

Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

500 years of tolerance,
mutual respect and
civil courage

Dr Dževada Šuško



مؤسسة قرطبة
The Cordoba Foundation

Volume 3
Issue 1
February 2022

insights



Editors

Dr Anas Altikriti
Chief Executive Officer

Dr Abdullah Faliq
Editor-in-Chief & Managing Director

H.D. Forman
Basma Elshayyal
Dr Eric Gordy
Prof Dr Jerome Krase
Sandra Tusin

Art Director

Syed Nuh

© Copyright 2022, All rights reserved, The Cordoba Foundation.

DISCLAIMER: Views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of The Cordoba Foundation.

Published in London

VOL 3 | ISSUE No. 1 | February 2022

Available online:

www.thecordobafoundation.com

info@thecordobafoundation.com



مؤسسة قرطبة

The Cordoba Foundation

The Cordoba Foundation (TCF) is an independent strategic think-tank that works to promote intercultural dialogue and positive coexistence through a range of activities including research and publications, training and capacity building, policy briefings and dialogues. The Foundation takes its name from the city of Cordoba - the European metropolis which was once a symbol of human excellence and intellectual ingenuity, where cultures, civilisations and ideas thrived. Embodying this spirit, TCF today facilitates the meeting of minds to advance understanding and respect for one another.

Our activities include:

- Structured consultation and advisory services
- Face-to-face interaction with decision-makers and figures of authority
- In-house research
- Workshops, seminars and debates on pertinent issues
- Consultancy Training and capacity-building Publications,
- Periodicals and Journals
- Resourceful website and knowledge database



Table of Contents

- 4 Welcome
 - by Dr Abdullah Faliq
- 6 Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina
500 years of tolerance, mutual respect and civil courage
 - by Dr Dževada Šuško
- 7 Introduction
- 9 Bosnia's tradition of co-existence
- 9 Bosnia's Sephardic Jews
- 10 Sarajevo Purim
- 10 Settlement of Ashkenazi Jews during Austro-Hungarian rule
- 12 Haggadah
- 12 Saving Jews during the Second World War
- 14 Socialist Yugoslavia and War
- 15 Importance of coexistence in Bosnia-Herzegovina today
- 17 Endnotes
- 19 Author Profile

Welcome

WELCOME to the first edition of *Insights* for 2022. We have recovered from last year's covid-induced break and are delighted to present the first edition of *Insights* for 2022 with a two-part special, focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In part one, Dr Dževada Šuško explores the fascinating, and largely unknown history of the peaceful coexistence between Jews and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina spanning 500 years – a mark of mutual respect and civil courage.

Forthcoming in March 2022, part two is titled *Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Battle for the Soul of Europe*, contributed by His Excellency Vanja Filipovic, Ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the UK. The Ambassador analyses recent attempts by Republika Srpska to effectively break away from Bosnia by forming their own military and judiciary. What this will mean for Bosnia now and the immediate future remains a big concern for Bosnia, and anyone interested in peace in the region. Sadly, the potential for deadly sectarian conflict is once again looming on the horizon. Ambassador Filipovic writes,

“Bosnia and Herzegovina is emblematic of what the future will look like. Either we will live in the system of Rule of Law, system of ethnic and religious diversity, system of values where human rights are upheld and “never again” means something; or, we as a civilisation will be on a track of uncertainty, with big power politics, where might is right, human rights are a mere slogan, hate speech a new normal, and divisiveness as the gold standard of politics. Bosnia and Herzegovina is fighting for its survival, but our fight is also the fight for the soul of Europe.”

Returning to part one of this edition of *Insights*, Dr Dževada Šuško, a Bosnian university professor of international relations and Chief-of-Office for International Cooperation at the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina, presents a radically different picture of conflict-ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina, to one of peace, stability, and harmony. She does this by providing historical antecedents to the continuously diverse make-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina and in particular the coexistence of Jews and Muslims in the country.

This is a must-read for anyone interested in interreligious harmony, post-conflict transformation and the consequences of hate and conflict. The historical coexistence of Jews and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina is particularly important given the tragic events of the 1990s where Bosnian Muslims were subjected to unimaginable

ights

suffering and pain at the hands of Bosnian Serbs, whose main motivation was religion. Serb forces systematically massacred more than 8,000 Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) in Srebrenica alone, which had been designated a United Nations safe haven. This was the worst act of mass killing on European soil since the end of World War Two, and Europe’s most recent genocide. But beyond Srebrenica, numerous other massacres took place all over Bosnia-Herzegovina, and many Bosnians are still reeling from the effects of such savagery as loved ones murdered by the Bosnian Serbs are yet to be found, while perpetrators who committed these heinous crimes roam free.

This timely article by Dr Dževada Šuško serves as a dire warning of what hate can lead to as was sadly witnessed by the Bosnians. But the article is also a message of hope. Not learning lessons or heeding warnings from Bosnia, we have in recent times been witnessing the massacres and genocide of others – the Rohingya by the Burmese regime (and further exacerbated by a military-led coup in February 2021), the Uyghur population (and other mostly-Muslim ethnic groups in the north-western region of Xinjiang) by China, and whilst we speak, Russia invades Ukraine. Whilst it is true that human beings do have an innate inclination towards violence, our natural default position, is to be in a state of peace. As an advisor and campaigner on Bosnia-Herzegovina for the past 20 years or so, I can concur with this position that the Bosnians seek peace whilst not forgetting the quest for justice. Despite all that the Bosnians have endured, they have been able to rebuild their lives by focusing on justice and peace, rather than hatred and intolerance. Dr Šuško testifies to this, “the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina which lasted from 1992-1995 did not endanger the coexistence of Jews and Muslims. It was even strengthened in these times of hardship.”

