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OSCE
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ZINE

Special coverage: How Bosnia and Herzegovina is raising its education standards

Russian Federation is “strong advocate” of OSCE cause: Interview with Russian Ambassador

Soul-searching on Kosovo: Recent violence poses challenge to international community





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Message from the Chairman-in-Office

Although education as a sector has not been a major concern of the OSCE in the past, I felt it essential to make it a key priority of Bulgaria's Chairmanship to help focus the attention of our 55 participating States on this critical issue. Education has a crucial role to play in building security, ensuring political stability, stimulating economic growth and reducing poverty.



I was delighted and impressed to see for myself the pioneering work that has been achieved in education by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina when I visited Sarajevo in late March. A special section in this second issue of the *OSCE Magazine* examines how Ambassador Robert Beecroft and his team, together with national and international partners, are putting a strategy on education reform into practice in a post-conflict and multi-ethnic society.

I was also gratified to see the importance attached to education by the governments and the citizens of Central Asia at an OSCE conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 5 April. The event, focusing on "Education as an Investment in the Future", produced a set of action-oriented follow-up measures. They are aimed at assisting the region's education system to adopt a more internationally-oriented approach, to aim for higher education standards for all, to strengthen vocational training, to train staff at ministries of education and to develop regional initiatives.

Related to this, I would like to highlight the role of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, which I visited on a trip to Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of April. I was highly impressed with the students of this new institution, and I am convinced that a longer-term programme encompassing the whole region is vital.

If our young people are educated about history in a balanced and accurate way, are encouraged to open their eyes to the richness of other cultures, and are equipped with the analytical skills to examine controversial issues in an objective manner, I am convinced that significant progress will be made in solving many of the apparently intractable problems confronting the OSCE region.

Solomon Passy
Vienna
May 2004

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Cover: First graders at Behaudin Selmanović Primary School in Sarajevo create collages with barley seeds in a class combining art and nature. Photo: OSCE Mission to BiH/Dejan Vekić
Photographs in the special coverage of BiH were taken by Dejan Vekić, Nermin Podžić, Kevin Sullivan and Edib Jahić.

Investing in the future of BiH

Security and education are a “natural fit”

Why has the OSCE taken on education reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina? At first glance, it may seem to be something of a stretch for a security organization. Look closer, though, and it's a natural fit: There is a direct relationship between an effective, non-discriminatory education system and long-term peace, security and stability.



“Something had to be done,” said Ambassador Robert Beecroft when he saw the poor state of education in BiH.

BY BLAIR BLACKWELL

An experienced diplomat with a background as a teacher, Ambassador Robert M. Beecroft recognized the link immediately. When he took over as Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH in 2001, he was dismayed to find the state of the education system largely unchanged from when he had first served in Sarajevo, as US Chargé d’Affaires and Special Envoy for the Bosnian Federation in 1996-1997, immediately after the war.

Because politics has dominated the education scene in BiH, the quality and standards of education of the country’s young people have suffered. Curricula and textbooks differed from region to region, depending primarily on ethnicity. Teaching material featured strongly nationalistic content and reflected open hostility to other groups.

Educators had not been trained in up-to-date teaching methods. Fresh graduates were not equipped with the necessary skills to tackle real-world challenges. Many school buildings lacked heating and basic sanitation facilities, not to mention computers.

Ambassador Beecroft’s response to the situation was swift and decisive. “When I saw that very little progress had been made in the seven years since the war,” he says, “I resolved that something had to be done. I also believed that the OSCE had the flexibility, capacity and vision to take on the challenge.”

From the head-office perspective, the Mission was in a unique position to forge ahead in educational policy development, while co-ordinating international support for the process. This would be reinforced with a field presence in 26 locations across BiH, with personnel able to work on the ground to put policy into practice, school by school.

The OSCE Permanent Council agreed, and the Mission formally took on its new mandate in July 2002.

INITIAL MEASURES

The Mission’s first step was to galvanize local educational experts, BiH authorities and international community partners. It defined a joint strategy that set out short- and long-term goals, placing education among the top priorities of BiH’s reform agenda. Hundreds of international experts and committed BiH citizens worked intensively to produce the Education Reform Strategy that was presented — by the BiH Education Ministers themselves — to the BiH Peace Implementation Council in Brussels in November 2002.

More hard work followed. First and foremost, a legal framework for change was needed. After months of drafting and intensive lobbying, the BiH Parliament unanimously adopted, in June 2003, a State-level Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education.

The law paves the way for a common standard of quality across BiH and sets out requirements for a Common Core

Special coverage

How Bosnia and Herzegovina is raising its education standards



Curriculum, nine years of compulsory education, establishment of parent and student councils, and greater school autonomy.

When fully implemented, the law will mean, for example, that a Croat or a Bosniac student from the city of Mostar in Herzegovina can transfer to a school in the Republika Srpska, or vice versa, with confidence that the student will find an inclusive and high-quality education environment anywhere in BiH.

Alongside the work on the law, preparations for a Common Core Curriculum were also under way. It started being introduced in schools in September 2003, enabling students across BiH to share a significant number of unified features in all subjects.

In science and mathematics, common elements make up more than 80 per cent of the syllabi. Even in the so-called “national” subjects, such as history, language and literature, some 50 per cent or more of the topics taught are the same.

“So often in BiH, politicians encourage the public, including students, to focus on differences,” Ambassador Beecroft notes. “The Common Core Curriculum, however, requires educational experts to focus on similarities. It proves that there is a lot that can be agreed on, even while respecting cultural differences.”

As staff members in the Mission’s Sarajevo head office were pushing for BiH-wide policy reform, some 25 staff members in the field were meeting regularly with school directors, parents, teachers and local authorities to implement reform in individual schools.

In the Mission’s first 18 months as co-ordinator of educational reform, huge strides have been made, especially concerning equal access to learning and non-discriminatory practices.

Armed with an Interim Agreement on Returnee Children, education officers explained to local communities and authorities the right of children to attend schools in the area where they were returning. By guaranteeing returnee children’s access to their own “national” group of subjects in schools, the Agreement has significantly raised the number of returnee enrolments throughout the country.

The bussing of students — in some cases, driving past a school 100 metres from their doorstep to a distant school where their nationality is in the majority — has declined. More returnee teachers have also been hired throughout the country.

Mission-sponsored roundtables and indi-

vidual consultations with school authorities are heightening awareness of the needs of Roma, national minorities, children with special needs, and other marginalized groups. Numerous schools are actively searching for local solutions, and action plans have been drawn up to ensure that best practices become the norm in BiH.

INCLUSIVE AND INTERACTIVE

The reform of university education, one of the most pressing issues, cannot be left out of the equation. As with primary and secondary education, the Mission’s primary focus in higher education is to push for the establishment of a State-level Framework Law to enable BiH to implement the commitments it signed up to in 2003, under the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Although the drafting of the law was completed in December 2003, its passage by the BiH Parliament is still uncertain due to politically based resistance.

Inaction, however, is not an option. Individual faculties in six of the seven universities in BiH are virtually autonomous and control their own funding, leaving little scope for the introduction of European-quality standards of teaching, examinations and research. Students have poor access to professors and lack democratic representation. Upon graduating, it is difficult for them to find jobs because the universities do not take account of the country’s real labour needs. It is also not easy for them to simply move to another area or to go abroad.

The link between education and economic development is critical. The OSCE Mission’s work complements the “Jobs and Justice” agenda of the Office of the High Representative. Lord Ashdown, who has repeatedly paid tribute to the OSCE Mission’s accomplishments in the sector, stresses that education is a huge priority and an investment — literally — in the country’s future.

Working closely with the citizens of BiH and in the face of daunting challenges, the OSCE Mission has made significant progress within the past two years. But there is still a long way to go. Efforts by some parties to politicize education continue, slowing the reform agenda and frustrating parents who are impatient to see tangible classroom improvements.

For the time being, the Mission’s active co-ordinating role and its commitment on the ground remain crucial.



Blair Blackwell is Information Officer in the Education Department of the Mission to BiH. She worked in international affairs in Kazakhstan and in Brussels prior to joining the Mission in 2002.



Playing “political football” with education reform penalizes every BiH citizen

Shortly after assuming the post of High Representative and the European Union’s Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2002, Lord Ashdown told the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna that the state of education in the country represented a serious obstacle to stability and security and called on the OSCE to take the lead in reforming the sector. Two years on, the former British parliamentarian remains a firm believer in the Organization’s ability to tap into its “comprehensively best grassroots network” to build civil society. Martha Freeman, Editor of the *OSCE Annual Report*, recently put some questions to Lord Ashdown.

Martha Freeman: As you know, education is a key priority of the OSCE’s Bulgarian Chairmanship. What value does the OSCE bring to the whole education reform process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and how can the OSCE ensure sustainable results?

Lord Ashdown: The OSCE is bringing immense value to the process because of its technical capacity and its diplomatic clout. It has assembled a body of expertise on education issues which enables the Organization to address this very complex subject at every level in a competent and effective way. The OSCE also has the ability to marshal the international community’s initiatives and recommendations, thus ensuring that education reform in BiH has the sustained and unanimous support of the country’s international partners.

What is your chief concern in the whole process of education reform in BiH?

I am concerned that it continues to be used as a political football by short-sighted and manipulative politicians. We are dealing with a resource on which every single citizen of BiH depends. From primary and secondary school, through to university or vocational school, the quality of service that is delivered to citizens now will have a major bearing on the country’s future. Yet, academic priorities languish while leaders bicker about unrelated issues. Children are taught in ill-equipped classrooms by over-worked teachers using out-of-date textbooks — not because the resources are lacking, but because they are not being used efficiently.

In early April, the OSCE held a conference on

OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE



The challenges of education and defence reform in BiH were at the centre of discussions between Lord Ashdown (left) and OSCE Chairman-in-Office Solomon Passy in Sarajevo (right) on 29 March. At a meeting with BiH Prime Minister Adnan Terzić, Minister Passy urged passage of the State-level Framework Law on Higher Education. This would enable BiH students to be part of a wider European higher education area under the Bologna Declaration of 1999, aimed at harmonizing European bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees.

education in Central Asia. Are there lessons from the BiH case that can be applied in that part of the world?

The lesson from BiH, I believe, may be that education is a very long-term proposition; a country does not see the returns on its investment in education for a generation, and students, teachers and parents have to lobby their leaders continuously in order to make sure that this core government responsibility is not neglected. For years, it

was neglected in BiH, with tens of thousands of children being penalized as a result.

How can the Government and its international partners ensure that efforts put into education yield results?

By listening to students, teachers and parents, one is instantly provided with an accurate analysis of how efficiently or inefficiently resources are being used.

Throughout Europe, the secular education of groups coming from different religious backgrounds is being intensely debated. How can we learn from these discussions in developing educational policy in BiH?

