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REUNIFICATION OF MOSTAR: “IS THERE A HOPE?”

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*“The future of the Federation lies in Mostar. If the international community can successfully unite Mostar, then the Federation will function.”
(International Crisis Group)*

ABSTRACT

In the last decade of 20th century, along with the dissolution process of Yugoslavia, constituent states of Federation have witnessed inter-ethnic conflicts. However, the most violent clashes took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995). This study intends to discuss the Bosniak-Croat conflict in Mostar in a specific way. Mostar -is located on the Neretva River in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina and -has a peculiar characteristic in terms of its population structure. During the conflicts in Herzegovina region, the city of Mostar was besieged firstly by Serbs then Croats. In the wake of these inter-ethnic conflicts, the city was divided into two parts. Today, the eastern side of Mostar is predominantly Bosniac, while the western side of the city is predominantly Croat. In this context, this study basically aims to dwell on; firstly reunification attempts that have been implemented by the international communities so far, and secondly the present situation in Mostar.

KeyWords: Mostar, Ethnic Conflict, Divided Cities, Reunification of Mostar, Reunification Initiatives.

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ÖZET

20. yüzyılın son on yılında, Yugoslavya’nın dağılma süreciyle birlikte, Federasyon’u oluşturan devletler etnik gruplar arası çatışmalara sahne oldu. Ancak, en şiddetli çatışmalar Bosna Hersek’te meydana geldi (1992-1995). Bu çalışma

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spesifik olarak Mostar'daki Boşnak-Hırvat çatışmasını ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Mostar, güney Bosna Hersek'te Neretva nehri üzerinde bulunmaktadır ve nüfus yapısı açısından kendine has bir karakteristiğe sahiptir. Hersek bölgesindeki çatışmalar süresince Mostar şehri önce Sırlar sonra Hırvatlar tarafından kuşatılmıştır. Etnik gruplar arasındaki bu çatışmaların ardından şehir iki parçaya bölünmüştür. Bugün, şehrin batı bölümü ağırlıklı olarak Hırvat iken, Mostar'ın doğu bölümü ağırlıklı olarak Boşnak'tır. Bu bağlamda, çalışma temel olarak; öncelikle şimdiye kadar uygulanan yeniden birleştirme çalışmaları, ikinci olarak da Mostar'daki mevcut durum üzerinde durmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mostar, Etnik Çatışma, Bölünmüş Şehirler, Mostar'ın Yeniden Birleştirilmesi, Yeniden Birleştirme Çalışmaları.

Introduction

The study of divided/contested cities has become a recent phenomenon for both social scientists and urban planners. To date, the majority of the literature in these fields deals with the cities that have been divided due to inter-ethnic conflicts or wars, and their subsequent social and urban rehabilitation, such as Nicosia, Cyprus; Jerusalem, Palestine; Beirut, Lebanon; Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this regard, this study specifically aims to concentrate on the City of Mostar.

Placed in the heart of Herzegovina, Mostar is one of the most interesting cities in the region, in terms of culture. When the city was under the rule of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) until the last decade of 20th century, Mostar was labeled as a symbol of *brotherhood and unity* (bratstvo i jedinstvo) by Tito, because of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition. As a microcosm of Bosnia and Hercegovina Mostar had functioned peacefully with its Bosniak, Serb, Croat and other minor group residents (Jews, Roman, etc.) for centuries, until the ethnic conflicts erupted throughout BiH in 1992.

During the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina - one of six constituent republics of the Yugoslav Federation- was faced with the bloodiest conflicts for the sake of its independence. The eastern part of country, Bosnia region, was the first target of Serbian attacks, while the southern part, Herzegovina region was the second. In the Herzegovina region, the theater of war was Mostar, that saw two sieges and attacks, one

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by Serbs and the other by Croats. As a result of these two attacks, the city of Mostar was devastated and 70% of the city was ruined.

On the other hand, after the conflicts, the population structure of the city changed dramatically. While before the war, the city population of Mostar was made up by Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, in the present day, Mostar is split in half between Bosniaks and Croats, who constitute the vast majority of the population. Currently, almost all Croats live in the western part of the city, while majority of Bosniaks live in the eastern part. The psychological border lies through the Boulevard that was accepted as the frontline during the Bosniak-Croat conflict. Today's division -without a physical border- is a corollary of the Bosniak-Croat battle.

In retrospect, Mostar was one of the most beautiful Yugoslavian city in which people from different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and religions had lived peacefully for hundreds of years. Besides, particularly during the Yugoslavian period, Mostarians enjoyed high standard of life conditions thanks to a broad range of industrial and agricultural activities and military bases. However, presently Mostar faces many economic challenges and high rate of unemployment.

