

HIGHLIGHTS

❖ The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is dissatisfied over the failure of the Herzegovina Neretva Canton Assembly to pass the cantonal budget for this year, but also with the behavior of assembly deputies who had numerous complaints on the draft budget, and yet they submitted only one amendment.

❖ OSCE Spokesman Henning Philip refused on Wednesday to comment about the nomination of Fikret Abdic for the upcoming elections in BiH, stressing that this is a matter for the BiH Election Commission and that tomorrow is the last day for the provision of information about the party candidates to the BiH Election Commission.

❖ At the request of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), Republika Srpska Minister for Refugees and Displaced Persons Mico Micic has dismissed members of the Banja Luka commission for the control of the legitimacy of the contracts on the use of apartments concluded and renewed after April 1, 1992, in the RS Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons, ONASA confirmed on Wednesday

❖ The construction of six houses for people whose houses were destroyed during a landslide in Mala Broda started on Wednesday in Zenica on the location Ravan.

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OPINION

Half Empty or Half Full?

Some point to a glass as being half empty. Others point to the same glass as being half full. The moral of the story is that there are two sides to every story, one more affirming than the other. The story of Mostar is no different. It is easy to focus on Mostar's recent past, beginning on April 6, 1992 when Serb gunners targeted and laid siege to this beautiful city in the heart of Herzegovina. Following the successful defense of the city by both Bosniak and Croat defenders, the alliance between the two groups came to an end, with the Croats picking up where the Serbs left off and laying waste to vast stretches of the city. The population of the city became more and more polarized and embittered with each artillery barrage and ground assault. In time, Bosniaks and Croats became concentrated on opposite sides of the River Neretva, that river with the unforgettable color.

Events in Herzegovina that date back to last spring may indicate a worsening of the tension between, on the one hand, the Bosnian government and the international community, and, on the other hand, the Croat nationalists in Herzegovina, including former BiH president Ante Jelavic. Those who follow events in Bosnia may interpret the situation as another case of "the glass as half empty," offering a pessimistic overview of the political and social scene. There is another side to this story, however. I suggest the "glass as half full" might be a better description of the state of affairs in Mostar, a city that is more than simply the epicenter of tension between different ethnic groups.

What prompts me to say this is a comparative glance at a few other cities found in conflict-ridden areas of the world. I am thinking of Belfast in Northern Ireland, Lefkosia (sometimes referred to as Nicosia, the last divided capital of Europe) in Cyprus, and Mitrovica in Kosovo. Each one of these cities is a place where tension is held at bay by "outside" forces, whether they be the British Army, the blue-helmeted United Nations peacekeeping troops, or KFOR. Their principal means of effecting this separation has been the use of physical barriers.

The "peace wall," that black corrugated-iron barrier separating Catholic neighborhoods from Protestant ones in Belfast, and the sand bags and razor wire of the Green Line that zig zags through Lefkosia, separating Greek Cypriot from Turkish Cypriot, are both maintained by foreign "peacekeepers" with the intent of limiting contact between the two sides.

It is in Kosovo that we find a city that more closely resembles Mostar. Like Mostar, Mitrovica has a river that plays a prominent role in dividing its community. The River Ibar has been used as a natural barrier, separating the Serbs in the north from the Kosovar Albanians in the south. This predominantly ethnic Albanian city is also a "flashpoint" for renewed conflict in the Balkans.

Yet with all the similarities between Mostar and these other cities, it is a very different place. It is a city that has no

walls, a city that has a river, but no barrier. Consequently, Mostar is a city that is "half full." Unlike these other cities, the persistent

absence of a great wall in Mostar is a subtle sign of unity within the community, an indication that there

is progress being made. Other signs of progress include the creation of a city-wide police force that will help to promote civility in the area and the rebuilding of Stari Most, which was itself a symbol of the community's common heritage. Compared to these other cities, Mostar will be a much more "liveable" city in the not too distant future.

No one said that progress would be easy or that it would happen over night. There is still much to do before Mostar once again becomes the center of culture and industry in Herzegovina. But the people of Mostar and the Bosnian government, in concert with the OHR, SFOR, and other governing bodies, have taken an important step in achieving this goal. They have chosen not to use the Neretva as a means to separate peoples as has been done in Mitrovica. Indeed, this is the most important sign that progress is being achieved. If the interest is to continue building a sense of community within Mostar, then it might be wise to acknowledge the absence of physical barriers and view the city as not "half empty," but "half full."



By Rory J. Conces