This is a matter for the people of BiH to determine. We have agreed on a Common Core Curriculum for all schools and I believe students, teachers and parents can build on this.

In June 2003, you warned the OSCE Permanent Council: "To

leave [the Balkans] now would snatch defeat from the jaws of victory." Almost a year later, do you still feel that way?

Absolutely. BiH is now beginning to respond to the international community's intensive engagement since 1996. Society is recovering; the first shoots of economic recovery are sprouting. The pace and scale of refugee return have confounded those who were sceptical right up until the end of the 1990s.

We are putting in place the institutional machinery to sustain a prosperous parliamentary democracy that is integrated into Euro-Atlantic political, economic and security structures. Now is definitely not the time to walk away. We must keep at it till the job is done, and the biggest boost to morale in this respect is the fact that the actions taken so far are beginning to produce positive results.

OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina: Overview

The mandate of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was established under the General Framework Agreement for Peace, which ended 43 months of conflict. Since the Agreement was drawn up in Dayton in late 1995, BiH has faced the daunting task of rebuilding itself as a multi-ethnic, democratic society. The OSCE Mission, one of the key agencies responsible for helping the country make this transition, began its work in December 1995.

The Mission's programmes are aimed at promoting the development of democratic political institutions at all levels, from the local to the State. The Mission's work covers democratization, education, human rights, public administration reform and security co-operation.

One of the Mission's key strengths is its extensive field presence, which enables it to monitor the

latest developments throughout the country and to work closely with local politicians, officials and citizens. The regional centres co-ordinate field activities to ensure that the Mission's policies and programmes are implemented consistently.

The OSCE Mission to BiH is made up of a head office in Sarajevo, four regional centres based in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar and Banja Luka, and 24 field offices that cover the entire country. Out of about 800 people working for the Mission, 600 are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, with

the rest coming from about 30 of the OSCE's 55 participating States.



This map is for illustrative purposes only and does not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the OSCE concerning names and boundaries. Illustration based on United Nations map.

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EQUAL ACCESS

Unsung heroes: Struggle to end discrimination in the classrooms

Returning refugees search for relevant education

A pupil in the Kozarac Primary School shows off his reading skills to Valerija Tisma.

BY KEVIN SULLIVAN

Sunshine drenches the blossoming hillsides. Green buds, eager to burst, dangle from the branches of poplar trees. As if mimicking nature's cycle, bright red bricks sprout from the sides of unfinished buildings.

Signs of new life are starting to stir on an early spring day in the small town of Kozarac, halfway between Banja Luka, the capital of the Republika Srpska (RS) entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and the northern region of Prijedor.

Valerija Tisma, the OSCE Mission's Regional Education Co-ordinator for this area, drives through the modest town centre to visit the scene of another revival — the

Kozarac Primary School. "This is the first town I visited when I started working for the OSCE," she recalls, as she navigates the muddy potholes with her OSCE vehicle, a white Pajero.

That was in August 2002, when Valerija had just signed on to work with the Mission's nascent Education Department. She had been sent to Kozarac to try to resolve a dispute between the education authorities and parents who were unhappy with the education their children were receiving. The parents had blocked traffic at a major crossroad as a sign of protest. For Valerija, it was a trial by fire, and an indication of what to expect in the months to come.

Returning to Kozarac Primary School a year and a half later, the memory of that first visit is still vivid as Valerija and her assistant, Nataša, enter the three-storey building. The school is sparsely decorated, like an abandoned house stripped of its personal effects, with lime-green paint splashed on white plaster walls in an attempt to warm up the cold hallways.

Through the tall, bare windows, one can see into the courtyard, where wheelbarrows overflow with wooden scraps. Donated by local sawmills, they are a vital source of heating for the school.

"We do not freeze completely, only halfway — just our fingers," says School Director Muhidin Šarić jokingly to Valerija and Nataša. They are old friends, held together by the common bond of having seen the school through troubled times.

RETURNING HOME

The Kozarac Primary School was virtually destroyed during the 1992-1995 war. The region was in the heart of Serb territory, and when fighting broke out, almost all of the area's 50,000 Bosniacs fled. As they left, their homes were razed.

According to the latest UNHCR estimates, more than 12,000 Bosniacs have now returned to the Prijedor region, many of them to Kozarac, where houses have been rebuilt with the help of international funding. However, returnees were initially wary about sending their children back to school. The classes were operating under a Serb curriculum, with a Serb administration and mostly Serb students.

A similar scenario was unfolding all across BiH, says Jo-Anne Bishop, the OSCE Mission's Adviser on access and non-discrimination issues. "Returnees were concerned that their children might face verbal

and physical assaults in school,” she says.

Valerija understands how the returnees must feel. She is originally from Knin, some 60 kilometres northwest of Split in Croatia, and was one of about 180,000 Serbs who left their homes during the Croatian Army’s “Operation Storm” in August 1995.

“If I were to return home to Croatia, I wonder how my three-year-old daughter, Mia, would fare in school,” she says. “I don’t think there are any Serb teachers there at all. Luckily, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE Mission has the mandate to co-ordinate and press for education reform.”

SEARCHING FOR A VOICE

When the OSCE first became involved in education, Bosniac parents in Kozarac were in the midst of a fierce protest. At the time, every decision — ranging from the curriculum to the hiring of teachers — was being made by a Serb school director and a Serb school board in a town 30 kilometres away. The parents wanted to have a say in their children’s education by changing the school’s status from a branch to a main school.

“We helped organize a series of meetings with Republika Srpska authorities to look into how parents’ concerns could be taken into account,” relates Valerija. “Changing the school’s status involved many layers of bureaucracy: It had to be approved by the RS Ministry of Education, then by the entire RS government, which consists of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Ministers and 16 other ministers.”

Eventually, the school was granted independence. Although the building still needed major reconstruction, at least the community could now have its own school director and local school board.

“Without people like Valerija, I could not have survived the situation,” says Mr. Šarić. “It was an extraordinary example of co-operation.”

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

What made the feat possible was the Interim Agreement on Accommodation of Special Needs and Rights of Returnee Children, which all the BiH Ministers of Education signed in March 2002. Like many official documents, it has a complicated name with a simple goal: to make returnee children feel as comfortable as possible about enrolling in their hometown schools.

In Kozarac, it meant a change in the school’s status. In other cases, it might involve creating a non-threatening atmos-



This rebuilt school in the northern region of Prijedor is educating returnee children.

phere for students or winning parents’ confidence in the quality of their children’s education.

Getting the Interim Agreement into operation posed a significant challenge. “At first there was a complete boycott by the cantons in the Federation entity — they wouldn’t recognize it,” recalls Jo-Anne Bishop. “Now you hear the Education Ministers referring to accomplishments in their areas.”

The shift in attitude came after the OSCE Mission ensured that the ministers themselves would take responsibility for developing the plan for implementing the Interim Agreement. It is an example of how the OSCE has been able to translate a piece of paper into practice in the real world.

More than 33,000 returnee pupils and students have now enrolled in their hometown schools. As a result of proactive measures, close to 1,800 qualified returnee teachers have been hired across the country. These figures are significant, considering that displaced and refugee families who return home often belong to the minority in their communities.

Azra Junuzović, OSCE Mission Education Officer, notes with satisfaction that a sense of complete local ownership of the Agreement has been fostered. “The OSCE helped get it started, but the BiH authorities have been doing the work this past year. There is still a lot to be accomplished, but now local expertise has improved, and the ministries have the capacity to continue the job.”

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

A visit to the Kozarac Primary School’s computer room shows how much the school has been transformed since its





In the village of Kamičani, a building in ruins frames a newly reconstructed school.

of the ethnic groups — Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. The confusion was reflected in the constant debates about the content of instruction and its potential to offend due to possible nationalistic connotations.

It seems almost comical, but Mr. Šarić admits that he was not even certain about which spelling or alphabet ought to be used in school. In terms of content, there was no guidance on which authors were “appropriate”. School officials even wondered if the songs the children sang in music class were “suitable”.

Then, in August 2003, the country’s Ministers of Education took a significant step forward. “They adopted a Common Core Curriculum for the whole country, and this saved us,” Mr. Šarić says, beaming. Finally, schools had the guidance they were seeking.

Kozarac is an example of how the return process can work. If it has been able to defy the considerable odds, having been the scene of some of the worst atrocities during the war, other areas with a similar history should be able to follow suit.

Valerija hopes she will see this happen. She has a personal stake in education reform: “I keep thinking of my daughter, Mia. When she starts school, whether it is here or back home in Croatia, I want her to like it. I want her to have good teachers, and I want her to get a good education.”

reopening. As the students meticulously tap away at their keyboards, the blue-green glow of the computer monitors reflects the concentration on their faces.

The IT teacher proudly tells Valerija that the school has one of the best-equipped computer facilities in the region: It has 16 computers, a ratio of one for every 21 students — far better than the national average of one computer for every 60 students.

Mr. Šarić, too, has reason to be pleased each time a challenge is tackled along the way, especially when it concerns a fundamental issue such as language.

When Yugoslavia started to break up, so did the *lingua franca* — then called Serbo-Croatian. Now, people in BiH speak variants of the same language that carry the names

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s education system: facts and figures

- ◆ Adult literacy rate is 93 per cent. (UNICEF data)
- ◆ According to data provided by school directors to the Mission to BiH, the country has 2,100 schools with some 560,000 students and a ratio of 16.5 students for every teacher.
- ◆ Children start school at age six or seven.
- ◆ Primary School enrolment is 86 per cent. (UNICEF data)
- ◆ The Republika Srpska has nine grades of mandatory primary school. The rest of the country is in the process of switching from an eight-year to a nine-year system.
- ◆ The school day is about six hours long, but some schools with four “shifts” are open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. to accommodate all the area’s children.
- ◆ After primary school, students can continue their education by attending either the four-year general secondary school in “gymnasia”, or by enrolling in vocational or professional secondary schools for two, three or four years.
- ◆ Since the war, three “parallel” curricula — Bosniac, Croat and Serb — have been developed, and are now taught.
- ◆ Curriculum development is the responsibility of education institutes closely supervised by the Ministries of Education.
- ◆ On average, teachers earn the equivalent of 255 euros a month.
- ◆ The country, which has a population of about 4.1 million, has seven universities, with a total enrollment of approximately 100,000 students.



Kevin Sullivan, Senior Public Information Officer in the OSCE Mission to BiH, headed the team that prepared this special coverage of education reform in BiH. He was a journalist and documentary producer in the United States before moving to the Balkans in 2002.

BiH education emerges from a time warp

Co-ordination and partnership hold the key



BY ELMIRA BAYRASLI

In July 2002, the OSCE Permanent Council empowered the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina to co-ordinate the efforts of dozens of local and international partners with the goal of overcoming the political inertia that was paralysing the country's educational development.

