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## **“University cooperation: strategies and challenges for Peace”**

### **Case study University of Sarajevo, West Balkan**

Post-conflict societies are facing the following challenge: How to **promote peace after conflict/civil conflict** in the era of globalization, marked by low solidarity, lack of social relations, populism “instant solutions”? Certainly, there is no such thing as “one size fit all” solution. The answer is long-lasting socio-economic and political process that includes a wide reaching set of different activities shaped by citizens/stakeholders of post conflict society. To see progress in this respect, usually two minimal precondition are: (i) well defined framework - locally driven, locally owned - indigenous approach, and (ii) global citizenship education which promotes a sense of citizenship at community, national and global levels through enhancement of a sense of belonging and respect for diversity. In long run epicenter of this process has to be **university education** (conflict sensitive) to support peace activism and equip students with knowledge to understand how dynamic of human relations work to be able to embrace diversity and induce behavior change and change of whole society. But, local/national universities are not capable to start such difficult and complex process. So, to craft context-specific intervention, to rebuild society after conflict has to be shaped in cooperation with “others”, that can help local/national universities to overcome barriers to promote peace and democratization at least within educational process. Spillover effect is expected, so trough “conflict sensitive” and global citizenship education process of healing and conflict resolution can be efficiently managed and shaped. I.E. cooperation between regional universities within whither university network such as AESI can be good enough mechanism to push and support peace building and democratization of post-conflict societies and regions. So, in order to argument this type of solution/answer to the question posed at the beginning, the case of University of Sarajevo and AESI is presented.

### **The role of University of Sarajevo and AESI in the peace building – case study**

After two decades of active participating in peace and democracy building process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Western Balkans (WB), three stages can be identified. The first stage was initiation where support of “neutral third party was crucial to establish foundation of national, regional and international inter-university cooperation and collaboration. The second stage was focused on sustainability of process trough institutionalization of first stage’s results by development two centers at UNSA which had main task to promote and support peace and democracy building. Finally this process reached third stage where rethinking and

innovation was necessary. In such way platform for all (network of people and institutions and web of activities) to promote peace and democratization has been established.

The initial phase started immediately after devastating war and the siege of Sarajevo. UNSA never stopped its activities, but just after the war it was necessary to invest efforts in recover and improving all academic education to fulfill local needs to provide equitable access, social inclusion and again become part of regional and international academic community. For UNSA it was clear that we have to play central role in rebuilding respectful, trustful relationship and cooperation on local and regional (WB) level as a path to reconciliation and peace building. But, in the same time it was clear that we need support from “neutral party”, friend from international academic community.

This stage started in 1999 when Prof. M. Caneva and Gen. R. Martinelli, on behalf of the Sapienza University of Rome, had a meeting with the University of Sarajevo Rector, Prof. N. Mulabegović, the Italian Peace Military Force Commander (SFOR) in Sarajevo and the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, H.E. Ambassador J.P. Klein. The outline of future peace building regional inter-university cooperation between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was outlined. This plan stressed several key points of peace building process: (i) it will foster and promote cooperation trough master/education program run in cooperation of Sapienza University of Rome, UNSA and University of Belgrade, (ii) the mobility/working visits will be integrated and obligatory part of the program, (iii) it will include all parties able to promote and support peace building process, (iv) cooperation sustainability will be ensured trough inter-institutional agreements, but also trough meetings at Rectors level.

This phase was implemented through following key activities: (i) 2000 Balkan Rectors’ Conference funded by the DGCS MAE in cooperation with the United Nations and Italian Peace Corps Command in Sarajevo; (ii) 2001 first inter-university meeting between Rectors of Sarajevo and Belgrade Universities organized by Sapienza University of Rome within Italian Peace Corps Command in Sarajevo, (iii) practical inter-university cooperation to support peace building process on the level of master studies: 2002 -2008: “State Management and Humanitarian Affairs”, UNSA & UNBG & “La Sapienza”, and “State Management and Non-Governmental Organizations” in which implementation University of East Sarajevo has joint.

Such approach to peace building and Master Program itself represents a unique example of cooperation among the academic community, Italian Embassies in Sarajevo and Belgrade, Peace Corps, the UN and EU (later). In the Italian system, there is no such program like this one in the Balkans (according to AESI, 2014). Re-established cooperation has been supported by different cooperation initiatives at regional and international level and trough different academic and research programs/projects.

