



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Croatia

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a close relationship with the state not shared by other religious groups. The legal position of most major religious communities improved because of agreements with the state, which grant benefits similar to those enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the coalition Government that took power in 2003 continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Religion and ethnicity were linked closely in society. Following independence in 1991, religious institutions of all faiths were victimized by the ethnic conflicts that led to the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 2005, there were occasional reports of intimidation and vandalism, particularly in the war-affected areas, directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property, although those incidents remained sporadic.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials frequently met with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities and with government officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 21,831 square miles and a population of approximately 4,437,000. The religious breakdown of the country was approximately: Roman Catholic, 85 percent; Orthodox Christian, 6 percent; Muslim, 1 percent; Jewish, less than 1 percent; other, 4 percent; and atheist, 2 percent. Before the emergence of the pro-Nazi Ustasha regime in Croatia during World War II, the Jewish community numbered some 35,000 to 40,000. An estimated 6,000 Jews were thought to have survived the war, and the community was thought to number about 2,000 during the period covered by this report.

The statistics regarding religious affiliation correlated closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church, primarily lived in cities and areas bordering on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. Members of other minority religions resided mostly in urban areas. Most immigrants were Roman Catholic ethnic Croats from Bosnia.

Protestants from a number of denominations and foreign clergy actively practiced and proselytized, as did representatives of Asian religions. A variety of missionaries were present, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Greek Catholics, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and a wide range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Christ, and various nondenominational organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ).

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Islamic community, and other smaller Christian denominations that have signed agreements with the state, receive some state support.

The 2002 Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities broadly defines religious communities' legal positions and covers such issues as government funding, tax benefits, and religious education in schools. Other important issues, such as pensions for clergy, religious service in the military, penitentiaries and police, and recognition of religious marriages, were left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government. Most religious communities considered the law an improvement over the previous state of affairs. Restitution of nationalized or confiscated church property is regulated under the 1996 Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during the Yugoslav communist rule, which was amended in 2002. As of mid-2006, only persons who obtained citizenship by October 1996 may file claims under Croatia's restitution law. The Government plans to propose an amendment to the law that would allow foreigners to file claims on an equal basis with Croatian citizens. As of mid-2006, the Government had not yet submitted the proposed amendment to Parliament. With regard to the period covered by the 1996 restitution law, government officials stated that a 1999 Constitutional Court decision has the legislative effect of allowing claims relating to confiscations during the previously excluded period of World War II to be considered under the

law's provisions.

In 2003, the Government approved a regulation on the registration of religious communities, known as the Regulation on Forms and Maintaining Records of Religious Communities in Croatia, which required all religious communities to submit registration applications within six months. The regulation stipulates that, to register, a religious community must have at least 500 believers and must be registered as an association for five years. All religious communities in the country prior to passage of the law are being registered without conditions; religious communities that are new to the country since passage of the law must fulfill the requirements for the minimum number of believers and time registered as an association. By the end of the period covered by this report, approximately forty religious communities had been registered and seventeen additional communities applied for registration. Registered religious communities are granted the status of a "legal person" and enjoy tax and other benefits under the Law on Religious Communities. Religious communities that are based abroad must submit written permission for registration from their country of origin. The Helsinki Commission reported earlier in 2004 on requirements to register new religious communities, but prominent human rights organizations, including the Croatian Helsinki Committee, said in 2004 that the requirements were well within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards. In December 2005, three churches—the Church of the Full Gospel, the Alliance of Churches "Word of Life," and the Protestant Reformed Christian Church—challenged in the Constitutional Court the Government's refusal to conclude agreements that would provide them benefits similar to those provided by agreements with the Catholic, Serb Orthodox, Islamic, and other communities. The Government maintained that the churches did not meet its requirements of having a minimum number of members and of being continuously active in the country since 1941. The appeal was pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the period covered by this report. No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

