

DUST

BOOK TWO

PART FOUR

BY THE WATERS OF THE BOSPORUS

'Change happens when those who do not usually speak are heard by those who do not usually listen'

BLEAK MOUNTAIN

Kahlenberg is the last peak of a chain of mountains, the Alps, that stretches westwards across Austria, Switzerland to France. It overlooks Vienna and beyond to the Puszta, the Hungarian Plain. Kahl means bleak. In 1683, troops from several European nations, and led by the Polish general Jan Sobieski, gathered on top of this bleak hill. They planned to rout the Ottoman army which was besieging the city, and drive the Muslim invaders across the plains of Eastern Europe back to Turkey. As Sobieski's troops prepared for battle, they would have surveyed with terror the imposing Ottoman army, then considered invincible, camped on the slopes below.

The result of that battle signified a decisive demarcation that separated Christian Europe from the Muslim world. To commemorate this momentous victory an awe-inspiring monument might have been appropriate: a cathedral or a gigantic cross to ward off any future attacks by the enemy. However, the modesty of the church built in gratitude by the municipality of Vienna, and dedicated to Sobieski and his troops,

suggests a different understanding of history: an awareness of the vulnerability of nations, the frailty of borders, and the ebb and flow of imperial fortunes.

Like the Romans over a thousand years earlier, the Ottomans recognized the strategic value of the city's position on Europe's biggest river. The Ottomans reckoned on taking the rest of Europe easily, once they had seized this significant outpost of the Roman Empire, and then attempted to take the city on several occasions. Each time they laid siege, Europe, sensing danger, came to the rescue.

The Ottoman Empire had constituted a threat for several centuries, but after this decisive battle in the seventeenth century, it seemed unlikely that Islam would ever succeed in taking over Europe.

On the day we visited Bleak Mountain, a large group of tourists from Turkey were admiring the panorama, while a guide patiently explained its history, and the defeat of their ancestors. The people from Istanbul gazed down on the woods clinging to the precipitous slopes and covered in blazing autumn colours. They looked at the Danube flowing round the mountain from the left, having passed through the valley of the Wachau region with its steep slopes covered in vineyards overlooked by ruins of crusader castles, and several luxuriously ornate baroque monasteries. The tourists noted the river going eastwards, skirting the north of the city, and then disappearing into the misty distance, across the Hungarian plain towards the Balkans.

The panorama is impressive, because it takes in the famous Vienna woods, the vineyards on curved slopes above the city's posh suburbs, and on which the Ottoman army once camped. The whole city is laid out with every church and city monument visible. The view explains its history.

A larger more vainglorious monument to the victory of 1683 might have tempted fate. As it turned out, despite the battles and skirmishes of history, which have attempted to keep the world neatly divided between races and creeds, the perpetual

and unstoppable movement of peoples across boundaries has made the world a single melting pot of all races and traditions. Vienna could not avoid becoming multi-racial and multi-cultural, as these Turkish tourists proved.

There is a direct link between Vienna and the Ferhadija Mosque.

A few years before Sobieski's victory which so decisively ended the Ottoman objective to conquer and Islamicise Europe, the Austrians had paid a ransom for Count Ausberg, one of their generals, captured and imprisoned by the Ottoman army. That money paid for the erection of the Ferhadija Mosque.

Apart from what happened on Bleak Mountain in 1683, the panorama tells another story. Few cities in the world have such a magnificent setting, so close to nature and at the same time enjoying the culture and social benefits of a metropolis with its rich intellectual and artistic heritage. The Danube however, and not the city, dominates the view. One of the main arteries of Europe, the river presented Vienna with the opportunity of becoming a major trading centre. A large United Nations building on an island in the river now gives Vienna its international credentials. The Danube then runs its course across plains, through gorges and further mountain ranges, gathering the waters of numerous powerful tributaries such as the River Sava, which have all played significant parts in their countries' histories. The Danube enters the Black Sea through a delta of widely spreading swamps. There at the time of the Roman Empire, in a region where water and land merge, the exiled poet Ovid composed his final life's work, the *Metamorphoses*, a compendium of myths on the theme of transformation. Humans become plants and animals. Creatures become human. The poet observed and pondered the delta's shifting watery landscape, a context in which he perceived humanity as being also in perpetual material and spiritual flux.

ARTISTS IN EXILE

Before returning to Bosnia in October 2002 we attended an exhibition of Bosnian artists, at the Bosnia Institute at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith London.

Artists, film makers, and actors came from Banja Luka, but it turned out they were exiles. They had forged successful careers in other part of Europe, and looked unlikely ever to return. Not all of them were victims of ethnic cleansing. Two were Bosnian Serbs who disapproved of nationalist excesses, and preferred to live and work abroad.

Igor Tojcic came from a prosperous Serb family in Banja Luka: his father had been involved in politics before the war; his uncle had been a well-known and respected lawyer, who helped Muslims escape the terror and, for his own safety, had to leave the city himself. Igor settled in London before the war broke out, and was therefore in a good position to help look after refugee children who had lost their parents. For years he worked on different forms of art and theatre therapy, to teach the children how to handle their traumas. As a result many of these children were able to enter schools and proceeded to do exceptionally well.

Igor planned to return to Banja Luka, and work with young people on similar theatre programs, helping them deal not only with their traumas, but, equally significantly, with a deeper issue concerning the myth of cyclical history which stipulated that wars and conflicts between the ethnic groups in Bosnia were inevitable and had to recur every second generation.

Irina Taskovski was a documentary film maker, and had organized a film festival in Banja Luka in 2001, but preferred to work from Prague and London, where she was able to establish a secure administration from which to operate. She wanted to strengthen the film base in Banja Luka.

Zeljka Jovic, another Banja Lukan, had found fame throughout Europe as a conceptual artist. She spoke, without much enthusiasm, of creating a studio for herself and other artists in her home town.

Her installation of a replica mill wheel which I described earlier haunts me, which is why I keep returning to it. The installation reminds me of the rushing streams in and around Travnik. Her wheel is lit from inside, to illuminate a series of film stills printed on paper strips framing a photo of a female gymnast performing a series of flip turns on perpetual loop. An old sepia photograph of a Bosnian mill wheel is projected on a screen stretched across a curtain behind the sculpture. The viewer has to set the wheel in motion by turning a handle. It then continues on its own. When she first showed it to me, in an adjacent room the farmyard cacophony of a theatre troupe from Sarajevo, doing warm-up vocal exercises, intensified the experience. The installation distilled memories of a country that had exiled these artists.

Zeljko Jovic's gymnast did one back flip after the other, the paper rustled as the wheel turned, and the light shone warmly, as it projected the image of old Bosnia on the screen. The longer I looked, the more the installation expressed a harmonious equilibrium between the individual, the environment, and the past: soothing and thought-provoking. This powerfully suggestive work of art should be permanently housed in Banja Luka, where tradition, history and the daily round of life for people from every community had been brutally interrupted.

Igor Tojic discussed with us ways of creating a piece of theatre, in which people from the different ethnic groups and religions could work together, and not only cooperate, but share in the telling of each other's stories. Theatre presents a safe setting for people to unload the burden of their history without feeling threatened or being threatening.

He reminded us of two myths, either of which could provide the kernel of the theatre piece.

One told the true story from Banja Luka of a Muslim girl and a Serb boy who fell in love, like Romeo and Juliet. Suffering parental opposition, the couple committed suicide in public, one leaping from the minaret of the Ferhadija Mosque and the other drowning in the Vrbas. They intended the sacrifice to heal the divisions in their city. Superstition protects the candle which remains permanently lit on a pile of stones near the castle grounds, even though the nationalist victors preferred to forget this story.

The other myth concerns a national psychosis which insists that every half century, during the lifetime of each second generation, neighbours from different ethnic groups must break all ties of friendship and co-operation, and have to start killing each other. This tradition is accepted by Bosnians as a fact of life. It was the way things always have been and always will be. So, for example, a doctor who has all his working life served his community, treating the sick from every group, without considering their background, over night, as it were obeying a higher command, turns into a militia man and starts to massacre his patients. The doctor is sorry about this, he doesn't want to do it, but it has to be: it is his destiny. This myth still remains uncontested in Bosnia, and the theatre piece should challenge the myth's seemingly incontrovertible truth, and deal with this national psychosis.

Igor Tojcic, Irina Taskovski and Zeljko Jovic inspired us with the quality of their work and achievement. These gifted artists were in exile from their homeland, either self-imposed as a protest at what happened there, or had been driven out. How could Banja Luka afford to lose people of this calibre? None of them felt any urgent reason to return. Apart from Igor Tojcic's enthusiasm for our project, the other two needed persuasion to be involved. Sitting in an Islington pub with successful film maker Irina

Taskovski, we wondered how these artists' skills and sensibilities could enhance the life and reputation of the city, which had become a shell, a husk of its former self.

OCTOBER 2002 IN BOSNIA

'You would never know Sarajevo had been in a war!' Adnan announced proudly as he drove us and two of our friends from the airport to the hotel. Andrew Barr is a television producer, film maker and photographer. His wife Liz Barr is an author.

Clean, smooth modern structures had replaced the shelled and burnt out tower blocks, government buildings and offices that once lined the main road into the city centre. Nevertheless, we were still passing row after row of scarred walls, pockmarked by the blasts of thousands of shells.

Gypsies occupied these tower blocks that awaited repair: the gaping windows open to the elements; walls, roofs and floors threatening to collapse into rubble. Snipers shot at people from these buildings during the war, killing men, women and children.

Adnan saw the progress, but Sarajevo remained a wounded city. Andrew and Liz Barr could only see the damage.

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This visit to Bosnia marked a significant next step in our work and for this reason we brought advisers and friends along to witness, observe and comment.

We aimed to establish the Banja Luka Civic Forum within a year, and make it a model for other towns and regions, not only in Bosnia.

A year ago, in September 2001, just ten days after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, we hosted a consultation at Coventry, bringing together the political and religious leaders of Banja Luka along with the city's mayor, members of his cabinet, businessmen and teachers. In the presence of the High Representative, Prime Ministers and Presidents of both the Federation of Bosnia and

the Republika Srpska, statements on future cooperation were made and agreements signed between the three communities from a city, where ethnic cleansing had represented 'the worst abuses of human rights in Europe since the Second World War' (Peter Maas, *Love Thy Neighbour*).

A month later these representatives from Banja Luka formed themselves into the Coventry Group, a first step in establishing moves towards peace, reconciliation and economic regeneration in their city. They invited us to continue working and advising them. For the following twelve months we raised funds from the Conflict Prevention Fund, made available by the British Foreign Office in gratitude for our achievement, and to allow our work to continue. The grant would help us establish an office in Banja Luka to manage and administer a civic forum. This office consisted of Dejan Jovanovic, a Serb journalist, and Magda Paranos, a Muslim graduate, both from Banja Luka, whom we had selected to be the project managers and whose first task was to produce a report on Banja Luka. The report would provide a situation analysis of the city, and help identify the chief issues, find allies, and ways of improving the situation there.

The basic principle of the forum could be expressed in the words of JD O'Brien:

'Change happens when those who do not usually speak are heard by those who do not usually listen'

JD O'Brien was a director of the Scottish Civic Forum, where we decided to send Dejan and Majda for training.

An international scandal concerning trade in weapons with Iraq was ruffling feathers in the Republika Srpska. The people involved had been sacked, but the scandal underlined the Republika Srpska's reputation as being Europe's rogue state: a black hole in Europe as well as Bosnia. This state of affairs would not improve. The

international community expressed reluctance to establish business, and give money, to a corruptly run country, where the issues of ethnic cleansing were not being addressed, returnees still finding it hard to reclaim homes and property. So the Bosnian Serbs in charge looked where they could for business. Trade in illegal arms was not the only profitable shady dealing. Human trafficking, prostitution and drugs continue to find safe routes through the Republika Srpska.

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On our way to Bled in Slovenia, where we intended to spend two quiet days planning the civic forum and how to take the Ferhadija project further, Blaz, a Slovenian student, explained why. He had to drive us there from the border of Croatia and Slovenia because Adnan had been refused a visa. Since the break-up of the former Federation of Yugoslavia, the separate countries restricted and continue to restrict travel by nationals from one region to another, although internationals are not affected. Since the end of the Bosnia War, Slovenia discouraged visits from Serbia and Bosnia, fearing immigration: a policy which victimised people from those countries, who had once been able to travel freely across the whole region. This attitude based more on malice than common sense remains confusing for nationals and internationals alike. The different countries are unwilling to acknowledge each other politically.

Blaz told us he planned to spend his annual holiday in Banja Luka, saying how much he looked forward to it. Despite Banja Luka having the worst reputation and therefore being the last place to go on holiday, it had now become a Mecca for young people.

Blaz explained that he and his mates preferred the laid-back atmosphere of Bosnians, who knew how to enjoy themselves. Drink being cheap, people chilled out better than anywhere else. The new nations of Slovenia and Croatia were rushing to join the European Union, where only economic growth mattered. Young people now reacted against this conservative dependency on questionable material security, which meant price rises and more expensive standards of living. The social, economic, and political collapse of Bosnia sentenced the country to years, if not decades, of being refused entry to the club of richer more stable nations. This isolation and cheapness attracted young people from across the region.

Bosnians are known for their generosity in sharing with strangers, regardless of circumstances; and in giving time. Witness the teeming café culture, even in the poorest towns. Neither the war nor ethnic cleansing could eradicate these relaxed attitudes.

There is a hoary old story about a rich businessman from Northern Europe lecturing a poor but contented Italian peasant. Irritated by the poor man sitting all day fishing, the rich man extols the benefits of capitalism. The Italian peasant might have been a Bosnian. The businessman tells the fisherman how to make a fortune, by working hard rather than idling his days away. ‘And then what will I do when I’m rich?’ asks the poor man. ‘You can spend your days fishing,’ replies the rich man triumphantly. ‘But I’m doing that already,’ says the poor man.

On our next visit to Bosnia we flew to Sarajevo so Adnan could drive us to Mostar where we were scheduled to meet the architects of the reconstructed Mostar Bridge, for advice on how to rebuild historic buildings like the Ferhadija Mosque.

THE MOSTAR BRIDGE

THE SOURCE OF THE RIVER BUNA

The source of the River Buna can be found a few miles south west of Mostar. The river gushes in mighty flood from the base of a massive wall of granite towering above the valley. The rock face rises sheer for hundreds of feet, and only birds can reach cracks in the granite to nest in nooks and crannies above the foaming waters. The source is not a quiet trickle. The mountain gives birth to a fully fledged river, which sets off tumbling and roaring down the valley to join the Neretva on its way to the Adriatic Sea.

The spot is popular with Bosnians, who come on hot summer days to enjoy the fresh air around the foaming waters, cool from the depths of the mountain. The rock face defies human approach, rearing up into the sky, and fringed on top by trees looking tiny in the distance. The river emerges in a cascade: an unstoppable force of nature. The presence side by side of monumental calm and hectic activity reflected our experience of the country and its people. At the awe-inspiring start of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a low rumbling tremolando is followed by octaves, from the whole orchestra, striding with the intimidating grandeur of this rock face.

Adnan always knew where to take us, planning pleasant surprises and showing off the spectacular beauty of his country.

Well qualified, he did not want to emigrate, even though opportunities frequently offered themselves. The only times he lost his cool and became uncharacteristically rude and hurtful happened on those occasions when he met young Bosnians moaning about their life, and how better it could be elsewhere. He did not tolerate such defeatism, and laid into the unfortunate whiners so forcefully, that they were shamed into silence.

Adnan saw the potential in Bosnia. Life could be good again here. Never forgetting his country's dark and complex history, he was proud of its traditions, telling us how Serbs and Croats, in the past, described Muslim Bosnia as the 'flower of the Balkans'. However, twelve years later, married with three children, despair at the lack of progress in his country, made him question his former optimism for the first time..

For now, pride in Bosnia's potential gave him chutzpah when talking to superiors.

Persuading the Turkish ambassador to be present at the first meeting of the Ferhadija Mosque committee and seeing him pull a face, Adnan had wagged a finger: 'Be there! It was your fault in the first place!' The ambassador had laughed, and sent a deputy.

The graceful arch of the ancient bridge, high over the River Neretva in Mostar, has long been one of the most familiar landmarks in Bosnia, known worldwide: a feat of medieval engineering and a symbol of unity between the Catholic and Muslim halves of the city.

When Catholic Croats dynamited the bridge on November 9 1993, filming the act, the world was appalled.

Warring nations used to consider the destruction of buildings as collateral damage, a regrettable by-product of conflict. In the distant past, monuments of conquered empires were plundered, and allowed to crumble, but not annihilated. Since Kristallnacht, the burning of synagogues in Germany in 1938, removing all traces of such significant monuments has come to represent a deliberate act of wiping out the culture and heritage of a particular ethnic group, sapping its desire to survive, so making ethnic cleansing more thorough. As a policy, this worked efficiently in Bosnia. With the international community's connivance the country ended up more divided than ever in its history, and each community now vigorously defends its separate interests, ensuring that those driven out do not return, or should even wish to.

Since religion defines the communities in Bosnia, and religious leaders have more authority over their people than politicians, the religious significance of the Ferhadija Mosque as a cultural heritage site presented a problem for the international community. The Mostar Bridge, being a civic structure, transcended cultural divisions by linking them; so reconstructing it became an act of healing, and a refusal to let extremist vandals have the last word. The World Bank agreed to sponsor the bridge project because of its historic significance, and practical use to the community. The World Bank, UNESCO, and other similar organizations, steered clear of projects with religious significance, so the Ferhadija Mosque could not be in their remit, despite the similarity between the projects as heritage sites.

For centuries, wealthy entrepreneurs and bankers donated large proportions of their profits to building and decorating churches and mosques: the glories of their particular cultures. But now that religions have tarnished their reputation, because of allegiance to violent nationalist and extremist political movements, the rational world of finance and business give them a wide berth.

A Muslim, Rusmir Ciscic, and a Catholic, Tihomir Rozic, shared the directorship of the Mostar Bridge Project.

The chief purpose of our meeting was for us to learn about the specific framework of a heritage project, the mistakes made, and the differences between reconstructing a civic and a religious monument. The meeting helped define an administrative structure and alerted us to the problems of raising funds for a religious building.

Twenty other buildings and ‘ancillary objects’ were part of the reconstruction program, including ‘three buildings of three nations’: the Orthodox Metropolitan Palace, the Croatian Nagradek Cultural Centre and the University Library.

The whole program cost fifteen and a half million dollars. The World Bank provided a four million dollar loan, to be paid back over ten years with a low interest of 1.5%.

Italy gave three million dollars, Turkey one million, Holland two million, Croatia six hundred thousand, and Mostar itself two million, with the rest being raised across Europe.

UNESCO controlled the professional side of the project. Without UNESCO there would be no progress. They sent a team of ten experts to supervise, meeting two or three times a year and deciding on the next stages. The Aga Khan Organization and several American foundations worked on other projects around the bridge, including educating young people on how to take care of and maintain old buildings along the lines we planned for the Ferhadija Mosque project.

Two thousand monuments still needed to be reconstructed in the region. These would open up opportunities for employment and tourism. Visitors to the nearby shrine of Medjugorje were already being diverted to Mostar, although the links between the shrine and Croatian nationalists meant that Catholics had ambiguous feelings about the Mostar Bridge. However, tourists, who might not be aware of the political allegiances of the shrine, would appreciate the bridge as a site worth visiting.

Tihomir Rozic described the elegance of the bridge, its arch, the harmony and equality of its dimensions: twenty eight metres on each side from the central point, and twenty to twenty five metres high: a unique structure in the Ottoman Empire, which is why Turkey took special interest in the project.

Necessary materials could be easily identified, but not the labour and work plans. The nature of each reconstruction had to be researched. This explained the presence of many different foreign agencies, all wanting to learn from the project.

After a geological survey, the stones would be recovered and the foundations studied. After that a tender would be made for completing the arch of the bridge parallel to repairing the foundations.

The Turkish firm Demarel undertook the reparation. Originally the firm first wanted complete control of the project, but, since many world nations were involved, it withdrew and offered just a million dollars, agreeing to build the foundations.

The particular problems of cultural heritage projects consisted of keeping to traditional methods of construction, using the same materials and bearing in mind the repair of original imperfections. All one thousand and eighty eight stones needed to come from the same quarry. Non-rusting Swedish iron, which did not expand and break the stones, was necessary to strengthen the bridge. In the final phase, once the stones had been laid to within three to four centimetres of accuracy they would be hand-polished and finished.

The bridge aimed to be opened in 2004. Other companies working in tandem and with a Croatian company, Omega, in charge, and starting the next year, took charge of rebuilding the two towers on either side.

Finally Tihomir Rozic declared: 'Don't use modern construction with concrete. You cannot achieve finer results than following the ancient tradition.'

Rusmir Cistic explained the organization. First, the city council, made up of Croats, Muslims and Serbs, agreed on the need to rebuild the bridge. Secondly, the three religious leaders, including Bishop Peric, signed the document and gave their agreement. Thirdly, the government of Bosnia granted permission. Only then did the World Bank assent to forming a Project Coordination Unit for building the bridge, insisting on all the posts being taken by representatives of each community: a Muslim accountant, a Croat and Muslim director etc., with translators working in English and the local language. Skilled professionals could come from any group, their qualifications mattering most. The World Bank provided management training. Finally a decision was made about space, what needed repair, the equipment to be purchased, and when work should start.

The World Bank set twenty two questions and tasks before releasing funds. Each had to be signed by both directors, to test a hundred per cent cooperation. The Project Coordination Unit was accountable to the World Bank. Supply and financial documents needed the World Bank stamp. Two World Bank experts visited the site four times a year for two to three days, and the Project Coordination Unit sent reports every six months to the World Bank, signed by both directors and the treasury minister. They opened an account in Mostar, and the World Bank stipulated that the city of Mostar should provide ten percent of the cost of the project: so for every ninety thousand dollars loaned by the World Bank, ten thousand had to be given by the city.

Willing cooperation, not forced, was crucial for the success of the project. The majority of the citizens of Mostar could hardly wait for the bridge to be reconstructed.

Tihomir Rozic said: ‘The best organization in the world will have no effect if there is no change in the situation in Banja Luka. The politicians must take responsibility.’

Rusmir Cacic added: ‘Politicians must publicly support the mosque, especially Bishop Jefrem, and loudly.’

He quoted Paddy Ashdown, the new High Representative, saying recently: ‘When we arrest Mladic and Karadjic, when the Ferhadija Mosque and the Mostar Bridge are rebuilt, then Bosnia and Herzegovina will be united.’

Paddy Ashdown would turn out to be mistaken. In 2014, years after the arrest of Mladic and Karadjic, the Mostar Bridge had long been completed, and the Ferhadija Mosque had reached the final stages of reconstruction. But Bosnia was more divided than ever.

Rusmir Cacic, a Croat, commented that the bridge had been destroyed not by Croats but by sick minds. In the same way sick minds destroyed the Ferhadija Mosque.

They advised us to make the reconstruction a multi-cultural event, and pay attention to media strategy, then promised to discuss our project with the World Bank.

After the meeting we looked around Mostar. A year before, we had looked at ruins and rubble. Now the whole city was a building site. The Catholic cathedral dominated the skyline with a tower reaching into the sky and sending a message to the Muslims on the other side of the Neretva that the Croats were now the dominant group. Later we were told that because the tower had been constructed too quickly and without due care, it could collapse.

In a Mostar café we talked with a Muslim journalist about bridges and mosques bringing communities together. He sighed, turned away from us in despair at our ignorance, and spoke with implacable cynicism of that impossibility.

‘Here we are still at war,’ he declared.

CHASING MONEY

The long haul to raise funds for the Ferhadija Mosque and establishing the Banja Luka Civic Forum continued.

Although the Foreign Office reassured us that the project would be supported, no one there paid heed to our warnings that if we did not get funding within three months the project would stop, the staff be laid off, and the work put on hold. Our problem lay in strategy: how to persuade funders of the urgency without appearing desperate.

Simon Goodenough, our neighbour in the UK, used to regard our journeys to the Balkans with amusement. Like every other sensible person we talked to about our projects, he could only shake his head as much as to say: ‘What on earth can you hope to achieve there?’

He agreed to be a witness, and like Andrew and Liz Barr, would eventually accompany us on one of our frequent visits to Bosnia.

Each time we had come back with stories and reports, his interest grew and eventually we persuaded him to be the Soul of Europe’s administrator. Simon

proceeded to draft a report and application for funds from the European Union. An experienced manager of projects himself, publisher, editor, and skilled fundraiser, this lean, tall, clever man with an aristocratic demeanour would be our best chance of attracting money from Brussels. Painstakingly thorough, he knew far better than we the language that appealed to funders, and devoted long hours into the night on the document which needed to be foolproof.

First he drew up a list of ‘outcomes’ from our first year’s work in Bosnia to impress the commissioners. We took this to Ambassador Cliff in Sarajevo so that he could correct and adapt it if necessary before submitting it to Brussels. Donald read it aloud.

Ian Cliff listened sympathetically, as always, but seemed overwhelmed at all that we had achieved. Donald concluded by observing that, gathering from our various visits around Europe, Bosnia had fallen off the radar, and was now of less interest to the rest of the continent. This made our projects more urgent and relevant.

Ian focused his response on assistance and names of influential supporters, businesses who might be interested in our projects. He reassured us that Roy Wilson’s replacement in Banja Luka, Fiona McWhillham, had dealt with our application the previous year, and would be working on the nuts and bolts this time, before the embassy processed and submitted it to the Conflict Prevention Fund again.

Fiona McWhillham would prove to be the Soul of Europe’s nemesis in Bosnia.

Ian, ever thoughtful and practical with us, offered to host a supper with leading international business leaders, now working in Bosnia, for us to meet on our next visit to Sarajevo, in December. British American Tobacco, Unilever, Glaxo and Allied Domecq, as well as Coca Cola, Raiffeisen Bank, Hypovereins Bank and Turkish Zirat, all concerned about the security of their interests in Bosnia, might welcome our initiative, particularly regarding the civic forum and encouraging democratization. Ian

offered to invite President Cavic to another private supper, and begin the process of persuading this representative of Serb nationalism to accept a position on the board of the Ferhadija Project. Donald expressed impatience at Serb reluctance to apologize for the destruction of the mosque. This reluctance prevented the process of truth and reconciliation from getting off the ground. Ian Cliff considered it early days. However, without an apology, the security of the reconstructed mosque could not be assured. The supper with President Cavic might help start the process of acknowledging guilt, and taking responsibility for the rebuilding. The president needed to understand the fate of his country within the wider European perspective, involving Brussels and partnership. Ian Cliff offered also to secure a meeting between Dragan President Cavic, Paddy Ashdown and the Austrian ambassador, Gerhard Jandl. Jandl had business contacts such as the Tuzla Chemical Works.

Ian Cliff showed us Paddy Ashdown's published and widely disseminated demands to the newly elected governments in Bosnia: his six steps towards integrating the entities into a single nation, including state-level tax, economic and judicial reforms, which if not met within half a year, entitled the High Representative to sack the elected leaders. So far the leaders in both entities had made no comment and were not budging on any of the issues, testing the new High Representative: what would Paddy Ashdown do? Despite these political games, the main issue remained: how long the patience of the international community could be tested before Bosnia be abandoned to its own devices and the chaos, inevitable bloodshed, pariah status in Europe and subsequent poverty, follow.

In the event, Paddy Ashdown sacked many of the leaders. But several years after he left Bosnia, Valentin Inzco took over the Office of the High Representative and reinstated them. European policy regarding Bosnia remained inconsistent and achieved little. Meanwhile the nationalist leaders continued to wait, and outmanoeuvred their

temporary foreign masters. It required little skill, because the European Union and the rest of the world had already lost interest in Bosnia, and would eventually send diplomats and bureaucrats of ever lower calibre, people who were no match for the likes of Dodik.

HARIS PASOVIC

Fiona McWhillam represented this new attitude towards Bosnia: a bureaucrat not long out of university. From the start, we noticed her lack of experience and the qualities that made Roy Wilson so helpful and effective on our projects. Our determination and fearlessness in the face of politicians, who needed to be kept sweet and not challenged beyond an occasional diplomatic observation, alarmed her. She represented British economic interests wherever the Foreign Office thought fit to send her, and this brief characterized the nature of the posting of future ambassadors we met in Banja Luka, Sarajevo, and Belgrade. She inherited a tricky project, and therefore reacted to the Soul of Europe as a problem, rather than an opportunity in the manner of Roy Wilson, Ian Cliff, and, before him, Graham Hand.

This process of dismantling us began stealthily. We did not realize what was happening until years after. Meanwhile Fiona tried to be friendly and cooperative, aware that we had achieved success in the British government's eyes with the Coventry Consultation.

