



## Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

**Adam Moore**  
**Pre-doctoral student**  
**University of Wisconsin – Madison**  
**IARO 2006-2007**  
**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **Ethno-territorial practices, local governing institutions and actors, and ‘ethnic conflict’ in Bosnia**

#### **Topic of research:**

My research examines ethnic conflict and local political institutions and actors in two towns in post-war Bosnia: Mostar and Brčko. First, in a more theoretical vein, it investigates the role of locally-based ethno-territoriality in the re-production of ethnically-framed conflict. By ethno-territoriality I refer to the various practices that actors and institutions deploy to mark particular places and territory as belonging to, or appropriate for, certain ethnic categories of practice or people. In its extreme forms, ethno-territoriality involves the “purification of space”—an erasure from the territorial landscape of all traces of ethnic ‘others’. This quality was demonstrated most clearly in the “ethnic cleansing” campaigns in Bosnia, which centered around not just the killing and forced resettlement of people, but also a purification and ethnic re-classification of places through the both the destruction and building of ethnic cultural landmarks, such as mosques, churches, cemeteries and memorial markers; the renaming of towns and streets; and the shelling of prominent symbols of Bosnia’s multi-ethnic heritage, such as the National Library in Sarajevo.

Second, it evaluates the relative merits of political structures for ameliorating ethnic conflict. Broadly stated, political arrangements adopted to manage ethnic conflict can be divided into two categories. The first, which I label “separative,” is based on the political,

*Funded by the US Department of State’s Title VIII Program and  
the IREX Scholar Support Fund*

territorial and cultural separation of putative ethnic groups. Arend Lijphart's consociational theory (1969, 1977), which is also the dominant political arrangement for ethnically divided societies, outlines the key aspects of a separative approach. Politically, ethnic groups are separated by: 1) establishing ethnically-based parties with proportional representation; 2) guaranteeing minority veto on important political decisions, and; 3) allocating civil service positions and government spending along proportional ethnic lines. Territorially, federal structures are divided along ethnic lines when possible. Culturally, ethnic groups are allowed to set up separate public institutions, such as schools or courts. Mostar has been organized along these lines for most of the post-war period, though there have been recent initiatives to integrate certain aspects of the city.

In contrast to Mostar—and the rest of Bosnia—the Brčko District embodies an alternative approach, which I call “integrative,” that advocates the social and territorial integration of ethnic groups. This approach calls for political arrangements that purposely promote social integration across ethnic lines. This often, but not necessarily, includes the following policies: non-ethnic, territorial federalism, possibly even using federal structures to create more heterogeneous administrative units; ethnicity-blind laws and policies; integration of public institutions; and the use of “vote pooling” electoral systems that encourage the formation of multi-ethnic party coalitions.

#### **Relevance and contribution to field:**

This project makes a significant contribution in two areas. The first is interdisciplinary research on ethnic conflict and violence. This literature tends to privilege ‘top-down’ perspectives over ‘bottom-up’ accounts. Consequently, the local context in the production and reproduction of ethnically-framed social conflict is neither well-understood, nor adequately addressed by research on violence and conflict. Likewise, the interweaving of territoriality and ethnic identification, political power and conflict is rarely explicitly examined in detail at this level. This project addresses these gaps by providing insight on the tangled relationships among local political actors, ethno-territorial practices, local governing institutions and persistent ethnic conflict. Specifically, it sheds light on the central role of various ethno-territorial practices in the production and reproduction of ‘ethnic conflict’ in Bosnia since the end of the war.

Second, this project also makes a significant contribution to scholarship on post-conflict reconstruction through an assessment of the impact of separative and integrative political arrangements on social conflict, ethnic categorization and ethno-territorial practices at the local level. The design of a state’s political architecture is of central concern to peacebuilding policy-makers, and assumptions—both explicit and implicit—about the relationship between ethnic identity and conflict are at the heart of debates over the relative merits of integrative and separative political arrangements in post-conflict countries. Thus the findings will have the more immediate, policy-oriented significance of assisting peace-building practitioners in their attempts to construct a sustainable peace in post-conflict states by providing an account of the differential effect that separative and integrative political arrangements have on this dynamic process.