We hope you will find these important contributions by Dr Šuško and Ambassador Filipovic refreshing.

Thank you

Dr Abdullah Faliq







Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina

500 years of tolerance, mutual respect and civil courage

Dr Dževada Šuško

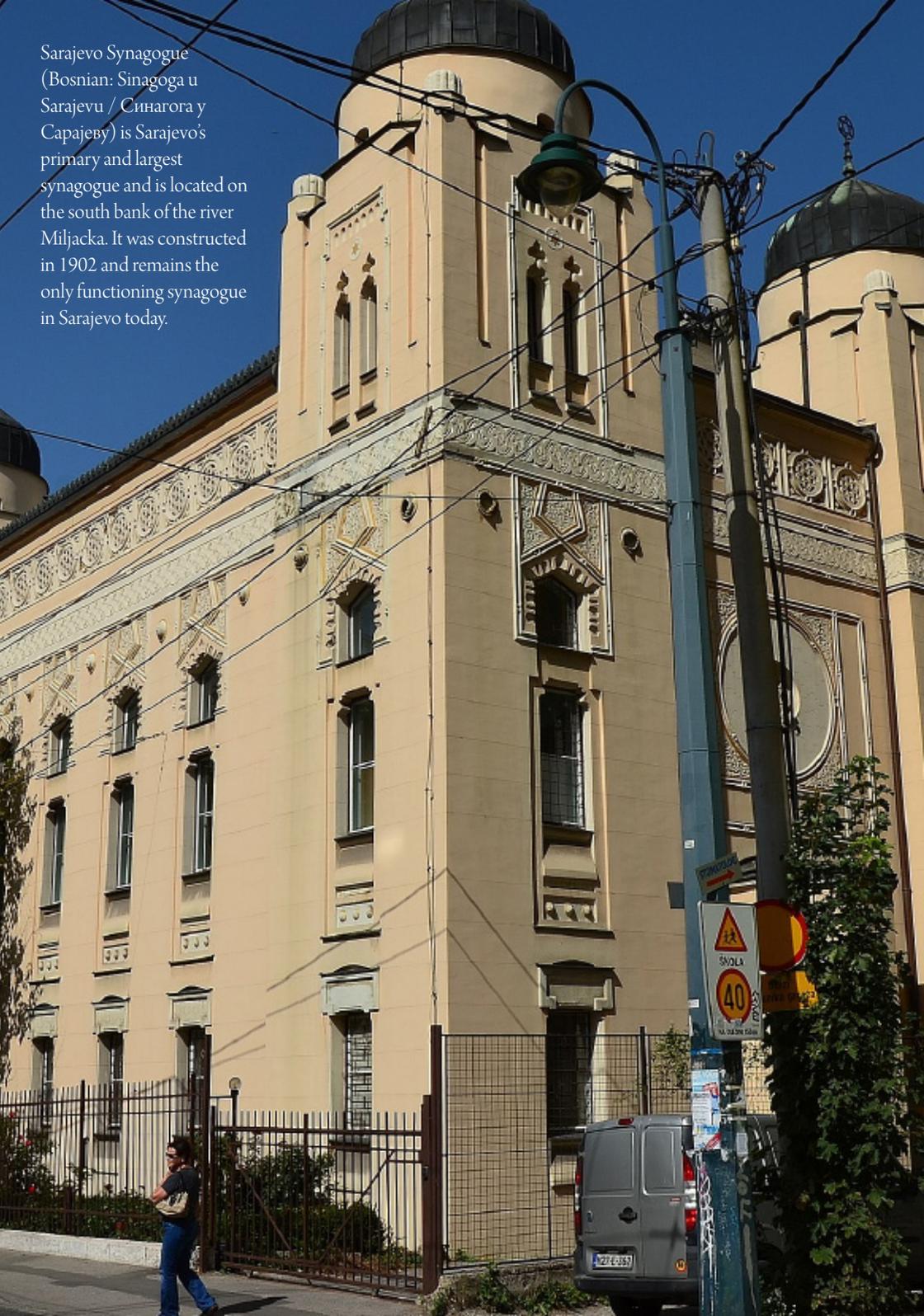
Introduction

RECENTLY, I read the following quote by the well-known German journalist Ulrich Wickert: “*The world needs good news. Be the one with good news.*” The book, *The coexistence of Jews and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: examples of tolerance since the 16th century until today*, is good news. This is not only the subjective opinion of the author of this paper and the editor of the book, but borne out by the unexpectedly high level of interest and positive reviews by academics, the public, and the media, who paid particular attention to the book and its launch event on 15 December 2021 at the Bosniak Institute in Sarajevo.

Why is this good news? Well, Jahiel Kamhi, a descendant of the Bosnian Sephardic Jews who lives in the diaspora, wrote in his blog after the book launch, “... because in today’s time of intolerance such a publication revitalises our memories and gives hope for a better future.

But let us start from the beginning. For over five hundred years, Bosnia and Herzegovina was continuously diverse, embracing the coexistence of Jews and Muslims. The presence of Jews in Muslim societies goes back as far as the first Muslim community in Medina in the 7th century. The rights of Jews were specifically protected by the Prophet Muhammad (*peace by upon him*) in the Constitution of Medina. In fact, the Madinan Constitution is considered to be the first constitution of a Muslim state, with clearly delineated and meticulously documented obligations towards various religious communities. Their property, dignity and faith were protected. To the extent that the names of Jewish tribes considered allies of Muslims were mentioned. Some even regard the Constitution of Madinah an early human rights and freedom of faith document.