Being among the divided/contested cities makes Mostar a subject for lots of studies in the field of political science, urban and regional planning, social psychology and so on. As mentioned at the very beginning of study, divided cities such as Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, Nicosia and others were analyzed in the case studies by the prominent scholar Scott A. Bollens. Each of these cities have peculiar characteristic in terms of their population structures, political governances, current daily life conditions and division ways, and they were categorized into 4 groups by Bollens;

- Active Conflict (Jerusalem)
- Suspension of Violence (Nicosia, Mostar)
- Movement Toward Peace (Belfast, Sarajevo)
- Stability/Normalcy (Johannesburg, Barcelona)

As seen above, Mostar stands in the category of *suspension of violence* and according to his approach, this category includes the cities in which there is tenuous cessation or suspension of urban strife but not much more. A city is marked more by the absence of war than the presence of peace. After the ending of overt conflict, there will likely remain deep

segregation or partitioning of ethnic groups in the city, local politics may persist in parallel worlds, and there may still be tension on the streets. This is because the legacies of overt conflict live on far past the duration of open hostilities themselves. In those cities, however, this potential for inter-group differences to inflame violent actions is lessened somewhat due to a negotiated agreement between nationalist elites and/or intervention by a third-party mediator. Although this is a significant advance, suspension of overt conflict is only a starting point in urban peace-building and requires important steps in the future that bring positive changes to a city in the forms of tolerance, openness, accommodation, and democratic and open participation. Without these movements toward peace on the ground, a city will stagnate and be vulnerable to regressive violent and political acts.¹

As mentioned above, Mostar is a city in which inter-ethnic conflicts were suspended and has a peaceful atmosphere for the time being, however, simultaneously an ethnically partitioned city. So, which expression should be used to specify the current situation of Mostar? *Divided*, *polarised*, *contested* or *violent*. Actually there is a terminologically richness in that field and it is needed to use proper definition for Mostar.

Moser and McIlwaine clarified the scope of these labels in their book; *Encounters with Violence in Latin America: Urban Poor Perceptions from Columbia and Guatemala*. They claim that labels such as divided, polarised, contested and violent must not be used without clear definitions. Each of these terms alludes to difficult urban circumstances, but they place emphases on differing dimensions along which cities, and their societies, can fragment. In addition, some terms are used to describe different environments at different times. For example, cities are described as divided in numerous contexts, including North American cities segregated by race, ethnicity, and class. At other times, divided alludes to more extreme circumstances of political division and contestation. Further thickening the definitional quagmire is the prevalence of urban violence across many parts of the world-such violence can be attributed to social factors (motivated by a

¹ Scott A. Bollens, "Comparative Research on Contested Cities: Lenses and Scaffoldings", Crisis States Working Papers Series No. 2, Crisis States Research Centre, London 2007, pp. 14-15.

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desire to get or keep social control), economic (motivated by material gain), and/or political (motivated by the desire to hold political power).²

All in all, the city of Mostar has many reasons to be labeled as a divided city; such as ethnically divided Bosniac and Croat communities, the presence of dual/mono- ethnic institutions, the politic contestation between the Bosniak and Croat politicians and limited interaction between the divided communities. In this context, it can be defined as a *divided city*.

In the light of aforementioned datum, the main purpose of this article is to analyze the recent situation in Mostar in terms of social and political dynamics of the city. However, on the other hand, in order to understand the current conditions of Mostar, it is needed to grasp the historical process as well as the causes and effects of the division. Therefore, firstly this study will provide adequate information about Mostar's past and present. In this context, in the first part of article, major factors, that underlie the present polarization of the city, will be dwelled on; and second part will mainly be based on reconciliation and reunification initiatives that were carried out by the international mediators. Additionally, the current situation in the city and relations between the divided communities, that is based on authors's own observations, will be given in this article. All in all, at the end of this study the answer of following question will be sought: "*Is there a hope for Mostar?*"

1. War, Destruction and Division

In March 1992, shortly after Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia, Bosnian Serbs -backed by the Yugoslav National Army (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija- JNA)- launched an offensive in eastern Bosnia. The war quickly spread to Mostar. The JNA first bombarded City of Mostar on April 3rd, 1992 and over the following weeks, gradually established control over large portions of the City. The siege lasted for three months. JNA's heavy shelling damaged or destroyed a number of civilian objects and resulted in a mass killing of thousands of innocent civilians.

² For more information please see Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine, *Encounters with Violence in Latin America: Urban Poor Perceptions from Columbia and Guatemala*, Routledge, London 2004.

On June 12th 1992, the ABiH (4th Corps of Army of Bosnia Herzegovina) and HVO (Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane/Croatian Defence Council supported by HOS - Hrvatske Obrambene Snage/Croatian Defence Forces - paramilitary from Croatia) amassed enough weaponry and manpower to force the JNA troops out of Mostar. After the JNA was driven out, the heavily armed, Croatia funded Bosnian-Croat forces (HVO) turned their guns to their allies, the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the hope of capturing the whole city in the light of Bosnian Croat secessionist campaign. The campaign resulted in a deeply rooted division of the city of Mostar into West Mostar (run by HVO and Army of Republic of Croatia) and the East Mostar (maintained by the Government of Bosnia Herzegovina).

