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**Abstract:** Presents an overview of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a developing federal republic in southeast Europe. General information; Details on the people and culture of the country, including information on the population, native people, health care, education, food, arts and entertainment, and holidays; Description of the geography and environment of the area, with a focus on the topography, natural resources, plants and animals, and climate; Overview of the country's economy, industries, agriculture and tourism; Structure of the government; Fun facts.  
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**Bosnia & Herzegovina**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a developing federal republic in southeast Europe, bordered by Croatia and Serbia. Long a crossroads between east and west, its culture and multi-ethnic character is the result of a stream of migrants and invaders.

From the end of the Second World War until it declared its independence in the early 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of six republics of the Yugoslav Federation. The dissolution of this communist republic led to a brutal civil war that lasted until 1995. Though peace has prevailed since then, the country remains divided along ethnic and religious lines, and is in part supervised by an international force charged with maintaining order during the transition period.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

- **Official Language:** Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian
- **Population:** 3,981,239 (2007 estimate)
- **Currency:** Marka
- **Area:** 51,197 square kilometers (19,767square miles)
- **National Anthem:** "Zemljo Tisucljetna" ("Thousand-Year-Old Land")
- **Capital:** Sarajevo

**PEOPLE & CULTURE**

**Population:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has a growing population that suffered setbacks in the early 1990s, with an estimated 100,000 killed during the civil war and perhaps 300,000 displaced. Currently the life expectancy at birth is seventy-five years for males and eighty-two years for females (2008 estimate). Population density is 78 persons per square kilometer (203 per square mile). The country is ranked sixty-sixth on the 2005 Human Development Index.

The population consists of Bosniaks (Muslim Serbs), Croats, and Serbians, all of whom belong to the larger South Slav ethnic category. When Bosnia was part of the Yugoslav Federation, the three groups lived in neighboring enclaves. Since the end of the civil war, the population has lived in separated administrative zones: Bosniaks and Croats in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which comprises 51 percent of the country's total territory; and the Serb Republic, which comprises the rest of the territory.

Approximately 48 percent of the population is Bosniak, 34 percent is Serbian, and 15 percent is Croat. Jews and Roma each account for a small percentage of the total.

44 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Sarajevo, with 522,000 people, is the largest city. The other large cities are Banja Luka, the capital of the Serb Republic, Mostar, Tuzla, and Bihac. Before the civil war, the cities often had multi-ethnic composition. Now, however, their nearly homogenous populations are dictated by the part of the country in which they are located.

Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian are all variants of Serbo-Croat, a South Slavic language. Bosnian and Croatian are rendered in a modified Latin script; Serbian is rendered in the Cyrillic script. The issue of language has become confused, with interpretation of the linguistic differences deriving from one's political perspective.

The area now known as Bosnia and Herzegovina was once noteworthy for its religious tolerance and predominantly secular character. The hostilities which fueled the civil war seriously harmed the notion of tolerance and inspired an assertion of religious identity. In general, the Bosniaks have been Sunni Muslim since the fifteenth century, the Serbs are Serbian Orthodox, and the Croats are Roman Catholic. There are also small groups of Protestants and Jews. BL.-Native People:

The three main ethnic sub-groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina all have long histories in the region. When the country was part of the larger Yugoslav framework, a common South Slav identity was stressed. With the dissolution of that framework, however, the identity also dissolved and each group asserted its interests. Croats and Bosniaks formed an alliance, backed by Croatia, while the Serbs were backed by Serbia. The ensuing hostilities devastated the country's infrastructure and led to great loss of life, particularly among the Bosniaks and Serbs.

Bosnian Roma, who have had small communities in the region for centuries, also experienced extensive hardship during the civil war. Targets of racial violence, many of them fled abroad and now exist in political limbo, with neither the right of return nor political asylum in their host countries.

There is also a small population of Jews whose history in the area dates back to their expulsion from Spain in the fifteenth century and their resettlement by invitation of the Ottoman government.

**Education:** The civil war devastated Bosnia and Herzegovina's educational system, which had been well developed. An estimated 70 percent of schools were destroyed, damaged, or used for military purposes, and educators were often drafted into military service.

Since then a great degree of normalcy has returned, though not to pre-war levels. Children between the ages of seven and fifteen receive free, compulsory education. Many of them continue on to secondary school, which is likewise free. There are numerous institutes of higher learning throughout the country, including five universities. These are located in Sarajevo, Tuzla, Banja Luka, and Mostar. Mostar University is now two universities, one for Bosnian Croats, the other an Islamic university.

**Health Care:** The country's health care system underwent similar stresses and breakdown because of the civil war. Moreover, it was forced to deal with war-related injuries and large numbers of internally displaced people.