Fiona McWhillam began her dealings with us by being helpful. Following our request, she introduced us to Haris Pasovic, the prize-winning theatre and film director who we hoped would bring his troupe to Banja Luka and initiate links between the arts in the Republika Srpska and the Federation. We met in the reception area of the Holiday Inn Hotel. However, in retrospect, her kindness may well have been a warning to us, that she considered our project to have zero chance of success.

Haris Pasovic had gained international respect and celebrity before the war in the former Yugoslavia. He remained active during the war and after. With Susan Sontag directing, he famously produced Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo, during the siege, and organized the first Sarajevo Film Festival, *Beyond the End of the World*, while the war still raged. He represented the spirit of the city's defiance and refusal to have its spirit crushed by the perpetual bombardment and killing. Our meeting reminded us of the video reports from civilians during the siege, screened late every night on BBC. The civilians' courage was expressed in the blackest humour. One man's report described lethal sniper attacks, and fearful families holed up without food, water and electricity. Behind him the winter wind blew through cracked window panes as he cowered wrapped in a thick jacket. From the gloom of his freezing unlit room he grinned and offered a lottery prize to all viewers: a weekend city-break in Sarajevo.

Haris Pasovic's production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* had recently caused a sensation in Sarajevo: a futuristic production about a Muslim Romeo and a Christian Juliet, involving actors and musicians, a massive stage, and including video projections, which brought the traffic in the city to a standstill for four hours each night.

Since Igor Tojcic had told us about a similar but real-life tragedy in Banja Luka, we hoped Haris Pasovic might be interested to work with us there on a play about this particular story.

Haris Pasovic arrived under the impression we were wealthy westerners, offering to finance further performances of his production in Sarajevo.

After listening to our proposals he calmly disillusioned us: Banja Luka was a dangerous place, a provincial backwater, and he would need insurance for him and the whole company.

He told us that only in Sarajevo were the three communities of Bosnia not considered separate groups. He considered the international community's insistence on constantly differentiating the ethnic communities to be a retrograde step.

If we wanted collaboration, he would be happy to welcome people from Banja Luka, and bring artists from there to Sarajevo to see his production.

Further advice from this eminent director increased our dismay and disappointment. He proposed that we establish relations with the media in the Republika Srpska, and take over a regular hour slot on television to show films and documentaries about the war, Srebrenica in particular. The Bosnian Serbs needed to learn about their recent past, and be told the truth. Now, and in the foreseeable future, pigs were more likely to fly than for such programs to be sanctioned.

He could not hide his contempt for Banja Luka, a part of the world he wanted to see disappear for ever.

As for us, he could only shake his head like Senad Pecanin, the Sarajevo journalist whom we invited to Coventry, and who then expressed pity for our naïve and vain efforts to change the situation of Banja Luka.

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STONES AND GARBAGE

Professor Hamidovic, who had been appointed the architect overseeing the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque, met us later for lunch at the Writers Restaurant. Sinister, dark-grey piranha fish ceaselessly prowled an aquarium in the upstairs dining area. Waiters occasionally fed them scraps from the kitchen, bits of raw meat, making sure their fingers did not touch the water surface where a scuffle of razor jaws snapped greedily.

The professor told us that the stones from the Ferhadija Mosque had been located in a garbage tip a few miles outside Banja Luka.

The stones required a thorough stripping of accumulated kitchen waste, and then washed. Stones from the Arnaudija Mosque had also been tipped in the same place as the Ferhadija, so there would be an added complication of separating one mosque from the other. We suggested, half-jokingly, that perhaps both mosques could be rebuilt at the same time. At least the site of the Ferhadija had been fenced off. The Arnaudija used to stand on ground next to the High School. The empty space was now a small playing field. Children sat round the edge of it, and scowled at visitors.

Professor Hamidovic tried to enlighten us on the issue of the minaret's height. In June 1968 it had been decided to make the minaret smaller. Then an earthquake felled the top part of the minaret, so height became irrelevant.

He knew people skilled at interior decorations, and recommended establishing workshops around the mosque: an area known as the *carsia*, a traditional bazaar.

The *carsia* dated from the Austro-Hungarian period, but only ruins remained: walls and foundations. The professor wanted the city institute to participate in the reconstruction. The institute had recently supervised the rebuilding of an historic Catholic church, built in the style and with the same proportions as a medieval church, in Sokolinj, a small village, eleven kilometres from Kotor Varos. All the houses in the village had been destroyed, and the people there killed by a troop of two hundred and forty Serb soldiers.

We discussed the continually divisive issue around the exact numbers of destroyed religious buildings.

According to the professor one hundred and twenty Catholic and two hundred Orthodox churches, and one thousand two hundred mosques had been destroyed.

According to Orthodox nationalists, mosques never existed even in the places where photographic evidence proved otherwise. Faced with this proof they added defiantly that, even if there had been mosques, there should not be any.

This argument persisted, and still persists. Only two years earlier, the mayor of Banja Luka had declared that it was only right and just that there be only Orthodox churches in his city, because Serbs, once a minority, now outnumbered Muslims, who had no need of more than one mosque. He did not comment on why the Muslim population had dwindled so drastically. History recognized a *fait accompli*, so the destroyers of the mosque, having eliminated all trace of them, shrugged their shoulders, smirked, and said: 'It had to be done.' They then added threateningly that, if the mosques were rebuilt, they would be destroyed again.

Churches and mosques in Bosnia were now nationalist symbols.

Professor Hamidivoc agreed with us that the Ferhadija Mosque would be the first rebuilding to involve all the communities, although the Catholic Church in Presnace offered a good precedent, because all the village's inhabitants, Orthodox and Muslim as well as Catholics, were pooling skills and resources to rebuild the Catholic pilgrimage church there. The Ferhadija Mosque should not be a weapon. The hundred workers required would be drawn from all the groups in Banja Luka, probably most of them Serb Orthodox, because after the war and ethnic cleansing there were mostly Serbs in the city and few Muslims. A College of Conservation covering all the crafts should be left after completion, to teach future generations how to preserve and restore such buildings.

As we walked along a street in the bazaar quarter of Sarajevo, Adnan caught sight of a large framed photograph of the Ferhadija Mosque in the window of an antiques shop. The composition had been prepared with care, to include the road, the *carsia* and surrounding hills, and taken early on a summer's day morning, when colours are at their brightest. The light-grey stone of the carved minaret glistens against a deep ultramarine sky.

We bought the photograph without hesitating, and, while we ate lunch on the pavement outside a cevapcici bar, propped it against a chair.

People passing by tapped us on the shoulder, smiled and said: ‘Ferhadija!’

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A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Malaysian Embassy stood on a hill behind the Office of the High Representative headquarters. A number of residences scarred from war still stood in this elegant quarter of Sarajevo, though a few had been reduced to rubble.

Adnan had hopes from our meeting with the ambassador because the Malaysian government had provided funds for his father Farouk’s school, and might be persuaded to support the Ferhadija Mosque project.

The ambassador received us politely in a large clean room. The serenity, highly polished furniture and cabinets, crammed with elaborately decorated pottery and golfing trophies, gave it the feel of a museum or a place of worship, a space uncontaminated by work; no office clutter.

He had witnessed the riot at the first laying of the foundation stone for the Ferhadija Mosque in May 2001, and welcomed an opportunity to share his thoughts, launching into several long speeches. Donald, uncharacteristically, could not get a word in edgeways.

The ambassador spoke about nationalism, and came to the conclusion that only multi-ethnic nationalism was good, in other words: different groups living together in peace, but following and keeping their own traditions alive. Malaysia had been a multi-ethnic society for centuries, with traditions ranging from Chinese to Western European.

We were pleased to hear that Malaysia had earmarked funds for the rebuilding of the mosque, but these would not be released until the project became a reality.

The ambassador knew the history of Bosnia and told us that many of the mosques destroyed in the war had been neglected under Communist rule. In fact, a number of these decrepit buildings had fallen into ruin during the decades before the war, and no new mosques replaced them. He acknowledged that during the war the dynamiting of places of worship represented a deliberate act of cultural ethnic cleansing. This vandalism had unexpected consequences: it became a cause for religious revival. The surviving generation of Muslims demanded the rebuilding of all mosques, even those destroyed before the war.

The ambassador also raised a significant political issue: the unwillingness of the international community to deal with the injustice of the attempted genocide. Such hesitation encouraged a status quo: a direct result of ethnic cleansing.

This issue exercised our minds perpetually. It posed the question: 'Why bother?' The Muslims had been virtually cleansed from Banja Luka. The Republika Srpska was a *fait accompli*. Eventually it might be recognized as the state Radovan Karadjic originally intended, although he had aimed for the whole of Bosnia. The horrors of the Bosnia War would be forgotten and the new situation be internationally accepted. Why turn the clocks back? The international community accepted the new state of affairs, even encouraging it by cutting deals with Serb nationalist leaders. The nationalists depended on this disinterest. They only needed to bide their time. In 2012 Milorad Dodik could speak of an independent Republika Srpska, and the international community listened, a first step to the fulfilment of Karadjic's aims.

The ambassador supported our work and agreed that it was important and essential, for reasons not only of human justice, but also for political and social security.

He pointed out that there were now more Muslims in Great Britain than the whole population of Bosnia. Muslims worldwide knew what had happened, would not forget, and were carefully watching the international community's response, while

radicalising in preparation for the next showdown, determined not to permit a repetition of such a holocaust.

‘Genocide cannot be allowed to have the last word,’ Donald announced.

The ambassador responded with an observation about Islamic fundamentalism: ‘Extreme and radical Muslims are feared in Malaysia. Fundamentalists follow the book and insist: my neighbour has to be Muslim. Most good Muslims believe in peaceful coexistence with other ethnic groups and have a long tradition of tolerance. Malaysia is a secular state, though Islam is the state religion, and in that respect is not that different from the UK.’

In the next years more and more young people across the Arab world, educated by the social media and attracted to more democratic and freer ways of life, echoed the ambassador’s words, and began to express anger at the influence of religious extremists, the young people saying: ‘We resent men in beards determining the agenda of our lives.’ This criticism built up alongside a hatred of tyrannies supported by Western interests, and eventually exploded in the Arab Spring of 2011.

Because the world financial crisis in 1999 had hit Malaysia, no country being spared, the weight of loans to major currencies prolonged the crisis, and, to Adnan’s disappointment, the ambassador could not help fund our work. But he offered to ask businesses, back in Kuala Lumpur, who might be persuaded to fund community activities. Unfortunately for us, unscrupulous and corrupt banks in Bosnia were taking advantage of Malaysian generosity. Money earmarked for schools and other charitable work had disappeared: hundreds of thousands of dollars. The only people benefitting from this theft were the politicians.

The ambassador gave a speech about history:

‘It is important that destroyed buildings should be rebuilt, that people live in peace together, that the Republika Srpska moves into Europe, and conforms to the values

and criteria of the European Union. The days of Hitler are gone. One can disagree about history. For instance, in our case, the part of Thailand that once belonged to Malaysia was given by the UK, without authority, to Thailand. But that is all history now. One may not like it, but we have to live together. Bosnia is a beautiful country. It used to be a tolerant place. Serb stonemasons used to build mosques. Bosnians once knew how to be good neighbours.’

‘Basic teaching, common to all religions, says that how we live our life in this world is more important than the act of prayer,’ commented Donald.

The ambassador responded with a joke about a Muslim on his deathbed calling his children and telling them: ‘Our Jewish neighbour has a leaking toilet polluting our water. I have been uneasy about this, not wanting to cause trouble. So I spoke recently with my Jewish neighbour telling him: repair your toilet, because I don’t know whether my children will be as tolerant as I am’.

Adnan understood, saying that the younger generation felt great anger about the war. Frustration at the lack of justice and acknowledgement of guilt by those who committed crimes fed resentment, with dangerous consequences for the future.

‘We have to learn new ways of living together,’ the ambassador declared. ‘Many Serbs in Banja Luka are sorry about what happened to the Ferhadija Mosque, but are afraid to say anything, because force prevails in this society. That was proved on the 7th of May with the stone-throwing. But once the mosque is rebuilt it will be easier for other religious places to be built. People will speak easier and return home. Up to now, there is no sign of the old city as it used to be. So rebuilding the mosque has to be a better sign, not only for Bosnia but also for all of Europe. Bosnia is my home and I am not more or less European than any other person in Europe. The Ferhadija Mosque may be a small project financially, but it sends a big message to the world.’

Remembering the many Serbs who opposed the war waged in their name, the ambassador told us about those Serbs in Sarajevo who fought alongside the Muslims to defend their city.

‘We cannot undo the war,’ he said. ‘But we have to go on.’

Malaysia gave funds towards the rebuilding of the school of which Adnan’s father was headmaster. Adnan drove us to visit it before we returned to Banja Luka.

We expected a perfunctory building, raised in haste after the war. Our only experience of schools in Bosnia was the Gymnazia in Banja Luka, basic and utilitarian with its bleak entrance hall, drab, bare walls in need of redecoration, draughty corridors, and flights of stairs leading to class rooms. Pupils roamed through this shell of an institution, and glared balefully at visitors.

Here in a Sarajevo school, children were gathering cheerfully in the playground, forming into lines, ready to start lessons, smiling at visitors, and looking enthusiastic, as though lessons might be preferable to playing football or tag.

Children’s paintings covered the walls of a spacious entrance hall. Dozens of plants in pots surrounded a pool in the middle, and light streamed in through large window panes. The airiness gave a sense of peace and freedom. The vivid paintings expressed unfettered imagination. The first impression was of welcome, not of discipline, of harmony rather than of the kind of compulsion that invites vandalism. Here education represented a joyful value, not a command. So the children looked happy and eager, feeling at home, where play and learning are indistinguishable.

Farouk Jabucar created the lay out and appearance of the school, turning it into a work of art, a pleasant space to enter.

The headmaster’s study was another spacious light-filled room furnished with a curved desk, chairs and plant-covered shelves; the place designed to make people feel

they were in a living room, not an office. In such a space, their boss would not overawe children and teachers.

Farouk gave a brief history of the school, beginning with telling us the shocking background to the children's lives. Many of them were displaced refugees from other parts of Bosnia, and the parents of at least a hundred children were still missing, presumed murdered.

As though this disruption were not traumatic enough, the Office of the High Representative caused more stress by insisting that all refugees return to their original homes. Since these children's families, those that survived, could not reclaim homes and property, they preferred to stay put in Sarajevo. Even if they succeeded in reclaiming homes, their children would not be able to attend the local schools because of discrimination and fear. Many families made every effort to emigrate, wanting to move as far away from Bosnia as possible. Politicians were not even trying to resolve these problems.

Another urgent question needed answering: how to prevent the youth of the country from leaving?

As for teachers: not being paid salaries for the last eight months made life difficult, if not impossible. The black market thrived for the time being, and most seemed to manage.

Ten years later however, in 2012, Adnan would inform us that people were beginning to die of hunger in Bosnia. Survival stratagems ceased to be effective.

Local authorities, cantons, were supposed to take responsibility for paying salaries, but all of them claimed to have no money. Meanwhile, political and municipal leaders lived luxurious lives in country villas, and drove around in expensive cars, apparently on salaries little higher than a teacher's average wage of around 300 euros a month.

Farouk's school built in 1989, the most modern in the former Yugoslavia, stood in Dobrinje, the district of Sarajevo on the front line of the war. Serb soldiers had shelled the school every day from the nearby hills, and came as close as thirty metres, until only twenty percent of the walls were left standing. But the school held out in what turned out to be a double siege.

Lessons did not stop. A documentary, made during the war, showed the children being taught in a school basement. Teaching and learning became acts of defiance. Five men protected the children, defending them with Molotov cocktails, which they threw at attacking Serb militia. War prevented repairs being done to the school, so lessons carried on in the ruins. Tanks picked up mothers and children at the beginning and end of each day.

The documentary had a backing track of symphonic music: Tchaikovsky's blazingly resolute Fifth, Schubert's grief-laden but heart-easing Unfinished, and Brahms' noble First, as well as the plangent tones of Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto. The music sounded the achievement of those years of defiance and protection of human values, when education became a weapon against those who wanted to destroy the school, and kill all the children.

Farouk put a high value on art nurturing the human spirit: a bulwark against intolerance, hatred and destruction. This explained why children's paintings covered every inch of wall. He understood that the best way to deal with the horror of their recent experiences, and the ongoing problems of their lives, was to allow them unfettered access to the imagination and creative self-expression.

In contrast, the striking absence of this kind of art in Banja Luka's High School reflected the stagnant apathy and amnesia of the city.

WORDS AND DEEDS

ESTABLISHING THE CIVIC FORUM IN BANJA LUKA

The main purpose of our visit to Banja Luka in October 2002 was the presentation of the Report compiled by Dejan and Majda, and the public announcement about establishing a civic forum in 2003.

The British Embassy offered to host the reception. Fiona McWhillam, who had only recently arrived to take over from Roy Wilson, met us for supper at the Castle Restaurant, and brought along Daniel Korski, a political advisor to the High Representative, whom we met at Donald's speech to the National Assembly on a previous visit, and whom the Speaker eyed suspiciously.

Daniel spent the evening questioning us on the value of our activities, winding us up with provocative observations. The sparring became tedious. Of course we had to be careful about every step taken, moving forward as though crossing a minefield, dismantling each deadly obstacle, and appreciated all the advice and information we could get, the kind of input that made Roy Wilson so valuable to us. But this kind of nitpicking, and playing frivolous intellectual games is counter-productive. It became clear in the following months that Fiona's task, regarding our presence in Bosnia, consisted of bringing British government support for our projects to an end. In hindsight this explained Daniel's presence at the supper. He was there to observe and advise not us, but her.

Meanwhile the people in Banja Luka were impatient for tangible improvements in their lives, and expressed hostility to never-ending arguments in the international community about what could or shouldn't be done. With the future of their country at stake, the words in such discussions had lost their currency. Cheap and without resonance, they were a luxury the Bosnians could no longer afford.

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For the following few days we stayed at the Palas Hotel, on one of the main streets in the centre of Banja Luka, within a stone's throw from the site of the Ferhadija Mosque. Adnan noticed a series of faded watercolours in glass frames hanging along the back wall of the dining area, and pointed out a couple that seemed to have escaped the notice of Bosnian Serb nationalists who frequented this hotel. They showed Banja Luka before the war, and mosques stood prominently in each painting, contradicting the stated aim of those ethnic cleansers, who wanted to wipe all trace of Islam from the city. Considering the thoroughness with which the mosques had been removed, it was touching to see they had not been airbrushed from these pictures: the white minarets, shining against blue skies, a perpetual reminder of what the place had once been.

The Palas Hotel stood at a major crossroads in the city, and people crowded there at all times of the day and evening, the good-natured waiters never appearing to sleep, serving drinks last thing at night and still smiling a greeting at breakfast.

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Dragan President Cavic was shortly to be elected the new President of the Republika Srpska. As Roy Wilson kept reminding us, the fact that he came to the Coventry Consultation boded well for the entity, as well as for our projects.

Although the president welcomed us warmly as ever, we detected a new cockiness towards the international community.

Various conditions had been laid on the newly elected rulers by the Office of the High Representative. These conditions concerned changes in the judiciary, the police force, army, and those institutions where multi-ethnic membership would bring about the eventual unification of the entities of the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia. The nationalist Bosnian Serbs who had fought so hard for their independent

state, even though still not recognized internationally as such, had no intention of complying with any conditions laid on them. The elections confirmed the divisions in Bosnia, and the new leaders decided not to make any changes, sat back and waited to see what the international community would do about them. Everyone was used to these games. Either Paddy Ashdown came down hard and sacked the leaders, or the world would lose interest in Bosnia, in which case they could do what they liked.

President Cavic indicated he knew what might happen to him if he did not comply with the Office of the High Representative, and joked about being sacked within months: 'I may not be here to see the start of your civic forum', the use of the word 'your' still proving how far we still had to go to persuade him that such a forum belonged to him, and to everyone in Banja Luka, not us. His confident and defiant manner showed him to be secure in his position. He expressed impatience and barely disguised contempt for the continued presence of the Office of the High Representative, which seemed to exist only to be a nuisance. He was prepared to wait.

But the new President depended on economic assistance and investment. He therefore had to walk a tightrope between the defiance of nationalist ambition and the need to be accepted by Europe. The Soul of Europe might provide a means of crossing the chasm beneath. Though he held to the principles of the party founded by Karadjic, he was enough of a pragmatist to realize that the hard line needed softening. He therefore listened attentively to Donald's presentation, knowing we did not come to lecture.

Donald outlined our plans for the next two to three years in Banja Luka, and spoke about the report which would be handed over to the mayor formally and publicly at the reception hosted by the British Embassy.

President Cavic then apologised for not being able to attend the reception because of his daughter's birthday party. So the reunion of the Coventry Group, a year after the

consultation, at an event where they were supposed to give their blessing to the continued work on the project, had already lost its significance for those in authority. The mayor would also say he could not attend, as did the religious leaders.

As it turned out, the political leaders did attend the reception. We were used to the patient and dogged process of persuading everyone that in the city's best interest they should be present. Nor were we surprised at such reluctance. The changes the forum proposed were a lot to ask of a society emerging from decades of totalitarian communism and then a brutal war. The presence of the religious leaders might have strengthened bonds between the communities they represented, the three standing side by side sending a message to the whole country about collaboration, friendship, and perhaps even forgiveness for crimes committed in their name. Bosnia seemed far from ready for such momentous admissions. As to the political leaders, a failure to attend the reception would have shown up the gulf between the authorities and the people they governed: those making decisions and wielding power preserving privileged prosperous life-styles. This apartness nurtured continued conflict between the different groups.

So, as with the Coventry Consultation, we prepared ourselves for long hours of persuasion and cajoling: President Cavic our primary target.

Starting with the economy, much to the relief of the president, Donald spoke about significant people in the Republika Srpska identified by the Report. We would bring together these figures to see what could be done about the economy. We were not here to provide investment, but to help people learn how to work co-operatively together. Such a forum creates a culture of citizenship. People were still fearful of expressing their opinions publicly. The forum organized by the Banja Luka office planned to set up monthly meetings in a relaxed public space, such as a café, where anyone could come and say what they wanted. Later on, public dialogues could take

place in a more formal setting, the Banski Dvor perhaps, Banja Luka's Town Hall, where people could learn to speak freely, closer to the seat of power. Consultation exercises arranged by the forum on such matters as the return of refugees, education and the economy, which most concerned those who had come to Coventry in September 2001, would call on experts and witnesses as well as politicians. The forum would report on these events and arrange lectures by speakers, with practical experience from all over the world, on how to break down prejudices between religions and ethnic groups. Forums encouraged young people and women, those not usually given serious attention, to speak and be heard. Forums created a space for hearing and listening.

The Scottish Civic Forum, established by the new independent parliament in Scotland to deal with issues of unemployment and relations between Scotland and England, had agreed to be partners with us, and help train the forum in Banja Luka. Donald promised to speak individually to all politicians, and over the next months show them how it was in their personal interest to support the forum, to 'hear what people are saying'. After three years, when we had withdrawn from the forum, the forum would be an example to the rest of the world, with local ownership of projects initiated by it. The people of Banja Luka could then teach the rest of Europe.

Meanwhile, we intended to work alongside the religious communities, creating links between Bishop Komarica and dioceses elsewhere in Europe, inviting Bishop Jefrem to the UK to meet people from similar rural ministries, and building trust with the Islamic community and funding for the Ferhadija Mosque.

The president, not having his nationalist supporters breathing heavily behind him, agreed to a discussion on these matters with Ambassador Cliff and Donald. A decisive meeting would eventually take place, perhaps the most important, politically speaking, that we managed to arrange during our time in Bosnia, but, before that

breakthrough event came months of prevarications and back-tracking. First, Cavic met Ambassador Cliff in December at the residence of the English Embassy's Head of Office in Banja Luka, where Fiona McWhillam hosted a stilted dinner party. Opera arias screamed out of loudspeakers while cold food was served. The president announced he could not be on the board for the rebuilding of the mosque, because of his position. He offered to send two assistants, a Bosniak and a Croat, to support the project, provided it linked with the rebuilding of an Orthodox Cathedral and a Catholic project yet to be identified.

This announcement avoided acknowledging the special case of the Ferhadija Mosque, its unique heritage value, and the recent violent history its destruction represented. Even the international community wilfully failed to recognize the significance of why the Ferhadija Mosque should be rebuilt. The international community appeased the nationalists, parroting their claims that all ethnic groups shared guilt equally, despite all the evidence.

This attitude has as much to do with suspicion of Islam internationally as with pragmatism. Whatever the injustices against this alien world of Islam, and the extent of suffering and depredations, these could never measure up to the smaller losses of groups which represent family. In the case of the perpetual war in the Middle East more significance is placed on each Israeli victim than on the hundreds of Palestinian victims. Losses of American and British soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, though high over the years of fighting, are treated with greater value than the proportionally far higher numbers, hundreds of thousands, of killed civilians and insurgents. In matters of family loyalties the other side doesn't count so much. In the Balkans, where President Cavic could rely on the loyal support of the Christian West, the Islamic community could not depend on the same friendship. This in large part explained our presence in Bosnia. We stood by the forgotten and ignored, not just out of sympathy,

but to point out the short-sightedness of western policies that were exacerbating rather than healing divisions between the major world groups.

We nurtured friendship on all sides, knowing that there was not the remotest chance of rebuilding the mosque, and keeping it standing, without the trust of everyone. Yet without acknowledging what happened just ten years earlier, there could be no guarantee of future peace in this part of Europe; and a secure future for the mosque depended on this. It seemed as though we were the only ones aware of this reality. Whatever initiatives we supported for groups on all sides, these projects would fail if they came at the cost of truth and justice. Therefore meetings with President Cavic would always be crucial: talking candidly, and discussing the civic forum, as well as the Ferhadija Mosque, two major projects developing back to back. Caring for the Orthodox and Catholic became a part of this process, but the mosque took precedence.

The president, ever mindful of his nationalist roots, would always find it hard to distance himself from those who had ordered the destruction of the mosque, so we tried to impress and reassure him by speaking of a reception Donald attended by Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, at which the Ferhadija Mosque, among other places, was proclaimed a World Heritage Site. The mosque should not be seen as a symbol of Bosnian Serb guilt, but of future unity in a community destroyed by war and ethnic cleansing. The symbol then becomes a positive force uniting communities again, all of whom had once treasured this great building, whatever their religion. Sacred sites of such artistic, social and historical significance were not the possession solely of their religious host, but belonged to the community. The civic forum aimed to help the people of the city, not only accept the mosque, but welcome its return.

To galvanize the stilted dinner party and as a carrot to the president, Donald discussed the possibility of inviting President Cavic and the Prime Minister to

Brussels for meetings with influential figures. Not just a pot of money, the European Union represented a wider, international dimension to the principle of the forum creating a new culture of citizenship.

The president listened attentively to Donald's lengthy presentation; then launched into a speech of his own. 'I spoke with Svetlana Cenic a few days ago,' he said, talking with us for the first time without his economic adviser present, though she would arrive later. 'Thanks for your energy and determination. We also think that without ideas and willpower we can do nothing. Atmosphere is improving for the Soul of Europe to work on the reintegration of all society and for peace. We are already at peace. The problem is now only with individual traumas from the war. Time is healing the wounds.'

'Is that so?' said Donald, thinking about Bishop Komarica and Mufti Camdzic who would be as surprised as we were to hear this news.

'Yes. Wounds are reducing,' the president assured us. 'Banja Luka has the potential to be a great city. As President I have the support of the vice-presidents, a Catholic and a Muslim. They will cooperate with me in the work of the Soul of Europe. In the next four years – if Paddy Ashdown doesn't replace me! – there will be time for big reforms, and the final definition of the entity of the Republika Srpska.'

We could not tell from his tone whether he intended these reforms to integrate the entity with the Federation of Bosnia, or to separate it further.

'I feel well prepared for this task,' the president continued. 'I have energy and strength to work over the next four years at full capacity. I hope that will be time enough to close open questions. I am thinking about your activities.'

We asked for advice about people who might be of help.

He named Ismail Ibrahim and the Muslim deputy Mayor of Modrica, who had experience in developing successful small businesses. 'Only today he asked for my

help with a firm making incubators,’ said President Cavic. ‘He is an interesting man, already sixty years old, with results. Not just talk.’

Donald pointed out a benefit of civic forums, that small organizations can sometimes pull people together in ways not thought possible, to help bring practical decisions. He then asked: ‘As the international community leaves Bosnia, how ready are politicians to take responsibility?’

‘Not yet ready,’ the president replied. ‘The crucial question is with the structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no country with the identical interior structure – due to different historical circumstances. Some countries have centuries old historical issues. I want to say that after the war there has been significant development. Bosnia and Herzegovina has now a constitution acceptable to everyone. Switzerland has cantons and they keep Switzerland a united country. Belgium has Flemish and Walloons. In Bosnia and Herzegovina some politicians do not want more entities. There is now a question of autonomy within the country. How will it be possible to function without inner conflicts? How can we ensure stability? Wars have nationalist and religious connections. Muslims are not Orthodox, etc.’