Sarajevo Synagogue
(Bosnian: Sinagoga u
Sarajevu / Синагога у
Сарајеву) is Sarajevo's
primary and largest
synagogue and is located on
the south bank of the river
Miljacka. It was constructed
in 1902 and remains the
only functioning synagogue
in Sarajevo today.



Bosnia's tradition of co-existence

Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina followed these principles and continued this tradition of coexistence, whether consciously or subconsciously. The Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain and Portugal during the Reconquista were accepted in Bosnia.² The Sephardic community arrived first in Sarajevo, then dispersed to many other Bosnian cities like Travnik, Višegrad, Banja Luka, Visoko, Zenica, Tuzla, Brčko, Bihać, Bijeljina, Gračanica, Bugojno, Jajce, Prijedor, Zvornik, Rogatica and many more. Thirty-seven synagogues were built, with eight of them located in Sarajevo alone.

Some sources claim that the inhabitants of mediaeval Bosnia were good-hearted people and open to others regardless of whether they were Catholic, Orthodox or Muslim. Closely linked to this is the syntagm “the good Bosniaks” (*dobri Bošnjani*) which appeared in historical documents and described the inhabitants of mediaeval Bosnia. Furthermore, Bosnia and Herzegovina has always been a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Hence, it might not come as such a surprise that arriving Jews were accepted by the locals. In comparison to other cities in Europe, Jews never lived in ghettos or in separate neighbourhoods. At the end of the 16th century, Siyavuz-Pasha built a residential building known as *Siyavuz Pašina Daira* (Siyavuz Pasha's Court), *Siyavuz Pašin Han* (Siyavuz Pasha's inn or lodging), *Velika Daira* (Big Court) or in *Judeo-Spanish II Kortizo* (The Court). It had forty-six rooms and is considered to be the first example of a collective residence in

Sarajevo.

A residential design was necessary because to read the Torah, ten male adults (minyan) were required. Soon, a Jewish temple was built next to it, the first synagogue whose architecture was reminiscent of Spain.³ Today, this temple is the Jewish Museum. In the residential complex, residents had different kinds of businesses, such as banking and trade, and had their shops in city centres.

To perform the ritual washing (tevilah), Jews used public baths (hammam / mikveh), such as the Gazi Husrev-Bey Hammam or the Isa-Bey Hammam in Sarajevo. Only Jews were permitted to enter the pools that were built in separate rooms. The tevilah pool in the female section of the Gazi Husrev-Bey hamam existed until the eve of the Second World War in 1939.⁴

Bosnia's Sephardic Jews

The Sephardic Jewish Community was established in the beginning of the 16th century. Gradually synagogues were built, Jews pursued different businesses and built their homes together with the native residents. Bosnia even developed an education centre for rabbis and hakhams. Many worked throughout Europe. At the time, Sarajevo had a synagogue, an Orthodox church, a Catholic cathedral and a mosque within a walking distance of a few hundred metres of each other – all of which are still preserved in Sarajevo, despite the wars. This is why Sarajevo received the titles *Jerushalaym Ketana* (Little Jerusalem) and *Jerusalem of Europe*.⁵

Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, was preserved throughout the centuries among the Sephardic community.

However, as language is dynamic and evolving the influence of Bosnian and Turkish languages could not be avoided, particularly as they lived under Ottoman rule for more than 400 years. The philologist and literary historian Muhamed Nezirović quotes Regina-Gina Kamhi in 1966 who then stated that Judeo-Spanish language, folklore and tradition has been preserved.⁶ This accords with the narrative that Sephardic Jews who enjoyed freedom of faith and the liberty to live their culture for centuries. Otherwise, had there been strict assimilation policies or any other kind of pressure they would have lost their language and culture. Hence, it is not surprising that the Jews responded with loyalty and patriotism which was visible in times of hardship, such as during the war 1992-95 when the graffiti “Jews protect Sarajevo” appeared on a wall.⁷

Sarajevo Purim

An important event occurred in 1819 when the Muslims of Sarajevo saved their Jewish neighbours from injustice, despotism and imprisonment. Namely, the Ottoman *Wali* (governor) Mehmed Rushdie-Pasha attempted to appropriate money from notable Sarajevo Jews and incarcerated them, including the Rabbi Moshe Danon, threatening them all with the death penalty. However, around 250 eminent Sarajevo Muslims signed a declaration to the effect that their fellow (Jewish) citizens must be liberated. Eventually, they were

Jews responded with loyalty and patriotism which was visible in times of hardship, such as during the war 1992-95 when the graffiti “Jews protect Sarajevo” appeared on a wall.

released, and after informing the Sultan of this injustice, the Governor was relieved of his duties and expelled from Bosnia. Since then, the Sephardic community has celebrated the Sarajevo Purim or *Purim di Saray* (liberation of the Jews).⁸ The theologian and university professor Enes Karić states the following in this regard:

Nonetheless, the Sarajevo Purim and the event in 1819 shows that in many parts of the Ottoman Empire there existed an impressive, I would say, natural solidarity among the adherents of different faiths, in this case between Jews and Muslims. In October 1819 only the Muslim people stood up to defend the Jewish people. Additionally, the Muslims confronted the official representative of the Ottoman regime and did not identify with him. This can be interpreted as a proof for a centuries old existence of horizontal societal links and relationships among the different believers in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire.⁹

Settlement of Ashkenazi Jews during Austro-Hungarian rule

With the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century, Bosnia

and Herzegovina became an integral part of Central Europe. This resulted in historical turmoil and a civilisational shift of far-reaching consequences. Muslims and Jews adapted to the new circumstances quite fast and experienced this switch as an extraordinary opportunity.

