

Attempts at Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe: Honest efforts, but without lasting success

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Abstract

This article concentrates on the post-war situation in the countries emerging from the former socialist Yugoslavia. It also briefly deals with developments in other countries of Southeastern Europe where confrontations between different ethnicities with different languages, religious denominations and political orientations have also triggered protracted conflicts. These are less in the focus of public debate and research activities, although most of them are not yet resolved satisfactorily. The purpose of the study is to evaluate different ways of coming to terms with a violent-or “negative”-past which is difficult to remember and does not fit into the normal glorifying ceremonies of national remembrance.* The end of the Yugoslavian wars has brought political peace but if “inner peace” within and between the societies of the former warring parties has been reached is still questionable.

* The term “negative past” has been coined by the German historian and former director of the Nazi concentration camp memorial in Buchenwald/Thuringia, Volkhard Knigge. The past is called “negative,” because people often have the feeling that remembering a past laden with memories of crimes, severe injustice and pain hinder them to develop a positive image of themselves or of the society in whose name these deeds have been done. In contrast, Knigge and others hold that responsible “working through” the past helps to regain self-consciousness and trust in society (Knigge and Frei 2002).

The Yugoslavian wars (1991–1995, 1998/99) and their aftermath—Wars that have divided the common state and keep the societies of the successor states still apart

To understand the entangled conflict situation in the space of the former socialist Yugoslavia we have to look back at the wars that were triggered by the movements for separation from the Yugoslavian Federation and the longing for independence. For the type of warfare and the shape of the peace conditions explain to a considerable extent why within and between some of the new countries stable conditions could not be established and inner peace has not yet been achieved. The Yugoslavian wars followed a pattern of warfare which gained in importance after the dissolution of the Soviet empire and of the bipolar world system at the end of the 20th century: from wars between countries to wars within countries. “One commonality among these conflicts is that warring forces target civilian populations, particularly women and children ... Indiscriminate and episodic violence occurs at random and affects people at a neighbourhood level ... the collaboration of paramilitary with military units produces acts of violence and cruelty that are designed not only to kill but to terrorize and destroy the basis of community life” (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 567). “Thus, human suffering at a communal level is a shared feature of contemporary conflict” (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002, 577).

The wars of transition often resumed and tried to finally “resolve” conflicts that had been suppressed during the Cold-War period. The warring parties revived frontline positions from former wars, particularly from the Second World War and its aftermath but also from the time of the Ottoman empire. These far-reaching lines of historical traditions and traumas had been covered over during Tito’s rule but were now reactivated to provide historical justification for the sudden outbreak of violence between the peoples of Yugoslavia (Höpken 2014).



The former “Republics” of Yugoslavia became independent countries from 1991 on. The different colours mark territories with an ethnic majority according to the census of 1991. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yugoslavia_ethnic_map.jpg

Seven countries emerged from socialist Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo,¹ Montenegro, Macedonia. Only Macedonia and Montenegro gained independence without military

¹ The status of Kosovo is still controversial; it is diplomatically recognised by more than 100 states but not by Serbia.

intervention or support from the Serbian or Yugoslavian army respectively, the latter being to a great extent under Serbian control during the time of Yugoslavia's dismemberment.

What special conditions allowed these two countries to reach independence in a peaceful way? In Macedonia, the Serbs were only a small minority besides Albanians, Turks and Romanies. Therefore, Serbia had only limited political interest in this multifaceted region and tolerated Macedonia's separation from Yugoslavia in 1991. It was Macedonia's complicated inner structure, not its relation to Serbia, which led to outbreaks of violence inside of Macedonia at the end of the century. Montenegro found a middle way between unity with or separation from Serbia. It formally maintained the union, but did not support Serbia's war against the successor states and took a neutral position in this regard, which was acceptable for the Serbian government. Only after the Kosovo war, a majority of Montenegrins spoke out in favour of separation from Serbia, which was realized in a peaceful way in 2006. At this time, Serbia had neither the power nor the will to withstand this decision, all the more so as Montenegro is a small, economically poor country with a heavily mixed population (e.g. ca. 45% Montenegrins, ca. 29% Serbs according to the census of 2011, and Albanians, Bosnians, Romanies). It strove for EU membership, which was not a political preference for Serbia at this time.

However, when Slovenia, as the first of the Yugoslavian Republics, declared independence in June 1991, the Yugoslavian army intervened.² The latter had however underestimated the fighting strength and determination of the Slovenian army, politicians and population. The Serbian leadership submitted to internationally supported peace negotiations after some weeks of fighting because it did not want to be dragged into a long war over Slovenia which was inhabited to ca. 90 per cent by Slovenians and was traditionally seen as culturally oriented to Western Europe and less amenable to an overall Pan-Slavic idea.

Slovenia's independence could even be seen as a relief enabling the

² About the military and political history of the Yugoslav wars, see Baker (2015).

government in Belgrade to concentrate its forces on the upcoming conflict with Croatia which meanwhile had also declared independence. The political-military situation here was different from that in and towards Slovenia. Here, one part of the country—the Krajina—was populated by a strong Serb majority which felt much more attached to Serbia than to an independent Croatia.³ Serb paramilitary troops in the Krajina were supported by the Yugoslavian army under the pretext that Serbia had to protect the rights, well-being and political aspirations of the Serb population in Croatia. The fierce and costly battles (Grandis and Leutloff 2003) only came to a temporary halt after the Yugoslavian army had conquered the Krajina. International political intervention helped to negotiate a ceasefire. Yet, clashes between the warring parties continued and peace was not in sight. The Serbian military superiority had forced Croatia to accept a cease-fire, but Croatia was not willing to also cease its political claim to the Krajina. The impact of the military defeat was not strong enough to dissolve exclusive identity concepts of national belonging, ethnic affiliation and religious conviction. Neither side showed the will for working out a compromise guaranteeing the rights of both Croats and Serbs, to live together in the Krajina (Bjelajac and Žunec 2009).

These features of the conflict not only repeated themselves but intensified to the extreme in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The former Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina displayed the most complicated picture: a Croat majority lived in a strip on the Mediterranean coast representing about 18% of the population, whereas the northern region was mostly populated by Serbs representing ca. 32% of the population; the Bosniaks—often also labelled “Muslims”—made up ca. 38% living mostly in the centre around the capital Sarajevo. Though the three ethnicities—Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks—have their majority regions, al-

