has been constantly declining – at 52,343 persons in 1997, 29,385 in 2000, 18,455 in 2003 and 14,230 in 2005. In the latter year, 94% of the total population were Croatian citizens and, like previous years, people from Bosnia and Herzegovina formed the biggest group of immigrants (58.7%).

Despite Croatia’s relatively homogenous society, the country is officially described as a multicultural society. After the War of Independence, the proportion of people who were members of national minorities nearly halved, and today only 7.5% of the total population are non-Croatian. At a constitutional level, the Republic of Croatia is defined as a nation state for Croatian people and as a state for the members of other nations or national minorities. This clear differentiation between Croatians and ‘others’ is indicative of the kind of ethnic-based nation-building concepts that are typical of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

According to the last nationwide census, which was conducted in 2001, the ethnic affiliation of Croatia’s 4,481,352 citizens comprises 89.6% Croatians, 4.5% Serbs, 0.47% Bosniaks, 0.44% Italians, 0.37% Hungarians, 0.34% Albanians, 0.3% Slovenians, 0.24% Czechs and 0.24% Roma. Besides these minorities, there are a number of other very small national minorities, such as those of Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Macedonian, Polish, Russian and Turkish origin – which represent about 4% of the Croatian population. It is important to mention that belonging to a certain minority group is, in most cases, narrowly linked to a religious affiliation – such as those belonging to Serbian-Orthodox, Macedonian-Orthodox, Russian-Orthodox, Jewish or Bosnian Muslim religions.

Most members of many smaller minorities live in relatively small and traditional settlement areas. Some parts of southern and eastern Croatia, and of the Slavonia region to the east of the country, are traditional settlement areas of the Serbian minority. In contrast, the Bosniak minority does not have any specific settlement area and can be found in rural regions as well as in Croatia’s cities.

In terms of the level of integration, almost all national minorities seem to be highly integrated into Croatian society – with the exception of the Roma minority. Even if there are some well-integrated families and other individual cases of successful integration, most of the Roma community are marginalised. Their situation concerning education, housing, work and living standards is often critical. As a result, in 2005, the Croatian government declared the ‘Decade of Roma integration’ – a nationwide action plan seeking to find solutions to the most urgent problems facing the Roma minority. After four years, it is probably still too early to expect final results – however, some commentators have been critical of the action plan, claiming that it is underfunded in light of the problems that have to be solved.

National policy context

Compared with west European nations, the legal condition of national minorities in Croatia seems to be relatively favourable. Guaranteed rights for national minorities have been a precedent for international recognition after the Croatian declaration of independence in 1991. The goal of becoming a full member of the European Union (EU) also requires an elaborated constitutional basis for minority rights and minority protection.
Case study: Zagreb, Croatia

In 2002, the amended Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia was passed and all relevant international treaties concerning the protection of national minorities were signed, along with some supplementary laws. The Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities gives extensive guarantees concerning specific rights and freedoms for members of national minorities (Article 7), providing for:

- constitutional parameters of non-discrimination in general;
- protection of specific cultural heritage, religion and identity;
- usage of the minority language and script in private as well as in official use;
- education in the specific minority language and script;
- freedom of implementing cultural associations;
- freedom of using ethnic insignia or national symbols;
- right to political representation at various levels (local and national) and in administration and judicial bodies;
- cultural autonomy in keeping, developing and expressing one’s own culture and in preserving one’s cultural heritage;
- access to media of mass communication and performing of actions of public information;
- implementation of national minority councils and representatives.

The protection of national minorities is implemented at three different levels: through international minority laws, through the Croatian Constitution and through specific (supplementary) laws. There is, for example, a quota that guarantees members of national minorities a proportionate representation in administrative and juridical bodies. In reality, however, a backlog seems to exist in implementing the legislative requirements because national minorities are still underrepresented in various functions or administrative bodies – for example, only 5% of all judges are members of a national minority.

Another important aspect of protecting national minorities are bilateral treaties between a ‘host country’ and the country of origin of certain minorities. The so-called Osimo Agreement between Italy and the former Yugoslavia still guarantees members of the Italian minority specific protection in Croatia. This agreement was complemented by a bilateral treaty concerning minority rights between Italy and Croatia in 1996. Another bilateral contract was signed in 1995 between Hungary and Croatia which guarantees a similar protected status for Croatians in Hungary and vice versa.

Political representation

The Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities and the Croatian electoral law guarantee the political representation of national minorities in the Croatian parliament as well on governmental bodies at local level. The distribution of the eight guaranteed seats in the national parliament follows a fixed proportion: while the Serbian minority is eligible for three of these seats, and Italians and Hungarians have one fixed mandate each, there is a common seat for the Czech and Slovakian minority. All other minorities are divided into two groups delegating one representative each: members of the Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Jewish, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vlach minorities constitute one group; members of the Albanian, Bosniak, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Slovenian minority make up the other group.

If a minority group represents more than 5% of the total population in a city or municipality, at least one representative of this minority can be elected in the local parliament. If the minority group constitutes 15% or more of the local population, this group has to be represented in the local parliament in the respective proportion.
Besides parliamentary representation at national and local levels, national minorities have the right to implement so-called Councils of National Minorities if their share of the total local population exceeds 1.5%. However, if the minority group has less than 100 members, there will be no election of a whole council but rather of a single representative of the respective minority. These councils and representatives act as mediators or advisors between their minority and the governmental level when minority-related issues have to be negotiated.

The small voter participation in the last minority council elections in 2007 can be interpreted in different ways – either as a lack of interest on the part of national minorities or as a result of the unmotivated execution of the elections by the Croatian government.

In addition to the local national minority council, there is also a Board of National Minorities at national level. This board cooperates with other departments and institutions, or with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local representatives of minorities. Besides its advisory and mediatory functions, this board is responsible for the distribution of state funds earmarked for national minorities.

Case study: Zagreb, Croatia
Profile of Zagreb

Brief description of city

The city of Zagreb is situated in northwestern Croatia, at the slopes of the Medvednica mountain and along the River Sava. Considering its geographic position, Zagreb is on the path of many migrant flows between the east and west. Today’s Zagreb has grown out of two medieval settlements, which developed over centuries on neighbouring hills. The first written account of the city dates back to 1094, when a diocese was founded on Kaptol in the upper town of Zagreb, while in 1242, neighbouring Gradec was proclaimed a free and royal city. Both settlements were surrounded by high walls and towers, remains of which are still preserved today. During the Turkish campaign in Europe, between the 14th and 18th centuries, Zagreb was an important border fortress.

The Baroque reconstruction of the city in the 17th and 18th centuries changed the city’s appearance. The first railroad through Zagreb was opened in 1862, with the gasworks and waterworks developing in the following years. The intense development of industry started in the mid 19th century. In 1910, more than one hundred industrial companies, plants or factories in important sectors or branches of economic activity such as machine building, textiles, food and printing had their site in Zagreb. The early 20th century was characterised by a stable expansion of the city in various ways, including as an economical centre and in terms of its spatial dimension. In the 1920s, the city’s population increased by nearly 70%. Subsequently, during the socialist regime between 1948 and 1990, the city’s development was not as impressive as in the 1920s, although Zagreb always played an important socioeconomic role in Yugoslavia.

Nowadays, Zagreb is not only the capital of Croatia, but also the country’s largest city as well as its cultural, economic, political and administrative centre – for example, in economic terms, it accounted for the highest nominal gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Croatia amounting to USD 19,132 (about €14,062 as at 16 February 2010) in 2005, compared with the national average of USD 10,431 (€7,667). Moreover, Zagreb is the seat of the central government, administrative bodies and almost all government ministries. According to a recent estimate by the city’s administration, the city of Zagreb had 786,200 inhabitants in 2008.

City’s migrant population

Looking at Zagreb’s migrant population, one interesting fact emerges: while in west European cities and metropolitan areas, the share of the migrant population is usually higher than the national average, Zagreb has a lower proportion of migrants.

According to the latest census of 2001, Zagreb’s population consists of 91.94% Croatians, which points to the homogenous structure of the city’s population (Table 1). Members of national minority groups constitute just over 5% of the city’s population, while other foreigners only account for a minimal proportion. The largest national minority groups are Serbs (2.41%), Bosniaks (0.80%), Albanians (0.43%), Slovenians (0.41%), Roma (0.25%), Macedonians (0.17%) and Montenegrins (0.17%). This breakdown shows that the biggest minority population is represented by so-called ‘new’ national minorities – that is, people of the former Yugoslavia. Persons of ‘other’ nationality include so-called Muslims by nationality, which was the official designation of the nationality of Slavic Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, along with a small proportion of people who see themselves as ‘Yugoslavians’. The ‘unspecified’ population refers to those who are ‘ethnically uncommitted’, which is also a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia. For west or central European readers, it may be surprising that so few foreigners from other continents live in Croatia: in 2001, for example, only 50 Africans and 292 Asians were counted – even if their numbers have increased in more recent years, these are still extremely low proportions of residents from other continents.
Case study: Zagreb, Croatia

Table 1: Population breakdown of Zagreb city, by nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Croatians</td>
<td>716,344</td>
<td>91.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National minorities</td>
<td>40,066</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanians</td>
<td>3,389</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrians</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosniaks</td>
<td>6,204</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarians</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarians</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonians</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegrins</td>
<td>1,313</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanians</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruthenians</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbians</td>
<td>18,811</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovaks</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenians</td>
<td>3,225</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlachs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4,764</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>15,649</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified according to regional affiliation</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>779,145</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Croatia Census 2001

In Croatia, religious affiliation is closely linked with ethnicity. Thus, in line with the population breakdown, the country’s religious distribution is similarly homogenous: 87.09% of all citizens are Christian Catholics, while Islamic and Orthodox faiths constitute the two largest ‘minority religions’, at about 2% each (Table 2).
Table 2: Population breakdown of Zagreb city, by religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>% of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Church</td>
<td>678,538</td>
<td>87.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist Church</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist Church</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvinist Church</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Pentecostal Church</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Church</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Catholic Church</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Religious Community</td>
<td>16,215</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehova’s Witnesses</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Religious Community</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Church</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Catholic Church</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Church – general</td>
<td>15,634</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgarian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox Church</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegrin Orthodox Church</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,393</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostics and unspecified</td>
<td>31,645</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-believers</td>
<td>27,617</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3,911</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4,764</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>15,649</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>779,145</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Croatia Census 2001

In line with the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, the city of Zagreb elects national minority councils and representatives – the first of these elections was held in 2003 and the second in 2007. In the 2003 elections, nine councils (Albanian, Bosniak, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Roma, Serbian and Slovenian) and six representatives (Bulgarian, German, Italian, Jewish, Slovak and Ukrainian) were elected. In the 2007 election, Zagreb gained two more national minority representatives (Polish and Ruthenian).

