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**CAN EDUCATION BRING PEACE IN DIVIDED POST CONFLICT SOCIETIES?**

The presentation traced a short history of the United World College (UWC) in Mostar between the years 2006-2010. The College had been established to help combat the pervasive effects of a divided education system which was prolonging and even worsening enmities between the three ethno-religious groups comprising the bulk of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through a combination of resistance to reform, hardening of post-war positions, encouragement of separate histories and languages, fragmentation of educational and institutional management and governance, separation of students, and writing of inflammatory text books in certain subjects.

The broader context was the bitter and costly internecine war of 1992-1995, which was waged across large areas of the former Yugoslavia at a cost of at least 100,000 lives and 2 million displaced persons or exiles. In the city of Mostar where the College was located, a bitter 6-month war between Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosniaks left 10,000 dead in the city alone, as well as a legacy of fear and mistrust. The ensuing Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 secured peace, but at the cost of recognizing and institutionalizing existing divisions and agreeing to a fragmented political status quo.

The College was funded in part through donations from government aid departments, private sponsorships and various NGOs. It opened in 2006. Since schools were themselves divided along ethnic lines, used different text books in key subjects such as History and Social Sciences, and taught in different languages (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian), the arrival of the UWC was bound to be subversive. At the same time the expectation from some of the major donors of a quick fix, not only to education reform but also to some of societies’ other problems, created a pressure on the College to rush into overt social engineering which had to be resisted.

The College did well in meeting most of its founding objectives. It was able to bring together students form all three groups (plus students from other fragmented societies around the world), and to educate them under the banner of the International Baccalaureate Diploma in an atmosphere of critical and relentless pursuit of the truth, and respect for other arguments and perspectives. It was less successful in its wider aim of influencing education reform in the country, although time may prove that the College did indeed sow seeds in this direction.

What actually happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an object lesson in failure to entrench and implement a unified education system as a matter of national security. What the College managed to achieve was simply to show that young people could set aside their own differences and those of their parents in the interest of resolving past conflicts, or of just getting on with their lives without bearing grudges.