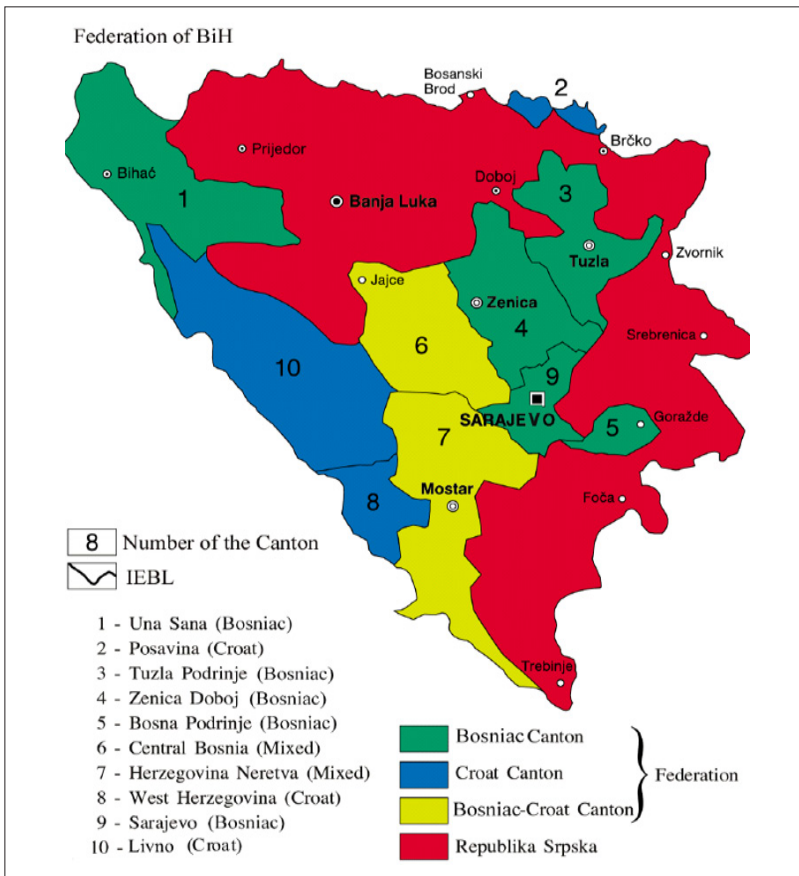
³ In order to show clearly the respective citizenship, Serbians in Serbia are called Serbians; as members of another state or state-like entity such as BaH, they are called Serbs; correspondingly, I use the terms Croats, if they are citizens of Croatia, and Croats, if they belong to the respective minority in other countries. The inhabitants of BaH without reference to any ethnical qualifications are called Bosnians.

most every community is home of people from all the three ethnicities. Nevertheless, Croats and Serbs strove to establish their own political entities with a clear majority population. The Croats wanted to have either an autonomous status within an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina (BaH) or join Croatia, whereas the Serbs were not willing to live under Bosniak–Croat domination and formed their own Serb Republic in January 1992 hoping for a political union with Serbia. However, the realization of these claims would have meant the dismemberment of BaH leaving the Bosniaks in a sector that would hardly be self-sustainable and would be under constant threat from their bigger neighbours Serbia and Croatia. Serb paramilitary forces supported by the still existing Yugoslavian army were the first to attack Bosniaks in Sarajevo and other places. All the three sides now took the risk of a cruel war fighting against their former neighbours and friends with whom they had lived together in one state and in one community for decades. Now, the three sides became entangled in a mutual war. International attempts at mediation promoted mainly by the US government failed because no solution could be found that guaranteed the sovereignty of BaH on the one hand and, on the other hand, fulfilled the claims of Serbs and Croats for their own territories or even union with Croatia and Serbia respectively. In the long run, the failure of reaching compromises even intensified warfare, led to expulsions of minority populations on a big scale often triggered by massacres against civilians.

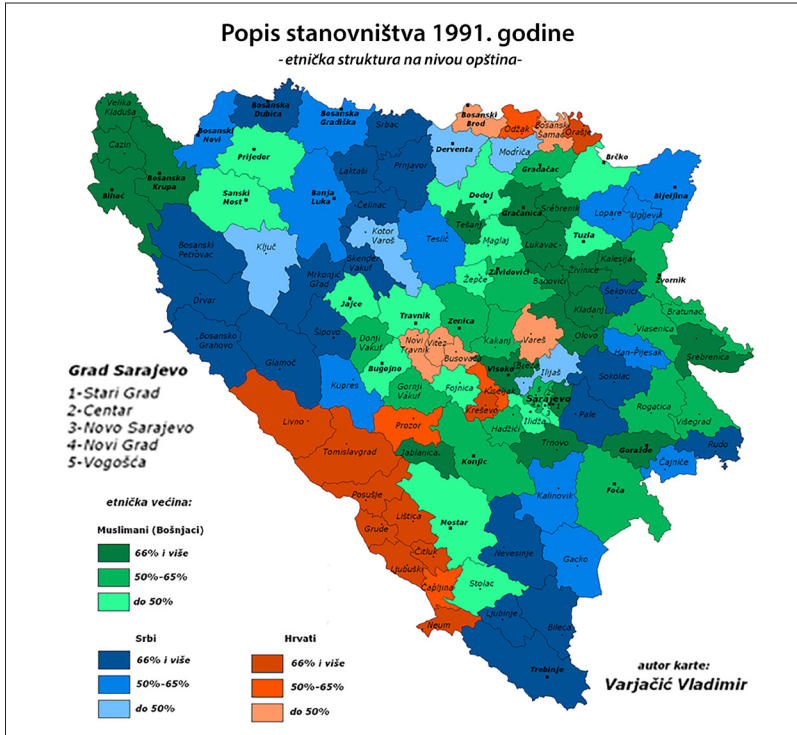
Above all, it was a war for territories, but the conflict had also a religious component, affected private lives and deepened the abyss between the ethnicities. For Serbs were mostly Christian Orthodox, Croats Catholic and Bosniaks Muslims. Many of the mixed marriages concluded in Yugoslavian time were forced or felt the need to divorce as they were no longer accepted by their community.

The war had one decisive caesura that brought the fighting to a peak but also brought all sides to the negotiating table finally. The initiative came again from outside, namely the International Community led by the US government, which convinced the government of Croatia to join forces with the BaH government in Sarajevo in 1994. This coalition

enabled the Croatian army to concentrate their forces on attacking Serbian troops and to get back the Krajina. Under heavy military attack, most of the Serbs left the Krajina or were expelled. Facing more and more pressure from the International Community, the Serbs in BaH tried to enlarge their militarily controlled area at all costs in order to improve their negotiating power when it should come to peace talks. They took control

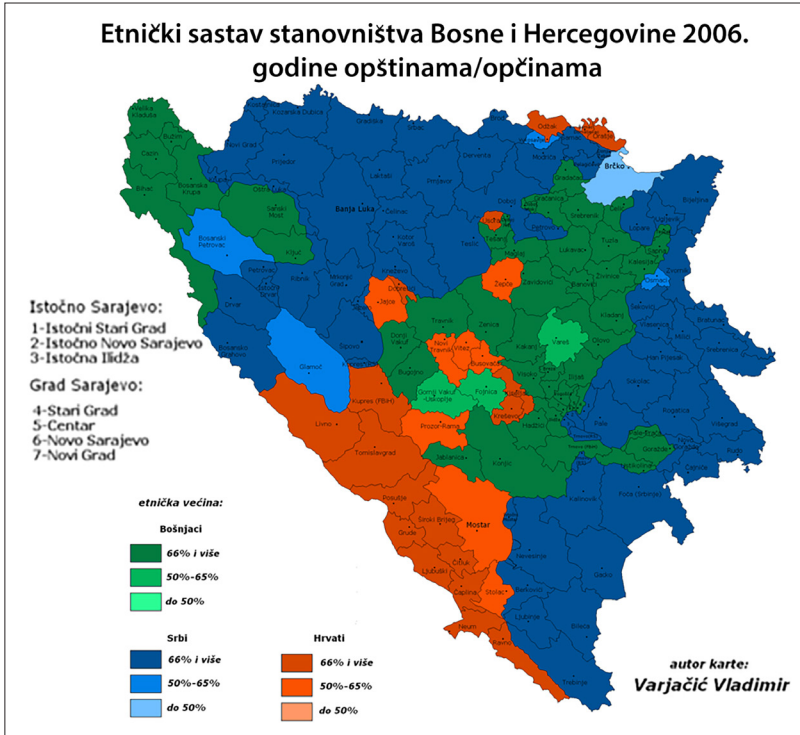


The political structure of BaH is still more simple than the ethnic composition of its population. It is an illusionary political model to harmonize both. Source: <https://reliefweb.int/map/bosnia-and-herzegovina/federation-bosnia-and-herzegovina>