The Muslim-Croat war for Mostar erupted one night in the early summer of 1993, climaxing months of rapidly escalating tensions. According to a Bosniak soldier, the atmosphere in the city resembled a tinderbox in those last days of 'peace', and gunmen from both sides had already taken up positions on either side of the Boulevard in anticipation of an imminent outbreak of fighting. His position on the side of the Boulevard closer to the Neretva faced Croat positions on the other side of the wide street. That night, according to his account, Croat militiamen holed up in the gymnasium building just across the Boulevard from his position brought a 17 year-old Bosniak schoolgirl abducted from west Mostar to the school. They then apparently gang-raped her before throwing her out of a top-floor window. The absolute stillness and silence for a few minutes after the girl's screaming ended. Then heavy firing broke out from both sides of the Boulevard.³

The conflict between Bosniaks and Croats lasted for two years and the cost of war for Bosniak Muslims was incomparably higher than for the other Mostarians (Croats and Serbs). Because they were jammed in the middle of heavy bombardment from west by Croats and from east by Serbs. As a consequence of these attacks, thousands of Bosniaks were killed or displaced.

Muslims were assembled in detention camps, put on buses to leave the area, or subsequently expelled to the ghetto on the east side, which Croats then bombarded from previously prepared artillery positions. The

³ Sumantra Bose, *Bosnia After Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, Hurst and Co., London 2002, pp. 103-104.

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Muslim population was surprised and obviously unprepared. They had no army and indeed the JNA had contained very few Muslim officers. Nonetheless, a rag-tag citizens' army made a stand in the east, and despite their overwhelming superiority in men, materials and positions, the Croats were unable to defeat it. The war was a close-fought affair, street by street, building by building. The Croat army used its Muslim civilian prisoners as a human shield in their trenches.⁴

The Muslims were starving, without power or water, living in the cellars of ruined buildings, and emerging at night when the snipers could not see them. It was reported that some snipers were mercenaries, and some of them British. About 2000 people were killed (although doctors, working in appalling conditions on the east side, performed 600 operations with little equipment and few drugs).⁵

In the course of conflict, since all the resources of humanitarian needs were destroyed, the only supplier of water was Neretva for the Muslims. They used the river to provide potable water and bath. However, the snipers, who took position around the river, were trying to shoot them. As mentioned above, only at certain times it was possible to have water for needs.

The Bosniaks controlled the east bank of the town and a slice of the west bank -roughly 2,5 km. long and 1 km. deep- encompassing the west bank neighbourhoods of Donja Mahala, Stari Grad (The Old Town, which spills over on to the eastern bank) and Cernica.

⁴ John Yarwood, *Rebuilding Mostar: Reconstruction in a War Zone*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 1999, p. 4.

⁵ Ibid., p.4.

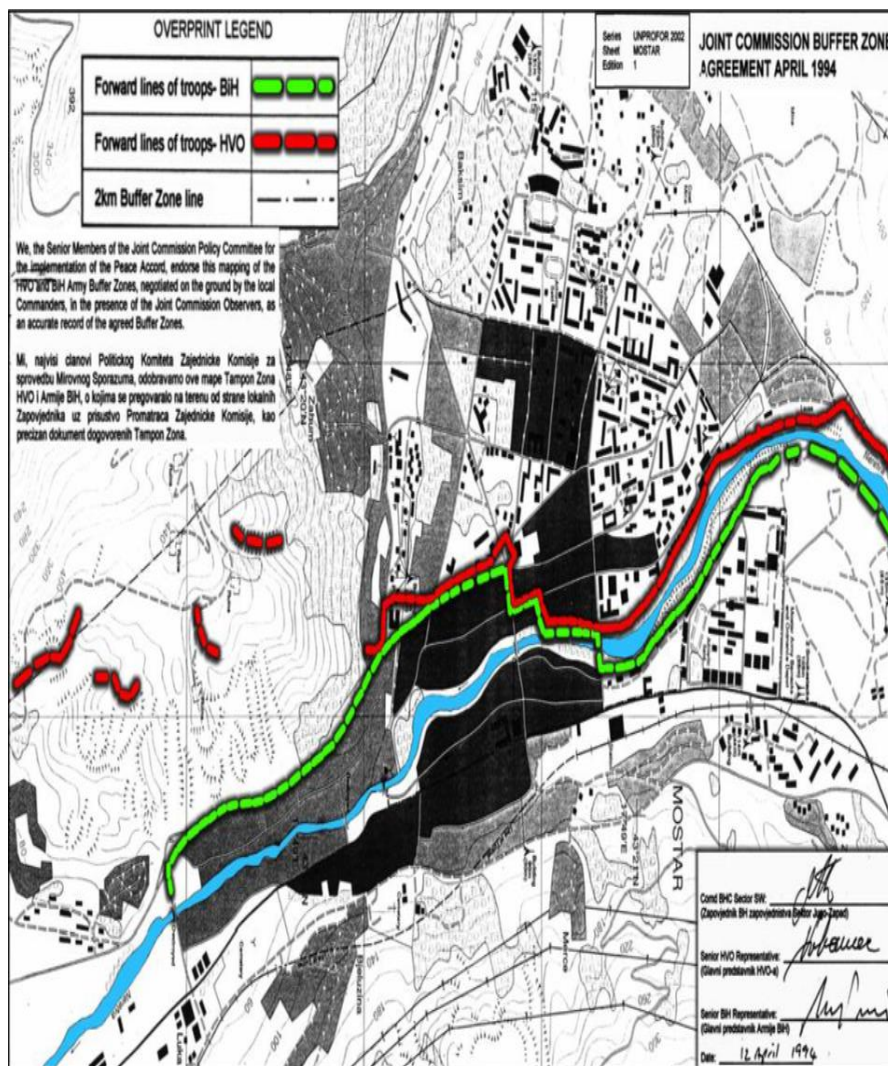


Figure 1: 1994 Map of Mostar Showing the Division of the City along the River and the Boulevard (Source: Map courtesy Z. Bosnjak, urban planner, Grad Mostar).