The Mission quickly assembled a small team of experts, who designed a coherent concept to help the country's educational system emerge from its time warp. Building on the work of the previous Education Working Group, the Mission invited all the parties that had a stake in the sector to take part in an Education Issues Set Steering Group, or EISSG for short.

Each stakeholder has retained its autonomy and special expertise; at the same time, each works within the Group to accelerate the pace of reform. Today, the EISSG boasts more than a hundred members, including the Office of the High Representative, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the World Bank, and numerous non-governmental organizations, government ministries and embassies.

Because of the breadth and scope covered by education-related issues, the EISSG has distributed specific tasks among six working groups. They deal with:

- ◆ access and non-discrimination
- ◆ quality and modernization of pre-primary and general secondary education
- ◆ quality and modernization of vocational education

- ◆ quality and modernization of higher education
- ◆ educational financing and management
- ◆ reform of education legislation

EISSG representatives work in partnership; the sum is truly greater than the parts. For instance, organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, with their long experience in protecting the right of all children to education, are paving the way towards improving equal access to learning opportunities and doing away with discriminatory practices. The European Commission, for its part, is laying the foundation for a high-quality primary and secondary education system that respects European norms and principles.

Along with High Representative Lord Ashdown, Michael Humphreys, the European Commission's Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, has been a strong advocate of accelerated reforms in the country's education system. He has warned at every opportunity that, if the issues were not adequately addressed, the system risked becoming "a divisive, instead of being a unifying matter".

"It is mainly through the EISSG's unified approach that our efforts have become realistic, making education reforms more sustainable," Ambassador Humphreys says.

Other EISSG participants could not agree more. The Head of the World Bank office in BiH, Dirk Reinermann, notes that in the field of financing, the chances of achieving an efficient and transparent use of public resources for education are much greater, thanks to the combined efforts within the EISSG.

Dragan Cović, one of the three members of the country's multi-ethnic presidency, greets students at the OSCE-sponsored Education Forum in Sarajevo in November 2003. He told the 400 participants that BiH must modernize its education system for the sake of the welfare and well-being of its citizens.

Similarly, Douglas Ebner, the representative of CIVITAS, a US-based civic education programme, believes that the EISSG has been helpful in “getting the essence of standards on the right track”. He praises the group for raising the profile of education by speaking in “a single, strong voice” and for not allowing BiH to sidestep the issue of reform.

“EISSG has brought education to the top of the agenda in BiH and provides political support for the passage of education laws,” says Sonja Moser-Starrach, the Council of Europe’s Special Representative in BiH.

As the lead agency for developing legislation on education in BiH, the Council of Europe oversaw the BiH Parliament’s unanimous adoption of the State-level Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in June 2003, helping the country on its path towards Europe. The State-level Framework Law on Higher Education is now on the parliamentary agenda, and the Council of Europe is relying on the EISSG’s political leadership to ensure its passage.

It will be some time, however, before the members of the EISSG can rest on their laurels. Persistence and hard work are needed to continue depoliticizing the education environment and to ensure quality teaching and learning in schools throughout the country. Among many pressing challenges, BiH has yet to set up a textbook commis-

sion and eliminate the remaining 52 examples of “two schools under one roof”, an arrangement that segregates students within the same school building, based on ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs.

As EISSG members continue dealing with the broad range of obstacles still blocking the road to education reform, their overall co-ordinator, the OSCE Mission to BiH, continues to monitor and assist each organization, making sure that the group’s commitment to transforming the country’s education landscape is translated into reality.

Slowly but inexorably, politicians are being deprived of the opportunity to use education as a tool to divide and control. Parents, teachers and educators are taking matters into their own hands, preparing the country’s children for a future in the wider world.



Elmira Bayrasli is the Spokesperson in the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina at a glance

Following the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and declarations of independence by its former constituent republics, a bitter conflict was fought in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) from 1992 to 1995. The war led to an estimated 250,000 casualties and the displacement of almost half of its population of four million.

The signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (also known as the Dayton-Paris Peace Accords) ended the war in December 1995.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now made up of two entities:

- ◆ The Republika Srpska (RS) comprises 61 municipalities.
- ◆ The Federation of BiH, which has an additional intermediary level of government, has 10 cantons and 81 municipalities.

A separate District of Brčko was also created and is administered under international supervision.

The BiH State Government consists of:

- ◆ a parliamentary assembly, which is divided into a House of Representatives and a House of Peoples;
- ◆ a rotating tripartite presidency (with one member representing each of the constituent peoples — Bosniac, Croat and Serb); and
- ◆ a Council of Ministers, comprising a Chairman and nine other ministers.

Immediately following the war, 60,000 NATO troops were deployed throughout BiH as a peacekeeping force. The numbers have been steadily reduced to about 12,000, reflecting the improving security environment.



NEUTRAL MEDIATOR

“Is grammar history?”

Searching for a textbook solution in BiH

Textbooks do not simply impart facts; they also mirror values and norms that society — or its dominant groups — want to transmit to the next generation. In a post-conflict setting like Bosnia and Herzegovina, they can also serve as flashpoints of cultural struggle and controversy. How does one begin to create an atmosphere of confidence among people with differing opinions and to foster a free debate about textbook content? With the help of local and international specialists, the OSCE has been striving to serve as a neutral mediator in the classroom.

BY FALK PINGEL

“Are you aware of your crime? Innocent victims swept downstream along the river Drina.”

It would not come as a surprise to come across this graphic description, charged with inflammatory references to the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the spate of books detailing the atrocities of the past.

However, the provocative passage was part of a grammar exercise in a textbook, in which primary schoolchildren in Sarajevo were asked to identify the genitive and accusative cases. In a country where students from the three ethnic groups that fought each other often use the same textbooks, such references wield a great deal of power to divide classrooms and communities.

The statement — an implicit indictment of one group of Bosnians by another — exemplifies the way in which the politics of the three major ethnicities were permeating the education system, making it difficult for students from different backgrounds to attend classes together. The content of textbooks triggered a public debate, with the Sarajevo-based daily, *Oslobodjenje*, publishing an article in 1998, asking: “Is grammar history?”

This was the complex situation that I faced in January 2003, when I assumed the post of Director of Education in the OSCE

Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of my first responsibilities was to take part in a newly formed review commission set up to remove objectionable and inappropriate material from textbooks. It was a daunting assignment, since we had to consider everything that could be potentially offensive to any of the three main ethnic groups in the country: Muslim Bosniacs, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats.

The OSCE Mission, the Council of Europe and the local authorities all contributed financially to the project. Twenty-four textbook specialists from BiH met to exchange findings and to discuss and agree on any material that needed to be weeded out. The Mission and the Council provided additional support by engaging internationally renowned textbook experts to provide advice on how to handle controversial topics in history books and how to ensure more balanced coverage of the various ethnic groups.

The commission reviewed and analyzed books intended for the 2003-2004 school year. Every single one of the more than 250 textbooks and manuscripts was examined, covering literature and language, history and geography, nature and society, and religion. It was a massive undertaking to present comprehensive proposals for changes to the ministers of education and publishing houses in time for the books to be printed and made available for the new school year. But it was encouraging to see proof — the single-minded dedication of the commission members — that a serious search for solutions was under way.

A third-year gymnasium student in Sarajevo is using textbooks that are free of inappropriate content, thanks to the work of an ad hoc review commission.





The process was often painful, as Bosnians were forced to wrestle with the possible impact of their beliefs on others. We repeatedly reminded the commission members to imagine their own children in the place of others from a different ethnic group. How would they feel if their children had to read from a textbook that contained derogatory phrases about their own people? Gradually, we witnessed the emergence of a genuine commitment to placing quality education ahead of politics.

One of our most difficult moments was when we came across a depiction of the famous Battle of Kosovo on the cover page of a textbook. This conflict has been a source of pride for Serbs for the past 500 years. However, it also risked arousing bitter feelings among the other ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia.

The Serb members of the commission finally agreed that the illustration did not belong in a textbook. They now had to go back to their political authorities and explain why they had agreed to delete the reference. Their willingness to compromise on such an emotionally-charged issue was a courageous step forward.

As the summer came to an end, so did the work of the commission. I was deeply impressed by the group's formidable achievements in just a couple of months. The final session was held in the Herzegovinian city of Mostar in south-west BiH. At that time, the city was still carved up into six sections as part of a power-sharing deal that gave the majority to Bosniacs in some areas and to Croats in others. No other place in BiH better epitomizes the country's ethnic divide.

Assessing the commission's work at that last gathering, I returned to the question that had originally stirred the debate — grammar textbooks. I had hoped that we would have reached a common consensus: that unacceptable ideological matters must no longer be allowed to seep into basic grammar exercises. I asked the members of the group: "Do you think we still have to consider grammar books in future textbook commissions?" The answer was an unequivocal "Yes — unfortunately."

Although we had solved the problem for the coming school year, we clearly had not yet succeeded in securing a sustainable approach to writing bias-free grammar books — not to mention history books! My enthusiasm for what we had accomplished was tempered by the thought of the tasks that still lay ahead.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The review process *did* prove that the people of BiH could come together to tackle some rather contentious education-related issues. But it was also evident that simply reviewing published books and manuscripts was not the best approach. The OSCE Mission has proposed to the education authorities that future textbook commissions should develop guidelines for authors to ensure that new textbooks address the need for an inclusive, non-discriminatory education.

The books would be written with Bosnia and Herzegovina as the main reference point, and should aim for a balanced presentation of all population groups in the country and in neighbouring States. The commission's recommendations would be an indispensable part of the textbook approval procedure, with the authors and BiH educational authorities having sole responsibility for suitability. A commission of this kind would initially focus on history and geography to ease the introduction of new comparative and multiple perspective approaches into the teaching of these subjects.

Although the textbook issue is just one among many facets of education reform in BiH, it is gaining in importance because of its potential spin-off effect on similar projects in other countries of the region. For example, the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro is involved in reviewing and improving history textbooks for the Albanian minority. And the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has asked the International Textbook Research Institute in Germany to evaluate Kosovo's new history textbooks.

I believe that our work with the textbook commission serves as a model of how OSCE assistance — through the provision of advice and international expertise, organizational skills and material support — can contribute significantly towards education reform.

Naturally, the tough decisions ultimately have to be taken by the local authorities, but in a region where identifying the difference between the accusative and genitive cases can fan powerful passions, a neutral voice can help people to move past politics to what really matters: the education of children.

Dr. Falk Pingel headed the Education Department of the OSCE Mission to BiH from January 2003 to January 2004. He has returned to his post as Deputy Director of the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany, where he has worked for the past 20 years, specializing in education on the Holocaust.