A council can be elected if it has more than 500 minority members, while a representative can be elected if there are at least 100 members in the city of Zagreb. In Zagreb, there is a broad range of NGOs dealing with national minority issues.
These organisations are usually founded by members of the respective minorities and, if they fulfill certain criteria, they can apply for financial support through the city of Zagreb. Candidates for the elections of national minority councils and representatives are appointed by the minority’s NGOs. If a member of a national minority is willing to go forward as a candidate without being involved in an NGO, they have to get 50 signatures from members of the respective minority group. Through the activities of these councils and representatives, citizens of Zagreb can get an insight into the minority group’s cultures and customs and vice versa. Councils and representatives of national minorities implement their programmes in ways that often support the well-being of the migrant communities that they represent.

Considering the city’s approach, the main objective is to enhance relations with national minority groups living in Zagreb – in line with the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities – enabling them to participate in the city’s public life and to conduct local affairs through the councils and representatives that they have elected. A further objective is to promote, preserve and protect national minorities’ status in society. The Mayor’s Office Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development is the contact and coordination point for all inquiries or requests concerning the work of the minority councils or the work of minority-related NGOs.

Many of these ethnic organisations have set themselves the target of preserving their own cultural heritage and identity by organising various cultural events or by establishing initiatives such as drama groups or traditional orchestras. Elsewhere, organisations may provide supplementary education or private lessons for children, often in their own language. This broad spectrum of activities is seen as an important form of support for the welfare of the respective ethnic groups in the city. For this reason, the city offers various forms of support to these NGOs – for example, providing accommodation for a minimal rent, or offering support in organising intercultural events.

**City’s Muslim population**

According to the 2001 Census, there are 6,204 (0.80%) Bosniaks and 16,215 (2.08%) members of the Islamic community living in Zagreb city. Some members of the Albanian national minority group and most members of the Roma national minority are Muslim. The Chief Imam (Islamic leader, often of a mosque and community) is Albanian and people of other nationalities are active in the Islamic community, although most of them are Bosniaks.

At the time of the census, the issue of declaration was still unclear: that is, there was a possibility to declare oneself as Bosniak and as a member of the Islamic community; however, there was no possibility to be declared as a Muslim ‘by nationality’, as people who did so were listed under the section ‘other’.

Against this background, one of the most important programmes of the Council of Bosniak National Minority of Zagreb is a scientific survey of the cultural position of Bosniaks or Bosnian Muslims ‘by faith’ in Zagreb. This survey, which was due to be implemented in 2008 and 2009, aims to provide a detailed insight into the social and cultural status of Bosniaks or Muslims by faith, so that the council can cooperate with Bosniak associations to formulate programmes and to help meet the needs of the Bosniak population in Zagreb city.

On the basis of data collected in the survey, associations and councils will be able to nominate members of national minorities for certain work tenders in the state administration and also to request funding for programmes that will help to resolve specific social, cultural, political, working, educational and other problems that minority groups struggle with in everyday life. The survey’s main goal is to gather information on the social and cultural status of Bosniaks and members of the Islamic community in Zagreb. Questions will be asked regarding the survey participants’ age, gender, home country, Croatian citizenship, education, employment, nationality, computer use, hobbies, housing, cuisine and income. The survey will be implemented in different parts of the city and the results will be combined.
No precise data are available about the structure of other national minorities of Islamic faith. Based on statements by some Roma minority members, most of the Roma population living in Zagreb are Muslim. According to information from the Albanian Catholic Mission in Croatia, the majority of Albanians living in the city of Zagreb are Catholic (about 450 families).

The term ‘Muslim’ in this region can refer to two things: that is, someone who is either Muslim by faith or Muslim by nationality. Under the amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 1971, Muslims became a constitutive nation – also known under the informal term Muslims with a capital ‘M’, which should be distinguished from other citizens of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia who are Muslims according to faith, as denoted by a small ‘m’ in Slavic languages. The Yugoslav ‘Muslim by nationality’ policy was considered by Bosniaks to be inaccurate and in opposition to their Bosniak identity because the term tried to describe Bosniaks as a religious group, not an ethnic one. In 1993, for the first time, the term Bosniak was officially recognised in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the term ‘Muslims by nationality’ was no longer used. Bosniaks are Europeans of Slavic origin who adopted Islam as their faith to preserve their uniqueness and independence. They have their own history, traditions and cultural heritage that are related to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The identity of Bosniaks living in the Republic of Croatia is enriched by the fact that they are Croatian citizens who enjoy rights equal to those of all other citizens.

In relation to employment and socioeconomic status, no significant differences are apparent between members of the Islamic community and the Croatian population. The Islamic community encompasses academic professors, distinguished physicians and politicians, working class people but also those who live on the edge of material existence, many of whom are from the Roma community.

In general, the structure of the Islamic community appears to have changed significantly: older people are no longer in the majority as many young people have joined the Islamic community in recent years. According to the representative of the Islamic community interviewed, young people have a greater interest in practising religion in their daily life. This can be seen at the weekly prayer meetings on Fridays, where about 50% of followers are young people.

In terms of the internal structure and organisation of the Islamic community in Croatia, there are a number of important institutions: namely, the Parliament of the Islamic community in Croatia, the Meshihat of the Islamic community in Croatia, the Mufti of Zagreb, and the Zagreb Medresa ‘Dr Ahmed Smajlović’ (Zagrebačka medresa ‘Dr Ahmed Smajlović’). The Parliament of the Islamic Community of Croatia is the highest legislative body of this community. The Meshihat of the Islamic Community of Croatia is the executive organ of the parliament that is responsible for the organisation of the Islamic community religious needs of Muslims and that provides conditions for religious service. The Head of the Meshihat is its president. In this mandate, the President of the Meshihat is Mufti Ševko Efendi Omerbašić. The mufti is a person who has, according to Shari’ah rules, the right and duty to define the Sahri’ah laws.

Majlis is the basic organisational unit of the Islamic community – in Croatia, the Islamic community has 13 Majlises. The Executive Board of Majlis is headed by the President of Majlis and Chief Imam, and takes care of the functioning of Majlis.

The Zagreb Medresa ‘Dr Ahmed Smajlović’ is the Islamic secondary school in Zagreb. Medresa was approved as a secondary school with public rights by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Croatia. Medresa began operating in the school year 1992/1993. It has four mixed classes with about 100 students.

In Zagreb city, there are six Bosniak, 13 Albanian and 42 Roma NGOs. These NGOs are not necessarily religious organisations but, in many cases and activities, they address religious topics. As outlined, the leading Muslim
organisation is the Islamic Community of Croatia and the Islamic Centre in the City of Zagreb. These organisations address the many aspects of everyday religious life and organise religious and educational panels, along with Islamic religious instruction for children, young people and senior citizens. They are also involved in humanitarian work through the charitable society Merhamet and in the activities of the Women’s Council which operates within the Islamic community. In addition, they assist in the organisation of a European competition for melodious Quran teaching, along with a professional symposium and roundtable meetings, and the Islamic Youth Conference in Croatia. Many of these activities have been organised for more than 40 years, which is an important indicator of how well developed the structures of the Islamic Community of Croatia are.

Islamic Centre
The Islamic Centre in Zagreb caters for a wide range of activities. Children attend religious classes in over 60 schools all over the city but many also attend religious classes at the centre during the weekend, including some Roma children. The Islamic Centre runs many cultural, religious, sporting and educational activities, and makes sure that people of all ages are included in its work. The centre also provides space for an Islamic playschool – the city recognised this need and provided the centre with HRK 570,000 (about €78,128 as at 16 February 2010) in funding to help set up this service. The playschool was opened by the city’s Mayor, Milan Bandić, in September 2008.

Members of the Islamic Centre who earn more than HRK 10,000 (€1,370) a year pay 2.5% of their salary as a membership fee; an unspecified amount can be paid voluntarily by those who earn less than HRK 10,000 a year. These fees are used to finance the community work of the centre in general. The centre is mainly funded by national subsidies, although appeals for funds are often made after Friday evening prayer for special events or needs. All members of the centre, with the exception of its secretary, work on a voluntary basis. About 50 members work on a regular basis at the Islamic Centre, although a great number of unregistered people play a part in the centre’s everyday work as volunteers.

Muslim Youth Club
The Muslim Youth Club (Omladinski Klub Muslimana) is an important institution within the Islamic Centre. Its main goal is to attract as many young Muslim people as possible in order to offer them a beneficial programme as an alternative to their sometimes difficult daily life in neighbourhoods characterised by ignorance, crime or drug abuse. The Muslim Youth Club tries to help young Muslims develop their religious views and to show them the ‘cool’ aspects of Islam. Young people are encouraged to continue as practising Muslims not only out of a sense of duty, but also to give them a deeper insight into a religion that can help them lead a good and useful life. The underlying philosophy is that children and teenagers should not be educated on the streets of their neighbourhood, but rather by their society.

In line with its goals, the Muslim Youth Club offers a wide range of facilities and programmes to interested teenagers, such as darts and tabletop football games as well as rooms for meetings. It also shows movies that contribute to a better understanding of Islam. In addition, the youth club maintains a website (http://www.okm.com.hr/), which has many useful links offering different opportunities in and information on social gatherings, sports, creative pursuits, tuition, computer science and technology, media and journalism, humanitarian efforts, religious education and folklore. The club also offers supplementary education for free to members of the Islamic Centre; other people have to pay a small fee for this service. It even organises other regular social events such as soccer tournaments, blood donation services or roundtable discussions where ecological issues are discussed. Five volunteers are in charge of the Muslim Youth Club and each person has their own project. Before a project can be realised, it has to be passed by the council of elders at the Islamic Centre.