Yet again he skirted the issue of ethnic cleansing, which had created national divisions between the groups. Nor did he mention mixed marriages, which, over the centuries, had encouraged a different stability: one of inter-ethnic friendship and cooperation. His words reminded me of the teacher from a small town outside Banja Luka who wanted Bosnia divided between ethnic groups.

‘There is nothing bad in that,’ the president continued in a reasonable tone, implying that the war had a positive outcome in finally separating the groups. ‘Both entities can compete and establish better conditions dependent on entity government. Everyone agrees that Bosnia is overall boss, and we entities are regions. The first question for the international community is to be clear about the inner structure of the country.’

Everything is possible with the correct constitution, which will be like the Bible to all people here. It will be easier when Europe opens the door to Bosnia, and Europe comes into Bosnia, not the other way round. Slovenia is not going into Europe; Europe is coming into Slovenia. Technical standards of Europe come into countries. The final construction of Bosnia and Herzegovina will be self-sustainable. In five years time we will be richer than Albania or Bulgaria. We have ten years of no development because war demanded all our resources. Relations with neighbour countries are a big question. The United Kingdom is surrounded by the sea. We have Croats, Serbs and Muslims all round us.'

Apart from several significant questions this speech begged, for instance concerning the meaning of conditions being 'dependent on entity government', and especially the reasons behind the war having consumed all Bosnia's resources, the final comment seemed to imply an intention to keep the Republika Srpska separate from the Federation of Bosnia, its Muslim neighbour. Perhaps President Cavic realized we were jumping to this interpretation, and quickly spoke about Bosnia being his country: 'It is important to strengthen relations between Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb. Relations are getting better though there is still infection from the recent past and the war in ex-Yugoslavia. Agreements are now signed and in 2004 there will be one trade alliance signed between Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. Foreign investment will come. We have a population of three and a half million, against the four million in Croatia, and nine million in Serbia. A big trade market will secure the economy.'

'What is happening with Karadjic and Mladic?' asked Donald, interrupting the political broadcast, and reminding the president of the unresolved issues around war crimes, adding: 'The international community worries about this.'

President Cavic for the first time expressed defiance. In the past he had preferred to distance himself from the chief instigator of ethnic cleansing in his party. The SDP

was being pressured to remove Karadjic's membership. Though the gesture might please foreigners, everyone knew Karadjic to be inseparable from the party he established, and therefore also from the entity of the Republika Srpska he created.

'My answer may not be acceptable to you,' said the president. 'Personally I am not in touch with either of them. I don't know where they are. But we have obligations, not political, but legal. They choose to hide and avoid the tribunal. If you think I am lying, that's your business.'

The president, like all Serbs, reckoned on the Hague Tribunal soon running out of funds and, given time, charges against Karadjic and Mladic might even be dropped. President Cavic probably also foresaw a time when these two baleful figures would be forgiven, honoured and welcomed back to political and military life with public statues erected in their memory.

Donald repeated his presentation about the economy for Svetlana, who arrived at this point of the conversation. He also announced a new Soul of Europe initiative on behalf of the country.

'Bosnia should be made a special case in Europe,' he declared, and told the president and Svetlana of meetings in Brussels, specifically with John Dunn of the Bosnia desk, raising interest in Bosnia and releasing money quickly for our work.

'Don't ride the horse before it is saddled,' joked Svetlana.

The president then made a proposal, and we noted that this was the first time he had asked a favour from us:

'I have an idea which needs our immediate attention. There was resistance to it, but I am determined. There is a former military base from before the war, part of what used to be Yugoslavia. And in the next two to three years the army will move away from the base. I want to give this base to the university. It is not in perfect condition,

but the location is excellent. The UK should give support to the university, and the Soul of Europe can help.’

Not sure what this entailed we asked for a detailed proposal.

‘Even before that,’ the president continued, ‘We should organize lectures, professors from Oxford, Cambridge, the best places. There should also be day-long communication with students, not just lectures. This is good for you, and could be part of the forum’s activities. It encourages dialogue and discussion among young people. Bring UK culture; use the opportunity to discover parallels, the issues of practical everyday living, not just economy matters. You can bring lots of experience, and also showcase British culture. Banja Luka is a sleepy region, and this could animate it. There are ten thousand students at Banja Luka University.’

We said nothing, perplexed by his continuing inability to understand why anyone at all should ever want to come to Banja Luka, let alone from the best universities, to showcase art and bring kudos. If the top end of British culture wanted a showcase in Bosnia, Sarajevo would be the place of choice, not Banja Luka, with its grim history of recent unacknowledged crimes.

Moreover, who would foot the bill for this venture?

This unasked question prompted Donald to outline our search for further funding from the Foreign Office and the European Commission. We were bearing in mind the two months work by Simon Goodenough, our administrator, spending stressful nights and days back in the UK office filling out complicated hundred-page application forms, anxious not to make any mistake, or forget a vital document.

‘There may be a delay,’ Donald said finally, and promised to raise the president’s proposal at the civic forum.

Svetlana who had just returned from Ros Tennyson's Cambridge course offering diplomas in training brokers, her place paid for by the Soul of Europe, promised to follow several leads among contacts she had made there.

·
'MY GOOD FRIEND DODIK'

After this meeting we had lunch at the Ambassadors Restaurant, favoured by politicians, business people and anyone who could afford to eat out. The future as well as the past haunted us there.

We met Radomir Kovic, who used to be the Serb Number Two at the Bosnian Embassy in London. He sat at a large table entertaining a group of UK businessmen.

Two and a half years earlier he had tried to intimidate us when we visited the Bosnian Embassy. He once accompanied the mild-mannered Bosnian ambassador, a Muslim, at the reception to help the Soul of Europe given by the London banker, Stephen Wenman in 2000, an event described earlier in *The Fountain in the Wall*. Radomir Kovic represented the interests of the Republika Srpska, so wherever the ambassador went he followed like a shadow. The ambassador, ever the cautious diplomat, gave polite speeches, while Kovic tirelessly worked the floor, trying to persuade bankers and businessmen present to visit the Republika Srpska with all its promising investment opportunities. Stephen Wenman avoided this persuasion, preferring the gentle ambassador's manner. Kovic focused his attention on Lazar Markovic, our Serb translator, and interrogated him on the Soul of Europe's work in Bosnia. By the end of the evening he had frightened Lazar into quitting helping us with our Bihac project. Kovic warned Lazar there would be bad consequences for us and our work if we did not stop working with Muslims.

Now in 2002 at the Ambassadors Restaurant the presence of the UK businessmen proved Kovic's efforts on behalf of the Republika Srpska were being fruitful, putting

the place on the economic map of Europe. These smartly dressed men sat moist-eyed with rakija, overwhelmed by hospitality at this restaurant owned by a hard-line nationalist. A group of instrumentalists and singers performed traditional folk music, while waiters served the best-prepared food and the most expensive wine in Banja Luka.

Radomir Kosic's guests reminded me of UK businessmen I had come across in Poland ten years earlier, shortly after the break up of the communist bloc and the end of the Iron Curtain. Also bright eyed with the prospects of making large profits in virgin market territory, with seemingly limitless opportunities made more seductive by cheap labour, few restrictions and quality materials, these entrepreneurs represented a different invasion from Soviet tanks. Elderly gentlemen, who had been former factory owners, politicians and economic advisors, now also grateful for and excited by the prospects of profit, welcomed the brash men with politeness and humility, entertaining them in Krakow's best restaurants. But they visibly quailed at the fast talk and hard bargaining of their guests, who were more familiar with the ruthless mechanisms of the free market. These businessmen warned of sharks, but were sharks themselves, in the improbable disguise of philanthropists who had come to help improve the economy of poor countries.

On hearing of our present activities in Banja Luka he requested a copy of the forum's Report as soon as possible. Ever cautious about his motives we did not reply but asked him who he thought would be the next Prime Minister.

'It will be Dodik,' he announced robustly with a smile, adding pointedly: 'Dodik is a good friend of mine.'

Milorad Dodik had recently been accused of corruption. While President of the Republika Srpska, in the years before we visited Bosnia, he had taken loans and money gifts from the international community, promising to deliver war criminals to

the Hague Tribunal, including Karadjic and Mladic, along with other assurances to bring his party into line with the demands of the Dayton Agreement. He delivered nothing and gave the money to cronies, rebuilding his hometown of Laktashi, a few miles north of Banja Luka.

We passed through Laktashi every time we drove from Zagreb to Banja Luka, and were struck by the relative prosperity of this small town, with its glitzy bars and shopping malls. Now Dodik faced charges. He would not be elected Prime Minister on this election. The words of Radomir Kosic surprised us. Surely he must have known we were aware of Dodik's crimes. Perhaps he felt the battle had been won, and realized that the international community did not care anymore about issues of justice and probity in Bosnia.

That worried us more than his proud boast of friendship with an alleged crook.

Several years later Dodik would become President of the Republika Srpska, remaining so to this day, and unlikely to be removed by election anytime soon.

THE POMEGRANATE FROM ZITOMISLICE

A LETTER TO THE BISHOPS

Donald sent a letter to both Bishops Komarica and Jefrem which included a sermon on our work in Banja Luka, a theological reflection on the aims, achievements, failures and hopes of the Soul of Europe. They did not acknowledge the sermon, although Bishop Jefrem confirmed receipt of the letter and said cryptically: 'It is your job. And I have a few points to raise.' Bishop Komarica however was enthusiastic and wanted to spend time discussing it.

The letter marked a significant development in the thinking of the Soul of Europe:

Dear Bishop

Today is the first anniversary of the Coventry Consultation. I want first of all to thank you for coming and for your courtesy and generous hospitality which you offered the Soul of Europe ever since. I cherish our friendship, strengthened by our faith held in common in Christ our Saviour who is also our hope.

I am writing this letter because you are a bishop in the Church of God and carry considerable burdens of responsibility and expectations from your priests and people.

I want to share with you a brief theological meditation which my experience of working in Banja Luka has inspired. I am not a professional theologian but I have written and had published a number of books and the sort of theology I undertake is done while on the move.

I have called the meditation: 'Seeing in the Dark', for this is what the last eighteen months have been for me.

Our work in Bosnia has been something like a pilgrimage (though the destination is not clear). I have sensed so many times that I am approaching and even crossing a boundary. There is a new landscape hinted at, inviting me to come and begin to inhabit it. But the invitation is also disorientating and frightening. It requires a loss and a risk. The darkness gathers round as I have crossed one threshold after another.

Prejudices disappear. Ideas change. Crossing boundaries produces confusion and momentarily the pilgrim is lost. (The icon has been a reassuring presence in this time – praying with the icons of the Virgin, particularly the Hodegetria: the Mother of God shows us the way).

These experiences are rarely planned. Like a visitation from beyond, they present themselves unexpectedly.

There have been so many, it would take a book to recount them. Here are three.

Last December you invited the Soul of Europe to attend the liturgy in the Orthodox Cathedral of Banja Luka. You invited me to address the congregation. When I am asked to speak to an unknown group, I try to catch the eyes of the people, because the eyes are the windows into our souls. I looked. Some were indifferent, but most were curious. But what struck me most was the unutterable sadness of so many of those people, young and old, themselves exiles in their own land. The sadness was compounded by the traditional rich liturgy, exquisitely sung, immaculate vestments and beauty of the words and music, expressing the longing for God. The darkness lifted.

Then there were visits to the devastated Catholic churches with Bishop Komarica, one after the other. We arrived and the bishop went straight to the sanctuary, lowered his head in prayer. I followed close behind, saying the Lords Prayer, trying to pray for the priest and the people of each community, now devastated and dispersed - this in Europe where all Christian faiths have flourished for centuries. How could we have let this happen? The bishop took us to Presnace. When I learned of what had happened there, I did not want to stay. What could I say or do? Father Zvonko took us to the room where those acts of barbarism took place. Now it is a chapel with a few chairs, prayer and hymn books, a lighted candle, photographs of Father Philip Lukenda and Sister Cecilia Grgie. And there in that small room, in the presbytery of a remote parish, the darkness lifted, for it is a place of healing, grace and love.

In June there was a meeting in Sarajevo to consider the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque. At the end of the meeting, I was invited to Friday prayers at the Begova Mosque. It was a beautiful and compelling moment. I will never forget the silence, stillness and attention of that large congregation in Sarajevo, and the plaintive chanting of the cantor so far, so very far, from the pictures portrayed in our media of Islam as a religion of terrorism and fanatics.

So everything changes. The darkness gathers; then disperses. Where am I?

To answer that question I will try and describe what it means for me to foster the dispositions of mind and heart by which all of us can grow in relation to each other and the mystery of God. In three ways: that of seeing, trusting and relating, noting the refusal of blindness, despair and egotism.

A WAY OF SEEING

The darkness is not just about my personal confusion. It is the context in which Christian discipleship has to take place. There is no other. We say that God is invisible, but that says something about us, rather than about God. God's invisibility acknowledges the depth of darkness in which all of us find ourselves in Bosnia, in Europe, in the world, and also within our own hearts.

But if this is the first thing to be said, it is not the least. We are set on a discipline of learning to see in the dark. It is not necessary or right for me to be paralysed or mesmerised by the dark.

The learning for me is to keep my eyes open against one form of blindness – the blindness to the past. Amnesia is a kind of blindness, a form of unbelief. The past can be cursed but never cancelled. The past must not be forgotten, because, even as the present slips into the past, there is nothing else for us to see or understand.

Time and time again, dear Bishop, in countless conversations in Banja Luka, with so many different people, I have had a strong sense of there being more to be said: conversations left hanging in the air.

And even if the past is remembered, the stains of injustice and cruelty from all sides do not disappear. They are with us to the end of time. In the Book of Revelation (Chapter 5 verse 6) there in heaven's glory is the Lamb, 'standing as though it had been slain'. Even in heaven there are scars.

A WAY OF TRUSTING

Ever since the Enlightenment we in the West have placed such high values on our autonomy that to speak of surrender or trust seems sentimental or soft headed.

By autonomy I mean the certainty that everything depends on our words, plans and activities. In the West we have so often become self-made men and women. I sense this in my own ministry, and have forgotten to have the courage to trust the darkness and to stay watchful in it.

That trust is based on the hope that God grants us; and the conviction that it is possible to hope against hope. Thomas Aquinas puts it well in his Summa Theologica: 'the difference between hope and despair is the difference between possibility and impossibility.' Hope simply refuses the absoluteness of impossibility.

In Bosnia I have met many from the international community full of bright optimistic ideas, which they wish to impose. The ideas come to nothing. They become tired, cynical, and leave. That is despair.

But hoping against hope refuses to become tired and cynical. It persists in seeing possibilities when there appear to be none. This sort of hope settles for nothing less than everything. When I addressed the deputies at the National Assembly in June in Banja Luka, I spoke of Banja Luka becoming a frontier city of the spirit where three great religious traditions will flourish again. Many mocked me. Some began to see some new possibilities.

So the question is: how is that hope to be nurtured and sustained?

A WAY OF RELATING

We have been made capable of friendship. When relationships are forged in mutual respect, then we can speak of friendship which sustains the courage to stay watchful and hopeful in the darkness.

That, for me, as a visitor to your country, is what sustains me. Jews, Christians and Muslims have many ways of dramatising, in parable and imagery, such inclusive friendship: hence the images of friendship are those of food, drink, of common meals and hospitality. Not just the golden images of paradise regained: 'gardens of delight' in which God's people feast on fruit; gardens at the heart of which is set: 'the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit', and leaves 'for the healing of nations', but also in the times between, 'traveller's food, eaten in haste, bread broken, bitter herbs and times of fasting.'

The hope of which I have written so crudely, continues to enact, even in the darkness, metaphors, images of friendship's absolute fulfilment, while despair stays paralysed, deadened by guilt, overwhelmed by cynicism.

Thus the threefold disposition of the mind and heart for seeing, trusting and relating, seems to me to be the way in which I at least try to be constant and hopeful.

I send you these words with my prayers to our common Saviour who prayed that we might all be one in the name of the Blessed Mother, who is dear to us all.

I would welcome your response. Best of all would be if you and I meet. I really would welcome your thoughts on what I have written. I have sent my meditation to both of you.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Donald Reeves

I would welcome an opportunity to see you when we are in Banja Luka. I hope you received the letter about the civic forum I sent recently. I hope you will be able to attend the reception and presentation of our proposals on Friday October 18th. I will send exact time and place later.

We never found an occasion when we and both bishops could discuss this letter together.

When we arrived at the bishop's residence, Bishop Jefrem took us into his study, rather than the more formal reception room upstairs, and, as usual, served brandy, whisky and coffee. Now good friends we could barely remember the times when we had no luck reaching him at all. Donald talked about the lessons the Orthodox Church could teach the West, and discussed opportunities for making available the riches of the Orthodox Church life to the rest of Europe, including a formal visit to the Exeter diocese in England, a rural ministry not dissimilar to Banja Luka, and an exhibition of icon-painting: 'This will be enriching, theologically and ecclesiastically, for the Anglican Church, sharing your experience.'

'It's a good idea, very tempting,' said the bishop, smiling shyly as though he were being bribed and might fall into sin. 'I am a bishop, but more a missionary in my own diocese. I have to stay here when there is a need, and even when there is no need. I am not refusing. I hope we can sort it out. There have to be conditions. We don't have the right not to fulfil the rights of all priests.'

We did not understand what he meant by these rights. 'It will be a formal visit,' Donald reassured him. 'You will teach us.'

'I am still learning,' said the bishop, 'though too old to learn.'

Remembering the monastery of Gomjanica we visited in the summer, Donald asked whether the nuns there would like to come to the UK on an exchange visit with Anglican nuns. He was thinking of a convent at West Malling in Kent where the abbess and a small community of sisters prayed regularly for our work in Bosnia.

‘There should be no problem with that,’ said Bishop Jefrem in alarm, no doubt thinking quickly how he could duck this invitation. ‘We expect guests here and are able to greet them, but we probably don’t meet with your high standards.’

Donald’s third proposal involved an exhibition of Bosnian Serb iconography, a presentation including contemporary religious art from across Europe.

‘There are deacons who are professional iconographers,’ Bishop Jefrem told us, which reminded us of the deacon we met in Belgrade two years ago, who besides selling brightly coloured icons, also painted more personally in a daring abstract expressionist style. ‘We need to discuss the exhibition and prepare for it carefully,’ Bishop Jefrem once more prevaricated.

While Adnan completed his final journalism exams in Sarajevo, which he passed with flying colours, Igor Solunac translated for us on this visit to Banja Luka and agreed to liaise with me about the exhibition, and meet again with the deacon in Belgrade, who was now a famous iconographer.

Bishop Jefrem commented on Adnan’s absence, and touchingly said: ‘Adnan is a good lad,’ evidently missing him. His deliberate compliment about the young Muslim subtly informed us of the change in his attitudes: once he had supported the ethnic cleansers for ‘doing God’s work’. However he had yet to acknowledge the enormity of the crimes committed with the blessing of the Orthodox Church. I smiled to myself remembering Adnan’s shudder when the bishop once tried to embrace him.

The bishop invited us to the next Sunday litany. Though he could not attend, his priests would look after us. Donald commented on the enormous sadness in the congregation.

‘Many are exiles,’ the bishop explained. ‘They lost families. People are sensitive to suffering.’

‘I have learnt that you have to care for your people,’ said Donald placing emphasis on ‘you’ and ‘your’. ‘That is the job of the Orthodox Church in this land.’

The bishop explained further: ‘Unfortunately most exiles won’t return to where they came from. Neighbourly life is destroyed. Some were killed, and those who are left have to stay, wherever they are. Those in authority and the international community do everything bureaucratically. That is necessary of course, but this ignores the details of people’s problems. For instance, everyone needs repossession of their property. A family gets thrown out of their house. The house is locked. No one lives there. What do we do about people thrown on the street? Unimaginable suffering. For eight years five families are living in a small room. I send them wood for heating. Reception centres are in a terrible condition. People who lose their faith commit suicide. If we could understand each other better, we could find ways of helping. There is lack of goodwill and too much ignorance among politicians.’

Donald changed the subject and talked about meeting the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, patrons of the organization Alliance of Religions and Conservation. He explained about sacred sites from all religions world wide, and how reconstructing sites like that of the Ferhadija Mosque could be seen as a regenerating factor for a community. Sites in Mongolia and South America were earmarked for assistance. We wanted to find an Orthodox site which could also be earmarked. The Alliance might help with fundraising. The bishop suggested either Mostar Cathedral, or Zitomislice Monastery, both destroyed by Croats in two wars.

At this point I handed the bishop a pomegranate from the tree growing in the ruins of Zitomislice, which we had visited on our way back from Mostar earlier that week. We had stood in the rubble, contemplating open graves desecrated by Croat Catholics. Bones of past monks and priests peaked out of the disturbed soil. Despite obliteration of the monastery, the layout could be made out from the shape of its foundations, as

with the Ferhadija Mosque. Numbered stones piled up in readiness for the rebuilding. We dared not cross a patch of waste-ground, to pick temptingly ripe fruit from another tree, in case we stepped on a mine. Adnan kept a stern eye on our movements, more aware of the dangers than we were.

The Serb Orthodox Church had earmarked money for Zitomislice, a name which translates as ‘dream of wheat’. We would attend the opening two years later. The ceremony is described at the beginning of our book about the Omarska memorial, *the white house, From Fear to a Handshake*.

The bishop smiled joyfully at the pomegranate, particularly at my thoughtfulness in bringing it to him, and commented: ‘Best of all is when people help to build the cathedral or monastery themselves. Here in the Republika Srpska there is no need for new churches. But Kosovo is another matter. Go see bishops Grigorje and Artemije.’

We ended the meeting discussing a symbolic gift from the Soul of Europe to the new Orthodox Cathedral, Christ the Saviour, in Banja Luka.

The bishop did not think such a gift necessary. He preferred donations to complete the building, especially decorations and bells. But he did not look a gift horse in the mouth, and said that nearer the time we could discuss this matter. Saying: ‘You could do that; then come for the consecration.’

He then told us the history of the cathedral. Donations had been raised and construction begun between 1939 and 1941, which coincided with the beginning of the Second World War, when the Nazis were enjoying unimpeded victories and conquest in Europe. The Serbs were forced by the Germans to blow up their own cathedral, and that trauma remained unhealed to this day. The persistent refusal of the Office of the High Representative to grant permission kept the wound open.

As we said goodbye, the bishop asked thoughtfully about our work in Bosnia during the year since the Coventry Consultation. We explained about the culture of

citizenship, our work with Bishop Komarica, the Catholic diocese and with the Islamic community, our desire to work with all the communities.

He nodded encouragingly and embraced us warmly, pleased to see us again.

This meeting with the bishop turned out to be a high point in our relations. Friendly and well disposed, he seemed ready for exploring relations beyond the inward-looking community of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in which he was an acknowledged conservative member.

Back in 2002 the Orthodox Church and Bishop Jefrem resembled an Advent Calendar with many shut windows, one or two opening tentatively.

Ten years later, on January 9 2012, every window had been jammed shut and locked.

On that day, Patriarch Irinej and all Serbian Orthodox bishops celebrated the feast of St Stephen together with Serb politicians from Belgrade, including President Tadic, in the newly consecrated Banja Luka Orthodox Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

President Milorad Dodik of the Republika Srpska and Bishop Jefrem presided. The day also commemorated the founding of the Republika Srpska, the ambition of Radovan Karadjic achieved through ethnic cleansing of the majority Muslim population and legitimised internationally by the Dayton Accord.

By 2012 the Republika Srpska would have become independent in all but name. For the Muslims in Bosnia, as well as all over the world, the commemoration in Banja Luka on January 9 2012 celebrated the creation of a country by genocide.

In 2012 we could not even imagine returning and being welcomed again in the Republika Srpska. By then, the rest of Europe and the world had shrugged its shoulders saying: 'At least there has been no war and fighting.'

Meanwhile tensions were increasing. The Muslims in the Federation faced on one side an alliance of Serbia and the Republika Srpska, both backed financially and politically by Russia, and hostile Croats on the other.

A century earlier, tensions in Bosnia led to a world war.

This is a letter Adnan wrote in response to our dismay concerning the celebrations of January 9 2012 in Banja Luka:

Unfortunately you are right, and there is a nothing crucial that I could add. Except, that Bosnian (mostly Bosniaks, Muslims whatever) are not that innocent in all of this, let me explain:

For more than fifteen years Bosnia had its chance. After the war all the interest was on Bosnia to be frank, top diplomats were engaged, billions of marks, euros, dollars, pounds and who knows what other currencies were poured into the corrupted system. Our political and religious elites didn't know or, better, didn't want to take advantage of that interest and finances, whatever, because they were (and still are) corrupt and illiterate. Private imperatives were higher and more important to them than the "greater good". Those "elite" are basically peasants that got a chance to run something more than a flock. We have a saying in Bosnia: "In flood, only shit floats to the surface, gold sinks". We see that in action: they are now rich, established and moreover indisputable leaders of the "nation". They are well satisfied with the present situation, because it allows them to keep the positions they "worked hard" for. At the present, the "international community" has more than a few problems in their own courtyard; they are not so interested in us. No one is able to keep pouring more money into this bottomless hole. On top of this, radicalization of all societies is encouraged by constant media "coverage" about Islamic terrorists, Iranian weapons of mass destruction, and prospects of new terrorism attacks. I am genuinely surprised

that people from EU and US even want to speak with us Muslims. In that setting it is easy for the 'republic of srpska' and its "el presidente" to call itself a state and to explain that they are the last line of defence against the scary Muslims...

This is of course a simplified version of what is going on, but in essence a true one. I could express this in more academic terms with in-depth analyses, historical grassroots, and economical consequences. At the end you will get the same; this country is left to die. Not that there is no cure or doctors, but the patient is apathetic.

My advice for you is: don't bother yourself with this Godforsaken place, there are numerous other places and people that need help of which they will actually make good use for future generations.

Even though I miss you two big-time.

Truly yours

Adnan Jabučar

HUNGER. THE PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT: OCTOBER 18 2002

Back in 2002 Adnan drove up from Sarajevo to join us at a press conference in a room above a shabby shopping arcade. The student journalists, mostly women, fell silent while this Muslim from Sarajevo spoke. They seemed stunned by the news that by May 7 2003 the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque would have started.

Donald then spoke about the civic forum, reconciliation and 'putting up with each other'. The journalists looked bored and strolled in and out of the room while the interview proceeded.

One of the few grey heads present button-holed Donald afterwards to explain the benefits of an ethnically clean society, and why Muslims should never be allowed to return to Banja Luka. He spoke about the holiness of Greater Serbia and welcomed the return of the king, Crown Prince Alexander.

Donald informed the elderly chetnik that we had met the king in Belgrade, and that the king supported our project for rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque.

This depressing encounter proved how the myth of liberation from Ottoman brutality thrived in the Republika Srpska. The myth begged questions about the success and failure of ethnic cleansing, and what to do about Muslims being an ethnic reality in Bosnia.

The presentation took place afterwards in a large room adjacent to the press conference, in the hope of attracting more media coverage. Apart from Omer Visic, the vice-mayor standing in for Mayor Davidovic, who had apparently been held up at some other place in the Republika Srpska, not a single representative of the Islamic community attended the event. Everyone noted the absence of the religious leaders. Bishop Komarica, whom we met earlier, looked beaten, his customary energetic defiance dampened by deepening depression. He excused himself: he would be flying elsewhere in Europe, and offered to send Sister Mirna in his place. Mufti Camdzic could not be contacted, but we would have a difficult meeting with him just hours before we left Banja Luka. No one expected Bishop Jefrem to attend, but he sent Father Vladislav, who had the tricky task of being our ally as well as an apologist for the Serbian Orthodox Church. President Cavic was attending his daughters' birthday party. Since the teachers, both glad to be present, had told us how disruptive his children were at school, we appreciated his priorities. He did come briefly towards the end of the presentation.

Svetlana and Pero Bukejlovic both arrived on time, doubtful about yet another talk-fest with no immediate chance of economic improvement. Svetlana looked as though she would prefer to leave Banja Luka at the first opportunity. She only supported us because there was nothing else happening in town. Pero 'Mr Economy' Bukejlovic pawed the ground and prowled the room. He smiled at me in a friendly knowing

manner, remembering the conversations in Coventry about making pear brandy and tolerated our presence for my sake. He liked us personally, but in his role as Treasury Minister, bearing responsibility for securing investment into the Republika Srpska, he shook his head at our inability to supply him with funds and contacts. He appeared to have lost that menacing nationalist fervour which had so terrified the headmistress at Coventry. They spoke and joked together, but occasionally she glanced at him in alarm.

When everyone had gathered, Donald introduced the Banja Luka report and explained the processes of a civic forum, trying to inspire the crowd of mostly young NGOs and representatives of the international community, including the new Deputy High Representative in Banja Luka. German and French representatives were notably absent, making a point of boycotting this British initiative.

