



Promise of Peace

Since the 1990s, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been recovering from war and has begun the process of healing. The higher education system shows potential to build a brighter future for country and colleges and universities from abroad are also helping to promote peace and understanding in the spirit of reconciliation and rebuilding. **BY SUSAN LADIKA**

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In 2006 *International Educator* began a feature article series on international education and peace resolution in divided regions of the world faced with conflict. Articles in the series are published occasionally in the magazine. This article, the fourth installment of the series, focuses on Bosnia-Herzegovina (earlier articles were about Cyprus, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and Northern Ireland).

ALTHOUGH THE FIGHTING ENDED MORE THAN A DECADE AGO, Bosnia-Herzegovina's higher education system is far more fragmented today than it was before the war began. Universities have fractured along ethnic lines, and new universities have sprung up, either in a bid for power and prestige, or as a means to protect their own ethnic identities in a place that was once the poster child for "Brotherhood and Unity"—the national motto of former Yugoslavia.

Bosnia "had a culture that transcended the ethnic groups," says Keith Doubt, a sociology professor and department chair at Wittenberg University in Ohio, who taught for five months at the University of Sarajevo on a Fulbright Award and frequently has written about the country. "Bosnian didn't have to say 'multiculturalism.' They lived and breathed it." Marriages between the country's Muslim Bosniaks, Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Serbs were common, and the groups lived together in mixed neighborhoods. But as former Yugoslavia crumbled in the early 1990s, so did many of the attributes that made the country—and Bosnia in particular—unique.

Now Bosnia is struggling to recover from the deep wounds it sustained during 3 ½ years of war. It was a conflict in which some war criminals had university ties, and even without their presence, the university system is in dire need of an overhaul.

At the same time, higher education has the potential to play a crucial role in mending society's scars and fostering peace and reconciliation. To Clifford J. Schultz II, professor at the Morrison School of Management and Agribusiness at Arizona State University, who has worked in Bosnia since 1992, universities continue to be "seen as a venue where there is



Student artwork from Education for Peace programs.

still a place for understanding, tolerance, respect, and the betterment of individuals in society.”

These concepts once were the bedrock of Bosnian society. In the aftermath of World War II, the six republics of former Yugoslavia—Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro—lived in relative peace and prosperity under the rule of Josip Broz, known as Tito.

He carved out a unique position for the country, poised between East and West. Yugoslavia ultimately split from the Soviet bloc, and Yugoslavs had freedoms that other Eastern Europeans lacked. Tito maintained a balance of power among the six republics and imposed harsh measures in order to keep nationalism at bay.

But his death in 1980 eventually tore Yugoslavia asunder. Tito designated no successor, leaving an unwieldy eight-member collective presidency running the country. As head of Serbia’s Communist Party, Slobodan Milosevic began stirring up ethnic tensions. As relations between Serbia and the other republics grew more strained, Croatia and Slovenia voted to secede, declaring independence in 1991. Slovenia emerged virtually

unscathed after a 10-day war with Yugoslav forces, but Croatia’s conflict continued off and on through 1995.

Unwelcome Conflict and an Ethnic Divide

Despite that fighting, few Bosnians believed war would strike there. Bosnia’s Serbs boycotted the republic’s 1991 referendum on independence from Yugoslavia, but early the next year they declared their own republic and proclaimed it part of Yugoslavia.

Just days after the European Community recognized Bosnia’s independence in April 1992, fighting flared in eastern Bosnia as the Yugoslav army and Serb paramilitaries went on the attack, and the conflict quickly spread. Later, war erupted between Bosniaks and Croats in the west of the country.

Despite a string of peace talks organized by international officials, and the ineffectual presence of United Nations (U.N.) peacekeepers, war raged unchecked, killing more than 100,000 and uprooting nearly 2 million from their homes.



Graffiti inside a shelled bank building in Bosnia.

International officials were finally spurred to action following the massacre at Srebrenica, a so-called safe haven protected by a smattering of U.N. forces, where at least 7,000 Muslim men and boys are believed to have died in July 1995. Serb forces attacked the town, sending residents and refugees fleeing. Survivors recount painful tales of male relatives slipping into the surrounding woods, hoping to walk miles across Serb-controlled territory to reach safety, or men being dragged away from family members, never to be seen again.

