



WUS AUSTRIA  
WAS FOUNDED  
IN GRAZ  
IN 1983  
AND IS EVER  
SINCE  
COMMITTED  
TO THE  
DEVELOPMENT  
OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION

# FESTSCHRIFT

wus 25! austria  
years



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## **congratulations**

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## HEADING TO THE MIDDLE: GRAZ AS AXIS BETWEEN MIDDLE AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE



**W**orld University Service (WUS) Austria is celebrating its 25th birthday - our most sincere congratulations! Encouraging higher education and academic autonomy in our South-Eastern European neighbour countries is a basic principal of WUS, which has found its support base at the Karl-Franzens University of Graz. WUS efforts to initiate and perpetuate a modern education system in South-Eastern Europe have long since bourn fruit: South-Eastern Europe is now no longer an isolated region! It is now a much more vivid community with a pulse, which takes the opportunities of higher (continuing) education seriously and presents itself as an attractive, valuable partner.

The Karl-Franzens University of Graz sees itself both as supporting and benefitting from this development. As the first higher educational institution in the German-speaking area with a total-university focus on South-Eastern Europe, the University of Graz is proud of its function as switch-point between middle and South-Eastern Europe. The university “Competence Centre South-Eastern Europe”, intensive cooperation with partner institutions, the Masters’ studies unique across Europe, and the ever more popular mobility program are just some of the activities which move South-Eastern Europe closer to the middle. At the same time, the university is able to profit from the wide web of partner universities, which support the intercultural experience exchange and contribute greatly to scientific as well as social dialogue.

The Karl-Franzens University of Graz takes very seriously its continuing function as bridge between universities and people in middle and South-Eastern Europe, as well as the responsibilities which come with it. In the future, WUS Austria and the University of Graz will keep on working to bring South-Eastern Europe to middle Europe - an especially positive outlook with which to start, with celebration, the next 25 years of WUS.

ALFRED GUTSCHELHOFER  
RECTOR OF THE KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

## 25 YEARS WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE (WUS) AUSTRIA

**25** Years World University Service (WUS) Austria - that also means 25 years of constructive collaboration with the Karl-Franzens University Graz. Since its establishment in Graz in 1983, WUS has been active in many countries in the area of higher education, creating a story of success on which, now, it can look back upon to see just how engaged and competent its team truly is. The special focal point has been, and continues to be, the countries of South-Eastern Europe - a fact which made WUS an indispensable partner institution for the Karl-Franzens University.

This is because the University of Graz has been engaged for decades in a wide array of partnerships concerning science, research, education and economy with institutions in South-Eastern Europe. The University of Graz was the first German-speaking university to establish the strategic focus “South-Eastern Europe” in 2000 in the areas of research, teaching and collaboration, and is now considered the leading Austrian institution for cooperation with South-Eastern European universities.

Therefore, a kind of synergy between the University of Graz and WUS Austria can be harnessed in the many projects they undertake together. The scope of activities covers everything from diverse collaborations with South-Eastern European universities and the development of stipends to projects to implement the *Bologna Declaration* in South-Eastern Europe. There is space here for only one example: the project *Strengthening Quality Assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina* lead so successfully to the subsequent project *From Quality Assurance to Strategy Development* that the first was disbanded in the assurance that the longevity of the common goal was being carried ever forward.

Largely responsible for the success of the collaborative work is, naturally, Prof. Wolfgang Benedek, who is the personal connection between WUS and the Karl-Franzens University. Also, the fact that many graduates of the University of Graz are WUS team members shows the close connection of our institutions.

As Vice-Rector for International Relations of the University of Graz, it is a joy for me to congratulate WUS on its 25th anniversary. WUS Austria is clearly a valuable element of the Austrian and European educational system - I look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration.

ROBERTA MAIERHOFER  
VICE-RECTOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND INTER-FACULTY EVENTS  
KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITY GRAZ



## „25 YEARS WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE (WUS) AUSTRIA“



**F**or 25 year the World University Service (WUS) Austria has been promoting successfully the human right to education, academic freedom and the autonomy of academic institutions.