Before the war, the government extended free and universal health care. Today, each of the two major administrative zones is responsible for the health care of its respective residents, and free and universal health care has become difficult to maintain at all but the most basic levels.

**Food:** The cuisine of Bosnia and Herzegovina was heavily influenced by Turkish traditions during the Ottoman era. Grilled meats are common, as are layered pies filled with meat, spinach or cheese.

Japrak is a dish of grape leaves stuffed with rice and meat, and bosanki lonac is a soup prepared with cabbage and meat. Sweets include baklava, and coffee is the drink of choice and an important component of social rituals.

**Arts & Entertainment:** Many cultural institutions, such as the national library, mosques and churches, were destroyed or damaged during the civil war. Rebuilding has been slow but steady. One of the most famous buildings in Sarajevo is the Bey's Mosque, Bosnia and Herzegovina's largest Islamic structure; it dates from the sixteenth century.

The Yugoslav literary tradition, as written in Serbo-Croatian with some regional variations, was once a shared enterprise. Particularly since the end of the war, however, it has been considerably politicized and thus shares far less common ground. Ivo Andric, Nobel Laureate in 1961, for example, is now considered to be anti-Muslim by Bosniaks. His most widely translated novel is "The Bridge Over the Drina" (translated 1959). Among other important modern authors are Alma Lazarevska, Mak Dizdar, and Aleksandar Hemon. Several of them have taken their country's recent upheavals as their subject matter.

Emir Kusturica, Bosnia's most famous director, has courted controversy with his bold, madcap films often centered on contemporary events. They include "When Father Was Away on Business" (1985), "In the Time of the Gypsies" (1989), "Underground" (1995) and "Life is a Miracle" (2004). Danis Tanovic's "No Man's Land" (2001), Oscar-winner for Best Foreign Film, also confronts the absurdity of the recent war. World cinema has been annually showcased at the Sarajevo Film Festival since 1995.

Basketball and football are the country's most popular sports, and professional athletic events draw wide and strong support from the populace. Skiing is popular during winter on the country's mountain slopes.

**Holidays:** Bosnians celebrate many Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox holidays. Secular holidays include Independence Day, which commemorates the country's split from Yugoslavia (March 1), and National Day (November 25).

## **ENVIRONMENT & GEOGRAPHY**

**Topography:** Bosnia and Herzegovina generally has a mountainous terrain. It is landlocked except for a 20-kilometer (13-mile) strip of coastline along the Adriatic Sea. The interior of the country has flat, fertile areas.

Mountains and valleys dominate the landscape along the border with Croatia and in the southern portion of the country. Mount Maglic, near the border with Serbia, is the highest point (2,387meters/7,831 feet). This range is part of the Dinaric Alps, and is composed mainly of a limestone strata called karst, which forms many caves and valleys. Karst accounts for nearly 35 percent of the country's terrain.

The Sava and the Bosna, from which the country takes half of its name, are important rivers, both flowing north. The Sava supports several ports along its course and feeds the northern Sava Plain. The Neretva River flows into Croatia and drains into the Adriatic Sea. The Miljacka, a tributary of the Bosna, flows through Sarajevo.

**Natural Resources:** Bosnia has large deposits of metals and minerals. Silver, manganese, zinc, copper, lead, nickel, iron ore, chromium, bauxite, coal, gypsum and salt are all present. Significant portions of the country are heavily wooded, much of the interior has dark, fertile soil, and the rivers yield some hydropower.

Inadequate sanitation, air pollution from the industrial sector, and deforestation are all environmental problems which the country is currently facing. Not only did the war extensively damage the infrastructure, it left an estimated 3 million unexploded landmines planted across the country, in both populated and unpopulated areas. Experts estimate that all populated and agricultural areas will be mine-free by 2009.

**Plants & Animals:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has two vegetation zones: the Euro-Siberian and the Mediterranean. Just under half of the country is forested, some of it with primeval growth. Tree species include beech, pine, evergreen, oak, spruce, and chestnut. The mountains are also lush with flowering plants, with an estimated 3,700 growing in the country. The karst regions support typical Mediterranean shrubs as well as many wild flowers.

The forests, inhabited by deer, chamois, gray bears, wolves and wildcats, are especially rich in wildlife. Hawks, vultures, and eagles are common birds. There are at least ten endangered or threatened species in the country; most of them are small mammals.

**Climate:** The climate of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a mixture of the Mediterranean and the continental. In the south and along the western border, the weather is moderated by winds from the Adriatic Sea, giving the area mild, wet winters and warm summers. Further inland the continental temperature prevails. In the flat, lower regions, winters are cold and summers warm.

