

A Centropa Project
Exhibit: Survival in Sarajevo
Teacher Fact Sheet for Project

Lesson 1: Answers to background questions in lesson

Teachers may present the following information in any way that is most comfortable for them. The answers to these questions will provide students with information they will need to understand the exhibit panels, which they will read in Lesson 2.

1. What was the Ottoman Empire?

"The Ottoman state rose to become a world empire, which lasted from the late 13th century to 1923. Like that of the Habsburgs, its eventual rival, the Ottoman Empire was dynastic; its territories and character owed little to national, ethnic or religious boundaries, and were determined by the military and administrative power of the dynasty at any particular time. The Ottomans attempted to bring as much territory as possible into the Islamic fold. The non-Muslims living in these areas were then absorbed into the Empire as protected subjects."¹

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, the Ottomans welcomed them, valuing their skills as merchants. In Ottoman lands Jews (and Christians) were considered "dhimmi," meaning protected subjects. They had some restrictions but under the more lenient Muslim rulers over the centuries Jews in Muslim Ottoman lands had good relationships with their neighbors.

[Click here](#) for an excellent, short overview of the Ottoman Empire from the BBC.

[Click here](#) for a map of the Ottoman Empire in at its peak.

[Click here](#) for a Jewish Virtual Library article on Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

[Click here](#) for more details about the history of the Ottoman Empire.

2. Where are the Balkans?

The Balkans are in [southeastern Europe](#) (click for map). Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country in the Balkans. In the 20th century this territory was part of Yugoslavia, which fell apart during the war that is the background of the Survival in Sarajevo story (see below).

[Click here](#) for an excellent BBC timeline of the history of the Balkans with short explanations of the transition points that will help you understand the historical context of the war in the Survival in Sarajevo story.

[Click here](#) for a Jewish Virtual Library article about Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sarajevo is in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

¹ <http://www.theottomans.org/english/history/index.asp>

3. Who are the Sephardim? Ashkenazim?

Sephardic Jews are Jews whose ancestors were originally from Spain and expelled in 1492. The term comes from the Hebrew word for "Spain," Sepharad.

[Click here](#) for a short article discussing the differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews.

[Click here](#) for a Jewish Virtual Library article on the Expulsion from Spain.

[Click here](#) for a short description of the actual Expulsion decree from Spain, along with the translated text of the expulsion decree.

4. What is Iberia?

Iberia refers to the area of Europe where Spain and Portugal are. [Click here](#) for a map of the Iberian Peninsula. It also includes Andorra and the British Crown colony of Gibraltar.

5. What was Yugoslavia? When was it formed? (mentioned on panel 3 of the history panels)

After WWI, the Versailles peace agreements created the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in southeastern Europe, and in 1929 the name of this state was changed to Yugoslavia, which means land of the southern Slavs.

Yugoslavia was a country made up of different ethnic groups with a long histories of conflict with one another. We recommend you read [this excellent overview of the important turning points in 20th century Yugoslav history](#) for succinct and clearly written explanations accompanied by maps.

The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s is the backdrop for the Survival in Sarajevo story, and here The next section of this fact sheet provides you with basic background information about the Bosnian war, with a focus on the siege of Sarajevo.

The Bosnian War in the 1990s

The Bosnian war is one of the most complex and contested conflicts in history. The below description of the Bosnian war, along with the summary of the legally adjudicated facts from the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands, is taken from the [Survival in Sarajevo web site](#).

We at Centropa do not accept that the war in Bosnia was a civil war. This was a war of aggression by the Bosnian Serbs (and later, the Croats in Hercegovina) who said they could not possibly live with Muslims, even though the Muslims of Bosnia were (and are) of the same genetic Slavic stock as the Serbs and Croats, who have peopled the region since the sixth century. Those who are Muslims in Bosnia (and in neighboring Serbia) are Slavs who converted to Islam during the centuries of Ottoman occupation (1463 to 1878). It should also be noted that the

Bosnian Serbs were wholly financed and supplied by the government of Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade.

These are the legally adjudicated facts, as set forth by the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague. Thanks to Chuck Sudetic, a war crimes investigator, for his input.