The youth work is not limited to the Islamic Centre: three times a year, large Islamic youth conferences are organised – two in Zagreb and one on the Isle of Krk located in the northern Adriatic Sea. There are 20 ‘main cities’ with a higher share of Muslims and, out of these cities, 10 teenagers are invited each year to Zagreb for one week to avail of
opportunities to deepen their beliefs and to take part in the various activities of the Muslim Youth Club. Another project that is underway involves efforts to promote the work of Islam, whereby flyers and easy-to-understand information about Islam are distributed around the city so that people of other religions and wider society can learn about Islam.

A few years ago, a football club called NUR was founded, which competes in the second Zagreb league. Until last year, members of NUR rented training fields but now they train on the grounds of the Islamic Centre thanks to facilities that were provided with the financial support of the city. The former Minister of Science, Education and Sports, Dragan Primorac, as well as the city’s mayor attended the opening. Another successful and popular initiative is the Arabeske choir, which represents the Islamic Centre and the Mosque. The choir was founded in 1993 – it performs at relevant multicultural events and has even released three albums.
Responsibility in the city and general approach to ethnic issues

Through the institution of councils and representatives, national minority groups participate in the public life of Zagreb city and carry out local work. This enables them to preserve and protect their status in society. Every issue in the city that has relevance for national minority groups has to be considered by the Committee of the City Assembly for National Minorities before a final decision is made. Thus, the principle of equality and political participation among national minorities has been implemented in city life.

The Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development at the Mayor’s Office has responsibility for addressing national minority issues, along with many other city offices, depending on the subject. Every city office has a contact person in charge of national minority issues. If a minority organisation applies for financial support from the city, this application is usually sent to the mayor or the Mayor’s Office and, in some cases, directly to the respective department. The request is then forwarded from the Mayor’s Office to the Department for Promoting Humans Rights, Gender Equality and Relations with National Minorities, where it will be considered and checked. The department also asks the respective council or representative of that national minority group for their estimation. If there are no objections, the application will either be dealt with in the department itself or it will be forwarded to another responsible department. In most cases, issues and applications concern the City Office for Health and the City Office for Culture, Education and Sports.

The city’s mayor takes an active interest in relations with minority organisations. The mayor participates in the implementation of programmes for minority groups and plays an active role in minority events, as well as in religious activities such as the celebration of minority groups’ religious holidays – for example, Islamic, Jewish and Orthodox holidays.

There are no elected representatives of national minorities in Zagreb’s City Assembly because, under the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, a minority group has to have over 5% of involvement of inhabitants in the city’s population to be represented in the City Assembly. Since none of the minorities meet this threshold, they have no representatives in the assembly. According to the Statute of the City of Zagreb, councils and representatives have the right to recommend measures to promote the status of national minority groups to working bodies of the city, including proposals for actions that promote issues of significance for national minorities. Councils and representatives can assign candidates for duties in working bodies of the city of Zagreb. They need to be informed of every issue that will be discussed on Assembly Session and working bodies of the City Assembly that concerns national minority groups.

The City Assembly comprises a Committee for National Minorities, which, according to the Assembly’s Rule of Procedure, considers issues that are important for implementing the rights of the city’s national minorities. The committee measures the development of national minorities’ status in the city, as proposed by councils and representatives of national minorities and other entitled applicants. It also gives suggestions and opinions to the City Assembly.

Issues, demands and interests of immigrants

Zagreb city is making substantial efforts to give equal importance to all of these issues. The majority of national minority groups are integrated with the city’s local population because most of them speak the Croatian language so they are not faced with language barriers, which can make it more difficult to become a part of society. The Roma population is the only group that still has urgent social as well as educational needs. The city therefore pays special attention to the Roma minority considering its difficult status. For example, it implements initiatives as part of the National Programme for Roma, which was promoted by the Croatian government. The programme includes all aspects that are important for the
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Roma population’s integration, particularly activities concerning physical planning. The city has also made significant efforts to improve educational measures for Roma children, especially with regard to preschool education in areas where there is a large amount of Roma inhabitants and where there is a need for special programmes to encourage the integration of Roma children into these preschool programmes. Most of those efforts are made through the cooperation between the city and Roma NGOs. In total, there are 42 Roma NGOs in the city, all of which address various areas of interest.

Members of national minorities, and their NGOs and councils or representatives, freely maintain connections with people with whom they share the same ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious characteristics. They also have links with legal persons situated in their county of origin who perform educational, scientific, cultural, publishing and humanitarian activities. There are generally no specific demands made by particular groups or ethnic organisations – they mostly apply for the same things, particularly for financial aid for cultural or religious-based NGOs or events.

In 2008, a report was due to be compiled examining the working plan of certain minorities in the previous year. The report sought to look at the general demands and interests of national minorities and their organisations, encompassing the following areas:

- information initiatives (web pages, bulletins, cooperation with the media);
- various events such as the Council day, other holidays of the minorities’ home countries, or memorials;
- educational activities such as workshops on various subjects, especially computers, and sometimes on traditions, customs and language;
- activities in cooperation with the minority group’s home country and other associations in the country or abroad, including organised trips to the home country;
- cultural activities such as movies, exhibitions and music;
- joint programmes involving the coordination of national minorities;
- initiatives concerning the implementation of political rights, legal aid, the use of language and script, and representation in the executive bodies of regional self-government.

Councils and representatives of national minority groups in Zagreb include various religious communities of certain minorities. For example, members of the Bosniak national minority are mostly members of the Islamic community, while members of the Serbian national minority are mainly members of the Orthodox Church, as are some members of the Montenegrin, Macedonian and Bulgarian national minority groups.

The city provides financial support for programmes and projects of various national minority NGOs. In Zagreb, there are 13 Albanian, six Bosniak, one Bulgarian, two Czech, five German, six Hungarian, four Italian, 10 Jewish, seven Macedonian, seven Montenegrin, two Polish, 42 Roma, seven Russian, one Ruthenian, 10 Serbian, two Slovak, three Slovenian and five Ukrainian NGOs. The city does not provide resources for these organisations’ everyday work but does finance or co-finance the implementation of their working plans. Such resources are granted by the relevant city office, depending on the goal of the organisation’s programme. Councils and representatives can have national minority organisations as partners in pursuit of certain activities. Therefore, the city can provide support in both ways – that is, to the councils and representatives and to the minority NGOs.
Issues, demands and interests of three Bosniak NGOs

In order to illustrate the interests and demands of minority organisations, the structure and work of three different Bosniak NGOs will be described in the following sections.

Bosniak war veterans’ organisation
The Bosniaks are the only minority group in Croatia with its own organisation for former soldiers of the War of Independence, the so-called ‘homeland army’. The Bosniak veterans’ NGO has 4,200 members, about 1,000 of whom are living in Zagreb, where the organisation’s central office is also located. The central office maintains close contact with the organisation’s regional offices, which are situated in the majority of Croatian provinces, with the exception of areas with only a few members where there is no office but only single local contact persons.

An elected President, Hamdija Malić, heads the organisation, which also consists of a governing body comprising three persons who have a controlling as well as administrative function. Two or three times a year, a central meeting is held where future programmes are discussed and decided upon, along with strategies on how best to cooperate with the respective ministries. The organisation is financed by national funds and the city of Zagreb provides an office space.

Among its main goals, the Bosniak veterans’ group provides a meeting point for all people who played an active part in the homeland army. It also offers judicial aid and provides information to its members, for example regarding disability pensions and other war-related problems.

The organisation is also planning an interesting initiative in the near future, involving the erection of a large memorial in front of the Islamic Centre in honour of the Bosniak victims in the War of Independence. To commemorate the 1,100 Bosniaks who fought and died on the side of the Croatian Army, the country’s Ministry of Defence and the city of Zagreb have provided the area in front of the Islamic Centre free of charge. It is expected that the memorial will be finished in the next two to three years, and its final size will be around 11,000 square metres. The structure of the memorial resembles a U-shape, which is the Islamic symbol for ‘water’. In recent times, many reports and newspaper articles have been written about this highly symbolic monument.

Figure 1: Logo of Bosniak veterans’ group, plans for memorial and photograph of President Malić
Besides its ambitious memorial project, the organisation runs various other regular activities – such as roundtable discussions where veterans from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia can meet, trips to cities that were severely impacted by the War of Independence (Sarajevo in the central region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Vukovar in eastern Croatia), a number of sporting events, as well as meetings to celebrate the anniversary of the Croatian Army’s foundation. Last year, a book was also published, recounting the history of the Bosnian defenders and their role in the War of Independence.

The Bosniak veterans’ organisation cooperates with over 25 other NGOs in Croatia. Although the organisation’s work may have a clear focus on coming to terms with the events of recent history, there are certain events or activities where nearly all other national minorities are involved. As mentioned, this NGO also works together with the respective departments of the city of Zagreb, in most cases with the Department for Healthcare, particularly when seeking financial aid for veterans.

Another interesting form of financial support, which is granted by the Croatian government, shows how widespread the country’s national integration strategy is: every year, one member of the Bosniak veterans’ organisation is given the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, with all costs paid for by the state.

It should be highlighted that an organisation like the Bosnian veterans’ group is much more than a simple community of veterans. One has to remember that the War of Independence took place not that long ago and that this culture of remembrance, as it is understood by the veterans, is an important part of the Bosniak identity.

‘Preporod’ cultural community of Bosniaks

‘Preporod’ is the second largest cultural community in Croatia. According to its President, Senad Nanić, it is a typical ‘classical, cultural minority association’. Preporod offers and organises many different activities and events, the main target group being Bosniak people living in Zagreb or in other parts of Croatia. Information and education are very important elements for Preporod, especially as children of the third and fourth minority generation seem to be at risk of forgetting their Bosniak roots. The organisation also welcomes the interest of other Croatians in its work or in Bosniak culture in general. Even if Bosniaks have been part of Croatian society for many decades, as Preporod’s president estimates, they are still a self-contained minority group from a cultural perspective, with only a few similarities with the main culture.