For the Jews, the new orientation was much easier as most of them were entrepreneurs and lived in urban areas. Of the 11,868 Jews who lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1919, the majority lived in the capital city Sarajevo. They constituted 12.32% of the inhabitants of Sarajevo and 0.62% of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. It is remarkable that their population growth between 1879 and 1910 was 24.6%, far higher than that of any other religious group.¹⁰ Ashkenazi Jews and Catholics from Austro-Hungary settled in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was remarkable from a cultural and political perspective, as they spoke a different language and had different cultural and religious traditions. The number of settlers increased to 35% and Ashkenazi Jews comprised one third of all Jews until 1910. They spoke primarily German amongst themselves and this is why their “brothers in faith”, the Sephardim, called them jokingly “Swabians”.

In this important period for Bosnia and Herzegovina, newspapers and journals began publication. They represented different political viewpoints and were published during a time when anti-Semitism in Europe, including in Austro-Hungary, expanded and intensified. Bosniak publications, and public opinion in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general observed this trend in Europe, especially the newspaper *Bošnjak*, which condemned rising anti-Semitism. *Bošnjak* was published much more often and for far longer than any other paper. In many editions, even the title page and the editorial clearly opposed anti-Semitic tendencies in the broader European context, and explicitly

spoke out against such tendencies in Russia and France.

Bošnjak and other journals, such as *Behar* and *Biser*, which were more culturally oriented, emphasised repeatedly that anti-Semitism is foreign to Islam and to Muslim tradition. Since this hatred against Jews occurred in Russia, *Bošnjak* often connected pro-Serbianism with anti-Semitic tendencies. Reading the journals *Behar* and *Biser*, the reader concludes that Jews were an integral part of Islamic civilisation from the first generation of Muslims in Makkah and Madinah up to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jews have been considered an integral part of Bosnian society and accepted unconditionally. They played equally important prominent roles in all civilisational and cultural spheres, as evidenced in literature, poetry, stories and descriptions of everyday life, even in riddles and crossword puzzles. This goes back to the manifold and multi-layered personal contacts and encounters between Muslims and Jews in everyday life over the centuries.

The following quote in Ladino of a young lady who faced problems during her studies in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century reveals the self-awareness and belongingness of the Sephardic Jews to Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Ken se espanta? Ke vengán veremos! Jo vo azer lo mio. Debaldes no nasio jo en Bosna. Batir lo vo komo la lana. I ja, trija muestra bošnjakita.

[Who is afraid? We will see when they come! I will do it my way. I wasn't born in Bosnia for nothing. I will beat the living daylights out of them. And said so, our Bosniak lady gets ready.]¹¹

§

Haggadah

The history of Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina would be incomplete without the Haggadah story. The Haggadah is a manuscript about religious commandments to mark the Pesach, a holiday that celebrates the liberation of Jews from Egyptian slavery. The manuscript comprises 142 pages and 69 miniatures written in Hebrew. After the expulsion of Jews from Spain during the Reconquista in 1492, part of Sephardic Jewish exodus found refuge in Bosnia, bringing a Haggadah with them – now known as the Sarajevo Haggadah. It is considered one of the oldest Haggadahs in the world and an important source for research into the cultural heritage of the Sephardic Jewish community.

The Koen family sold the Haggadah to the National Museum. Since then, it has been considered an integral part of the cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the Second World War, the museum director and humanist Derviš Korkut saved the Haggadah from the Nazi puppet state NDH (Independent State of Croatia) which occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹² Korkut brought the Haggadah to a mosque near the mountain Bjelašnica and hid it between religious Islamic books. Fifty years later, during the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-95), the nation's cultural heritage was again under attack and the National Museum was bombed many times. This time, Director Enver Imamović saved the Haggadah and brought it to the strongroom of the National Bank. Today, the Haggadah is again an integral part of the exhibition at the National Museum, and is available to

be seen by all.

The pious Muslim couple Derviš Korkut and his wife Servet rescued a young Jewish lady named Mira Papo, accepting her as their own child and presenting her to the public as “their cousin Amira” during the Second World War. For this, as well as their display of civic courage and humanity in saving the Haggadah, they were awarded the title of “Righteous Among the Nations” in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.¹³ The historians Anisa Hasanhodžić and Rifet Rustemović state in this regard:

Among the 59 until today recognised Righteous among the Nations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 30 of them are Muslims who individually, as a couple, or as a group saved the lives of their neighbours in cities all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each of their stories bears witness to immense courage, self-sacrifice and the overall good-naturedness of human souls. Neither the worst time of the Ustasha terror regime nor the highest danger those risked who helped Jews could hinder them from remaining good-hearted, showing humanity and being a glimmer of light in such dark times.¹⁴

Saving Jews during the Second World War

During the onerous length of the Second World War, Muslims saved their Jewish neighbours from the Holocaust. What is most remarkable is that the Bosnian Muslims wrote resolutions against hate speech, violence, pogroms and killings for the sake of peace, truth, justice and coexistence. Already in 1941, at the very beginning of the war, the most eminent Muslim citizens requested the