In line with the concordats signed with the Catholic Church and in an effort to define their rights and privileges within a legal framework, agreements have been signed with the following religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community (2002); the Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Pentecostal Church, Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, Christian Adventist Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, Church of Christ, and the Reformed Movement of Seventh-day Adventists (2003); and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Croatian Old Catholic Church (2003). The Jewish Community of Zagreb, which facilitates "coordination" with ten other Jewish communities, sought to sign an agreement with the state in November 2005. The text was similar to that offered by the Government in 2003, which was refused by the Community because of lack of progress on property restitution. Signing was once again delayed as another Jewish group contested the Community's membership requirements. That group, the Jewish Religious Community Beth Israel, requested state registration as a new and separate entity in September 2005, following a split in the Community after the decision not to renew the contract of the country's first Rabbi. As of May 2006, the Central State Office for Administration was considering these requests. The Government's general approach is to negotiate agreements with individual religious communities based on a common framework rather than set uniform, nondiscriminatory standards and practices. Leaders of non-Roman Catholic religions, with the exception of the Serb Orthodox Church, expressed general satisfaction with the communication they had with the Government.

In July 2005, Croatian Radio Television (HRT) signed an agreement with eight minority religious communities guaranteeing equal representation in its programs. HRT agreed to live broadcasts of important annual celebrations and minimum weekly and monthly coverage. Under an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, HRT provided up to 10 hours per month of regular coverage of Roman Catholic events, while the other religious communities received 10 minutes of coverage or less.

The Roman Catholic Church operates one of the country's private national radio stations, Catholic Radio, which is financed by private contributions. There are no restrictions on religious broadcasting. Topics of interest to major non-Roman Catholic religious groups are covered regularly on weekly religious programming on HRT.

The Roman Catholic Church, on several occasions, reacted to its treatment in the media. In May 2005, the Catholic Radio Marija Association collected more than 40,000 signatures requesting that a satirical cartoon series critical of the Catholic Church be removed from national television. The Association also sent an open letter to the OSCE disagreeing with the organization's view that the program was an expression of civic and media freedoms. Political leaders reacted in February 2006 when the weekly *Nacional* printed the controversial Danish cartoon of the prophet Muhammad. President Mesic described this as an unwise move and said that "...balance needed to be kept between the principle of freedom of speech and the need not to hurt anyone's religious sentiments." Prime Minister Sanader also considered this as "a wrong editorial move," and the Government stated that, while advocating full freedom of media, it maintained that "articles containing disparagements and mocking another's religion, nationality or world-view should by no means be published in the media." Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo burned a Croatian flag in front of the Croatian Embassy in protest against the publishing of the cartoons.

The Islamic community's Bairam ceremony, usually attended by high-level government officials, is telecast live annually from the Zagreb Mosque. The Islamic community credited the monthly TV broadcast *Ekumena* for contributing significantly to an atmosphere of greater tolerance.

Muslims have the right to observe their religious holy days. They are granted a paid holiday for one Bairam and have the right to observe the other as well, although they are not paid for the second day. The Ministry of Education recognizes the diploma conferred by the Muslim community's secondary school in Zagreb.

Missionaries did not operate registered schools, but the Mormon community provided free English lessons which were normally offered in conjunction with education on the Mormon religion.

There was no government-sponsored ecumenical activity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government imposes no formal restrictions on

religious groups, and all religious communities are free to conduct public services and to open and run social and charitable institutions.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives financial state support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. The concordats and other agreements with non-Catholic religious communities allow state financing for some salaries and pensions for priests and nuns through government-managed pension and health funds.

The concordats also regulate recognition of marriages, public school catechisms, and military chaplains. The Ministry of Defense employs fifteen full-time and four part-time Catholic priests and chaplains. After the Government signed an agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, five Orthodox priests began service in prisons and penitentiaries; the Islamic Community deployed one imam in the same service. In October 2005, the Government signed a protocol with the Islamic community that guarantees that members of the armed forces and recruits of the Muslim faith have regular access to chaplains, are provided with halal meals, and are excused from duty during major holidays. According to internal army polls in 2004, fifty-five conscripts and active members of the armed forces requested Muslim pastoral care.