Another important aspect of Preporod’s work is the preservation and cultivation of the Bosnian language. To this end, Preporod has been involved in a number of activities, such as editing different publications and setting up a drama studio that stages Bosnian literature and various music groups. The organisation’s work is not only focused on Zagreb but on the whole of Croatia; people in smaller towns are particularly interested in Preporod’s events due to the lack of regular cultural programmes in the periphery. Unlike some of the events in Zagreb, in rural areas many Croatians can be found in the audience of Preporod’s concerts or plays. In addition, the organisation has taken part in projects with Serbian minority organisations, making an important contribution to more favourable interethnic and intercultural relations.
Preporod is particularly active in terms of publishing. Every year, the organisation publishes two or three books, dealing with issues relating to the Bosniak history or identity, along with a journal for teenagers called *Yasmin*, which includes contents like short stories with a religious theme, lyrics of famous Bosniak songs, games and comics or quizzes. It also publishes a Bosniak newspaper once a month.

Preporod’s most notable magazine, known as *Behar* (meaning ‘spring’), comprises articles mainly written by professional authors and journalists; for more than 17 years, this journal has featured a wide spectrum of articles and reports concerning the Bosniak culture. In nearly all issues during the period 1992–1994, the War of Independence has been a dominant theme: many of the articles described the success of the Bosnian and Croatian army, while other articles featured some diary-like accounts written by victims of the war. In more recent years, there has been a clear religious impetus and terms like ‘war’, ‘tolerance’, ‘belief’ or ‘Djihad’ are discussed in many articles and columns. The magazine’s editorial board often emphasises that *Behar* is one of the independent magazines where people can read the uncensored ‘truth about the war’. Dominant themes during the period 1995–1998 have included the positioning of Islam in the ‘new’ Europe, the rise of new states after the War of Independence, along with many religious or philosophical based articles about ways to find a ‘new’ identity. The latest issues of *Behar* deal with less political topics than previous years: these include interviews with prominent representatives of the Islamic community, columns discussing the position of women in modern Islam, as well as articles on Bosniak culture in general – including interpretations of old Bosnian literature, prints of important Bosnian paintings by old and new artists, articles about Bosnian history, and copies of lyrics and poems. Thus, *Behar* is a thematically diverse and ambitious magazine, which provides a voice for Bosniak people. It also helps to influence opinion, featuring regular columns commenting on current politics from a Bosnian point of view. Unfortunately, the magazine can only be purchased regularly at the Islamic Centre, although some shops are beginning to sell the publication. In the context of this study, it is important to mention that there were no articles or reports dealing with problems related to being a ‘minority’ group in Croatian society.

This goes hand in hand with the claim by Preporod’s President, Mr Nanić, that despite the global discussions about Islamic culture and Islamist terror, there have been no incidents of hate or prejudice against Bosniaks in Croatia. Mr Nanić contends that in western or central Europe, there are far more prejudices against Islam than there are in Croatia or the west Balkan region in general. Admittedly, during the war, some Arab fundamentalist fighters came to Bosnia and evoked certain fears within society – however, people have reportedly always differentiated between fundamentalists and Bosniaks.

In terms of its organisational structure, Preporod has three vice-presidents, who hold several meetings each month to discuss financial and programme issues, as well as discussing and planning future projects. Only the secretary of
Preporod is employed – all other members of the NGO work on a voluntary basis. Authors, directors and musicians are paid under service contracts in order to motivate professionals to work for Preporod.

The funding of all minority organisations is regulated by national law. As a result, the city of Zagreb provides work space, but only charging a ‘symbolic’ rent. Although the city does not usually finance any events, due to increased national governmental subsidies in recent years, Preporod has been able to realise a greater number of programmes. Nevertheless, the NGO is dependent on these official forms of financial support as the Bosniak minority is economically poor, which means that there are only a few private donations; even the national finances of the minority’s home country Bosnia and Herzegovina are weak – as a result, Bosniaks cannot rely on money from abroad, in contrast to the Italian minority, for example. Although the organisation tried to generate some support from Bosniak businesspeople, they were not interested in advertising in Preporod’s magazines and newspapers.

Figure 3: Preporod’s rehearsal room and publications office

Sevdah cultural artistic association
Founded in January 2006, the Sevdah NGO seeks to communicate and promote Bosnian culture rather than a certain religion. Sevdah’s approach can be seen as an interethnic one because it wants to show that although Bosnia consists of three part-nations, it is ‘one’ country. The organisation tries to promote an overall Bosnian culture, independent of whether someone is a Bosnian of Muslim, Serbian or Croatian origin. Just like the other Bosnian NGOs mentioned, one of the main goals of Sevdah is to preserve Bosnian culture and identity based on concerns that Bosnians of all origins tend to forget about their own history and traditions.

Similar to other minority-based organisations, Sevdah is funded by national subsidies, as some of the courses they offer have to be paid for; private donations only play a minimal role. Contrary to some of the other organisations, Sevdah does not receive work space provided by the city, although its application is currently under examination. As a result, and until the issue is resolved, Sevdah has to cooperate with many other Bosniak NGOs. For example, the Islamic Centre provides the organisation with space for activities such as rehearsals. One person is employed as an accountant and secretary, while the remaining members all work on a voluntary basis.

Sevdah concentrates on programmes and activities such as drama groups, dance, folk dancing, exhibitions and music. It does not produce any publications because, according to one of the leading members of Sevdah, Muhidin Aličehajić, many other Bosniak NGOs such as Preporod are publishing more than enough. Some 80% of Sevdah’s members are younger than 20 years, which reflects the target group of the organisation – that is, young people. Sevdah has its own drama group for children, involving between 70 and 80 children. Other regular members include 24 musicians in the Sevdah orchestra, 10 singers, 40 choir singers, five assistants and 30 members without specific functions. In 2008, the
NGO organised 16 events across Croatia and there have been three documentaries about the group on the national minority television programme ‘Prizma’.

Overall, looking at the three Bosniak NGOs under study, they have some goals, demands and interests in common – such as the preservation of Bosnian identity, language and heritage. However, according to the President of the Council of the Bosniak Minority of the City of Zagreb, Ekrem Bećirović, most of these organisations have there own separate agenda and, as a consequence, there is considerable overlapping of activities. One of the main goals for Mr Bećirović is to group together some of these activities into a more united Bosniak NGO.

Forms of relations and dialogue

Ethnic and religious groups
Zagreb city mainly has contact with religious communities in the city if it is asked to solve a particular problem or demand that would help preserve and improve relations with these communities. In an effort to promote ecumenical dialogue and interreligious cooperation, direct contact has been established with representatives of religious communities and many of their activities have been financially supported at their request.

In 2007, one of the city’s locations was given for temporary use to the Jewish Religious Community Bet Israel. Subsequently, in 2008, a new synagogue was founded and its renovation was co-financed by Zagreb city. Also in 2007, the Macedonian Orthodox delegation arranged with the city that it would provide a location suitable for construction of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, since this community does not have its own space for practising its religious rites. Prior to this, they held their sermons in a small Roman Catholic Church in the city centre.

The city provides funding for ethnic and religious organisations through various city departments, depending on the nature of the demands. Most of the demands are made directly to the city’s mayor, but are then distributed to the relevant city department according to the particular request. The demands mainly fall under the jurisdiction of the City Office for Education, Culture and Sports, the City Office for Legal Property Relations or the City’s Assets and City Office for Health, Labour, Social Protection and War Veterans. With regard to religious minorities, there is no legal obligation on the local authority to finance religious communities. Nevertheless, the city provides new locations for certain religious communities to practise their faith, such as the synagogue or the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

In 2008, the Department for Education, Culture and Sports of Zagreb city provided financial support for a number of projects, including the following initiatives.

- **Pre-school education:** Minority-related NGOs continuously offer programmes for pre-school education which are financed or co-financed by the city of Zagreb. Such programmes include, for example, a half-day nursery school for Roma children, realised under the ‘Croatian Roma Union’, or different pre-school activities for Roma children as a supplementary preparation for school, organised by the association ‘Golden Heart for Roma’. Even religious activities are financially supported by the department, in agreement with the children’s parents. This has resulted in the provision of specific programmes in 16 nursery schools for every persuasion. In Zagreb, there are 45 religious-based or private nursery schools, covering over 3,000 children, where pre-school education is offered. This educational programme costs about HRK 1,000 (€137) a month and the city supports Roma families to enable their children to take part in pre-school education.

- **Support for the Roma minority:** The ‘Zrno’ nursery school offers specific programmes for the integration of Roma children and works with many Roma organisations to help maintain these activities. The Department for Education, Culture and Sports provides financial aid for these activities. The Croatian Roma Union provides translators even in nursery schools – which can be seen as an important part of the integration activities – and is thus also funded by the
department. In 2008, the association Golden Heart for Roma received HRK 120,000 (€16,455) in order to realise its pre-school project, which included providing warm lunches for children and salaries for teachers. In addition, the department gives financial support to Roma families with critical socioeconomic difficulties.

- Hungarian minority: The Department for Education, Culture and Sports also finances a bilingual nursery school, providing HKR 450,000 (€61,700) a year for the school’s teachers and 13 children.
- Jewish minority: The city supports a specific pre-school programme for 25 children, providing HKR 300,000 (€41,133) in funding.
- Bilingual education in schools: Every national minority has access to bilingual classes; thus, the education of 521 Roma children, 15 Hungarians, 33 Jewish children, 58 Serbs and 72 children in an Islamic private school is supported by the Department for Education, Culture and Sports.
- Ongoing research: The Department for Education, Culture and Sports also provides funding for an ongoing study examining the social position of Roma girls and women. Moreover, writers with a minority background are financially supported in certain projects dealing with the identity and heritage of their national minority.

In general, Zagreb city provides resources for intercultural dialogue through support for common activities of national minorities in the city. These resources are allocated to those involved in the coordination of national minorities within the municipality. In 2008, HRK 697,000 (€95,570) in funding was allocated, while HRK 1,127,000 (€154,530) was granted in 2009. These resources have to be allocated for defined purposes and activities, but minority NGOs can also be funded through these means. Minority NGOs can obtain funds from various city departments, depending on the nature of their request. Usually, these demands are related to health, welfare or cultural needs, or also to demands concerning minority youth NGOs. In addition, organisations can ask the city for certain resources for activities that have not been planned in advance and, if the funding is approved for such initiatives, city funds are allocated from current reserves.

