Welfare and Values in Europe:
Transitions related to Religion, Minorities and Gender
(WaVE)

Croatia:
Overview of the national situation

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1. Introduction

Croatia is a small (according the Census 2001 it has 4,437,460 inhabitants) and young country that gained independence in 1992, after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. The process of gaining independence was connected with the Homeland War, which ended in 1995. After a turbulent social and political period during the 1990s, the Croatian situation has been slowly but considerably normalised. The main political goal of the Republic of Croatia is to become a full EU member. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU was signed in 2001, and after Croatia fulfilled all conditions, the negotiation process started in October 2005.¹

The interaction between religion, minorities and gender is a new topic in Croatian scientific research and the results of the WaVE project will provide new knowledge on social welfare, majority – minority relations and gender. This statement is based on the analysis of recent scientific literature and research in Croatia, briefly presented below.

There are two recent research studies, which (only partially) have focused on the social, welfare-related role of religious agents in the country. The first one is the European Value Survey (EVS) conducted in Croatia in 1999; it produced a series of data about different aspects of the social role of religion and was published later in a book (Baloban, 2005). The second study is more important as, by initiating this research, the Catholic Church wanted to present itself as an institution, which has paid much attention to different welfare issues. The Croatian Caritas and the Centre for the Promotion of Social Teachings of the Church conducted research on poverty in Croatia. The results, which highlighted the high poverty level and different aspects in the life of poor people, were presented and discussed at the international conference in October 2004 and were partly published in the Croatian journal Revija za socijalnu politiku (Journal of Social Policy), no 3-4/2006.

There is no research on the relations between the majority Church and minority groups with the exception of one recent report on attitudes of the Catholic Church toward reproductive and sexual rights (Škrabalo, Jurić, 2005). The report was produced within efforts of the Open Society Institute in Croatia to measure the openness of society.
In addition, there are only a few researchers that pay attention to minorities at the national level, except for studies on the Roma population (Štambuk, 2000, Šućur, 2000, Štambuk, 2005). An analysis of the EVS data shows that there is a social distance toward different social groups, such as people of different races, foreign workers, homosexuals etc. (Zrinščak, 2006). Research on youth also indicates a high social distance toward nations of former Yugoslavia, particularly toward Serbs and Albanians (Baranović, 2002). Banovac and Boneta researched social distance toward different ethnic groups and found a low level of acceptance of Serbs, Albanians and Romas (Banovac & Boneta, 2006). Although the issue of relations between Croats and Serbs was the main issue during the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia, there are few political documents and analyses, which are devoted to the problem of the returning Serbian minority to Croatia after the Homeland War and their access to public services, but no reliable research.\(^2\) Also, there are some publications and projects by the Franciscan Institute for Culture of Peace and the Croatian Caritas on reconciliation and forgiveness after the war (Vuleta, Batarelo, 2001, Vuleta, Anić, Milanović Litre, 2004).

Gender equality is a relatively new topic of research in Croatia. In recent years some studies, mainly conducted by various women’s associations and other non-profit organisations (“Transition to Democracy”, “B.a.b.e.”, “Women’s Studies”, “Society for Psychological Help”…) have focused mainly on family violence and violence towards women (Ajduković, Pavleković, 2004). There is also other research on the position of women (Leinert-Novosel, 1999) and single parent families (Raboteg-Šarić, Pečnik, Josipović, 2003). This research did not focus on gender equality in relation to religion. There is one important exception: the study on different aspects of position of women in the Catholic Church in the 20\(^{th}\) century was conducted by Rebeka Jadranka Anić (2003). Very recently, the Franciscan Institute for Culture of Peace conducted a complex study on gender roles in society and Church, but results have not yet been analysed and published.

Beside the already mentioned EVS, which focused on values and religion (and partly on their relation to some welfare issues and attitudes toward minorities), there is just one more research study, which examined value orientations in connection to religion (Marinović Jerolimov, 2005).

2. Characteristics of the Croatian welfare system
2.1 Historic background

The beginnings of social policy can be traced back to the end of the 19th century when Croatia was a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. However, after World War I Croatia became a part of the new Yugoslav state in which the implementation of social insurance laws was very slow. After World War II Yugoslavia became a communist state and Croatia was one of its six republics. The main characteristic of the communist welfare state was the statutory social insurance, but only for those employed by the expanded state sector (Zrinščak, 2003). Agricultural workers and those employed in the private sector were excluded, something which contributed to the attractiveness of the state sector. The health and education sectors became public with free access for all. The communist state promoted also a new position of women in society, mainly connected to the possibility (and even necessity) of their employment. However, the communist welfare state had many shortcomings: services were free but low quality, members of state and party apparatus had privileges, workers were in general poorly paid, etc.

The peculiar features of the welfare systems of countries that are undergoing post-communist transformation are usually labelled very simply and very generally as post-communist welfare states or welfare states in transition (Deacon, 2000). This means that the system combines elements of the communist system with different and in many cases contradictory changes in the transition period. Although the term “post-communist welfare state” is very ambiguous, it is impossible to describe the Croatian welfare system in terms of the classic Esping-Andersen typology of welfare states. The factors which have shaped the Croatian post-communist welfare state are: the communist legacy, transitional social consequences, war problems, new social risks, global social changes, and the role of neoliberal thinking, particularly channelled through the role of international financial institutions in designing and implementing welfare reforms in post-communism.

The post-communist transformation has witnessed on the one hand remarkable continuity in the statutory welfare provisions, but also on the other hand has not-regulated or partially planned privatisation in almost all welfare fields. Besides these factors, the transitional crisis together with problems connected to the war in Croatia contributed to the fall of GDP, a considerable rise of unemployment and other related welfare problems. The war devastated much of the Croatian territory and a considerable part of the population
became displaced persons. The situation has been slowly but considerably improving after the war ended in 1995 and Croatia regained its occupied territories.

