

This City Card is one of 13, which presents a very brief overview on the city. The information provided is not exhaustive, nor would it be possible encapsulate the entirety of the diversity of experience, outlook and communal identity of the population of any of these cities. Statements about political facts are not intended to prefer one perspective on those facts over another, the interest here is not in entering into political differences over the country's sensitive institutional arrangements. The political parties are categorized according to local voter base, although some parties with a pronounced mono-ethnic constituency also oppose what they see as the predominant forms of ethnic politics. Furthermore, the 1991 census: did not give individuals choices of how to describe themselves, and its categories confounded ethnic and religious identities; the categories also did not allow for a representation of individuals or families from mixed backgrounds, which the reader should keep in mind. In addition, the segment that captures "Voices" of citizens are not filtered or approved but presented as a reflection of local perspectives that have been raised by individuals that attended one of the events during this research process. Lastly this project involves a long-term engagement with the people in these cities, and our will involve going back to them to examine the perspectives of parties interested in further reconciliation or trust-building activity. For more details about the project and the research results please visit the our website: Religion and Ethics in the Making of War and Peace and the Faktori pomirenja i izgradnja povjerenja (B/H/S Languages based website)

Banja Luka is the second largest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the capital of the entity of Republika Srpska. Settlement here dates back to Roman times, with an old fort, Kastel (from the latin Castra) located in the city centre. Banja Luka was heavily modernized under Austro-Hungarian rule, with railroads, schools, factories and infrastructure built and developed. In 1969, two devastating earthquakes damaged many buildings in the city, which was repaired with support being given by other Yugoslav republics. The population of Banja Luka according to the 1991 census was 195,692, while in 2013 it is 199,191. The ethnic composition of the population before the war was diverse, 54% describing themselves as ethnic Serbs, 15% Croat, 15% Muslims, 12% Yugoslav and 4% as 'Other'. The war of the 1990s has left the demographic picture changed, with ethnic Serbs comprising its majority. The majority of non-Serbs were expelled during the war, 17 mosques were destroyed, and ethnic tensions continued to mark city life. In post-war elections, parties with a Serb voter base have comprised the overwhelming majority of the city's Assembly.

In regards to reconciliation, our survey findings indicate that 82% Banka Luka citizens feel reconciliation is important for BiH, n the right. Like in many other cities education and culture play an very important field where reconciliation and trust-building can be inspired.

Banja Luka was a strong economic center before the war, with a developed industrial structure, particularly known for mechanical, electric, textile, food, and cellulose industries. The war and the transitional period have destroyed most of the city's industrial capacities.<sup>2</sup> Today, Banja Luka is burdened with a high unemployment rate: the Unemployment Bureau of the RS gave the registered unemployment rate at c. 22% in 2015, with over 40% of that population being under 35.<sup>3</sup> The average monthly salary in 2013 was 939 BAM (11th in the table of BiH municipalities) and GDP per capita was 8,720 BAM (13th in BiH).<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that it is rich in natural resources, land and water, and that about 50% of the city's land is agricultural, these have been made use of to a very low degree. Banja Luka is also rich in cultural heritage, though the city authorities have noted that its potential as a tourist destination has not yet been exploited.<sup>5</sup> The strategic orientation for development is based upon food manufacturing, tourism and agriculture.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Bosnians jailed over mosque riots," BBC report, 21 October 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2347643.stm

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Official Website of the City of Banja Luka, available at http://www.banjaluka.rs.ba/front/category/63/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> RS Unemployment Bureau, unemployment statistics, available at: http://www.zzzrs.net/index.php/statistika/

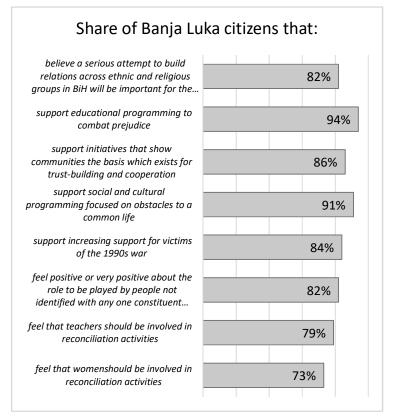
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Available at http://www.mojemjesto.ba/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> City of Banja Luka Development Strategy, available at: http://www.banjaluka.rs.ba/front/article/9712/



**VOICES FROM BANJA LUKA**<sup>6</sup>: The citizens of BL are unanimously dissatisfied with the political and economic environment in the city, but also in the country as a whole. Political leaders purposefully raise interethnic tensions to maintain the *status quo*, as it suits their own interests. In explaining the survey results, which showed a far higher degree of support for reconciliation at the state rather than the local level, several participants said this is because most of the

cities in BiH, including Banja Luka, are ethnically homogenous, and reconciliation needs to happen on the level of inter-group not intragroup relations - as one participant said, "with the others over there in other cities", particularly in the entity of FBiH. The youth complained that they are oversaturated with the general political discourse. Youth who are active in reconciliation work are in a minority and the passive youth are in a majority. Younger participants complained about the lack of educational and academic mobility, within and outside of the country; in their view, direct contact with peers from both entities and abroad is the best way to overcome prejudice and engage in learning. In general, citizens are not satisfied with the education system: its content is dictated by politics and not expertise, and textbooks teach three different histories, at times outdated. The position of women was affirmed to be worse than it was in 1996, with no government will to positively act on it; equally so the position of disabled persons. Hopes of religion playing an reconciliatory role are low: good religious leaders like Hrizostom are sidelined, because he has shared very



positive peace messages and did not fit into the highly politicized profile that religious leaders generally enjoy in BiH. Banja Luka has a very active and live civil society that strongly contributes to reconciliation efforts.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> This section is a summary of key-points form the Focus Group and Public Event in Banja Luka.