#### **Research methodology and research sites:**

My project consists of a case-study of the post-war dynamics of conflict and ethno-territoriality in two towns in Bosnia: Brčko and Mostar. They are excellent sites for inquiry

*Funded by the US Department of State's Title VIII Program and  
the IREX Scholar Support Fund*

due to their similarity in several key respects. Both were ethnically heterogeneous towns before the war (and remain so today); both experienced extensive ethnically-directed violence during the war; both were widely identified, by international and local observers, as post-war “trouble” towns with high levels of ethnic division and conflict; and the post-war political arrangements established in both towns possess a significant degree of independence from other political structures—cantons, entities and the central state—in Bosnia. The central difference is that from the 1994 Washington Agreement until recently Mostar has been a politically divided town organized along consociational principles, while international arbitration in 1999 established Brčko as a unified, multi-ethnic District that explicitly rejects the separative politics that govern Mostar—and Bosnia as a whole under the Dayton Accords.

I have utilized a variety of methodological approaches to gather information on post-war social conditions, the local dynamics of ethno-territorial practices, and the ways in which integrative and separative arrangements have shaped these practices in Brčko and Mostar. They can be grouped into three broad categories: 1) semi-structured interviews with international officials, and local officials, civil servants and residents; 2) collection and analysis of various primary and secondary sources such as Office of High Representative (OHR), Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and United Nations (UN) reports, internal documents and polling data; national print and broadcast media; and local government records; 3) participant observation of the daily social interactions and ethno-territorial practices of local residents and officials.

### **Research findings and preliminary conclusions:**

I am still in Bosnia conducting research therefore I have not yet formally analyzed my interview, archival and ethnographic data. Additionally the research funded by IREX covered fieldwork in one location (Brčko), of a two-sited research project comparing political arrangements and social conditions in both Brčko and Mostar. Therefore I am not yet able to draw definitive conclusions about the relative merits of integrative and separative political arrangements. What follows are some provisional findings and conclusions that I can report from Brčko.

First, despite Brčko’s integrative political structure ethno-territorial practices continue to be a fundamental aspect of political contestation within the territory of the District. Simply put, ethno-territoriality is still perceived to be an effective tool for mobilizing public support for specific political projects and parties—even those that are ostensibly multi-ethnic or non-nationalist. For example, following Brčko’s first elections in 2004 the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which garnered the highest number of votes, established a ruling coalition composed of parties from all three ethnic groups and opposed by the two largest nationalist parties in the District: the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and the Bosniak nationalist Party for Democratic Action (SDA). SDP is a formally multi-ethnic, but in membership predominately Bosniak, organization. Due to its professed multi-ethnic political stance it was, at a minimum, tacitly supported by various international actors in Bosnia, such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which lavished advice and money on its pre-election efforts. Nonetheless, shortly after taking over it engineered a political crisis in the District by slipping into the final draft of an updated spatial plan for Brčko a proposed new mosque—which was not requested by the Islamic Community in Brčko—to be built in the center of town on land previously designated as non-ethnic, civic space with public buildings (the District courthouse, public records facility, etc.) and parks.

This ethno-territorial maneuver by SDP has contributed to paralysis in the Assembly, which has been plagued by walkouts by Bosnian Serb political parties and inability to agree upon key hiring decisions such as a new police chief. It has also effectively shifted attention away from practices of corruption that greatly benefit SDP leadership and business figures connected to the party by shifting focus toward a divisive 'ethnic' issue and pre-emptively politicizing nearly all debates concerning local governance. These corrupt practices by SDP and its allies in the government range from the need for ordinary citizens and business people to pay bribes to officials in the Department of Urbanism in order to obtain a building permit, to the establishment of a lucrative kickback system in which all SDP party members—from Assembly councilors to clerks and janitors—who are employed by the government are required to contribute 10% of their salary back to the party, thus establishing a sizable slush fund controlled by local party leadership. Given the perverse incentives that such a kickback scheme generates—along with the use of certain ministerial offices, such as the Department of Urbanism, for personal enrichment—it is no surprise that in the past year OHR Brčko has repeatedly found fault with the present government's hiring practices, and has felt the need to impose several Supervisory Orders aimed at reforming the law on civil service and correcting the most egregious hiring irregularities. This case provides a good illustration of the ways in which ethno-territorial practices pursued by local political actors are often driven by cynical, instrumental calculations—not a reflection of genuine ethnic grievances or division.