The massacre in part prompted international efforts to turn up the heat on Bosnia's Serbs, leading to approval of the Dayton Peace Accords in late 1995, which brought an end to the fighting. It also carved up the country along ethnic lines, with a federation of the country's Bosniaks and Croats controlling 51 percent of the territory, and Bosnian Serbs controlling the remainder, which is known as the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic).

A Glimmer of Hope Despite Brain Drain

"It's one of those situations where putting the genie back in the bottle and hoping people can live together peacefully is extremely difficult to accomplish," says J. Brian Atwood, dean of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Atwood served as administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for six years under President Clinton.

To him, the best hope for the country is for the "old dinosaurs that created the problem to die off,"

and a new generation to emerge in which the "most enlightened new leaders have international education experience."

Part of the challenge will be overcoming the legacy of those such as Biljana Plavsic. The former Bosnian Serb president, who pled guilty at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to committing crimes against humanity, was a professor of natural science and dean of the department at the University of Sarajevo before the war. "It's just an unfathomable betrayal," says Doubt.

At the same time, the war drove out many of Bosnia's brightest and best. Brain drain took some to the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Australia. In other cases, "in the initial wave of ethnic cleansing, people at higher education institutions were the main targets," says Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, who was a lecturer in economics at the University of Mostar for 12 years before the war began. She fled in 1992 and now is coordinator of the Faculty Development in South East Europe Programme of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Since the war, nationalists have firmly been in charge of Bosnia's universities, Bojicic-Dzelilovic says. "It's an important instrument of control."

Combating Challenges

Other sticking points stem from the university system itself. Problems arise from its lack of reform, the unfettered growth of universities and colleges, and the foot-dragging by legislators to pass laws that conform to the Bologna Process.

When the war broke out in 1992, Bosnia had four public universities. Three were located in what is now the Muslim-Croat federation—in Sarajevo, the nation's capital; in Mostar, near the border with Croatia; in Tuzla, a primarily Muslim area; and in Banja Luka, which now is the capital of the Serb Republic.

But the war splintered the University of Mostar, with Catholic Croats remaining at the university and Bosniak Muslims left to start a new school in the city called Dzemat Bijedic University. Since the war, universities also have been founded in Bihac and Zenica, which are both in the federation; and the University of East Sarajevo was created in the Serb Republic.



University of Denver student Will Seitz reading to his class at the Vares Summer School in 2006.

So as the country's population declined, the number of universities doubled, "all because of nationalism or egomaniac aspirations," says Daria Duilovic, who wrote a lengthy paper assessing the university system for the Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina, part of the Soros Foundations Network.

To Duilovic, it's crucial to provide a European-focused higher education system to meet the needs of the country's youth. For Bosnia, "this requires replacing the political, ideological and ethnic focus of higher education currently offered by most of the (Bosnian) universities with (a) modern, democratic, effective, sustainable, labor-market and Europe-oriented approach. The prime role of the university—dissemination of knowledge and research and development—has not changed throughout its history, and it should not be subordinated to anyone's so-called 'vital national interest,'" Duilovic writes.

Educational Aspirations

While one of the country's key goals is to be included in the European Higher Education Area by 2010, much needs to be done so Bosnia can meet the Bologna Process requirements. At the moment, Bosnia remains the only member of the Bologna Process that has failed to pass a new higher education law in keeping with its requirements. The country also must reform higher education financing; direct policy, strategy, and planning from the national level; and establish a restructured and integrated university system, Duilovic writes. "It is important to bear in mind that the new (higher education) framework is a condition and not a goal of (higher education) reform."

A series of proposed reform laws have fallen flat over the years. Although Duilovic wrote her paper in 2005, little has changed since that time. "We are still stuck," she says. "Education was held hostage by the election campaign" for the October 2006 general elections. Out of frustration, the Republika Srpska and some of the cantons in the federation have adopted their own higher education laws, but that counteracts the drive for a comprehensive national education law.

The country's new prime minister, Nikola Spiric, an economics professor at the University of Banja Luka, has vowed to make higher education reform a top priority. "For the first time after many, many years, it is very promising," Duilovic says.

Collaboration for Peace

While reform has been slow at the university level, there are still signs of hope for reform and reconciliation, arising from interdisciplinary programs offered in conjunction with other European universities, faculty exchange programs, student fellowships, and even informal programs aimed at promoting peace and understanding.

One university that has been extremely active in striving to break down barriers is the London School of Economics and Political Science. Working with the University of Bologna, Italy, two master's degree programs were launched in 1997. The University of Sarajevo began to offer a European studies program, while the University of Banja Luka hosted a program on transition and reconstruction.