Marriages conducted by the fifteen religious communities that have agreements with the state are officially recognized, eliminating the need to register the marriages in the civil registry office.

Facilitating the return of refugees (primarily ethnic Serbs) remained a challenge for the Government, which made progress in a number of areas relating to returns. However, some ethnic Serbs who wished to return to the country, including Serbian Orthodox clergy, continued to encounter difficulties or delays in resolving various administrative issues. Serbian Orthodox officials reported that the number of Serbian Orthodox clergy, which had been reduced to 30 after the 1991-1995 war, increased to 128. The increase was greatest in the Dalmatian and Karlovac eparchies. Orthodox Church sources ascribed the rising number of new priests, mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, to the increase in Serb returnees. Orthodox Church sources complained that the new priests, particularly in Knin, continued to have difficulties with renewing their working permits and residency status at relatively short intervals. The lack of a more permanent status deprived them and their family members of health care benefits and pensions. While religion and ethnicity were closely linked in society, the majority of incidents of discrimination were motivated by ethnicity rather than religion or religious doctrine. Discrimination continued in some areas against ethnic Serbs and, at times, other minorities, including the administration of justice, employment, and housing.

The Government requires that religious training be provided in public schools, although attendance is optional. Because 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, the Catholic catechism is the predominant religious teaching offered in public schools. Schools that meet the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per class allowed separate religion classes to be held for the students. In cases where there are not sufficient numbers of students of a minority faith to warrant separate classes, students may exercise the option to receive religious instruction through their religious community. In 2003, government officials estimated that 4,500 primary and secondary school children in 37 schools attended Serbian Orthodox religion classes, the majority of which were in Eastern Slavonia, Rijeka, and Gorski Kotar. Orthodox Church sources reported that the number of students in 2005 rose to approximately 5,000, of which 4,050 were in Eastern Slavonia. Local Orthodox clergy commended the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the GOC Institute for Education, and the Catholic Church in Djakovo diocese for good cooperation. In 2005, after initial resistance, principals of two schools in Knin permitted Serbian Orthodox religion classes for the approximately 500 primary and secondary school children eligible to attend. However, Orthodox clergy complained that authorities in one of the primary schools allowed only half of the guaranteed number of classes, and, in the other school, pupils of Serb ethnicity were dispersed throughout the school so that the legally required minimum of seven students per class could not be reached. Similar resistance by local school boards to establishing Serbian Orthodox religion classes in schools continued in Imotski. In 2005, Serbian Orthodox officials reported that many school children and their parents remained reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox to avoid being singled out. Similarly, the Orthodox clergy noted that children in the Karlovac area were reluctant to openly attend their religious education for fear of being ostracized.

In September 2003, the Jewish Community of Zagreb opened the first private Jewish elementary school in the country. The Government annually observes January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day with seminars and commemorative events.

The secondary school operated by the Islamic Community for religious training was at full capacity (102 students); the community intended to gradually convert the school into a more general secondary school while at the same time developing an institution of higher education specifically for religious training. The community postponed its plans to open a Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Zagreb Mosque in order to meet academic requirements. It planned to open an Islamic institute for higher education in September 2006 that would educate both clergy and laity and provide training for religious teachers in the schools. The minister of culture, in charge of relations with religious communities, expressed support for the project. Authorities representing the Islamic community continued to report good cooperation and dialogue with the Government. The Orthodox Church opened a religious secondary school in September 2005 that had ten students during the period covered by this report, with plans to expand in the coming years. The Roman Catholic Church intended to establish a university in Zagreb in 2007. (See below.)