Ustasha regime to cease the killing of Jews and the looting of Jewish property, in addition to Serbs and Roma. The resolutions were written and signed all over Bosnia and Herzegovina; for example in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka, Prijedor, Bijeljina, Tuzla and Zenica. The Sarajevo Resolution was signed by all institutions of the

The pious Muslim couple Derviš Korkut and his wife Servet rescued a young Jewish lady named Mira Papo, accepting her as their own child and presenting her to the public as “their cousin Amira”

Islamic Community and representatives of Muslims, such as the teachers’ association *El Hidaje*, the cultural society *Narodna Uzdanica* and the humanitarian organisation *Merhamet*. There were many hundreds, perhaps even thousands of copies that were circulated as pamphlets all over the former Yugoslavia. Some were even translated into foreign languages.¹⁵

The resolutions clearly condemned the crimes against minorities and emphasised the importance of coexistence. The signatories distanced themselves from those Muslim individuals who participated in these crimes, and also gave information on the killings and expulsions of Muslims, primarily in Eastern Bosnia. Adil Zulfikarpašić, one of the most prominent dissidents in the Bosniak diaspora, claims:

*This was a unique case all over the German occupation zone in Europe. Neither in France, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Austria nor in any other country have citizens protested with their signatures against Hitler’s race politics – only Bosnian Muslims did that.*¹⁶

The historian Mustafa Imamović

stressed that the Serbian side did not respond with such a gesture of civil courage to “protect the Bosniaks from the Chetniks.”¹⁷ The well-known American historian of Croatian origin, Ivo Banac, even claims that these resolutions were a protest addressed to the regime in order to state clearly that the Muslims

do not want to be linked with the Ustasha crimes against the Jews, Serbs and Roma.¹⁸ Similarly, Nada Kisić Kolanović argues, “Eventually, Muslims condemned the pogrom of innocent non-Croat citizens because in their collective mentality there is a deeply rooted rejection of injustice towards the adherents of other faiths.”¹⁹

These resolutions increased the pressure on the Ustasha regime. In Sarajevo alone, more than 1,000 people were arrested, among them around 300 Muslims.²⁰ Estimates say that around 18,000 Jews lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina before the Second World War, with more than 12,500 in Sarajevo, alone. Altogether, around 8,500 Jews were killed during the Holocaust in Sarajevo. Those who survived, mostly with the help of their friends and neighbours, left for Israel. To obtain the required visa for Israel, they had to declare that they would not return to reclaim their property in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The story of the Muslim family Hardaga and the Jewish family Kabiljo is remarkable. Along with his brother Izet and his wife Bahrija, Zejneba and Mustafa

Hardaga saved Joseph and Rifka Kabiljo, their son Benjamin and daughter Tova. The Hardagas were a pious Muslim family, and when the pogroms began, they sheltered the Kabiljo family in their home and saved their lives.

Zejneba's father, Ahmed Sadik also hid his neighbour with the surname Papo in his

house. A famous photograph from 1941 shows Zejneba Hardaga hiding the racist sign on the sleeve of her friend Rifka Kabiljo with her *zar*, a full-body dress that Muslim women wore at that time. The Kabiljo family escaped to Israel where they applied for the families Hardaga and Sadik to receive recognition as the Righteous among the Nations at Yad Vashem. This was approved and Zejneba visited Yad Vashem in 1984 where she planted a tree. Fifty years after the Holocaust, when genocide was committed against the Bosnian Muslims, Zejneba and her family were granted refuge in Israel. Zejneba's daughter Sarah Pećanac even worked at Yad Vashem.²¹

Socialist Yugoslavia and War

Yugoslavia as a state survived after the Second World War, but this time under Communist rule. A new political and social system was established. The new regime undertook several measures to place religious communities under state control and to drive religion from the public sphere as well as from people's minds. As it did after the First World

During the onerous length of the Second World War, Muslims saved their Jewish neighbours from the Holocaust. What is most remarkable is that the Bosnian Muslims wrote resolutions...

War, the state pursued the nationalisation of religious communities' properties, which was often misused and eventually privatised. This included most mosques, *waqfs* (endowments), synagogues, churches and other entities that were also nationalised. The restitution of nationalised property remains

an unsolved problem until today. Some figures estimate the value of nationalised property at several dozen billions Euros.

Regarding community coexistence during this Yugoslav period, the Communist party unified the various national identities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It gathered Muslims and Jews together with Serbs, Croats, and others under the umbrella of "brotherhood and unity". Mixed marriages were very common, particularly in urban areas. Danilo Nikolić, the former president of the Jewish community remembers:

My first neighbours were Džemila and Ramiz Fađan. They lived in the street Tijesna in Sarajevo in the neighbourhood of Bjelave. After 1945 my mother worked the night shift. I slept at my Muslim neighbour's house. Next to their own five children, they gave particular attention to me. After the Second World War people were poor. We slept under one blanket which was stitched out of small pieces of cloth. Everyone knew that Danilo would sleep at the neighbour Fađan's place when mother worked at night. When my mother came back from work, she would first come

to their place. Džemila and Ramiz were like a family to me. Džemila was my aunt and Ramiz my uncle. This is how I called them. After school I would always drop by like at a family's place. There were a lot of such examples.²²

However, at the end of the 1980s the nationalist ideology of Greater Serbia threatened the peace in the whole Balkan region which led to the disintegration of, and aggression against the former republics of Yugoslavia which declared independence on the basis of referendum results when the citizens decided to secede from Yugoslavia. Serbia's president Milosevic pursued a policy of ethnic-cleansing and genocide of the non-Serb, primarily the Bosniak population.