Ethnic map of BaH according to the census of 1991. Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/53/DemoBIH1991.png>

of so-called safe areas under the protection of UN troops where many Bosniaks who lived in Serb-dominated regions had taken refuge. Some of these areas were surrounded by Serb military. Serb troops now expelled and massacred thousands of Bosniak civilians to gain a more monoethnic Serb-dominated territory. One of these actions taking place near the community of Srebrenica was later classified as genocide by the Hague International Court (Calic 2009; Allcock 2009). Under the fire from two sides and forced to withdraw the Serbian troops from the Krajina, threatened by US military intervention, the President of Serbia, Milošević, saw his own position and the well-being of his country Serbia



Ethnic map of BaH 2006. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina#/media/File:DemoBIH2006a.png.

endangered and pressed the Bosnian Serbs to consent to peace talks under the guidance of the USA.

The Peace Accords of Dayton hammered out in a conference lasting several weeks in the autumn of 1995 confirmed the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisting of two “entities,” the “Serb Republic” (RS) and the “Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” the latter comprising ten “Cantons” (communities) with either a Croat or Bosniak (and in one case even a Serb) majority. The two entities and the ten Cantons have their own governments in addition to the central, overarching government and the Presidency–this complicated state structure was the prize

for peace. The country's constitution is part of the Dayton Accords and in so far protected against changes that would harm the peace agreement. The constitution defines the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats as "constituent peoples" of the country (Gavric and Richter 2010).

The war has changed the ethnic composition of the country's regions: many of the formerly mixed areas transformed into political units dominated by one ethnicity, however without creating totally homogeneous areas.

As a result of the war, Croatia could secure its borders and considerably diminished its Serb population. It was the first of the former Yugoslav entities to join the EU. The remaining Serbs in Croatia, like other minorities, are now protected by the EU and UN minority legislation. Though discrimination and prejudices still exist, violent clashes of a larger scale are no longer to be expected. It can be said that the country is pacified and politically consolidated. However, reconciliation measures, whether within Croatia or with neighbouring countries, were not considered necessary on a larger and institutional scale. Although the spectrum of judgements and opinions is broad in historiography and history textbooks, the governments tend to introduce more nationalistic tendencies in the last decade (Koren and Baranović 2009). The public still sees Serbia as the culprit and aggressor in what is now called "the homeland war" meaning it was a just, defensive war—and the same can be said about the Serbian attitude towards the Croatian warfare (MacDonald 2002; Radonic 2010).

The "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" consisting now of Serbia proper and Montenegro had to get over the loss of BaH and Croatia where it was unable to achieve its goals in Krajina. However, it could hold its proper territory till the upcoming war with Kosovo.

The wars that dragged on over a period of five years had fostered mistrust and tendencies to cut oneself off from communication with members of the "other" communities.⁴ The minds of the generations edu-

⁴ Grandits and Gosztonyi (2003) draw attention to opposing trends of behaviour on a local level.



The rebuilt churches and mosques in Mostar serve as symbols of the collective memory defining an exclusive cultural space (cultural territorialism). The church tower now is higher than before the war. On top of the mountain behind the church, a cross has been erected which can be seen from everywhere and overlooks the whole river plain on which Mostar is located.



cated in socialist Yugoslavia were largely shaped through the then official ideology of “brotherhood and unity.” However, the brutal violence of the wars destroyed trust in interethnic relations almost completely.⁵ This was particularly felt in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the three ethnicities are part of a unified state, but one can hardly say that they also form a unified society.

The acts of violence had created hatred, divided families, separated communities, led to expulsion of population and changes of ownership that could not simply be stopped or even reversed after the end of the war. A return to pre-war living conditions was not possible.⁶ This was the reason why the war transformed into a fight for cultural uniqueness

⁵ Basic (2004) delivers exciting stories from soldiers: What did they think, how did they react in war, how did they conceive their war experiences?

⁶ D’Alessio (2009) has described life and social atmosphere in the divided town of Mostar in an exemplary way. For a theoretical approach, see Blagojević (2009).

and difference after the Dayton Peace agreement. To give an example: When I was heading the OSCE⁷ Education Department in 2003–eight years after the war!–I had to organise the conferences of the country’s twelve ministers of education⁸ taking place regularly and alternately in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and the Croat part of Mostar so representing the political centres of the three ethnicities. When I proposed that we use this opportunity to visit cultural monuments of these cities to get familiar with the variety of cultural expressions in the country, the ministers rejected the proposal and one of them bluntly declared that they are not interested in the respective other ethnicities’ cultural manifestations because these are not worth a visit.

The enforced peace: No victors, only victims

The war over Bosnia and Herzegovina did not produce clear victors or losers. It came to a halt before one of the warring sides militarily collapsed or triumphed. Peace was brokered by international military and diplomatic intervention without which the fighting would not have stopped. During the peace negotiations in Dayton, USA, the leading broker, the representatives of the US government, had repeatedly threatened the parties with further military intervention or an abrupt end of negotiations which would have meant the continuation of war. The former warring parties had either to accept the territorial compromises and the stipulations of the Peace Accords regulating the social and political relations between the peoples of BaH or lose the support of the International Com-

⁷ The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is—as part of the International Community—responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords, amongst others, in the field of education.

⁸ They represent the ten Cantons, the RS and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to the Education Minister of the Federation, also the central government’s Minister of Civil Affairs is invested with a coordinating function in education; also a representative of the special district of Brcko took part in the conferences. Brcko was a mixed Bosniak–Serb Canton administered first directly by the International Community, now by both entities as a “condominium.”

munity. The bulk of proposals dealing with the internal and external relations between the former warring parties came from international brokers and were often related to overarching international treaties such as the incorporation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights into the constitution of BaH. The local players mainly were interested in securing as much territory and privileges for their own ethnicity as possible. They accepted the multi-cultural principles of a future living together in the post-Yugoslavian states only formally, under political pressure, and did not acknowledge them whole-heartedly or with understanding. They hardly took the initiative to shape the future relations between the peoples in a humanistic, open-minded, forward-looking way.⁹

The Kosovo-War: Putting an end to the Yugoslav wars?