The relationships between the public, private, non-profit sectors and family are not easy to estimate because of rapid changes which are happening in many fields and partly because of the lack of data. In the field of health, education and social welfare the state is still the main provider of services. At the same time, some costs are being shifted today to users. The unregulated public-private mix in the healthcare sector can be noticed because access to higher quality of the healthcare is usually connected with informal payments. Welfare services are almost completely free for users, but the shortage of services (for example, in the field of care for the elderly) causes inequality between those who can pay for private service and those who cannot. The family is here still the most important source of services. Care for children, elderly or handicapped persons, relies on the informal help from nuclear or extended family members. Emerging private market forces can be noticed also in the field of the pension system. In 2002 the public pension system was changed and insured persons are obliged to pay part of their contribution to private pension funds. The welfare sector is mainly a female sector. In centres for social work, 87% of professionals are women and in welfare institutions 84% are female (Jurčević, 2005). There is no data on the informal welfare work, but there is no doubt that it is performed mainly by women. The role of the non-profit sector is also a relatively new phenomenon, although the communist system tolerated partly professional, cultural or sport non-profit organisations. The new political system opened manifestly the floor to the rise of this new sector but at the same time, particularly in the 1990s, created some serious obstacles to the development of the civil society. The comparative international CIVICUS research on civil society in Croatia showed that its role in the welfare sector is still very limited (Bežovan, Zrinščak, Vugec, 2005).

2.2 The role of the Catholic Church in welfare

The welfare system in Croatia was mainly constructed during the communist period. The education of social workers started in Croatia in 1952 (the first post-secondary education of social workers in the whole communist world) and the first so-called centres for social work (which had to deal with all welfare problems in local communities) were established in the late 1950s. As a result, the welfare sector was basically secular, detached from the Church. In the communist time the Catholic Church organised some welfare activities (Caritas in
Zagreb started to operate in the mid 1960s, which although not legal, they were tolerated by the system. The new post-communist state opened the possibilities for getting involved to all Churches, including the majority one. *Caritas* established its different activities and regulated its relations with the State. However, because of the communist legacy and secular character of the welfare sector, the position of the Church in the national welfare system is far from being important or comprehensive as in many corporative welfare states. Nevertheless, the Church tries to become a more important partner in social debates. Because of this and from time to time, the Croatian Bishops Conference points to the deficiencies of the Croatian welfare system and tries to cooperate with other social actors with the aim to change the situation.

### 2.3 Future challenges and current debates

In the near future, the welfare system will be challenged by several problems. The negative natural increase of the population together with the low fertility rate is already very high on the public agenda and will remain so (Puljiz, 2005:106-107). According to the Eurostat data, life expectancy for men is 72 years of age, and for women 79. This is slightly below the EU average. In the EU-25 it is 74.9 for men and 81.3 for women, while in the EU-15 it is 75.9 for men and 81.8 for women (2003). Croatia is also an ageing society with 16.5% of population over 65 in 2001, and in that respect it is not different from other EU countries. Several governments have been concerned with initiating demographic measures that would stimulate the rise of fertility but without or with very limited success. Although only partly discussed, the possibility for reconciling work and family life will be of greater importance in the near future. This is of a particular interest to women as they work partly in the illegal or unregulated sector (poorly paid or not paid for overtime work, only in temporary work, etc.) (Kerovec, 2005:19-20, Puljiz, 2005:115, Milidrag Šmid, 2005:7). The issue of future migration trends has just started to be discussed as new migration patterns can be expected. In recent years the Chinese community has been growing which can also produce some tensions in future. The public is mainly preoccupied with the living conditions of current pensioners but the living conditions of future pensioners (which is connected with the radical pension reform in 1999 and 2001) will be one of the main challenges in future.

There are several issues currently debated. The first one is a permanent discussion about unfavourable demographic trends (Wertheimer Baletić, 2005:12, Puljiz, 2005:100-101).
Work on Sundays, mainly in shops and supermarkets (usually large shopping malls, constructed recently by foreign investors), is also debated. As mentioned, women work overtime with no pay, with no free days, during Sundays and holidays. The Trade Union, backed by the Catholic Church, wants to restrict work on Sundays, while employers are very much against this. Debates on poverty and income inequality are also high on the agenda, but there are only very general discussions about high poverty or inappropriate inequality (although income inequality is, for example, still lower in Croatia than in many Western European countries). According to data from Eurostat, those at risk of poverty rate after social transfers in 2003 were 18% and the unemployment rate was 13.6% in 2005. Therefore, the poverty rate is slightly higher than in EU15 (17%), and EU25 (16%), but the unemployment rate is significantly higher than in both EU15 (7.9) and EU25 (8.7). From time to time the work of social workers is also debated, as the media usually portray them as unethical, as those who separate children from parents and have no compassion, etc.

The main issue concerning gender in relation to welfare is violence against women. This problem came on the agenda in the late 1990s and the beginning of 2000s, as a result of the long-term activities of women’s organisations, but more importantly as a result of newly stimulated democratisation and more openness to the EU in the beginning of 2000. Violence against women is debated in connection with family violence and sexual abuse on children. Some other issues (such as trafficking, or the economic position of women) have also come from time to time on the agenda but with low intensity and duration.

It is very hard to say if there is an explicit source of conflict related to welfare provision regarding religion, minorities or gender. There are tensions between Croats and Serbs in previously war-affected areas, but these tensions and conflicts are not restricted to welfare; they are connected with the possibilities of economic prosperity and harmonious life between majority and minority nations. Only one serious conflict occurred recently when the government announced a plan in 2004 (requested also by the EU) to establish an asylum reception centre but failed to do so because of the strong protest by local inhabitants.