**Measures to improve intercultural relations**

Zagreb’s City Assembly makes decisions on criteria for achieving financial support for health, social and humanitarian programmes, as well as projects of interest to the city. These decisions cover programmes of social significance, including national minority issues. The City Office for Health, Labour, Social Protection and War Veterans invites tenders for the nomination of programmes and projects of social significance. NGOs of national minorities can apply for this tender, as can other NGOs that are registered to pursue programmes of social and humanitarian significance in the city of Zagreb.

The city is also obliged to implement the National Programme for Roma and Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, which means including this group in social and public life. The Action Plan of the Republic of Croatia is complementary to the 2003 National Programme for Roma. It undertakes to tackle the problems encountered by the Roma population in four areas: education, healthcare, employment and housing. The measures proposed by the action plan aim to eliminate the marginalisation and discrimination of the Roma minority, eradicate poverty and improve their living standards through faster economic development. In all four areas, special attention is devoted to the rights of children and women, particularly their education and healthcare, and the inclusion of Roma in all forms of work. These measures are an important part of the efforts to prevent or diminish social exclusion among groups with critical socioeconomic problems, and national minority representatives and councils are involved in these issues.

As mentioned, relations with ethnic-based organisations are maintained on a voluntary basis and with good cooperation. The city of Zagreb provides work space for minority NGOs, and these locations are given at their request, outside of the priority list. Minority NGOs get financial support from the city for the realisation of cultural, information and publishing programmes which cover the majority of activities of minority communities and promote the need to preserve the ethnic,
cultural and linguistic identity of these communities. The city’s contact with ethnic and religious minorities is institutionalised through national minority councils and representatives in the city. NGOs contact the city directly with special demands or through the national minority councils and representatives.

Ethnic organisations (minority NGOs) nominate candidates for the election of national minority councils and representatives. There are nine councils, each with 25 members, and eight representatives of national minorities in the city. The applicant (in this case the minority NGO) can nominate no more than the number of candidates who are elected in the minority council (25 persons). Members of national minority councils and representatives are elected directly by secret ballot for a period of four years.

Besides the institutionalised structures like the councils and representatives of Zagreb’s national minorities, various city offices deal with specific minority issues. The Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development at the Mayor’s Office coordinates these issues.

The legal framework is defined through decisions of the City Assembly, which grants financial support to NGOs in areas that are of interest to the city – such as for healthcare, social and humanitarian programmes and projects. Programmes relating to public cultural needs can allocate funding to minority organisations in the field of culture and education.

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue

Zagreb city is also involved in mediating different forms of interreligious and intercultural dialogue. These are mostly events of a cultural and religious nature which are attended by the city mayor, his deputies and city representatives, along with the representatives of ethnic and religious communities who cooperate with national minority councils and representatives.

Each ethnic minority that is represented by councils and representatives in the city celebrates important dates and organises events connecting their home and host county. These events are often attended by members of other ethnic minorities as well as by city representatives.

The Coordination of Councils and Representatives of National Minorities has the task of creating links between minority groups, ensuring better cooperation and enhancing the atmosphere of trust. The Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities stipulates that two or more councils of national minorities established in the same or different units of self-government can establish a coordination of national minority councils and representatives to coordinate and promote a common interest. Using this legal option, all of the councils and representatives in Zagreb city established the Coordination of National Minorities accepting the Agreement on the Establishment of Coordination. By the agreement of all of its members, the coordination is allowed to devise statutes, rules of procedure, working programmes, financial plans, final accounts and other important decisions for Zagreb’s national minorities. National minority councils and representatives can enable the coordination to take action in their jurisdiction. The Coordination of National Minorities gathers all national minority councils and representatives of the city. A few NGOs also gather members of different national minorities: namely, the Union of Associations for Promotion of Cultural Heritage of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia and the International Association of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Armenians, Moldovans, Croatians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenians and of other nationality. They have the same status as all the other minority NGOs.

Presidents of councils and representatives are brought together as well as representatives of the city, depending on the purpose of the event. For example, if an event is organised by the Council of Bosniak National Minority, then the members of the Islamic community will also be present. Since the city often finances or co-finances most of the activities...
and events of ethnic and religious minorities, the city mayor is always a valued guest, as are his deputies and representatives.

A ‘street-level’ form of mediation in terms of interethnic dialogue – for instance, street workers in problematic multiethnic neighbourhoods – is not provided by the city of Zagreb. Representatives of the city as well as of ethnic NGOs do not see the needs for actions such as this.

**Support for ethnic/religious holidays**

Zagreb city supports all activities that are organised to preserve the ethnic, cultural and religious identity of ethnic and religious minorities. For example, in more recent years, to mark the occasion of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah (festival of lights), the first candle on the Menorah candelabrum was lit at the main city square by the ambassador of Israel and the city’s Mayor.

Every year, national television broadcasts live coverage of the Muslim feast Bairam from the Zagreb Mosque, which is attended by high state and city officials. The Islamic population can freely celebrate their religious holidays with a day off work for Bairam.

The Coordination of National Minorities has established a ‘day of national minorities’ in Zagreb city, which is celebrated in April every year. Along with city representatives of national minorities, the mayor and representatives of government and city offices attend this event. The national broadcaster Croatia RadioTelevision (*Hrvatska radiotelevizija*, HRT) regularly broadcasts reports of this celebrated day. National minority councils and representatives, as well as their NGOs, also regularly participate in other minority group activities through the pursuit of their working programmes and successful dialogue among ethnic communities.

**Examples of good practice in cooperation**

**Education**

In the field of education, examples of good practice can be found in the area of pre-school education. In the neighbourhood of Kozari bok in southern Zagreb, where a large number of Roma people live, the nursery school ‘Zrno’ has been set up to encourage the integration of Roma children into pre-school education. In addition, in cooperation with Roma NGOs and the Social Care Centre and Kindergarten (*Cefferino Jiménez Malla*), the Croatian Roma Union is implementing short programmes for pre-school education, as is the Roma NGO ‘Golden Heart for Roma’. In Zagreb’s nursery schools, children of the Roma national minority are integrated, receiving special attention in their pre-school preparation.

Elsewhere, the NGO ‘Children First’ operates a multinational programme of workshops for children and mothers from socially deprived areas. In the nursery school ‘Potočnica’, a full day’s bilingual programme in Croatian-Hungarian pre-school education is offered to 13 children. Similarly, the religious nursery school of the Jewish community, ‘Mirjam Weiller’, provides a full day of pre-school education for 12 children.

The inclusion of greater numbers of Roma children has also been encouraged in primary school education as well as in free, extracurricular school activities. Pupils of Roma nationality who are in poorer economic circumstances are also provided with food during the class and given the option of an extended stay.

Students of the Hungarian national minority are offered bilingual education at the primary school Ivan Gundulić, where two combined classes in the Hungarian language have been financed. The school receives monthly resources in support of this programme.
Elsewhere, the new Jewish primary school Lauder-Hugo Kon, in the cultural centre of Pešćenica (Kulturni Centar Pešćenica), runs five classes for 26 pupils. The private Serbian Orthodox Comprehensive School ‘Kantakuzina Katarina Branković’, which also has public rights, educates 22 pupils in two classes. This school receives monthly support for the realisation of its programme, in accordance with the provisions regarding ‘financial support to private schools with public rights’. In the Islamic community, Zagreb Medresa ‘Dr Ahmed Smajlović’ is a private school with public rights, providing education to 94 pupils in four classes.

**Employment**

Zagreb city is obliged to act in accordance with the laws regulating the employment rights of migrants. Employment in public institutions is open to everyone under equal conditions, as prescribed by the law. There are no differences in wages, conditions and promotion. According to the country’s labour law, discrimination is prohibited.

**Table 3: National minority members employed in public bodies in Zagreb, by gender, education and job status**

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<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<th>College</th>
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Under the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, state administration bodies and judicial bodies must ensure the representation of national minority members in line with the provisions of special laws and in accordance with the total number of minority members in the population. Under the same conditions, national minority members have preferences in employment.

On 5 December 2008, the first Migration Information Centre in Croatia was officially opened in Zagreb. The centre is part of the regional project ‘Capacity building, information and raising awareness towards promoting orderly migration in the Western Balkans’, which was financed by the European Commission Aeneas programme in 2006 and co-financed by the governments of Switzerland, Germany, Italy and the Principality of Liechtenstein. The project is implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), whose main partner is the Croatian Employment Service.

The Migration Information Centre does not mediate in employment and does not provide consular services. Instead, it gives clear and concise information, as well as advice on the competent services for potential migrants (immigrants and emigrants). The centre’s purpose is not to encourage Croatian nationals to leave the country, but rather to help prevent illegal migration and people trafficking through the promotion of legal migration. Since the project started in June 2008, some 406 requests were handled, 33 of which concerned immigration and the remaining emigration. In recent months, the centre has intensified its public relations efforts and, as result, a significant increase in requests is expected.

Figure 4: Images of Migration Information Centre in Zagreb

Housing
A great number of refugees from other parts of Croatia left Zagreb soon after the war, mainly because the government was providing measures to renovate their houses destroyed in the war. One group of migrants solved their housing problems by themselves – buying or renting apartments in the city’s housing market. In the past few years, the number of apartments being built in the market is increasing. The possibility of renting apartments has also increased.

In the city area, there are many agencies that intervene in buying and selling apartments. One group of migrants has permanently settled in Zagreb by exchanging their houses and apartments with those situated in other countries of the former Yugoslavia. However, these exchanged houses were often built without the necessary permits, and migrants sought help from the city to solve their legislative problems. Other groups of migrants built new houses using their own financial resources, but unfortunately in places where building was not allowed. Such areas, mostly situated in agricultural regions, are much cheaper, and illegal building is more convenient because no money has to be spent on documentation for building permits and other expenses.
Case study: Zagreb, Croatia

The city has tried to resolve this problem by providing the basic communal infrastructure – that is, water, drainage, gas and electricity services. Zagreb city continuously includes newly built streets in its annual maintenance programme, which includes asphalting, drainage and traffic signalisation. The city also provides bus transport and organises waste disposal.

