Spirit of Bosnia / Duh Bosne

An International, Interdisciplinary, Bilingual, Online Journal
Međunarodni, interdisciplinarni, dvojezični, online časopis

“As long as Sarajevo exists, this newspaper will publish every day!”

Dayton International Peace Museum

These were the stirring words of Kemal Kurspahić, the first editor of Oslobodjenje elected by his fellow journalists. Oslobodjenje (the word for “Liberation”) was founded in 1943 as Sarajevo’s anti-Fascist newspaper during World War II. And Mr. Kurspahić’s staff did exactly what he urged — never missing a day after May 14, 1992, when their security guards fled as the building came under direct attack for the first time.

Kurspahić had been educated in the tradition of a Western-style free press, so he had already moved the paper toward journalistic practices more independent of political power rather than continuing to be a government mouthpiece. By the end of 1989, it had been voted Yugoslavia’s Newspaper of the Year, and awards continued to come internationally. Obviously, this didn’t earn him friends with any of the warring factions.

Oslobodjenje resisted the rising nationalism of the time, winning court cases against the legislature’s attempts to retake control of the paper. Its staff was an intentional diversity of Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats.

“From the beginning of the war,” Kurspahić recounted, “journalists were also the driver-distributors and the paper carriers.” They wrote and typeset their paper every day in a bombed-out building without water, electricity or telephone service. “In the long weeks and months, [it] was usually the only source of news.… As many as ten families would share one copy of Oslobodjenje.”

Refusing to be silenced by war, the newspaper found newsprint and fuel for their generator on the black market, at greatly inflated prices which they paid using the proceeds of the international awards they had won.

Online Exhibit at Dayton International Peace Museum

The Dayton Peace Accords is a story about the challenges of finding peace after wartime.

To do justice to what people in the Balkans endured, we cannot shy away from the larger issues of the conflict: xenophobia, genocide, rape, war crimes, and redress.

The preceding text is copyright of the author and/or translator and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.