The Muslim forces in Mostar had been practically besieged, with only one tenuous supply line running across mountain tracks to the nearest Armija base in Jablanica, located 45 km. north in the direction of Sarajevo

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(the Mostar-Jablanica stretch of the M-17 road that snakes alongside the Neretva was unusable for supply purposes during the fighting because it was directly exposed to Croat guns from the mountains to one side, and less directly also to Serb artillery located some distance to the east). They had nonetheless managed to withstand an devastating all-out assault by an enemy with an overwhelming superiority in heavier weapons and numerous unimpeded supply routes, liberally aided by units and equipment of the army of Croatia (HV).⁶

By the time the fighting ended in Mostar in 1994, 2,000 persons had been killed, 26,000 displaced, over 5,000 buildings damaged or ruined, all 10 bridges destroyed (nine by the Serbs) and the urban infrastructure shattered. Muslim east bank of Mostar had suffered the greatest destruction, along with the central core of the city – the area around the Boulevard. Historic monuments, religious buildings and cultural symbols were apparently deliberately targeted.⁷

Although the extent of destruction in the eastern part of Mostar was tremendous, demolition of Old Bridge (Stari Most) was the most harrowing point for Bosniak Muslims. It was targeted for days and on November 9, 1993, the most important and remarkable symbol of cosmopolitan Mostar and Ottoman heritage, the Old Bridge, was destroyed by Croatian tank shell. Not only the bridge that connected both side of Neretva, but also the bridge between two communities (Bosniaks and Croats) was destroyed by this attack.

The costs of violence and separation between the rival ethnic groups in Mostar are more neatly calculated in material terms. The physical destruction or inaccessibility of many schools, offices, homes, factories, and public infrastructure in Mostar during the course of hostilities left its citizens in the eastern sector struggling for bare survival and economic life in the western sector dominated by illicit trade. Thousands of Bosnians forced to abandon surrounding villages arrived in the city, occupying empty apartments and straining the already overburdened infrastructure.⁸

⁶ Bose, pp. 104-105.

⁷ Scott A. Bollens, *Cities, Nationalism and Democratization*, Routledge 2007, p. 171.

⁸ Jon Calame and Amir Pasic, "Post-conflict Reconstruction in Mostar: Cart Before the Horse", *Divided Cities/Contested States Working Paper*, No. 7, 2009, p. 6.

The conflict between Bosniaks and Croats was ended by the signing of Washington Peace Agreement on 1st March, 1994, which established the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). Based on the peace agreement, FBiH was divided into ten cantons by the Law on Federal Units (Cantons) in June 1996.⁹ Besides Mostar was established as a joint Bosniak–Croat city and the capital of the mixed Croat-Bosniak Herzegovina–Neretva canton.¹⁰

The composition of Mostar's population has changed drastically as a consequence of the war. While the population was made up of 35% Muslims (Bosniaks), 34% Croats, 19% Serbs and 12% others (including those who identified themselves as Yugoslavs) before the war; presently Mostar is split in half between Croats and Bosniaks, who make up the vast majority of the population.¹¹ However, prior to conflict, about 6000 Croats lived among the east bank's nearly 30.000 residents. At least 15.000 Bosniaks were among the 45.000-plus on the west bank. Large minorities of Serbs were spread across both sides of the city.¹²

In the present day, according to the census, which was held in 2013 throughout BiH, the total population of Mostar is 113.169.¹³ However, there is no official information regarding the certain numbers of Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs who compose the population of the city. But, it is said that more than 50% Croats, approximately 45% Bosniacs and 4-5% Serbs and others live in Mostar for the time being. The main reason that underlies the alteration of population structure is the migration of significant number of Croats from central Bosnia to Herzegovina region but particularly to around and in Mostar. On the other hand, simultaneously many Bosniaks fled or were forced to leave the city during the conflict.

⁹ Bosnian Podrinje Canton, Canton 10 (Livno), Central Bosnia Canton, Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, Posavina Canton, Sarajevo Canton, Tuzla Canton, Una-Sana Canton, West-Herzegovina Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton.

¹⁰ Florian Bieber, "Local Institutional Engineering: A Tale of Two Cities, Mostar and Brcko", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.12, No. 3, 2005, p. 422.

¹¹ Monika Palmberger, "Renaming of Public Space: A Policy of Exclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *MMG Working Paper*, 2012, p. 11.

¹² Bose, p. 100.

¹³ This data indicates the official preliminary results that published by Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agencija za Statistiku Bosne i Herzegovina). The final results of census shall be published the latest up to 1 July 2016 by the mentioned institution.

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After the conflict most of Bosniaks and Croats sold or exchanged their homes. This situation, dramatically contributed to creation of a divided Mostar. Namely, while the majority of Bosniaks settled down in the eastern side of city, Croats located in the western part. As for Serbs, the third major population of the city before the conflict, most of them sold their homes and did not return to Mostar. Only a few thousands of Serbs turned back to the city.