Daniel Fearn from the British Embassy in Sarajevo hosted the presentation, standing beside Donald and nodding his head solemnly.

Dejan spent the whole time worrying about paying the caterers, who were demanding money upfront, before serving food and drink. Fiona McWhillam had left for a weekend break to Italy with Daniel Korski, and had not given Dejan any cash. As usual, Adnan knew how to handle the situation. He engaged the caterers in friendly conversation, and with the aid of some free bottles of rakija, persuaded them to wait for their money.

Fiona may have thought the presence of the ambassador sufficient, but we noted her lack of care for Dejan and her absence with disappointment. It would have helped to be present at a significant event in the embassy calendar.

Graham Day had replaced Georges Bordet as Deputy High Representative and Head of Office in Banja Luka. Impressed with the report, as well as the whole idea of a

civic forum and the staff we had appointed, he attended the event and would give us the level of advice, time, and generosity we used to receive from Roy Wilson.

The evening ended with the guests trying to catch the attention of the present Deputy High Representative who studiously and skilfully avoided talking to anyone not from the international community. He later promised to support us, saying that one of the practical things he could do was stop the nationalists' plan to build tower blocks around the site of the Ferhadija Mosque.

The presentation chiefly benefited the NGOs, the most energetic and hopeful young people we encountered in Banja Luka so far. Asked what they wanted above all, members of the Youth Party declared forcefully: 'To destroy nationalism!' They understood that there could be no progress or development without dismantling the crippling intolerant, violent and ultimately self-defeating mindset of their parents' generation.

These young people with little influence could not make up for the absence of those members of the Coventry Group, the civic and religious leaders, none of whom attended the presentation. The unity of the presence of these leaders would have attracted media attention, and helped the cause of the civic forum immeasurably. Their noted absence served to underline the ever painful issues of inter-ethnic mistrust at the heart of Banja Luka, and proved the urgent necessity of this initiative and the crucial importance of the civic forum.

Perhaps the presence of the leaders might have diverted attention away from the report. However, they needed to be seen together in public at some stage soon, to endorse the civic forum, and show the world that they kept their word expressed in the Statement signed by all religious leaders at the Coventry Consultation, that the three communities should cooperate and coexist, reconciled and at peace. Before that could happen, people in Banja Luka needed to confront the issues of guilt concerning the

shattered Islamic community, which still survived but without any mosque or place for the mufti to live, and the decimated and neglected Catholic diocese.

To round off the presentation, Ambassador Cliff gave a speech of thanks and encouragement, which for some reason included an anecdote about him learning how to brew beer. President Cavic, as he usually did at these public events, looked across at us like a good school-boy, checking that we noticed his belated brief presence, and were approving.

The ambassador then invited everyone to help themselves to the food and drink.

Hunger dominated the event. The young people fell voraciously on the banquet which was sufficient for the whole of SFOR camped around Banja Luka, but they made scarcely any inroad, and left platters piled high with canapés, biscuits, cakes and roast meats. Adnan noted the prevalence of pork, so we heaved a sigh of relief at the absence of the Islamic community. The offence would have backfired on us. We did not dare think how Mufti Camdzic might have reacted.

After guarding the door and vetting the guests, two policemen seated themselves at a side table where the chef and waiters eagerly served them large portions from the feast. They tucked napkins in their collars to protect their ties and were still eating solidly an hour later when we left, looking at us shyly, not saying a word as they munched.

As with the teachers, these policemen could not reckon on being paid regularly. This explained their hunger. Guarding a banquet must have felt like a better posting than standing on a stretch of road outside Banja Luka, flagging down cars for speeding and minor traffic offences purported to have been committed some miles back, as happened to us several times, and insisting on taking penalties on the spot in cash.

The issue of a ‘safe space’ for public events arranged by the forum dominated the next staff meeting with Majda and Dejan.

Majda suggested a local café where young people already gathered informally for discussions, but Adnan and Dejan expressed doubts. Nowhere in Banja Luka could be considered safe for the free sharing of opinions along the lines we suggested, and were taken for granted in the UK, where a well-established liberal tradition has defended the rights of free speech for generations. Bosnia was emerging from centuries of increasingly oppressive Ottoman and then Hapsburg rule, decades of totalitarian communism, and then a bitter internecine war. Society could not be changed overnight. However well-founded Majda’s optimism, the fear of speaking one’s mind could not be underestimated.

It needed patience, skill and advice for this process to take root in Banja Luka, where the current attitudes of political leaders could be summed up as: ‘You voted for us; now let us carry on with governing and you shut up.’

Donald explained the process: how to chair meetings using a local convener, calling witnesses, experts, bureaucrats, and, when necessary, relevant politicians to more formal gatherings; how to encourage ownership of the forum by its members, making it less dependent on outside agencies like ourselves; working on remits dealing with the main issues such as returnees, legislation, bigotry and corruption; how to develop brokering roles, bringing together the best people in the economy for instance; and how to decide on action points, calling on relevant and experienced agencies for help and advice.

Majda agreed to research the café further and find partners for the forum. Dejan offered to meet people at the Office of the High Representative, those concerned with the economy, and find out what national plan there might be for growth, and what contribution the forum could make. Adnan planned to write a report. He would

examine the situation with his journalist's eye and prepare the ground for the rebuilding. His task also focused on public relations and the media, persuading other journalists to follow our activities and to give the project a high profile.

At the end of the month, Majda, Dejan and Adnan went on a course with the Scottish Civic Forum in Edinburgh to learn the rudiments of operating such an organization from Donald Reid, one of its directors.

Before leaving Banja Luka, we visited several of the NGOs which had sent representatives to the Presentation of the Report.

The first NGO we visited turned out to have doubtful credentials.

The organization Buka ran a centre for the 'decontamination of youth culture' and hosted a regular TV talk show. The main Republika Srpska channel gave it a prime time evening slot, on which the director could host question times with religious leaders and politicians. We watched a sample program, which sounded promising in an Any Questions format until we looked closer and saw the familiar figure of Bishop Chrysostom, a fervent nationalist, next to an unidentified Catholic priest sitting opposite two nervous representatives of the Muslim community in suits, unknown to us. The debate took place without an audience. Buka claimed to bring a different perspective to social and political issues, but seemed to be controlled by the nationalist bosses of the network. Milosevic had cunningly learnt to lend his verbal support to some independent NGOs in Serbia during his rule, in order to prove his democratic credentials to the rest of the world. Meanwhile he reserved the right to withdraw his support. NGOs in Serbia could not operate freely without fear of retribution in the shape of losing their funding. In the same way the Republika Srpska authorities knew how to appear democratic while still pulling the strings.

Buka's chief influence came from its magazine, a kind of Time Out for young people in Banja Luka, with sexy cartoons, features on films, pop music, gigs and local youth events.

The director and his assistant immediately informed us aggressively that we were naïve, ill-informed and clueless. This attitude did not bode well for any co-operation with the forum. Sasha Taclic, the director, lectured us on Buka's wide influence, while his assistant, Sinisa Marcis, a self-consciously handsome man with attitude, looked coldly indifferent as though this meeting was a waste of his time. He covered issues of sexuality in the Buka magazine, nothing subversive, but entertaining and likely to attract a young readership.

They both attacked other NGOs in a manner we shortly discovered to be mutual. All were fighting for the limited funding available, and remained stubbornly resistant to co-operation, accusing the others of not producing results, and spending too much time talking.

'NGO's falsify reports,' each organization said about the others. 'They implode and fall apart. We are the only NGO that gets threats constantly.' In Buka's case the death threat came from an extreme nationalist group, a letter first delivered to the wrong recipient, by ironic mischance a policeman, who happened to live at the same address as the director. The director admitted that Buka made every effort to avoid clashing with the authorities on any controversial issues, but extremists made trouble.

'Your problems cannot be separated from other problems,' he said. 'All issues are linked, so take care which partners to bring on board. Find out what results your partners can show you.'

The two men began to soften their attitudes, evidently not wanting us to rule them out as partners on the civic forum, but making it clear they should take precedence over other less influential NGOs.

‘Our prime concern is to see the Ferhadija Mosque rebuilt,’ they declared, in the half-hearted manner of saying something we wanted to hear, then added unconvincingly: ‘More even than you want it! It is our country. The Ferhadija is more than a building.’ To allay our suspicions as to their sincerity they explained: ‘No matter how absurd it may seem, the Ferhadija not being built actually suits all sides. Normal life without nationalist policies will sideline all nationalism, of whatever group. Buka represents normality.’

During the conversation Adnan scanned their literature, which lacked English translation. He came to the conclusion the Republika Srpska had set the NGO up as an agent provocateur to seem liberal and inclusive, but directed to investigate subversive elements. He advised treading carefully, and not inviting Buka to be partners until we could trust them.

Without having read the Report, they criticised the civic forum for not doing enough research. What then had Dejan and Majda been doing these last few months uninterruptedly if not researching? But they were adamant in their criticism: ‘Measurements are important, workshops, feedback from target groups. Without that picture you are nowhere. Five thousand people came to throw stones at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the Ferhadija Mosque. You’ll have succeeded when two thousand of those people help build the mosque. We are doing your work. We have presented a product with five years’ experience.’ Fearing to seem dismissive, they did concede respect for what we were trying to achieve and concluded: ‘You can count on our assistance. Present proposals to us.’

They offered to link websites and the abrasive conversation ended with a joke about the ‘decontamination of religion.’

After this meeting we did not hear from them again.

The Youth Party, who had made a refreshing impression at the presentation, criticised Buka, and other NGOs. The Youth Party focused on human rights and achieved several successes. They raised funds from Japan to provide heating systems for primary schools in the Republika Srpska, and organized discount cards for students travelling from Bosnia to other European countries. They provided a safe platform for young people to air their views. 'There is a voice now,' they assured us. Café conversations were already happening without intimidation. Older people continued to be a problem, hostile to the Youth Party, though the much older generation, their grandparents, had more in common with attitudes of young people, who tended to be more religious than we had assumed, and went to church regularly. Nationalism, corruption, youth problems, drugs, and alienation constituted the main issues. After the stone throwing at the site of the Ferhadija on May 7 2001 the Youth Party produced a press release, criticising the violence, with pictures taken of the riot, which was distributed at their regular activities: live acts, garage and house music and DJs. The majority of people in Banja Luka disapproved of the riot; the grandparents particularly angry because the mosque had represented an important part of their culture and heritage, even though they never worshipped there.

In her smart office near the city centre, Majda Despetovic, director of the Business Development Centre, described the desperate state of the economy. We knew some details from Svetlana, but not the political situation which was chiefly responsible for preventing change. The director explained the lack of will on the part of politicians: loans for small business enterprises were not forthcoming on the orders of Pero Bukejlovic's deputy. There was no institutional support for the Business Development Centre and no visible signs of improvement anywhere: no money, no resources and no results, even after four years working with entrepreneurs. The World Bank and US

Aid refused to give loans because of the lack of a viable market in Bosnia. Difficulty in acquiring passports became an added obstacle to trading. When it came to loans from abroad, the high interest rates and the smallness of the sums involved made it impossible for businesses to pay back within the stipulated three year period.

Companies had to be already registered to qualify for loans, with balance sheets going back three years, a catch 22 situation preventing new businesses from operating. As for marketing and start-up in those formerly state-owned businesses, which were the first to attract loans, the process of privatisation meant people lost their jobs. The government had no legislation to protect the work force. Many individual producers of goods, small industries like handicrafts, honey and farm produce, though they had skills, access to materials, and land, disqualified themselves from funding because they were not registered. Micro-credit schemes like Quick Fix, recommended by Hans Kretschmer, the former European Commission ambassador in Sarajevo, put too high an interest on its loans.

The Chamber of Commerce met regularly and put proposals forward at every meeting, a never ending story, but with no movement or results.

Majda Despetovic interpreted the low turn-out at the last election as a sign of apathy and lack of will: a 'serious' problem for the future of the Republika Srpska.

Those in authority only supported those businesses thriving on corruption. Big international businesses like Pepsi Cola were discouraged from settling in the region, because of the system of double taxation, in which both the Republika Srpska and the Federation demanded cuts in the profits.

Majda Despetovic identified the most pressing issue as the lack of dialogue between the authorities and the people: the reason for why she supported the idea of a civic forum, urging us to act as mediators. Ministers had no idea or interest in democratic processes. They needed the help of those with experience in this field. People had no

experience of state institutions, and how to make them function in everybody's interest. The legal framework was inadequate. Of the thirty thousand enterprises throughout Bosnia, twenty thousand were craft shops.

Majda Despetovic, energetic, intelligent and in good spirits despite the gloomy forecast, joined us for lunch, choosing what the restaurant menu described as 'grilled peace of meat', and then expressed a firm commitment to leave the country as soon as possible. She had a house and future mapped out in Slovenia.

Two hours before leaving Banja Luka we managed to get hold of the elusive Mufti Camdzic, who granted us an audience after breakfast.

Though exhausted he welcomed us warmly, rather than with the expected tsunami of reproach and fury at our lack of progress with rebuilding his mosque.

To pre-empt any such attack, immediately the polite greetings were over, Donald launched into a presentation of our plans. This took the wind out the mufti's sails. Impressed by our imminent visit to Istanbul, he listened with approval to the plans for structuring the company needed to establish the project, the board of directors, and even paid attention to how the activities of the civic forum, with the support of the British ambassador, would help improve the atmosphere in Banja Luka.

Donald explained the workings of the civic forum, and expressed hope that by the tenth anniversary of the mosque's destruction, on May 7, we could at least have the stones cleaned and ready for use in the rebuilding.

As a triumphant flourish to end his presentation, Donald mentioned a meeting with Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh, at which it was decided to elevate the Ferhadija Mosque to world heritage status.

The mufti suddenly looked stunned and embarrassed. Perhaps he had been preparing an attack on us for our slow progress, and could not justify this. In fact he had mixed

news to give us. On the one hand, positively, the persistent efforts of the Soul of Europe in Banja Luka, meant that full permission for the reconstruction had been granted. Now, negatively, the Islamic community of Bosnia, on television and in the papers, was putting pressure on the Reis ul Ulema to appoint an architect and engineer immediately, without consultation. The reason was: ‘Why aren’t you doing anything, now you have permission?’

Worried by this sudden turn of events Donald exclaimed: ‘We are rebuilding an ancient mosque, a work of art, it is not so straight forward. It is a heritage site. We really must work together on this, and not go in separate directions!’ We had a vision of a Saudi-style mosque, looking like a sports centre with a minaret, being hastily constructed on the site of Sinan’s masterpiece, or perhaps on a strip of land between the Orthodox and Catholic cathedrals, as had been suggested by Radomir Kosic in grudging concession to our demands.

‘We are in the same direction,’ the mufti murmured, with appeal for sympathy in his voice. ‘The pressure is now too hard and high for us. Please, I beg of you, write a formal letter to me and to Dr Cerić, one we can show to the Banja Luka Islamic community: that this must be done in the way you have explained; and also inform the media. We want Serbs and Croats involved as well. First we need to clean and prepare the stones, then bring them to the site. Bosniak refugees all over the world are asking for an explanation as to why the mosque is not being rebuilt yet. They are ready to give money.’

Donald had to think quickly and persuade the mufti not to surrender to this pressure. They discussed setting up a company with a structure including architect, project manager and consultants. The mufti and Donald would go around Europe together, to the Netherlands, Sweden, France and Germany, where large numbers of Muslims might be interested to support such a project. Only three days previously, Otto Frank

the Swedish ambassador had visited the mufti. We could ask him to be an ombudsman and member of the board. Crown Prince Alexander had also come from Belgrade to offer his support for the Ferhadija: another case where we had exerted influence.

The mufti seemed overwhelmed by the responsibility of suddenly having to take control of the Ferhadija Mosque project, and was relieved when Donald insisted on taking charge. First we offered to draft a letter for the mufti along the lines of: ‘I, as mufti, propose an architect and engineer, but that the Soul of Europe has asked for patience, that we should not rush into everything before qualified experts have been appointed. The project will start in the spring of 2003.’ Donald promised to meet Tina Wik, the architect appointed by the Dayton Accord to oversee the rebuilding of destroyed heritage sites in Bosnia, then to open a bank account for public subscriptions, and to establish a Foundation approved by the government.

The meeting shook us. It felt as though the rug had been pulled from under our feet. We sat in the Palas Hotel drafting the letter. A timid elderly man approached our table. He looked like a retired teacher, but turned out to be the architect appointed by the mufti to rebuild Sinan’s great mosque. The man looked overwhelmed but also relieved to meet Donald, and introduced himself as Isak Cavalic.

‘I thank you for your detailed insight,’ Isak Cavalic spoke, eagerly and rapidly, as though our presentation of future plans for the project were lifting a weight from his shoulders. ‘I heard about this meeting.’ It seemed more likely that the mufti had phoned him to come straight over to the hotel before we left town. ‘I promised then to do the project voluntarily for the Soul of Europe,’ he continued breathlessly. ‘I am here to help, not just promise; not only for the Ferhadija but also to help young people. It is not important where I work, and in what capacity, here or anywhere in Europe. I have been an architect here in Banja Luka for over thirty five years. I have been responsible for over three thousand buildings and recently made a model for the

College of Architecture. You can count on me in any way. Use my expertise: I will work voluntarily. I have seen the proposals. I have helped the mufti with many mosques. In my opinion three boards are needed for the project, one is the Soul of Europe, another will be made up of experts, consultants and honorary people. The third will be the executive group. I can be the communications officer, making sure there is no problem. That is how I see my job.'

He agreed the mosque should be built as it used to be: the same structure, though with modern heating.

'As soon as we proceed with the project, we will involve you,' Donald promised, thanking him and adding with emphasis: 'It is your town, your mosque.'

Feeling hopeful but apprehensive we prepared for our first visit to Turkey, where we hoped to attract support and funding for the rebuilding of the mosque and arrived there on November 20 2002.

ISTANBUL

DOWN BY THE WATERS OF THE BOSPORUS WE SAT DOWN AND WEPT

... this amazing location where the sea meets the land and the east meets the west....

Like one big bazaar vibrating with life, colours and scents... and the afternoon tea at

the Orient Express Hotel with the old pianist and the old ladies gossiping and their

fur coats are having a rest on a separate armchair...

Ouzi Zur, poet and artist.

Like many of the world's great cities that are situated on wide rivers or round harbours convenient to centres of trade, Istanbul straddles important waters resonant

with myth and history: the Golden Horn between two ancient parts of the city, linking the Mediterranean with the Black Sea via the Bosphorus Straits and the Sea of Marmara. The waters also separate Europe from Asia.

Istanbul spreads over several hills, so every part of the city can see other centres across the waters. Low residential and commercial buildings show deference to large domed mosques rising grandly with unimpeded view: delicately carved minarets decorating the sky. The impression is of an eternal city: for as long as these mosques stand, so will Istanbul.

The city bridges two continents but to think of Istanbul as being on the edges of both misinterprets its status as a world centre from the time of earliest empires, the crossroads of civilizations, and which accounts for its cultural significance. Once Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, then Byzantium, when the early Christian Church became politically influential, it was throughout that history a flourishing centre of commerce, up to and beyond the time when Islam conquered the headquarters of Emperors Constantine and Justinian. Then it became a fulcrum of the Ottoman Empire, with spacious urban design, parks, fountains and wide streets enclosing busy residential and commercial quarters, all built on a modest scale so as not to divert attention from the domes and minarets of mosques. However wealthy and influential the city might be, worship and acknowledgment of Allah takes precedence.

Despite the fall of flourishing empires, their legacy, added to recent secularization of politics and openness to Western influence, preserved Istanbul's international status. Its mix of religions and cultures, liberal, cultivated and cosmopolitan, including large Russian, Kurdish, Balkan, and Middle Eastern communities, drew influences from every direction. Though viewed by the West as exotically Asian, Turks consider themselves as European. This ambiguity makes integration into modern Europe an

intriguing prospect, despite the reservations of more nationalist minded countries that raise their predominantly Christian flag, suspicious of a future, in which such faith divisions become less significant nationally. Given the sizable minority of Muslims, now an integral part of European life, Turkey's presence in the continental family can only be beneficial. However the steady and inevitable resurgence of fascist nationalism in Europe, during a time of increasing economic insecurity, drip-feeds doubt and fear. In a continent which treats its inhabitants from neighbouring countries as unwelcome foreigners, Turks remain alien.

Despite a warm and generous welcome, with reassurances that we could expect support, the visit turned out to be disappointing.

We had come to expect Western indifference to Bosnia, an expression of traditional Islamophobia. We were not prepared for a similar indifference on the part of Turkey, which had been closely involved with Bosnia for centuries, and had family ties with the people there.

We discovered that Turkey had minimum interest in this former province of the Ottoman Empire. Help was restricted to basic humanitarian assistance. Not even the advantage of Bosnia providing Turkey with a foothold in Europe engaged interest. Small wonder the abandoned Muslim community in Bosnia turned to the Saudis for help. The Saudis introduced radical Islam to this corner of Europe, a tradition alien to Bosnian Muslims. Saudi influence there further alienated Turkish interest. The fate of Muslims in Bosnia seemed to be of little, if any concern; not even the matter of justice and family loyalty.

The reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque did raise some interest in Istanbul, but only because Sinan as one of the Ottoman Empire's most celebrated architects, had built it. Sinan occupied the same position in Turkey as Sir Christopher Wren in

England. Sinan designed the Sulejmanija Mosque which dominates the Istanbul skyline, and represents the city as St Paul's Cathedral does London.

Istanbul businessmen stared at us bemused: who were these two Englishmen, bothered about such an unimportant country as Bosnia and wanting to rebuild a destroyed mosque in a town best left to ethnic cleansers and forgotten? They smiled sympathetically and wished us good luck as much as to say: 'Carry on! We have lost interest. Don't ask us for too much help because we are busy with our own concerns. However, we are quite interested in the Sinan mosque, and will do whatever we can to help that project.'

We had hoped for cooperation, even a sharing of the burden, but were left with the distinct impression that it was all right for a couple of Englishmen to take sole responsibility for reconstructing the mosque, if that was how we wanted to spend our time. They would respect and admire our work, even though they pitied our naïveté. It was a 'noble task' they kept saying, implying it to be a pointless one; and the Turks had better things to do with their time and money.

We realized the Soul of Europe was alone in its task and entered the interior of the Hagia Sofia. Its massive dome seems to float unsupported over a vast dark interior in which gigantic Islamic inscriptions in bright gold hover between ancient Orthodox murals and frescoes. Were we making a colossal mistake? History perpetually records acts of injustice that are left unresolved, the victims ignored, and criminals victorious. The world carries on. History keeps repeating itself to the consternation of each succeeding generation; each one reckoning that the latest atrocity is so horrific that it has to be the last. Humanity can not allow it to happen again. And yet it continues. Humanity does allow it.

However, we could not bring ourselves to accept that apathy and indifference should represent tolerable attitudes to the perpetual patterns of history. Someone had to break

these vicious circles. If that was all we managed to do, just trying, then even the attempt, however futile and vain, would be worth it.

Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, writes about the difficulties people and small organizations with little influence have in making any difference to making the world a kinder and better place. Commenting on futility and failure, he adds soothingly that such efforts, however futile and disappointing, go ‘with the grain of the universe’.

Hilary Oakley, an Anglican priest who then went into business, and our adviser on developing business opportunities for the civic forum, had introduced Donald to Alper Utku, a business consultant from Istanbul, on one of his regular visits to London. They struck up a friendship, and Alper Utku then invited us to Turkey, where we hoped he would introduce us to businessmen who might be persuaded to help the project.

Alper’s chauffeur negotiated the steep and narrow streets to Alper’s office in Beziktas, the business district of Istanbul beyond Taksim, the modern hub of the city. Beziktas overlooks the Golden Horn towards the ancient city centre, where the Sulejmanija and Blue Mosques dominate the skyline.

Inside the modest building, Alper’s state of the art minimally furnished office was spacious, decorated in subtle pastel colours, and large, original de Groot paintings on the walls. Their massive daubs of garish colour and childlike figures, contrasted cheekily with the sober business-like atmosphere. Lack of furnishings gave the impression of Alper moving offices, not settling. He perched here on those few occasions when he stopped flying round the world. He later informed us that for a hundred and twenty nine days a year he travelled away from Istanbul.

Cedat Cakir, another entrepreneur and trusted business partner, joined us. He worked mainly in Europe, whereas Alper's interests straddled the world with major contracts in Africa and Asia. Focussed, energetic and friendly, so youthful as to be barely out of school or college, they set up several successful businesses and had already become wealthy.

We sat round an office table in another office, in which another large de Groot painting dominated the otherwise sparsely decorated space. Throughout the meeting Alper tapped away at his laptop, hunting down names and addresses for us, and conducting several business projects at the same time. His fingers clicked perpetually on the keyboard while he paid careful and critical attention to the proceedings, fixing other meetings for us, making suggestions, and offering advice. The more I looked at his boyish physique and wide-open, child-like eyes, the harder I found it to grasp that he had left school long ago, and that he ran a business consultancy empire, had married, raised children, and was building a grand residence on the Bosphorus. Alper belonged to that generation of communication technology geniuses who, already at school, streaked ahead of the others, mind and computer at one. In a hundred years this technology will be implanted, babies being born fully lap-topped.

Cedat looked with intense seriousness at Donald, who gave a presentation about the Soul of Europe and Turkey's possible involvement with our project in Bosnia. Donald made three points: first it was a heritage project, the rebuilding of a Sinan mosque, that aimed, second, to improve integration of Islam into Europe, and third, help religions to live together in peace.

Alper responded immediately by making it clear that he saw his role as only helping with the infrastructure to help the project, because he did not have the time and resources to actually help rebuild the mosque.

His subsequent emphasis on securing official commitment from the government of Turkey, to power and motivate the project, became the chief issue of the meeting. We needed stamped written approval, and authorization from ambassadors, authorities, religious leaders and anyone with influence in the media, so that businesses could be encouraged to support such a project. People would not agree to talk or meet with us without such authorization. This throwback to the Ottoman Empire may have served as a screen to protect businesses from having to commit to a project. Alper told us to draft a letter which must come from the Turkish Embassy in Sarajevo. Ambassador Erozan, whose imposing presence and forceful opinions we had experienced several times, had just left the office, and the new ambassador would not arrive before the end of January. We had applied for such a letter already, and told Alper about our meeting with Erozan's substitute. This person turned out to be a minor official who dared not commit anything to paper. Donald had patiently explained the purpose of the project while the official looked at us with alarm and persisted in misunderstanding, telling us, time and again that the embassy could not fund our project. We kept saying that we required only the embassy's moral support in writing a letter supporting our work, but he dared not do this even, as though his job or perhaps even his life were at stake.

'Get me the letter and then I will be able to introduce you to business people,' announced Alper, metaphorically closing the book on this Catch 22 issue. It was not worth his while talking to contacts without such a letter. On the other hand we could not persuade the Turkish embassy to give us this moral support.

However, Alper expressed enthusiasm for rebuilding a Sinan mosque. Ottoman architecture came high on the list of his various leisure activities, and he wanted to be associated with this kind of heritage project. His commitment to us might inspire confidence in other Turkish businessmen who respected him.

Cedat also talked encouragingly about his contacts with heritage and inter-religious organizations and businesses, particularly in the Netherlands, his main sphere of influence, and offered to introduce us to people there. He would set up meetings in Amsterdam.

We discussed the benefits of public subscription. Major construction businesses like Enka and Ali Sen in Turkey, and Carak Tara in Macedonia, were all known personally to Alper.

Before we could approach donors for funding we needed the support of officials, politicians, the mayor of Istanbul, architects and experts. Most of all, we needed a perpetually elusive letter from the Turkish Embassy in Sarajevo. This requirement kept being repeated like the refrain of a song with so many verses that it became monotonous.

Cedat then suggested we meet the Rumeli Association which looked after Turkish interests in their European territory, a foundation which covered the whole area of the Balkans. Alper tracked down their number and fixed a meeting for us. This would lead us to the Bosnia Association, an encounter which had significant resonance for the future of our work, and reminded us painfully, yet again, of the insurmountable problems we would face in the following years.

The discussion moved on to finding a translator and setting up an office in Istanbul to deal with donations. Alper and Cedat seemed to think we were wealthy benefactors from the other end of Europe with money to spare for this part of the project. Since he was paying our hotel bills, as a generous gesture of support, Alper must have known these levels of expenses were beyond the Soul of Europe's means. An expansion of our administration called on funds from Turkey and these would not be forthcoming until we had met the businesses, which in turn would not happen before we had the support of people with political influence, and that depended on the non-

existent letter from the Turkish Embassy in Sarajevo. Meanwhile the Islamic community in Banja Luka waited impatiently and doubted our sincerity.

We never anticipated how difficult it would be persuading Turkey to come on board, like coaxing an unwilling creature to eat from our hands. Occasionally we elicited a positive response about the ‘nobility’ of our project, accompanied by inspiring quotes from the Koran about generosity of heart, and God’s reward for selfless loving, sharing and giving, such as: *‘you will not attain piety until you expend part of what you love and whatever you expend, God knows of it’* and *‘you can not be real believers unless you love each other’*.

