

1992-1995: Bosnia

The population of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Bosnian Serbs (Orthodox Christians who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Serbia), and Bosnian Croats (Roman Catholics who have close cultural ties with neighbouring Croatia). In the turmoil following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Bosnia declared independence (1992). This was resisted by the Bosnian Serb population who saw their future as part of 'Greater Serbia'. Bosnia became the victim of the Bosnian Serbs' determined wish for political domination which it was prepared to achieve by isolating ethnic groups and, if necessary, exterminating them.

With the back drop of the on going civil war, in July 1995 Bosnian Serb troops and paramilitaries led by Ratko Mladić descended on the town of Srebrenica and began shelling it. Despite being declared a safe zone by the United Nations, Bosnian Serb forces prevailed. Women and children were forced onto trucks and buses, men and boys remained. The deportation of Srebrenica's population took four days.

Around 8,000 Muslim men, and boys over 13 years old, were killed in Srebrenica. Up to 3,000, many in the act of trying to escape, were shot or decapitated in the fields. Mladić sent out written orders to 'block, crush and destroy the straggling parts of the Muslim group' – it was carried out.

Half of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population was displaced by the conflict, and still today around one million (of the pre-war population of 4.5 million) live abroad. The Bosnian diaspora is concentrated in the USA, Germany, Croatia, Serbia, Austria, Slovenia, Sweden, Canada and Australia. Remittances from these former refugees now make up a significant portion of Bosnia's economy.

Destruction of historical monuments was a major part of the 'ethnic cleansing' which took place during the Bosnian war – mosques and Ottoman-era buildings were particularly targeted. The Dayton Agreement called for cultural heritage to be designated, restored and preserved. The most famous reconstruction is the *Stari Most*, a 16th century Ottoman bridge in Mostar, which was destroyed by shelling in 1993.

Bosnia continues to function uneasily under the Dayton Peace Agreement – with a complicated constitutional structure overseen by the international community, in the form of the High Representative, who can overrule local politicians when he decides to. There is little trust between Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims and Croats. Former High Representative Paddy Ashdown has said "All three ethnic groups are cohabiting peacefully, if not yet cooperating enthusiastically, and the economy is growing, albeit from a very low base".