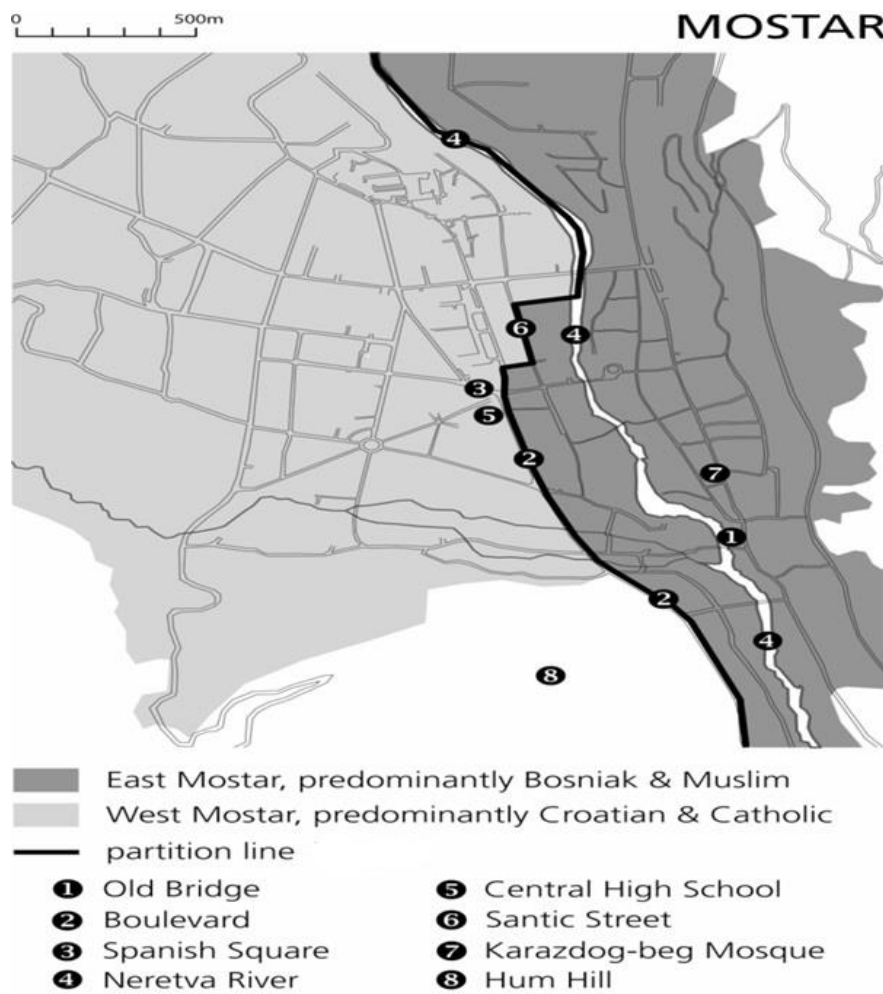


Figure 2: Present Demographic Division of Mostar (Source: Jon Calame and Amir Pasic).

Today, the lives of most Bosniaks and Croats are still separated. If they do not actively seek to interact with one another, Bosniaks and Croats actually share little time with their national counterparts: Bosniak and Croat children attend different schools, teenagers go to different universities, adults have separated workplaces and leisure time is predominantly spent on “one’s own” side of the city. Only a small number of people still maintain friendships with pre-war friends of a different nationality and for them even the nature of their relationships has often changed.¹⁴

Moreover, currently, health care facilities, culture centers and sport clubs, which are the main places for a society to come together and communicate, are separated, as well. For instance, there are two football clubs in Mostar, one is Bosniak football team, Velez; and the other one is Croatian football team, Zrinjski. The tension is always very high during the matches between these two clubs due to nationalist ovations and attitudes by the extremist fans. They provoke each other and regard the matches as a struggle rather than a sporting activity. Usually this rivalry results in physical violence, fighting or injuries.

As mentioned above, the city of Mostar is still a divided city in terms of every single aspect of the daily life. This division and high tension also cause some cases of violence between the Bosniak and Croatian communities. On 26 April, 2015, early in the morning, while a group of young Croats were passing over Musalla square, in the east side of the city, they encountered with Bosniaks who were waiting at the bus station. They provoked and attacked each other and two Bosniaks were badly injured. In addition, almost a month later, on 22 May, after their graduation ceremony, Croatian students started to exclaim on the Boulevard -frontline during the conflict- saying “Old Bridge does not exist any more, Ustashes¹⁵ destroyed

¹⁴ Palmberger, p. 13.

¹⁵ Ustasha, also spelled Ustaša, is the Croatian fascist movement that nominally ruled the Independent State of Croatia during World War II. In 1929, when King Alexander I tried to suppress the conflict between Croatian and Serbian political parties by imposing a personal dictatorial regime in Yugoslavia, Ante Pavelić, a former delegate to Parliament and an advocate of Croatian separatism, fled to Italy and formed the Ustaša (“Insurgence”) movement. Dedicated to achieving Croatian independence from Yugoslavia, the ustaše modeled themselves on the Italian Fascists and founded terrorist training centres in Italy and Hungary. *Encyclopedia Britannica* [Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/620426/Ustasa> Accessed 15.05.2015] For more information about Ustasha please see; Irina Ognyanova, “Nationalism and National Policy in

it". Inherently, as a consequence of this provocation, they attacked each other again.