The focus of WUS Austria on the countries of South-Eastern Europe, where there is a heightened need for cooperation in education and research with the member states of the European Union, deserves special recognition. By setting up local offices in South-Eastern Europe, WUS Austria has been contributing greatly to the establishment of links and networks between the local institutions of higher education and academic research on the one hand and their counterparts in the European Union on the other hand, which has led to much improved opportunities for cooperation.

These goals are fully supported by the Ministry for European and International Affairs. Consequently, our two institutions have been cooperating successfully on many occasions.

Therefore, on behalf of the Cultural Policy Department of the Ministry for European and International Affairs it is my pleasure to express my special recognition to WUS Austria for the many years of beneficial cooperation and to extend my best wishes for the future.

AMBASSADOR EMIL BRIX  
MINISTRY FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## WUS – A SUCCESS FOR SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

One of the weaknesses of initiatives that were and still are active in South-Eastern Europe (Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, etc.) consists in virtually not having considered education and science as a priority. This results from the fact that on the EU level, there is no joint responsibility for these fields and the national regions still have the authority. However, it is very clear that without activities in this area, there can be no satisfactory economic and social development, nor a coming to terms with the martial past.

Although foundations and NGOs have done some significant work in this respect, a joint strategy is lacking also due to the fact that the governments themselves didn't particularly concentrate their attention on these areas. Especially in this regard, WUS plays a decisive role. It is fascinating and striking that in my daily activities I'm consistently reminded of that, as I meet with WUS alumni in responsible positions.

In my opinion, Austria is not aware how much WUS contributed here in the interest of our country. The dominant role that Austrian enterprises play in the economy of South-Eastern Europe (from which our country highly benefits) would not be possible without WUS alumni.

In this way, an unparalleled connection with Austria has been established and an European obligation fulfilled. I know what it means under the given circumstances to keep an initiative alive and to continue striving to create enough enthusiasm.

All the more gratitude is due to WUS in that it did not only do our country an important service, but especially because what is (a bit carelessly) called "human capital" in the common language of conferences has been supported. So the development and dissemination of European values in their best sense, a perspective for a young generation, and eventually for the future of the respective countries would not be possible without WUS. I am constantly asking myself if organisations of this kind should not deserve an award. If this award existed, then WUS would be an outstanding candidate for it. That such organisations exist helps us to be sometimes proud of Austria!

ERHARD BUSEK,  
FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR, RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES SALZBURG,  
CHAIRMAN OF THE INSTITUTE FOR THE DANUBE REGION AND CENTRAL EUROPE





## COOPERATION WITH WUS AUSTRIA



THOMAS KENNER WAS RECTOR AND PROFESSOR FOR PHYSIOLOGY AT THE KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ.

Since more competent voices than mine can explain the beginnings of WUS and its initial trajectory, I shall not go into that here. My memories of WUS - how could it be otherwise - are mostly identical to my memories of Wolfgang Benedek.

Beyond this, the concerns and duties concentrated at WUS in Graz were, in their practical and their personal emotional quality, very much bound to Sarajevo. Even in the last, but still dangerous days of the gruesome Bosnian war, Wolfgang Benedek and his WUS activists travelled to their colleagues in Sarajevo to begin helping with the restoration of the university system there. It was an unbelievable experience for me, as dean of the medical faculty of the University of Graz, to participate in a programmed visit to Sarajevo together with the rector, Helmut Konrad, on the 8th and 9th of December 1995, and to be welcomed by ministers of the government there. We were able to visit the university campus and the university hospital as well as a part of the city itself.

At this time, the airport buildings, where we had been flown via military transport from Zagreb, still looked like a system of bunkers barricaded by sheets of steel and sandbags. In the tiny entrance way was a sign reading "MAYBE AIRLINES" - an ironic statement about the still insecure situation surrounding air travel. Even in such danger, a bit of humour was to be found.

