

The United World College in Mostar/Bosnia and Herzegovina

A School in the Peace Process

1. At the height of the Cold War the vision of one person, Dr. Kurt Hahn, led to the creation of the Atlantic College in Wales (UK) in 1962. It was the first United World College (UWC) of what is today a movement of 15 UWC colleges world-wide. The most recent have been Colleges in Germany and Armenia (2014) and China (2015). Since 1962 some 45.000 students from more than 150 countries have graduated from these colleges with International Baccalaureate Diplomas and Certificates.

2. The focus and unique hallmark of the United World Colleges has from the outset been the 16-19 age group, young men and women at a time in their lives when idealism is strong and openness to new impressions is profound. These last two years of secondary education among students with their different languages, cultures and, often, sobering life experiences, create communities of intense personal change and enrichment. This is especially the case with the growing numbers of students recruited from countries in recent or current conflict and from countries of the developing world. In order to underline the importance of the individual, scholarship programmes ensure that all students are chosen on personal merit alone without regard to race, faith, social or economic background.

3. In 2001 the United World Colleges and the International Baccalaureate Organisation joined forces in the 'UWC-IB Initiative' to explore the prospects of creating the first College in a post-conflict country. In 2004 the Initiative was commissioned and challenged by the OSCE to create a College in the then war ruin of the historically famous Mostar Gymnasium. The Development Bank of the Council of Europe was persuaded to make a soft loan, endorsed by the Bosnian National Parliament, to rebuild the school. The College opened in September 2006. The governance was strengthened in 2010 by the establishment of the Bosnian Foundation Education in Action, which then re-registered the College under Bosnian Cantonal law. Critical to all these developments was the decisive support from the outset of Elisabeth Rehn, from 1995 to 1998 UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FYROM, from 1998 the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, and later the Chair of Table 1 for the Stability Pact for South East Europe from 2003 to 2005.

4. The role of the Foundation and the College is to equip the next generations of young people in BiH with the knowledge, skills and leadership qualities necessary to bridge ethnic divides. Here, the force of example is needed. The College is a practical demonstration of what can be achieved in a city that was only recently the scene of bitter conflict. The Foundation has also set up a Centre for the Professional Development of Teachers, the only organisation in the country to offer training to all teachers regardless of their ethnic origin, and has prepared proposals for the reform of the final years of Bosnian secondary education with the possible introduction of an external Matura and new, more objective procedures for university admissions.

5. The College is a focal point for collaboration with other schools in Bosnia and the region with Model United Nations Assemblies, academic and other competitions, and numerous community service projects. These have included clean-up and recycling initiatives involving the wider city population, festivals for children with special needs, street arts festivals which have become regional events, and the involvement every day during the academic year of College students in local charities.

6. Whilst the College has a natural emphasis on South East Europe, the Bosnian students from all three national groups are joined by many others from countries with histories of political unrest and bitter conflict: Afghanistan, Armenia, Belarus, China, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel, Mongolia, Myanmar, Northern Ireland, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Russia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Yemen. The human lessons learned in this environment are lessons for life. For the divided nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are priceless.

7. International interventions have been part of Bosnia's history for centuries. The Dayton Agreement brought the recent war to an end in 1995. Sadly and dangerously, the constitution accompanying the Agreement leaves in place ethnicized citizenship and ethnicized, fragmented governing structures for which Dayton foresaw only a few exceptions (foreign policy, the currency), not education. Thus the country is unable to adapt its educational system to the needs of modern European society and European Union membership. Solutions are inconceivable without renewed international intervention and support.

8. The United World College of Mostar and the Foundation achieve really effective, proven interaction between their Bosniak, Croat and Serb students; cooperate widely with the citizens of Mostar to whose economy they are also making a significant contribution; and stand for modern educational reform on international lines through the work of the Centre for the Professional Development of Bosnian Teachers.

9. The EU Stabilization Pact of 1999 includes education and youth in peace building for BiH and its neighboring countries. The Pact makes references to the need for the 'marginalization of the importance of ethnicity in everyday life' and the urgency of 'respect for human rights'. Education reform and educational system improvement are identified as parts of the Stabilization Pact. Education for democracy and citizenship, seen by the EU as significant elements for reconciliation in BiH and other Balkan states, is central to the UWC Mostar experience.

