



## Country Profile: Bosnia-Herzegovina

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, Bosnia Herzegovina was confronted with an ethnic civil war from April 1992 to December 1995. The three main ethnic groups in Bosnia Herzegovina, the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Serbs and Croats did not agree whether or not Bosnia Herzegovina would become independent. On February 29, the Bosniaks and Croats voted for independence in a referendum, which was boycotted by the Serbs. After independence was declared, a civil war broke out when Bosnian Serbs, supported by the Serbian government of Milosevic, attacked the Republic of Bosnia- Herzegovina. The Serb goal was “ethnic cleansing”, an euphemism for forced displacement invented by Milosevic, accompanied by genocidal terror to drive Bosniaks and Croats out of Serb areas, which became a separate Serb Republic, governed from Pale. The war was characterized by cruel killings and mass rapes of Bosniaks and Croats and caused an enormous numbers of displaced persons.

In July 1995, the worst massacre occurred in Srebrenica, which was in 1993 declared a ‘safe area’ under UN protection. However, under the command of General Ratko Mladic, the army of Republika Srpska killed 8000 Bosniaks in Srebrenica, mainly men and boys. The Srebrenica massacre became the worst massacre in Europe since the Nazi area.

Late 1995 peace negotiations in Dayton, Ohio led to the so-called Dayton Agreement, which finally ended the Bosnian war and set up two separate entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. In addition, there is the district of Brcko which is a self-governing unit and is both part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska.

Although the UN failed to prevent genocidal massacres in Bosnia, it did establish a new era of international justice for those who were responsible for the genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague was created by the United Nations in 1993 and became the first international tribunal to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes since Nuremberg. Years passed with only low-level officials in custody, but finally Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic were captured in May and July 2011. All top war criminals have now been arrested and will be brought to trial for genocide and other crimes against humanity.

Today, Bosnia Herzegovina is still a divided country, with two effective governments, and divided by ethnicity down the heart of the country. Milosevic’s “ethnic cleansing” succeeded. The elections in 2010 in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in a political crisis, since ethnic political leaders could not reach agreement on the formation of a new government. In February 2012, the parliament finally approved a new central government, ending 16 months of deadlock. With this new government, hope is growing that Bosnia-Herzegovina may progress towards EU accession.

- Genocide Watch strongly encourages the work of the ICTY to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of the Bosnian Genocide. The capture of Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadžić last year in Serbia were of great importance for achieving justice.
- Genocide Watch urges the European Union to support efforts by Bosnia-Herzegovina to build political and economic institutions that will overcome ethnic differences, bring stability in the country and promote accession to membership in the European Union.
- The European Union should seek ways to build bridges between Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska, and Serbia, and to keep a watchful eye on the situation in Bosnia Herzegovina, lest violent conflict recur.

Because ethnic tensions remain high in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Genocide Watch considers the country at stage 5: polarization.