And, even though the damage to the city was very obvious, there was still one functioning spotlight. In the room where I was sleeping, one could still see relatively freshly made bullet holes in the wall next to the bed. At the time of our trip, the Dayton Agreement had not yet been signed; that was to happen two weeks later on December 19th, 1995. The work of WUS Austria really contributed to the mood of renewal at the University of Sarajevo. One could truly say that we, and especially the WUS representatives, were greeted like old friends. The mood was also reflected in the almost overwhelming hospitality they showed us. We were invited to a welcome dinner which would have been remarkable even in times of peace. Out of their musical tradition, they sang a long, epic evening song to us accompanied by the lute, that we, inexperienced and unpractised, were unable to reciprocate.

The connections made during our efforts to support the University of Sarajevo were deepened by further visits - I participated in another trip there in December 1996. Again at this meeting, the activities of WUS-Sarajevo were highlighted.

With these few descriptions of constructive situations and moods, the stage upon which the intense work and effort were played out, I have tried to paint a picture of what kind of importance Austria had taken over in the Balkans and what a meaningful role WUS played in this.

## WUS AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

The Karl-Franzens-University Graz became a very important academic axis between South-Eastern Europe and the so-called “West” in the 90s. During the years of the war in the Balkans, the doors of the university were open, due partly to WUS Austria, which, even then, had its nerve centre in Graz. This gave hundreds of young people from desperate situations in the Balkans hope again for a better future.

There were months when the WUS office at the University of Sarajevo seemed like an island amongst all the surrounding devastation and need. Arriving there, one would meet young people with a positive attitude, excellent abilities in foreign languages and with a knack for steering problems towards their solution, amidst complicated daily existence. This situation in Sarajevo could just as easily describe many other university towns on either side of the conflict. Lately, I’ve experienced how the reconstruction and leadership of the University in Prishtina in Kosovo has been lead through the WUS office. And when one looks around today in the Ministries of Education in the Balkans, many of the people there have WUS to thank for the turning point in their lives.

The Karl-Franzens-University Graz has good reason to be proud to be the location for WUS Austria and to have Prof. Wolfgang Benedek at the helm, in charge of the many connections. I truly enjoy looking back on the many trips we took together, on the signing of the university-partnership with the University of Sarajevo, on the surprise of the plaques given to honour our work at the university, and on several adventures we had together in the Balkans, where I could always rely on him and on the WUS network for support.

Again and again, people here cross my path whose life story contains a chapter of WUS. But the labile situation of the Balkans in and directly after the war was exactly ripe for the fundamentals of civil society that WUS brought to bear, which now begin to show their longevity. The new, young elite, who have left the prejudices of the past century for the most part behind them and on whose shoulders the future of the region rests, have WUS to thank for their mobility, their internationality, their professionalism and their belief in the possibilities of a better society. In this way, WUS has made their contribution to the stability of the wider region with relatively restricted means, but all the more commitment.

HELMUT KONRAD WAS RECTOR OF THE KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITY GRAZ, FROM 1993-1997. FROM 1995-1998 HE WAS VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE AUSTRIAN RECTORS CONFERENCE. SINCE 2004 HE IS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.



HELMUT KONRAD ON HIS WAY TO SARAJEVO WITH “MAYBE AIRLINES”, 1995



## WORLD UNIVERSITY SERVICE AUSTRIA – A “GUARDIAN ANGEL” OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION ON THE BASIS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY



TRIBUTE / BARBARA WEITGRUBER

**W**orld University Service Austria has been a partner at all stages of my professional life in a number of different joint activities and projects over the past 21 years.

When I was Director of the Office of International Relations at the University of Graz, WUS Austria was the driving force and the leading partner in initiating cooperation with partner universities in Africa, and especially in establishing a formal link with the University of Harare in Zimbabwe.

At that time the focus of activities for WUS Austria was on the right to education in the South (e.g. in South Africa or in Latin America).

In 1992 WUS Austria started its assistance and cooperation activities in and for South-Eastern Europe accompanied by the establishment of branch offices in that region. These offices helped to channel humanitarian assistance to the universities in order to keep them going and to counteract - to some extent - to the massive brain drain of university teachers and students. As WUS Austria aimed at local empowerment and capacity-building, the establishment of local structures and committees was encouraged and supported, and the WUS offices all still exist today.

During this period of time, WUS Austria was an important partner in a number of support measures and co-operation projects for and with the higher education and science sectors in South-Eastern Europe.