Despite the problems described above, the integrative structure of the Brčko District and its relative independence as a political unit nonetheless provides an important avenue for non ethno-territorial practices and politics to emerge. Whatever internal squabbles they may have, Brčko's politicians generally work together in a productive manner to defend the position of the District vis-a-vis the state and entities, such as the recent fight over tax reform and the introduction of the VAT in Bosnia. In doing so, their actions—and the accompanying rhetorical invocations of District interests—gradually reinforce the legitimacy of Brčko as a distinct, multi-ethnic space in Bosnia.

Moreover, there has been great success in the District towards the establishment of professional, genuinely integrated, public institutions such as police, the courts and schools. Several polls conducted by NDI show that these institutions consistently receive high marks for trustworthiness and overall approval from residents. This is crucial to any lasting success in the District as their presence provides a relative sense of security for both returnees and displaced people (DP's, such as Bosnian Serbs who fled from Sarajevo to Brčko in the Spring of 1996), thereby facilitating reconstruction and reintegration of the town. Additionally integrated public institutions provide an important setting for constructive, daily interaction across ethnic lines. This is especially the case with Brčko's schools. Interviews with present and former students of the integrated Gymnasium (high school) indicate that school in the central place in which cross-ethnic friendships have been forged among youth.

While the integrative political structure of Brčko appears to play a positive role in mitigating ethno-territorial practices and ethnic conflict, a more important factor is the degree to which OHR Brčko is embedded in the daily life of the District. The easy distinction between 'international' and 'local' actors does not hold up upon close inspection of social and political life in the District—especially the critical early years under the first OHR Supervisor, Robert Farrand. Interviews with local officials and

residents reveal that OHR's cultivation of close working relationships with political and social leaders in the District has proven crucial in successfully diffusing opposition to controversial measures such as the integration of schools. More importantly, knowledge of local conditions has enabled OHR to effectively monitor progress of reforms in the District and step in when necessary to ensure implementation. It is easy to overlook this last point as debates over further reforms in Bosnia (constitutional, education, police, etc.) still dominate discussion in political and diplomatic circles. Bosnia, though, already has a raft of progressive laws and institutions—at least on paper. The country's Achilles Heel is that in practice they are frequently ignored or subverted by local politicians and officials whose task it is to implement them.

### **Suggestions for future research:**

The deeper I have dug into local sources of ethnic conflict in Brčko, the more I have begun to realize the necessity of understanding *intra-ethnic* politics, how the various interests and coalitions within a supposedly homogenous 'ethnic group' intersect, diverge and collide, and consequently shape *inter-ethnic* relations. Indeed, as my fieldwork progresses I have found that examining local, intra-ethnic dynamics is an increasingly important aspect of my project. Yet research on ethnic conflict rarely starts with intra-ethnic relations as a focal point of investigation or explanation. Rectifying this oversight is one of the most crucial tasks for future research in this field.

### **Recommendations for the US policy community:**

As noted above, I am not yet in a position to provide advice on the relative merits of integrative vs. separative approaches to managing ethnic conflict due to the still early stage of my research. However other lessons have emerged. Probably the most pertinent for the U.S. policy community is that successful implementation of post-conflict reconstruction projects requires a strong presence at the local level. Theoretically impressive laws and institutions are meaningless if they are not enacted in practice, and assuring their implementation requires local knowledge and presence. It can not be achieved from a compound in Sarajevo, or Baghdad. Of course, meaningful local engagement requires a relatively deep and sustained commitment of monetary resources and personnel, and recognition of this from the outset of any project.

A corollary lesson is that the Brčko experience appears to reinforce Roland Paris' (2004) argument that post-conflict reconstruction projects should focus on 'institutionalization before liberalization'. In other words, attention should be given to getting functional and effective institutional structures established first, and only then pursuing democratization and market liberalization. This was the path followed in the District with regard to elections, in contrast to the rest of Bosnia, and to date it has proven to be a more successful approach.

### **References:**

Lijphart, Arendt (1969). "Consociational democracy." *World Politics*. 21: 207--(1977). *Democracy in plural societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press  
 Paris, Roland (2004). *At wars end: building peace after civil conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press