The last war over the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia was fought over Kosovo in the years 1998/1999. In socialist Yugoslavia, Kosovo had been part of the Republic of Serbia enjoying the special status of an autonomous region until 1980. Many Serbians and Serbs in Kosovo felt and feel almost mythically attached to the Kosovo, where they think their forefathers had defended Europe against the “Muslim threat” in the late Middle Ages when Southeastern Europe came under the Ottoman domination (Spasic 2015; Djokic 2009). Although Serbs constituted a relatively small minority amongst others (ca. 10% before Yugoslavia’s dismemberment, today ca. 5-7% of Kosovo’s population), the Serbian historical myth and mission stood against all endeavours of the Albanian speaking majority population to achieve independence like the other post-Yugoslavian states did. Ongoing clashes between the Serbian army and Kosovo-Albanian paramilitary troops as well as the Kosovo Liberation Army in the 1990s developed into open war and massacres

⁹ Holbrooke (1999) who headed the American delegation offers the most impressive and detailed description of the road to peace; see also Bildt (1998).

committed on both sides, expulsion and dislocation of Albanians and Serbs (Gow 2009). Peace talks initiated by the International Community came close to agreements but were torpedoed in the last phase. Only after NATO military intervention including the bombing of Belgrade, President Milošević was ready for a withdrawal of Serbian troops and agreed to the establishment of a UN-administration (UNMIK) and the stationing of UN troops (KFOR) in Kosovo.¹⁰ Kosovo's autonomy status was renewed, so that it formally remained part of the Republic of Serbia (and Montenegro at this time, i.e. 1999). Ongoing tensions between the Albanian and the reduced Serb population groups led to the destruction of cultural Serb monuments and attacks on Serb villages. One cannot state that the region is pacified. Practically, the country has a bipolar structure. Most of the communities are more or less homogenous with a clear Albanian or Serb majority. The education system is divided (Kostovicova 2005). Only after years of international negotiations, UNMIK operations practically came to an end and, in 2008, Kosovo declared its independence which is meanwhile recognized by more than half of the UN member states but not by Serbia. As the political status of Kosovo could not finally be clarified between the UN, Kosovo and Serbia during the UN administration, UNMIK's mandate formally is still in force. Yet, the Kosovo government feels free to regulate internal issues at will and does not show serious inclination to engage in steps towards transitional justice. Even first timid contacts between the ministry of education and the Georg Eckert Institute intended to revise history textbooks and curricula were obstructed on so-called administrative reasons. Critical textbook analyses conducted by experts of the Institute were simply rejected by Albanian experts. The meetings did not provide starting points for a sustainable project on textbook revision and educational reform. The education system remains divided between the two population groups. Mystical identifications with space and ethnicity often form the heart of the narrative and are not appropriate to overcome the politico-cultural divide

¹⁰ Petritsch and Pichler (2005) offer detailed insight into this difficult process.

between the two ethnicities (Lichnofsky et al. 2017). As Kostovica (2009, 209) summarizes in her textbook analysis: “In sum, both the Serbs and the Albanians emerge in their respective geography and history textbooks as the embattled defenders of their territory, always at the mercy of the ‘other.’ For the Albanians, the Serbs are exclusively associated with massacres and expulsions; for the Serbs, the Albanians are brutes referred to in derogatory terms ... possible counterarguments based on opposing facts are omitted or sidelined.” Such extreme descriptions of each other only mellow down slowly but as long as the inner conflict and divisions last, they will not disappear.

According to the official interpretation, Serbia was not directly militarily involved in the Bosnian war. Therefore the Bosnian war is neither commemorated in official ceremonies nor depicted on war monuments (Kandić 2007) whereas the war against Croatia is seen as a defensive campaign and is remembered in the traditional heroic way. However, after the Kosovo war and all the more so after Milošević had lost the Presidential election, Serbia saw itself compelled to adopt a more moderate position instead of its former dominant, self-opinionated habitus. The wars of the 1990s were interpreted as “liberation wars” focussing on the fighting over Krajina and Kosovo as well as the NATO air strikes against Serbia in 1999 (Humanitarian Law Center 2021). They were included into a commemoration line comprising other well-known fights for Serbia’s independence such as the 1389 Battle of Kosovo and other anti-Ottoman uprisings particularly in the 19th century as well as the First and Second World War. Besides the propagated official memory policy less state-controlled remembrance activities developed: “Some steps toward digital memory activism, visible, accessible and participatory for everyone, have been taken ... the noticeable turn towards online platforms for purposes of online commemoration and advocacy, and the growing use of hashtags by memory activists in their memory work” (Humanitarian Law Center 2021, 35; Fridman 2019).

This overview of the situation in the former Yugoslav region shows that the implementation of transitional justice and reconciliation needs the backing of local administration and political organs. If the initiatives

mainly come from outside, sustainable effects are hardly to be expected, all the more so as local civil society institutions were almost not existent in the immediate post-war years and play a limited role up today. If official policy is not in line with reform efforts from outside, and if even a considerable part of the population regards them with scepticism, the impact of such activities remains restricted. A good example proving this has been the Joint History Project of the Thessaloniki based “Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe” (CDRSEE). This project has developed source-based teaching material about the history of Southeastern Europe and trained about 1.000 teachers, who came particularly from the former Yugoslavian region, to use this material in classroom. After some years of training, the Centre evaluated the project’s impact and outcome. Almost all teachers who participated in the seminars stated that they use the material with lasting success but that they could not convince a notable number of their colleagues who had not participated in the project to teach the material as well.¹¹ Thus, the project was successful for the participants only but had not the intended ripple effect. I think that teachers in China, South Korea and Japan may have made similar experiences when they taught extra-curricular teaching materials on the history of East Asia developed by multilateral groups of researchers and teachers.

Nevertheless, I do not want to say that reconciliation projects are not useful. The more of them are being performed, the more teachers and scholars adopt innovative teaching content and methodological approaches. It remains open at which point they will represent a critical mass posing an alternative that can no longer be denied by colleagues or school authorities. We learned from our projects conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute that some of the participants could join teams of authors who developed alternative teaching devices or were accepted by the ministries as curriculum experts or textbook authors so that positive effects can be

¹¹ Oral reports at the CDRSEE conference “History Education fostering European Integration,” Thessaloniki, 20–21 November 2010.

noted in the longer run.

All these cases show that reconciliation efforts can only achieve a major impact if they are carried out by public institutions and/or supported by official policy. They need a favourable domestic political climate. If these conditions are not given, they may nevertheless serve as a basis for subsequent activities with a wider impact when a political climate change and more openness for mutual acknowledgement is in sight.

Transitional justice as a means to overcome the ethnic divide: Textbook revision, commemoration, trials, with particular reference to BaH

Textbook Revision

The shortcomings of the peace process and the lasting impact of the war were particularly felt in the field of education. As a consequence of the ethnicized and compartmentalized political structure education became provincialized (Moll 2013). The RS, Herzegovina and many of the Cantons developed their own curricula and partly even textbooks. Until today, they stress differences rather than commonalities in ethnic, cultural and religious features. At the end of the 1990s, the International Community, which had to oversee the implementation of the Dayton Accords, became aware that pupils in BaH were exposed to formulations that disparage the other communities, neglect their cultural achievements and accuse them of massacres committed in past and present (Ramet 2007). Schools and parents strove to create mono-ethnic classes wherever possible. The teaching of history and social sciences did not prepare students to become citizens of a joint BaH but oriented political awareness and identity patterns to their own entity which was for Serbs and Croats closely related to the neighbouring states of Serbia or Croatia respectively. These states represented the main reference points in Croat and Serb textbooks and were sometimes even called “Fatherland” (Karge and Batarilo, 2009).