WUS Austria also became a very active member of the Higher Education Working Group of the Task Force “Education and Youth” of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and joined forces with the Task Force in many activities related to higher education, science and research ever since its foundation in 1999.

Of course, the priorities of WUS Austria have changed over times from humanitarian assistance and post-conflict rehabilitation to measures supporting



the full integration of South-Eastern Europe in the European Knowledge Area with a variety of activities like the *Brain Gain Program* to promote brain circulation or *Course Development Programs* to facilitate the implementation of the Bologna reforms, to name only two. In the framework of the EU-Program TEMPUS, WUS Austria was very active in a number of projects, all aiming at promoting reforms in higher education.

Many of these activities have of course taken place in close cooperation with Austrian universities or other European universities and companies. For European and international donors, the clear understanding of the specific needs of higher education institutions in South-Eastern Europe has made of WUS an important partner and coordinator for many projects and initiatives.

Over the years I have witnessed WUS developing into a nationally and internationally well known leading NGO in cooperation with South-Eastern Europe in higher education and into a highly successful coordinator of programs and projects with and for South-Eastern Europe.

What impressed me most over all these years was the high level of personal commitment, enthusiasm and tenacity of all WUS members. I certainly hope that this will continue – wherever in the world the promotion of the human right to education on the basis of academic freedom and university autonomy needs to be fostered.

BARBARA WEITGRUBER, AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH



## 25 YEARS OF WUS AUSTRIA

by WOLFGANG BENEDEK



Returning from a conference of the *International World University Service* (WUS) in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1982, my valued teacher and colleague Professor Dr. Konrad Ginther brought with him the idea of founding an Austrian committee of the World University Service. I gladly took over the implementation of this project. Through WUS, interested higher education teachers and students could take part in a world-wide network which was just as relevant in South Africa to those suffering under Apartheid as to those living under military dictatorships in Latin America, but also in Asia, Canada and Europe. The goals of the network were clear: to realize human rights in the context of education and to protect university autonomy. Every two years, the complete “WUS Family” from the South and the North would come together to meet and discuss current topics and future strategies in complete equality. WUS offered thousands of refugee-students the ability to proceed with their education well into the 1990s.

With the democratization of Latin America and the end of Apartheid, these programs (funded mostly by the Swedish development agency SIDA) came to an end. The international office of WUS in Geneva lost its biggest financial supporter and its activities were suspended shortly afterwards.

As a side note, I should mention that the precursor organization to WUS - “European Student Relief” – was founded in 1920 by an interreligious British initiative in order to provide for students and professors of the University of Vienna who found themselves in a desperate situation after World War I. The first Austrian WUS committee was founded after World War II, but it did not stay active for long.

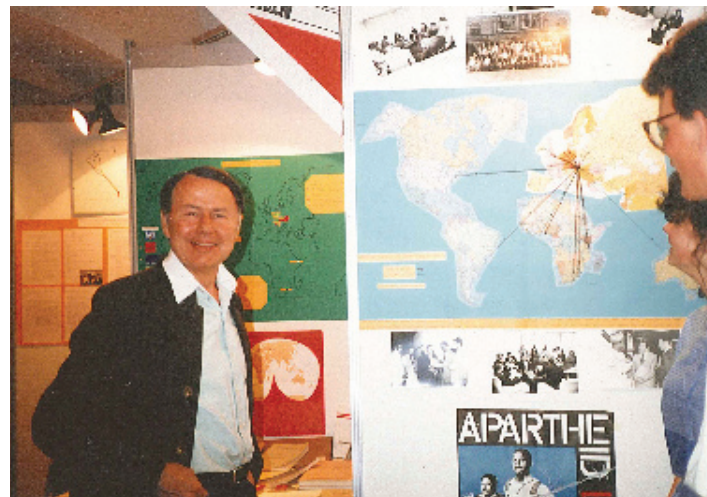
The newly founded Austrian World University Service committee (WUS Austria) concentrated on legal aid programs in South Africa and the support of the militarily occupied universities in Latin America in the 1980s, but it also had contact with committees in India and Sri Lanka. Later, WUS Austria also ran post-graduate summer courses in Stadtschlaining and then at Makerere University in Kampala. In its activities, WUS Austria focused specifically on supporting the right

to education for those suffering from politically motivated persecution and on furthering the autonomy of the universities. In this vein, the so-called *Lima Declaration* regarding freedom and autonomy in higher education was adopted by the 1988 WUS General Assembly. Manfred Nowak, who is still active as a board member of WUS Austria today, was the driving force behind this important step.