10. The Board of the Bosnian Foundation Education in Action underlines the importance of the linkages between the United World College in Mostar, the efforts for education reform and nation-building at the national level, and the objectives above all of the EU Stabilisation Pact. The Board hopes that awareness of UWC Mostar's contribution to these peace-building initiatives will lead to enhanced support of the UWC Mostar by the Bosnian authorities, the EU Commission, EU member states and other countries and international agencies.

Founders of the Foundation Education in Action

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The Student Body 2006-2015

798 students from 72 countries

International students: 417

BiH students: 381

Afghanistan (6), Albania (11), Armenia (1), Australia (1), Austria (13), Bangladesh (1), Barbados (1), Belarus (5), Belgium (8), BiH (381), Brazil (3), Canada (2), Chile (1), China (4), Croatia (5), Czech Republic (11), Denmark (4), Egypt (4), Ethiopia (4), Finland (9), France (9), Germany (33), Greece (2), Hong Kong (5), India (3), Iraq (9), Israel (23), Italy (9), Jamaica (1), Jordan (1), Kosovo (10), Lebanon (5), Libya (1), Lithuania (1), Macedonia (7), Maldives (1), Mexico (3), Mongolia (1), Montenegro (12), Myanmar (1), Namibia (1), Nepal (2), Netherlands (26), Niger (1), North Korea (1), Norway (9), Pakistan (9), Palestine (4), Poland (7), Portugal (1), Romania (2), Russia (8), Rwanda (2), Senegal (1), Serbia (8), Slovakia (9), Slovenia (3), South Africa (1), Spain (14), Sudan (2), Suriname (1), Swaziland (3), Sweden (2), Syria (2), Tajikistan (2), Turkey (16), Ukraine (1), United Arab Emirates (1), United Kingdom (15), United States (29), Yemen (2), Zimbabwe (1).

Comment

“I deem this project crucial for reconciliation in BiH” (Wolfgang Petritsch, former High Representative in BiH)

“In the Balkans we have all been challenged to do our work better, to understand the nature and complexity of the region, and to use the right tools and strategies to reach our objective to transform the Balkans and equip it to sustain liberal democracy and the rule of law, grounded in efficient and effective institutions ... (Jacques Paul Klein, former Head of the UN Mission to BiH)

... I felt weak and incapable to change anything in my previous school ... Don Quixote fighting the windmills. Only the windmills of the system of our country were not illusionary, but real giants. This was the opportunity to grasp something pure, disinfected from all the prejudices ... we teach our students how important it is to accept the role of an activist ... the

majority of our students come from societies oppressed in this or that way ... the most important virtue of our college is by far its location. This is where the problems exist and this is where the students need to act." (Ivana Knježević, English teacher and Pastoral Coordinator)

"UWC changed everything, the way I saw the world, friendships and mostly, how I saw myself. Not only do you reinvent the meaning of idealism and friendship here, you reinvent yourself. You realize, with the help of all the others, your strengths and weaknesses. You learn how to make yourself a better person. That is the greatest gift UWC gave me." (Detmer Kremer, UWC Mostar alumnus)

"My time at UWC Mostar was the most challenging yet rewarding time of my life and left an immense impact on me and my future path. I'm filled with gratitude for being able to have experienced such a personally enriching time of my life not only in such an extraordinary school as UWC but also in such a beautiful place as Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina." (Christina Hasenhuettl, UWC Mostar alumna)

Because all of us have been to the Old Bridge numerous times, we have witnessed how it still stands even after five centuries, defying the green time that relentlessly runs through it. And what will become of the bridges that we've built? Bridges that know no nationality, religion, skin colour, eye colour, good or bad people, bridges that can't be seen with an eye but are felt with the heart ... there is no river that bridges cannot bridge and there are no coasts that bridges cannot connect. (Nermin Šehić, Bosnian UWC Mostar alumnus)