Keeping politics out of schools

Perspectives of a former teacher and parliamentarian



BY KEVIN SULLIVAN

Pencils and notebooks are put away, backpacks are tightly zipped, and coats are within easy reach for a quick getaway. The second grade pupils at Osman Nakaš Primary School in the Novi Grad section of Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are anxiously waiting for the bell to ring, signalling the end of their school shift.

But Jorunn Hageler, the OSCE Mission's Regional Education Co-ordinator for Sarajevo, has dropped by to surprise them with a visit, and they quickly settle down again.

"It's very important to go to the schools to get a sense of what is actually happening in the classrooms," says Jorunn. Her job often keeps her tied up in education-related meetings or handling managerial tasks, and interacting with young people is a way to re-energize herself.

She knows the children are studying English, so Jorunn poses a simple question: "What kind of changes would you like to see in your school?" Hands instantly shoot up, and a little girl with light brown hair answers with confidence, "Computers".

The response is hardly surprising. Close to half of the country's 2,100 schools have no computers; of the schools that do have them, half of them have reported that their computers are not in good working condition.

But Jorunn is not about to let the pupil get off that easily. After 25 years as a sec-

ondary school teacher in her native Norway, she knows only too well that children need to be challenged. She asks them a series of follow-up questions: "Why do you need computers? What can you do with them? How will they help improve your education?" This style of teaching demands analytical thinking, not simply the repetition of memorized information, which is the norm in most BiH schools.

"You have to tap into the curiosity of children," Jorunn says. "They must learn by asking questions and seeking answers. They should look upon the teacher as an adviser and as someone who guides them to find answers."

Jorunn has been with the OSCE Mission since November 2000, starting as a democratization officer, and later moving to the Education Department. Before coming to Sarajevo, she was a member of the Norwegian parliament from 1993 to 1997. This unique blend of experiences makes her ideally suited to tackle education reform issues in BiH from more than one angle.

From a teacher's vantage point, she can clearly see in practical terms that most schools in BiH are in poor shape. Classrooms are overcrowded; buildings are in a state of disrepair; teachers work without pay for months at a time; basic supplies are lacking; the curriculum is overloaded; and teaching techniques are outdated.

As a former legislator, she is aware of the root cause of many of the problems: politics.

GREETINGS

In BiH schools, even something as

"Interacting with young people is re-energizing," says Jorunn Hageler.



mundane as the way a teacher greets students can be loaded with political implications. The accepted greeting is *dobar dan*, or “good day”. But in some schools, where politics and religion have moved to the fore, teachers use either the Muslim *Salaam alaykum* (Arabic for “Peace be with you”), the Serb

Pomoz Bog (“May God help you”), or the Croat *Hvaljen Isus* (“May Jesus save you”).

As a result, greetings that are supposed to make children feel welcome in school end up having the opposite effect on many of them, depending on their faith. Osman Nakaš Primary School, for example, has 750 students; most are Bosniac, but there are also Croats, Serbs and even Roma.

Considering this diversity, the school director, Srečko Zekić, felt it was crucial to educate teachers about the importance of using non-religious greetings. But even this tiny step could endanger his job, since he is appointed by the area’s political representatives.

“The director believes people are afraid to speak out against the politicians,” says Jorunn. “Politicians have been trying to convince him to have a mono-ethnic school — and it is to his credit that, so far, he has been standing firm against the pressure.”

OUTSIDE CURRICULUM

Religiously coloured greetings are one of a range of issues that must be resolved, but which are also taking the focus away from other pressing concerns. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to make much headway in matters such as curricula and teaching methodologies.

For example, Mr. Zekić attempted to update classroom instruction by sending his teachers to a training programme on modern, interactive teaching techniques that engage students and encourage them to use critical thinking. But the system is designed in such a way that schools cannot take their own initiatives without the consent of political representatives. For the time being, the cantonal Ministry of Education has decided to limit the programme to first- and second-grade pupils.

“They don’t want to introduce an ‘outside curriculum’ in the schools,” Mr. Zekić says

with a shrug. That may sound reasonable, but he adds that, in fact, the programme does not deal with the curriculum at all; it merely introduces a more contemporary teaching method. For some politicians, it is all a matter of control.

“The country’s leaders are focusing on issues related to ethnicity and culture,” reflects Jorunn. “Many educators and school directors are interested in advancing real reforms but are being held back by the political process.”

Here is just how complicated it can get: Once a law on education is passed, the local Ministry of Education must issue instructions, based on the law, to the schools. This means that even when modernization measures are included within the scope of the law, school officials cannot implement them until they get the go-ahead from their superiors. In some cases, the ministers will not issue these instructions without a green light from their political party leaders.

On top of these frustrations, schools suffer from a serious and persistent lack of resources. According to information provided by school directors to the OSCE Mission, about 400 schools do not have adequate heating, more than 750 do not have gyms, about 500 do not have libraries, and 600 schools do not have a telephone connection.

PRACTISING DEMOCRACY

Jorunn is convinced that fundamental views about education in BiH simply have to change. While students learn about democracy, basic democratic tenets are not regularly practised in the classroom. Students are often afraid of their teachers and are expected not to ask questions. One way to change this mindset is through student councils, which are now being set up throughout the country. Once students gain a voice, they may be more willing to use it in class.

The real potential for change rests in the hands of people like Director Zekić. He has worked at the school for 32 years with a proven commitment to a fair, open and modern education. He is encouraging other school directors to follow his lead, and has even taken to echoing a mantra of the international community: “Do you want to join Europe or not?”

Jorunn says that everyone with a stake in an improved system — pupils, parents and school authorities — is longing for improvements. “They are all looking forward positively to the reforms. They are impatient to see changes. And that’s the best impetus any project can have.”



PERMANENT COUNCIL

Russian Federation is “strong advocate” of OSCE cause

Ambassador Alexander Y. Alekseyev, Head of Delegation of the Russian Federation to the OSCE from August 2001 to early 2004, says the Organization is “an indispensable pillar of the new all-European security architecture”.

However, in an interview with OSCE Press Officer Mikhail Evstafiev, the 58-year-old diplomat warns that “obvious structural flaws” risk undermining the OSCE’s credibility. Russia’s Istanbul commitments, the situation in Chechnya, the OSCE’s principle of consensus and the role of field missions are just some of the wide-ranging issues that the Ambassador discusses in his summing up of his term in Vienna.

Mikhail Evstafiev: What challenges were you faced with when you arrived in Vienna nearly three years ago?

Ambassador Alekseyev: It was a rather difficult time for the OSCE. In December 2000, the Ministerial Council in Vienna had revealed a number of crisis trends and imbalances in the Organization. A great deal of effort was needed to overcome this dangerous impasse and to put the OSCE back on the Helsinki track.

We should really thank the 2001 Romanian Chairmanship, who displayed the bravery and determination to start a process of thorough analysis of the Organization’s shortcomings and to develop a programme of action, including the reform process, designed to maintain the relevance of the OSCE in a changing political environment.

It goes without saying that the events of 11 September 2001 represented a turning point in the development of the OSCE — a wake-up call to make us all realize that in order to effectively combat new risks and threats, especially terrorism, we should put aside our differences and get down to real business.

How do you see the relationship between the OSCE and the Russian Federation, especially in the period since the Istanbul Summit of 1999?

The Russian Federation has always been a strong advocate of the OSCE cause. Russia regards the OSCE as an indispensable pillar of the new all-European security architecture, with common values and norms of behaviour for all States.

The OSCE Summit in Istanbul played an important role in the history of the Organization by adopting a Charter for European Security, which established a set of principles and commitments for equal cooperation between the OSCE participating States. In Istanbul, we all agreed to regard these voluntary commitments as an integral package, without differentiating between more important and less important ones.

Unfortunately, immediately after the Istanbul Summit, some parties displayed a clear amnesia regarding this core principle and started singling out certain commitments of certain countries, while totally forgetting about their own. This practice of double standards has taken a negative toll on the OSCE’s credibility and is still undermining its democratic and impartial foundations.

One appalling example is the situation of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia and Estonia. Let me be blunt: In the centre of Europe, hundreds of thousands of peo-

ple are being deprived of their elementary human rights — citizenship, voting rights, the right of their children to receive education in their native languages, and so on. And this abnormal situation, which endangers security and stability in Europe, is practically being ignored by the OSCE.

There is much talk of Russia's Istanbul commitments. What is your perspective on this?

The Russian Federation has proved its seriousness in complying with the Istanbul commitments contained both in the Charter and the Istanbul Declaration. Russia has fulfilled — well ahead of schedule — all the relevant commitments undertaken in the context of the adopted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). The Bucharest and Porto Ministerial Council Meetings in 2001 and 2002 confirmed the progress that had been achieved in the implementation of outstanding agreements and commitments, including those concerning Georgia and Moldova.

There is a real possibility that, given the political will of all concerned, this question will be resolved, provided, of course, that all the necessary conditions are in place. At the same time, we would urge other OSCE countries to display a similarly constructive attitude and to fulfil their own Istanbul commitments in a fair and unselective way.

How do you view the closure of the OSCE Missions in Estonia and Latvia and the subsequent work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in these countries?

When the two Missions were about to be closed, I urged the Organization not to make a mistake that could undermine the OSCE's credibility and the prospects of its field activities. The issue of mass statelessness and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population in Latvia and Estonia had not been resolved in any way.

In the two years since the closure of the Missions, the situation of the Russian-speaking minority has deteriorated rather than improved. It has become clear that the efforts of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities have not been sufficiently influential to change the discriminatory policies of these two countries' authorities.

If the OSCE does not make this issue a priority and start working with the same determination as other international bodies, the ability of this Organization to work impartially and effectively in the human dimension will be called into question.

Going back to the issue of double standards, could you explain where you see the problems and what you believe should be done differently?

We think that, in its present form, the OSCE does not meet its proclaimed goal of serving as a democratic forum for equal dialogue and co-operation among all 55 participating States. I will explain why.

First of all, the OSCE has lost its individual nation-based nature. Instead of being one family of 55 equal States, united by common goals and values, the OSCE is now split between different "exclusive clubs" of countries pursuing their own political agendas and interests. Very often, dialogue is replaced by a patronizing and moralizing approach by certain countries, and equal co-operation gives way to robust political pressure.

As you know, a game without rules benefits those who are strong at the expense of those who are weak or who do not have the privilege of belonging to exclusive groupings. If this situation were to continue, it would further devalue the OSCE's credibility. The absence of established rules and procedures — our so-called flexibility — opens the gate for the extensive use of so-called "administrative resources" or "under-the-carpet diplomacy" by certain groupings or countries.

This situation is aggravated by the lack of proper accountability and transparency in the activities of major institutions and field operations. It leads to the violation of established mandates and the mismanagement of financial and personnel resources. The lack of a fair consultation process, both within the OSCE and between the OSCE and host States, has contributed to a deterioration in the relationship between them and has caused some internal crises.