When the war in the Balkans began in 1991, the Austrian committee of WUS was one of the first to recognize responsibility in terms of protecting the right to education. First, WUS Austria set about trying to help the students who had fled Yugoslavia to Austria by establishing scholarship programs. Soon, however, programs were also started to support the students' home universities. In the beginning, the university of the war-torn city of Sarajevo received much of the attention, but later other Bosnian universities, as well as the universities in Montenegro and Prishtina and, after the fall of Milosevic, in Serbia received aid. WUS Austria charged itself with providing urgently needed humanitarian aid and then rebuilding the necessary infrastructure. Later on, WUS was also involved with facilitating the return of professors and students, the reform of the curricula, the development of quality research and ensuring stronger practical orientation for higher education through links to the economy.

To accomplish these goals, WUS Austria set up an office at the University of Sarajevo in the autumn of 1994. Further offices in Banja Luka, Podgorica, Prishtina and Belgrade followed, but WUS Austria was also present through projects and contact persons in other countries, such as Macedonia. In Sarajevo and Banja Luka academic centres were built to offer students better access to opportunities of international mobility.

I will never forget the arrival of the bus full of pale and tired students and professors from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Sarajevo who came to the Technical University of Graz after their own laboratory equipment had gone missing in the summer of 1994. They returned with a large amount of material which had to be transported into the city via a tunnel under the airstrip, since, in the meantime, the lines of besiegement around Sarajevo had once again closed. Similarly, my first visit to the war-torn city of Sarajevo in autumn of 1994 remains unforgettable, when the former rector Faruk Seleskovic and his wife Enisa received me like their son. There was a striking contrast between the unbelievable destruction we found there and the openness and generosity of the people who had been thrown





SOROS-SEMINAR IN BUDAPEST WITH KAMBIZ GHAWAMI,  
CHAIRMAN OF WUS GERMANY

na which included all universities as well as the later co-foundation of WUS Romania. The principle was always to work with local staff as much as possible; only in Kosovo, at the beginning of the co-operation, this was not possible. In addition, young Austrians came to these offices as part of their civil service to contribute to peace-building and acquired language and intercultural competences along the way. Many of them are still very successful in this area today.

All of these activities would not have been possible without the institutions and the people who applied themselves to the cause so tirelessly. Chief among these I would like to thank the University of Graz, where all the incumbent rectors always supported the activities of WUS Austria, as well as the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, the Foreign Ministry and, especially, the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) which finances a large part of WUS Austria's projects in South-Eastern Europe.

I would also especially like to thank the former rector of the University of Graz, Helmut Konrad, who concluded the partnership agreement with the University of Sarajevo during his time as rector, and Barbara Weitgruber, soul and motor of the Task Force "Education and Youth" of the Stability Pact. She was always as active for educational cooperation with South-Eastern Europe as was the General Director of the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, Anton Dobart.

together into this situation. And finally, I will always remember my visit to Kosovo in 1999 after WUS Austria, whose Prishtina office had been plundered during the NATO bombardments and been subsequently moved to Tetovo, could return. I also want to highlight the generosity of the then Austrian Minister of Education, who made a significant amount available for the employees of the University of Prishtina working at that time without any payment.

In a similar way, the Austrian Foreign Ministry, together with the DAAD and a Dutch partnership, financed the pay checks for university employees of Sarajevo, Tuzla and the Bosnian university in Mostar for an initial period.

Because of the massive human rights violations and the war, WUS Austria also financed several human rights centres, beginning with one in Sarajevo in 1996 and, in 2000, in Prishtina. These are active still today, connected as a network and contribute to solving ethnic conflicts.