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav communist regime remained a problem. Many religious communities identified property return as their top priority and complained about the lack of progress. A 1998 concordat with the Vatican provided for the return of all Roman Catholic Church property confiscated by the communist regime after 1945. The agreement stipulated that the Government would return seized properties or compensate the Church where return was impossible. Some progress was made with some returnable properties being restituted, and there were instances of compensation for non-returnable properties. In 2003, the Roman Catholic Church submitted a list of priority properties for restitution to the Government that included large commercial buildings, recreational property, and several properties already in use by the Church, such as monasteries, dormitories, and residences for children with disabilities. Catholic Church officials reported the return of a few properties over the last year, while some claims ran into open opposition by local authorities. Prime Minister Ivo Sanader met with the Zagreb Archbishop Josip Bozanic in May 2006 and agreed to sign a contract to hand over the King Tomislav army barracks complex as a compensation for other yet unspecified church property in Zagreb. The building will be used to house the Catholic University, which was scheduled to begin its program in the fall of 2007. The Government signed a letter of intent in July 2005 to hand over the property and expressed full support for the project. The press reported that the city of Zagreb returned the Komedija theatre in the city center to the Franciscan Monastery. The theatre would continue to use the building for the next fifteen years under a favorable rent

agreement.

In March 2006, the press reported that the Varazdin town and county authorities opposed restitution of the former monastery in the town's center in which the Computer Science College is located. The building is listed as one of the remaining fifteen capital objects in the country intended for restitution. City authorities disputed the legal basis of the claim and cited its substantial investment in the building. According to the Varazdin bishop, the town's mayor agreed in 2002 to relocate the college, and the Church protested against widespread media reports perceived as pressure intended to influence the procedure. This was the only remaining claim made by the Church in Varazdin at the end of the period covered by this report, because a monastery, currently used as a medical school, was returned in February 2006 to the Order of Ursuline nuns. Negotiations remained stalled on the Government's offer of a 25 percent stake in the Croatia Osiguranje insurance company that opened three years ago.

Other than the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during Yugoslav communist rule, there were no specific property restitution agreements between the Government and non-Roman Catholic religious groups. The Serbian Orthodox community, the second largest claimant of property in the country, reported that its joint restitution subcommission with the Government had not convened during the year, despite repeated requests. It reported that restitution in 2005 was minimal, and expressed particular concern over the lack of progress in restitution of several valuable business and residential buildings in downtown Zagreb. In 2005, reconstruction of a number of Orthodox churches began across the country. Most notably, the Ministry of Reconstruction funded and worked on the landmark St. Nicholas Church in the center of Karlovac, which was demolished during the war. Overall, sources in the Serbian Orthodox Church believed that the Government had been slow to follow through on its commitments but commended good relations with the president's cabinet. The Church continued with legal action initiated in 2004 against current owners of forty previously church-owned and then nationalized flats in Zagreb in order to prevent further sale. No progress was made in any of these cases or in the return of properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forests.

Several Jewish properties, including some Zagreb buildings, were not returned. The Jewish community stated that the process of returning nationalized property in Zagreb was halted in 2005 and had made no progress since. The Jewish community of Osijek reported some progress on the return of property in Osijek and Vukovar; in 2004, the property on which the former synagogue of Vukovar stood was returned. Other claims remained stalled in court at the end of the reporting period.

The Muslim community had no property claims. Its major issue concerned the construction of a mosque in Rijeka after several years of delays because of administrative obstacles and local community protests related to its location. An acceptable alternate site was found, and the community expected the construction to begin soon after the authorities adopted the city zoning plan in June 2006. Plans existed to build a mosque in Osijek. In 2005, city officials offered a favorable site that was connected to existing infrastructure.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

Generally, acts of anti-Semitism were rare. In April 2005, the Jewish community and some international organizations received a threatening, anti-Semitic letter. Police investigated but identified no suspects. In June 2006, police pressed charges against a twenty-one-year-old student for sending two threatening e-mails to the Zagreb Jewish Community. In the messages, the author insulted victims of the Holocaust, Jews, and the black race. He also expressed hope for "the Iranians to complete a nuclear bomb as soon as possible and launch it on Haifa and Tel Aviv," after which celebrations would be held in Zagreb's streets.