In the past two years, the city has legalised structures wherever possible, in accordance with the new town-planning scheme. The city provided for the building of other housing facilities and required infrastructure such as kindergartens, schools and other cultural and commercial facilities. Other citizens with no migration background can also buy apartments and lots for the building of family houses. In this way, segregation can be avoided in order to improve the integration of migrants. The legal frameworks for these measures are provided for under the Rent Act and the City Rent Regulation.

Zagreb city also owns apartments in the city area which it rents out in accordance with the city’s rent regulations. Apartments are granted based on previously announced competitions, which are published in the daily newspaper, and also according to a priority list. The price of renting city apartments is protected and is far below the rental prices in the open housing market. Certain criteria have to be met if someone wants to rent one of these city apartments: applicants must be living in the city for at least 10 years; they must have no other housing option or possibility of resolving this problem; they must not own a house or an apartment; their monthly family income cannot exceed 75% of the average monthly salary in the city. Thus, the criteria for renting city apartments are based on people’s housing status and social health status, the length of time they have lived in the city, and their participation in the War of Independence.

As an exception, an apartment can be rented to people who are not on the priority list if they are living in city housing that needs to be demolished, or if they are living in extremely difficult social or health conditions. These people need to prove their difficult position to the competent authority and to submit the appropriate documentation to the social welfare system.

Figure 5: Image of informal housing in Zagreb

Experts from the city of Zagreb and representatives of minority NGOs agree about the success of all the measures implemented by the city. This positive estimation can be attributed to the favourable communication and cooperation underway between the partners involved.
Role of the social partners

In contrast to the government approaches and efforts concerning intercultural policies, there are few activities or political strategies worth mentioning when it comes to social partner organisations such as chambers of commerce or trade unions. For example, the activities of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce are mainly focused on relations with (Croatian) companies and on related economic issues. As a consequence, the chamber does not interact with any kind of minority or immigration organisations.

Similarly, the integration of foreign workers does not appear to be part of the ‘mission statement’ of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (Savez Samostalnih Sindikata Hrvatske, SSSH), which is one of the most important trade unions in the country, although the issues of ‘gender equality’ and ‘intergenerational solidarity’ are mentioned.

Relations between ethnic groups

Migration processes in Zagreb are still characterised by the effects of the War of Independence in the 1990s. Zagreb was one of the main destinations for refugees during the war, but there is no reliable statistical information on how many of them tried to stay in Zagreb. After the war, many people who emigrated at the beginning of the war – which, due to their nationality were mostly Serbs – returned to the city. Since some issues have not been properly solved, tensions can arise due to burdened relations from the past. For instance, World War II symbols – often rightist symbols that concern Serbs and Croats – have sometimes been displayed at performances or concerts of certain artists or at sports events. The sense of national consciousness may be augmented due to emotions and the use of alcohol. Although such occurrences are not common, they sometimes arise. Such situations are regulated by the Act on Combating Discrimination and by the Act on Amendments to the Criminal Law.

In relation to cooperation between different ethnic groups and organisations, the Law on Associations gives all legal and physical persons the right to form an association on a voluntary basis. An association obtains the status of a legal entity once it enters the Register of Associations. Three NGOs represent certain national minorities in Zagreb city in order to preserve their culture and customs. Although the Coordination of National Minorities is not an NGO, it gathers nine councils and eight representatives of the city of Zagreb. On that legal basis, Zagreb tries to support cooperation between ethnic groups and organisations.

Besides this official approach, there are certain annual events in which the city’s most important religious communities participate, as follows.

- At one interreligious meeting, Catholics along with followers of other Christian churches and communities, as well as Jews and Muslims, pray for peace to celebrate the Day of Saint Francis of Assisi. The meeting has been attended by representatives of the Islamic community, Evangelical Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Catholic Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, Serbian Orthodox Church and Jewish community.

- Another interreligious meeting involves an ecumenical journey through the churches of Zagreb, with the purpose of praying for Christian unity. The central ecumenical celebration in Zagreb was held in the city’s Baptist Church. The next destination was the Serbian Orthodox Church, followed by the Greek Catholic Church and then the Evangelical Church. The event ended with a group prayer service involving all participants at the Marian shrine in Marija Bistrica in central Croatia.
An international scientific symposium of theology professors is organised by the Catholic Faculty of Theology of Zagreb, taking place each year in a different place. The 31st international symposium took place in April 2007 in Sarajevo on the topic of ‘Christianity and Islam’. The event was hosted by the Bosnian Catholic Theology, along with the Franciscan Theology and the Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo. At the symposium, Catholic and Islamic theologians discussed topical issues. The symposium brought together more than 90 professors of theology and other participants. It marked the first time in history that the organisers of the symposium involved the oldest and largest higher-educational theological institution of the Church in Croatia (Catholic Faculty of Theology of Zagreb) and the most important Islamic theological institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond (Faculty of Islamic Sciences in Sarajevo), both of which collaborated in the realisation of the symposium on the basis of balanced representation of Catholic and Muslim theologians.

Conflicts like those mentioned with a nationalistic background can be seen as ‘traditional’, but they are not organised or planned and are often connected with the soccer games of a Zagreb football club. In recent years, a few assaults by right-wing neo-Nazis or right-wing skinheads were reported. However, these attacks had no organised political background and were obviously not planned. Besides this, there are no ethnic or religious groups which the city regards as problematic for social cohesion and integration. If conflicts arise, the police force is responsible for dealing with them and there is no city policy for such conflicts.

Another aspect that should be mentioned is the important role of the Roman Catholic Church in the country. According to several surveys, more than 80% of all Catholics in Croatia characterise themselves as being ‘very religious’. Contrary to socialist times, the Catholic Church has once again formed an important part of Croatian identity. At a national level, the Catholic Church promotes integration and openness to interreligious tolerance. This approach is supported by many clerics of other religions, especially between Orthodox churches, and the Catholic Church’s communication efforts seem to be well established.

Public communication

Zagreb’s communication strategy with respect to national minorities is implemented through the channels of their councils and representatives. The city does not publish any regular bulletins or journals in this respect.

Under the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, radio and television stations at national, regional and local levels have to promote comprehension for minority members. For instance, they have to produce or broadcast television shows intended for minority members in their own languages. Moreover, they must broadcast programmes that encourage and promote the maintenance, development and display of cultural, religious and other characteristics of national minorities’ identity. The aim is to preserve and protect the cultural resources and traditions of these groups, as well as to create and broadcast programmes providing information for national minorities about the work of their councils and representatives.

In the state and local governments’ budgets, funds are allocated to co-finance radio and television stations in the creation of programmes directed at national minorities, at the proposal of the Council for National Minorities or of the national minority councils in relation to the competent bodies of local self-government. In order to implement national minority rights, minority members can publish their own newspapers, as well as produce and broadcast radio and television programmes. Most of the city’s national minority councils and representatives have their own website and publish limited editions of minority newspapers (see earlier section on Preporod’s publication).

Minority members work in media organisations as well as all of the other public institutions under the same conditions as Croatian citizens. As minority members are integrated and speak the Croatian language, there are no differences in recruitment. Moreover, minority members can work on other projects, not only those in minority-related editorial offices.
One particular multicultural radio programme – called ‘Multikultura’ – discusses life issues and the activities of national minorities in Croatia. In addition, the multinational programme ‘Prizma’ is broadcast on television. Both programmes are broadcast on the national network HRT. Every week, these programmes give an insight into the activities of minority communities, along with the work of government bodies in relation to minority groups, as well as of minority parliamentarians; they also give a sense of minorities’ everyday life in order to preserve their traditional, cultural and other heritage.

The minority programme ‘Prizma’ has been broadcast more than 800 times and includes special broadcasts and documentaries. The programme’s contents focus on cultural policies and their effects on the everyday lives of national minorities, as well as on reports regarding their culture, heritage and customs. Prizma is broadcast every Saturday at 13.30 for 45 minutes. The programme’s target group is the entire Croatian public, not only the members of national minorities. Compared with the situation in other European countries, Prizma has a relatively high viewership. Furthermore, the programme has a solid financial situation, whereas other European public broadcasting services try to reduce costs in this field.

Every show is broadcast nationwide in the language of the national minority at which the report is targeted, and includes Croatian subtitles. Minority groups that have a vivid cultural life, such as the Jews or the Serbs, have the largest proportion of shows. On the other hand, there are far fewer programmes about the country’s relatively large community of Bosniaks – which can be seen as a sign of their high level of integration. As a result of their often problematic socioeconomic situation, there are also many programmes dealing with the specific situation of the Roma population.

Summary and lessons learnt

Zagreb city provides funding for ethnic and religious organisations through various city departments, depending on the type of demand. Most of the demands are issued directly to the city’s mayor and then distributed according to the subject matter. These demands are mostly under the jurisdiction of the City Office for Education, Culture and Sports, the City Office for Legal Property Relations and the City’s Assets and the City Office for Health, Labour, Social Protection and War Veterans.
With regard to religious minorities, there is no legal obligation on the local authority to finance such communities. Nevertheless, the city provides new locations to certain religious communities for religious practice – as seen in the case of the new synagogue and the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Most of Zagreb’s ethnic or religious minorities are well integrated in the city. The majority of minority members speak the Croatian language as their mother tongue, since most of them have lived in Croatia for a long period of time or moved to Croatia from parts of the former Yugoslavia and so the language differences are minor.

In terms of integration, the Roma minority gets special attention considering its difficult status. The city implements activities under the National Programme for Roma, which is promoted by the Croatian government. This programme includes all segments important for the integration of the Roma population. Moreover, Zagreb has established its own city programme of activities and measures for improving the area and environment of locations inhabited by Roma people. In relation to housing, differences are conditioned by one’s financial assets and not their ethnic or religious origin – thus, there are no separate settlements in Zagreb consisting only of people from the same country of origin. Even the Roma population, who are traditionally an enclosed community, live in mixed settlements with other inhabitants of the same financial status, albeit with a few exceptions.