3. Religious composition in Croatia

In the ex-Yugoslav territories three main religious traditions have existed – Catholicism, Serbian Orthodoxy and Islam. Because of the turbulent history, religious
institutions in many cases compensated for the lack of state organisation of separate nations and played significant ethnic, linguistic, cultural and political roles. Identifying ethnicity with religion, or equalising religious and ethnic belonging is a common assumption: Croats are perceived as Catholics, Serbs as Orthodox and Bosnians as Muslims. This division still exists, and for this reason the recent war against Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina was incorrectly reinterpreted as a religious war, although the religious factor cannot be denied.

Croatia is a country with a relatively high religiosity in comparison to many other European countries and with one dominant Church – the Catholic Church. According to the 2001 Census there were 87.83% Catholics, 4.42% Orthodox, 1.28% Muslims, 0.14% Greek Catholics, 0.14% Jehovah Witnesses, while all other religious communities amounted to 0.53% (among them Jews, Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, Baptists, etc.). There were 5.21% of respondents who declared themselves as non-believers, agnostics, or those who did not declare a religious affiliation. In comparison to 1991, changes in the religious composition of the country can be noticed. Because of the war events and particularly after Croatia regained its previously occupied territories, many Serbs (predominantly Orthodox) left the country and many Croats (predominantly Catholics) came to Croatia from other former republics of ex-Yugoslavia (mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia). Therefore, there is an increase of Catholics (from 76.64% to 87.83%) and a decrease of Orthodox (from 11.12% to 4.42%). A slight increase also occurred among Muslims, Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses, and Calvinists and those from “other religions”. Among small religious communities, Jehovah’s Witnesses grew the most, from 0.10% to 0.14%.

Croatia is a country with high religiosity measured also by other indicators (regular church attendance, different beliefs, importance of God in everyday life or prayer outside religious services). At the same time, the level of religiosity is not consistent in all dimensions. The religious influence is partly noticed in some moral attitudes (for example, in attitudes toward abortion) and hardly in the field of public morality (such as attitudes toward corruption, illegal behaviour etc.) (Črpić, Zrinščak, 2005, 79-80). The dominance of Catholicism does not exclude openness to eclecticism, especially to belief in reincarnation or astrology.

4. Characteristics of the Catholic Church
4.1 Historic role

In Croatian history, the Church was symbolically interpreted as a keeper of souls and national identity. The unfavourable period for religion and religious institutions started with the establishment of communist government. Although the socialist Constitution guaranteed all forms of religious rights and religious freedom religion was formally treated as “private matter”, on the ideological level the government reinforced the ideological fight against religion. Religion and religious institutions were politically unacceptable and negative. Therefore, at the institutional level, religion and religious institutions were invisible (Marinović Jerolimov, 2000:22), but despite the societal marginalisation, traditional religiosity and connections with religion and Church were not exterminated.

The breakdown of communism brought the revitalisation of the role of religion in society. During the 1990s, religion, particularly the Catholic Church, gained legitimacy for being active in society. The Catholic Church embraced political transformation and the political elite used it as a supporting partner. It was a period of high level of manifest religiosity and of intensive identification of nationality and religiosity. The Church had also an important humanitarian role during the Homeland War.

4.2 New legal framework

The new Constitution that was approved by the Parliament in 1990 promotes new values. According to the Constitution, Croatia is a secular country, built on the idea of separation of Church and State. The Constitution guaranteed the freedom of awareness and religious beliefs and their public expression. It also stated that all religious communities were equal in law, they had the freedom to perform their ceremonies, the right to have and freely run schools, institutions, charitable associations and in all these activities to obtain the protection and assistance of the State. However, the principles of separation and equality are according to the real situation and dominance of one Church, reinterpreted and realised as a principle of cooperation between Church and State, mainly the Catholic Church and State (Zrinščak, 2004). This was particularly visible in the signing of four agreements between the Holy See and Croatia: on legal questions (1996), on cooperation in the field of education and culture (1996), on spiritual care in military and police forces (1996), and on economic issues (1998). Through these agreements the Catholic Church regulated different aspects of its social
roles and functions. There were objections if agreements with the Holy See violated the idea of separation of Church and State and put other religious communities in unjust positions. In many cases smaller religious communities feel in unfavourable position, although their position is much connected to their low numbers and low visibility. However, that is an ongoing controversy known also in other European countries, which touches the question of legal and real equality among different traditional and non-traditional religious communities.

It should be stressed also that not everyone welcomes the new position of the Catholic Church. There is a division as some parts of society strongly reject the Church’s engagement in social issues, while others consider that the Church must be more engaged in social life. This situation seems to be very confusing and the Church tries to define its position and future development. Theologians and clergy emphasise the role of lay persons, particular in a welfare domain as a way of how the Church should demonstrate its mission in contemporary societies.

4.3 The cultural and symbolic dimension of religious institutions

One of the most prominent roles of the Church and function of clergies is to perform religious services connected with crucial moments of human existence – childbirth, marriage and death. There is no data on the rate of baptisms and burials performed by the Catholic Church. Certainly, there are well-founded estimates that religious services for birth and death are widespread. According to the EVS data from 1999, the majority of population believe that birth (88.4%) and death (93.7%) should be marked with religious services (Črpić, Zrinščak, 2005:74).

4.4 The organisational structure and financial situation of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Croatia is organised according to the territorial model and is divided in three metropolitan areas and 15 (arch) bishoprics. Bishoprics are further divided in parishes. The Holy See approved the separate Croatian Bishop Conference in 1993, as in the former Yugoslavia there was only the Bishop Conference of Yugoslavia.