Also in June, two youths wearing shirts with Nazi insignia verbally and then physically assaulted the rabbi of the Jewish Community in Zagreb. Police continued an investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Religion and ethnicity were closely linked in society, and religion often was used historically to identify non-Croats and single them out for discriminatory practices. This link contributed to the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and to the perpetration of violence and intimidation against religious persons, institutions, and symbols of all faiths. Such incidents continued to occur sporadically during the period covered by this report and were primarily directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property.

During the period covered by this report, human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders noted that overall ethnic and religious relations remained stable. The exceptions were incidents involving harassment of clergy and desecration and vandalism of Serbian Orthodox Church property, which continued to occur sporadically. In Dalmatia, Serbian Orthodox officials reported an increased number of incidents of verbal threats and isolated physical attacks against clergy and property. Serbian Orthodox officials continued to complain that local police investigations rarely led to identification or legal action against perpetrators.

The majority of reported incidents against both Orthodox Church property and clergy occurred at the end of 2005 prior to Orthodox Christmas.

For example, in December 2005, the Orthodox Church and the NGO Serb Democratic Forum reported that a group of young men smashed the entrance to the St. Sava Church in Split and shouted threats such as "Kill the Serbs," and continued to cause damage on nearby streets. In Zadar, in December, offensive graffiti referring to a Serb Orthodox saint and Ustasha symbols were sprayed on the fence of the St. Ilija Church. Church sources reported that an unknown perpetrator lit a fire in front of the Orthodox Diocese building. The fire was contained before spreading to the adjacent park. Police investigated but did not identify perpetrators in any of these cases. Similarly, unknown persons damaged the shutters of the Orthodox residential and administrative building in Osijek and pasted the windows with threatening messages such as "Serbs should hang." The perpetrators were not identified.

In September 2005, the Serb Democratic Forum reported that a group of unknown attackers threw stones at the Church of the Assumption in Drnis in the Dalmatian hinterlands while the priest was inside the church. The men yelled, "Do not toll the bell; this is not Serbia." The police arrived shortly afterwards but were not able to apprehend the perpetrators. In October 2005, a group of young men jumped over the wall of the Sibenik eparchy courtyard shouting anti-Serb slogans, and demolished garden furniture and window shutters. Police identified three perpetrators and indicated to the media that the incident had no political significance. Despite its low profile in Croatia, the foreign minister of Serbia and Montenegro (SaM) sent a protest note to his Croatian counterpart, and the SaM ambassador visited Sibenik and asked local authorities to guarantee the security of Serbs and their places of worship.

Sporadic, small-scale incidents occurred elsewhere in the country. For example, in August, human rights NGOs reported that a group of young men rushed into the courtyard of the parish's Orthodox priest in Slatina in the early morning hours, yelling ethnically-based epithets. The police intervened quickly and filed a report against the perpetrators for disturbing public order. The priest did not file criminal charges for the ethnically-motivated abuse.

The Muslim and Jewish communities reported no major incidents of violence or harassment toward religious persons or sites during the period covered by this report; however, during Bairam holidays in November 2005, a plaque on the Dubrovnik Mosque was burned and the fire partly damaged the entrance door. Similarly, a plaque was removed from the front wall of the Islamic community building in Split in February 2006. In both cases the police investigated but did not identify any suspects. Local Islamic community leaders expressed concern about the incidents as they echoed similar cases of vandalism in 1993 and 1997.

