HIGHLIGHTS

- The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is dissatisfaction over the failure of the Herzegovina
  Canton Assembly to pass the
  cantonal budget for this year, but also with the behavior of assembly
depuities who had numerous com-
plaints 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 Abdić
  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 provi-
sion of information about the party
candidates to the BiH Election
Commission.
- At the request of the Office of the High
  Representative (OHR), Republika Srpska
  Ministry for Refugees and Displaced Persons Milos
  Micic has dismissed members of the
Banja Luka commission for the con-
trol 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 con-
*HIGHLIGHTS*

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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 Bosniaks
and Croat defenders, the alliance between the
two groups came to an end, with the
Croat defenders 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
erver 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 differ-
ent ethnic groups.

What prompts me to say this is a com-
parative 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 effect-
ing this separation has been the use of
physical barriers.

The “peace wall,” that black corrugated-
iron barrier separating Catholic neigh-
borhoods 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 communi-
ty. The River Ibar has been used as a nat-
ural 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
calls, 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 communi-
ty, 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 pro-
mote civility in the area and the rebuild-
ing 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 con-
tinue 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.”