

Media and Coexistence in Bosnia - Herzegovina



Keren Ghitis
(’01), Herzlia, Israel

Soros Media Center
Sarajevo, Bosnia - Herzegovina

Project Goals

- To evaluate the influence and credibility of the media in Bosnia and to assess its potential contribution to reconciliation
- To explore the willingness of the different parties to coexist
- To assess the effectiveness of different approaches to generating openness to the possibility of a new, peaceful future.



Personal Goals

- To understand the history of the region and the roots of the conflict
- To assess the accuracy of the western understanding of conflict as primarily ethnic and nationalistic in character
- To discover how each group in Bosnia constructs its own narrative
- To experience rapport with people from completely different backgrounds from myself

Activities

- Interviewed journalists, local and foreign media representatives, refugees, and local folks
- Collected information about 'hate speech' and media reconciliation projects
- Helped develop a 'Reporting Diversity Manual,' a guide for journalists on how to deal with prejudices and other sensitive issues
- Tried to enlist cooperation from several newspapers to cooperate on a 'reconciliation campaign' by publishing weekly articles on coexistence issues

Key Dilemmas

- Are Bosnians prepared to discuss reconciliation? Is their reluctance a matter of time, mentality, or something else?
- Is coexistence achievable when the leaders from the war period are still in power?
- What should be the role of the West in promoting reconciliation? Must the initiative come from local people?
- To what extent can the media play the role of educator and make a positive difference?

Important Learnings

- Reconciliation is not an isolated issue. A sound economy and proper education are essential foundations to reconciliation and coexistence.
- The electronic media has far more influence on Bosnia than printed media.
- Television, radio, and newspapers are not "magic tools." The media can at best only promote ongoing processes.
- It is easier to create hatred and antagonism than to build peace.