Relations between the Government and the Jewish community steadily improved over the past several years. However, President Stepan Mesic (who held a nonpartisan, partly ceremonial head-of-state position) spoke out publicly in support of one specific Jewish group after the Zagreb Jewish Community split in mid-2005 over the issue of whether to renew, for an eighth year, the contract of the rabbi. While generally supportive of ethnic and religious minority groups, the president criticized the decision not to renew the rabbi's contract and suggested that the rabbi was to be expelled "according to the same principles by which the Nazis drove Jews into concentration camps." Community leaders criticized the president's perceived interference.

In March 2005, President Mesic visited the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem and acknowledged that inappropriate statements by prior leaders caused mistrust between Israel and Croatia. In June 2005, Prime Minister Sanader made his first official visit to Israel, where he met with then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and paid respect to the victims of the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem memorial. In April 2006, President Mesic spoke at the Holocaust commemoration ceremony at the Jasenovac concentration camp; the ceremony was attended by representatives of Parliament, Government, and national minorities, as well as representatives of the Orthodox, Jewish, and Catholic faiths. In November 2005, Croatia became a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Preparations were under way to open a memorial museum and educational center by the end of 2006 at the Jasenovac Memorial Area.

While the Roman Catholic Church officially seeks no role in political life, it campaigned through its most prominent institutions, including the largest Catholic Church charity, Caritas, on several topics of public interest. Along with the Center for Promotion of Social Teaching and the Franciscan Institute, Caritas campaigned for the law that would ban all stores from opening on Sundays, and, in March 2006, they approached the minister of economy for support. In late 2003, Caritas campaigned for legislation based on the church-state concordats that would ban most retail stores from opening on Sundays. A law restricting business activities on Sundays was enacted in January 2004; however, the Constitutional Court overturned the law in April 2004 after major retailers appealed the law citing financial losses. In March 2006, the same organizations challenged the proposed privatization of water resources on the grounds that access to spring water must be handled transparently and for the public good.

In March 2006, authorities rescinded the license to a U.S. film crew that intended to film parts of horror movie *Omen 4* in Split after the local Roman Catholic authorities campaigned against it. The Ministry of Culture issued all relevant permits in December 2005, but the Church in Split and authorities in the nearby town of Solin objected to the use of the Split city center and Solin cemetery, causing the annulment of the permits. The media reported that some film sets were vandalized and burned.

The Roman Catholic Church continued to exercise influence over the Government's social policies. For example, in January 2005, the Church publicly criticized the international Global Fund's MEMOIDS educational program, designed to raise AIDS awareness in secondary schools. The Church objected to the mention of the use of condoms in the program, stating that it encouraged promiscuity.

In his interviews and sermons in April 2006, Cardinal Bozanic referred to internal and foreign policy topics. He called for precise laws to ban corruption, calling it one of the greatest evils of society. He also supported Croatia's EU aspirations, but called first for a definition of national interests and preservation of the country's identity. In May 2005, the Bishops' Conference invited Prime Minister Sanader to speak to the group about EU integration, Croatia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and the role of the Church in relation to these processes. In September 2005, the media reported that the country's representatives of the Catholic organization *Iustitia et Pax* criticized the work of the ICTY, stating that the Tribunal's practices did not guarantee justice and that arresting the then-fugitive general Gotovina should not be a condition for Croatia's negotiations with the EU. Senj-Gospic Bishop Mile Bogovic made similar statements in September, criticizing the ICTY prosecutor as biased and suggesting that the ICTY is a political court. However, such statements were not echoed by Cardinal Bozanic, and the Church, in line with government policy, took a moderate position.

Since Cardinal Bozanic took office as archbishop of Zagreb in 1997 and became head of the Croatian Bishops' Conference (HBK), the Catholic Church's leadership sought a more proactive role in advocating ethnic and religious reconciliation. Ecumenical efforts among the religious communities developed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. For example, religious leaders met frequently to discuss issues of mutual interest and to cooperate and coordinate with the Government Commission for Relations with Religious Communities.