The Bosnian educators came to London for a meeting, and "it was the first time any people had an opportunity to talk" since the war began, Bojicic-Dzelilovic says. The experience gave people a chance "to detach themselves from the nationalist rhetoric that is predominant in those institutions."

Lecturers came from different parts of Bosnia, and there was even a plan to bring Banja Luka students to Sarajevo, but it was impossible to get funding. Instead, because the degree was issued in conjunction with the University of Bologna, it was required that all students spend two weeks in Bologna, she says. Having everyone meet up in another country gave the students a chance to mix—something that would have been impossible at that time at home. Since 2002, the program has been run out of Bosnia.



University of Denver students Marcella Baldwin and Elizabeth Straw with Vares students and their artwork that was displayed at the Vares Art Show at the end of the summer school in 2005.

A human rights and democracy master's degree program was begun at the University of Sarajevo, working in conjunction with the universities in London and Bologna, as well as other schools in Western and Southeastern Europe. The program is taught in English and open to all students. One part of the course involves traveling to Srebrenica, the site of the horrific massacre, and discussing memories of war and war crimes. "That way you directly address reconciliation issues," Bojicic-Dzelilovic says.

The Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies at the University of Sarajevo now runs these and similar master's degree programs, drawing students from across the region and other parts of the world, and in September is introducing a religious studies program developed in conjunction with Arizona State University, says Taida Begic, deputy director of the interdisciplinary studies program.

The democracy and human rights program, and the upcoming religious studies program, focus on the most sensitive topics in the region. The human rights and democracy classes explore subjects



BUILDERS FOR PEACE

In the city of Mostar, a bombed building stands alongside repaired one.

like war crimes and genocide. Students “cope, talk, and deal with the issues in class and in their private lives,” Begic says, and while this can lead to intense discussions, no incidents have arisen.

The London School of Economics also is involved in the Faculty Development in South East Europe Programme, which it conducts together with the Open Society Institute and brings in faculty from throughout the region to enhance their teaching skills and develop research. It’s also a means to establish links between the academic communities in former Yugoslavia.

One of those who has taken part is Fikret Causevic, an assistant economics professor at the University of Sarajevo. He first went to London for three months in 2002, and has returned for a month in 2005 and 2006, and has an invitation to go again this summer. He says the program has helped him develop his teaching techniques and publish his research.

It’s also provided a chance to discuss the time of war with others from former Yugoslavia. Causevic is quick to acknowledge that those selected for the London program “are not radicals. It’s not very difficult to talk to them.”

In his own university classroom, discussion of war comes up in terms of damages and loss of human capital—two key areas when considering the country’s future economic prospects. Although the University of Sarajevo has a mixed student population, Bosniaks predominate, but there have been no tensions in class over the topics. At times, students from the University of Banja Luka also are brought in for classes. “That was not possible five or six years ago,” Causevic says. “The situation is getting better. Not step by step but foot by foot.”

Coming Home to Educational Roadblocks

Sometimes those who go abroad to study can face challenges at home. Bojicic-Dzelilovic says faculty may have problems getting leave from their home universities. “The old guard sees it as a potential threat.”

Adin Sadic encountered resistance after returning in 2005 from two years of studying media management at Ohio University on a Ron Brown Fellowship funded by the U.S. government. It was named for the former U.S. Secretary of Commerce who died in a plane crash in Croatia in 1996. Sadic, who has an undergraduate degree from the University of Tuzla, came back to his home university, “eager to work with students and invest my knowledge and enthusiasm. I was rejected. I couldn’t find a way to get in.”

Students from all regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina dance with Education for Peace programs.



EDUCATION FOR PEACE

Sadic, who is now a press officer for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), an international organization that helps promote democracy and the rule of law in Bosnia, says that in his opinion, university leaders are more concerned about the loyalty of their faculty than the quality of education they offer. "That's the reason I'm afraid for the future of this country. Quality doesn't matter."

His fellow Ohio University student, Zoran Ergarac, ran into similar problems when he returned home. He wanted to return to his alma mater, the University of Banja Luka, but had problems getting his U.S. degree in communications recognized, and then couldn't begin a doctoral degree program because he wasn't affiliated with any particular Bosnian political party.

