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## Cardinal Franjo Kuharic

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# Reconciliation takes time to grow

Franjo Kuharic, the Roman Catholic cardinal of Zagreb, Croatia, received the Schiller Institute delegation on April 13, and gave a thorough briefing about the complex historical, political, and religious situation in Bosnia and Croatia. While hopeful about the possibility of reconciliation in the future, he stressed that this needs time to grow and cannot be pushed from the outside. He emphasized that there should be forgiveness, and an end to hatred, which is what the Catholic Church is trying to contribute in this situation.

He began by outlining the situation before the war, when the Bosnian population was 44% Muslim, 31% Serbian, and 18% Croatian. In 1991, some 95% of the population of Croatia voted in a referendum for independence, and so did 66% of Bosnians (because most of the Serbian population did not participate in the elections after Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic ordered a boycott). Karadzic at that time warned that if the referendum did not go according to his wishes, there would be war. At that time, there were two systems in one country, national and socialist, with Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic representing a synthesis of both. The war started with the Serbians tearing apart former Yugoslavia, "cleansing" and expelling everyone according to ethnic ideas.

In Bosnia, both victims of this aggression, Croats and Muslims, started fighting each other. At that time, Cardinal Kuharic explained, he issued urgent appeals for an end to the conflict, calling for the ethnic groups to live together; this is Bosnia's destiny, he stressed.

In this war, on the Croatian side, whole parishes were completely or massively destroyed. In Sarajevo, before the war there were 145 parishes with 528,000 Catholics; now 99 of those no longer exist, and 350,000 Catholics have been "cleansed." In Banja Luka, where 100,000 Catholics lived and there were 50 parishes, now there are only 5,000 Catholics left. Churches and mosques have been destroyed; out of 16 mosques that previously existed, not a single one remains.

With the Dayton Accord, situations like that of the Posavina corridor remain unresolved. Some 160,000 Croats and Muslims were expelled from that area, and Serbia now controls it. The big question is, can these people, under Dayton, freely return to their homes? "Only if everybody can return, can there be democracy," said Cardinal Kuharic.

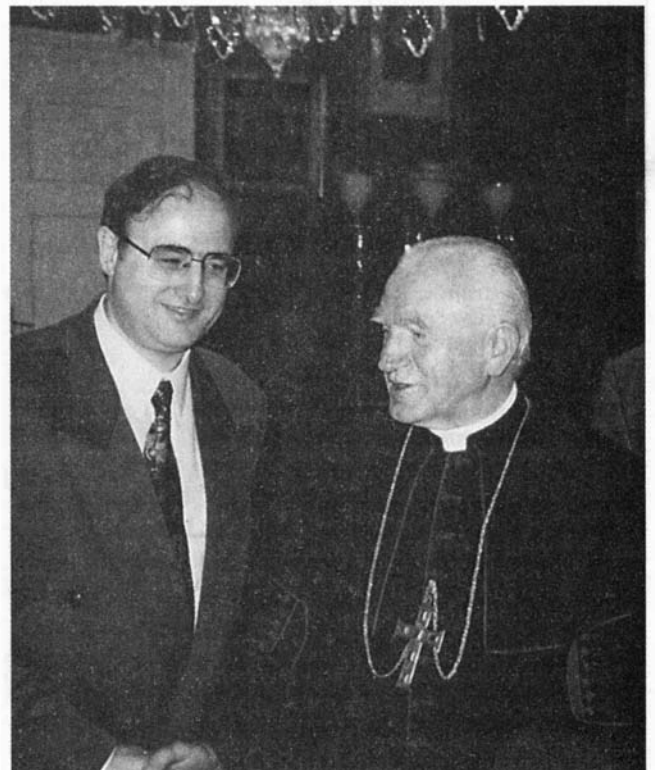
### The political problem

The problem is the politics, he explained. Material, spiritual, moral, and political actions and help are needed, but these must conform to ethical norms. Not enough was done to stop the aggression, right at the beginning, by Europe, the U.S.A., and the UN. "It seems that some green light was given," the cardinal said. How was it that for three years, 400,000 people in Sarajevo could be encircled? "Sarajevo was a big concentration camp."