Belgrade-backed Bosnian Serb military forces besieged Sarajevo from late spring 1992 until late-summer 1995. These forces were under the command of General Ratko Mladic and the political direction of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, both of whom are now on trial on genocide charges at the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague.

Bosnian Serb troops controlled the city's water, electricity, and food supplies and used this control to apply pressure on the Sarajevo government. During the early months of the siege, it was possible to bring goods into the central city through Bosnian-Croat held areas on the city's western edge. But this lifeline was severed by Bosnian Serb military operations in the late summer of 1992 and by the Zagreb-backed Bosnian Croat militia, which, from October 1992, turned against the mostly Muslim Slav Bosnian government forces in an attempt to force the Sarajevo government to agree to a three-way carve up of the country that would have effectively left the government in control of an unsustainable patch of territory around the capital.

Subsequently, Sarajevo had only two tenuous lifelines: an international airlift into Sarajevo's airport, whose operations were too frequently shut down by attacks and threats by the Bosnian Serb military, and a route that ran along the treacherous mountain road over Mt. Igman and linked up with persons who were willing to risk their lives to sprint across the grounds of the city's airport, which was patrolled by the United Nations and under sniper and mortar fire, or pass through a crude tunnel dug beneath the airport tarmac and grassy aprons.

More than 10,000 people were killed and about 50,000 wounded in Sarajevo by snipers or mortar attacks. The deaths included scores of people cut down in Serb mortar attacks on water stations, a bread line in the central city, and the city's main outdoor market.

Despite shrill international condemnation of the wholesale human rights violations committed by the Bosnian Serb army and Bosnian Croat militia as well as civilian killings carried out by individuals attached to the Bosnian government forces, the outside world undertook no effective action to halt the bloodshed until after Bosnian Serb soldiers and Serbian paramilitary police troops, under General Mladic's orders, executed more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys, along with a number of women and children, after the takeover of the United Nations safe area at Srebrenica in July 1995.

Lesson 2: Survival in Sarajevo

The answers to the below questions can be found on the exhibit panels or in the PDFs of the exhibit panels that you may request from Lauren Granite at granite@centropa.org. Students will use this information to create a timeline (the whole class together), as well as write their docent scripts (individually, in groups or pairs, depending on the size of the class).

For your convenience we are providing the answers from the exhibit panels. The answers are in italics.

History Panels

- When did Jews first arrive in Sarajevo?
1500s, as a result of the expulsion from Spain
- What skills did they bring with them?
tinsmiths, leather tanning, pharmacology, medicine
- Who were the rulers of Sarajevo at this time?
Ottomans
- In what ways did Sephardic Jews keep their traditions?
dress, music, language
- What made the Jewish experience in the Ottomans different than those of Jews in the north?
Jews were never forced into ghettos, no pogroms, as occurred in Jewish communities in Northern and Western Europe.
- What is the importance of the key in the photo and what do they tell you about the Sephardic Jewish attachment to their original homeland, Spain?
They indicate how emotionally wrenching it was for Jews to be expelled from Spain. They had lived there for hundreds of years and were very enmeshed in Spanish culture. Leaving there was considered second only to the exile from Judea in the 6th century BCE.
- What happened in 1908 that would compel Sarajevo Jews to dress up in their traditional costume to welcome the emperor of the Austro-Hungarian empire?
(see photo)
They were waiting to greet the very popular Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Franz Jozef, who visited Sarajevo in 1908.
- What percentage of Yugoslavia's Jews were murdered during the Holocaust?
75-80%
- How did Muslim women help Hana Gasic's family survive the Holocaust?

They would tell the Nazis not to bother climbing the steep hill to the Montiljo family home because they weren't there.

Post- to Pre-War Jewish Community

- How many Jews remained in Yugoslavia under Tito, once most Jews had left for Israel and the west?

Approximately 7,000 registered members. (This means there may have been others who did not join the Jewish communities in the larger cities Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb, or those of the smaller cities of Skopje, Novi Sad, Split, Osijek and others.