All this activities raised attention towards importance university education in regard of peace and democracy building as a foundation of post-conflict recovery. So, UNSA management commitment has been established and second phase started in 2004 by establishing university centers (Center for human rights and democracy and Center for Inter-disciplinary studies). Those centers become epicenters of all initiatives run by UNSA in regard to peace a democracy building, providing capacity for multidisciplinary approach to such complex phenomenon like rebuilding post-conflict society. Those centers were equipped to recognize

local needs and context and to use such knowledge to deepen regional and international cooperation by creating and implementing wide set of very different activities. The interdisciplinary and innovative education remain to be epicenter of those activities (2002 ERMA – Bologna UNI; EU Commission and Italian government, 2007: M.Sc. Religious studies Arizona State Uni, UNI Oslo, UNI Copenhagen, UNi Goteborg; M.Sc. European studies; M.Sc. International and regional security; PhD – Global studies; Ph.D. - Gender studies). So, in this second phase process on institutionalization has been done while sustainability of the whole process has been ensured.

It is important to mention “Conference of BIH University Rectors” held in Rome in 2007. This meeting organized by Sapienza University of Rome was dedicated to future of peace and democracy building trough inter-university collaboration. The main outcomes of this meeting were: (i) important strategic document focused on Strengthening Research and Higher Education Capacity of BIH and SEE Countries and for promoting their integration in the European Research Area; (ii) MoU signed by BIH University Network and Italian University Network, along with UNESCO BRESHE and Marco Polo System. This opened up “space” for development of third phase of the peace and democracy building process in WB and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In 2013 Conference “University Cooperation Promoting the Peace and Integration in the Balkans” organized by UNSA, University of Belgrade and AESI was place to reflect on past activities, especially results of the first steps within this process. Third phase of this process started around 2015 when need to strengthen impact of successes of past activities through strengthening participation and inclusiveness has been recognized. This called for innovation and strengthening resource to have stronger impact on building social bonds through internalization of skills, values and attitude for peace building. So, international cooperation is a priority that is implemented through set of following activities beyond cooperation within AESI framework such as: summer schools that includes different stakeholders (Rethinking tolerance – UNSA, Milano Bicocca, UNI of East Sarajevo, Sveučilište Mostar, UNI Mostar); master studies (M. Sc. Inter-religion studies and peace building – 3 theological faculties, NGOs), training for academic staff TRAIN + (8 public universities in BiH, but program is built on success of regional TRAIN program implemented in cooperation with WB universities); stronger inclusion and mechanism to enable participation (Office for student support – developed through cooperation within Erasmus+ project).

The stars of this phase are two activities: (i) M. Sc. Interreligion studies and peace building – 3 theological faculties, which is very unique and innovative approach to peace building in Bosnia and Herzegovina i WB; and (ii) international research H2020 project - Religious studies infrastructure: Tools, Experts coNnection & Centers (RESILIENCE), that is focused on development of new methods and tools to understand dynamic and phenomenon – to demystify underling issues of different socio-economic and political processes. **In the same time under umbrella of AESI UNSA has opportunity to share its experience, reflect, but also to learn and to develop ideas how to improve whole process. This activity supports international social outreach of UNSA and ensure impact on society.**

Finally, as result of all activities within this process of peace and democracy building trough academic education the platform for all that enable social outreach, engagement is established. It is not strong enough, but development of capacity to include all and raise

mutual understanding based on competences (not just knowledge) to know and appreciate “others” and commonalities, guaranty its sustainability. But, such approach has to be integrated in each University activity, which is very challenging, slow and long-lasting process of change. Social outreach, collaboration, mobility of students and staff as a fundament of knowledge co-creation should be focus of future UNSA activities in promoting and building peace.

### **Instead conclusion – What have we learned?**

So, can we say that this approach is successful? The process is still young and so far it is difficult to give final evaluation. But, there are some indications that process has been just partly successful. Young generation of politicians, former alumni of AESI master course, are taking over important decision making positions within government and institutions, bringing “new breeze” of modern approach to the governance. This is not visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but Canton Sarajevo is exception.

What have we learned?

Frist of all that peace and democracy building is slow, painful and long process asks for persistence and impact cannot be seen immediately. It is in fact core, center of post-conflict societies rebuilding and therefore it is most important investment in the future.