These are only some of the most obvious structural flaws in the OSCE. The list could be expanded endlessly. Left unattended, those shortcomings have already resulted in — and are still leading to — more dangerous political effects such as biased and politicized approaches, geographical imbalances and a division between "equal" and "more equal" nations.

Do you believe that the OSCE can play a constructive role in ending the crisis in Chechnya and, if so, in what way?

I believe that what you call the "crisis" in Chechnya already belongs to the past. The Russian federal and Chechen authorities are now doing their utmost, through the process of political settlement, to return life in the Chechen Republic to normality in all spheres: political, economic and social.

As to whether the OSCE can play a constructive role or contribute some real added

value in assisting Chechnya's current rehabilitation, I have my doubts. I will try to explain.

The political settlement process in the Republic is aimed at creating legally elected bodies. With a view to this objective, a constitutional referendum and presidential elections were held in Chechnya in 2003. The OSCE was invited to observe these two events because we felt that a positive assessment of the voting processes by the OSCE could have represented a constructive contribution by this Organization to the political settlement.

But the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) chose not to send observers to the referendum, limiting its role to dispatching a small assessment team — and not even that, to the presidential elections. The pretext given for not sending observers is not so important now, since other international organizations sent representatives to the Republic and assessed the electoral processes in Chechnya as being free and democratic.

What is important here is the obvious lack of political will on the part of the OSCE and the ODIHR to play a constructive role in Chechnya. The purpose of the position taken by the OSCE Chairmanship and ODIHR was evident: to cast a shadow on the legitimacy of the elected President of the Chechen Republic.

As far as the viability of a possible OSCE role in the economic and social reconstruction of Chechnya is concerned, I still don't have an answer. We have been trying for quite some time to identify some specific projects in this field. Unfortunately, most of the offers we received were not of real practical value and did not correspond to Chechnya's needs.

Russia is currently co-operating with many international organizations in Chechnya — in particular those within the United Nations system, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Council of Europe — and we want to avoid duplication.

Total international assistance amounts to just 5.7 per cent of the funds being channelled into reconstruction in Chechnya, with the remaining 94.3 per cent coming from the Russian federal budget. This co-operation is taking place within the Chechen Republic's federal programme of social and economic reconstruction.

Good examples of such co-operation are ICRC projects with funding of \$21 million for 2004 and UNESCO activities in the field of

education, amounting to \$2 million.

I doubt that the OSCE can offer anything comparable in terms of funding and expertise. What is really needed in Chechnya is assistance in reviving the construction industry, creating jobs, improving health care and education, and building apartments for returning internally displaced persons (IDPs) and all those who lost their homes.

Are you in favour of the OSCE shifting its geographical focus more towards the Caucasus and Central Asia? What role would you like the Organization to play in these regions?

In principle, the OSCE should pay equal attention to all its participating States and regions. We all have the same commitments and none is without shortcomings. I am against artificially focusing on any specific region, since this could lead to a deepening of the geographical imbalance in the OSCE.

Our Organization should address specific problems in different countries. Take, for example, irregularities in the election process, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in Europe, corruption and press freedom on both sides of the Atlantic, human trafficking across the OSCE area — whether in Russia, Austria or Sweden — unresolved conflicts to the West and to the East of Vienna, national minorities in Latvia and Estonia, and imperfections in the functioning of the penitentiary system in quite a number of participating States.

Of course, some OSCE participating States, including those in Central Asia or the Caucasus, may well request OSCE assistance. If funds are available and if the requests are in line with the OSCE's mandate, I don't see any problem about the Organization's responding. What is important is that any assistance should be explicitly requested by the host country's authorities and delivered in a transparent way, and, again, with the proviso that adequate financial resources are available.

Having studied the OSCE closely from the inside, would you recommend any changes in its structure or the way it works to improve its effectiveness? And how do you see the future of OSCE field missions?

To keep up to date with the evolving security environment, the OSCE needs to have the capacity for constant change and development. The process of OSCE transformation and adaptation should be a permanent one. The practice of other international organizations, including the United Nations, confirms this.

We believe that the process of OSCE reform should be based on two pillars. The

first pillar should rest on the formulation of a new political agenda for the OSCE which would embrace the entire OSCE region and the politico-military, the economic/environmental and the human dimensions. The decisions adopted at the Ministerial Council Meeting in Maastricht in December 2003 are an important step in this direction.

The second pillar should be a programme of comprehensive internal reforms covering various aspects of the OSCE's structure and activities. The reform efforts should go hand in hand with the elaboration of the new agenda in order to sustain the whole process and keep it forward-looking.

The issue of OSCE field activities is the most pressing. The missions, in their present form, have lost their initial meaning as a mechanism for assisting countries, acting at their request. They often act along lines which have nothing to do with their mandates.

Instead of assisting, the missions interfere in internal affairs and do not properly consult with the authorities of the host countries. The main focus of their activities has shifted from assistance to monitoring and criticism. Furthermore, there is still an obvious lack of due transparency and accountability in their finances and personnel policies.

This has already resulted in a number of conflicts between missions and host authorities. I am convinced that, unless the current situation changes, the days of field activities are numbered.

I would also like to say a few words on an issue which has been raised on the margins of some recent OSCE events:

the principle of consensus. The opinion has been expressed that this principle has already outlived itself, has become an obstacle to the OSCE, and should be changed or abolished. The Russian Federation sees such views as very dangerous and as threatening the very existence of the OSCE.

The consensus rule is a basic principle of the Organization, confirmed in a number of OSCE decisions, including the Charter for European Security. It arms the OSCE with a genuinely democratic tool that provides all countries, big or small, with equal rights in decision-making and in the shaping of OSCE policy.

Without the consensus rule, the OSCE risks turning into a forum in which a majority of countries will impose their will upon the minority, making them, in the process, pay money for activities they do not agree with. Under such a scenario, quite a number of countries would not stay a day longer in the Organization.

Yes, it's true, sometimes it takes a lot of effort and time to build consensus. The outcome depends to a great extent on the will and diplomatic skills of the Chairmanship. But if the process is structured properly and transparently and the concerns of all States are duly taken into account, things can be resolved much more easily. And we will then have a powerful instrument, sometimes even much stronger than legally binding decisions.

Thirty years of the OSCE have proved the effectiveness and relevance of consensus, and we should do everything to maintain and strengthen it.

AMBASSADOR ALEXANDER Y. ALEKSEYEV served as Director of the Third Asian Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry from 1998 to 2001, prior to his appointment in Vienna. His overseas postings have included Pakistan, where he was Ambassador from 1993 to 1998, and two stints in India, from 1969 to 1974 and from 1980 to 1985. Born in Moscow in 1946, Ambassador Alekseyev graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and holds a Ph.D. in History.



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REBUILDING CONFIDENCE

Soul-searching on Kosovo

March violence poses challenge to international community

How could this have happened in the fifth year of a heavy international presence? The outbreak of violence in Kosovo from 17 to 19 March served as a brutal reminder to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and its partners that their efforts to bring about a more tolerant and democratic society in the province still had a long way to go. To do its part, the OSCE has responded swiftly and reappraised its approach.

“Some of the damage can be repaired, some not. Building trust and confidence will be difficult and doesn’t stand a chance of succeeding if the efforts are not mutual. One day, the international community will be gone, and we will have to learn to live together.”

**Edita Buçaj,
Press Officer, OMIK,
reflecting on the
March events.**

BY BRYAN HOPKINSON

On 16 March, Kosovo-Serb residents of Cagllavicë/Caglavica, a village just outside the capital, Pristina, blocked the main Pristina-Skopje highway in protest against an earlier drive-by shooting which had wounded a local resident.

That same evening, in the northern village of Çabër/Cabra, three Kosovo-Albanian boys drowned in the Ibar river. A fourth boy, who survived, said that they had been harassed by Serbs with a dog.

These two separate incidents led to three days of rioting by crowds of Kosovo-Albanians. The violence spread to other areas, directed mainly against Kosovo-Serb communities, but also against other groups and UNMIK targets.

The death toll reached 19. More than 900 people were injured and some 4,000 were left homeless. Nearly 800 houses and about 30 Orthodox religious sites were either damaged or destroyed.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

Kosovo is still struggling with many problems, and there are enough reasons for people to be unhappy. Jobs are scarce and the economy is not growing fast enough to support a growing population. Indeed, there could even be a recession this year, as currency inflows and the international presence continue to shrink.

Constant policy disagreements between UNMIK and the locally-elected Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) are magnified by the media, weakening the credibility of both structures. This situation helps create the impression that Kosovo is going nowhere and cannot offer any future to its young people. Observers noted that male teenagers made up the majority of rioters.

Then, there is, of course, the ever-present question of Kosovo’s final status. The continuing uncertainty is far from helpful in bringing about stability.

However, popular dissatisfaction alone would not have sustained the violence for three straight days in almost every part of Kosovo. Based on eyewitness accounts, it seemed obvious that the crowds were being directed and manipulated.

Everyone in Kosovo knows that there are certain elements in society that are always ready to take up violence for political or criminal ends. Still, no one was quite prepared for the extent of damage and destruction that these elements could inflict once they gained control of angry crowds.

REVIEWING OSCE ROLE

It was clear that the international community had to take these unexpected developments very seriously. What was to stop the violence from erupting again every time a provocation arose? Part of the answer lay in identifying and prosecuting those who were mainly responsible. But, equally clearly, we at the OSCE had to dig deeper into the root causes of the violence.

Since 1999, Kosovo has been administered by a Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General. The four pillars of the administration are: police and justice (United Nations), civil administration (United Nations), institution-building (OSCE) and economic development (European Union).

As a pillar of UNMIK, what could the OSCE Mission in Kosovo do to respond?

During the disturbances, our main concern was the protection of our staff, especially those of Serb ethnicity. Several were



Mitrovica, 18 March: the calm after the storm. The Ibar river divides the town into two ethnic parts.



Bryan Hopkinson has been Director of the Office of Political Affairs in the OSCE Mission in Kosovo since November 2002. His previous experience includes posts as Director of the International Crisis Group offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (immediately after the 1999 conflict) and Montenegro. Between 1980 and 1996, he was a member of the British Diplomatic Service, specializing in African and European Community affairs, serving in London, Uganda and Portugal. In 1995-1996, he served as his country's Ambassador in Sarajevo during the last phases of the Bosnian war and the early months of implementation of the Dayton peace process.

given refuge in the OSCE headquarters in Pristina. Sadly, some, including international staff, lost their homes to arson. To our relief, no OSCE staff member was seriously injured.

SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Once the security of staff was assured, we focused on reassessing the Mission's policy in the wake of the incidents. The Head of Mission, Ambassador Pascal Fieschi, created five task forces to review policy aspects that appeared to be directly related to the underlying causes of the violence. The task forces' work cuts across the Mission's various departments:

Youth and education. Why were so many young people prepared to go out into the streets and attack their fellow citizens? What more can the OSCE do to help them build a promising future and nurture their efforts to become useful members of society?

