

Goodbye, Bosnia, I'm going to Sarajevo

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There is a well-known saying that jocularly describes the vast difference between the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its capital; it was still often used before the war: »Goodbye, Bosnia, I'm going to Sarajevo.« The capital was and is the big Other for the surrounding country. People perceive it as a world of its own. It is, indeed, a multireligious and multi-ethnic place - it has always been a place of various cultures, the centre of multicultural life in all Bosnia and Herzegovina, indeed in the whole region. Fruitful relations between Islam, Christianity and Judaism had been established long ago and have been officially formulated by the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The percentage of Jews in the general population is now comparatively tiny, but historically they have had an important and significant share in the relations between the different religions. The relationship between Muslims and Jews in particular has been of the greatest importance during the five hundred years of their living together in Bosnia. It always reached a high level of mutual understanding and respect, except during the years of World War II. Numerous examples throughout history prove this. The most impressive one occurred in 1819 when the Muslims of the Bazaar of Sarajevo saved the ten most prominent Jews of the city and Rabbi Moshe Danon whom the Bosnia governor Rushdie Pasha wanted to put to death.

During the Second World War neighbours saved the life and the property of Jews at the risk of their own lives. Some were killed in concentration camps because they had tried to save their neighbours and friends. During the last war in 1992–1995 there were numerous examples of mutual neighbourly help; this time the Jews especially helped their fellow citizens to survive by providing food, clothing, footwear, medical equipment and medicine, a telephone connection and postal links with relatives. About 1,500 residents of Sarajevo managed to get out of the besieged town along with their Jewish neighbours. Today these relations are safeguarded by national associations that have signed an agreement to work together. So far, they already have digitized their various periodicals and have, among other things, organized dance events and exhibitions of their artists.