Zagreb’s local government and administration promote good interreligious and intercultural dialogue, along with efforts aimed at mutual familiarisation, regular and successful cooperation, and measures conducive to a better atmosphere of trust. In terms of the Croatian media, it seems to be more accessible and open than in previous years. As a result, attracting the readers’ or viewers’ attention by stressing ethnic or religious stereotypes is no longer a problem – which is possibly a positive sign for the overall development of a genuinely pluralistic society.
Local intercultural policies towards Muslim communities

In this section, the most relevant issues concerning Zagreb’s Muslim population and groups will be described. It should be borne in mind that in Croatia, as well as in the whole west Balkan region, religion and nationality are narrowly linked. Thus, talking about the Muslim community in Zagreb primarily encompasses the Bosniak and Turkish community, along with a certain proportion of Albanians and Roma who are also Muslims – although in quantitative terms, Bosniaks constitute the most important group.

Major issues, demands and interests

The major issues, demands and interests affecting Zagreb’s Muslim community appear to be similar to those arising in other European cities, as the following sections indicate.

Mosque building

In 1916, an Imam was situated in the military garrison in Zagreb and occasionally also performed civil affairs. In the same year, a Muslim devotional municipality was founded and was raised to the mufti level, which subordinated all the Muslim municipalities in Croatia. Since the Ramadan (Islamic month of fasting) of 1920, Muslims were renting halls for temporary Mesjids (places of worship).

In 1934, Zagreb established the first Islamic religious commune. The city ceded a residence in Tomašićeva Street 12, where the first Zagreb Mesjid was located as a permanent devotional place. Today, the seat of the Mesihat of the Islamic Community of Croatia is situated at the same address.

The decision to construct the Zagreb Mosque was made in 1941, when the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia decided to convert the House of Fine Arts building into a mosque. The construction of three reinforced minarets, 45 metres high, and external fountains was completed in the spring of 1943. Readjustments were also made inside the building so that the mosque would comprise all the important spaces – that is, the office of the Imam, two apartments, a classroom for religious classes, two mahlifs (spaces for women), a library and an Abdesthana (space in which Muslims ritually wash their faces before prayer).

Unfortunately, the Muslim community was not allowed to enjoy the mosque for long. The mosque opened its doors in 1944 but was subsequently forced to close in 1948. The ‘new authorities’ closed the mosque and tore down the minarets because it allegedly represented ‘the ideological symbol of the past’ and due to the fact that it was opened during the ruling of the Independent State of Croatia. After its closure, the Mejlis (places of gathering) were relocated to their former location on Tomašićeva Street 12.

The cornerstone of today’s Zagreb Mosque was laid in 1981 and the mosque was officially opened in 1987. The mosque is fully opened and can accommodate more than 2,000 people. Its style consists of a modern interpretation of classical Islamic architecture, with a combination of traditional and modern aspects, meeting the functional needs of the mosque and modern needs of its believers (see Figure 7).

The area of the mosque is 10,000 square metres and it is divided into three sections. The first and most important section is used for praying, except the minarets, and there is also a sanitation area for women and men. The central part consists of the library and a reading room, which contain a significant collection of books, mostly in the Arabic language. There are also classrooms for religious education, as well as space for discussions and socialising, which are decorated in the style of Muslim houses.
The building also consists of a restaurant and, despite the fact that it is adapted to the believers so that it serves everything except pork meat and alcohol, it is open to all visitors – that is, believers, tourists and random visitors (see Figure 8). A museum dedicated to the first Zagreb Mosque is located in the central part of the building. Apart from the preserved remains of the old mosque, there are photos and reminiscences from the mosque’s short but rich history. Next to the museum is a conference hall for lectures, seminars and forums which is open to anyone who wants to organise an event. The third part of the development is of an official character, comprising guest rooms and accommodation for religious officials. A small ‘town’ for young people is situated below the mosque, consisting of a secondary religious school and general secondary school, the headquarters of the football club NUR and the Muslim Youth Club.

Figure 8: Restaurant at Zagreb’s Islamic Centre
For the whole Croatian Islamic community, the mosque and the Islamic Centre are among the central points of their religious lives. During Ramadan, many visitors from other parts of the country meet in the centre for group fasting. In addition, a big conference is held every year, where all Croatian Muslims can meet and take part in discussions and roundtable talks, improving their knowledge and sharing experiences within the community.

Figure 9: Entrance hall to Zagreb Mosque in Islamic Centre

In view of the high importance of the Islamic Centre for the Muslim community, the centre’s members are hoping to have the centre included in the official Zagreb Tourist Guide, which is published by the city of Zagreb. As the Islamic Centre is open to everyone, the community wants to increase the broader public’s awareness of the centre’s existence and of its various facilities. Zagreb city seems to be willing to include the Islamic Centre in its next edition of the city’s tourist guide.

Cemeteries and burial rules

At present, Zagreb city has three joint cemeteries and a few smaller ones located in its suburbs. The first joint cemetery was set up, comprising a few smaller ones, as the city was growing and the need for a joint cemetery was great. One new joint cemetery was built in 1952 and a second one in 1993. Many small cemeteries in the city belonged to those of a certain religion, but already by the mid 1900s, when the first joint cemetery was built, conditions were introduced so that the old cemeteries could be closed down. In accordance with the statute of the first joint cemetery, members of different religions wanted their separate spaces. However, it soon emerged that such segregation generated difficulties primarily of a technical nature. Administration of the cemetery was provided for under the Interconfessional Act of 1879, which turned church property into city property. Subsequently, the administration abolished the practice of providing separate spaces for certain religions – although members of religious groups still demanded to be buried in separate spaces, in accordance with their religious persuasion. However, over time, such demands began to dissipate and eventually the same cemetery became a real joint cemetery for people of many religions. Nonetheless, even when religious separation existed, the statute guaranteed ‘complete and absolute practice of religious rites at the funeral’.
Halal food
In 2006, the first Halal butcher’s shop was opened in Zagreb. Products were prepared in accordance to Shari’ah law, conforming to the traditional customs and practices of Muslim believers. ‘Halal’ in the context of food and drinks refers to what Muslims are allowed to consume. Permitted foods require strict treatment procedures.

The Halal butcher’s shop was opened within the Islamic Centre in Zagreb, in cooperation with the Podravka food company. Podravka’s meat industry has the Halal certificate, which indicates that the production process is adjusted to strict food standards, from selecting animals to slaughter and placing the final product on the shop shelves.

Many Croatian food companies have a certificate that enables the sale of their products in countries where Halal food is only allowed. Over 20 companies in Croatia have the certificate and currently there are a growing number of stores in Zagreb city where Halal food can be found. Companies that are interested in getting the Halal certificate usually wish to export their products to Arabic countries; however, these products are also placed on the shop shelves in Croatia. Muslims can get information about Halal food and where it can be purchased at the Islamic Centre in Zagreb.

The Islamic community has also established an agency dealing with Halal certification. The agency’s head office – which covers certification for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia – is based in Tuzla in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agency is also a member of the World Halal Forum, which has its headquarters in Malaysia in southeast Asia. The steering committee that decides about the certification is composed of representatives from all of the above countries. The certification procedure starts with the company’s request to the Meshihat of the Islamic community. The Meshihat considers the request and forwards it to the certification agency, which arranges the first meeting. Halal standards are explained to the company, which will then study the standards and decide if it wants to certify certain products or the entire enterprise. When a company wants to certify the entire enterprise, the process is detailed, especially in relation to the meat industry.

The goal of Halal standards is to monitor products ‘from the field to the table’. The company applying for Halal certification must choose internal auditors who will attend special training sessions. Their knowledge is not examined – rather the company’s work will determine whether it achieves Halal certification. Official documents have special sections on additives and emulsifiers permitted for use in final products. There is extensive debate over their status in Islam, with questions raised over whether they are Halal or are suspicious and therefore require further examination. In the final stage, the steering committee examines the auditors’ reports and gives its opinion. If the opinion is positive, the company receives Halal certification in three languages – Arabic, Croatian and English – which is valid in all countries across the world.

Dress code and gender roles
According to information from the Islamic Centre in Zagreb, the position of Muslim women and their integration into Croatian society are not any different from the situation of other woman in the country. In Croatia, a small number of women decide to dress according to the strict Islamic regulations, covering their whole body, except the face, hands and feet. Women are not discriminated against or refused employment because of their dress code. However, according to the President of the Women’s Council of the Islamic Centre, Azra Omanović, many women lack the courage to dress according to their religious code of practice for fear of reactions from the public.

In 2008, the Women’s Council of the Islamic Centre was founded. Although this young association is still in its initial phase, its main goals are already framed. On the one hand, it aims to address issues with a specific gender basis or concerning women, such as breast cancer prevention. On the other hand, the council wants to shed light on an issue which still generates many prejudices in Croatian society – that is, women in Islam. Through various activities, the Women’s Council tries to create awareness about the ‘real’ role of women in this context – to date, some meetings with
representatives of other religious communities have taken place. A key objective is organising an ecumenical event where the issue of ‘women in different religions’ will be discussed. In addition, the council offers courses such as those on ‘successful parenting’, as well as a telephone hotline for single parents.

**Representation of interests**

As mentioned earlier, official Muslim organisations include Zagreb’s councils, which represent members of national minorities, as well as specific NGOs. Like all other councils and representatives in the city, which are all entitled to equal treatment, they establish their working programme, financial plan and final accounts. The city provides resources for their needs and for certain activities based on their working programme. All relevant demands of the Muslim community are communicated by the councils or specific NGOs. The city finances or co-finances the implementation of these organisations’ working programmes, at their request.

Another interesting question is how the majority population reacts to the demands, interests and work of the Islamic community. There are no available opinion surveys on the subject, and no signs of criticism are evident in the local media regarding concrete projects realised by the Islamic community. In terms of cooperation with Zagreb city, all national minority councils and representatives get exactly the same treatment, as do all minority NGOs – therefore, there is no evidence of dissatisfaction or tensions, at least not in relation to faith or nationality.