Inter-community affairs. The OSCE and its local and international partners had invested heavily in promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation programmes. Why was this investment not enough to prevent the re-emergence of hatred? Was it simply that our message had not been reaching the radical parts of society — those most likely to resort to violence?

Media. Many residents said that their deep anger at the alleged Serb involvement in the Ibar drownings had driven them onto the streets. Observers have said that this reaction had been directly provoked by excited and uncritical broadcasting on the night of 16 March.

The OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media has said that if it had not been for the reckless and sensationalist reporting, the events could have taken a different turn and might not have become so vicious and brutal. Others have also remarked that if the media had taken more measured actions and weighed their possible consequences, the riots might not have taken place at all.

Why did the capacity to do this not exist, after several years of media development programmes sponsored by the OSCE and others?

Fear of the past. Why is the Serb community still the target of choice for Albanian extremists when its reduced numbers hardly constitute a threat? Can anything more be

done to lift the dead weight of history from the people of Kosovo?

Monitoring and capacity-building.

Why were the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government so powerless and so lacking in influence to prevent and stem the violence? What can be done to help them be better able to carry out their responsibilities, especially since the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan gives them far-reaching tasks and duties?

[The Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan was launched on 31 March by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Harri Holkeri, and PISG Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, after several months of preparation. The plan lays out a series of measures that need to be taken to create a pluralistic, tolerant and modern democratic society in Kosovo.]

Members of the task forces are in unanimous agreement that OMiK should continue to offer a model of partnership to the people and institutions of Kosovo. However, they acknowledge that this model remains vulnerable to forces prepared to turn to violence to achieve political ends at any cost.

To reduce this vulnerability, the task forces have made the following recommendations:

- ◆ Engage all elements of society, including those that are known to be hostile to the international community's objectives, and try to identify opportunities for bridge-building, if this is at all possible; at the very least, undertake an accurate assessment of the balance of forces in society.
- ◆ Develop a dual-track approach to capacity-building and to monitoring of performance of governmental, media and civil-society structures. If it is to be forward-looking, monitoring must feed back into capacity-building; otherwise it becomes an end in itself, with no progress being made.
- ◆ Work towards fostering an improved attitude of mutual respect at all levels of society, especially among young people.

This programme is not meant as an instant formula to transform Kosovo. Changing a society is a task beyond the resources of the OSCE or any other organization, and experience shows that the results never fall into place as neatly as planned.

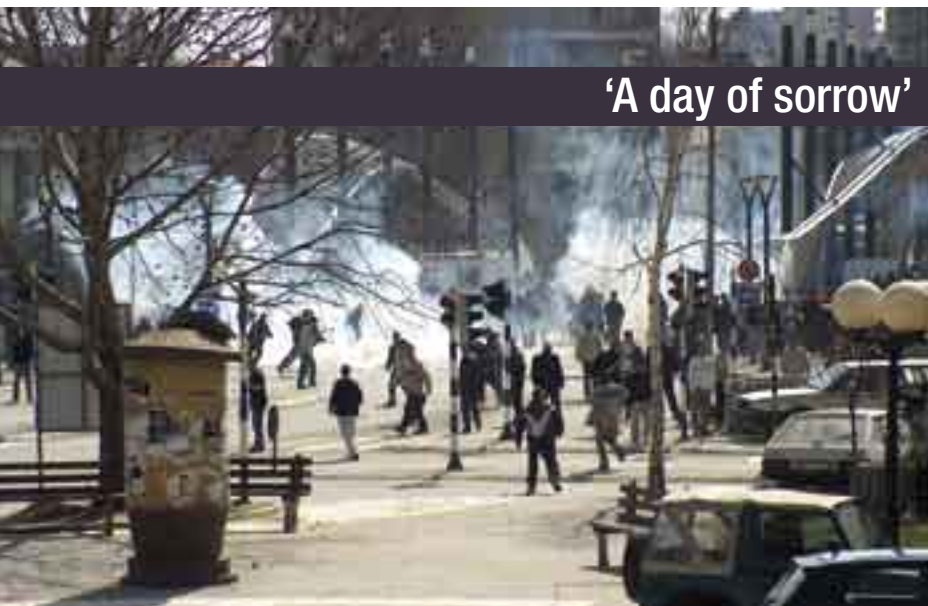
Nonetheless, OMiK can — and should — continue offering valuable support to the vast majority of people in Kosovo who still have hopes for a bright future and for an escape from the failed and destructive models of the past.

"This is a day of sorrow for all the people of Kosovo. Violence only causes personal pain and harms relations between communities. More importantly, it will make it more difficult to finding long-lasting solutions to the problems in Kosovo. In the light of these tragic incidents, the people in Kosovo and their political leaders have a responsibility to bring calm and continue on the path of embracing democracy and civil society ... The media have a great responsibility to factually report on events and not be party to creating more tensions. If claims made in and by the media cannot be verified, then they too must accept responsibility for misinforming the public."

Ambassador Pascal Fieschi, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, in a message to the people and leaders of Kosovo, including the media. Pristina, 18 March

"The violence in Kosovo is not acceptable in democratic societies and it is not welcome on the path to Europe. The perpetrators of the violence should be brought to justice. We expect an urgent action plan from the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government and would like them to give feedback on how the international community can help."

CiO Solomon Passy, in a joint visit with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. Pristina, 22 March



'A day of sorrow'

"Evidence that, to some degree, the violence that broke out on 17 March was organized and orchestrated, does not excuse errors of journalism. The factual accuracy, tone and context of reports touching on any aspect of ethnicity are particularly crucial to prevent broadcasts from becoming immediate catalysts for violence. In the face of explosive

allegations, there is no latitude in professional journalism for rumour or guessing about the truth."

Temporary Media Commissioner Robert Gillette, in a report examining the performance of three Kosovo-wide television broadcasters. Pristina, 23 April

To read the report, see www.osce.org/kosovo

'Tragic lack of balancing voices'

"For several crucial days, the media in Kosovo borrowed some of the characteristics of its own un-free, pre-democratic past, features that I personally know only too well: lack not only of objectivity but also of plurality. What we witnessed in Kosovo was not just one-sided, careless and unprofessional journalism in a post-conflict volatile society, but it was a tragic lack of other balancing voices..."

"... Specifically the broadcasting sector displayed unacceptable

levels of emotion, bias, carelessness, and falsely applied 'patriotic' zeal. The reporting on the evening of 16 March by the three main Kosovar TV channels deserves the strongest possible criticism. In contrast, the mainstream print media, with some unfortunate exceptions, displayed rather more constructive behaviour.

"... The clear spin given by the media in accounts of the fatal drowning of a group of children ... seems to be unsupported by any journalistically

valid accounts. Neither can one say these accounts were informed by a desire to help avoid violence ..."

"While displaying the weaknesses it did, the media was not, of course, intentionally instigating violence. But the media has a responsibility to react properly and professionally to serve the best interests of the population of Kosovo.

"Without the reckless and sensationalist reporting on 16 and 17 March, events could have taken

a different turn. They might not have reached the intensity and level of brutality that was witnessed or even might not have taken place at all."

Miklos Haraszti, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, in a special report to the OSCE Permanent Council, on the role of the local media in the March events in Kosovo. Vienna, 22 April

To read the report, see www.osce.org/fom



ON THE SPOT

Malaise in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica

Too close for comfort: Watching progress go up in flames

“On 17 March, I happened to be in Mitrovica. The sirens filled me with fear and panic. What happened exceeded my worst nightmares. My only thoughts were of the safety of my wife and son. They were at home in Gracanica — so close, and yet so far away.”

Slavisa Mladenovic
Language/
Administrative
Assistant, OMiK,
in a note to a friend.

BY BERNARD VRBAN

I sniffed a hint of impending trouble when I walked into the OSCE’s field office in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica early on Wednesday, 17 March.

I was told by the security guards that on the previous evening, RTK, the public broadcaster, had reported on the drowning of three Albanian boys in the Serb-majority municipality of Zubin Potok. The reports said that they were chased into the river by Serbs who had unleashed a dog on them.

Although the story had yet to be confirmed by police, tensions were mounting. Schoolchildren, holding up placards and accompanied by their teachers, slowly paced through town in silent protest over what they believed to have been another inter-communal crime.

It was not long before international Special Police Units came into the “Confidence Zone”, parking close to the bridge leading to the north. A group of Albanian men gathered, waving the Albanian flag and threatening to cross the bridge. Once they broke through the ranks of the police on the southern side, a brief street skirmish ensued on the northern

side, where some Serbs stood waiting. The Albanian tide found itself pushed back across the bridge.

Had it all been over after a few rocks and punches were thrown, few people outside of Kosovo would have got wind of the incident. But it escalated into semi-automatic gunfire and lobbing of grenades, leaving seven dead in the former mining town, some 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Pristina.

We — Albanian, Serb and international OSCE staff — could only watch the unfolding violence helplessly and in disbelief from the windows of the sixth and top floor of the OSCE office building, a mere few hundred meters from the bridge. We saw young Albanians attacking police units to try to stop their advance through the pedestrian mall.

MEDIA DISSERVICE

As part of my job, I monitored the media coverage of the events, which was deeply disappointing. Not only had RTK done a disservice to its entire public in Kosovo the night before by sensationalizing a story without making any effort to look into the facts, it then went on to fuel passions by broadcasting “live on the spot”, focusing on a schoolchildren’s march to the village where the three boys had lost their lives.

I was expecting RTK, at the very least, to interview a Kosovo-Albanian official who, I was hoping, would send a constructive message and appeal for calm. To my dismay, when an official finally did go on the air, it was to sprinkle his statements with offensive phrases and expressions.



A Serb station's performance was no better. True, its brief newscast on the incident on the bridge was factual, and true, a Kosovo-Serb member of parliament who was interviewed sought to ease the tensions, but these were quickly followed by a nationalistic feature film about the situation of Serbs under the Ottoman Empire.

I was in close contact with the office of the Temporary Media Commissioner, an independent body that oversees the media in Kosovo with the support of the OSCE. It was clear that the Commissioner, Robert Gillette from the United States, would have to take action after the dust had settled.

That evening, the United Nations evacuated the Serb employees of the OSCE's Mitrovica office from our building to the north, where they lived. Together with seven other international staff, I was moved to United Nations quarters immediately adjacent to the bridge. This was where we spent the night, waiting anxiously for news developments, phoning friends and colleagues, speculating on what had gone wrong and what might still unfold.

It was the worst night that most of us had ever spent in Kosovo. It was not the cold and damp in the bunker that made us shiver, but the day's tragedy.