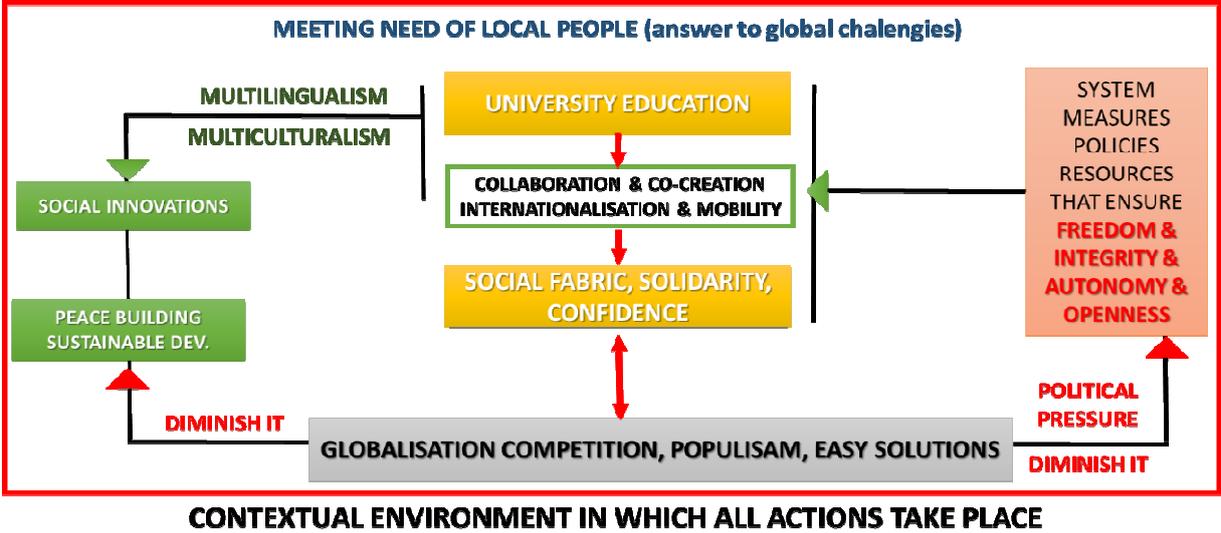
Second, universities, interuniversity collaboration has to be epicenter of promotion and support of peace building. Just after the conflict the „neutral third party”, international universities are important facilitator which enables building of peoples net that is focus to and able to create and implement academic education process dedicated to conflict resolution.

Third, to see sustainable progress in this respect it is necessary to build structures/centers/institutes with main task to create and implement different initiatives necessary to support stronger and faster development of conflict-sensitive academic education but also everyday practice that ensures social outreach for universities. This mechanisms (hardware) have to be supported by platform, that is net of people and institutions and web of initiatives and activities dedicated to the development of **mutual understanding based on competences (not just knowledge) to know and appreciate „others” and commonalities!**

Fourth, precondition to see such approach succeeding is to enable high level of international staff and student mobility, autonomy of universities that enable them to recognize local context and local needs to deepen internal connections and internationalization.

**Fifth, local socio-political and economic context has to be taken in account.** In the 21st century, in the era of globalisation, increased competition, populism and easy solutions university has to play central role in the development of sustainable social fabric, revival of solidarity and humanity as well as building trust and confidence. All this is necessary in order to meet needs of local people and to answer efficiently to global challenges, by promoting conflict resolution, peace building and democratization. Such, challenging and complex goal can be fulfilled only trough co-creation process that includes new ideas, social innovations and openness shaped by strong collaboration between universities and all society stakeholders at local, national and international level. New ideas, social innovation necessary to pave path of peace and sustainable development can be built on achievement of multiculturalism promoted by mobility, internationalization. Such complex task can be performed only by

universities which freedom, integrity, autonomy and openness is guaranteed and supported by system measures, policies and resources. But, in a globalized world, where different political/economic conflict, economic crisis and populism put pressure on governments, requesting cut in public expenditure and asking for higher level of control over all institutions including universities. So, it is not easy to develop capabilities and competences necessary to fulfill this challenging task – performing central role ensuring conflict resolution and high quality of life for all.



Sixth, the currently efficiency of UNSA activities in regard to deepening process of peace and democracy building is endangered by strong political pressure and sharp decrease of autonomy – all its aspects from financial to academic. But, new research projects such as mentioned H2020 RESILIENCE guaranty that this process, even endangered, will survive and developed.

Seventh, this UNSA experience can be shared as an example and be used to raise new ideas and projects.