Only the Bosniaks had no foreign point of reference and started to

develop their own political identity as citizens of BaH. Already during the war, the Bosniak, Croat and Serb dominated territories had developed their own teaching materials strengthening their specific ethnic identity and emphasising differences in language, culture and religion between the three ethnicities. Partly, history textbooks were even imported from neighbouring countries. This violated the Dayton Accords and prompted the International Community to intervene. An agreement between the ministries of education and OSCE hammered out a procedure of textbook approval and revision. It stipulated that no discriminatory language or disparaging formulations should be used that are not tolerable from the point of view of one of the three ethnicities. This procedure changed some formulations but hardly alter the overarching narrative. In contrast, it led to a long process of controversial debate and delayed the printing of new textbooks (Pingel 2009).

To speed the process and make textbook authors and ministry experts familiar with principles of multi-cultural teaching approaches, external NGOs provided support such as the Council of Europe, EURO-CLIO and the German Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. They offered numerous seminars bringing together teachers and curriculum experts from BaH and Council of Europe member states. The seminars offered examples of multi-cultural textbooks and of how controversial issues can be seen from different perspectives in teaching material (Carretero 2017). Such approaches were almost unknown to Bosnian teachers, curriculum experts and textbook authors. Participants of seminars conducted by the Georg Eckert Institute developed guidelines on how to write non-discriminatory, multi-perspectival texts. The guidelines recommended for the first time that the wars of the 1990s should be treated in history teaching and textbooks. According to a former resolution of the Council of Europe this topic should be avoided because it seemed to be too controversial and emotionally loaded. However, without treating the wars, the most significant experience of adults and children could not be expressed and clarified in the classroom. The guidelines were meant to serve as a basis for textbook approval and further revision processes. However, although approved by all ministers of

education, implementation of the guidelines became a problem as the Institute had no power to control the use of the guidelines whose legal status remained controversial. Textbook revision had an effect on some textbook authors who now deviated from the traditional, ethnicized, one-sided narrative as long as projects for innovation lasted. Yet, this effect often faded away when the activities of NGOs and the International Community ended or were scaled down (Pingel 2017). The last comprehensive analysis of BaH history textbooks performed in 2018/2019 shows that each side still emphasises its own achievements in culture, politics and economy and neglects or diminishes the qualities of the “other” in this regard (Karge 2019). Until now, the principal narrative has changed only gradually and not systematically, with only a few exceptions. Each side eulogises their own war heroes who are said to have fought a just war. Self-criticism on issues of national significance and pride remains almost unknown. Insofar, textbook revision had only a limited effect on reconciliation. Projects researching the effects of innovative educational approaches in the region show that they need constant support from outside, otherwise they lose impact. The local educational authorities have shown almost no interest on their own to foster controversial thinking and multi-cultural approaches (Pingel 2023). Temporarily, the situation seemed to be more open in Croatia but counter-movements from national conservative groups—also in academia—often worked successfully against innovations in methodology and content (Dimou 2009).

Memory politics

Memory politics can affect mutual recognition, acknowledgement of crimes and foster insight into the suffering of one’s own people as well as of the “other.” However, it can also be used to produce and disseminate heroic self-images of innocent victims who suffered from the deeds of the opponent. On one’s own side you find only righteous fighters and brave victims, on the other side brutal foes. This was more or less the way in which commemoration developed in BaH (Hajdarpašić 2010; Duijzings 2007; Grandits 1998).

Each side claimed to have the most victims to prove the brutality of



Shovels to dig up the graves of victims of the Srebrenica genocide. Photo: Author

the opponents. Only detailed research conducted by local NGOs brought to light the correct figures of deaths which were considerably lower than officially estimated. It is revealing that the authorities were not interested in such research which could lower the blood toll their own ethnicity had to pay. The competition over the number of victims stylizes oneself as the suffering subject and the other as the aggressor. Andersen and Borcak (2022) even speak of a “mnemonic war.” Due to this dichotomic approach common official commemoration procedures have not been developed. The focus is on mourning one’s own victims, not on mutual understanding. People are often distrustful of the official institutions’ ability to bring to light the real story of the war events. A strong minority does not even think that official commemoration will help to come to grips with the brutal past. According to an opinion poll, between 20 to 30% of the population of BaH held that the wars of the 1990s should not be treated at all in order not to reawaken painful memories or even stimulate



Poster for a commemoration ceremony in the centre of Sarajevo showing coffins of the victims of Srebrenica. Photo: Author

feelings of hatred again.¹²

However, a civil society driven movement for an appropriate and worthy culture of remembrance developed particularly within the Bosniak society. Families who had to mourn victims came together to uncover more information about what happened to their beloved ones, who was guilty of the crimes and how the victims could be commemorated. Engaged officials from international organisations supported them. This is how the plan was born to establish a large cemetery close to Srebrenica according to the international model of war cemeteries, and to erect a museum in the old factory building where the refugees were housed under the assumed UN protection. The first commemoration day was celebrated in Srebrenica in July 2000, five years after the catastrophe. In

¹² Opinion poll of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Justice and Truth in BiH—Public Perceptions” of 2005 (Mandić 2007).



An aerial view of the Srebrenica-Potocari Genocide Memorial Center.

Source: ArminxDurgut/PIXSELL

2003, the first 600 corpses were buried in the new cemetery (Duijzings 2007).

For many years, Serb politicians did not take part in the annual day of remembrance. Instead, they officially neglected that Serb troops were involved in genocidal activities. In the post-war years, Bosniak participants in the ceremony had even to fear attacks from Serb local protesters. To make the Srebrenica cemetery a safe place for commemoration, the High Representative of the International Community¹³ ordered that the cemetery, which was located on the territory of the Serb Republic, was declared extraterritorial and put under the authority of the central government (and no longer of the government of the Serb Republic). Although meant to provide a safer environment for future commemoration meetings, this measure triggered vehement protests from the Serb side (RS Government 2007; Morrow 2012). In the longer run, the situation eased, and representatives of the RS took part in commemoration ceremonies. The government of the RS even established a Srebrenica commission,

¹³ The High Representative represents the International Community in BaH with the right to interfere in legislation which is not in accordance with the Dayton Accords.

which presented its report in 2004. For the first time, the RS publicly admitted that mass crimes had been committed in Srebrenica and other places. However, the International Community remained concerned about widespread ongoing denial of Serb mass-crimes in the public and the media. As a countermeasure, the High Representative again interfered and used his legislative power to interdict the denial of genocide and relativization of crimes in 2021. This certainly was an initiative of goodwill but Hronešová and Hasić 2023 contend that it did not contribute to bring the controversial narratives closer to each other. Instead, it sparked a new heated debate and brought about new tensions between Serbs and Bosniaks questioning not only the historical facts but also the role and legitimacy of the High Representative to direct the memories of the war through official orders. Opinion polls showed that the majority of the Serbs in the RS still denied that the former General Mladić and President Karadžić—both convicted of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)—had committed such crimes (Hronešová and Hasić 2023, 407). Milorad Dodik, the current President of the RS, again denied the Srebrenica genocide and was not punished—like other violators of the law, showing that the law was ineffective in deterring such denials. It still requires initiatives from the civil society such as “The Mother of Srebrenica” to keep the memory of the crimes alive and to help find out the historical truth. In their study about the commemoration of Srebrenica in the RS, Halilovich and Adams (2024) argue that one has to study local commemorative spaces in order to detect alternative memories that do not follow the official narrative disseminated by leading media and propagated by official institutions. However, official memory politics from all sides makes it difficult to uncover the more subjective, divergent memories that are emotionally loaded and marked by personal experiences. In contrast, the Sarajevo Canton Memorial Fund warns against a too diverse array of memorial activities in face of the fragmented culture in BaH and works for a more unified state-directed memory policy as a means to fight denial and negligence of war crimes (Rauch 2023). This debate over commemoration prescribed from above or agitated top-down is going on.