So we continued to try and persuade, while our resources dwindled, and the chance of reconstructing the mosque became ever more remote.

Alper knew the doctor who happened to look after the mayor of Istanbul, and reckoned he could fix a meeting for us with this significant person.

Two eager consultants from a construction firm suddenly arrived, smiling fiercely and primed to love-bomb us into securing their services for the rebuilding of a Sinan mosque. They must have been told about our presence by Alper, and were about to launch into a long presentation, fixing screens and laptops, but, as soon as they heard we had no money to pay them, left as rapidly as they came, smiles switched off.

World events briefly impinged on the meeting with Alper and Cedat before we left. An international war with neighbouring Iraq threatened: a catastrophe which would affect Turkey directly. Cedat and Alper were emphatically against war. ‘Sometimes economic ties between countries are complicated by state politics,’ Cedat observed. ‘Relations between Iraq and Turkey are sensitive.’

This war would not be stopped. On a later visit to Turkey we stood on the border with Iraq and listened out for the American planes on their way to bomb Baghdad.

Alper Utku was a business consultant for the owner of the Merit Antique hotel, advising on its program of modernization and improvement. He booked us in there for the several nights we stayed in Istanbul.

The main hotels in the city cluster around Taksim Square, the modern hub of Istanbul. But the Merit Antique stands in solitary splendour on a side street off the main road that leads to the historic centre on the other side of the Golden Horn. Friends of mine, who knew the city, warned me about the infiltration of the Russian mafia there and consequent dangers. I would have an alarming close shave with one of these gangsters on a future visit.

Outside the hotel, tradesmen carried or pulled carts piles high with huge boxes along the pavements between crowds of competing hustlers, all calling out insistently: 'Hey there! American? English? German? What would you like? A girl? Sex show? Come with me, we can go somewhere!'

The peaceful atmosphere inside the hotel provided welcome security; the spacious air-conditioned hallways leading to arcades with shops and restaurants. The elegance of the furnishings cocooned guests from the rough and tumble beyond the revolving entrance door. The bedrooms looked out on an ancient mosque with a large dome. Its elaborately carved minaret rose above the rows of shops on the other side of the street where barrow boys dodged honking taxis and trucks. Long-limbed young Russian women mingled with shoppers and tradesmen, and were followed closely by their pimps, wearing dark glasses and gold bracelets.

Inside the hotel, piped sounds of a soporific flute playing *Send in the Clowns* and *There's A Place For Us* on a perpetual loop, heightened the surreal atmosphere of a few guests scattered among armchairs, luxurious plants, and wooden tables with delicately carved legs. A fountain gushed in a stream down the centre of the hallway beneath a high glass ceiling.

Our visit coincided with Ramadan. This explained the emptiness of the hotel during the day. As soon as dusk fell, people gathered in thick crowds around the many tables, and sat on chairs covered in gold cloths. With faces intent on filling empty stomachs, they silently, hastily and single-mindedly consumed elaborate feasts, served on large platters by rushed waiters, while groups of musicians and singers performed folk songs at a volume to drown the clatter of cutlery and plates.

A burly shoe-shiner in a multi-coloured waistcoat squatted in a corner of the reception area, surrounded by cloths, dusters, brushes, a multitude of bottles of oils, polish and creams, all neatly arranged in separate elegantly decorated and polished-brass containers. He attended to our shoes as a concerned doctor might care for a patient, and after long minutes of rubbing, brushing, flicking, and expert teasing of corners and clefts, left them shining as they had never done, even when new.

Outside the hotel, crowds flowed ceaselessly in a steady river through the Sultanahmet towards the Hagia Sofia, the Topkapi Palace and the Blue Mosque with its six tall minarets, past the University, the crowded bus and tram stops, smaller mosques with their adjacent hammams, shops selling leather goods, tourist bric-a-brac, Turkish Delight and halva, past the Grand Bazaar, and narrow streets beetling on both sides, in every direction.

The crowds never seemed to stop moving, not even for the occasional beggar, who grasped at every opportunity to importune people, chasing after likely foreign-looking donors, accompanying them on the way, persisting in demands, and tugging at their clothes. One morning a young man crouched on the pavement sobbing loudly. We considered persuading someone to find out the reason for his distress, but hours later he was still sobbing and I noticed him peep from under his sleeve to check if anyone was paying attention.

The Hagia Sofia stands close to the Topkapi Palace, high walls surrounding secretive spacious grounds, and both places charge high prices for visitors to enter. The ancient Orthodox basilica has not been destroyed to make way for a mosque, although inside, words from the Koran are imposed in gigantic gold lettering across the Christian mosaics. With this unresolved contrast of juxtaposed faiths and the constant presence of tourists, the Hagia Sofia no longer feels like a place of worship. Kemal Ataturk's solution to the problem of whether it is a mosque or church was to make it officially a museum. The mighty dome spans a cavernous gloomy space which provides an atmospheric setting for treachery and murder in films like *From Russia with Love*.

The grandiloquence of the Blue Mosque, on the other side of the road from the Hagia Sofia, contrasts with the gracefully proportioned Sulejmanija Mosque, built by Sinan on one of Istanbul's many hills. At night, the minarets of both mosques glisten with strings of fairy lights and an illuminated message of brotherly love.

The Dayton Accord had appointed two architects to deal with the rebuilding of destroyed places of heritage significance in Bosnia, including mosques and churches: Tina Wik from Sweden and Professor Zeynep Ahunbey from Turkey.

Zeynep Ahunbey met us at the Church of the Pantocrator on one of Istanbul's hills where she was in the process of supervising the restoration. The restaurant next to the church overlooks not only the Sulejmanija Mosque, but also the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara.

The twelfth century Church of the Pantocrator having once been converted into a mosque, the Zeyrekhame, like the Hagia Sofia, had not been destroyed but needed restoration. From the outside it looks a fine example of early Orthodox architecture with its domes and modest scale indicating how Muslim architects had taken some of

the principles and motifs of early Christian design, developing them, so as to create an Ottoman style: both favouring rounded arches, domes and an intimate scale.

The professor, trim and elegant in a russet brown jacket and trousers, looked at us through narrowed eyes, almost shut, with the minimum of expression on her face, as though she could not determine what kind of people we were, and why she should be wasting her time on us. After listening to Donald's presentation on the three main themes of the Ferhadija Mosque being a heritage project, symbolic of the status of Muslims in Europe and the consequent need for some concrete collaboration between Christianity and Islam in Europe, she gave no indication of interest but did suggest some names of businesses who might be persuaded to fund the project: names such as Koc, Sabanci, Erika (a construction firm), as well as the Dijanet in Ankara, and Sarik Tara, all of whom Alper Utku probably knew. She then let slip the surprising information that already fifty thousand dollars had been set aside for the Ferhadija Mosque. No one had thought to tell us this before. The Reis must have known, but probably kept quiet about it so as not to discourage us from continuing to raise money for him.

In a disinterested fashion she recommended we meet the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture and the mayor of Istanbul, then suggested that the Orthodox cathedral in Mostar might provide a project to match the Ferhadija. She advised us to draw up a program of action, seemingly unaware of the plans Donald had already sent her, along with feasibility study proposals, for which we would also need funding. We found ourselves again in a vicious circle.

Donald asked her about the scale of her authority in Bosnia.

'We reject proposals,' she replied curtly.

What was going on? Bosnia seemed to be an irritation in the professor's life, distracting her from more important projects elsewhere. She did not seem to care that

an Anglican clergyman had taken total responsibility for the rebuilding of an Ottoman mosque. More fool him, probably. Apart from proposing names, mostly those suggested by Alper Utku, she offered no help. When we asked whether she might be interested in being the architect in charge of the project she suggested finding someone else, and quickly left us, in order to continue her supervision of the reconstruction work in the Church of the Pantocrator.

We sat on the terrace of the Zeyrekhame with its panoramic view across Europe and Asia, the city and its three seas. A pall of dust hung over the ancient churches and mosques as the sun tried to break through winter clouds. At that moment we felt all our work was for nothing.

We thought of Bosnia abandoned by both east and west, and wondered how just the two of us could begin to achieve any of our objectives. Western attitudes favoured paying lip service over taking care of this ravaged part of Europe. Politicians preached, made threats and issued commands but did little to help build the foundations of a democratic society, which might begin to put the country on its feet again. Turkey with no such tradition of hypocrisy had no qualms in expressing lack of interest in the fate of a part of Europe it had once controlled. Bosnia had become the bin-end of Europe and also the bin-end of the Ottoman Empire.

The more we sensed the indifference of the world to Bosnia, the more we realized the importance of our presence there. We kept remembering the words of our friend Bishop Komarica: not ever to stop, to persist, never to forget the people of Bosnia or give up hope. This was his calling, and he had to live it day after day, constantly banging on closed doors of political apathy and contempt.

We sat for several hours by the Zeyrekhame contemplating the city below us and listened to the chorus of the call to prayer, which came from every direction at

midday. A powerful baritone intoned from Sinan's Sulejmanija Mosque, which rose, spreading and nestling in all its magnificence on the hill opposite us, shortly joined by voices from smaller mosques scattered across the city. The harmony continued like a heavenly choir reminding us, and the people in the streets below, that their concerns, however pressing, were insignificant against the eternal perspective of God.

Without oil or any commodity to attract the attention and greed of super powers, who cared if Bosnia became a rogue state? Whatever happened there, the world could control and contain the damage. As Adnan observed at his most cynical, it would suit the world if the country cleared itself of all people and became a golf course, or leisure park, for the European rich. These affluent Europeans had no interest in the qualities of relatively peaceful coexistence that had existed between the disparate communities in Bosnia, and which had made this part of Europe unique for centuries. During that time other countries in the same continent were locked in perpetual conflict, national and imperial rivalries and resentments, leading eventually to the global massacres and annihilation of two world wars.

The call to prayer came to an end, fading atmospherically like angels disappearing into the clouds with a final flutter of wings. One solitary muezzin kept intoning the words of the Koran, like a soul left to carry the burden of grief, of need, and of understanding. For several minutes the cracked elderly voice persisted in reminding the people to pray then stopped abruptly, as though realising it needed to leave with the others. The city, its concerns, and our lives, continued as before.

Precisely because the rest of the world did not care, we had to persist. We remembered Bishop Komarica appealing for our faithfulness, Mufti Camdzic alternately punching us in the solar plexus, then embracing us with tears in his eyes, Bishop Jefrem, waiting impatiently and excitedly for our arrival, and the many young people in Bosnia trying to leave for better lives elsewhere.

THE AHDNAMA OF SULTAN AHMET SIGNED 28.5.1463

Two meetings emphatically confirmed our sense of Turkish disinterest in Bosnia.

Cedat Cakir, whom we had met earlier at Alper Utku's office, advised us to visit Rumelli, the organization supporting Turks in the Balkans, as well as a linked group specifically caring for the interests of Turks in Bosnia. The taxi driver had problems finding their address in a remote suburb of Istanbul. This already indicated to us that these organizations had no status, and enjoyed only minimum recognition.

Eventually we arrived at their headquarters in a back street, and waited for Alper to send an interpreter, because the people there only spoke Turkish or Albanian. The house served as a centre for refugees from the Balkans. Forms, consisting of applications with passport photos attached, piled high round the photocopier in the dingy office. Throughout our meeting, elderly people in drab clothes kept entering and looking expectantly at us. Up to a million Bosnians now lived in Turkey. Rumelli restricted its activities to Bulgaria, Macedonia, and that part of Europe belonging to Turkey. They gave us the phone number of the Bosnia Sanjak Association, and we fixed a meeting for the following day.

The taxi drove us to another remote suburb of Istanbul, where the pot-holed streets had no name, and construction workers stood in disconsolate groups, watching one man hammering the stony earth with a pickaxe. It took us so long to find the association's office that the taxi driver kindly agreed to wait for us at no cost so we would not be abandoned in this wasteland.

A mournful looking man and his secretary, an older woman coughing furiously with a heavy cold, welcomed us warmly. It felt as though we were the first visitors to have bothered making the effort to find them, and the man enthusiastically began to phone colleagues from other parts of the suburb to come and meet us.

While we waited, I examined a framed document on the wall, prominent among fine paintings and photographs of mosques, Bosnian towns and sites including the Mostar Bridge. The man observed me staring at the document and, in excited tones, said it was the Ahdnama, a declaration-order written by Sultan Ahmet, the conqueror of Bosnia in the fifteenth century. It had been found recently in the Catholic monastery, at Fojnica in Bosnia and provided written evidence of the religious tolerance and recognition of human rights by the Ottoman Empire towards its Catholic Christian subjects. No one had ever mentioned this significant document to us in all our travels in Bosnia, though, as the man commented, the wording predated the Bill of Rights by five centuries:

Let nobody bother or disturb those who are mentioned, nor their churches. Let them dwell in peace in my empire and let those who have become refugees be safe. Let them return and let them settle down in their monasteries without fear in all the countries of my empire. Neither my Royal Highness, nor my viziers nor employees nor any of the citizens of my empire shall insult or disturb them. Let nobody attack, insult or endanger neither their life nor their property nor their churches. Even if they bring somebody from abroad into my country they are allowed to do so...

These words, written in 1463 after the conquest of Bosnia, now echoed down the centuries as a reproach to the mythology of Turkish brutality and intolerance, described in harrowing detail in such classics of Bosnian literature as *The Bridge Over the Drina* by Nobel-prizewinning Ivo Andric. The reality of what actually happened in the years after the conquest may not have complied with the clear orders of Sultan Ahmet, but then neither did the Bill of Rights achieve its noble objectives. Decades of civil rights' struggles in the United States testify to that reality, and it still fails to achieve them across the democratic world, where governments profess to honour its

precepts. These words found in a neglected place on the edge of Istanbul shone for us like a mellow candle flame in the gloom of our spirits.

Adnan subsequently found a copy of the Ahdnama in Sarajevo. He framed and presented it to us. This print now hangs over the entry to the Soul of Europe offices. The words surround the celebrated turbaned profile of Sultan Ahmet as painted by the Venetian Giovanni Bellini. The conqueror's delicately aquiline nose and small shrewd eyes indicate both absolute authority and feline guile.

The Chairman of the Bosnia Sanjak Association arrived with an interpreter, whose family were refugees from Macedonia. The association had upwards of one thousand five hundred members. Between 1960 and 1968 there had been pressure on Turkish Muslims in Bosnia to move to Turkey, not as refugees, but because there seemed to be no future for their children. This became the foundation of the association, which became an aid agency during the war when thousands fled to Turkey.

After an hour's conversation we were taken to an upstairs room, where plastic bags, full of food and presents for the poor, covered the floor. At Bajram, the feast which ends Ramadan and is the Muslim equivalent of Christian Christmas, instead of spending large sums of money on expensive presents in an orgy of consumerism, Muslims traditionally give to the poor and celebrate with a family meal.

Meanwhile the Macedonian interpreter summed up Muslim attitudes to the West: 'Near to the civilized world people were killing each other. But no one from that world did anything about it. The situation caused us to lose confidence in Europe.'

Our work seemed to have hit rock bottom in the derelict suburbs of the city, but two significant meetings during the final days in Istanbul cheered us.

Cemal Usak, president of the Journalist and Writers Association since 1995, welcomed us to his smart and spacious offices opposite the Hilton Hotel in Taksim.

Having heard of the Soul of Europe and read our web site, he had wanted to meet us long before we decided to come to Istanbul. He focused on inter-faith, inter-ideological and inter-religious dialogue world-wide, but with specific projects in the East. His organization supports initiatives in the vast territories and populations of the former Soviet Union, where Muslims had traditionally been in a majority and were now suffering discrimination.

Alper Utku expressed reservations about our links with Cemal Usak, on religious grounds. Turkey is a secular society, in line with Europe. Religion had to be kept separate from politics. The Ferhadija Mosque represented a heritage project because of the architect Sinan, and for that reason alone he would give his time and support. Cemal Usak worked on inter-faith and inter-religious projects that had no interest for Alper, who did however consider himself a devout Muslim.

‘We, as Muslims, need change,’ said Cemal Usak. ‘People in Ankara still live in the 1930s.’

He reminded us that the Abrahamic faiths shared roots in Turkey. Abraham came from Southern Turkey, and early Christian movements had originated along the border of Northern Iraq and Turkey. The final chapter of my book takes place on that very border at a time when American planes were delivering shock and awe to Baghdad and I looked down the mountainside where Abraham once stood. He must also have surveyed the desert stretching into a dusty distance, before setting out on a journey which led to the writing of the Old Testament and influenced history for better and worse over the next three thousand years and counting.

Cemal therefore saw it as only natural that inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogues should take place in Turkey, the hub of world civilizations rather than a country on the edge of continents.

He gave us two surprising pieces of news.

Firstly, conferences across Europe were talking about our work for the Soul of Europe, including Greece which we had not visited.

Secondly: Sinan, the architect of both the Sulejmanija and Ferhadija Mosques, had been born into an Orthodox family in Thessaloniki. His descendants still lived there. He converted to Islam, the only member of his family to do so. That was noteworthy in itself but even more remarkable because he became the greatest architect produced by the Ottoman Empire. This fact, like the Ahdnama of Sultan Ahmet, gave the lie to the myth of Ottoman repression. That empire encouraged talent from all its dominions and people sometimes converted out of choice, not only by compulsion.

‘There will be no peace in the world without peace between the religions,’ declared Cemal, adding with emphasis: ‘And there will be no peace between religions without collaboration.’

These words quoting Hans Kung the theologian summed up his perception of the work of the Soul of Europe in Bosnia. At a recent conference on inter-faith tourism, he had given a speech referring to the Ferhadija Mosque project, saying: ‘If we reconstruct churches and synagogues together, we can talk about Bosnia, and also about rebuilding mosques.’ He added: ‘Dialogue means to know one another.’

‘The idea is wonderful,’ declared Cemal in response to Donald’s presentation, ‘But Turkey is now in deep economic crisis.’ When is a country not in economic crisis? ‘Five years ago it was easy to find sponsors.’ Really? ‘Now for the last three years it is hard to find any.’ It is always hard to find sponsorship. In times of apparent plenty, businesses shore up assets to prepare for economic downturn; most of the time the droning complaint is about crisis. ‘But we will succeed!’ he exclaimed and mentioned the names of Turkish firms now opening branches of textile goods in Banja Luka, with other companies following from Sarajevo and Bahrain. However, we

found no Muslim businesses from anywhere investing in Banja Luka, a place Muslims now deliberately shunned.

Cemal finally guided us around his spacious offices each padlocked with sophisticated security devices. We walked through halls, down corridors and across a large conference room, all kept immaculately clean, elegantly furnished and decorated, the walls lined with photographs of conferences and meetings in every country of the world. The association did not lack funds or influence. Cemal proposed linking our organizations. On a future visit to Istanbul we would discuss joint initiatives.

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HALUK

Our most entertaining encounter in Istanbul which, despite its promise, proved ultimately unproductive, began inauspiciously.

Alper had fixed us to meet his colleague and mentor, Haluk Turkmen, in the coffee bar of the Hotel Marmara on Taksim Square. The bar looked so crowded and noisy we waited upstairs in the quieter cocktail lounge, calling Haluk on his mobile every minute but receiving no reply. After half an hour when it seemed we had been stood up, he did answer. He had been sitting all the time in the coffee bar below where the noise level had prevented him from hearing his phone ring. Luckily for us, a passing waiter alerted him to the mobile flashing. An important meeting in Istanbul almost failed to happen.

A sharply-suited man, not much older than Alper, but looking as though he were at least in the final year of university, rather than still at school, was already managing consultant and an executive board member of several companies. He smiled at us cheerfully and we spent the next hour trying to lip read him, while the crowds at the

surrounding packed tables shrieked, yelled and bellowed at each other in order to be heard above the thumping rock music shaking the walls and ceiling.

Alper admired and trusted Haluk, so the purpose of this meeting was basically to reassure Alper that the Soul of Europe merited his time and attention. Haluk took an immediate liking to us, and we spent the rest of the evening with him. To our relief we left the Marmara café, and walked down the quieter streets to the luxurious Four Seasons Hotel. Haluk wanted to cement this new friendship as Alper had hoped, crucial for any project we would develop with Turkey.

Haluk, like Alper, spoke fluent English, and the conversation proceeded with practical advice, such as the need to set out a proposal with a timed programme, indicating clear objectives and deadlines, all mixed with poetic flights of fantasy. A bright, cultured and thoughtful man, Haluk's clever use of aphorisms and metaphors to illustrate his points made him understandably admired by his peers. He had the knack of pinning an idea with an image. So, for instance, he described our plan to secure the support and funding from businesses as a process of 'wind blowing leaves': gathering the support of politicians and the media for the Soul of Europe and the project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque. This would accumulate positive attitudes which, like the wind, would then automatically pick up support from businesses, driving interest in the same direction. Haluk described the nature of securing support imaginatively: not just by individual persuasion, which did not guarantee success, but creating a tide of opinion which would bring inevitability to the project.

On our next visit to Istanbul he would offer to help marshal support from top politicians, and organize significant media coverage, not just an article here and there, but a prominent spread in the Huriyet Sunday edition, one that would be read by the most people. Alper balked at being too closely involved with us because of his heavy business commitments, and also because he had never been part of this kind of

project. Haluk would help him, and explained that Alper had a higher standing with his peers, because secularly minded rich business people of Turkey knew Haluk to be a devout believer, and therefore suspected his motives as being only religious and charitable. They trusted Alper more, and if he backed a particular project, then it must be worthwhile. It would help the project more if Alper remained the front man in Turkey, while Haluk worked behind the scenes, and arranged for us to meet all the people of importance necessary to the project.

After speaking intensely Haluk told us his story. Born to a poor family and educated in a Protestant missionary school, founded at a time when Turkey became multi-faith in the post-Ataturk years, he studied humanities and history, then economics. After making rapid success in the business world, he took stock of his life's purpose, and changed direction to be an adviser and consultant, working less for money than for more spiritual values. He had the ear of Presidents, Prime Ministers and Mayors as well as businessmen and politicians, who respected his candour and probity.

Having delivered this glowingly impressive self-portrait he began to philosophise. 'Life is not coincidence,' he said, gazing intently at us, and offered us hospitality in a smart alcove of the Four Seasons Hotel. While we drank coffee, and picked at a tray of elaborately decorated small cakes, a piano tinkled in the next room. 'People are brought together for a reason,' he explained, describing how his first meeting with Alper as a business rival developed into a close friendship. He seemed to consider us in the same light: a chance meeting that had significance.

Haluk had studied in Tarsus, where St Paul once lived. 'Ethics came before religion,' he said, and talked of the strong chain connecting Adam to Mohammed.

Haluk emphasised the secular nature of modern Turkish society. We needed to appeal to businesses for support on humanitarian, rather than religious, grounds. He used the image of 'fish eggs' to describe the profligate quantity of promise which

would take time to hatch into large shoals, gathered from three sources: politicians, media and businesses. By the end of January our first targets would be Huriyet, the mayor of Istanbul and the Prime Minister. By the end of February we needed to establish a charity account. In March we needed to have linked Ferhadija Mosque Project and Soul of Europe web sites. In April we would open an office in Istanbul. Haluk doubted whether Cemal Usak and the Inter-cultural Dialogue Platform could be of use.

Finally he quoted a famous comment about a past project to build a mosque: ‘We have raised the mosque with the prayers of the rich and the money of the poor.’ Next time it would be the right way round.

SACRED SPACES: THE CEMBERLITAS HAMMAM

Sinan, the architect of the Sulejmanija and Ferhadija Mosques, also designed and built the elegant Cemberlitas Hammam in 1584 as a commission from the sultan’s wife to be a charitable foundation raising money for the poor.

Hammams have been traditionally attached to mosques so people can prepare themselves for worship by washing and purifying their bodies, and approach God in as perfect a condition of physical and spiritual cleanliness as possible. God is forgiving, but devout Muslims try not to offend him by offering prayers and worship with the dust and sweat of the outside world on their bodies. However some less reputable hammams are sleazy places where sex happens. That is not their purpose.

The Cemberlitas Hammam still gives the visitor a hint of its spiritual dimension. Sinan took care over the proportions of the spacious circular central chamber with its pale-pink-grey pillars and arches. After the elaborate process of soaping, using mountains of lather, and inflicting vigorous massage that stretches the body’s joints, often with excruciating pain, the exhausted visitor lies on a large polished heated

navel stone to recover and meditate. The visitor gazes up at Sinan's large dome, with its multitude of star-like indentations pierced by an equal number of rays of sunlight, refracting through clouds of vapour. The visitor listens to the trickle of cooling water and the occasional hiss of steam.

The domed hammam is an architectural echo of its neighbouring mosque. After individual ablutions, worshippers are prepared to join the communal prayers there, together with family, friends and strangers.

Hammams in Istanbul have now become tourist attractions. Attendants demand tips for perfunctory service, and there is a sense that visitors should be treated with contempt as though they were engaging in indecent activity. The attendants push visitors in and out, hurrying the process, to allow for more massages and tips.

The Cemberlitas Hammam remains salubrious, because of its fame and the large number of tourists wanting to experience the interior of a Sinan masterpiece.

In other hammams the attendants might proposition and harass foreigners, which makes the experience stressful rather than relaxing, and far from spiritual. At one hammam in Taksim the masseur knocked on the door of my cabin to ask whether I wanted sexual services, for a substantial fee. No one could leave any hammam without running the gauntlet of demands for tips, not only from the masseurs, but also the towel-handlers and attendants.

In the Cemberlitas Hammam, it being Ramadan, the attendants stopped working at nightfall, and focused on the eagerly awaited meal. They seated themselves round a large table, along with male members of their families and friends, and began to serve each other tea and pass round platters piled high with pies and delicacies. The attendants pointedly ignored the unwelcome visitors. With large towels wrapped round paunches and draped over heads and shoulders, these customers wandered aimlessly and disconsolately up and down stairs, along corridors or waited

expectantly, looking out of the doors of their private cabins. They were supposed to rest on a narrow bed, and drink refreshing mint tea, which, at this particular time of the day during Ramadan, the attendants were not willing to bring.

SNOW

BOSNIA JANUARY 2003

Light snow fell on roads, roofs and the hillsides of Bosnia. Snow covers mess, dirt and crimes. Snow makes everything pristine, white and innocent. A body can be covered and remain hidden. But eventually snow melts, and the mess, the dirt and the crimes are revealed, the body decaying and disintegrating, no longer recognizable.

I don't like Spring. I am annoyed by the thaw, the smell, the dirt. Spring disgusts me. The blood seethes: feelings and thoughts are gripped with suffocating longing. Spring bores me. I prefer severe winter. I love its snow. In moonlight as when the sledge, swiftly and smoothly, glides over the surface.....

Autumn. Pushkin.

Snow also silences and isolates. A little fir tree covered in snow, painted as in a close-up, stands out from the forest that surrounds it, the sky oppressively dark in the background. The Ukrainian artist Shishkin, a leading landscape painter in nineteenth century Russia and contemporary of Leo Tolstoy, scrutinizes the personality of this chosen tree, drooping under drifts of snow, and elevates it into a monumental portrait, every detail precisely observed. Just as Constable's *Haywain* conjures up for the English a feeling of homecoming and belonging that reflects a specifically English ideal landscape, with luxuriantly foliated large trees, deep shade, fertile meadows and clear streams, so Shishkin's *Fir Tree* appeals to Russian melancholy: a sense of

solitude in a country where each person is just one of millions scattered across its vastness. The little tree stands apart from the many others. The dark sky threatens more snow, obliterating and making the tree invisible beneath the drifts. There is a sense of foreboding, of a desire for warmth and security, companionship and love. The tree represents every Russian soul, and is a popular painting. Fresh snow is pure white. It suggests the evanescent beauty of Snow Maiden, the mythical foundling girl of Russian fairytales, who delights a childless couple, but breaks their hearts when she melts away under the first rays of Spring sun. The dark sky in Shishkin's painting warns of an oncoming blizzard. Pushkin's poem *Winter Evening* describes an old couple sitting in their hovel while a furious winter storm howls outside, shaking the roof, shrieking like a banshee, and banging on the shutters like a stranger begging to be let in. The old man, drunk, looks mockingly at his wife, who sits calmly spinning by the hearth, and he toasts his youth long gone. As always with Pushkin, the poem's potency emerges between the lines. They suggest a disappointed life, sorrow, and anger at what might have been. This is not a cosy scene of domestic harmony, but of poverty, mismatch, compromise and making do. The raging storm releases the man's emotion.

Shishkin's painting of a small tree encased in snow is as suggestive as Pushkin's poem. It also expresses the fears, frailty and neediness of humanity.