In short, although 20 years have passed since the end of conflict, it seems that Mostarians need more time –if they have- to eradicate the traces of conflict not only in the city but also in their minds.

2. Reunification of Mostar?

In the war-torn Mostar, particularly in the first decade after the conflict, in terms of providing political and social reunification, many attempts have been made by international organizations. These reconciliation and reunification initiatives can be classified under three main topics: the EU administration (1994-1996), Interim Statute (1996-2003) and reconstruction of Old Bridge (1997-2003).

After the signing of Washington Agreement in 1994, the armed conflict between Bosniaks and Croats in Mostar came to end. Since the city was polarized as Bosniak and Croat parts after the conflict and because of high sensitiveness of the city administration issue, contracted parties agreed on assignment of European Union as the responsible for city governance for two years. Shortly after, on 5 July, 1994, European Union Administration of Mostar (EUAM) was established by another agreement in Geneva, Switzerland.

The EUAM therefore worked in collaboration with local parties to overcome the present division of Mostar, and to create a suitable climate that could lead to a common administration of a multi-ethnic city, the holding of democratic elections (before the end of the EUAM's mandate), and a return to normal life for all of its citizens. The main criteria considered in the EUAM strategy document to be fundamental to the concept of a unified city included: a population willing to live under a common set of rules, a central municipal authority acceptable to the population, a common legal framework and guaranteed rights for all citizens, a common public service, tax system, and police force, and most importantly freedom of

Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945)", *IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences*, Vol. 6, Vienna 2000.

movement for all citizens residing in the city.¹⁶ Besides, the EUAM's goals also included establishing security, facilitating the return of refugees and displaced people and restitution of essential services in the city.¹⁷

Two years later, in March of 1996, as the EUAM's mandate neared its end, the Interim Statute¹⁸ of the City was reached as a temporary solution for the self governance of Mostar. With this Statute, the *de facto* division of Mostar into Croat and Muslim (Bosniak) sides that had occurred during the war was institutionalized in the city's post-war government. Seven largely autonomous municipal districts were established within the city, three in the west with Croat majorities, three in the east with Muslim (Bosniak) majorities and a small jointly controlled Central Zone.¹⁹

At the city level, the Interim Statute provided for a city council with equal numbers of Bosniak, Croat and "other" councillors (16 members from each group). There were to be a mayor and deputy mayor (who would take turns occupying each other's office) and a small city administration. The city was intended to exercise sole competence in the spheres of finance and tax policy, urban planning, infrastructure, economic policy, and public transport, including the city's railway station and airport. The mayor was empowered to set up departments to manage these five fields of activity. All other responsibilities were left to the six city-municipalities.²⁰

¹⁶ *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C 287, Vol. 39, 1996, pp.2-3.

¹⁷ Yarwood, p.7.

¹⁸ Interim Statute of the City of Mostar was signed in Rome, Italy, in 1996. By signing the Rome Agreement on 18 February 1996 the parties agreed to support the process of unifying the City of Mostar, and to adopt the EU's plan for reform and reconstruction. The issues addressed in the Agreement included a commitment to return, the development of a unified police force and the delimitation of the Central Zone. The Interim Statute was adopted on 7 February 1996, and viewed as an important transitional stage in the development of Mostar; as an interim, and therefore temporary, arrangement to ensure the basic administration of the City and government services while a permanent legal structure was negotiated, drafted and adopted.

Six municipal districts, or "City-Municipalities," were established through the adoption of the Interim Statute: Mostar South, Mostar South-West, Mostar West and Mostar South-East, Mostar North and Stari Grad (Old Town). The Central Zone in the middle of the traditional commercial and tourist centre of the city was to be administered directly by a City-wide administration. (Available at: http://www.ohr.int/decisions/mo-hncantdec/default.asp?content_id=31707).

¹⁹ Emily Gunzburger Makaš, "Mostar's Central Zone: Battles over Shared Space in a Divided City", *Urban Conflicts: Ethno-Nationalist Divisions, States and Cities*, Queen's University, Belfast 2011, p. 1.

²⁰ ICG Euro Report, Building Bridges in Mostar, No:150, Sarajevo/Brussels 2003, p. 2.