Now Ergarac is a senior instructor at Janjos College in Prijedor, one of the many private higher education institutions that have popped up around the country since the war. Prijedor, which once had a large Bosniak population, "was one of the black spots of Bosnia when it comes to ethnic cleansing," he says. Now the town is about 70 percent Serb.

The college, which focuses on business education, has a majority of Serb students, but students from all three ethnic groups attend. The college respects Ramadan and other holidays that the various groups celebrate.

Ergarac says there aren't many major incidents between the different ethnic groups in Prijedor, but tensions remain. In his public relations classes, Ergarac will use examples from media, asking the students to watch clips and then voice their opinions. Topics might include Iran and terrorism. "Sometimes opinions collide."

But just having a mix of students in the classroom is a major step forward. Schultz, who has taught in Sarajevo, Tuzla and Mostar, says topics such as economics are particularly popular because students can get the skills they need to start a business or secure work abroad. "It's better to trade bushels than bullets," he says. "Nobody talks about ethnic hostilities in the classroom. Every second spent hating is an opportunity cost for managing an enterprise."

"As much as the economy can help reconcile people, education is the next thing," adds Sladjana Curak, another Ron Brown Fellowship recipient. With education, "students can develop into independent thinkers. They cannot be manipulated."

Curak taught at a private Catholic elementary and secondary school for five years in the city of Travnik before studying for a master's degree in education administration at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She now is finance and management adviser in the education department of the OSCE.

In many places where there is more than one ethnic group, elementary and secondary students go to school in the same building, but during different shifts. Parents often insist they want their children educated in their own language—even though they are nearly identical.

Curak asks, what is "really important? Who the kids are in school, or what the things are that we teach them? They are not

just citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They are citizens of Europe." When Bosnia's youth go for job interviews outside of the country, they are going to be asked, "What do you know, what are your skills, not what is your ethnic group?"

Azra Hromadzic, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, is preparing a dissertation on "Emerging Citizens: Youth, Education and Reconciliation in Post-Conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina." She spent 20 months observing reconciliation among youth, much of it at a secondary school in Mostar, where the Croat and Bosniak teens are together under one roof, but attend different classes with different curricula.

Some extracurricular activities included both groups, as did the student council. And she found the teens sharing a quick smoke in the bathroom or discussing things like teachers, religion and flirting. "It was something between reconciliation and coexistence. There was curiosity and fear of the unknown."

Some programs fostered by North American institutions already are focused on breaking down barriers among the various groups. Shortly after the war's end, the University of Denver launched a program to help refugees. The program was started at the urging of Swanee Hunt, a prominent Denver resident who then was serving as U.S. ambassador to Austria. During her time in Austria, Hunt



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Project Bosnia volunteers Jennifer Pritchard, Andrea Fox and Jill Hoefgen with students at the Vares Summer School.

was extremely involved in trying to encourage peace and reconciliation in the Balkans. She now is an adjunct lecturer in public policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Foreign Universities Reach Out to Bosnian Youth

Over the years, the University of Denver's Project Bosnia has evolved to meet the needs of Bosnian society, and now offers internships for graduate students in fields like social work, psychology and law. In 2001, a multiethnic summer school was started, with University of Denver undergraduates teaching youngsters from the town of Vares, says Melissa Schaap, the university's International Service Learning coordinator.

The summer school brings together more than 100 Muslim and Croat youngsters each year, who are educated at separate schools during the school year. "It provides an opportunity to see one another as kids rather than as Croats or Muslims," says Ian Sethre, who served as Project Bosnia coordinator for four years. "We're not saying ethnicity isn't important, but it's not paramount when you're playing soccer or working on a collaborative art project."

From the start, the town's high school principal was supportive of the project, while the elementary principal was obstructionist, Sethre says. And often it's not uncommon for adults to be more resistant to change than their children are.

Sarah Dushame, a graduate student in international administration at the University of Denver, spent last summer interning at the United Nations Population Fund in Sarajevo. There she worked with both Muslims and Croats, and spoke with a wide variety of people. She typically found that people her own age "just wanted to get over it (the war)," while older people "just waited for it to happen again."

Because of that, programs such as Education for Peace (EFP) specifically target children. For adults, "by and large it's very difficult to change their mindset," says H.B. Danesh, founder and director of the International Education for Peace Institute, headquartered in Vancouver, Canada.