In the spring of 2005, Croatian dailies reported on repeated acts of violence and sexual abuse in the home for mentally incapacitated children in Brezovica run by the leading Catholic charity Caritas. Criminal charges were brought against the director, who was suspected of covering up the evidence and preventing criminal proceedings against the orphanage staff. One employee was arrested. In August 2005, the archbishop of Zagreb replaced the director. Approximately one year after press allegations about the abuse, Zagreb's Archdiocese Visitation inspected and found no irregularities or abuse. The head of the inspection team complained that their work was impeded by inappropriate, negative media coverage.

According to surveys published in July 2005, the Catholic Church's traditional reputation as an institution that enjoys the most public trust was affected by these reports.

In March 2006, the editor of the Catholic religious program at the national television station HRT received negative media attention when he dismissed the sign language interpreter on the grounds that she was going through a divorce. The editor argued that it was inappropriate for a divorced person to appear in a religious program and that he had received complaints from the viewers to that effect. The HBK distanced itself from the move. In April 2006, the HRT Program Council reinstated the interpreter and fined the editor.

According to the results of a survey published in May 2005 by the international research agency GFK Marketing Research Center, citizens placed the most trust in the Catholic Church, the president, and persons close to them, as opposed to the Government, judiciary and political parties, which occupied the opposite end of the scale. According to the same survey, this high level of trust had remained unchanged over the past five years.

In February 2006, the Muslim community in Zagreb hosted the Bosnian Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, who presented a Declaration of European Muslims. The Declaration, which received considerable media attention, invited Muslims to accept European democratic standards and appealed to EU countries to officially recognize Islam in order to make it less vulnerable to external influences. Croatian Mufti Sevk Omerbasic noted that Croatia was one of four countries in Europe that officially recognizes Islam and in which the indigenous Muslim community was successfully integrated into society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the coalition Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and actively works to encourage the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. U.S. Embassy officials met frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and minority groups and engaged in the promotion of human rights, including the religious rights of these groups. The embassy organized the visit of a U.S. author and expert on Islam in the Balkans. That visit generated significant media attention on the author's message of tolerance and religious freedom in Europe. In addition, the embassy supported the construction of an interethnic, interreligious seniors' home in an ethnically mixed community near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was organized by the local Muslim community in cooperation with Caritas.

During the period covered by this report, Phase II of the International Partnership among Museums (IPAM) was implemented between the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Jasenovac Memorial Area. (IPAM is a U.S. State Department-administered international museum exchange program in collaboration with the American Association of Museums.) The partnership's previous work in Phase I concentrated on technical expertise exchange, such as preserving and managing collections, developing a joint web site, and conducting research. Phase II concentrated on efforts to educate the public about the Holocaust and the history of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Activities consisted primarily of personnel and expertise exchanges, both in person and electronically. The United States was supporting the development of a Holocaust Education Center at Jasenovac Memorial through the expertise of the USHMM. The education center would provide workshops for student tour groups.

In January 2005, the USHMM participated in a Ministry of Education seminar for history teachers on studying and teaching the Holocaust. In the summer of 2005, four history and sociology teachers traveled to the United States, and five more history teachers participated in the same program in June 2006. In addition, the embassy was funding the translation and printing of a USHMM handbook on teaching the Holocaust. The project commenced in 2004 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with the Jasenovac memorial area. In November 2005, 700 handbooks about the Holocaust were distributed to high schools, and plans existed to reprint and distribute approximately 2,000 brochures to primary schools in the fall of 2006.

In cooperation with Yad Vashem and the Visual History Foundation, the Jewish Community prepared a brochure that analyzes history textbooks for primary and secondary schools; the brochure was scheduled to be publicized in September 2006. The authors-several prominent historians-cited a lack of information concerning Jewish ethnic identity and culture and on the genesis of anti-Semitism, which would provide the historical context for anti-Semitism in Croatia and the Holocaust. For example, historians observed that the existing textbooks implied that implementation of racist laws had no roots in the NDH (Independent State of Croatia) but occurred exclusively under the influence of Germany.

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