It is not possible to assess the current financial situation of the Church. There is no transparent data on personnel employed. The Church is financed by its own income and partly
by the financial help of the State. According to an agreement on economic issues, the Church can receive non-taxable money from believers and the State is responsible for the return of property taken from the Church after the World War II. A joint Commission was established in order to define which property can be claimed and for which the Church should receive compensation. Furthermore, the Church receives a certain amount of money each year from the state budget for the salaries of priests and other employees, the maintenance of Church buildings and the contribution of the Church to welfare activities. Based on an agreed calculation the Church should have received about 200,000,000 kunas per year (approximately 27,200,000 euros), but in the period from 2000 to 2003 it only received approximately 160,000,000 kunas per year (about 21,700,000 euros) (Pandža, 2005). The Church still has complaints about its unfavourable financial situation due to the numerous social activities it performs.

4.5 Welfare – a new position of the Church

During the 1990s the main focus of the Church was the reestablishment of its social position, deprived in the communist time, and the regulation of its relation to the State. The war also affected many of its activities in the 1990s. However, after the second half of the 1990s the Church has also tried to show that the welfare situation of the population and the general social situation in the country is one of its main concerns. In 1996 the newly appointed Zagreb archbishop cardinal Bozanić paid much attention to welfare issues (Zrinšćak, 2001). In numerous public speeches and official documents, both issued by himself or the Croatian Bishop Conference, the Church has addressed the following issues: “structural sin” relating to the privatisation of the economy, as a result of which many workers lost their jobs, immoral behaviour in the business sector, high unemployment rates, poverty and social inequality, demographic problems, the hard life of pensioners, reform of the family policy, which reduced benefits to mothers and children, corruption, etc. The Church also established the Centre for the Promotion of Social Teachings of the Church, which has organised several important activities, including public lectures on the Church’s social and moral teachings and some public campaigns; it has also initiated even research on poverty and sociological research on religiosity and other social issues. The Catholic Church has established itself as an equal and active partner in the welfare domain despite some restrictions. The argument that the Catholic Church has a significant role in society is justified by the measure of confidence in institutions. According to the 1999 EVS, 44.0% of respondents assigned the highest level
of trust to the Catholic Church. Respondents believe that the Church can give answers to the moral needs of individuals (69.5%) and to family problems (68.0%), to questions on the meaning of life (74.6%), to current social problems (39.9%) and to the restoration of law and order (37.0%) (Zrinščak, 2001:191-192).

Because of the lack of data, it is hard to outline the whole range of the Catholic Church’s welfare activities. One of the oldest and the largest Catholic welfare organisations is the Croatian Caritas. Caritas is a non-profit organisation, an institution attached to the Croatian Bishop Conference and further divided in 15 bishopric Caritas organisations and about 1,500 Caritas organisations in parishes. The Croatian Caritas has numerous activities devoted to projects for the reduction of poverty, the promotion of voluntary work, and advocacy at the national and local level, also for the promotion of small enterprises, establishing family counselling centres, and different humanitarian activities, such as monetary or in-kind help, soup-kitchens, etc. In recent years the Croatian Caritas has wanted to transform itself into a modern organisation that performs activities at the level of civil society and that tries to build partnerships with other civil society organisations. This effort is not reflected so far at the level of parishes, which still mainly act as traditional organisations that only offer humanitarian help to people in need. The Catholic Church has also wanted to establish different welfare institutions, but as already stated, because of the communist legacy the Croatian welfare sector mainly belongs to the state. Among 454 kindergartens in Croatia there are only 45 that belong to religious communities and 42 to the Catholic Church (Bouillet, Bračić-Ružič, Zrinščak, 2002). Among 407 secondary schools there are only 13 or 3.2% that belong to religious communities. According to two different Church sources 9 or 10 schools belong to the Catholic Church. Up to 4.6% of homes for the elderly belong to different Churches. During the communist period the Catholic Theological Faculty existed outside the University of Zagreb and in 1991 it became once again a part of the University. The same situation applied to with theological faculties in other Croatian towns. Activities for establishing a new Catholic University in Zagreb are in their final phase.

4.6 The Catholic Church and minorities

The position of the Church towards minority religions was largely affected by the war in which the conflict between Serbs and Croats (but also other non-Serbs which were, as the Croats, chased away from the territories occupied by rebel Serbs) partly had religious
The Church, even during the war, proclaimed the principles of love, dignity of others, non-discrimination, but it also supported the duty of the state to defend itself (Šanjek, 2002:118). In many cases this was reinterpreted as a support to military activities of the Croatian Army against rebelled Serbs. In recent years the Church has more actively called for reconciliation and harmonious life; it has promoted its pro-European stand, although it has usually underlined that national identity should be maintained and national interests defended. Some bishops and priests (possibly in their majority) are more prone to emphasising national interests and to stressing values that are proclaimed more by the right-wing political parties. In that way they are also closer to politicians and parts of society that are very suspicious to the Europeanisation process.

The Catholic Church promotes ecumenical dialogue between different religious communities and has numerous links with other religious communities, particularly with the Islamic religious community, which is a traditional religion in Croatia (the Croatian Parliament recognised Islam as equal religious community in 1916). Good relations can also be observed with traditional Protestant communities, while relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church are heading in a good direction after the war. The Zagreb archbishop cardinal Bozanić and the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church patriarch Pavle met in Belgrade, Serbia in 2004, although the mistrust still prevails. Each year a prayer for the unity of Christianity is organised in Croatia and in 2006 participants included representatives of the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Evangelic Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Union of the Baptist Churches, and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church. Possibly some slight tensions can be observed in relation to some new religious groups, but due to their low figures this does not attract much attention.