“Don’t forget Srebrenica.” The Graffiti in English is addressed to the International Community bearing responsibility for keeping the memory of the genocide alive.

Photo: Author (November 2003)



Overpainting of the Srebrenica Graffiti: An indicator of normalisation?

Photo: Author (November 2009)

Memory politics follow political trends and have had their ups and downs in the 30 post-war years. In the decade after the war, a rigid moral and demanding attitude prevailed in demanding the acknowledgment of crimes and show respect to victims in BaH.¹⁴ With material as well as economic reconstruction and normalisation of daily life, this emotional and uncompromising attitude decreased without fading away. It could be revived whenever provocative political comments or actions were taken concerning commemoration issues from either side—and the two interferences of the High Representative were widely seen as such provocations by the Serbs.

Trials

Judicial redress is often seen as an effective means of healing in societies where state-committed crimes occurred. It helps to reestablish personal identities in the families of victims, build new trust in state institutions during the phase of reconstruction and convey a feeling of righteousness providing a secure ground for rebuilding shattered or dissolved social ties (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002). However, the effects are ambivalent if trials are not initiated by one's own institutions but by a third power, be it the former, now victorious enemy or a "neutral" international court. For the former case, the Nuremberg trials carried out by the Allies after the Second World War in Germany are a prime example. They were rejected as unjust "victors' justice" by a great part of the German population. They had only a limited effect on the recognition of crimes in society in general and on the insight into the responsibility of the many institutions that carried out these crimes.¹⁵ Similar reactions could and can be observed in BaH, Serbia and Croatia. Only in the long run, it can be said that international trials contribute to a mind-change within the population of aggressor states.

The UN Security Council established the International Criminal

¹⁴ Bugarel et al (2007) develop such a bottom-up approach against the main stream official memory from an anthropological point of view.

¹⁵ Cohen (2004) confirms this not only for the Nuremberg but also for the Tokyo trials.

Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) already in 1993. Investigating the crimes, apprehending and arresting the perpetrators, many of whom had gone into hiding, took a long time. A total of 83 defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from long to life imprisonment. The court could conduct trials against the most important war criminals, the President of Serbia during the wars, Slobodan Milošević, the President of the RS, Radovan Karadžić, and the military leader of the RS, General Ratko Mladić. Milošević died during his trial; therefore no judgment could be pronounced. Karadžić was sentenced to 40 years in prison. In its last judgment, the court sentenced Ratko Mladić to life imprisonment in November 2017.

The trials of the ICTY in the Hague, Netherlands were regarded with scepticism or rejected by the majority of the population in whose name these crimes had been committed. The international trials did not help to bring about a process of mutual recognition, forgiveness or apology (Zgonjanin 2018; Kostić 2018; Orentlicher 2010; Allcock 2009; Cooper 1999).¹⁶ The indictments and trials of the ICTY strengthened feelings of victimization on all sides rather than bridging the gap between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks.

Particularly high-ranking Serbs who had been indicted could hide within their own population for many years. In the post-war years, there were hardly feelings of guilt in the population. It was a breakthrough when the new President of Serbia, Đinđić, extradited the former Serbian president Milošević to the Hague Court in 2001 although Milošević had been indicted already two years before when he was still president. After his almost triumphant appearance in the Dayton negotiations, President Milošević had come under fire because of Serbia's political, if not military engagement in the Bosnian war and under pressure from the ICTY investigating against him for mass crimes and even genocide. Before the Kosovo War, Serbia's official media and politics of history rejected the charges and accusations almost unanimously. Only after he was voted out

¹⁶ See also the OSCE reports on war crime tribunals <https://www.osce.org/zagreb/66067>.

as president, the mood in the Serbian population slowly changed and the new president could wage Milošević's extradition but even then not without heavy pressure from outside, particularly from the US government. The population's attitude to the war crimes remained ambivalent (Ramet 2007b). On the one hand, former convicted war criminals "are ... accepted in society," on the other hand "the state representatives depict Serbia as the state most dedicated to regional reconciliation. In this way, Aleksandar Vučić¹⁷ emphasises that Serbia has confessed its crimes and condemned the perpetrators of the crimes committed in its name ..." (Humanitarian Law Center 2021, 33).

The national-conservative Tudjman government of Croatia was opposed to cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, and this attitude was in line with public opinion. Only after Tudjman's death in 1999, the new President Stjepan Mesić and the then ruling social-liberal coalition were ready to extradite war criminals to the Hague. However, they did this not without pressure from the EU Commission which threatened the government to otherwise defer Croatia's application for EU membership. Nevertheless, the bulk of the population still met investigations of the Tribunal with "lack of understanding and rejection" (Pervan 2007, 172). To reduce the influence of the international court on the judicial prosecution of Croatian war crimes, the Croatian judiciary itself started to conduct investigations against individual persons who are indicted for having committed war crimes against Serbs. According to opinion polls the majority does not support such trials and sees only Serbia and Serbs as aggressors and war criminals whereas Croatian forces are regarded as a defensive army that could not have done such acts.

Even among the Bosnian population, the Hague Court was regarded ambivalently because it also staged a trial against a Bosniak high ranking fighter who had attacked Serb civilians near Srebrenica and was seen as a brave defender and military hero by most Bosniaks. Often, victims do not accept the impartiality of an international court if the judgement is

¹⁷ Current President of Serbia, as of 2025.

against a member of their own group. Fletcher and Weinstein (2002, 602) even contend that the victimized would accuse the court of not understanding the reality of the fighting and suffering they had to endure. The victims construct different layers of experience. Whereas they acknowledge that the court has a correct understanding of the crimes of “the other,” they cast doubts on the court’s ability to evaluate their own fighting experiences. In the interviews, Fletcher and Weinstein (2002, 602) conducted “...the participants speak about the need for international criminal prosecutions exclusively in terms of accountability for crimes committed against members of the national group with which the speaker identifies.” These findings are in line with general studies on international law “which is sceptical of the independent power of international law to affect domestic society and politics” (Waters 2013, 187). NGOs in Croatia and BaH such as Documenta, the Centre for Working through the Past in Zagreb, or the Research and Documentation Center in Sarajevo tried to make crimes known including those committed by one’s own soldiers but their work is often criticized and discriminated against as infringement of national interests.

