



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Profile: Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Before the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990's, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse republics within Yugoslavia. According to a census taken in 1991, the population included 43% Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), 31% Serbs, and 17% Croats, and 8% other minorities. During his communist regime, the President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, was able to stifle nationalist sentiments in Yugoslavia. However, following his death in 1980, nationalism quickly swept across Yugoslavia and ethnic groups began vying for independence.

On January 9, 1992, Bosnian Serbs self-declared an autonomous Serb region in Bosnia-Herzegovina that was later renamed to Republika Srpska. Bosnia-Herzegovina held an independence referendum on February 29, 1992. Bosniaks and Croats voted overwhelmingly for independence from Yugoslavia, but Bosnian Serbs boycotted the vote because they wished to remain within a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. On March 3, 1992, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia. Bosnia-Herzegovina's independence was formally recognized by the U.S. and many European nations on April 6, 1992.

A few days later, the Bosnian war (1992-1995) broke out. Serbia supported the Bosnian Serb forces that swept through Eastern Bosnia and forced Bosniak residents to flee from areas within Republika Srpska. The Serb forces laid siege to Sarajevo for 44 months, the longest siege of a capital city in modern warfare. Sarajevo was cut off from food and medical supplies, and its streets were turned into a deadly free-fire zone where Serb snipers targeted Bosniak civilians from their positions in the surrounding hills. The Markale Market Massacres were committed by Serb forces against civilians during the siege, when several people were indiscriminately killed in the city's historic marketplace. The Bosnian war was characterized by mass killings, mass rapes, torture, and displacement. At least 100,000 people were killed during the war, most of whom were Bosniaks.

On April 16, 1993, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution to establish demilitarized safe zones in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The U.N. peace-keeping force sent to protect the safe areas, UNPROFOR, failed to exercise force against Bosnian Serbs and ultimately stood by as atrocities were committed against Bosniaks. Any forceful action required approval from the former U.N. Chief of Mission, Yasushi Akashi, who consistently shot down these requests in favor of negotiation. His refusal to authorize airstrikes against Serb snipers in Sarajevo is just one example of several weak pacifist responses taken by the U.N. that resulted in the Srebrenica Genocide.

Under the command of Ratko Mladić, Bosnian Serb forces surrounded and targeted Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica for extermination. Srebrenica had been designated a U.N. safe area, but Dutch peacekeepers failed to take any action to prevent Bosnian Serb forces from overtaking the town. The Srebrenica Genocide began on July 11, 1995, resulting in the systematic extermination of 8,372 Bosniak men and boys and the deportation of over 25,000 women, children, and the elderly. The genocide in Srebrenica was the worst atrocity committed in Europe since WWII.

The Srebrenica Genocide finally mobilized NATO, which bombed Bosnian Serb forces and Belgrade. After several airstrikes, Bosnian Serb and Serbian leaders agreed to peace talks in Dayton, Ohio. The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed on November 21, 1995, officially ended the Bosnian War. The country was split into two entities, The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Republika Srpska. The

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is mainly populated by Bosniaks and Croats; and Republika Srpska by Bosnian Serbs.

After the genocide, Bosnian Serbs engaged in a well-organized attempt to coverup their crimes through reburials from primary mass graves to secondary or tertiary graves. The International Commission on Missing Persons has used DNA analysis to identify remains and inform families. Each year on July 11th, a commemoration is held at the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial in Potočari and remains are reinterred at the cemetery.

Although the main architects of the Srebrenica Genocide, Slobodan Milošević, Radovan Karadžić, and Ratko Mladić were captured and prosecuted for genocide and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), genocide denial continues to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina.

To this day, genocide deniers from Republika Srpska and Serbia practice historical revisionism by minimizing the number of victims, accusing the ICTY and U.N. of bias against Serbs, and glorifying war criminals. Denial of the genocide by Bosnian Serb and Serbian politicians has stoked the flames of nationalist rhetoric and obstructed reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

- Genocide Watch strongly supports the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) and local courts in Bosnia that are prosecuting war criminals.
- Genocide Watch urges the European Union to promote accession of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the European Union and to assist Bosnia in political and economic reforms.

Because genocide denial has exacerbated ethnic tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Genocide Watch considers the country to be at **Stage 6: Polarization** and **Stage 10: Denial**.