

Peace agreements must address education

by Pilvi Torsti

The 1995 Dayton Accords may have brought peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina but by ignoring education they have failed as a blueprint for state-building.

Despite Dayton's broad scope, education was only mentioned as a part of an annex on human rights and fundamental freedoms. As a result, the ethno-national division of education that helped sustain the Bosnian war remains intact. For over a decade Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks have followed separate curricula. Having three education administrations in a country of under four million people is not only an inefficient use of resources but reinforces divisive nationalistic politics and consolidates ethnically-pure territories. A key goal of Dayton - reversal of ethnic cleansing via return of displaced people - is significantly hampered by unavailability of schooling for minority nationalities. Bosnia teaches us the need to ensure that education issues - and particularly the study of history - should be at the heart of peace agreements: educa-

tion is an essential long-term building block of a functional civil society.

Mostar exemplifies Bosnia's fractured education system. All the secondary school buildings are located in the parts of the city with a Croat majority and only offer the Croat curricula. Bosniak secondary school students are forced to use primary school premises in afternoons and evenings.

United World Colleges, a movement established after the Second World War to foster international understanding and the only global movement offering international secondary level education to scholarship students as a contribution to peace and understanding, is currently working in Mostar on an initiative which for the first time since the early 1990s hopes to bring students from all national groups into the

same classroom to follow a common curriculum. Challenges ahead include rebuilding the Mostar Gymnasium and financing this new intervention in post-crisis education. While quality education can only meet the needs of a limited number of students at a relatively high cost it should be noted that the introduction of the International Baccalaureate programme has had a wide influence on the reform of school systems in many countries. The project also presents a new departure for international education which typically has been offered only in stable countries.

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Mostar