Unfortunately, Croatia's president Tuđman shared Milošević's ideology and pursued a policy of ethnically cleansing Bosnia and Herzegovina of Bosniaks in the areas that his army, the HVO, controlled.

However, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina which lasted from 1992-1995 did not endanger the coexistence of Jews and Muslims. Conversely, it was strengthened during these times of hardship. The planned conference "Sefarad 92" which marked 500 years since the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain and the settlement of Sephardim in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was organised in September 1992 despite the beginning of the war and the shelling of Sarajevo. As for that conference, one of the organisers, Muhamed Nezirović drew the following parallels:

In two distant European peninsulas, the Pyrrhonian and the Balkan, in different

*periods of time, a multicultural community was born which Europe until then had not yet experienced. In the West, one died in the fatal year of 1492 whereas a little earlier another was born in Bosnia which was put in danger in the fatal year of 1992 – here at this place. Both of these countries, both visions on the right to live together – *convivencia* - have been endangered.²³*

The humanitarian organisation *Merhamet* and the Jewish cultural and humanitarian society *La Benevolencija* gave material and sanitary help to all citizens.²⁴ Jews, Muslims and Christians protected and fought within the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and within other important institutions for the multi-ethnic sovereign state.

Another example of the deep rootedness and continuity of Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the Jewish cemeteries that have existed for centuries. Today, the Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo is considered to be the largest in Europe. While during the war Republika Srpska destroyed Muslim graveyards, as witness to their continuous presence, Bosnian Muslims kept and cultivated the Jewish graveyard as a sign of respect towards the native Jews. Similarly, the old Orthodox church in Sarajevo was not damaged even when the city was under siege by Serb forces.

Importance of coexistence in Bosnia-Herzegovina today

The question of coexistence is challenged by the remaining nationalist ideologies which, after war and genocide, aim at dividing politics and society. We are witnesses to a rise in Islamophobia

and anti-Semitism, as well as the glorification of convicted war criminals in the form of murals, memorials, offensive songs that announce new killings and pogroms as well as threatening nationalist rhetoric by individual leading politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region.

Within this context, the recent law on the criminalisation of genocide and holocaust denial is of great importance. The High Representative, Valentin Inzko, at the end of his mandate in July 2021, imposed an addendum to the criminal law which sanctions the glorification of convicted war criminals, genocide denial, crimes against humanity and war crimes – all of it in accordance with European Law. Nonetheless, nationalist Serb and Croat politicians united to abolish that law and are still blocking state institutions. This has greatly concerned the local and international community.²⁵ The implementation of that law would hinder the further destabilisation of societal cohesion and peace and strengthen the rule of law.

On the other hand, others claim that the current crisis cannot threaten the

Today, the Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo is considered to be the largest in Europe. While during the war Republika Srpska destroyed graveyards, as witness to their continuous presence, Bosnian Muslims kept and cultivated the Jewish graveyard as a sign of respect

centuries-old state of coexistence. Some say that the word ‘coexistence’ is not sufficient to describe the depth and intensity of the closeness of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and how they have lived together. A sincere and honest appraisal of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina will confirm this. The following quote from the introduction of the book “Coexistence of

Jews and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina” may serve as a summary and recommendation:

Jews and Muslims, like Catholics and Orthodox, are native inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have lived in peace for centuries. It is not true that there have always been wars, that hatred has always existed and that there is a powder keg that could explode any moment. This narrative is artificial, constructed in nationalist circles and used for ideological goals. There have been many attempts to overrun and destabilise Bosnia and Herzegovina but that is all the more reason for us to talk and to write about our common heritage and common values.²⁶