But even that can be done. As president of Lanegg International University in Switzerland, Danesh had developed a program called Conflict-Free Conflict Resolution, and was asked to hold a workshop in Sarajevo in 1999 for journalists and government officials. Initially participants were suspicious of one another and didn't want to stay at the same hotel. But after the first day they were singing and dancing together, he recalls.

Because of that success, the government asked him to develop a pilot program for the country's primary and secondary schools, which was called Education for Peace. Originally it was introduced at three elementary schools and three secondary schools—one of each in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Travnik. It involved about 6,000 students and 400 staff. "Everyone in the schools, from the director to the janitor, has to be trained in the principles of education for peace," Danesh says, and every subject focuses on peace rather than conflict. Each semester the schools have a peace event and every class must make a presentation. Those with the best presentations travel to national peace events.

After six months, Danesh was asked to expand the program, and it now is run at more than 100 schools, serving 80,000 students and 5,000 teachers. Eventually it will spread to all the 2,200 schools in the country. Six universities also plan to incorporate EFP principals into their training of university students who intend to become teachers.

When the program is first introduced into a school, Danesh has found that the children are usually enthusiastic, while the reaction of adults runs the spectrum from enthusiasm to antagonism.

At the peace events, every class does what it wants. Some talk of peace, while others talk of nationalism and separation. Invariably, parents get angry if their youngsters' teachers didn't focus on peace. "Parents become adamant that teachers should teach kids about peace," Danesh says. "At the end of the semester, you immediately know what kind of teacher they've had."

The goal is that in 20 years, Bosnia will have "young leaders in society who think according to the principles of peace," Danesh says.

Another group with a clear focus on peace is Builders for Peace, founded by Thomas Butler, a retired Harvard University professor of Slavic language and literature. Butler has studied in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and recalls, "I was deeply affected by the war. I never thought that there would be a war. I was shocked, in a great deal of pain over the whole thing."

He never thought of traveling to Bosnia until translating for Svetlana Broz, Tito's granddaughter, when she was lecturing in the United States. She kept urging him to visit Bosnia, and in 2002 he said he would go—but only to work. He contacted others in the field seeking student volunteers, and created Builders for Peace. Over the years their projects have ranged from repairing a mosque in Mostar to cataloging books at a monastery in Fojnica to teaching English to youngsters at a summer school in Gračanica. The U.S. volunteers work side by side with locals.

Butler says he had a deep desire to come and work. Words "have almost lost their value. Work and action carry the message. There is an underlying suspicion. Maybe because we don't have a doctrine, we let our work do the talking. It overrides that (suspicion). We come as a kind of on-the-spot medium for conciliation."

In Mostar, which perhaps remains the most ethnically divided city in the country, not only did Muslim and Croat students work together with U.S. volunteers in rebuilding the Karadžić-beg Mosque, they also planned out a student information center and database for the students at the two Mostar universities.

Judith Kubran, a program administrator in the graduate psychology program at the City University of New York, volunteered with Builders for Peace and oversaw the creation of the student information center and database. Three Croat students and three Bosniak students joined with about a half-dozen Americans on the project. The city is divided by the Neretva River, and the Croats primarily stay on the west side, while the Bosniaks remain on the east. But both Muslim and Croat students gathered each day at the old Turkish house where the U.S. volunteers were staying to work on the project.

Originally, Builders for Peace had hoped to do reconciliation work, but the Mostar students said it was too painful to talk about. One of the students had been imprisoned during the war. Another had seen his father killed. "Only 10 years later, wanting them to do reconciliation work, it's impossible. With

the Holocaust, 60 years later, it's hard," says Kubran, whose parents are Holocaust survivors.

So instead the group focused on developing the student information center and database, but a lack of funding prevented the program from being launched.

For Amir Drljevic, one of the students who took part in the project, it was his first time chatting with Croats since the war. Yet tensions remain. While studying at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, he was invited to attend a conference in Washington, D.C., on the tenth anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords. There he talked with a Croat whom he knew by sight from Mostar. Yet since their return home, they pass each other going to work on other sides of the city, but when Drljevic said hello, the other young man turned away.

At school in Mostar, the information technology student hears nothing about reconciliation in his courses. Yet he believes "young people can overcome these things." And that's exactly what Bosnia needs.

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SUSAN LADIKA has been a journalist for more than 20 years, working in both the United States and Europe. She is now based in Tampa, Florida. She has been to Bosnia on assignment several times since the end of the war and has written about the region extensively.

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