Sarajevo lay peaceful under the snow, the sounds of traffic and the city muffled. Smoke rose from the valley, billowing past rows of small houses on the surrounding hillsides, and disappeared into the grey clouds. Shishkin's fir tree stood outside the hotel's dining room. It filled me with melancholy, and brought reminders of the disturbed recent history of the country, the many crimes hidden and forgotten, and the need to come clean and right again.

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Ambassador Humphreys from Ireland had succeeded dour and patronising German Hans Kretschmer as the European Representative. Ambassador Humphreys took an enthusiastic interest in our projects.

We asked for this meeting in order to register a complaint about the process for making funding applications to the European Commission, and to alert the ambassador to the waste of resources, and the rigidity of procedures which did not recognize the complexities of our kind of work. Donald wrote about this in a document we would distribute later: *The Elephant and the Flea* (see appendix).

The ambassador invited Gordana Suvalija, a project officer to the European Commission delegation in Bosnia, to join the meeting. She advised us to approach another source which specialized in micro-funding, specifically for the civic forum in Banja Luka. NGOs and businesses, joining the forum, could apply for funds even before its launch. However her words came cheap. These applications were rejected.

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‘It’s not really about oneself... it’s about the people around,’ said Bishop Komarica, greeting us warmly. ‘Thank you for contributing to our task here. You and the Soul of Europe are like a small stone in a great mosaic. And among so many black stones you are a coloured jewel.’

Since we saw ourselves as part of a larger creative process involving groups, people and movements across the world, to be seen as one of those coloured stones we received as a touching compliment.

In Medieval paintings depicting the building of a cathedral, crowds of artisans, sculptors, stone-cutters and builders swarm over massive scaffolding, all united in creating a great edifice. Had I been born in those days, and been fit and lucky enough

to survive beyond infancy, my sole aim would have been to join a workshop producing stained glass for such a cathedral.

Bishop Komarica listened attentively to Donald, who explained the purpose of a civic forum, and the consultations it would host, including as a priority a public enquiry into returnees. The bishop understood the objectives immediately, saying: 'I am happy whenever I see a new candle lit in this dark place. Let us hope when new things emerge we won't be disappointed. We had a lot of NGOs, but Brussels complained about too much money being spent on them while so many people were in need. It is necessary to build a civil society. The political gang now in power are clever at avoiding trouble. Even if NGOs were independent, they would have no effect on the politicians. In fact I have the feeling that European politicians are actively helping the small ones here who are wicked. Without their support, these little gangster politicians would have no power. I have been meeting European Union representatives and American diplomats with Romano Prodi in Brussels.' Prodi was President of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004. 'Publicly they all speak about Bosnia, and that the situation here is the worst in Europe. But I got the impression that Bosnia will only join the rest of Europe on Judgement Day, and even then only in the afternoon! They spoke about Brussels ruling Bosnia, and the audience laughed! They understood! That is why they are sending the worst people to govern us here. These are well paid and there are so many of them. Why is nothing happening? My impression is that Europe and the United States have no political will to change the situation. There is no unity of purpose. They say one thing and do another. There is no credibility. And they even agreed about this! The American ambassador himself said there was no unity. Then the European representative said that America wants to be world boss, so we have to watch out. That is why every candle is precious. But people have the right to more than a candle. The sun should

also be allowed to shine on us. We have the right to the sun. Sadly I told you all this already two years ago. Despite all your efforts, there are constant obstacles, from unexpected quarters, even from those you expect to be on your side.’

We could not disagree with this bleak interpretation of international politics regarding Bosnia. To this day the situation has not changed. It is deteriorating.

‘If I were a pessimist, I couldn’t carry on,’ Bishop Komarica muttered, during a momentary silence.

‘The analysis is correct,’ said Donald, ‘and is even worse than you describe. Brussels has no plan for Bosnia. There is indeed money for projects. But what is the use of these when people need to return home and to jobs, and the protection of law and order? The economy, returnees and law have to be integrated. But we are both still here and determined to carry on. The British government is supporting us for the time being through the Foreign Office.’

‘So why did they not support you earlier?!’ cried Bishop Komarica in frustration. ‘I met all the ambassadors here, and they did nothing to help returnees in any way. But I am happy and will support you. You will be a loudspeaker to amplify the voices of all the small voices not being heard.’

We had news for him, plans that might help. A Catholic bishop from England would come to Banja Luka and discuss a partnership between his and Bishop Komarica’s dioceses; Bishop Komarica and two priests would be invited to the UK in the autumn on a visit organized by the Catholic aid agencies Cafod and Caritas. People would not only pray for the diocese, but support it. Advocacy and friendship meant that Catholic groups in Bosnia need not feel abandoned.

‘Thank you one more time for this brotherly solidarity,’ responded Bishop Komarica, moved by Donald’s efforts. ‘Speaking of your big heart, you love Jesus

and therefore love all people. You are able to recognize Jesus' face in those who are abandoned and powerless.'

During the minutes we had waited for him in his reception room, we had noticed how most of the paintings on the walls had been replaced by numerous framed certificates of awards from organizations world-wide. These signs of recognition kept the bishop busy travelling from place to place, giving speeches, being applauded, patted on the back, presented with an award, and then sent home again with nothing but this framed document. The awards thanked him for his courage in the war and his continued witness, but his diocese remained traumatized. His priests continued to be neglected by the European Catholic community, and people were still afraid to return to their destroyed homes.

'We prayed for unity all January, as usual,' the bishop continued. 'Your offer must be the result of this prayer.'

We talked about the Second Vatican Council, which decades earlier had basically stipulated that the Church should not be its own goal, and we laughed when Bishop Komarica reminded us of the famous graffiti scrawled across a wall in Rome: 'Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of God, and what happened? The Church!'

The discussion cheered Donald and the bishop, who were finding common ground. This led to speculation about the Pope's visit in June. Though nothing had been officially announced, because an invitation had first to come from the president of Bosnia, the person preparing the Pope's visit had already spoken several times with Bishop Komarica. The bishop considered this to be a great opportunity for reconciliation work.

'If the Pope comes to Banja Luka it will be a miracle,' announced Bishop Komarica. 'This will not be without results. Wherever the Pope goes he brings new perspective and new light. People can choose to accept or reject him, but the perspective is always

different. There is no need to explain the Pope and his moral superiority. He is good in heart and deed.’

We wondered how the Soul of Europe could help with the reconciliation work after the visit. The bishop was preparing the ground for this.

He told us that the Pope planned to beatify Ivan Merz, a doctor and layman from Banja Luka born in 1896 and who died young of illness in 1928, after several years devoted to raising young Croatian Catholics, the Croatian Eagles, and promoting liturgical revival. The name Croatian Eagles, with their slogan Sacrifice-Eucharist-Apostolate, made us shudder, with its fascist connotations, reminding us of the Ustashi and Croatian nationalists’ control of the Catholic shrine at Medjugorje. We wondered how the beautification could help reconciliation and healing of wounds. The Pope planned to speak about this new saint, just as he had praised him in Sarajevo immediately after the Bosnia War.

‘You as outsiders seem to understand Banja Luka better than we do,’ the bishop said thoughtfully, in response to Donald’s offer of proposals. ‘What is our preparedness for all this?’

‘Bishop Jefrem should open his heart and mind,’ declared Donald, ‘so the Orthodox Church can eventually say sorry. That will make him more human.’ We did not say what we were both thinking: that the Pope also had some apologising to do. Donald then suggested bringing Patriarch Pavle over from Belgrade.

Bishop Komarica explained that Pope John Paul took a special interest in ecumenical rapprochement with the Orthodox, because of his experiences growing up in Catholic Poland, a country bordering the most powerful Orthodox region of Eastern Europe. He had personally witnessed the enmity between the two Churches. This rivalry went back over centuries when Poland had been a powerful and aggressive kingdom threatening Russia. Pushkin and Mussorgsky described this rivalry between nations,

with strikingly contrasting cultures based on different faiths, in *Boris Godunov*, set at a time when a Russia, weakened by tyranny and boyar factions, had trouble keeping enemies at bay, not only from the Catholic West, but from the Tartar East and Islamic South. These divisions remain reflected in Balkan politics, to devastating effect in the recent war. People who do not know South Eastern Europe underestimate the venom of this ancient hatred, entrenched between the two Christian Churches and even overshadowing conflict with Islam.

Only recently, the Bulgarian Patriarch had refused to meet the Pope but was forced to change his mind by the king. A visit to the Vatican now being planned by several liberal-minded Orthodox bishops in Serbia was even causing a rift in the Serbian Orthodox Church. There were rumours that if the delegation took place, hard line Orthodox bishops, together with colleagues in America, would break away from the Church and split it.

Some were saying that Patriarch Pavle, being elderly and frail, would probably prefer his Church to remain united. My experience of the Patriarch suggested otherwise. Age and experience made him even more resolute to initiate changes. He had spoken as strongly as Pope John Paul about reconciliation, and been sharply critical of the reactionary elements in his own Church. When we attended liturgy at the Vavedenje Church on one of our early visits to Belgrade, the Patriarch had specifically ordered the most reactionary bishop to vacate his seat next to him, so Donald could sit there. The bishop glared angrily throughout the rest of the service, but Patriarch Pavle had made his point.

Our meeting with the bishop ended with talk about the daunting task of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque and establishing the civic forum. 'This is a new initiative for Banja Luka,' the bishop announced gravely. 'It will change the face of the city. It will replace destruction with construction.'

Bishop Jefrem welcomed us with a warmth that matched Bishop Komarica's and showed especial delight at seeing Adnan again. It never failed to touch me to see this reserved, diffident and self-conscious bishop melt in the relaxed, self-confident presence of the young Muslim.

However, whereas the conversation with Bishop Komarica flowed smoothly with agreement on all issues, discussion with Bishop Jefrem turned into an obstacle course.

Instead of welcoming a generous invitation from the Bishop of Exeter to visit his diocese, Bishop Jefrem expressed reservations.

'I have obligations to my diocese,' he said. 'There is a problem how to settle these and fix a date.' We were used to this kind of response from him, and knew there would have to be negotiations, compromises, bullying, and cajoling, as happened before the Coventry Consultation two years ago. Other more important matters in the future however required Bishop Jefrem's support, so this particular battle we were prepared to lose, in order to secure support for the civil forum, the Pope's visit and the Ferhadija Mosque.

The imminent threat of war in Iraq prompted a series of reflections from the bishop.

'I am worried about this war,' he began. 'We've been through all this before: the fears, the coffins arriving. And if this war starts it will be far worse than our war, because of the weapons involved. Not only the Iraqis and Americans, but the whole region will suffer terrible economic and ecological consequences. Oil fields will be on fire and the weak as always will suffer most. Fear of war is in the past and present. We can only pray because we have no influence on what will happen. Anti-American and anti-English feeling is growing. We can only hope this scenario doesn't happen.'

We assured him that the majority of English people were protesting against the war as well as against the Prime Minister's policy of supporting President Bush, who was

pressing for a swift attack on Iraq. Donald added that all the Churches in the United Kingdom were campaigning in opposition.

This prompted Bishop Jefrem to make an observation which clarified an ambiguous remark he had made on one of our initial visits.

He said: 'Your Church is now in the same position as ours was during the war. Now you will understand what it was like for the Church to be powerless.' Two years earlier he had told us: 'No one listens to me!' We could not be sure whether he had meant supporting the nationalists, or trying to stop their excesses. Our initial impression of the bishop, traumatized by what happened in the name of the Orthodox Church during the war, had been close to the mark. As a consequence of this trauma the bishop had difficulty dealing with politicians and other leaders, preferring to withdraw. This had been his reaction to the conflict and we could not judge him and contrast his response to that of Bishop Komarica, who had risen to the challenge of war with considerable courage. Bishop Jefrem on the other hand allowed the crimes to continue without protest or doing anything to stop them. Now, having come to know him personally, we understood that it was not in his nature to be a secular leader, or to come to the defence of the weak and suffering. His training and particular religious tradition had not prepared him for a catastrophe, in which the society he knew disintegrated around him into chaos and violence. Bishop Komarica had no choice but either to succumb and die, or fight for his people. That the mild-mannered Catholic found the inner resources and spiritual strength to brave the front line and face up to the police chiefs murdering his people was tribute to his exceptional character. Bishop Jefrem belonged to the side of the destroyers and murderers, and though one can easily judge others from a distance, no one could over-estimate the excruciating dilemma of his situation: a religious leader given exaggerated respect, but nevertheless manipulated and ultimately oppressed by his political colleagues. This

explained his decision to stay permanently at home and to refuse to conduct services during the war.

While Bishop Jefrem talked about God ruling history, states and individuals, though human beings should always take responsibility and must never be passive, I suddenly noticed the picture of a crucified Christ on the wall behind him, hanging between two icons. Crucifixions are not traditionally a significant part of Orthodox iconography and it struck me as a touching gesture towards ecumenism that he had given it such prominence in his main reception room.

‘We are aware that at the present, with our weakness, we have no influence in the world,’ said the bishop, adding pointedly: ‘Those nations that do not destroy their own buildings are truly lucky.’

The invitation from the Bishop of Exeter took up the next part of the meeting. Bishop Jefrem would be shown how a mainly rural diocese, similar to his own, functioned, and how parishes were run; about the levels of Christian care and how people trained for ministry. He would be received formally, attend vespers and the Eucharist, but would not be expected to give long speeches, although people in England were interested in learning about the Orthodox Church. A tradition of friendship between the Anglican and Orthodox Churches had begun in the First World War when the Church of England cared for Orthodox seminarians fleeing battle zones.

Relations however always remained fragile. Last December 25 in Belgrade, a group of thuggish Orthodox students, ignoring attempts by Patriarch Pavle to stop them, refused members of the small Anglican community, including the British ambassador, entry to their annual Christmas celebration. The incident embarrassed the authorities, and it was widely reported. Philip Warner, the Anglican chaplain, wrote a vivid description of the event. The ambassador declared the incident had been blown out of

proportion. Nevertheless it indicated that much needed to be done to improve relations between Christian Churches in the Balkans. For this reason alone we encouraged Bishop Jefrem to accept the Bishop of Exeter's invitation.

Avoiding a direct response, the bishop mused on the events in Belgrade: 'It is difficult to resolve the issue as to why the incident happened. For a long time we had no democracy here. Now people think democracy is anarchy. It was a minority group and not the official view of the Patriarchate.' He could not disguise a hint of ambiguity in his carefully chosen words. Elements of the Far Right supported the Serbian Orthodox Church.

He then asked for more time to check his schedule, and to prepare a response to the Bishop of Exeter. He seized on the suggestion that he come at the same time as the Orthodox Cathedral Choir. We had invited the choir to tour English churches and cathedrals, pending our ability to raise enough funds. He wriggled out of any commitment by saying triumphantly: 'If I don't come, the choir will be my ambassador!' He did not realize that this might strike the Bishop of Exeter as impolite, even offensive.

We let the matter drop, needing to prepare the bishop for the main business on our agenda: the Pope's visit. It needed careful diplomacy, sounding him out on how he felt about this Catholic invasion.

The bishop seemed uncertain how to respond, but for the moment expressed no hostility. Suddenly he opened up, and told us about 'the door in the wall'.

Recently when the wall dividing the Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals needed repairing, the discussion focused on what to do with the door in the wall.

'Leave the door open,' the bishop had declared. 'We have an obligation to continue with the open door.'

Bishop Komarica's predecessor had been a German, and a pioneer of ecumenism. Bishop Jefrem's predecessor, Bishop Andrei, came from Novi Sad, and drew bitter criticism from his more reactionary Orthodox colleagues for his widespread support of ecumenism. After Bishop Andrei's death, Bishop Jefrem felt he needed to continue this obligation, but with less enthusiasm. 'We must go slowly and make no wrong steps,' said Bishop Jefrem. 'Bishop Komarica understands this and we agree.' At least they were talking about it.

Then the bishop looked perplexed at the prospect of the Pope's visit, realizing the painful issues such a visit would raise. 'I do not understand why the Pope is coming to such an insignificant place,' he remarked disingenuously.

As we were departing, the bishop let on that we were not the only foreigners to be allowed to visit him. Just a week earlier he had enjoyed a pleasant conversation with an American SFOR brigadier chaplain. The chaplain had called persistently, and eventually the bishop gave in.

'You see you are not the only ones I talk to,' the bishop said sweetly, as much as to tell us, like a good schoolboy, that he was opening up, and coming out of his shell.

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THOSE WHO BUILD THE HOUSE OF GOD...

We met Reis Mustafa Cerić back in Sarajevo during a gap in his busy flight schedule around the world. As a Muslim leader educated in the West, fluent in English and respected, he had become a favoured guest at conferences everywhere.

Immediately on entering the room, and holding his arms out to us in an unexpectedly warm welcome, he quoted the saying from the Koran about those building the house of God being the true believers.

We spent the next hour discussing the finer points of relations between the Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims, analysing the psychology of Orthodox bishops,

who invariably play the role of being hurt, offended and suffering, and therefore making it hard for others to approach them. Compared to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Reis joked, the Russian Orthodox Church had a global vision.

The Reis reflected on wider and deeper historical issues, noting the ancient tradition, excoriated in Ivo Andric's *The Bridge over the Drina*, that describes in harrowing detail how first-born sons of Serb families were torn from their mothers by Turks. This tradition of sons being brought up in far-away centres of the Ottoman Empire, was now being repeated on a voluntary basis. The brightest children of Bosnian families were now leaving the country to make careers in distant centres of the 'Western Empire'. The result was the same: the best talents and energies of the country being sapped away by foreign lands left the Balkans 'a weak colony'.

'Now all these areas are giving sons to the West!' exclaimed Dr Ceric, referring to the recent Oscar being awarded to the Bosnian film director, Danis Tanovic, who lived in Paris: 'The West takes the best!'

He gave further examples of talented Bosnians moving to places like Sweden, becoming teachers and successful business people, because the incentives were greater outside their own country.

After briefly discussing names for a planned inter-religious conference in Sarajevo he suggested Asim Zubcevic as a possible representative of the Islamic community in Bosnia. The Soul of Europe could liaise with Asim Zubcevic on a regular basis, now that the Reis was hardly ever free to see us. Ifet Mustafic, the Reis's chef de cabinet, whom we would have preferred because we knew and liked him, had other commitments. The Reis tried to explain the convoluted method of getting this representative officially on board. The Soul of Europe had to meet someone recommended by the Reis; then write a letter recommending him back to the Reis who could then officially appoint the man. This sounded to me like Ottoman

bureaucracy in its decadence: the kind of unnecessarily complicated manoeuvre that brought about the empire's decline, and which Mesa Selimovic's novel *Death of a Dervish* describes with the sinister overtones of Kafka's *The Castle*.

The Reis acknowledged the lack of care by Muslims in the Federation for their brothers and sisters in Banja Luka. We had met this attitude from Haris Pasovic, the theatre and film director, who scorned the idea of doing anything to help the Republika Srpska. Sarajevo intellectuals questioned why the problems of Muslims in Banja Luka should concern them.

'They condemn because they can't identify with the Muslims there. But they have to learn, or it will be an all-lose situation,' declared the Reis, and recommended securing support from the Muslim Vice-President of the Republika Srpska as well as Sulejman Tihic, who used to be deputy speaker of the National Assembly in Banja Luka: a lone Muslim among the predominantly Serbian Orthodox nationalist members and who now occupied a high post in the Bosnian government. Vice-presidents, like vice-mayors, however had no authority, being token appointments to obey the Dayton Accord, which stipulated equality of ethnic representation in government. Presidents and mayors obeyed the ruling, but these token figures were ignored on both sides.

The Reis insisted we take our time, and not rush the building of the mosque.

'It is not just stones,' he said. 'The process will take several years.'

The problem lay with Muslim factions, not only with western attitudes to Islam. It might also have been part of his agenda to delay the project.

'The biggest error of Muslims is that they stopped reading the Old and New Testaments,' he explained. 'Muslims like Prince Faisal have forgotten all the other prophets. Only Mohamed matters to them.'

Talking about a recent inter-religious conference he attended in Holland on the subject of piety, he told us: 'I was a panellist. A Jew asked: should I go to hell

because I am not a Muslim? Without thinking I told him: those who believe in any religion, in God and the hereafter, and do good deeds, they need have no fear of hell.’

The significance of this discussion with the Reis became clearer at our subsequent meetings on future visits to Banja Luka, Istanbul, and across Europe, during a time when war on Iraq loomed ever nearer. Before a single stone of the mosque could be put in place, a broader and more solid foundation of partnerships throughout Europe had to be built.

This made the Banja Luka Civil Forum an urgent priority: to support the long period of preparation for rebuilding the mosque, and changing the hearts and minds of the whole community.

Whether we could persuade Mufti Camdzic and the Islamic community in Banja Luka to be patient remained doubtful. Dr Ceric gave us a letter, giving the Soul of Europe authority to take decisions about the mosque and reassuring everyone that we were doing the best we could.

For us this had been the main purpose of our meeting, and we left with the important document safely in our hands.

Donald raised the subject of funding. Embarrassed, the Reis joked: ‘The Middle East has Lawrence of Arabia; we will make you Donald of Bosnia!’

We went to see the Malaysian ambassador again. He took our problem more seriously, and said this state of affairs was not acceptable, even though, inevitably, the embassy had no funds for the project.

He introduced us to his second in command, a graduate of economics who looked too young to have left school even but had access to people with funds. He would help organize a visit to Kuala Lumpur, set up links for us with organizations, and even to establish a company for this heritage project. All we needed do was supply him with

research material, drawings, and answers to technical issues, all of which Professor Hamidovic could provide.

The ambassador held positive views about partnerships between the Soul of Europe and his country, because Malaysia enjoyed excellent multi-racial and multi-ethnic relations between the main communities: western, Indian and Chinese. Under the British Empire these people had been imported to help run the rubber plantations and businesses. Now they all considered themselves ethnic Malaysians.

Adnan wanted us to meet the editor of Hayat in the hope that this respected media outlet would give our project positive publicity. Hayat means ‘corridor’ and was the name of the independent television channel in Bosnia. A group of intelligent, lively men and women welcomed us in offices decorated with contemporary paintings of women and horses, and furnished with glossy rubber plants luxuriating between desks, chairs and shelves. In the background, and throughout the meeting, a screen showed an old film about the love between a Serb boy and an Albanian girl.

Founded in 1992 at the start of the war, Hayat broadcast twenty four hours a day, and showed every kind of programme, but chiefly dance, sport and culture. One hundred and fifteen employees included experts trained by the BBC and CNN. Hayat reached one and a quarter million viewers.

The directors of Hayat promised to support the Soul of Europe and cover our projects on one condition: free access to BBC programs. As expected, the British Embassy assured us that would be impossible. However, the young men from Hayat wanted to be actively involved in our work, especially enthusiastic about the process of healing memories. We would try and find funds so they could host the Banja Luka consultations, planned for later in the year. They would invite us on a program to present the case for our work.

A MUSLIM FROM SARAJEVO IN BANJA LUKA

We endured the first of several stressful meetings with Fiona McWhillam, the new Head of Office in Banja Luka. This was a stop-gap appointment after Roy Wilson, our main ally and supporter who had been one of the chief supporters of the Coventry Consultation, had left for Yerevan, Armenia to be deputy ambassador. Alarmed to hear that we had appointed Adnan, a Muslim from Sarajevo, as director of the Banja Luka Civic Forum, Fiona rang her close friend Daniel Fearn, an advisor to the High Representative, complaining that our decision would upset the Bosnian Serb politicians.

Fiona and Daniel both considered we had made a serious mistake, though it never occurred to us that Adnan might not be suitable. The only Bosnian we knew who was tried and tested, he understood the project completely. He had gained our trust. Without him, the Coventry Consultation could not have taken place. As a result this Muslim from Sarajevo had made friends and allies among the political, municipal and religious leaders of the Republika Srpska, including Serb Orthodox and Croat Catholic.

We endured an unpleasant meeting with Daniel Fearn who delivered a shockingly racist speech about Muslims not being acceptable in Banja Luka. He seemed to be implicitly condoning the ethnic cleansing there. In order not to lose our funding, we compromised by agreeing to make the appointment temporary: using Adnan as our representative to train the future director and leaders of the forum.

The attitude of the British Embassy disturbed us, not only for its bigotry, but for its lack of trust in the way we were working. They insisted the forum should be 'home-grown', and forced us to accede that it would be best to find a director from Banja

Luka. This went against the grain of what we were trying to do. It colluded with the Serb nationalist policy of separating the Republika Srpska from the rest of Bosnia.

We considered Adnan to be a lucky discovery: talented and suited to the job. Being Muslim gave his position in Banja Luka greater resonance, encouraging ethnic mix once again, healing the divisions that were continuing to divide the whole country. Exceptionally brave to accept this challenge, Adnan perpetually reminded us of the importance of keeping Bosnia united, and warned of the dangers of the international community's attempts at forcing segregation: predominantly Serbs in the Republika Srpska; Muslims and Croats uneasy partners in the Federation.

Before we left Sarajevo for home, Adnan showed us a video of his New Years Eve party. Several couples, including his Croat girlfriend and young Serb and Muslim friends are dancing in his new flat. They move gracefully and shyly. Bosnians have always been famous for their love of dance, partying, and sociability. Old documentaries show groups celebrating feasts, weddings and other events, all ethnicities together, clinking glasses, and singing uninhibitedly. These scenes viewed now are made poignant by the knowledge of horrors to come, when these same people suddenly became enemies, and slaughtered one another. So the dancing at Adnan's party seems tentative, fearful and wistful, with a suggestion that it may take years before these people could freely and uninhibitedly party together again. Adnan leaves the video camera for a moment to join the dancing. Hands held above his head he sways gracefully and smiles at the camera, seeming to seduce and cajole a future harmony closer to the present.

THE UNION OF CIVILIZATIONS

RETURN TO ISTANBUL FEBRUARY 2003

TURKISH MUSLIMS

My aunt's summer house, where I spent boyhood summers drawing, daydreaming and cooking her foolproof rice recipe, was situated in the village of Salmannsdorf nestling near the edge of the Vienna Woods. It is within walking distance of the suburbs of the city. Only now do I suddenly understand the significance of the name: Sulejman's Village. On that spot, perhaps where I actually sat, the Turkish commander with his Muslim army pitched camp four centuries earlier, and plotted the siege of Vienna.

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Two hundred and thirty years after that siege, the composer Franz Schubert's strolled and picnicked with friends in the woods and fields around Salmannsdorf and found inspiration for songs like *Die Forelle/The Trout* and *Das Lied im Grünen/Song in the Green*, symphonies and piano sonatas. There he heard the violinist, Johann Strauss Senior, father of the Waltz King, performing with his small band popular dances in the café-gardens of Salmannsdorf, where people from the city came to enjoy fresh air, and relax, before returning to smelly streets and cramped homes.

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A hundred and fifty years after Strauss and Schubert, I sat under the same trees which shaded the Ottoman Commander and the composers; and at the end of day would also stroll, like Schubert, back down the hill to Vienna, watching the city light up in threads of bright necklaces under a red sky, as it darkened into twilight.

WAR, ASSASSINATION AND MASS MURDER

This part of my original report was written at a critical moment in recent history. America and Great Britain were preparing to invade Iraq. The mightiest nation in the Western World, assisted by its most faithful ally, was about to crush a Muslim country. I wrote then that the consequences would be *apocalyptic*, saying: *even those supporting the invasion, whose stated objective is the immediate removal of the dictator Saddam Hussein, are fearful.*

A few days earlier the Prime Minister of Serbia had been assassinated by hit-men, on orders from his mafia protectors whom he had dared to cross.

I forecast that the world would divide itself further *into more entrenched positions: the mainly Muslim poorer eastern world ranged against the western, affluent and mainly Christian might, which does not hesitate to crush any threat to its dominance. Suspicion and mutual fear will continue to grow, and there will be prolonged terror campaigns. This war will make that prognosis a certainty.*

Pavel Chukrai's film, *Vor (The Thief)*, examines the underside of post-war life in the Soviet Union through the eyes of a boy whose mother is a young war widow. A soldier, returning from the front, seduces the mother on a train journey. He becomes the boy's stepfather and turns out to be a conman, who uses the cover of his new family, first to charm, gain trust, and then to cheat and rob people, wherever they settle. The film is a bitter and ironic follow up to the director's father's Cannes prize-winning film made over twenty years earlier, *Ballad of a Soldier*, which tells a poignant story of a quite different soldier's experiences of war. Following the journey of this soldier's furlough to visit his mother, the film depicts a country in chaos. Relationships are as fleeting as life itself. The soldier in the Pavel Chukrai's father's film is romantic, brave, resourceful and sensitive, but doomed in a war where millions

lost their lives. The soldier in Pavel Chukrai's film is a hardened survivor, who raises his stepson to be tough and ruthless. The conman is eventually arrested and disappears from the boy's life, but not before priming the boy to survive orphanage, and to make the best of a life which is unfair, nasty and brutish. The boy grows up and becomes a high-ranking officer in the Soviet army in Afghanistan.