Endnotes

- 1 Jahiel Kamhi, "Promocija tolerancije i suživota: Podrška braći u zemlji koja danas prolazi kroz težak period", 18.12.2021, <https://mojabih.oslobodjenje.ba/mb/b-v-logovi/promocija-tolerancije-i-suzivota-podrska-braci-u-zemlji-koja-danas-prolazi-kroz-tezak-period-717790>.
- 2 Sefarad potiče iz ladinskog jezika (*s'farad*) i znači, zapadna zemlja, a odnosi se na Španiju. The word "Sephardic" comes originally from Ladino language (*s'farad*) and means "Western country" which was then understood as Spain.
- 3 Behija Zlatar, "Dolazak Jevreja u Sarajevo", u Muhamed Nezirovic, Boris Nilevic and Muhsin Rizvic, eds., *Sefarad* 92, Sarajevo, 1995, str. 59.
- 4 Hamdija Kreševljaković, "Banje u Bosni i Hercegovini" (1462-1916), *Izabrana djela*, knjiga III, Sarajevo, 1991, p.32.
- 5 Muhamed Nezirović, u Muhamed Nezirovic, Boris Nilevic and Muhsin Rizvic, ed., *Sefarad* 92, Sarajevo, 1995, p. 20.
- 6 Muhamed Nezirović, u *Sefarad* 92, 1995, p.26.
- 7 Edward Serotta, <https://www.edwardserotta.org/gallery/siege-of-sarajevo>
- 8 David Kamhi, "Rav Moše Danon i Ruždi-paša – Sarajevski purim i Sarajevska megila", in *Suživot jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, ed. Dževada Šuško, Sarajevo, 2021, p.103-127.
- 9 Enes Karić, "Mitovi i protumitovi o jevrejima u Osmanskoj imperiji", in *Suživot jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, ed. Dževada Šuško, Sarajevo, 2021, p.56.
- 10 Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Bosnien und der Hercegovina vom 10. Oktober 1910, Landesregierung für Bosnien und die Hercegovina, Sarajevo, 1912, XXXVIII – XLII.
- 11 Taken from the story of Laura Papo-Bahoreta "Morena" which is quoted by Nezirović, p.27.
- 12 Marko Attila Hoare, "Suživot i saradnja između jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini tokom Drugog svjetskog rata", in *Suživot jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, edited by Dževada Šuško, Sarajevo, 2021, p.199-200.
- 13 The title "Righteous among the Nations" is an award given by Israel and the Memorial centre Yad Vashem in Jerusalem since 1963 to non-Jews who during the Holocaust risked their lives to save Jews. See more Anisa Hasanhodžić and Rifat Rustemović, "Komsiluk u teoriji i praksi: doprinos muslimana spašavanju Jevreja u Bosni i Hercegovini tokom Drugog svjetskog rata", in *Suživot jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, Sarajevo, 2021, p.188,189, 191-192; Jackie Mtzger, Yael Weinstock Mashbaum, Interview with Davor Bakovic, Son of Yugoslav Partisan and Second-Generation Link to Muslim Righteous Among the Nations, <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/interviews/bakovic.html> (2.1.2022).
- 14 Hasanhodžić and Rustemović, p.189.
- 15 Muhamed Hadžijahić, "Muslimanske rezolucije iz 1941", in *Nasuprot zlu*, Sarajevo, 2019, p.14.
- 16 Quote taken from the text of Mustafa Spahić, "Reakcije na muslimanske rezolucije", in *Nasuprot zlu*, 2019, p.27.
- 17 Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka*, Sarajevo, 1998, p.535.
- 18 Banac, "Bosnian Muslims: from Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Postcommunist Statehood, 1918-1992", u Mark Pinson, ed., *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Their Historic Development from the Middle Ages to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, Harvard University Press, 1993, p.142-143.
- 19 Nada Kisić Kolanović: *Muslimani i hrvatski nacionalizam 1941-1945*, Zagreb, 2009, p.214.
- 20 Rasim Hurem, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu 1941-1945*, Zagreb-Sarajevo, 2016, p.324-325.
- 21 <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/hardaga-sadik.html> (20.1.2022)
- 22 Dževada Šuško, ed., *Suživot jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: primjeri tolerancije od 16. stoljeća do danas*, Sarajevo, 2021, p.226.
- 23 Muhamed Nezirović, p.17.
- 24 Here it needs to be stressed that the network KOHKO was established in 1992 and the abbreviation in Bosnian language stands for the Coordination Committee of Humanitarian Organisations. The members of that Committee were the Muslim humanitarian society Merhamet, the Jewish humanitarian society La Benevolencia, the Catholic humanitarian society Caritas and the Serb humanitarian society Dobrotvor. The aim was to provide support to the citizens of Sarajevo during the war.
- 25 AJC Urges Bosnia-Herzegovina to Maintain Legal Ban on Holocaust, Genocide Denial, 8.12.2021, <https://www.ajc.org/news/ajc-urges-bosnia-herzegovina-to-maintain-legal-ban-on-holocaust-genocide-denial>
- 26 Dževada Šuško, "Bosna i Hercegovina – zemlja koja stoljećima svjedoči zajedničko življenje Jevreja i muslimana", in *Suživot Jevreja i muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini: od 16. stoljeća do danas*, Sarajevo, str. 9.



مؤسسة قرطبة

The Cordoba Foundation

Cultures in Dialogue.



Great Mosque at Córdoba, Spain



Houses of Parliament, London, UK

The Cordoba Foundation (TCF) is an independent strategic think-tank that works to promote intercultural dialogue and positive coexistence through a range of activities including research and publications, training and capacity building, policy briefings and dialogues. The Foundation takes its name from the city of Córdoba - the European metropolis which was once a symbol of human excellence and intellectual ingenuity, where cultures, civilisations and ideas thrived. Embodying this spirit, TCF today facilitates the meeting of minds

to advance understanding and respect for one another. Our activities include:

- Structured consultation and advisory services
- Face-to-face interaction with decision-makers and figures of authority
- In-house research
- Workshops, seminars and debates on pertinent issues
- Consultancy Training and capacity-building Publications,
- Periodicals and Journals
- Resourceful website and knowledge database



info@thecordobafoundation.com
www.thecordobafoundation.com

Twitter @CordobaFoundati(The Cordoba Foundation)