- How did the Jews of Sarajevo define who was a Jew?
Open to outsiders, they did not have a clear way to define who was a Jew. They welcomed all those who saw themselves as part of the Jewish community and wanted to join in cultural and social events.
- If Jews could not be religious under communism what did they do to express their Jewish identity?
Strong cultural and social programming, including youth clubs and summer camp, for children as well as families.

Sarajevo: City Under Siege

These questions have no hard answer – they rely on students to read and view the photos and respond. At the same time, teachers should make sure that students have an idea of how limited and dangerous life was in Sarajevo during the siege (see above, The Bosnian War in the 1990s). In this ethnic conflict, people who had once lived happily together side by side sometimes turned on each other.

Students who will be docents for these panels should read and discuss the below excerpt from Edward Serotta's book, *Survival in Sarajevo*, so they can convey in their presentation how people's attitudes changed, along with their physical conditions.

- Look at the photographs, read the panel and captions. What would it feel like to live in Sarajevo during this time?
- Would you trust people more or less?
- Who would you turn to for help?

Excerpt from Survival in Sarajevo:

"When war broke out, walks in the surrounding hills were impossible, and with no electricity the computer and television set stood idle. Haris Karalich found himself busier than ever with jobs from various aid agencies, and Denis [his 10 year old son], with his school now closed, often drifted through the ruined city alone. Radoslav [his friend] too felt the isolation and alienation war brings. "All my old friends left Sarajevo, and the other children started calling me names, dirty Serb, dirty Chetnik, all because my mother's Serb and my dad half-Serb. Even a real good

friend of mine, a Muslim boy, won't speak to me anymore. Only Deny doesn't call me names," he said.

"Well, I don't care who's a Muslim, a Serb, a Croat," Denis muttered. "People who care about such things are sick." The boys grew closer together than ever." (p.99)

A Community Goes to Work

- What services did La Benevolencija provide for people? (Students will have to carefully read these panels to find all of the aid La Benevolencija gave to Sarajevans.)
 - Radio communication with the Belgrade and Zagreb Jewish community centers
 - Mail delivery
 - Youth programs
 - Medical and dental supplies and services
 - Food
 - Women's club
 - Activities
 - Clothing
 - Shelter and blankets

Those Who Helped

- What is "nationalist identity?"

Nationalism is a complex terms that can refer to several meanings. The most basic meaning is the identification with one's national identity. The other one relevant to this exhibit is when people with that identification create policies and/or act in a way to create a state run only by people of that nationality.

On this panel, "nationalist identity" refers to those people who not only identified with their particular national group (e.g., Serbs), but who supported and promoted the policies of their governments during the Bosnian conflict. Nationalists in this case would support their leaders no matter the cost.
- Why have "Jews in Central Europe always felt more comfortable in larger, multi-ethnic empires?"

Historically in Europe, when nationalism has arisen Jews were seen as outsiders because they were never considered a part of any national group (e.g., Germans, French, etc). Nationalistic fervor has usually been conservative in nature, and those running nationalist campaigns only saw Jews as outsiders and, often, scapegoats for the country's problems. Nazi Germany, of course, is the most well-known example of this. At the same time, multiethnic empires or states tended to be more tolerant of difference in general and Jews thrived in these environments. The Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires were examples of multi-ethnic empires where Jews were accepted and protected.

- What does it mean to “leave your politics at the door?” Why is that sometimes an important strategy among people of different backgrounds?
It means you do not discuss your political views with others because you know you will disagree and perhaps argue with each other. Those who leave their politics at the door (can be family members, co-workers, friends) choose not to discuss politics because they value the relationship.

Exodus

- How did some people escape Sarajevo?
By convoys arranged by the American Joint Distribution Committee. Between 1992-1995, La Benevolencija organized 11 convoys.
- Who left Sarajevo?
Sarajevans. (The panel says that 116 of the 294 people who went on the last caravans were from the Sarajevo Jewish community. The others were of various backgrounds.)

Muslims and Jews

- How do the stories of the two Muslims and their involvement with Jews challenge your understanding of relationships between Muslims and Jews?
This is a reflection question; each student must answer on his or her own.