The strengthening of the principles of sustainability and of ownership served as a motive for the foundation of a national WUS committee for Bosnia and Herzegovi-



Today, our main partner at the University of Graz is Vice-Rector Roberta Maierhofer, who has developed the South-Eastern European focus of the university, to which WUS Austria has also made its contribution, into a world-renowned field of competence. In the background, there were people like Erhard Busek, the former Vice-Chancellor of Austria, who, with his understanding and good will, always encouraged us on our way.

Today, WUS Austria is a professional educational organization, which develops national and EU projects in South-Eastern Europe, and, in the future, perhaps also again in Africa and Latin America. As a result of its competence, WUS Austria often receives requests to become a partner in international consortia with universities and organizations. It has not been uncommon to learn that an Austrian university is only able to take part in such an activity because WUS Austria has shared its experience with the university. Invitations to become more active in cooperative projects with the economy have also increased over the past years.

That said, WUS Austria has never forgotten its initial goals including enhancing the situation for foreign students in Austria and increasing the internationalization of universities. Many of the original members of WUS are still active in this area. The activities of WUS Austria in the area of human rights were partly taken over by the *European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation* in Graz, founded in 1999. Also here, the Human Right to Education, including the education on Human Rights, is given a central role.

Under the competent leadership of Adi Kovacevic (originally from Sarajevo) as director of WUS Austria, and through the efforts of his team, WUS Austria's activities have continued to increase. A few flagship programs, such as the *Balkan Case Challenge*, have made WUS more visible to the public. While most other larger institutions have traditionally settled in Vienna, WUS Austria has notably maintained its main centre of operations in Graz, in the region of Styria – both of which have always provided their support to WUS Austria.

25 years is a long time and one could say much more about them. There are so many various experiences and perspectives worthy to be shared. Therefore, the idea of a very personal “Festschrift” was born, in which collaborators, partners and friends of WUS Austria can share their experiences and memories of WUS Austria. From this, a kaleidoscope of stories and impressions is created, which together give an insight into the variety and experience of WUS Austria. To conclude, I would like to thank all those who have contributed memories, thoughts and financial support to this work, spanning 25 years.



BUT DEDAJ, WOLFGANG BENEDEK  
AND ENVER HOXAJ

WOLFGANG BENEDEK, CHAIRMAN OF WUS AUSTRIA,  
PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

## WHAT WUS MEANS TO ME

by **ALMIR KOVACEVIC**



**I**n May 1992 I left my city, my friends, family, the life I knew before, and drove into the unknown. While driving the car and trying to avoid anti-personnel, anti-tank, or whatever mines there were in the minefield they let us drive through, I couldn't know that my life as a third-year student of the University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, had just ended; that I would never again see some of my colleagues and professors, that I would never again be happy or angry in the corridors of the professors' offices, which I had just left with the grade of 10 or 5 in my student record booklet.

Continuing to travel into the unknown, by bus, train, or on foot, the small bag which I took with me became increasingly less important. The only thing that mattered was the left pocket of my jeans jacket into which I hid my passport, high school diploma and my student record booklet, with the still unverified summer semester of 1992. All of us, refugees, runaways, expelled people, were no longer different due the size of houses in which we lived, nor the makes of our cars which were burnt somewhere anyways. The only important issue was the answer to the question 'What do you know, what is your profession?'. Only the knowledge and skills which we possessed gave us little, but important hope for future. It was then, when I was 22 years old, that I understood that the knowledge and skills acquired through education were the most important and the most intimate "thing" that I owned. Only that "something", located so deep inside me, could not be taken away from me, torn or burnt. It was then that I felt that the student record booklet inside my left pocked became heavier and more important as the days passed, as it was the booklet that gave me the hope of continuing my education. My nights in railway stations in Zagreb, Budapest or Vienna were no longer so lonely. I could brace for my left pocket whenever I felt that I was falling asleep, and wake up with this document of hope at dawn, waiting to continue my journey.

Such an experience, acquired in a situation when only the primordial and essential becomes important, left deep impact on me. In the course of my studies that I continued at the University of Graz, I was led by instinct, polished by experience and, by chance, I learned of the work of WUS Austria and its slogan "Right to Education." It was long afterwards that the real meaning of this slogan became clear to me, and hence even more important.