Snow occurs at the higher elevations, where winters are long and summers brief. Temperatures for Sarajevo average -1° Celsius (30° Fahrenheit) in January and 20° Celsius (68° Fahrenheit) in July, which is typical for continental areas at lower elevations.

The entire country is prone to powerful earthquakes such as the one that devastated the northern city of Banja Luka in 1969.

## **ECONOMY**

Bosnia and Herzegovina's economy was shattered by the end of the war. The industrial sector and infrastructure was severely damaged, inflation was out of control, and unemployment figures were staggering. Since then, the situation has improved significantly and the gross domestic product (GDP) increases annually, due in part to the \$5.4 billion USD that the country has received in international aid. It is now considered to have an economy in transition: from conflict to post-conflict and from a centralized to a privatized economy.

Inflation has remained below 1 percent in recent years, and unemployment has fallen between 16 and 20 percent. GDP per capita is now estimated at \$4,848 USD, but an underground economy still thrives. The labor force is estimated at just over 1 million. Despite the progress, economic output is 30 percent less than it was before the war, and poverty levels are still high, with 20 percent of the population below the poverty line and another 30 percent very near it.

**Industry:** Industry accounts for 32 percent of the GDP. Before the war, much of Yugoslavia's heavy industry was concentrated in the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The sector included oil refineries, arms factories, manufacturing and metallurgy. These industries were largely ruined during the war and are functioning at low production levels. They are, moreover, concentrated within the Muslim-Croat area of the country, putting Bosnian Serbs at a disadvantage.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture accounts for 12 percent of the GDP; the most fertile land lies within Serb areas. Products include cereals, pulses, potatoes, corn, and fruits. The war was very detrimental to the country's livestock, which was reduced by 70 percent of its pre-war level. Cattle, sheep, and goats are the most commonly raised animals.

**Tourism:** Bosnia and Herzegovina has been struggling to shed its war-torn image and encourage tourists to return. It has been a slow process, hampered by a seriously damaged infrastructure, landmines, erratic services, and some hostility towards the West in the Serbian portion of the country. Approximately 89,000 tourists now visit annually, mostly in Sarajevo, Mostar, and the mountain ranges that offer winter skiing and summer hiking.

Despite these difficulties, the country has enormous potential to develop as a tourist center, as evidenced by the recent re-opening of the bridge in the city of Mostar, which had been destroyed by shelling during the war. It is estimated that visitors to that site alone generated \$22 million USD in revenue in 2004.

The country offers several alternative forms of tourism. Many tourists, for example, are interested in the effects of a disastrous civil war and the amount of reconstruction that has occurred. Others visit the village of Medjugorje in southwest Bosnia and Herzegovina, an important place of pilgrimage for Catholics who believe that the Virgin Mary makes regular appearances there.

The medieval gravestones, called stecci, are another draw. An estimated 60,000 are scattered across the country, many of them decorated with floral motifs and various human and animal figures.

## **GOVERNMENT**

A new constitution was adopted as part of the 1995 Dayton Accord, which formally brought the civil war to a close. It asserts that the country is composed of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serb Republic. Each of these entities exercises wide powers over their respective areas, whereas the central government manages international affairs. The current arrangement has not proven very effective, but attempts to unite the three ethnic groups into a more coordinated coalition have failed.

Bosnia's executive branch is overseen by a three-member joint presidency. Each of the country's ethnic groups elects a president by popular vote to four-year terms, and the presidency rotates between them every eight months. The presidents are responsible for nominating two prime ministers (one Bosniak, one Serb) and a deputy prime minister (a Croat) as well as the Council of Ministers, selected for a similar balance. Together the presidents make decisions which the legislature drafts into law.

The bicameral legislature consists of the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives. Each ethnic group is represented by five members in the House of Peoples; the forty-two directly elected members of the House of Representatives are likewise proportional. Members of both houses serve four-year terms. In addition to its legal duties, the legislature approves the ministerial selections.

The only court with powers that extend over the entire country is the Constitutional Court. It is comprised of two members from each ethnic group plus three members appointed by the European Court of Human Rights. They are responsible for solving disputes between the two entities and for interpreting the constitution. Each entity has its own court system for internal judicial operations.

Popular among the numerous political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the Party of Democratic Action (PDA), the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ-BH), and the Serb Democratic Party (SDS).

## **FUN FACTS**

- World War I began in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, when a Bosnian Serb named Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife.
- The 1984 Winter Olympics were held in Sarajevo.
- The reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge cost \$15.4 million USD.

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By Michael Aliprandini

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