

Bosnian “Culture of Dependency”

Since the Dayton Peace Agreement was initiated on November 15, 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina has been a relatively peaceful nation. However, the road that has produced relative stability has come with a price. Under Dayton, not only have the warring sides been separated, but international involvement has reached a new level in the form of peace-building activities ranging from top-down international regulation of elections, economic management, and institutional development to bottom-up development of political culture through civil society-building. With the extension of international regulatory mechanisms over the past few years, the Bosnian political leadership have had a limited role in developing and implementing policy. Bosnia is a sovereign state, but policy is, in large measure, determined by international policy-making bodies, such as the Office of the High Representative. It has led to a “culture of dependency” and has given the people of Bosnia little economic prosperity and a superficial democracy. Yet this dependency is needed, for it allows democratisation to take hold in the face of the anti-modern and anti-democratic forces of ethnic nationalism. Such a populist ideology, whether it be Croatian, Serbian, or Bosniak (Moslem), is obstructionist to a genuine democracy. Granted, the economy is in a shambles and land mines clutter the cities and countryside. With unemployment at 50% and an estimated 1 million land mines in the country, each of these is a formidable problem, but the xenophobia and ethnic chauvinism that is generated by ethnic nationalism is an insidious problem that equally threatens the

International policy-making bodies determine policy in BiH. It has led to a “culture of dependency” and has given the people of BiH little economic prosperity and a superficial democracy



By
**Rory J.
Conces**

country’s stability. Nationalism, the Croatian author Dubravka Ugresic once wrote, means that “one’s national origin is the essential fact: it is the measure of all things, it determines perspective.” It separates people and places them into ethnic categories, thereby weakening ties of community and solidarity. It is the old “us versus them” mentality, but with nationalism power and force become tools used by mono-ethnic political parties, like the SDS (Serb), SDA (Bosniak), and HDZ (Croat) in Bosnia. The problem is compounded because Bosnia is composed of the Croat-Bosniak Federation and the Republika Srpska, an arrangement that has helped to sustain the power of ethnic parties. Some Bosnians believe that an improved economy is the key, and that once people have a job and a liveable wage, they will soon forget who is who. Perhaps they are correct, but a person’s identity may be more deeply seated and less related to a pay check. In the meantime, others are working at a more fundamental level of Bosnian

society, the level of personal identity and interaction. The Nansen Dialogue Centre and the Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina are two NGOs in Sarajevo that have had success at this level. These groups are attempting to build a civil society that is composed of autonomous and respectful individuals and based on the notion of “unified pluralism.” Institution building is needed to provide the conditions suitable for the virtues of individual and collective autonomy and critical thinking, an acceptable moral framework, and the expressions of solidarity, friendship, and citizenship to peoples different from ourselves. At the same time, however, there must be efforts to help people realize that autonomy and a unified pluralism are achievable goals. One method that these NGOs use, and that has been gaining ground in the United States, is “intercultural education,” which allows persons to reach a critical distance from received opinion, thereby making it possible to incorporate the perspective of the other as equally deserving of respect. It promotes the shared “humanness” of the “other.” Although promoting dialogue and understanding among the citizenry is not as glamorous as the rebuilding of cities, it plays an important role in allowing diversity with unity, a key ingredient in civil society-building. Given the global society that we live in, efforts such as these, whether in the Balkans or the United States, should be applauded and continued.

(Rory J. Conces is a professor at University of Nebraska in Omaha. He was Fulbright Scholar at the University of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina)

HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Two Bosniaks were arrested in Gorazde on Friday on the basis of two international arrest warrants issued by international judges in Kosovo concerning a weapons trafficking case between BiH and Kosovo, and two more people were charged last weekend, UN/IPTF Spokesperson Kate Frieson said on Tuesday.
- ❖ The councilors of the Alliance for Change in the Mostar Stari Grad Municipal Council on Tuesday replaced the mayor, Zijad Hadziomerovic, a member of the Democratic Action Party (SDA).
- ❖ A meeting of finance ministers of the countries of the former Yugoslavia is being held in Belgrade, within the terms of the agreement on the succession of the former Yugoslavia reached in May this year in Vienna, the Beta news agency reported.
- ❖ President of the BiH Chamber of Commerce Mahir Hadziahmetovic emphasized during a

- Tuesday meeting with Chinese Ambassador Li Shu Yuan that relations between the two countries have so far produced poor results.
- ❖ The International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) announced on Tuesday that he has received the approval of the Yugoslav Government, on the basis of which it will start the technical process of identification of persons missing from conflicts in the region.
- ❖ The work of the Bijeljina Municipal Court has been blocked because of the strike of the jury judges of the Court.
- ❖ The Sarajevo-based “Bosnalijek” pharmaceutical company on Tuesday received ISO 9001: 2000 certificate from Ulrich Horn, a representative of the Swiss SGS, the biggest and most important certification house with its headquarters in Geneva.

BOSNIA DAILY

Editor - in - Chief
VLASTIMIR MIJOVIC
Publishers:
POENTA d.o.o.
Sarajevo, S. Mujica 9
Director
AMRA ZIMIC
Senior Editor
EMIR SALIHOVIC
Copy Editor
RICHARD MEDIC
Editor
ELMEDIN TOPCIC
DTP
GORAN ZAVADIL
Secretary
ARZIJA JUSIC
Phone/Fax: 033 262 803
GSM: 066 212 004
E-mail: bdaily@bih.net.ba