Now, we are in the post-Dayton era. On the positive side, one can say that the war is over, there is no fighting now. That is good, but all the elements of the accord must be fulfilled. This peace is not just; political corrections need to be made, and there needs to be a dialogue.

There were several meetings between the Orthodox Church leaders and the Catholic side during the war, the cardinal reported. Several appeals for peace were issued, but they did not influence the situation. "The goals of the war were political, not religious."

Last May, the patriarch of Moscow, Aleksii, invited the cardinal for a meeting in Belgrade. The cardinal instead proposed to meet in Sarajevo, because, in this completely surrounded city, everybody was suffering. This was accepted. Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Pavle came, Cardinal Puljic of Sarajevo and Cardinal Kuharic were present. Rejs Ulema



*Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, archbishop of Zagreb and primate of Croatia, greets Umberto Pascali of the Committee to Save the Children of Bosnia-Herzegovina.*

Mustafa Cerić was invited to attend, as the highest Muslim leader of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but he did not come. After that meeting, both Catholic cardinals visited him, and asked why he did not attend. He replied that this was his personal protest, because the Serbian Orthodox were not protesting the genocide against the Muslims.

Now, hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for the conflicts to be resolved, to go back to their homes. But the political, economic, and religious climate must be created in which people can go back.

Then there was the Croatian liberation of the Krajina/Knin area. The majority of the Serbian population left, even though Cardinal Kuharić, as well as Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, appealed for them to stay. What were the reasons for their leaving?

1. A psychological and political reason: They could not accept living in a Croatian state, since they had been indoctrinated to believe that wherever Serbians live, there is the Serbian state.

2. There was a military order by the Serbian leadership for them to leave.

3. The destruction which Serbs had inflicted on Croatian houses and churches, and the massacres against the population. In many cases, it is no longer possible even to recognize

the sites where the churches had been. Those who had contributed to this, did not want to wait around for the Croats to return.

The cardinal described how, nevertheless, the people want to return to their homes more than anything else. He receives postcards from people, who say, "My house has been completely destroyed, but I am happy, that now I have returned." These people had to live as refugees for the last four years, relying on the help of others, and now they have their freedom back again, and they are on their own land. It is very important to help the reconstruction of these private houses, he said.

In Bosnia, there is a complicated situation. There are the most helpless people—children, invalids, and those who do not have homes. The world's politicians are not doing what they should do. But after all, this world has a heart, which was shown in the humanitarian help.

Conflicts start, said the cardinal, when principles are separated from interests. I give bread to those in need, he said, not because I want to make them Catholic. Help must be without conditions. If you place conditions, the game of interests starts. People need bread, because they are hungry.

### A moral crisis in the world

"The world is in a general moral crisis; we have collectivism, hedonism, and liberalism." Under communism, the people were told that faith is negative, that it has no future, that it will lead backwards. Positive values were called negative; materialism was called positive and scientific; values were turned upside down.

Recently, the cardinal said, I was visited by a banker, whom I asked, "Do banks have a heart?" Bishop Komarica of Banja Luka once wrote a letter to a member of the diplomatic corps about the situation in Banja Luka. The ambassador gave this letter to his government and later told Bishop Komarica: "My government answered, that they have different information than you as bishop are supplying." The bishop asked the ambassador: "Are we people for you? Do we have a right to exist?" The ambassador replied, "For me, you are; but for my government, not."

The process of reconciliation must grow up from within. One should not retreat from this idea, but it is not a political issue. If you have only one idea, it is always simplistic. American leaders have proposed that all the leaders of the Balkan nations should come to America to pray together. But I cannot imagine Milosević praying there, said the cardinal.

"I see the situation from the inside, you from the outside. Once I gave a press conference in Sarajevo, and one journalist told me, 'I have been in Sarajevo for 10 days, and I understand the situation.' I replied, 'I have been here for 70 years, and I still do not understand it.'"

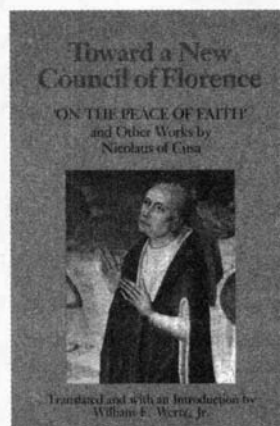
Cardinal Kuharić concluded by blessing the delegation and its work.

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