The Thief, like a number of contemporary Russian films made since the collapse of the Soviet Union, depicts a world of absent, elusive and even threatening dangerous father figures: a world of dysfunctional father-son relationships, in which dealings with women are carnal, unloving and violent. In *The Thief*, the role-model of father is reflected in the oppressively ubiquitous poster image of Stalin.

While the boy survives and makes a success of his life, the conman has either escaped from prison, or completed his sentence, and turns into a seedy drifter who lurches drunkenly from one liaison and crime to another. The boy encounters him once more by accident. The man barely recognizes him, and cannot even remember the name of the mother, just one of many conquests. In shock and disgust the boy shoots him, with the gun the conman gave him for safe-keeping before his arrest. Many years later, the boy has now matured into an army officer and is importuned by a drunken tramp who momentarily reminds him of his conman stepfather. The film concludes with a pessimistic acknowledgement that life repeats itself without chance of redemption or change. This constitutes a waste of human energy and spirit, which could have built a better post-war society, rather than undermine it. The tragedy is also about human betrayal and the souring of trust. The boy clings to the conman, out of need for a father's love, and, as he grows up, becomes traumatised by the realization that by accepting the conman as his father, he has betrayed the memory of his real father, a man he never knew and who at intervals in the film appears as the

ghost of a young soldier. Perhaps this ghost is the young man in Pavel Chukrai's father's film *The Ballad of a Soldier*.

The Thief chronicles a specific period: post-war Soviet Union. It examines a social history which was kept hidden by decades of propaganda. The conman sees his way of life as a battle for survival, but also as an alternative to communist conformity. He is caught and punished. Since the collapse of communism, criminals have taken over the administration and the nation's wealth. Conmen are now in charge of countries that were part of the communist bloc, not only Russia but also including the Balkans. The situation is now even bleaker than that portrayed in the film, which shows a world where a sense of right and wrong at least gives the son dignity. This man makes something of his life without losing his humanity. He is able to mourn the memory of a stepfather whom he loves, despite faults and crimes.

The Thief had particular resonance for me now, a few days after the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister, and with the imminent war on Iraq. It is about a violent male world with unresolved father issues. The American president appeared to be embarking on a grudge war, started, but not finished, by his father. The tyrant of Iraq defiantly assumed the role of father of his nation, deploying troops led by his sons. Women are irrelevant. They are victims, or unwilling accomplices and tools. In the film, the death of the boy's mother from peritonitis is depicted with shocking brevity, as though her life barely counted.

MUSTAFA YILDIRIM

A problem arose at our first meeting in Istanbul.

Mustafa Yildirim, a leading business consultant, represented affluent Turkey. We waited in the reception area of his elegantly furnished home, rooms leading gracefully

into each other by way of flights of steps, binding the living spaces that were divided on to three main levels. The basement, facing the garden through a large window, provided comfortable seating for leisure as well as receiving guests. The middle level by the front door consisted of offices and a kitchen. Secretaries and servants bustled about while we waited for the host to descend from the private apartments.

Brightly coloured landscape paintings hung between shelves displaying a range of artefacts. Like in a museum, they included ceremonial and elaborately decorated swords and pottery. The windows had been designed to protect the rooms from the direct sun, so a gently diffused light came from different angles, as in a Vermeer painting in which life turns to rapt reflection and a moment becomes eternal.

We had time to look. A photograph catches a second of time and pins it like a butterfly in a frame, but a Vermeer painting accumulates time in the artist's painstaking observation of such mundane activities as reading a letter, pouring milk, measuring ingredients for a cake, playing an instrument or sitting at a table. The pictures endow fleeting moments of everyday life with a sense of the eternal.

Outside in the garden, heavy fresh snow lay around the swimming pool and dropped in soft thuds from the trees and bushes. We had not expected snow in Turkey, but winter came here as in the rest of Europe. The snowy cloak over buildings and streets made the Ottoman minarets and domes appear especially magical: they floated on a white sea.

Eventually Mustafa Yildirim descended from on high, smiling hospitably, polite and kindly. With years of experience and success behind him, he listened to us, smiled ironically at our naivety, and expressed reservations about the objectives of our visit.

Sitting close to Donald on one of the sofas, and having listened to our presentation he told us: 'You are a general without troops.' This response was meant to knock the stuffing out of us, but Donald ignored the insult and launched into a lecture on the

powerless leader, citing Ghandi. Impressed, Mustafa Yildirim became slightly more amenable.

However, he criticised us for coming at the wrong moment in Turkish history. ‘We are preoccupied with the ongoing economic crisis.’ 1998 would have been better. But when is there ever a time that is not wrong? Had we come in 1998 we would have been told the same depressing news, that we should wait for the economic climate to improve. Mustafa Yildirim warned us against approaching the private sector, which would be hostile to any demands on their wealth.

He then advised us to describe our project as being European, not specifically Bosnian, and to emphasise the heritage and political aspects. This indicated he had not listened to, or understood, Donald’s presentation. However he did offer to open a door for us and introduce us to Vehbi Koc, one of the richest and most successful businessmen in Turkey.

First we had to find funding from Europe, and then, ‘once you have put flesh on the bones of your project’, Turkey might ‘come on board and help build the mosque’. His subtle point of priorities emphasised the need for Christian Europe to show good faith and, for once, to initiate support for a Muslim project.

He told us that European national governments had to be persuaded to tender material and financial help, and not just utter words of tolerance.

The project concerned a Muslim national treasure, but the destruction of the mosque by Serbian Orthodox Christians reflected a general animosity towards Islam that had festered for fourteen hundred years in Europe. For this reason he told us to get a couple of million pounds from the European Union first towards building the mosque.

Mustafa Yildirim then accompanied us to the front door, wished us well and said good bye. We never saw him again.

RELIGION IN A SECULAR MUSLIM COUNTRY: CEMAL USAK

Cemal Usak who headed the Writers and Journalists Foundation and had heard of our activities in Bosnia, wanted to meet us again: the first person in Istanbul who showed any enthusiasm.

Someone at Alper's or Cemal's office had made a mistake with the diary and instead of 20th February put 20th March. Cemal had just come out of hospital for a check-up after an unsuccessful operation to remove kidney stones. Not wanting to miss us, he interrupted convalescence and rushed to his office for our meeting. The headquarters for the Writers and Journalists Foundation were elegant and spacious, situated close to some of the most expensive hotels in Istanbul. This indicated adequate funding and respect from wealthy donors. Looking ill and drawn, he gave us an effusively warm welcome with many apologies for a mistake he had not made, and took us for lunch in a restaurant above his office. We were touched by his hospitality, putting himself out, regardless of any mistake.

While discussing the problems in kick-starting our project, especially finding initial funding, Cemal inspired us with the story about Abraham, his wife Hagar and son Ishmael as told in the Koran. Christians are familiar with Abraham, Sarah and Isaac, but forget the parallel story concerning the rest of the family around the founding father of the three faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. According to the Koran, Abraham, on his way to Mecca, left Hagar in the desert. Abandoned, she went to search for water. She found none. Hagar went seven times to a special mountain before finding water. 'God knows,' she said. Hagar, as wife of the prophet, assumed Ishmael would also be a prophet. God would not abandon them. God waited for Hagar. Cemal interpreted this for us: we have to come seven times or even seven hundred times to the special mountain, because God waits for us.

After our unproductive conversation with Mustafa Yildirim we were in need of this inspiration, and asked Cemal to choose a verse from the Koran for the Soul of Europe.

Cemal offered to find a suitable verse. We discussed the differences between Islam and Christianity, and especially the controversial fanatical interpretation of the injunction in the Koran to kill Christians and Jews. According to Cemal, the context of the story about those particular Jews and Christians referred to in the Koran needed to be understood. They broke a promise to Mohamed. This story of betrayal and retribution did not reassure us.

Cemal told us that the Koran is clear on the understanding of God in every tradition. The Ten Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount have the same significance for both faiths: honouring God and not committing crimes; but recognising that specific rules of food and dress should be according to individual custom. The most important question is: What is your life? Only then does the question arise as to how you live your life, according to what rules.

Cemal also quoted the Muslim scholar Said Nursi, a former leader of the Muslim community who died in 1946: 'Don't just have dialogue, follow dialogue with cooperation; meet together to rebuild Europe and humanity.' Said Nursi was reflecting on the devastation at the end of the Second World War and warning people against cynicism, loss of faith, materialism and immorality.

In the context of our meeting with Cemal, the words of Said Nursi about the need to rebuild humanity and find ways to co-operate struck a chord.

Cemal talked freely about religious matters without feeling the need to apologize. He offered to arrange a large meeting for our next visit to Istanbul, and began to fix a provisional date.

He saw our initiative as representing a new beginning. These negotiations would present a historic chance not only for Europe, but also for Muslims, to show the rest of the world that two great civilizations were not always fated to clash.

‘Islam and democracy are compatible,’ he said, and showed us an article in *The Economist* dated 7.12.2002 which included the observation: *Perhaps most important: a EU that is open to Turkey should send a message to the troubled Muslim world of today - the West does not consider Islam and democracy incompatible as long as Islam doesn't.*

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: A HOLY JOURNEY

Haluk Turkmen decided to be our best friend in Turkey. He called our work: Mission Impossible, but also a Holy Journey.

While he and Alper hosted a training day for business consultants, we waited in one of the offices and had more time to contemplate the state-of-the-art furnishings, minimal but elegant, and especially the expensive original de Groot paintings, which dominated the large walls with lively splashes of colour and primitive shapes. We considered the relationship between art and money. The materials: canvas, paint and brushes, cost at most a few pounds, including the frame. The composition of these paintings by a famous artist, who took no more than a few hours over them, raised the value to astronomic sums, probably to six figures. Art now represents a business which guarantees the greatest return for the minimum outlay. That is, of course, if you are a successful artist. In a world recession, such art provides the best investment because of the mutually dependent relationship between owners, bankers/businessmen and dealers. It is in the interest of both groups to keep the value of art high, and not to fluctuate downwards. The paintings can then be a safe investment. This consideration has little to do with the actual quality of the work, and certainly not its material and

labour costs. A certain amount of skill is necessary to create the artefact, but this is irrelevant to its astronomical value. In sixteenth century Holland, tulip bulbs represented the same kind of investment, also exchanging hands for huge sums which bore no relationship even to their rarity value. Rich people decided what they were worth. Buying and selling became a game, even a gamble. Like paintings, bulbs are fragile and vulnerable to theft and destruction. A name attaches glamour to the object, and a desire to possess what is created by a select few who with skill and good fortune rise to the top: the cream of the art world.

Haluk hovered outside the room. He seemed shy and hesitant. Perhaps he was embarrassed by the act of combining the mechanics of teaching business with supporting our kind of humanitarian work. Eventually he entered, bringing a bemused colleague, whom he introduced as Kudret. Kudret ran a training company for the state planning department, having worked for four years in the Prime Minister's office as a state planner. Haluk and Kudret knew each other from childhood, when they attended the same Protestant missionary school in Tarsus.

Suddenly Haluk embarked on a white hot and enthusiastic introduction to the aims of the Soul of Europe. This made an instructive change from Donald's usual presentation. Haluk rushed breathlessly through the long term objectives, highlighting the need for reconciliation between those from 'different violated backgrounds', a neat way of distilling the essence of the Balkan conflicts.

We were going to help rebuild damaged Bosnia, mentally, physically and spiritually. We had a mission statement, and now needed a sample case of projects. The peak of the iceberg should become visible, implying the vast amount of work and preparation invisible below the surface. Haluk described the unique importance of the Ferhadija Mosque, and the nature of the Soul of Europe's work, 'defying' injustice and crime. The mosque project represented not just a historic reconstruction, but would be a

major sign for the future, which everyone should support. Having summed up the Soul of Europe in less than a minute, Haluk continued with the area he knew most about: financial targets and needs, and began to list our future tasks, including finding leaders from major institutions, who could contribute financially, technically and morally. There were many companies in Turkey proud of their Balkan roots, and many individuals who would be supportive and interested. He quoted the saying about mosques being built ‘with the prayers of the rich and the money of the poor’, which applied to Christian churches too. A double page spread in Huriyet would attract business contributions and support from the government. Talent and heart were needed to attract resources.

Haluk then turned to Kudret, who looked bemused, and told him that the project needed help with construction. Haluk made three points: ‘Was the project interesting? Was the work interesting? Could Kudret take charge until the project had achieved its aims?’ We needed his professionalism and experience.

We did not expect Kudret to make an immediate decision, but he seemed happy to help us out on a temporary basis straight away, realizing the urgency of our situation. He also had contacts with the government and experienced eurocrats. He would proselytise on our behalf, reassuring people we were a genuine civic initiative. He knew which people might be interested. He and Haluk agreed on creating a broad base of support, including a variety of interests from all parts of society, political, business and religious.

They made a surprising observation. The fundamentalist right-wing groups had a reputation for being corrupt; funds kept disappearing.

Haluk’s own assignment would include helping us prepare a budget plan, with facts and figures, an action plan, and fundraising, making indirect approaches by publicising the project and securing support from colleagues. He offered to produce a

corporate file, which would provide documentation, including architectural designs and animation technology. He and Kudret would work on the media. Haluk offered to give his technical work free of charge, while the project gathered support. Kudret's mission on the project would help him, as much as his input and experience would help the project. Kudret added value to the project, as a young secular highflier. He represented the 'modern', whereas Haluk, known for his interest in spiritual matters, represented the 'conservative'. They promised to provide monetary, political, and advisory support.

If Kudret decided he could not commit, then we needed to find someone from among those interested in our work to be a permanent officer, administering the Turkey base of the Soul of Europe.

In passing, Haluk mentioned that he had just met an elder of the rotary club in Ankara who checked the Soul of Europe, and decided we were bona fide.

'We are the epicentre,' announced Haluk, warning about the dangers of mixing 'oranges and apples'. 'New ships attract more flies.' Kudret's task involved detecting dangers, keeping away from politics, but still using 'winds', which meant meeting leaders, and persuading them that this could be a 'piece of cake for everybody'. By this, he did not mean that the work was easy, but that all involved in the project could benefit from it.

Looking back ten years later, it is striking how quickly the enthusiasm of this conversation, with so much promise of action and ambition, dissipated. We would never meet Haluk or Kudret again on future visits to Istanbul. Apart from some friendly emails wishing us well, we would receive no further communication.

An ex-army officer brought us down to earth before we left Istanbul. Kudret introduced us to Sabri Dogar, another sceptical businessman. He knew about war and rebuilding societies, from working with the UN in Somalia and, considering us to be naïve amateurs, lectured us about the necessity of having clear targets.

He told us our idea was great, but...

Expanding on his experience as an international diplomat he urged us to broaden our vision. This was not just about the mosque. We needed to visit other destroyed countries, and widen our base by building both churches and mosques, finding supporters world wide, as well as local partners.

‘You have to understand Muslim mentality,’ he warned us. ‘They have to be sure of you, so you must always be transparent and open.’

Our time in Istanbul came full circle with Sabri Dogar repeating the same advice as Mustafa Yildirim about the need to make our project European, and to make a priority of getting European funding.

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We spent time between these meetings crossing bridges to and fro across the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, observing the affluent suburbs that stretched for miles along the shores: elegant houses with gardens leading to the water’s edge where private yachts were moored. Kemal, a friend I had met in London, drove us everywhere, explaining the history and lay-out of his home city, then took us for a traditional meal in the Asian quarter. Kemal pointed out the homes of the wealthy on the banks of the Bosphorus. Alper Utku aimed to buy one of these properties.

The splendour of the ancient city, that had once been Constantinople and Byzantium in the Christian phase of its history before becoming Muslim Istanbul, was arrayed mostly on the European side of the Bosphorus: the tourist centre, where tourists visited the Hagia Sofia, the Topkapi palace, and famous mosques. Islam pitched its flag on

the edge of a continent that identified itself as Christian. The Asian quarters on the other side of the bridges house the main shopping, and cultural centres of the city.

When seen from high vantage points, Istanbul, with its offices, residential, and commercial areas covers hills and banks on either side of the Sea of Marmara. This substantial stretch of water separates continents and inspires thoughts about history: the connection between peoples, religions, traditions and cultures; power and influence fluctuating between the west and east over thousands of years. In honour of Hero and Leander, mythical lovers who were for ever trying to reach each other, Lord Byron, romantic poet and political satirist, swam the Hellespont, the narrow stretch of water that connects the Aegean Sea and the western end of the Sea of Marmara. The lovers' failure reflects the seeming impossibility of bonding conflicted continents. Christopher Marlowe's poem about Hero and Leander sets out to satirize Homer's *Iliad*, an epic that tells the story of divine interference in men's affairs. Marlowe describes an infatuated sea-god molesting Leander as he tries to swim across the Hellespont, so causing the young man to drown. Divine intervention in *The Iliad*, in contrast to Marlowe's outrageous version of the legend, has cataclysmic consequences.

Virgil continues Homer's epic with the adventures of Aeneas, a surviving son of the defeated King of Troy, on his flight across the Mediterranean to North Africa, and then to Italy, where the Gods decree the founding of a new civilization. The Roman Empire acknowledged its roots in Asia. Virgil, writing at the peak of Rome's influence across Europe, Asia, and North Africa, is emphasising the bond of nations through blood ties that unite races and go back to the beginnings of mankind. Boundaries that separate did not exist then.

Istanbul is often described as the bridge between Europe and Asia, East and West. It is in fact a melting pot of histories and traditions. More than a meeting of

civilizations, the city is a refined distillation of different world views. Look at the imposing ruins of the ancient Roman walls of Constantinople, through which present-day traffic passes ceaselessly, and the churches of Byzantium and the minarets of Istanbul, standing side by side, and witness the interdependence of peoples and cultures. Istanbul is a bigger version of Sarajevo.

It is also a squalid modern city: crooks, pimps, hookers and punters mingle with street traders, shoe-shine boys, beggars and tourists.

On my last night in Istanbul a Russian gangster in the next room kept me awake by loudly haranguing a woman, who might have been his wife, girl-friend or a hooker. He was complaining about a partner who had double-crossed him. He planned to kill this partner. Our beds were on either side of the wall so I could hear every word, the pillows only centimetres apart. The woman tried to calm him down with massage and kisses. But after a few seconds he would again launch into an angry tirade, steeling himself for action, describing the gun he planned to use. It surprised me that he would share this information with the woman, whoever she was, but imagined he had to express his doubts and fury to persuade himself of the necessity of killing. This continued till 5.00 in the morning. I resisted protesting or banging on the wall, the preferred way of communicating with neighbours to shut them up; I feared a shot through the wall. Because the reception had promised me a wake-up call, so we would not miss an early flight, I crept out of the room as quietly as possible before the phone rang. I then waited for Donald in the lobby.

The scenario reminded me of the exotic reputation enjoyed by Istanbul throughout the Cold War. Russian and Western spies kept tabs on each other: the new civilizations of America and the Soviet Union colliding here. Russian mafia now replaced communists and the area around the Merit Antique Hotel had become notoriously dangerous.

REMAKE

VISIT TO BOSNIA MARCH 2003

On a stormy night, driving from Sarajevo to Banja Luka, the car's right front-tyre burst half way through the Vrbas Gorge. Melting ice had loosened stones on the precipices rearing up on each side, so sharp rocks lay scattered over this stretch of the road. Cold wind lashed our faces, and rain pelted down, as I shone a torch while Adnan fitted the new tyre. We had broken down in one of the wildest places in Europe. Bandits used to control this territory. Close to the border between the Muslim Federation of Bosnia and the Serb Republika Srpska this road is still dangerous. For years after the war the road was closed to traffic because of bombed bridges and tunnels.

With typical sangfroid Adnan did not panic, calmly got out of the car and changed the tyre in the middle of a storm. He might have been on the bypass of a small English town rather than a rough road in Northern Bosnia, where only ten years earlier people were shooting each other and refugees fleeing. Today along this road gangsters smuggle drugs, arms, gas, cigarettes, and people.

TWO BISHOPS AND A MUFTI

'We do condemn the Iraq War,' declared Mufti Camdzic at the Islamic Centre on our arrival, 'But we are also aware that Saddam Hussein cooperated with Serbia during the war. His vice-president, Tariq Aziz, said there was no oppression in Bosnia, and that Iraq and Serbia were friends. The US helped us then, and we will always be grateful.'

The conflicting interests and intrigues of modern politics continue to baffle and astonish. Why would a Muslim country support a vociferously anti-Islamic Serbia in ethnically cleansing Bosnia of Muslims? Libya too had supported Milosevic. Loyalty between tyrants trumps ethnic allegiances, as the Russian and Syrian presidents prove. Serbia traded arms with Iraq during the Bosnia War and up to the invasion in 2003.

‘The US helped us, so we will not attack the US and will always be grateful, but we nevertheless feel this war to be wrong,’ said the mufti.

So, since the Foreign Office was presently financing the Soul of Europe’s projects in Bosnia, the statement we wanted the mufti to sign jointly with Bishop Komarica and Bishop Jefrem, needed to be bland and uncontroversial. It expressed no more than a protest against the cruelty of war, and a plea for peace.

Bishop Komarica had suggested this joint statement. He considered it to be a better use of our time and authority than our planned statement about welcoming the Pope’s visit. The bishop could negotiate with the Orthodox Church. Mayors and State Presidents were already on their way to the Vatican to finalize plans for the Papal visit.

The meeting between the two bishops and the mufti represented the high point of our relations with these three religious leaders. Bishop Komarica had always been a friend, and shy, chilly Bishop Jefrem had thawed. Even so, as expected, he turned down the invitation from the Bishop of Exeter to visit Devon later in the year: he claimed to be too busy. His present co-operation would not last. Mufti Camdzic was always difficult to please, but for just these few weeks he too had begun to accept the process behind the project to rebuild the Ferhadija Mosque, and our part in it. He seemed prepared to understand the wider implications. At a seven-and-a-half hour meeting of the Ryaset in Sarajevo, the main governing body of imams and muftis had discussed the Ferhadija Mosque as the chief topic. Sharp questions were asked about

the Soul of Europe's authority to lead the project forward. Though Mufti Camdzic did not say as much, he clearly led the doubters. But the Reis had told the assembly that they should let us take charge, and there were formal thanks for what we were doing. Whether out of obedience, or because he liked us in spite of himself, Mufti Camdzic once again invited us to visit his home in Sarajevo and also to attend a picnic in May, along with Sulejman Tihic, who had just been elected one of the new state-level Presidents. These picnics were elaborate affairs involving whole lambs being roasted on spits, guests seated on tree trunks, and tables brought along for a sumptuous buffet.

Before meeting with the bishops the mufti acknowledged that the process we proposed for rebuilding the Ferhadija did constitute a timely gesture of uniting communities, in contrast to a manufactured war which divided them.

For the first time we felt the project was ready to sail.

Pushkin's *Autumn* captures that heady moment when after months of waiting, torpor, delay and preparation, the imagination, stirring itself like the sails of a great ship, as it begins to cleave through the ocean waves, liberates itself, and once released from ropes and chains becomes unstoppable, magnificent, ready for challenges and dangers; excited by the prospect of unpredictable outcomes.

Now with Mufti Camdzic finally on board, no longer sniping and complaining, we felt the ropes loosening and the massive project on the move.

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The meeting with the bishops and the mufti took place in Bishop Jefrem's upstairs reception room. Mufti Camdzic had never been invited before, and did not even know where the bishop lived. He arrived with an imam, so there would be two Muslims present along with the Catholic and Orthodox bishops.

Bishop Jefrem had prepared a feast of drinks, cakes and biscuits, and welcomed us warmly. The bishops, mufti and imam were dressed formally in clerical robes. Bishop

Jefrem, wearing striking jewelled icons, was momentarily flustered by Donald's admiring comment on a huge and elaborately decorated pectoral cross placed neatly in the middle of the bishop's chest. The bishop muttered something about 'being in conflict' because of his love for beautiful artefacts when he had taken an oath of poverty. Then, to mollify us for turning down the invitation to Devon, he presented a gift of an icon for the Bishop of Exeter, and read out an accompanying letter explaining 'to his respected Brother in Christ' that 'our Church and our people live in deteriorated circumstances, which have been brought about not only by the civil war, but also by an unskilful governance by the foreign protectors.' Politeness came with a barb.

In one sentence he managed to deny any Orthodox Church responsibility for the war, by describing it as 'civil', meaning that all parties were equally culpable, and that his community had not been the chief aggressor. At the same time he managed to blame the international community for his present troubles, so the letter not only implied innocence, but also expressed outrage at the evil continuing to be done to his people. Bishop Jefrem was a long way from any acknowledgement of what happened in fact.

Bearing in mind Serb historic allegiances to Iraq, we should not have been surprised that Bishop Jefrem did not hesitate to welcome a joint statement by the religious leaders of Banja Luka against the Iraq invasion. Bishop Komarica drafted the statement with Donald; Bishop Jefrem made some alterations, and they signed it formally at the meeting. 'We have an obligation to the people there who are dying from dreadful diseases because of poverty and the sanctions. The war will only bring more tragedy to them,' Bishop Jefrem declared and then added with emphasis: 'You know how rarely I travel; but if I thought a journey to Iraq would help the situation, I would go!'

This meeting between the three religious leaders, the first of its kind, made us hopeful for more joint activities. We proposed that they all make a pilgrimage to the Walsingham shrine in England, where Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican communities and churches were present together in the same place. Bishop Komarica was keen to go anywhere, and Mufti Camdzic also. However, given Bishop Jefrem's unwillingness to accept an invitation from a fellow bishop in the Anglican Church, such a joint pilgrimage was unlikely.

Bishop Jefrem launched into a prepared speech, about the current situation in his country. 'Before anything else, let us start to live normal lives. That will produce better results in work and life for all people and of course the religious communities here. I don't know how much you are able to see for yourselves, but people here live in extraordinary circumstances: too many refugees, uncared for, unemployed, right in front of you, expecting help, and we are unable to give it. What we don't really see is the right path to living normally again. Sadly, everything in this country is in foreign hands and they do what they want, not responsible to anyone. They change laws and governments, but my impression is that no one is offering concrete solutions. I am also, in a manner of speaking, in an executive position in my community. Whatever I command, I am responsible for it, and must take the consequences of my decisions. But the international executives take no responsibility. No OHR leader ever found it necessary to speak with religious leaders. They should hear our problems, because they are the problems of the people. Their bureaucracy keeps us at a distance. I feel the same as I did under communism, which was also a secular, atheistic society. In Banja Luka I have two hundred and fifty thousand people in my charge. I am not even allowed to resolve problems of where to build churches. Communism didn't want to help, but why don't democratic powers deal with these issues? If they deal with us as

religious communities, then they are dealing with social issues. I can't make out if the OHR disapproves or approves of churches.'

We offered to set up conversations between the church leaders and the authorities.

'It is embarrassing for me to transfer my obligations to someone else,' replied Bishop Jefrem. 'I am just telling you this as between friends. I have no moral right to expect you to solve this problem. Problems are being made unnecessarily complicated.'

We suggested taking a few steps.

'You probably know better than I do,' said Bishop Jefrem, then realizing he needed to be talking on behalf of all religious leaders, not just his own Orthodox community, added: 'If Mufti Camdzic has difficulties with the local authorities, then he should tell me and I will help.'

Such an unexpected offer encouraged us: the first time the Orthodox bishop had considered helping the Islamic community. This meeting certainly marked a high point in his relations with the Muslims in Bosnia. Before it, he had brushed off the rebuilding of mosques as one the Islamic community should solve by themselves, and afterwards his attitudes hardened to the extent that he could claim, without blinking an eyelid, that the Muslims had imagined all their problems.

For the present time his friendly attitude boded well for the future of our major project in Banja Luka.

The three leaders were reassured by our declaring that it was the three religious leaders who constantly brought us back to their city.

'Thank you,' said the bishop. 'You made the point well. This place is indeed the meeting point of religions. We did have the former Yugoslavia where all this applied. The world is now small and religions do meet. The problem in Bosnia is a

consequence of the falling apart of a multi-ethnic state. Sadly, the world rulers, deciding about small nations, prefer small controllable entities.’

Bishop Jefrem warmed to his argument which had clearly been occupying his mind for years, and now needed to be shared with people he had come to trust.

‘I am sorry, but all of you come and tell us to live together,’ he went on. ‘But we did in fact. We had learnt that lesson. In this country there was no street, house or family that was not mixed. Then someone decided it shouldn’t be so. And we split up. Sadly what happened was what most people didn’t want. Now what happens is that those who rule the world talk about consequences, and not the causes, of war. The guilty one is he who set off the domino chain, who pushed the first piece. I know that all people participated in the tragedy, but they were not the instigators.’