Several proposals to establishment of a truth commission in the successor states of Yugoslavia did not produce viable results. Thanks to the engagement of the head of the Jewish community in Sarajevo, a draft law on the establishment of a truth commission for BaH could be developed but it did not pass the parliament and did not meet with sufficient public support (MacDonald 2009). The conviction was too deeply anchored in the minds and hearts of the people that they all know the truth of victimisation, suppression and murder, which has been inflicted upon them. That this truth is only partial is still not widely accepted.¹⁸

Yet, one should not forget that the trials documented war crimes extensively and carefully and so created a firm basis for research and distribution of the historical truth in the longer run. This is, by the way, also

¹⁸ Boerhout (2016) delivers many examples for commemoration activities and monuments distancing themselves from or neglecting victims of the “other” side.

one of the remaining merits of the Nuremberg trials. Until today, researchers make use of documents the court has produced and make them available to the public so that the denial of crimes can be easily refuted. This will seemingly also apply to the ICTY.

Reconciliation in Southeastern Europe will be a long process and happen first in smaller groups of engaged and enlightened individuals before it will reach the level of official institutions, influential media and politics.

The immediate post-war years centred around material reconstruction and the return of refugees, which is almost done. A new, viable political structure could be built in Slovenia and Croatia, to a great extent also in Serbia and Montenegro whereas a promising political structure for the future is not yet reached in BaH and Kosovo and only partly in North Macedonia. During the second decade of the 21st century, foremost the International Community strove to help establish a satisfying political balance between the different population groups and rebuild social ties inside and between different ethnic/cultural/religious communities—this is only partly done.

Reconciliation efforts achieve a major, lasting impact if they are carried out by public institutions or supported by official policy. They need a favourable domestic political climate. If these conditions are not given, individual engagement and NGO-projects serve as a basis for subsequent activities with a wider impact when a political climate change and more openness for mutual acknowledgement is in sight.

Ethnic problems not yet resolved in Southeastern Europe

In the following, I will deal with protracted conflicts in Southeastern Europe that have not shown political violence or military clashes in recent years. Yet, they bear the risk that violence may erupt and be reinforced through Russia's aggressive policy that tries to aggravate internal political differences in countries of Southeastern Europe and to weaken their

stability and trust in European cooperation.

One of the former Yugoslavian countries, Macedonia, came into trouble with two of its neighbouring countries. Ethnic-national claims and delineations played a role here. The controversies I refer to can jeopardize the country's application to join the EU and have strained its neighbouring relations. For example, Greece did not accept the country's name when it became independent, because Greece's northern province had the same name "Macedonia" and Greece assumed that the naming of the state Macedonia was related to territorial claims on the Greek northern province (in the Yugoslavian time, Macedonia was called "Socialist Republic of Macedonia" which Greece had tolerated). Though the suspicion seemed to be exaggerated, it was not without reason. Both countries see Alexander the Great as one of their historical heroes and mystify him as part of their national heritage. The first Macedonian history textbook, which appeared after independence, in fact sent an ambiguous message. A map showed regions with a Macedonian majority population including areas situated in Greece. The delineation of ethnic boundaries could create the impression that Macedonia would also lay a political claim on them.

To avoid any misunderstandings, Greece demanded a name change, otherwise it would vote against Macedonia's accession to the EU. Because of the name struggle, Macedonia was called "FYROM" in international relations meaning the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Both governments came to an agreement only after long negotiations during which Greece even imposed an embargo on Macedonia making trade and border crossings for Macedonians difficult. According to the agreement the country bears the name "Republic of North Macedonia" since 2019 (Zivanovic and Marusic 2018). The conciliatory approach approved useful because it opened the way to further reconciliation efforts such as an agreement on a mutual history curriculum and textbook studies (Jordanov 2019).

Although a pragmatic solution could be found in this case, claims of exclusive identities associated with competing historical concepts of nation and ethnicity still linger in the region. A similar unsolved dispute

about history and present puts strain on relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. The dominant Bulgarian narrative contends that Macedonia and Macedonians have been part of Bulgaria since the Middle Ages. Macedonia remained only a geographical concept without a political representation during the time of Ottoman domination. Most of the region became part of Serbia after the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and was incorporated into the Yugoslav Kingdom. Yet, part of the Macedonian population felt more connected to Bulgaria than to the Yugoslav Kingdom. Bulgaria fighting on the German side in the First and Second World Wars had partially occupied the Macedonian region. However, the brutal Bulgarian occupation convinced the Macedonians that the Bulgarians would regard them as a second-class-Bulgarian minority and would not treat them as Bulgarians proper. Macedonia regained a political status as one of the Republics of Socialist Yugoslavia. The official Bulgarian narrative still maintains that Macedonia and Macedonians have separated from Bulgaria and cannot be seen as a distinct people with its own political-cultural history and identity. Bulgarian history textbooks did not even mention Macedonia as an independent country in the years after 1991 (Jordanov 2019). This narrative could not and cannot be accepted by North Macedonia. The bilateral “Agreement of Good Neighborhood” of 2017 was meant to overcome the differences in view of the European integration process. It should deepen mutual trust, foster rapprochement and cultural cooperation. To this aim, a joint multidisciplinary commission for history and other areas was established with a far-reaching mandate in 2021. The commission on which the author served as an advisor should not only compare history textbooks and make recommendations for changes but should deal with politics of memory in a broader sense. It should, for example, discuss whether common memorial days could be established commemorating historical events in which both sides were involved. The Bulgarians who put forward this proposal obviously had the hope that the Bulgarian version would prevail, and the distinct Macedonian interpretation would become marginal. The commission agreed on textbook analyses and joint recommendations, but the latter were not formally adopted. The harmonization of politics of memory was not even

further treated. Seemingly, the Bulgarian members felt under pressure from their government and the public only to consent to a text that questioned the political identity and cultural distinctiveness of the Macedonian people. This position understandably remained unacceptable for the Macedonian side. Therefore, the meetings ended up without a result and Bulgaria's final stance on Macedonia's accession to the EU is still pending (Marusic 2025). The European perspective formed the background for a joint historical commission, but it could not override exclusive national-ethnic concepts upheld by the Bulgarian members of the commission. The Bulgarians misused Macedonia's wish to become a member of the EU as a means to establish an exclusive overarching Bulgarian narrative and political identity.

Another conflict over ethnicity and nationality lingers on at Europe's Southeastern border. I refer here to the Mediterranean isle of Cyprus. The island was inhabited by a Greek majority and Turkish minority for centuries. The British followed the Ottoman domination, took over administrative control in 1878 and declared Cyprus a colony after the First World War in 1925. After the Second World War, the relationship between the two communities became more and more conflictual. A strong movement for unification with Greece developed within the Greek Cypriot community that further fuelled the conflict. The British government wanted to get rid of the problem and granted the island independence in 1960. The power was divided between the two communities according to their share of the population. However, this spurred competition and led even to armed clashes instead of establishing a balance of power. The current conflict line goes back to the year 1974. Greek Cypriot right-wing nationalists sought the support of the autocratic junta in power in Greece at that time, and tried to unite Cyprus with the so-called Greek motherland to realize the junta's "big idea" of a Greater Greece. The unification with Greece met with decisive resistance of the Turkish minority but also a part of the Greek-Cypriot majority community did not support it. Under the pretext to protect the Turkish community in Cyprus, Turkey sent troops to the northern part of the island where most of the Turkish speaking people lived. As a consequence, the island was di-