5. Welfare, religion and gender

5.1 The position of women in society

The communist system promoted the employment of women but because of low quality and shortage of services or economic impossibility to buy some services, women were burdened by double work in a much higher proportion than women in the West (Pascal, Manning, 2000, Puljiz, Zrinić, 2002). The situation became even worse in the post-
The communist era and women can be included generally in a group of “losers” in the transition (Leinert-Novosel, 1999:7, Dubljević, 2003:31). There are two main reasons for this. The first reason is connected with the economic decline and worsening of social situation in connection to transition and war. According to the first Quality of Life Survey conducted in Croatia in 2006, 35% of women are involved in caring for and educating children every day in comparison to 22.6% of men. Even 80.7% of women perform housework tasks every day in comparison to 32.8% of men. The economic position of women is of particular interest. Despite some positive trends (education, participation in the social domain...), the position of women in the labour market is worse than that of men. Although women represent 51.5% of population, their share in employment amounts to only 45%, and the possibility for women to be without any income is three times higher in relation to men. The Eurostat data shows that in 2004 the unemployment rate was 15.6% for women and 12% for men. Women, particularly older women, also have a larger share in poverty (Kerovec, 2005:19). One of the most important problems is work in an unofficial economy. Women predominate in the shadow economy and this type of work reduces their pensions. Men in Croatia are paid salaries that are 19.4% higher than women. The second reason is connected with the promotion of traditional women’s roles in society by right wing political parties (which were in power during the 1990s) and by the Catholic Church, which usually stresses the image of women as caring mothers. Some measures were introduced, which would encourage women to take paid leave (up to three years) in order to stimulate higher fertility rates, but those attempts cannot be evaluated as very successful. Single mothers are an especially disadvantaged group; they have to deal with many problems and can rely mostly on the help of relatives and friends, and not on society, since there is an evident shortage of public services. In the context of debates about work on Sundays in shops and supermarkets, the Catholic Church directs public attention to the issue of women’s work and the separation from children and family, which can lead to the destabilisation of normal family life. The Church does not express such a sensibility for other problems among women – violence against women in family and society or the sexual exploitation of women, although it also mentions these issues.

Unfavourable positions of women in the labour market, difficulties in reconciling work and family life (including maintaining a household), as well as, the influence of a traditional image of women are reflected in the public domain. The level of participation of women in public life is very low. According to the UNECE gender statistics there were 7.9%
of women in the Parliament in 1995 and only 7.9% and 10.0% among government ministers. The situation is better today, at least in the Parliament where the participation of women rose to 21.7% in 2005. Generally, women are not adequately included in processes of government and important decision-making.

Since the late 1990s and the beginning of 2000 there were several official steps for promoting new policies of equality between women and men and improving different aspects of position of women in society. The government issued several important documents and passed laws, such as the National Policy for Promotion of Equality between Women and Men 2001 - 2005, the Law on Equality between Women and Men (2003), the establishment of the Ombudsman for Gender Equality and the Government Office for Gender Equality (Rodin, Vasiljević, 2003, Milidrag Šmid, 2005:6). However, the question is when and how this important framework will start to influence in greater extent the reality. Maybe the main positive steps can be found in the field of family violence. The government also introduced some specific measures for addressing the higher unemployment rate among women (particularly older unemployed women) but there is no sign that these measures have brought any improvements so far.

5.2 Gender questions in the Catholic Church

“Women’s questions” do not exist in the Catholic Church. The Church did not present any kind of response toward the political activities of women and to other aspects of the social position of women (Anić, 2003). There are no women’s organisations that tend to research and promote female roles in the Church or promote a new culture of interaction between genders and cooperation with secular women’s organisations (Anić, 2003:25). Statements on the position of women in the Church are rare and they have been formulated after 1995. Catholic magazines from time to time elaborate feminist topics, but promote explicitly negative statements about feminism. Topics of feminist theology are elaborated more positively but the Church does not have official statement on feminist exegesis (Anić, 2003:43). Theological interpretations are usually based on traditional dualisms, which ascribe to women qualities such as intuition, dedication, self-denial, emotionality, kindness… Recent theological interpretations on women are based on the model of the Virgin Mary. At the same time the Church has always supported a traditional family, and consequently, traditional social roles of women and men. This traditional view has a considerable influence also today.
but the communist regime ruptured in some aspects the historic influence of the Church in the social formation of gender roles. That is visible today, for example, in attitudes towards abortion. The free health insurance paid abortion based on a woman’s demand was introduced in 1978. Although Croatia is today a highly religious country and although the Church (as one of the most trusted social institutions) explicitly rejects abortion, the same law from 1978 is still in effect. The majority of population accepts today the attitude that by having an abortion a new life is terminated. At the same time the majority justifies abortions in some cases (such as when a woman is not married) and is clearly against any changes in the current law (Škrabalo, Jurić, 2005:180). The Catholic Church raised its voice against abortion after 2000 (when left-centre parties came to power). Before the general elections in late 2003, bishops asked believers not to vote for parties and individuals that advocate abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage (the first law on rights of same-sex consensual unions was passed in Parliament in the same year before the elections). In an address to believers in October 2005, Croatian bishops asked for the annulment of the abortion act, for improvements in laws on marriage and family and generally for a greater understanding of the Church teachings on marriage and family life. It is interesting that in that case different religious communities coordinated their efforts and a common statement on the dignity of life, entitled “Human life is God’s Gift”, was issued. This statement was supported by the Catholic Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Muslim Community, the Evangelical Church, the Union of Baptist Churches and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church. The Church has also tried to influence the government in issues of different aspects of medically assisted fertilisation.

6. An overview of the minority presence in Croatia

Because of the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia and the formation of an independent Croatian state, relations with minorities were one of the main issues during the transition in Croatia. The political and social situation of minorities is much better today, although tensions and problems persist between Croats and Serbs, particularly in the war-affected areas. According to the Croatian Constitution, a national minority is a group of Croatian citizens whose members traditionally live in Croatia. Members of a national minority share ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious specificities that are different from the rest of citizens and try to maintain their particularities. The Croatian Constitution lists several minorities with an autochthonous status: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, although others not mentioned can also assert their rights.
According to the number of acknowledged nationalities, Croatia is one of the most multicultural East-European countries, but their actual number is not so high. The 2001 Census listed 22 nationalities, which amount to 7.47% of population, plus many others in the category of “other nationalities” that amount to 0.49% of population, all together adding up to 7.96% There are 4.54% Serbs, 0.47% Bosnians, 0.44% Italians, 0.37% Hungarians, 0.34% Albanians, 0.30% Slovenians etc.