18 MARCH, THURSDAY

The following day was spent in anticipation — of exactly what, we did not know. Would there be more clashes? Would things return to "normal"? Could we all get on with our lives and our work? Thankfully, the day passed without any turmoil, since KFOR — NATO's Kosovo Stabilization Force — had taken control of the town and imposed a curfew.

However, reports of another major impending clash that evening forced KFOR to relocate all international staff from the OSCE, the UN, UNHCR and other agencies to the French KFOR base on the southern outskirts of Mitrovica.

Once we arrived at the camp, though, we all wished we had remained in town, for we found ourselves witnessing a scene of conflagration, accompanied by sounds of gunfire. The village of Svinjare, hardly a kilometre away, was going up in flames.

The homes of Kosovo-Serbs — about 112 — had been set ablaze. We were later told by KFOR that the villagers had been evacuated hastily, just before the mobs came in by bus.

The people of the village, some 119 families, were taken to the mess hall of the French KFOR base, where they had their



More than a hundred houses in the village of Svinjare went up in flames.

Photos of scenes around Kosovo on 17-18 March are courtesy of UNMIK's Afrim Hajrullahu.

meals and slept, crowded together. They passed the time smoking and exchanging thoughts on what might happen to them. They commiserated with one another and called relatives in other Serb-majority areas.

Slowly, they began to move to the crest of the hill overlooking their village, taking in what they had feared since 1999. Svinjare, which had been half-Albanian and half-Serb, was no more.

I have been involved in humanitarian work before and have worked among the "internally displaced", but never will I forget the sadness, the loneliness, and the desperation that I saw in an old woman's eyes that night as she watched her hopes, dreams and memories vanishing into thin air.

One of my colleagues, who works closely with many ethnic communities, was greatly shaken by the events — as were we all. Hardly a single municipality with a Serb population was left untouched. Orthodox churches that had stood for centuries were among those that were either destroyed or pillaged.

We remained in the camp for six days, waiting for the situation to calm down, glued to the radio. No one dared say it, but deep down, each one of us knew that once outside the safety of our sanctuary, we would all have to face a drastically different Kosovo from the one we were used to.

Bernard Vrbanić was a Media Democratization Officer in the OMIK field office in Mitrovica, which has about 60 staff members. He has just assumed a new assignment as OMIK's Deputy Spokesperson.



"The international community is united in its efforts to prevent such violence happening again. Violence and intolerance do not help to resolve the situation in Kosovo. On the contrary, they complicate it."

Chairman-in-Office Solomon Passy, meeting with senior government officials of Serbia and Montenegro. Belgrade, 24 March

Kosovo images

Conveying the
OSCE story to a
home audience

BY CAROLYN MCCOOL

What did you actually do?" "What was it like?" "Why did you go?" I am asked these questions all the time, about my stay in Kosovo.

I try to explain it this way: "We go to the most difficult places on earth in search of our common humanity, to discover what binds us together despite the chasms that have opened up between us, and to help build — or rebuild — the bridges that will strengthen our connections with each other."

Somehow, though, no explanation seems to make sense, except to those who were there, those who are still there and, most importantly, those who will always be there.

But it's not good enough to say that it's really hard to talk about it, is it?

Perhaps that is why I agreed to take part in the making of the film, *Kosovo: Fragile Peace*, which was produced by the National Film Board of Canada. The folks back home are not only entitled to know what we at the OSCE do, and why; they must also learn to understand our work if it is to be sustainable — and sometimes images speak more eloquently than any lecture or report could.

The film focuses on the first central election in Kosovo, in 2001. At that time, I was the Director of Democratization for the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK), and my daughter, Kate Oja, was there on a six-month visit.

The film is also about Kate and me, and that was not easy for us. Moira Simpson, a filmmaker from Vancouver, and our friends at the National Film Board had to convince us that there had to be a personal angle so that the overall message could be better appreciated by the wider Canadian public,



which was not as familiar with issues in the Balkans as the European audience was.

The one-hour film premiered in several Canadian cities in 2003. In Ottawa, my contracting agency, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), hosted the event, which attracted an audience of some 450 — more than could fit in the auditorium. Since then, the WUSC has distributed the film to its wide network of universities. It has also been shown at special events such as the Amnesty International Film Festival.

"TOO POSITIVE"

The response has been overwhelmingly favourable, with one interesting exception: on several occasions, after the question-and-answer portion, Albanian- and Serbian-Canadians have come up to me — separately — saying that we had shown the other community in too positive a light.

Certainly, striking the right balance was one of the greatest challenges we encountered in doing the film, and we did not lay claim to perfection or even wisdom. What was uppermost in our minds was: It is always the task of a mission member to serve — and to try to understand — all communities, particularly those that have been in violent conflict with each other.

There are many things that are not in the film. My experiences as the Director of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Region for the OSCE, from August 1999 through December 2000, are not there — a huge gap, considering the role that city and that region played in the early post-conflict era.

Nor, I must say honestly, was there really any sense of what the OSCE Mission in Kosovo was like behind the scenes, either internally, or in relation to the more private and confidential aspects of our activities with the peoples of Kosovo.

Finally, the film ends with the announcement of election results and does not enter the fascinating, complex and highly charged

Carolyn McCool at a voting centre in Kosovo in 2001.

Photos: National Film Board of Canada

world of practical, day-to-day governance. Former colleagues who shared with me that very emotional, freezing-cold day in November 2001 would know what a gap this was, since that was the day when fairly elected representatives of all the communities of Kosovo came together under one roof in Pristina for the first time.

But a film must have a beginning and an ending, and filmmakers must go home at some point to begin the long and difficult process of creation. It took nearly a year, and the result is *Kosovo: Fragile Peace*.

PEACE-BUILDING HERITAGE

Canadians have a special regard for peace-building. Outside our country, it is hardly known that Canadian diplomat and statesman Lester B. Pearson, who later became Prime Minister, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957 for an initiative to send a United Nations force to the Suez Canal, in order to quell the outbreak of violent conflict between Egypt and Israel. This was the beginning of the modern practice of peace-keeping, and subsequently, peace-building.

I believe that Canadians working in field operations try to live up to this heritage. To have been able to do this within the OSCE, a regional organization dedicated to the advancement of the highest ideals of security and

co-operation between people and between nations, has been an honour for me.

If I have one request of OSCE colleagues — whether they are with national delegations, in the Secretariat, and the institutions, or on field missions — it would be this: Find some way to share with people in your home countries what the OSCE is all about. Make it alive, make it real for them. Particularly in these days of doubt and confusion about the nature of institution-building, of democratization in the widest sense of the word, we must all take personal responsibility for supporting those who have demonstrated an ability to get the job done.

The OSCE is one of the organizations that is making a difference. Do for it what you can, and you will be doing it for those whom it serves.

Carolyn McCool, a lawyer specializing in assistance to refugees, lived and worked in Kosovo from August 1999 to September 2002. She is one of some 150 Canadian civilian experts who have been deployed to south-eastern Europe under the Balkans Civilian Deployment Project, which is administered by the World University Service of Canada and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. She is now on assignment in Afghanistan to help assess election-related issues.

The making of “Kosovo: Fragile Peace”

BY MOIRA SIMPSON

In June 2001, a journalist and documentary filmmaker asked me if I was interested in making a film about her friend, Carolyn McCool, who was “Director of Democratization” in post-conflict Kosovo. I quickly looked on the OSCE’s website and found out that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was the largest regional security organization in the world.

That was the start of a most extraordinary year. I became fascinated by the opportunity to witness a post-conflict society. For 30 years, I had made social and political issue documentaries, but never in a war-torn land. Like most Canadians, I was proud of Canada’s reputation for aiding troubled parts of the world, yet I had never really understood what “democratization” or “nation-building” encompassed.

As I did my research for the film, I became aware of grumblings involving foreign missions. I read an article written by an aid worker in Beirut claiming that the “liberators” had become “occupiers”. A friend who once lived in a post-conflict society had become sceptical about the motives of some of the “internationals”. She called them “the new missionaries”.



Carolyn and daughter Kate Oja are featured in *Kosovo: Fragile Peace*.

For more information, please see:
www.nfb.ca and www.wusc.ca

Eager to discover for myself what an international peace-building mission was like and to explore some of these thorny questions, I flew to Kosovo several months after meeting Carolyn briefly for the first time in Vancouver. I arrived in Pristina alone, with seven cases of gear, as director, writer, cinematographer and sound recordist rolled into one.

Carolyn's 20-year-old daughter, Kate, who was temporarily living in Kosovo with her mom, helped with sound. With her own camera, she filmed a video journal, parts of which were later edited into the film. Along a parallel path with Carolyn, but at a grass-roots level, Kate worked for an OSCE-funded travelling musical roadshow which was trying to generate support for the upcoming election. Through this project, Kate made close friends with other young people, both Albanian and Serb.

During my two months in Kosovo, I faced all the daily frustrations of anyone living in a place without a working infrastructure. But my chief concerns were related to the film. My camera broke, and since there were no repair or rental services, I had to shoot most of the film with an inexpensive backup camera.

LARGER TAPESTRY

I walked practically everywhere with my heavy gear because I couldn't call a cab to pick me up since there were so few addresses or street signs remaining after the conflict. I would set up lights for a sequence and invariably the electricity would go off; my candle-light exposures improved dramatically. Several times KFOR confiscated my tapes because I had been filming in "sensitive" areas that I hadn't even realized were considered high-risk.

From the beginning, I didn't feel I would be in Kosovo long enough to be able to authentically tell the story of its people from the point of view of Albanians or Serbs.

Therefore, the film's central storyline had to follow Carolyn and Kate.

At the same time, I wanted the peoples, land and culture of post-conflict Kosovo to permeate the film. It was important to me that the fragility of Kosovo's peace and the tenuous birthing of a democracy be layered through the story of Kosovo's first-ever free central election. My goal was to weave an intimate story about a mother and her daughter into a much larger tapestry.

The most difficult challenge was to try to film the different communities in Kosovo in a way that would allow each to feel that it was being treated honestly and fairly, despite the atrocities of the recent conflict and its after-

math. There would be no simple good guy-bad guy scenarios. That included the international community. I wanted to show the legitimacy of peace-building projects but also to acknowledge the criticisms.

Each day of filming began the same way. I would walk with my gear to the OSCE offices, always buying a warm apple pastry on the way. The shock and pain of seeing bombed and burned-out buildings in my adopted neighbourhood never faded.

When I reached the OSCE, I would map out my day. I might accompany an OSCE staff member to a Serb enclave, attend an election gathering in a Roma community, be taken by the French KFOR on a tour of sites that could not be filmed without military escorts, or hang out with Kate and her friends and learn about the post-conflict tensions through their eyes.

BLAZING A TRAIL

Whenever we could find the time, Bekim, Carolyn's kind driver, would drive me through the towns and countryside of Kosovo. Through the window of the van, I would film war monuments lining the road, destroyed homes being reconstructed, packs of street dogs, children on their way to school, KFOR convoys barreling towards us, rusty old farm vehicles that kept the traffic moving at a snail's pace and mosques on the horizon.