Nonetheless, in the 1980s, in the context of the planning and building of the new mosque and the Islamic Centre in the neighbourhood of Borovje in Peščenica, some opposition arose. Leading this opposition was the organisation Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which held its meetings nearby. The protest was of a religious nature because people reportedly did not want to have the sound of a muezzin calling followers to prayer a few times a day. The protest delayed the realisation of the Islamic Centre by about one year. Nowadays, the members of AA are regular guests at the centre’s restaurant, where no alcohol is served.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of other problems arose – but according to members of the Islamic community, these problems had their origins at a political rather than a neighbourhood level. During the War of Independence, several anonymous phone calls were received at the Islamic Centre, threatening its members and warning them to leave the centre. However, the war also had a positive effect in terms of the centre’s relations with its surrounding neighbours: the fall-out shelter of the newly built centre was open to everyone living in the area, and this made an important contribution to improving relations between the communities.

Although there are no surveys or scientific studies examining the relationship between these differing neighbours, a programme was recently broadcast on Slovenian television which touched on this subject. The programme gave an insight into attitudes towards the mosque of people living nearby – none of the interviewed persons gave a negative opinion about the mosque. Since Borovje is not the most attractive of places in Zagreb, many people were even happy about the fact that an important development like the Islamic Centre was located there.

Zagreb city wants to step up relations with national minorities through their participation in public life, with the aim of promoting and preserving their culture and traditions and presenting them to the wider population through their activities. Due to the relatively high level of integration of Bosniaks, on the one hand, and the fact that the majority population seems to be becoming accustomed to Islam, the city does not see the need for any urgent action regarding another strategy in this area. Although it is unfortunate that no surveys have been carried out on such attitudes in the city, surveys were not deemed necessary because Muslim groups were never considered as problematic – a similar estimation is given at university and research level.
General approaches and policies towards Muslim groups

There is no explicit policy towards Muslims because relations appear to be favourable. At the request of the Muslim community – through Zagreb’s Islamic Centre – the city provides moral and financial support for various activities whether they are of a cultural, religious or an educational nature. Another reason why there is no explicit policy towards Muslims is because, as already mentioned, religious issues are also represented and communicated through the organisations and councils of the city’s national minority groups, especially those of the Bosniak, Roma and Albanian communities.

Several kinds of contact are institutionalised through these national minority councils whose members are Muslim. The city provides support for the council and through this has contact with the Islamic Centre. Zagreb also takes part in the council’s activities and finances various initiatives under the council’s working plan. For example, the Bosnian council celebrates memorials, various national and religious holidays in which the city also participates – these include the Festival of Sacrifice, Ramadan, the celebration of the new Hijri year, the Memorial of suffering of Bosniaks in Srebrenica, and the Independence Day of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In terms of the city departments that have contact with national minority organisations or religious groups, the Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development at the Mayor’s Office acts as the main coordinating department, with many other city offices also playing a role depending on the issue at hand. Every city office has a contact person in charge of national minority issues. The city’s mayor also takes an active interest in relations with minority and religious organisations, participating in the pursuit of minority programmes and playing an active role in minority and religious events.

As a positive consequence of this organisational structure, Zagreb city has contact with all relevant minority and religious organisations. For instance, in the register of NGOs at the State Administration Office (Srednji drzavni ured za upravu), six Bosniak NGOs are registered and all of them cooperate with the Bosniak Council and, through this, with the city. Even if these are organisations of national minorities, they also deal with religious issues. Besides the Islamic Centre, only one other Muslim organisation exists in Zagreb – the city maintains contact with both of these organisations.

The city’s national minority councils represent their Muslim members as well as the Coordination of National Minorities. City representatives are not elected as religious minority representatives but as members of the political party elected to the City Assembly. Muslims are included in all segments of public life, as well as in government and administration. The city gives financial and moral support to Muslim organisations as well as to other religious organisations, at their request – as previous sections of this report have illustrated.

Another interesting question relates to whether the city has some explicit policies or strategies to improve intergroup relations. Due to the high level of integration, such policies are not an issue regarding the majority population and Muslim organisations. Muslim community members speak the Croatian language and they are well integrated into Croatian society, receiving the same treatment as other Croatian citizens. Nevertheless, Zagreb does encourage and support all activities that could help to improve intergroup relations in the city as well as understanding and tolerance among citizens.

In relation to the police force, the city of Zagreb is not responsible for the local police – the latter are under the jurisdiction of the country’s Ministry of the Interior (Ministarstvo unutarnjih poslova Republike Hrvatske, MUP RH). Police relations towards Muslim organisations are the same as with any other organisation of this kind.
Good practice examples of improving relations with Muslim groups

As mentioned, there are no explicit measures or policies directed at the city’s Muslim population. Neither the official policy of Zagreb city nor the representatives of the Islamic community nor national minority groups see an urgent need for action of this kind.

Public communication

Due to the high level of integration and absence of language or cultural barriers, the city does not see the need for any public communication strategy towards Muslims.

According to the Islamic Centre, the media is very interested in the work of the community, and there has been great progress made in the perception of Islam and Muslims through the media. The Islamic community cooperates with Croatian television. Moreover, several religious officials cooperate as expert assistants and are frequent guests on numerous televised programmes of a religious and ecumenical nature.

The Islamic Centre also issues printed publications such as bulletins. Although religious television and radio programmes are not locally based, several national minority organisations such as Preporod produce various publications that often deal with religious or Islamic issues.

Summary and lessons learnt

As outlined, it is important to highlight the lack of any urgent need for intercultural policies towards the city’s Muslim population. Due to the high degree of integration of this community, the majority population is accustomed to the traditions and needs of the Muslim community. The long tradition of living together has provided the basis for a well-functioning society.

Although the city has no legal obligation from the local authority to finance religious communities, it provides funding for religious organisations through various city departments, depending on the type of demand. Demands are often of a cultural, religious or an educational nature, all of which are important for integration and therefore supported by the city.

There are some preconditions for positive interethnic as well as interreligious relations: namely, cooperation, dialogue, respect and goodwill on both sides. The city’s urban civil society seems to be open and developed enough to respect other religious beliefs. This is not only the view put forward by the city’s officials, but also by representatives of the Islamic community and of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The city’s experiences with Muslim groups have been positive to date, contributing to the high level of integration. It is hoped that when Croatia enters the EU, potential Muslim migrants will find a welcoming outlet at Zagreb’s Islamic Centre.
Fortunately, there is no real evidence of a possible radicalisation with respect to intergroup relations. Neither officials of Zagreb city nor representatives of the various national minority organisations are of the opinion that there are serious radicalisation tendencies within the majority population or in any minority group. As in other cities, some right-wing or skinhead groups exist – in Zagreb, this is often connected with certain supporters of the Football Club Dinamo Zagreb. However, the few violent attacks that have occurred have been condemned by the vast majority of people and, in most cases, successfully punished by the executive organs. Looking at the Croatian media, including its tabloid press, the press coverage seems to have become increasingly modest in recent years, and articles reinforcing stereotypes – often in connection with the Roma or Serb communities – are not as frequent as they were in the years after the War of Independence. Therefore, the city does not have any specific policies or strategies aimed at combating radicalisation tendencies, and this is also the case at national level.
Key challenges and lessons for CLIP

On the whole, the situation regarding Zagreb’s national minorities seems to be relatively positive. In preparation for EU accession, the Croatian government has implemented laws and policies concerning minority issues, in line with European standards. National minorities have elected representatives at every political level, and the state supports efforts to preserve their cultural identity and heritage. While the implementation of minority rights at local level has worked well in the case of Zagreb, it may be more difficult to implement in rural parts of Croatia. In general, however, Croatia is probably the ‘most pluralistic’ of all the post Yugoslav nations (Melčić, 2008, p. 110).

Melčić’s estimation seems to be confirmed when looking at the situation in Zagreb. On the one hand, there are certain governmental and administrative structures which give national minorities the possibility to be represented and supported by the city: the Council of National Minorities and the Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development should be mentioned in this context as coordinating bodies. The collaboration between the city, councils and related minority NGOs has resulted in a mixed structure of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ representation of minorities that seems to work well.

In addition, civil society in Zagreb seems to be open-minded and tolerant enough to accept the existence of ‘other’ cultural or religious minorities. Nevertheless, this should be viewed against the background of the fact that the city has an extremely homogenous population where the share of national minorities or other foreigners is low, representing only about 5% of the population. Many of the ‘old’ minorities such as the Jews, Italians and Hungarians seem to be well integrated into Croatian society. Serbs or Bosniaks, who became a ‘new’ minority as a result of the War of Independence, also have a high level of integration – one of the key challenges was, and still is in some respects, to interact with and integrate members of those national minorities that were involved in the war. A future key challenge will be to find suitable integration strategies if the numbers of ‘brand new’ minority groups like the Chinese or Africans increase. Croatia is still not an immigration state and, in economical terms, not one of the main destinations for potential immigrants. In any case, the few foreigners residing there could not establish ethnically-based network structures which would promote immigration at an individual level. However, all of this may change in the future and another challenge will be to find suitable integration measures if international migration flows become more of an issue in Croatia than they are today.


List of persons and organisations interviewed

Mirjana Turudić, International Relations Department of the Croatian Chamber of Economy
Ekrem Bećirović, President of the Council of Bosniak National Minority of the City of Zagreb
Ahmed Ikanović, Secretary of the Islamic Centre Zagreb
Elizabeta Knorr, Responsible Officer for the Department for Promoting Human Rights, Gender Equality, Relations with National Minorities and Religious Communities and Civil Society Development at the Mayor’s Office
Representatives of the Croatian Employment Service, Zagreb Regional Office and Migration Information Centre: Marica Jelić, Provisional Chief, Dubravka Klarić, Head of the Department for Mediation and Preparation for Job-finding, Patricija Kezele, Head of the Migration Information Centre
Hamdija Malić, President of the Organisation of Bosniak Veterans in the War of Independence of Croatia
Archpriest Kirko Velinski, Representative of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Croatia
Salih Demirović, Representative of the Muslim Youth Club
Azra Omanović, President of the Women’s Council of the Islamic Centre in Zagreb
Hanna Gelb, Journalist of the television programme for minorities, Prizma (HRT)
Senad Nanić, President of the Cultural Community of Bosniaks in Croatia ‘Preporod’
Muhidin Aličehajić, Representative of the Cultural Artistic Association ‘Sevdah’
Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (SSSH)

Heinz Fassmann and Peter Görgl, Institute for Urban and Regional Research (ISR), Vienna