According to its geopolitical position and rather turbulent historical socio-political processes, Croatia was very open to migration processes (Čizmić, Živić, 2005:57). It was for centuries a country with high emigration to other non-European and European countries. Immigration to Croatia and patterns of immigration are mainly connected with political processes. From 1102 Croatia entered the political union with Hungary and from 1527 it became a part of the Austrian Empire. Parts of the Croatian coasts were always under Venetian rule and later under Italy. Italian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and some other minorities originate from these periods and are concentrated in different parts of Croatia. When the Ottomans started to penetrate into Europe many Slavic nations (mainly Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Montenegrins) moved towards the borders of what was then the Austrian Empire. When the Ottoman power started to decline Austria occupied the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it became together with Croatia a part of the same state. After the formation of the (first) Yugoslavia after World War I and (second) Yugoslavia after World War II, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia became parts of one state that created new migration patterns, now inside the one state. Some migrations were politically motivated, but most of them were for economic reasons– because of the Adriatic coast and the tourism industry started to flourish in the late 1950s and 1960s, Croatia became an attractive place to settle, particularly for Bosnians, Serbs and Albanians (Albanians from Kosovo which was a part of Serbia). The Homeland War caused another migration as many Serbs left the country and many Croats from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia came in (Lajić, 2002:38). Chinese immigration into the country is a very recent phenomenon (Gelo, 2006, Krasnec, 2006). It is a new kind of non-Slavic, external immigration that is not yet scientifically analysed. Despite the low number of Chinese immigrants, their sudden visibility together with unfavourable demographic trends has stimulated debates on future migration trends and the need for defining immigration policy.
Minority groups can be found in very different parts of Croatia. There are no consistent patterns of their concentration in different places as migration processes were influenced by very different historical factors and phases. Nevertheless, we can detect the most attractive regions for immigrants: Eastern part of Croatia (Vukovar-Srijem county, Pozega-Slavonija county and Osijek-Baranja county), Zagreb and its surroundings, and the Adriatic coast.

According to the 2002 Constitutional Law on National Minorities all minorities have equal rights that they can assert in all social fields. There are different legal mechanisms that could help them in obtaining specific needs. The law also guarantees adequate representation of minorities in local, regional, and national political bodies. The same applies to access to welfare services (Gjenero, 2005:54, Mesić, 2003:170). However, there is no research or data on how that guaranteed access is realised in everyday life. The first scientific conference that focused on access to social rights indicated that access can be connected with different obstacles – such as poverty, low education levels or regional disparities (Puljiz, 2004, Šućur, 2004). Welfare services are not distributed equally in geographic terms and among those living in rural and less developed areas or areas more affected by the war can have more problems in fulfilling their welfare needs. The access is also very much connected with employment perspectives. On this basis, it could be said that, beside formal equality, real inequality in welfare fields can touch both Croats and minorities. However, minorities that live in such economically depressed areas affected by the war, mostly Serbs, can have more difficulties because of ghettoisation and social isolation. The only research on the connection between minority and welfare status consists of studies on Roma population (Štambuk, 2000:198, Šućur, 2000:216-222, Štambuk, 2005).15

Questions of integration or assimilation are not challenges for official policy on minorities. Debates on immigration have just started to dominate the public agenda. They were firstly the result of the resistance of local population against the asylum centre that the government wanted to establish and recent Chinese immigration (Gelo, 2006). Both cases provoked very negative attitudes towards foreigners. In the beginning of 2006 a well-known demographic expert publicly declared that the government should work on its migration policy, and to attract young and educated people from some (mostly Slavic) countries. The need for developing an immigration policy is based on negative demographic trends in Croatia and shortage of labour force, but his appeal was not well received by the public.
Mostly negative attitudes on future immigrants can be connected maybe by the current debate on the Europeanisation process which would allow wealthy individuals from EU countries to more easily come into the country and buy most of the Croatian natural resources, such as houses on the coast, islands, hotels, etc. It should be said that these kinds of debates largely do not touch autochthonous minorities that have been living for centuries in Croatia.

The Muslim minority can be for analytical purposes divided in three groups. The first one consists of Bosnians from Bosnia who speak the same language as Croats and with whom Croats have a longer history of mutual life (Čimić, 1997:97-99). Bosnians are after the Serbs the largest minority, and they live mostly in urban areas. The second group consists of those who moved to Croatia from other parts of former Yugoslavia, and they mostly live in larger towns and on the coast. They are partly Macedonians (Slavic nation), and in the majority Albanians who speak a different language and have different historical background. The third group includes those who came from different Arab states, but there are only about 500 people. Because of these specificities of the Muslim presence in the country, and because the majority speak the same language, Muslims are successfully integrated in Croatia but have maintained their ethnic and religious identity (Omerbašić, 1999:453). In some particular localities Muslims can have some problems, as in recent years in the city of Rijeka where there is a conflict regarding the building of a mosque; these kinds of problems are not reflected at the national level and have not initiated any kind of public debates on the Muslim presence in the country.