vided into two parts that are separated by a small security belt, marked by barbed wire fence and controlled by UN troops. Meanwhile, this borderline can be passed from both sides. Yet, neither the Greek Cypriots nor the EU recognize the northern part which is under strong political influence, if not control of Turkey and only recognized by this country. The EU, where Cyprus has been a member state since 2004, regards the whole island as EU territory so that one could say that the EU has an unresolved border conflict with the NATO member state Turkey. Both sides, EU as well as Turkey, try to keep the conflict low. However, without the Turkish troops, the Greek population would have most likely put constant pressure on the Turkish population. Up to now all endeavours have failed to resolve the conflict and to unite both parts of the island again. Even the full engagement of the UN and the then Secretary General, Kofi Annan, were of no avail. The Annan plan envisaged a federation with two constituent peoples (not so different from the model applied in BaH). A majority of the Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan in a referendum, but the majority of Greek Cypriots rejected it. The latter felt to be in the better economic and social position than the Turkish part, and may lose more than win through unification.¹⁹ Particularly on their side biased images about the “other” – the Turkish, mostly Muslim population – prevail who are seen as descendants of the Ottoman “occupiers” and “suppressors.” Also on the Turkish Cypriot side, the unification plan met with some resistance. The Turkish government had supported immigration from Turkey. The Turkish immigrants are not familiar with the island’s history before partition and less interested in unification and living together with the Greek community. Cultural stereotypes are still alive on both sides although NGOs and international organisations such as the Council of Europe have tried with great commitment to bring both sides together. Also here, the foundation of a truth commission was raised but not realized (Kaymak 2007). The Greek Cypriot gov-

¹⁹ Yılmaz (2010) provides a historic overview and an informative description of the many, so far unsuccessful negotiations between the UN, Turkey, Greece and the Cypriot communities; see also Anastasiou (2009).

ernment took steps to a more reconciliatory approach in education, particularly school education. The Minister of Education declared the major aim of the academic year 2008–2009 the “cultivation of a culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and co-operation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with the aim of overcoming occupation and leading to reunification of our country and people” (Makriyianni et al. 2011, 8). Also on the Turkish Cypriot side trends came about to “shift towards a more Turkish–Cypriot centric approach in the lower secondary school history education” instead of putting the weight on Turkish history and follow structure and content of Turkish textbooks to a great extent (Makriyianni et al. 2011, 31). In particular, the local NGO Home for Co-operation has rendered outstanding services and established a meeting point for seminars, encounters, and joint festivals in the UN Buffer Zone between the two parts of the island (Perikleous and Shemilt 2011; Perikleous 2011; Karahasan and Latif 2011). The Council of Europe supports the NGO’s work to develop bi-communal teaching devices and to bring teachers and scholars from both sides and other European countries together. As Cyprus and Turkey are members of the Council of Europe, Turkish teachers, textbook authors and researchers took part in these activities so that innovative teaching devices developed in these encounters even radiated to pedagogy in Turkey and led, for example, to the Turkish translation of the UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Revision and Research (Pingel 2003).²⁰ Yet, such trends are not stable and depend on the overwhelming political climate on both sides. Facing tendencies of Islamization and nationalism today, the Turkish education system becomes less open for this kind of innovation, and Erdogan’s siding with the Palestinians in the Gaza war and further militarization of the whole region gives almost no hope that Turkey would be ready to withdraw its troops and foster a reconciliation process as it had done when the referendum was held in 2004. At the time of the referendum, Erdogan was in favour

²⁰ The second edition of the Guidebook (Pingel 2010) has also been translated into Korean language.

of the island's unification because he had the hope that both, united Cyprus and Turkey, would become members of the EU. As this is no longer a viable option, the interest in the unification issue is fading away in the Turkish government as well as among Turkish Cypriots. In the case of Cyprus, reaching EU membership was a driving factor for attempts at unification. When only one part of the island reached that aim—the one that voted against unification—and the other was blocked, interest in unification died away and Europe remains confronted with a protracted conflict.

A concluding look at the broader historical background of the conflicts in Southeastern Europe²¹

The problem to balance out the interests of different ethnicities in Southeastern Europe emerged with the step by step dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of modern nationalism in the 19th century. The ethnicities we have dealt with in this chapter had their distinct places within the society of the Ottoman Empire, which consisted of different “societies” existing side by side even if not always peacefully. They were acknowledged for their cultural and religious rights, had their own communal–political representation and were often given work in governmental institutions. They were acknowledged as inhabitants of a minor status, not on equal footing with the ruling Turks. When the Ottoman polity faltered, the ethnicities developed more self–pride and self–consciousness and adopted Western European nationalism as a politico–ideological tool for the realization of their aspirations to freedom and independence. Some of them, such as the Serbs, achieved this aim forcefully, while others did so through the First World War that brought the Ottoman Empire to an end. Together with a growing sense of distinct national awareness, the ideology of the unity of the South Slav people took root, particularly

²¹ For a comprehensive history, see Ramet (2006).

in Serbia which saw itself as the master to lead the South Slavs to political unity. With the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire the South Slav people could choose their own political representative institutions and formed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (including Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia), which was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. From its very beginning, the Yugoslavian state was shattered by divergent political conceptions, ranging from a centralized to a highly federalized structure—the first advocated by Serb, the latter favoured by Croat politicians. The fierce debates over the political outlook of the state led to violent clashes and changes in the political order of the state as well as the re-distribution of power. The Second World War aggravated the inner divisions to the extreme and connected them with external relations and power politics. The country was divided, and Serbia mainly came under German, Croatia under Italian occupation forming something close to a proper but Catholic-fascist like state under Italian and German surveillance. Partisan movements arose in both parts, fighting the occupiers but also each other. The communist-oriented Tito partisans finally could unite the different resistance groups into one army and expel the occupiers from the country with the help of approaching Soviet troops. Based on the power of the partisan movement, Tito rebuilt a united Yugoslavia under the banner of Socialism. He did not shy away from using force and massacres to get rid of not only fascist but also more liberal or even socialist opponents. His propagated ideology of “brotherhood and unity” should outplay the old politico-ethnic rifts. This succeeded until the end of his government. It became apparent that the old antagonisms were still subliminally present. Already Tito had arranged a constitutional reform in 1974 giving the Republics—and in so far the ethnicities—a greater say. After his death, tendencies for federalization and difference instead of unity became stronger and exploded with the opening of the international order through the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ghosts of the past resurrected and confronted Europe with years of bloody wars and expulsions on a large scale, not known since the aftermath of the Second World War. European states tried to mitigate the violent conflict through diplomatic intervention, but in the end it was the de-

cisiveness of the US government to resort to military intervention in order to give diplomacy more power that successfully brought the warring parties to the negotiating table. The EU awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 could mitigate the conflicts in Southeastern Europe and prevent the outbreak of new open violence within and between the former warring parties, but it was less successful in solving protracted conflicts in its border region.

Concluding statement

This article is based on my personal experiences as an educational consultant to international organisations and as a participant in projects conducted within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in the post-war period. To balance the limitations inherent in this approach, I used a wide array of research on the topic I have dealt with here concentrating on publications in the English language. I approached the region as someone coming from outside with the intention to contribute to peacebuilding after a time of brutal conflict. This intention-realized only to an unsatisfactory degree-provided the perspective for my work, but should not have harmed the impartiality of my presentation and evaluation of the conflict and its aftermath.

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