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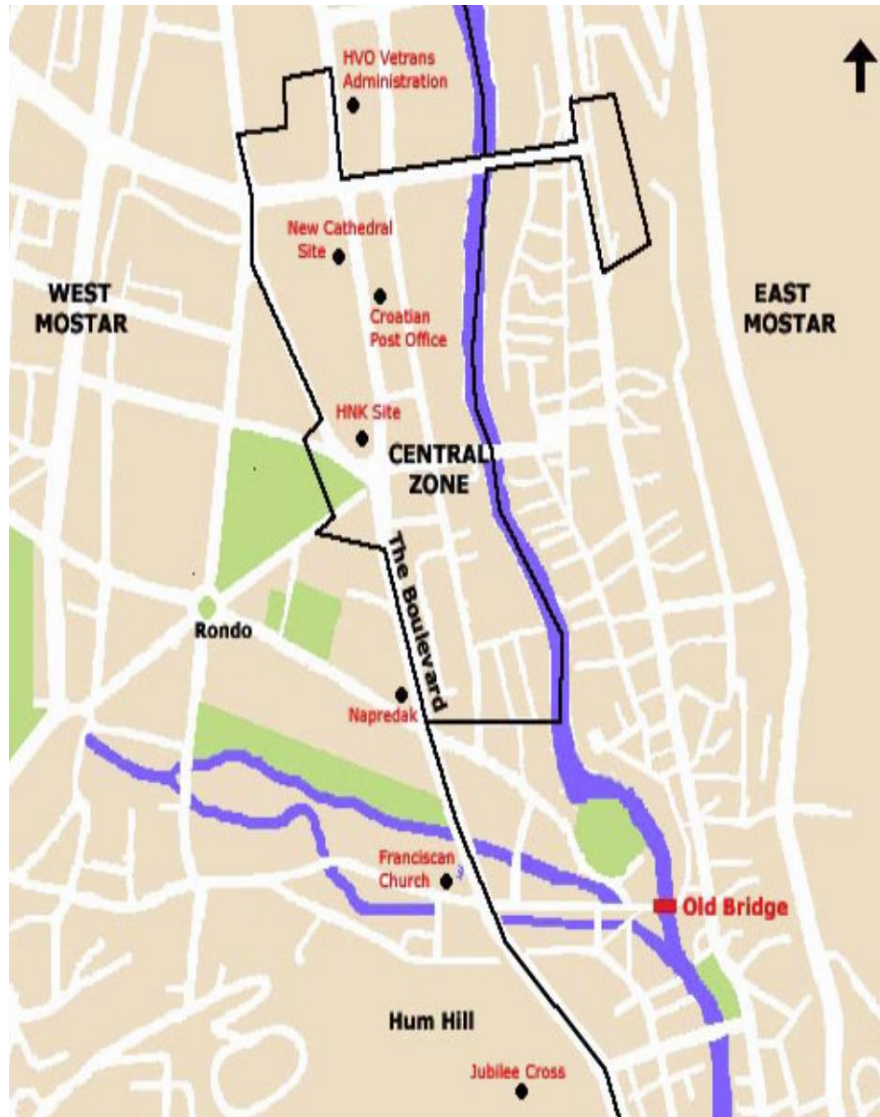


Figure 3: Boundaries of Central Zone (Source: Emily Gunzburger Makaš)

It was the Central Zone that was the biggest innovation and most contentious issue of the Interim Statute for the former warring parties. In order to solve the city's wartime communal partition and to terminate

nationally divided administrations on the opposite banks of the Neretva (three Bosniak municipalities on the east bank and three Croat municipalities on the west bank) the Central Zone was designed, and was accepted as a step on the way of a unified, single city administration.²¹

The EUAM sought ways of unification for the divided communities in the post-war Mostar, by enacting the Interim Statute. Thus, a neutral, symbolic area was formed to engender the reunification of divided parts of the city. The Central Zone was planned as an encounter place to band together Croats and Bosniaks. That was the first and most important goal of this neutral zone. Besides, the Central Zone was thought to be the cultural and commercial centre of Mostar including public parks, cultural centers, residential and office complexes where the people would conduct their daily business.

The Central Zone represents the only part of the city of Mostar to be managed exclusively by the joint city administration and is therefore the symbol and key to a unified and multiethnic Mostar. However, the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union-Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) has actively obstructed the establishment of all institutions with competencies over this zone (courts, police, housing office, revenue collection, and special voting procedures) arguing that the canton or neighbouring municipalities should cover such areas in the central zone. The HDZ also disrupts the normal functioning of the Central Zone by blocking the establishment of any institutions with specific administrative jurisdiction there. This includes blocking the establishment of an office for processing claims for return of property within the Central Zone, of a Central Zone Court and Prosecutor's Office, and of a system for collecting revenues in the Central Zone.²² In the overall HDZ's Mostar strategy, weakening the central zone and city administration is complemented by the exclusion of Bosniaks from the municipal institutions in Croat majority municipalities.²³

Mostar was governed and administratively organized according to the temporary solution reached in Rome in 1996 until a new city statute was finally implemented in 2004. In mid-2003, drafting this new statute and reunifying Mostar became one of the top four priorities of High

²¹ Ibid., p. 2.

²² ICG Balkans Report, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*, No: 90, Sarajevo/Washington/Brussels 2000, pp. 43-45.

²³ Ibid., p. 45.

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Representative Paddy Ashdown.²⁴ Following months of discussion, the High Representative supported the idea of assisting in the establishment of a multiethnic, cross-party commission that would include representatives from all of the levels of government that may be called on to make changes to their legislation or constitutions. This Mostar City-based commission, nominated by the Mostar Mayor and Deputy Mayor and appointed by the City Council on 15 April, met 15 times from April through July to discuss necessary reform. During the process, the OHR and OSCE served as the secretariat of the commission, leaving the commission members fully responsible for the negotiations.²⁵ Although this commission agreed on many issues, it was not able to end the negotiations successfully. Therefore, in that conjuncture, it was inevitable to establish another commission and maintain the process.