7. Religious minority – majority relations

In line with the situation of a majority religion and low number of other religions, all other religious groups are usually publicly labelled as religious minorities. Consequently, religious minority groups can be defined in relation to the dominant religion – Catholicism. On the other hand it can be said that different levels of minorities exist. The first group (usually recognised as such in public) consists of those religious communities that have a longer historical presence and/or are very different from Catholics: Serbian Orthodox, Muslims, and Jews. The second group, maybe not differentiated as such by public, includes communities which have also a longer tradition, but have also regulated their relations with the government by signing special agreements, which give them some special rights: the Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, the
Baptist Churches, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, etc. The third group consists of several new religions, or new religious movements, but due to very low figures, they do not usually attract any kind of public debates.16

Organisational aspects of religious minorities largely depend on the question to which religious tradition belong each minority. Therefore, there are considerable differences in organisational forms among Orthodox, Muslims and different Protestant Churches. Their activities also largely depend on the traditions and size of each minority. Some of them have their own secondary or high-school institutions even since the communist time (the Evangelical, Baptist, Pentecostal Churches and the Adventist Community). In 1992 the Muslim community established a “medresa” – a secondary school, and has plans to establish a Theological-Welfare faculty. The Serbian Orthodox Church also has its own secondary school. The Jewish community in Zagreb established a kindergarten and a primary school. All these educational institutions are recognised by the state. There are also different activities mainly focused on the spiritual life of their believers. Religious communities that have signed an agreement with the government have other rights, such as to offer religious instruction in public school and to perform religious marriages, which are recognised by the state.

There are no issues concerning gender in relation to minority religions that are high on the public agenda. Just one case was publicly discussed recently. Although there are no legal restrictions, the police authority in one Croatian town did not want to issue official documents to a woman who provided a photo wearing a veil. The practice of other police authorities was to let Muslim women or Catholic nuns to have their picture on official documents with their specific clothing. Debates lasted only for a few weeks, and only some women’s groups argued that, in the name of women’s liberation, Muslim women should not wear their veils on documents. The case was brought to the Constitutional Court, with no decision so far.

Many religious communities have their own welfare organisations. They were particularly active during the Homeland War when they organised humanitarian aid for all the population. The Union of Baptist Churches established a few non-profit organisations which offer different types of aid: assistance to persons with specific needs, home help, foster care etc.17 The Pentecostal Church has a welfare organisation called AGAPE which organises assistance to those who need help in 18 towns and has separate centres for assistance to children.18 The Adventist Church has created an organisation called ADRA, which is a part of
ADRA International, and has concentrated on projects of reconstruction and economic progress for war affected areas. The Muslim humanitarian organisation, Merhamet, was particularly active during the war when it organised humanitarian aid for numerous refugees that came from Bosnia to Croatia. Merhamet also coordinated aid from different international Islamic humanitarian organisations (Omerbašić, 1999:378). Except for the activities organised by Merhamet, there is no data on the basis of which we can conclude that Muslims have established their own welfare-providing network.

Some religious communities have reported problems in establishing their own places of worship. The first mosque in Croatia was built in Zagreb during the communist time and there are problems in finding a place for a mosque in the city of Rijeka. There are also not yet realised plans for re-building a synagogue in Zagreb, which was destroyed in 1941. Religious communities have also reported that the return of property is very slow but this is a problem for all religious communities (including the Catholic Church) and for many individuals. The Serbian Orthodox Church has reported different cases of violence against priests and churches, and the Islamic community also has a problem in establishing separate parts in cemeteries for Muslim graves in many towns. There are no signs that small religious communities have particular problems in establishing their own places of worship.

8. Conclusions

What is the role of religion in the welfare domain? Can we see minorities as a provocation for dominant values and for the cultural identity of the majority? What is the position of women in the welfare domain? These are some important questions that must be properly answered. Interaction between religion, minorities and gender is a brand new topic in Croatian scientific research and results from the WaVE project will provide new knowledge on welfare, majority – minority relations and gender that will contribute to the understanding of recent trends in the EU.

This project will take place in a specific time in Croatia – during a time when the role of Church and religious organisations in welfare and the public sphere is intensely debated, in a period of normalising relations between the majority and minorities, particularly in the war-affected areas, in a time of discussions about violence against women but not in the same way about other aspects of women’s position in society. The past (the communist legacy, the
effects from the war …) is still very much present, while the future knocks at the door and many changes can be foreseen.

Another specific and very important factor is that Croatian society has started negotiations for full EU membership and the Europeanisation process continues. This is connected with profound changes that are already provoking different social reactions. It is interesting to note that according to different public opinion polls Croatian public support for EU membership is only or even less than 50%\(^1\); this is connected partly to prevailing feelings (coming from the war time and the dissolution of Yugoslavia) that the EU does not want to accept Croatia quickly, i.e. that Croatia has to wait other post-Yugoslav states that have not yet started EU negotiations. Recent debates in Europe on “expansion fatigue” only support that feeling, while the government strongly advocates for quick negotiations and political support for full EU membership before the end of this decade.

The first phase of our research has demonstrated already several main issues and problems. After the turbulent period of transition and the war, the Croatian welfare sector is faced with a considerable number of recent and future problems. The analysis of the current Croatian situation indicates that an explicit source of conflict related to the interactions between welfare provision, religion, minorities or gender does not exist. On the other hand, there are many tensions that can be noticed, and there is a lack of data in numerous fields. Some issues are even not debated, or have just started to dominate public discussions, such as questions on immigration policy or access to public services. There is also a well-founded impression that many inequalities exist, but we (public, politicians, researchers…) do not know much about them.

The position of the Catholic Church is of particular interest. The Church is a very important and the most trusted social institution. Its role in the welfare sector is not visible in terms of ownership of welfare institutions (as the welfare sector is dominantly secular), but the Church’s role is significant as it tries to promote its welfare activities and to become a critical social voice in many issues. This is a part of the process of transformation from a state-oriented to a society-oriented institution. On the other hand, activities of the Church provoke various public reactions – from support and encouragement to critique and disapproval.
The Croatian religious landscape is very specific because of the interference of ethnicity and religion – Croats are Catholics, Serbs are Orthodox and Bosnians are Muslims. After the turbulent 1990s, the authorities (the government and key political figures) try to promote reconciliation and a harmonious life, although tensions are still present and will continue in future.