Carolyn was always the anchor. Brief daily interviews with her kept me plugged into the latest developments. Whenever possible, I filmed her working. Struggling to help build a multi-ethnic society, Carolyn was trying to bring both Serbs and Albanians into the electoral process. I learned a lot about the possibilities of peace-building as I watched her sensitively and compassionately help "blaze a trail" for a traumatized people.

Back in Canada, about 80 hours' worth of footage was left on the proverbial cutting-room floor. What remained was a distillation of what I had filmed. Letting go of stories and images and characters I had met and grown so fond of was so painful that it was only later that I began to see what the film accomplished rather than to grieve for what was not there.

Carolyn and Kate and everyone I met on my journey trusted me with their insights and their ideas and their love for Kosovo. I deeply hope I have honoured that trust. I too grew to love Kosovo.

Moir Simpson is a Vancouver-based award-winning freelance film director and cinematographer. She is currently involved in a documentary on the struggle of Muslim women in Canada.

Moir Simpson at work in Kosovo.



Charting a conflict-free course for the Caucasus

On the road with the Chairman-in-Office

A sudden flare-up in tensions in Georgia just as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, was starting a long-planned visit to the South Caucasus in March meant his programme had to be altered at the last minute. Unfazed, he and his team acted spontaneously as mediators to help defuse the crisis.

BY MIKHAIL EVSTAFIEV

At Sofia airport on March 14, it had become apparent that breaking-news developments would radically alter the agenda for the first leg of our trip to the Caucasus. Simmering tensions between the new Georgian leadership and the head of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, Aslan Abashidze, had escalated into a stand-off that put the country's stability at risk.

TBILISI, GEORGIA: 14-15 MARCH

Shortly after landing in Tbilisi, we learned that the whole Georgian Government had left to join President Mikheil Saakashvili in the western port of Poti for emergency talks on the crisis. Right then and there,

the official programme for the OSCE Chairmanship's visit was scrapped. The Chairman-in-Office (CiO) decided to proceed to Poti to meet the President.

Ambassador Roy Reeve, Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, placed the

Mission helicopters on stand-by. He also instructed Mission cars to leave at dawn for Poti so they could be at the OSCE team's disposal in case the return would have to be by road.

At daybreak on 15 March, however, bad weather made it impossible for helicopters to fly; at the same time, the OSCE drivers were ordered to turn back after they found themselves crawling along at a snail's pace through thick fog on a snow-covered mountain pass. The Minister's Tu-154 jet would not have been able to land on the airport runway at Poti, so a light aircraft was chartered.

In Poti, the Chairman-in-Office encouraged President Saakashvili to resume a dialogue with the Ajara leadership to try defusing the tensions around Ajara. The Georgian leader assured him that force would not be used and that he would invite Mr. Abashidze to meet him for talks that same day.

Minister Passy quickly called Mr. Abashidze on the phone, urging him to accept the offer to meet and resolve differences in a peaceful manner.

Appealing publicly to both sides to exercise restraint, the CiO made clear that the OSCE would do all it could to support the country's territorial integrity. "We are committed to promoting democracy in Georgia and will work hard to secure a peaceful future for the people of the region," he said.

The same message was repeated at Minister Passy's meetings with Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, acting Foreign Minister David Aptsiauri and the Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II.

The CiO remained in contact with President Saakashvili by telephone after his departure from Georgia. The meeting between the Georgian President and the leader of Ajara eventually took place on 19 March, and agreement was reached.

"Without any doubt, this can be seen as a very positive development for the whole region," the CiO later said in a statement welcoming the news. "Tensions have been defused through negotiations. The easing of tensions in Georgia will contribute to the free and fair conduct of parliamentary elections."

BAKU, AZERBAIJAN: 15-16 MARCH

Late in the evening, we boarded the Minister's plane and set off on the next leg of the trip.

There was no let-up in the CiO's schedule in Baku the following day.

A church in Tbilisi, Georgia



OSCE/MIKHAIL EVSTAFIEV



The CiO and Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev took questions from the press after extensive discussions.

Photos: OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev

Minister Passy had a lengthy meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and also held talks with Prime Minister Artur Rasizadeh, Speaker of Parliament Murtuz Aleskerov and Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev.

The CiO called for continuation of the dialogue on the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without any preconditions.

“The OSCE is always prepared to be a facilitator. We can offer many scenarios on the resolution of the conflict, but it will all be just laboratory work until both Azerbaijan and Armenia reach an agreement at the table,” he said. “The OSCE is not capable of miracles and cannot impose a ready-made solution. History teaches us that when it comes to conflicts, time always works against us.”

Minister Passy also made it clear that the OSCE Minsk Group — co-chaired by France, the Russian Federation and the United States — and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, were doing their utmost to help find a solution to the conflict.

The CiO expressed the hope that education, a priority of the Bulgarian OSCE Chairmanship, would play a part in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. “We must invest in the education of the next generation,” he said, stressing that it was important that young people have access to accurate and objective history books.

“If we allow our children to be misled by propaganda, the next generation will find it hard to be objective and to forget about old scars.”

The visit to Baku also included informal meetings with opposition leaders and representatives of non-governmental organizations who were concerned about human rights, election issues and freedom of the press.

YEREVAN, ARMENIA: 16-17 MARCH

Once again, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict took centre stage the next day, when the CiO met Armenian President Robert Kocharyan, Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan,

Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan and the Catholicos of All Armenians, Karekin II.

Renewing his appeal for continued dialogue, Minister Passy suggested that the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should try to step back from years of mutual mistrust. “We need to overcome the historic burdens and do our utmost to heal the wounds of the past as soon as possible. We must find new directions for the next generation in Armenia and Azerbaijan,” he said.

At the end of the South Caucasus trip, the OSCE CiO pointed out that “time is not an ally” for any of the parties and that drawing the attention of the international community could help promote settlement of the conflict.

As he was leaving for Sofia, the CiO learned that Azerbaijan, where he had raised questions on democratization and respect for human rights, had pardoned 130 prisoners who had been considered political prisoners by various international and non-governmental organizations.

On the way home, Minister Passy held consultations with his First Deputy, Ljubomir Ivanov, and Ambassador Ivan Naydenov, and it was decided that a press statement regarding the pardoning should be issued the next morning. We sketched a quick draft incorporating the Minister's words:

“I hope this move will prove to be another step towards reconciliation and the upholding of democratic values in Azerbaijani society. We are glad that Azerbaijan recognizes the need to follow OSCE principles in promoting democracy and human rights. This move gives new hope for positive developments in the country.”

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Although the exhausted members of the delegation and the journalists could look forward to getting home promptly, there was no such luxury for the Foreign Minister.

At the airport lounge, in a last-minute huddle with his aides, he reviewed reports, discussed an important morning appearance before parliament, which was scheduled to ratify the North Atlantic Treaty, gave instructions to urgently prepare a statement condemning the violence in Kosovo, and considered a possible trip to the troubled area.

Mikhail Evstafiev is a Press Officer in the Secretariat's Press and Public Information Section.



Meet Miklos Haraszti, new Representative on Freedom of the Media

BY PATRICK HAFNER

A prominent Hungarian writer and former political dissident, university professor and member of parliament assumed the post of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 10 March.

"This is a very emotional moment for me, as the task of the OSCE Media Representative is, in many respects, the continuation of my life's work," Miklos Haraszti, 59, told the Permanent Council on 11 March. He thanked the participating States for making it possible for him to work for press freedom in the international arena.

"I am also acknowledging the powerful role played by the first shaper of this mission, the passionate and devoted personality Fremiut Duve, in whose shadow I will have to labour hard to find my own way of directing our work," Mr. Haraszti said. Mr. Duve of Germany served as the first Media Representative from January 1998 to December 2003.

He set out three themes that his Office would focus on, which address "delicate interdependencies and conflicts between freedom and other needs of society":

- ◆ Freedom of expression on the Internet and the problem of proliferation of hate speech online;
- ◆ Freedom of the media and the needs of national security and the fight against terrorism; and
- ◆ Libel and defamation as it applies to journalists and the media, and the need to decriminalize these actions, or at least to do away with imprisonment as a sentence.

"In my work, I will not differentiate between the West and the East, between new and old democracies," said Mr. Haraszti. "All the 55 OSCE par-

ticipating States have pledged to adhere to our common principles of a democratic society ... Alas, a feature that we all share in common is that no country is perfect."

His greatest challenge, he said, was to find the right measure in choosing between the different tools at the Media Representative's disposal. "The right balance is needed between observation, co-operation, recommendation and sometimes protest in order to achieve the greatest possible impact, always having in mind that our actual aim is to help."

Interviewed on ORF radio, the Austrian broadcaster, on 29 March, Mr. Haraszti said that he would not focus on political interventions alone: "I will not simply concentrate on the behaviour of governments, because too many journalists were socialized under communism and now find themselves in a vacuum concerning their professional ethics."

He said he would encourage the media to devote more attention to the quality of journalism and to rid themselves of old patterns so that authorities would not find it easy to oppose them.

In a special "Portrait of the Day" report on 19 March, the Austrian daily *Der Standard* said that after the controversial and hard-hitting Mr. Duve, "it was generally expected that the 55 OSCE participating States would agree on a soft successor. However, after tough negotiations, they agreed on a candidate who understands it as his life's work to speak up for the freedom of the media".

Patrick Hafner, a journalism graduate from the University of Munich, is an Intern in the Secretariat's Press and Public Information.



Portrait of Miklos Haraszti courtesy of Erhard Stackl/*Der Standard*.

2 January 1945 Born in Jerusalem to Hungarian refugees.

1948 Moves to Budapest with his parents.

1960s Studies philosophy and literature at Budapest University; active in the political protest movement.

Early 1970s Works in a tractor factory and writes about it in a book, *Darabber* ("Piece Rates"), which is smuggled to the West by German literary figure Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

1975 The book is published in German, entitled *Stücklohn*, with a foreword by German writer Heinrich Böll. Later, it is translated and published in 15 other countries. Its English title: *A Worker in a Worker's State*.

1976 Co-founds the Hungarian Democratic Opposition Movement.

1980 On his return from three years in the West, assumes post of Editor of the *samizdat* (underground publishing) periodical, *Beszélo*.

1988 Awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Northwestern University in the United States.

1989 Participant in the roundtable aimed at urging the political establishment to bring about freedom of the media.

1990-1994 Member of parliament, where he actively promotes a new media law, which, however, fails when it is put to a vote.

Mid-1990s Leaves politics and lectures on democratization and media studies in US universities.

2002 Member of the board of the Hungarian public television broadcaster.

Mr. Haraszti's essays have been published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and in major European papers.