Subsequently, on 17 September 2003, under the auspices of OHR, the Commission for Reforming the City of Mostar was established including 12 members, 6 representatives of political parties (Bosniak and Croatian politicians), up to 5 experts and a Chairman (appointed by The High Representative).

The work of Commission lasted for three months and the Interim Statute was ended by the new statute declared by HR Paddy Ashdown in January, 2004. In accordance with the new regulations, six municipalities were converted to voting districts within a single municipality. A single and unified city budget, where all revenues (fees, tax revenues, non tax revenues and capital revenues) and expenditures would be presented, was formed. Besides, the new statute regulated the right and obligation to decide on the interests and needs of the City of Mostar, the scope of local self-government, organisation, financing of the city, as well as other issues, rights, obligations and responsibilities referring to the city.

²⁴ Makaš, p. 15.

²⁵ Office of the High Representative (OHR), Commission for Reforming the City of Mostar, Mostar 2003, p. 56. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an *ad hoc* international institution responsible for overseeing implementation of civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The position of High Representative was created under the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, usually referred to as the Dayton Peace Agreement, that was negotiated in Dayton, Ohio, and signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. The High Representative is working with the people and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community to ensure that Bosnia and Herzegovina evolves into a peaceful and viable democracy on course for integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Once and for all, the rebuilding of Old Bridge is another reunification initiative implemented by the international organizations. The symbolic unification of divided sides of Mostar seemed to be a big step in the reconciliation process by the international community. Because it was beyond reconstructing an ordinary structure that was destroyed during the war. Therefore, thousands of people, including ministers, prime ministers, presidents and representatives of international organizations attended the opening ceremony of the Old Bridge.

The World Bank and UNESCO, along with the local authorities, launched a joint appeal for the reconstruction of the Stari Most, which generated international support, with donor organizations and countries answering the call. The World Bank was responsible for the financial aspects of the project in conjunction with the City of Mostar, while UNESCO managed the technical and scientific coordination. Two smaller organizations, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the World Monuments Fund, provided critical support in implementing the project and reconstructing other historically and socially significant buildings in the historic city²⁶. Funding for the reconstruction initiative was provided by several foreign governments, including the European Union, Croatia, the Netherlands, Turkey and Italy. International peacekeeping troops from Hungary contributed to the project by providing divers to scour the riverbed and retrieve fallen pieces of the bridge. Overall, the World Bank evaluated the reconstruction of the bridge to be a success in having achieved the original objective of improving “the climate for reconciliation among the peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina through recognition and rehabilitation of their common cultural heritage in Mostar”.²⁷

Due to its historical and emblematic significance, reconstructing the Old Bridge was more than constructing an ordinary bridge that had collapsed during the conflict. Therefore it was considered as a big step on the process of social reunification by the international community. Actually, the rebuilding Old Bridge has contributed to the reunification process to

²⁶ UNESCO, “Stari Most: Rebuilding More Than a Historic Bridge in Mostar”, *Museum International (Quarterly Published Journal)*, No.224, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 9-11.

²⁷ The World Bank Implementation Completion Report, Report No: 32713, 2005, pp. 5-8. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2005/06/6030874/bosnia-herzegovina-cultural-heritage-pilot-project> [Accessed 20.05.2015]

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some extent, however, the city needs more for full integration. Because, as a matter of fact, the Old Bridge is not a shared value for the Mostarians. Namely, the Old Bridge does not have any sense for many Croats, while Bosniaks consider it as a symbol of the city and an element of Ottoman heritage.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, many reunification initiatives have been carried out in the war-torn city of Mostar. In spite of these initiatives, the division between Bosniak and Croat communities and among the institutions is still very perceivable and deep and far from being over. Educational institutions -from kindergarten to university-, health care facilities, culture and sport centers, telecommunication services are separated for the time being. This division among the institutions is the biggest obstacle to social integration and in particular, the presence of mono-ethnic schools hinders the new generations of the city to come together and to interact. As a matter of fact, they grow up isolated from one another.

On the other hand, it is important to note that, on 20 February, 2015, Bosniak (Narodno Pozorista Mostar) and Croat (Hrvatski Narodno Kazalista) culture centers have organized a theater play -named "Ajmo na fuka" (Let's have a coffee)- together for the first time after the conflict. The main theme of the play was that "whatever happens, only benefit to us from each other, there is no any other solution". It seems that Bosniak and Croat communities have begun to change their minds against each other. These sort of social activities should be supported by the local and political authorities. Because social integration is the first requirement in order to reunify polarized communities and once it is provided then the real unification will come out.

All in all, as for the answer for the aforementioned question; *hope* is the only thing that divided and polarized communities should have. There is always a hope for Mostar, but indeed it needs more time. Perhaps, 20 years is not so long to forget the past or to eradicate the traces of war. However, as long as political parties, particularly Croatian local authorities, do not stop pumping nationalist feelings to people's minds, there will not be a really unified, cosmopolitan Mostar.

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