The definition of a national minority in the Croatian Constitution is relevant for our research. A national minority is a group of Croatian citizens that traditionally live in the Croatian territory. Members of a national minority share ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious peculiarities, different from those of other citizens, and wish to maintain their particularities. Along with the autochthonous minorities many other nationalities live and have settle in different parts of Croatia. The Constitutional Law on National Minorities guarantees equal rights of all minorities, but there is no data or research on the achievement of these rights in everyday life. Welfare services are geographically not spread equally – those who live in rural areas or areas affected by the war have more problems in meeting their welfare needs and some minorities live predominantly in these areas.

Religious minorities can be defined in relation to the dominant religion – Catholicism. All small, but traditional religious communities have recently signed agreements with the government according to which their positions and rights are regulated. Religious communities acknowledge improvements, although they report some problems in local communities. New or non-traditional religious communities can be officially registered as such, but cannot have rights that can be regulated only through agreements with the government. Because of the specificities of the Muslim presence in the country (as they are a traditional religious community in Croatia, speak the same language as Croats) Muslims are integrated in society, but have maintained their ethnic and religious identity. Organisational and practical aspects of religious minorities depend on religious tradition, size of the minority and its legal status. Many religious communities have established their own welfare organisations (ADRA, AGAPE, Merhamet).

Issues of gender equality are a new theme in Croatia. New policies on equality between women and men have been promoted but real equality has not been achieved. Women are faced with a number of difficulties: inferior positions in the labour market,
unemployment, exploitation in a “shadow” economy, violence and gender discrimination and low participation in public life.

Due to all these factors, there is a great need that future analysis places Croatia in the European context, in relation to other societies. This is a great possibility to compare Croatian society with other European societies and to generate data that does not yet exist. Also, this is an encouragement for looking at the past, recent and future trends and the interactions between three crucial domains – religion, minorities and gender, from a welfare perspective.
Endnotes

1 Diplomatic relations between the EU and Croatia began after the EU recognised Croatia’s independence on 15 January, 1992. Contractual relations between the EU and Croatia were conditional on Croatia’s observance of a “code of good democratic conduct”. On 18 July, 2000 the European Commission adopted a proposal to the Council on opening of negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Croatia. The proposal was a major step forward towards bilateral relations, following the election of a new political leadership advocating political and economic reform in Croatia. The EU opened negotiations on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Croatia on 24 November 2000 at the Summit in Zagreb. On 29 October 2001 the EC and Croatia signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. In early 2003 the government officially submitted a document applying for EU membership. (www.delhrv.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_country/bilateral_relations.htm).

2 On 25th June 1991 the Croatian Parliament proclaimed the Republic of Croatia as an independent and sovereign state. The Declaration of Croatian independence was followed by attacks by the Yugoslav Army, and a rebellion by ethnic Serbs in some parts of Croatia. The Homeland War began in late 1991 and concluded with military action (the Storm) in August 1995 by which Croatia regained much of its occupied territories, when many Serbs left country.

3 http://www.caritas.hr
4 http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/
5 http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/
6 The position and responsibility of social workers for socially deprived persons and questions of safety at work are debated in public, especially after cases with tragic consequences. Those cases create a negative image of social workers as a profession.
9 The first Quality of Life Survey in Croatia was initiated by UNDP Croatia and was conducted from March to May 2006 by the research agency “Target”. Data are not yet officially published but are circulated among circles of experts.
11 The shadow economy includes both unreported and underreported activity. The Institute of Public Finance in Zagreb researched the shadow economy in the period from 1990 to 2000. The shadow economy accounted for approximately 25% in the first period and for approximately 10% of GDP on average between 1996 and 2000. See: http://www.ijf.hr
13 http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/Dialog/Saveshow.asp
14 Croatia has undergone great changes since the 1990s and the life of sexual minorities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender persons: LGBT persons) has been improving since 2000, but homophobia is still strong, especially in rural areas. Homosexuality is legal in Croatia. It was decriminalised as early as 1977. According to the Croatian Penal Code (Art. 192,193) the age of consent is 14 for all, irrespective of sexual orientation. Since July 2003 Croatia introduced modern laws addressing LGBT persons in East and Central Europe. Parliament changed a number of laws and added anti-discrimination clauses. Homosexuals cannot get married in Croatia but same-sex unions are recognised under the Law of Same-Sex Unions. Croatia has six laws addressing LGBT people that protect LGBT persons from overt discrimination. LGBT organisations are supported by human rights organisations and women’s’ groups. The majority of political parties recognise and support the struggle for sexual minority rights. In recent years homosexuals have become more visible in the media (http://www.iskorak.org).
15 Social distance toward Roma population is an important problem. The government has established a group of experts for drafting a national strategy for the Roma population with aims to improve their position and integration in society.
16 The Church of the Whole Gospel, the Union of Churches “Word of Life” and the Protestant Reformed Christian Church brought legal action to the Constitution Court because of the government’s rejection of theirs demands for singing an agreement with the government (2005). The government considered that these communities do not comply with established preconditions: minimum number of members (6,000) and a historical presence in the Croatian territory since 1941.
17 Data from interview with Željko Mraz, General Secretary of the Union of Baptist Churches.
18 Data from interview with Stanko Jambrek, coordinator in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church.
19 http://www.adra.hr/o_nama.html
21 See, for example, Eurobarometer data on Croatia: http://www.delhrv.cec.europa.eu/en/static/view/id/317
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UNECE Statistical Division Database,


**Other resources**

Interviews with members of the Islamic community in Zagreb.

Interview with Maja Škifić, coordinator of the Family Counsels in the Croatian Caritas and consultation with Boris Peterlin, coordinator of the Croatian Caritas special projects.

Interview with Željko Mraz, General Secretary of the Union of Baptist Churches.

Interview with Stanko Jambrek, coordinator in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church.

Interviews with Marinko Juretić, parish-rector of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Milan Topić from Serbian secondary school.