Just before we travelled on this latest visit, Biljana Plavsic the former president of Republika Srpska, had been sentenced to eleven years in jail for her part in encouraging the ethnic cleansing in the Bosnia War. Her most famous action was stepping over the bodies of slaughtered Muslims to kiss the warlord Arkan, a man she admired, saying: ‘I only kiss heroes!’ During her trial at The Hague she accepted responsibility for her part in war crimes, an admission that dismayed all those Bosnian Serbs who insisted that no ethnic cleansing had taken place, that Muslims had voluntarily left the country, or massacred themselves and destroyed their own mosques. For the first time a prominent Bosnian Serb publicly admitted guilt. Most people cynically concluded she was trying to save her skin and get a short sentence. If so, this worked. A few years later she was released and welcomed back to Banja Luka by President Milorad Dodik, who led her smiling in triumph through the streets. Wearing a fur coat she waved at the crowds: a hero returning from unjust captivity.

We asked Bishop Jefrem, who kept a photo of Karadjic hanging in his dining room and another one in his vestry office at the cathedral, for his opinion about the trial and

sentencing of Biljana Plavsic. 'It's a hard question,' he responded. 'As a man I have my opinions. There was not a proper trial or judgement. She and the court came to an agreement. Honestly I admire anyone who admits to her crime. But I also think it's not good or just to make someone else guilty without proper discussion. At the beginning of the war there was politics, and at the end of the war also politics, not the rule of law or justice in either case.'

Bishop Jefrem could not betray the people who supported him during the war, so his equivocation exonerated him from guilt and responsibility. Now he could blame the internationals for the bad situation in his country. It had nothing anymore to do with the past, with Plavsic, Karadjic or himself.

The meeting became animated and friendly, with frank exchange of opinions and a feeling that the bishop could share everything with us.

As we left, he returned to form by declining an invitation for an exchange of visits between nuns in England and the nuns in Gomjanica. They were too busy with plans for restoration, he informed us.

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The day before this meeting with the bishops, representatives of NGOs charities and individuals had gathered in the Bosna Hotel to establish the civic forum.

Both events indicated enthusiasm for a new process of collaboration, and making a difference to society. Marked mistrust and resistance continued towards the international community, which no longer disguised its disinterest, exasperation and boredom with Bosnia; but at least the people themselves were prepared to take charge as long as they received encouragement and opportunity.

Throughout their meeting the bishops and mufti chattered away in Bosnian together like old friends, and we had the impression that, though respected and loved for being present, we had become peripheral to their joint concerns.

Meanwhile the Foreign Office was losing interest in our project. They delayed a promised payment to our management team in Banja Luka for so long that Dejan had to find a new job. We kept calling the Foreign Office to hurry the process, and a man on the other end of the phone responded to our urgency by saying: ‘I’ll toodle along later down the corridor to see what’s going on.’ Not having received payment for over a month, Dejan and Majda managed to secure employment elsewhere, and handed in their notice. The training, at considerable expense to us, had been in vain. Adnan stepped in to prevent the project collapsing and under pressure to find an assistant, chose a young Bosnian Serb woman prepared to help out. Radmila turned out to be a gangster’s girlfriend, but none of us knew that at the time.

Tall, with long blonde hair, Radmila seemed, for the time being, to be co-operative, capable, and sympathetic to our aims. ‘You have no idea,’ she confided in me, ‘how moving and important this is to me to see these religious leaders getting on so well. What is needed here is for people to witness them like this in public.’

The people attending the civic forum meeting, young and old, men, women, students, academics, housewives, and businessmen, all gathered round a big table. They spoke animatedly, delivering long speeches in the old-fashioned communist style; but they listened to each other, not being cynical or defeatist, and prepared to take matters further to make a success of the forum. Their society, their world, their town, and their children depended on them.

Then on the following day the bishops signed a joint declaration condemning the invasion of Iraq. An awkward moment followed when Bishop Jefrem’s deacon served brandy to the mufti. The bishop quickly corrected him and ordered juice to be brought. The meeting then proceeded in good humour. Observing them get on so well, joking, laughing and chatting together, brought a lump to the throat at the memory of

massacres, murders, atrocities, destruction, and injustices. Only ten years earlier these same people had represented communities bitterly at war with each other.

BALKANIZATION

Balkanization is a new form of colonization.

In Bosnia there is little trust between internationals and the people, because Internationals coming with their own agendas do not attend to the concerns of citizens in countries they colonise. We took care to listen to Adnan and consult him on all decisions, not just because we did not want to offend him, but because we were aware of our ignorance, and needed all the help we could get to understand a people and a country where we were guests.

He took us to a packed cinema opening of *Remake*, a film which tells the story of two wars and the way each echoed the other. In the Second World War the Serbs were victims of Croat aggression and ethnic cleansing. In the Bosnia War, the Serbs turned into aggressors and ethnic cleansers. The film depicts the international community as culpable and complicit in torture and murder both times. Foreign diplomats are portrayed as ignorant, arrogant, opinionated, and basically uninterested in the issues tearing Bosnia apart. The victims remain powerless and dependent on this foreign 'enemy', who becomes ever more contemptuous and patronising. So the vicious circle continues.

The main protagonist of *Remake* is a handsome Muslim. There is no positive solution in the ultimately bleak ending. The cycle of violence is set to continue forever. When the hero finally meets up with his Serb childhood friend on the outskirts of Sarajevo in the final days of the war, both are demoralised by atrocities, betrayal, and abandonment by the rest of Europe which offers refuge to war criminals. There seems to be no way forward but to die together.

The references in the film to Serb suffering during the Second World War in notorious concentration camps are intended to remind audiences that victims come from all communities. This accounts for the film's title: *Remake*. Adnan needed the catharsis of seeing on screen what he had endured throughout the war, as did every Bosnian member of the audience. Any other viewer would be shamed by the scathing criticism of foreigners in the film, who say in effect: 'We are here to help clear up the mess of your war. Don't complain to us when we are rebuilding your country, giving you money, and expertise, for which you should be grateful. We represent the civilized, affluent democratic western world, and our authority, high salaries, helicopters and four wheel drive cars are proof of our superiority.'

THE SULTAN OF BRUSSELS

The International Crisis Group, an independent, non-governmental organisation committed to preventing and resolving conflict, publishes regular reports on the political situation. We exchange useful information with the International Crisis Group. It is interested in our experiences on the ground. We made a point of visiting Mark Wheeler. He looked at us wearily, in the manner of those foreigners who have been around a long time and knew better than we the hopelessness of the situation in Bosnia. The more we spoke to people like Mark Wheeler, the more we realized the urgency of getting the civic forum up and running by its own people. Given the unresolved issues of the war: the plight of returnees and unacknowledged guilt for ethnic cleansing in particular, a Muslim from Sarajevo could surely only be seen as a positive ingredient in the forum's activities. If the Republika Srpska wanted to become a part of the European Union and prove that it valued ethnic diversity, then Adnan's presence helped this process. For the time being, such thinking outraged the Foreign Office. If officials there had been more efficient, and sent funds on time, we

would not have been in the dilemma of Adnan taking over from Dejan and Magda, who were compelled to find other work. Adnan was the only one left trained for the task.

The International Crisis Group is a well informed think tank operating in many areas of conflict globally. Generally critical of the Dayton Accord, the ICG saw its task as alerting the world to the consequences and problems emanating from the enforced national divisions in Bosnia. By now, we were as up to date, if not more so, because we worked on the ground, and could identify the present political currents and attitudes among the people, not as viewed from the remote perspective of politicians with their personal agendas. For instance, Mark Wheeler assured us that the decision to close the issue of refugees and returnees had not been reached, though the international community had given the state entities only to the end of this year to assist returning refugees with money for homes and jobs. On the ground we came across no sign of such generosity. Only people who could afford to pay for themselves, who were rich businessmen, and therefore of value to the community, were allowed to return: but at their own expense. Krešimir Zubak, the former chairman and leader of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had come up with a two to four year plan to provide facilities and funds before he was then replaced. About three hundred and fifty thousand refugees wanted to return, and Mark Wheeler expressed to us unfounded optimism about the fulfilment of this plan.

We now focused on the main purpose of this meeting: to pick Mark Wheeler's brain about how to extract funds from the international community.

It turned out that the man to see was Chris Patten, a Commissioner at the EU whom the Reis dubbed: the Sultan of Brussels. Dr Ceric had already joked with us about the necessity of taking gifts, prostrating ourselves in front of him, and asking politely about his sleep and digestion. Mark Wheeler advised us to go straight to the top: the

only way of manipulating the European Union bureaucratic system. He informed us that the European Commission delegation was preparing to take over the Office of the High Representative. The protectorate would then be taken over by a process of 'stabilization'. This gave officials the pleasant sensation of doing something useful. As usual, the reality and actions remained distant from the words. However, this change in European Union attitudes explained a hopeful meeting we enjoyed with the approachable and hands-on Michael Humphreys, who had taken over from Hans Jorg Kretschmer. Kretschmer had confined himself to making offhand suggestions about approaching funding sources: a futile gesture, as none were likely to support our kind of work. In contrast Humphreys immediately introduced us to Gordana Suvalija, a project officer of the European Union delegation in Bosnia. She promised to open doors to a whole range of possible funds for the civic forum in Banja Luka. Kretschmer had not disguised his amusement at our naïve attempts to make a difference in Bosnia, nor his disinterest. He was basically doing us a favour by granting us an audience. In contrast, Michael Humphreys listened intently to our observations and opinions.

Mark Wheeler confirmed our suspicion that most people in Brussels couldn't give a damn about Bosnia. For any progress and results we had to collar the head sultan. Renzo de Vitti had been delegated to push through reforms on VAT, and the two entity customs services in Bosnia, which would make it harder for the Republika Srpska to detach itself from the rest of the country and form itself into a separate nation. These reforms might scotch the main aim of the Bosnian Serb parties who governed in rotation. We could access Sultan Patten through de Vitti.

Once again, we were advised to approach the World Bank even though they had no interest in funding religious objects. Mark Wheeler pointed us in the direction of US Aid and the Swedish ambassador who had access to a charity, the Swedish

International Development Agency. SIDA turned out to be a fortunate connection and became a pillar of the Ferhadija Project.

We observed Mark Wheeler's cheerful nonchalance in his manner towards us. He had good reason, because the International Crisis Group planned to wind up its operation in Bosnia in the next two years. Once the Office of the High Representative had segued into the European Commission delegation his task would be done. This sense of completion made him look more positively at present developments:

'It's the most exciting time now,' he said, smiling, 'seeing whether the experiment of a multi-national country can work!'

We did not point out that the county was in fact divided. The following years proved him to be over-optimistic and wrong.

We were used to observing how upbeat people became as their date of departure drew near. Only Roy Wilson remained cynical and ever more trenchant in his criticisms. This made the final weeks of his time in Banja Luka emotionally difficult for him: having to cope with lavish expressions of love and gratitude from everyone, even those he had constantly lambasted. Bosnians appreciate honesty above flattery.

We had discovered this Bosnian characteristic in the weeks leading up to the Coventry Consultation. Constantly insisting on discussing issues of justice and reconciliation, we did not lie to the then vice-president and the mayor, as well as to various ministers who attended; especially the Orthodox bishop and the mufti. They came to trust us.

Despite his smiling optimism, Mark Wheeler did acknowledge the hard fact that under the protectorate of the Office of the High Representative the political processes had been steadily de-legitimized, so allowing the local politicians to relieve themselves of responsibility.

‘TURKS’

Before returning to England, we were invited to supper by Professor Hamidovic. This gentle academic had lost his wife before the war, and raised their son alone. He then discovered he had cancer and needed an urgent operation. Despite these tragedies the professor seemed constantly cheerful. He prepared a lavish meal with many local delicacies and nothing was too much trouble for this hospitable man. He and his son shared a small and densely furnished flat, the walls covered with bookshelves, original paintings, and drawings, indicating the home of a cultured man. We talked for hours round the dining table about life, politics and the future in a way that is characteristic throughout Eastern Europe. My parents brought this tradition to England and introduced it to English friends who were used to domestic chatter over meals consumed as quickly as possible. At my parents’ table the plates waited to be cleared while important topics were discussed long into the night.

With the professor we talked about war, terror, survival, and the future.

During the siege and shelling of Sarajevo the Serb general Ratko Mladic laughed and joked on video with a Canadian Serb saying: ‘Whenever I go by Sarajevo, I kill someone. We kick the hell out of the Turks. Who gives a fuck about them?’

It was strange for me to think of Professor Hamidovic, Adnan, Ibrahim, and other friends as ‘Turks’. Whatever community they might be pigeonholed in, I could only see them as people. Labels dehumanise. It is easier to kill and ethnically cleanse a label. The traumatic aftermath of this vicious thinking carries on for decades.

Mehmed Belan, another friend I made in Sarajevo, told me his story. Mehmed was six years old when the war started. A Serb sniper killed his father early in the first weeks of the siege of the city; his mother had a nervous breakdown, managed to flee the country and broke contact with her son whom she left with his father’s mother in a one-roomed flat on Ferhadija Street. For years no one knew what happened to

Mehmed's mother. She had re-married, lived in Sweden, and wanted no contact with her son. Mehmed and his grandmother survived the siege. Ten years later, having raised him, sent him to school, and acted as his mother, she fell ill with cancer. For years Mehmed looked after her until she died. As a result of this unpaid care, he failed to find work, could not pay bills for the flat, and was thrown out. He ended up making coffee and cleaning the toilets in an internet cafe, in return for having a chair to sleep on when the café closes at night.

We paid a visit to the new Turkish ambassador, Sina Baydur. This dignified, well-educated woman listened politely to our presentation, and did not angrily interrupt like her predecessor, Ahmed Erozan, who could not wait to inform us in frustration about the lack of trust between the Islamic community of Bosnia and Turkey. Sina Baydur assured us of support from the Turkish government, so long as we emphasised the heritage rather than the religious aspect of the Ferhadija Project. The fact of its being a Sinan mosque might attract support in an otherwise secular nation, also because it was considered an important historical monument from the time of the Ottoman Empire.

We then met another 'Turk', Alma Silajdzic who managed the foundation set up to build a memorial to the over seven thousand men and boys murdered by the Serb army in Srebrenica. She told us of various sources of funding. The religious aspect of rebuilding the Ferhadija would remain an obstacle to accessing these sources. The mosque had no chance against the Mostar Bridge or the Srebrenica Memorial.

As usual, Ian Cliff, the British Ambassador, compensated for this discouraging news by doing the opposite. He offered to mediate with Dr Cerić, and to push the project forward with the Islamic community. He proposed inviting other ambassadors to meet with us, on our next visit, so they would be briefed, and could inform their national governments about our project. Some might eventually help with funding.

THE BLOOD STAIN

VISIT TO BOSNIA APRIL 2003

We were driving towards the border crossing, after a quiet journey from Zagreb, when President Cavic's motorcade of four black Mercedes surrounding his own customized Audi suddenly charged towards us along the narrow road that links Bosnia to the motorway in Croatia, and forced us on to the grass verge, pushing our Skoda into a ditch.

The president's Audi cost the combined annual salaries of ten teachers, so President Cavic's purchase caused outrage. Slumped over the wheel Adnan sighed, and told us that aggressive road-hogging was a regular feature of presidential driving in Bosnia. People in authority pay no attention to other cars, which get out of the way so bosses can reach their destination quickly, and without stopping for anyone or anything.

Silence descended on the small road. Our Skoda stood stalled in tall grass. Cherry and plum blossom sprinkled over the spring countryside.

This latest visit to Bosnia marked a stride forward in our project. Adnan had managed to gather a number of NGOs, charities including Muslim Merhamet, Orthodox Dobrotvor and Catholic Caritas, businesses, and significant individuals, to be the foundation of the Banja Luka Civic Forum. They had already formed an administrative board, and enthusiastically urged Adnan to continue as director, calling him a facilitator. He brought experience from the Coventry Consultation, as well as two years of closely observing Donald dealing with groups and leaders. The forum was also making moves to link with a similar forum in Tuzla.

The Foreign Office asked us to interview applicants for the post of director of the forum; a job Serb Dejan or Muslim Majda would have filled more than adequately, had the Foreign Office been efficient in paying them on time. We had lost them for good, their training wasted. Betraying its ignorance, the Foreign Office mistakenly assumed that Adnan as an outsider, and moreover a Muslim from Sarajevo, would not be acceptable to the people of Banja Luka. Let alone the fact that the members of the civic forum wanted him, and they included Banja Luka Serbs, the Foreign Office underestimated his skills, not only of organization, but above all of being able to get on with people from all communities and walks of society. His social skills were second to none and he knew how to steer the group into making good decisions while making them believe they were in charge.

It became clear from the interviews that the wisdom and experience of the forum members outstripped all the applicants. The strength of the forum in itself constituted our greatest triumph so far, and if we could not return to Bosnia we knew that at least after three years we had achieved a measure of success. With people of this calibre, the forum would endure whatever the obstacles and future complications. None of us had reckoned on the Foreign Office whipping the carpet from under our feet, or the determination of Brussels to stop the project.

The atmosphere in Banja Luka had improved. The prospect of rebuilding the Ferhadija Mosque was no longer a dangerous and foolhardy proposition that it had been only one year earlier. Two new mosques were being built on the edge of town and a large Muslim graveyard had been cleaned up. All the forum members, including the Bosnian Serbs, supported the Ferhadija Project as a matter of course.

The civic forum represented the cream of Banja Luka. The interviewees for the post of director represented the general quality of people now looking for work in Banja

Luka, from the wretchedly depressed, to the criminal and corrupt. A formidable task faced the civic forum, trying to make improvements in the life of the town.

Adnan had found a smart new office to rent, centrally situated in Banja Luka, but tucked away in a side street behind a primary school. Radmila and Adnan posed as a local man and wife to secure a reasonable rate, which was always doubled, if not trebled, for internationals. With his usual perspicacity and care for detail, Adnan chose a place without a landlord: 'no old lady always around watching: intelligence,' he winked. A long tradition in communist countries had such people working as spies.

A large single floor constituted the whole office, including two bedrooms, two separate work spaces, a kitchen, bathroom, and the best asset: a large living room which would serve as a space for the civic forum board members to meet. The Ferhadija Project could also be run from here.

First, Adnan gave us a bleak run-down of present attitudes in Banja Luka: the apathy and resentments expressed to the members of the forum during daily meetings at their own places of work. Everyone in the town complained about the deterioration of standards; how there used to be a reliable local train service, and a functioning infrastructure; how dirty and unsafe the streets had become. People would arrive late for meetings. Minorities like Catholics and Muslims proudly refused help from outside their groups. For instance: Sveta Matic, the successful Serb businessman on the forum, had offered to re-open a Catholic printing firm, and although we informed the bishop and Caritas, no one had taken the trouble even to contact him. It suited the minorities to continue suffering so they had a stick to beat the internationals.

Meanwhile the majority Orthodox played hard to get, finding fault with invitations and expressing displeasure at imagined slights. Some of the wealthier established NGOs, like the Nansen Dialogue Centre, kept aloof from the forum, saying such

initiatives had been tried before and failed, as though that provided sufficient excuse not to try again. Self interest and rivalry seemed to be the game: they did not need the forum to function and flourish, because they enjoyed adequate funding from Norway and Germany, where they spent time attending conferences, and were lionised as ‘tragic victims from Bosnia’.

Adnan took this negativity in his stride, not wasting time worrying about the complaints, but focusing his energy on the handful of capable and committed forum members. There were enough of them to establish the forum, and eventually the others would come on board once they saw it functioning well, and realized that it would ultimately be in their best interests to join.

Then the forum members arrived. This highly motivated, intelligent, experienced and active group included representatives from Merhamet, the Helsinki Group on Human Rights, a woman’s group called Women Can Do It, Lex International, and a man who singlehandedly ran an NGO for disabled people.

They studied the CVs of the applicants for director and quickly came to the conclusion that none came close to being sufficiently qualified. But they agreed to carry on with the charade and listed questions for the applicants. Why were they applying? What had they been doing so far? How good were they interacting with the authorities? What experience did they have of working with NGOs? What vision did they have for the forum, and what were their attitudes to minorities? A question about what they thought about the Ferhadija Mosque being rebuilt, perhaps still the most contentious issue in Banja Luka, would be a good test of their attitudes. We needed to judge their sensitivity about democratic initiatives and citizens’ values, and how open they were to other people, and their willingness to learn and adapt. Above all they should have no political allegiances.

Many of the interviewees were in local, poorly paid employment, and had applied for this job to earn a better salary with an international organization. Some expressed interest in the ideals of a civic forum. However, none gave an inkling of any notion of what a civic forum might be, just as we had predicted to the Foreign Office.

We had noted the depressed state of applicants before: their inadequate qualifications and general lack of quality when we interviewed staff for the Banja Luka office of the Soul of Europe. All three we eventually chose then stopped working for us within half a year: Mirjiana after a couple of weeks because she did not like working for ‘too many bosses’; Majda and Dejan because we could not guarantee permanent employment..

The first interviewee, a woman teacher, seeming on the verge of tears, began by apologizing for not being able to speak good English, which did not matter for the job. Her main qualifications were in sociology and the study of democracy and human rights over ten years. She had some experience working for an NGO, United Women. She understood the need for a civic forum to change pernicious attitudes, already being disseminated in schools: ‘nice lies’, as she put it, preserving the ethnic purity of the Republika Srpska. ‘We are really far from being a normal democratic state. Our politicians are not able to think about people’s needs. We live in a feudal age,’ she commented, adding: ‘We are still a criminal country, one without progress.’

She and one other female applicant, equally depressed and lacking in confidence, were the only ones to gain our sympathy, although it was clear to everyone they could not operate as brokers. Despite good will and thoughtfulness about the principles of a civic form, even their enthusiasm and possible efficiency in administrative matters, they would be hampered by entrenched fear, and an inability to deal with bullying authorities.

The next applicant brought with him a sulphurous whiff of Bosnia's criminal past and present. In black leather jacket, jeans and macho demeanour he paced outside the office and puffed aggressively on a cigarette before entering. His CV did not hide the fact that he used to be an active member of the Bosnian Serb government during the war. His hair now white, he was still the lean, athletic, and ruggedly handsome henchman of ten years earlier. Now the present lap-top chetnik administration of the Republika Srpska had no more need of his services. In his CV he arrogantly wrote: 'I have even more qualifications than you have asked for', which begged the chilling question what these other qualifications might be. 'I am retreating from politics,' he declared, rapidly becoming impatient with the interview, 'and am applying for many jobs.' He admitted to knowing nothing about a civic forum and its principles, expressing no interest in them. 'I'm just looking for a job,' he said with a contemptuous smile. He missed the male camaraderie of the war years when he and his mates knew what to do, and found their niche in the business of terror, death and wreckage. With attitudes changing, he tried to adapt. He even admitted to having no problem with the reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque, which underlined the impression that the ethnic cleansing had less to do with religion than about settling historic scores. He looked scornfully round the room, and not finding a single person he might care to work with, was only too happy to leave.

In contrast to the other interviewees who represented the reality of life in the Republika Srpska, the next applicant arrived pointedly by taxi. He had dressed smartly to give the impression of being a 'director'. He seemed to have done surprisingly well in Banja Luka, as a Muslim. He had run several businesses. For nine years he had worked for the OHR on issues of refugees, gaining experience of the international community, and specifically on the International Rescue Committee, as a project co-ordinator. US funded, it supervised Serb NGOs in Croatia: small shelter

projects. He also was treasurer of a free legal aid centre. Originally trained to be a vet, the war stopped his studies. On paper and in manner he seemed a good candidate for the job. However, members of the forum expressed doubts about him and could not believe his CV, which detailed an incongruously busy working life. Self assured, ebullient and dynamic, he might not have problems dealing with politicians. Merhamet backed him for his Muslim credentials, but the others doubted his sincerity. Besides which, he gave the impression of wanting to be a 'boss' rather than a 'broker', another job to add to his list. This wide boy would give orders and pocket another substantial salary. The forum members grilled him so thoroughly that he phoned later to tell us he would not be interested in the job anyway.

The last two interviewees consisted of another unemployed teacher, even more tearful and depressed than the first, and our present assistant Radmila's lively sister whom Adnan had pressured to apply for the position, because no people of quality were forthcoming. She possessed the right attitudes, but the civic forum members dismissed her, along with the others, as not being sufficiently qualified or able. They then insisted on Adnan, who had kept a low profile throughout the proceedings. They wanted him to stay on temporarily as facilitator, till the forum was firmly established. All agreed to eventually appoint a director from among the forum members.

Adnan arranged two newspaper interviews.

The first took place in a gas station on the outskirts of town. Groups of men, in black leather jackets and jeans, sat at tables in the coffee area, drinking beer, smoking, shouting, and exploding alarmingly into sudden artillery bursts of raucous laughter.

The interviewer had just graduated, and his immaturity contrasted strikingly with the unfettered machismo all round. A broad smile of surprised delight lit up his face when Donald leaned forward, wagging his finger, and took Banja Luka to task for its

crippling corruption and outmoded political and nationalist attitudes. Normally no one dared air such opinions in public, least of all in this gas station, where the thuggish men surrounding us looked ready to embark on another ethnic cleansing spree.

The man's main line of questioning focused on sources of funding for the Ferhadija Mosque, this being a sensitive issue for the Bosnian Serb dominated Republika Srpska. He had been primed to ask this by the editor of the nationalist paper, who intended to make it a major issue if it turned out that money came from international Muslim sources abroad. Such a fact would stoke resentment, and possibly violent responses, among his mostly impoverished Bosnian Serb readership.

The second interview, with a bright woman from the news agency Onasa, took place in Topolino, a flashy café near the town centre. Students packed the place and, slowly sipping espresso, flirted and eyed up the competition, while shouting at each other over thundering rock music. Some of the students stared at us beadily, as though calculating how much money could be got from us. We sat on the edge of the café by the roadside, where traffic belched fumes and honked incessantly.

The young woman, like the previous interviewer, only wanted to know who was giving money for rebuilding the mosque, but we expanded the mosque issue by examining the hypocrisy behind words like 'reconciliation'. We emphasised the need to 'walk the talk', to actually make something happen, and to engage on the ground with practical projects of collaboration between communities. We talked about the interdependence of people, and the dangers of politics mixing with notions of mystic nationalism.

A year ago such talk in a public place in Banja Luka was unthinkable. Two years ago it would have been dangerous.

The journalist's agency had told her to ask just one question, and because we could give her no answer, she lost interest.

As always, Bishop Komarica consoled us with friendly talk and rakija. The Pope planned to stay overnight in the bishop's house, along with a retinue of doctors, nurses and advisers. Mayor Davidovic and President Cavic had already visited Rome to discuss arrangements for an event we had initiated, not just to support a neglected Catholic diocese, but to signify social change in a place that had become a pariah in Europe. Given the history over several generations, the political ramifications of the Pope's visit to Banja Luka were more important than its religious significance.

Later that day, Father Zvonko, at our final meeting on this visit to Banja Luka, reluctantly agreed to see us in the café of the Hotel Palas, and though he made an effort to be polite, he could not hide his dark mood, and spoke through pursed lips about the perpetual need for funds. If we were 'serious about helping him' he had a list of projects from rebuilding houses in Presnace to finishing the church. He talked ruefully about the Pope's visit, seeing it as unnecessary expenditure: money, even a fraction of it, he could have used. He conceded that friendship and not being forgotten meant more than euros, but this priest seemed at the end of his tether.

Not many people, even in the Republika Srpska, knew about Presnace, a poor village on the outskirts of Banja Luka. Father Zvonko found himself chained to a tiny forgotten community, recovering from the trauma of war, murder and atrocities. We could smell the neglect and poverty, and felt sympathy for the young man repressing his anger and despair beneath his clerical collar. Now in his thirties, his youth was rapidly disappearing, and he looked prematurely old: features pinched and hardening.

Father Zvonko illustrated the crisis facing young people in Bosnia, those having to remain in their physically, emotionally, and spiritually ravaged country. The elderly had no choice but to survive as best they could. The school and college leavers focused efforts on emigrating. A small minority of corrupt community leaders among

the middle groups were doing well out of the situation, zealously tightening their hold on power to protect their interests, and also to prevent themselves being brought to justice. Everyone else faced the fallout of the crisis on a daily basis, and most did not possess the ambition, energy, determination and intelligence of Adnan.

The best of these, like Father Zvonko, hung on with prayer: their spirits burning up in the effort of resisting apathy and cynicism. His situation was never-ending, grindingly predictable. Day after day, he rose each morning to see a half-finished church open to the elements, the broken roofs and walls of his parishioners' houses, caring for his depressed flock, knowing that the rest of the world no longer cared about him, or his community. All this was made more acutely painful by the constant reminder of the trauma at the heart of Presnace: the murder of Father Filip Lukenda and Sister Cecilija Grgic. This crime still cried out for acknowledgement, justice, and reparation. The floor in a room stained with their blood had become a space of prayer and meditation. Despite the horror of what happened there, the site felt full of grace and forgiveness.

Yet the bloodstain made us ever more determined to carry on, despite all the obstacles to come. The final part of *Dust* tells this story.

THE END OF DUST BOOK TWO PART FOUR

BY THE WATERS OF THE BOSPORUS