Author Profile

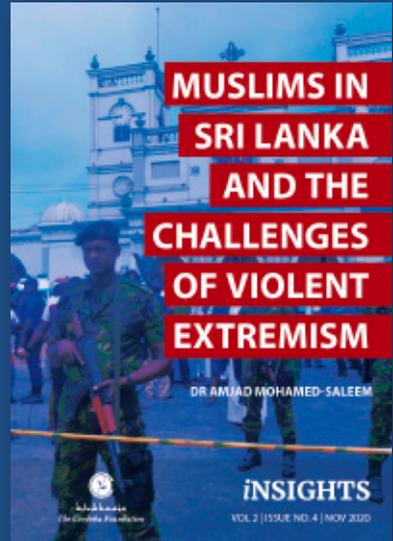
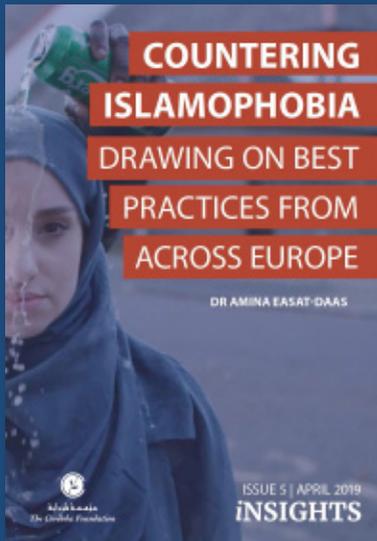
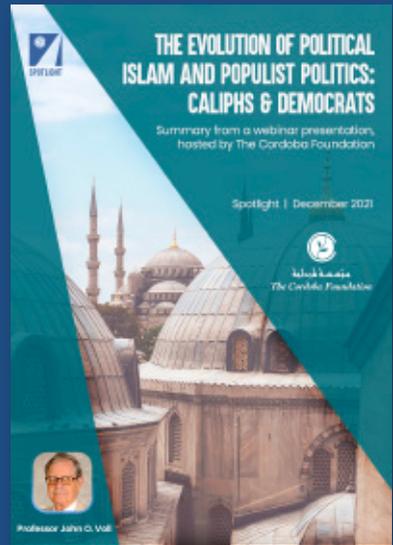
Dr Dževada Šuško



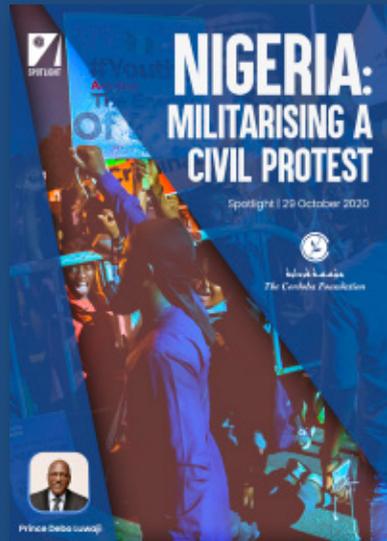
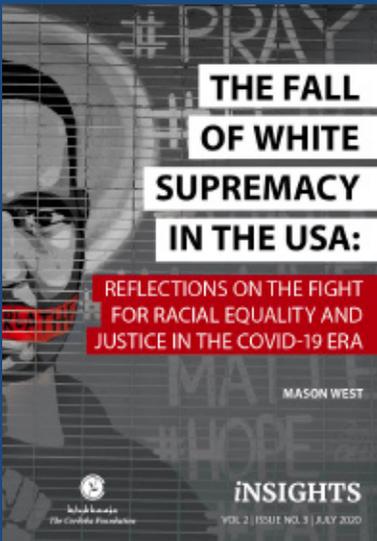
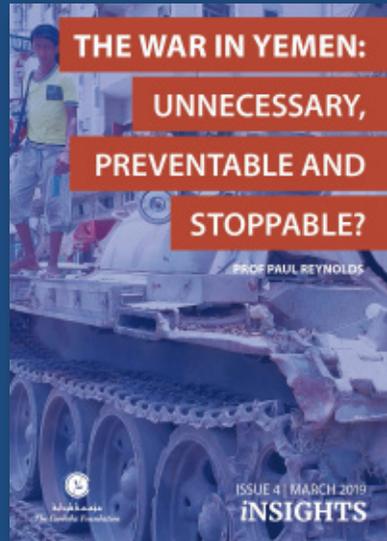
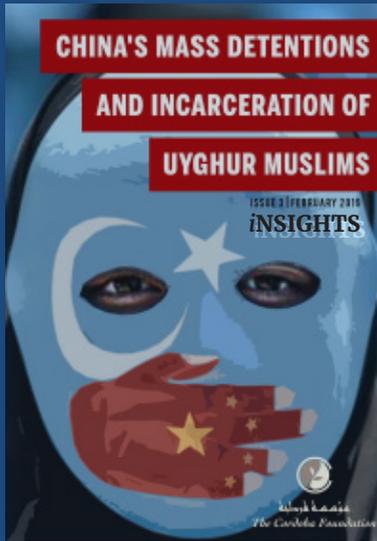
A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR for International Relations and Chief-of-Office for International Cooperation at the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Dževada grew up in Germany where she completed most of her studies in history, political science and cultural anthropology at the universities of Heidelberg and Hamburg. She undertook several studies abroad, such as in Florence, Madrid, Ottawa and Ramallah, and speaks several languages. Her academic focus is European history, society and politics; Islam and Muslims in Europe; religion and politics; human rights; interreligious relations; intercultural communication; soft diplomacy and women's issues. She has published several books, including, *The Coexistence of Jews and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Examples of Tolerance Since the 16th Century* (Elkalem, 2021), and *Muslims and Europeans: Diasporal and Migrant Identities of Bosniaks* (Brill, 2019).

Dževada is involved in NGOs, such as the Centre for Education and Research Nahla, which works on the empowerment of women, the Centre for Advanced Studies in Sarajevo, which addresses contemporary issues on Islam and Muslims, and the Committee for Freedom of Religion and Belief, which monitors violations of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



All back issues of our publications available free to download



insights



مؤسسة قرطبة

The Cordoba Foundation

info@thecordobafoundation.com
www.thecordobafoundation.com

Cultures in Dialogue.



Twitter @CordobaFoundati(The Cordoba Foundation)