By chance, or maybe not exactly by chance, I am presently working for the organization whose slogan is "Right to Education."

When I leave my apartment in Graz to go to work in the headquarters of WUS Austria, my thoughts most often wander to everyday routine: discussions with my colleagues and partners on the next steps in the implementation of a strategic project, to the questions posed by my colleagues from the financial and administrative department, the first morning coffee in the office, as well as the coming deadlines for the submission of new projects and the workshop for the optimization of our processes. I often think of the schedule of project tasks in the new project jointly implemented by five of our offices. I think of the continuing growth of our organization, which develops thematically and geographically.

The fact that allows me to raise my head high on my way to the office and to feel satisfied regardless of the 10-hour work day awaiting me every day, is the feeling that I have dedicated my 11 years of work experience to education, knowledge and science. This is something that no one will ever be able to take away from me, something that brings prosperity and development to all of us.

I would like to thank WUS Austria and the people which make it up, the organization which is both my employer and my friend, for the right to go to work feeling happy and for being able to tell a stranger in the airport café what a fantastic job I have.

ALMIR KOVACEVIC,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WUS AUSTRIA



HARMANDIC, NITSCHKE AND KOVACEVIC,  
STRATEGY MEETING 2004

ANNUAL MEETING IN GRAZ 2007





## PERSONAL MEMORIES OF WUS

by MANFRED NOWAK



BRUNO KREISKY PRIZE, 1996

World University Service (WUS) is one of the oldest NGOs to be engaged in human rights. Already after the First World War, WUS contributed to the reconciliation of the various European nations by organizing student exchanges and supporting disadvantaged students. I myself first came into contact with this now globally restructured organization in 1982 when an Austrian WUS committee was struck under the leadership of Konrad Ginther and Wolfgang Benedek, which - by the way - was not the first in the varied history of the WUS. Since around this time I have also been functioning as the (not very active) vice president of WUS Austria.

In the beginning, we concerned ourselves with improvements to the international students' situation at Austrian universities through offering a broader scope of service, less bureaucracy, and reforming the rather dusty preparation course. Brigitte Ortner, Grete Kernegger and many others were invaluable in their efforts to make the necessary changes to the system. After the cold war and the ethnic-religious cleansing in former Yugoslavia, the focal point for WUS Austria shifted to South-Eastern Europe.

My first experience with WUS International was a two-year appointment in 1984 in Nantes. The WUS structure, with more than 50 national committees from around the world, the international offices in our "Villa" in Geneva and the large and small political discussions and political games appeared like a mini-UNO to me at first. The Latin-American committees and their left-wing political ideals, the African committees, as always grounded and respected, the Asian committees with their wisdom, variety and equilibrium, and the "Western" committees, who never knew whether to side with the left-leaning, emancipated ideals of the group as a whole or with the pragmatism of their home countries (which, not incidentally, were financing WUS.) WUS was one of the first NGOs to define themselves as simultaneously a humanitarian, developmental and human rights organization. Kofi Annan's wisdom, that the major goals of the United Nations (peace and security, development and poverty elimination, humanitarian opportunities and human rights) are interdependent, and that without human rights nothing else functions, were already main tenants in WUS. The biggest project during this time were supporting the uprising against the Apartheid regime in South Africa and against the military dictatorship in Latin America through organizing education programs in the halls of the African National Congress and conducting a stipend program for Latin American political refugees.

One of the key projects for the coming years would be the creation of common standards concerning academic freedom and university autonomy and the implementation of these through the publication of a yearbook about academic freedom, wherein the experience of various countries was analysed and certain lobbying and awareness-building was chronicled. Through this project, it became obvious that university cultures, traditions and structures are very different, the world over, and that only with great difficulty could common standards for all countries and universities be established. However, in 1988, after hard but also very educational and fruitful discussions in Peru, consensus was reached with the “*Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom*”, which was maintained for many years as a central document for the UNESCO and other organizations who felt it important to strengthen university and scientific independence.

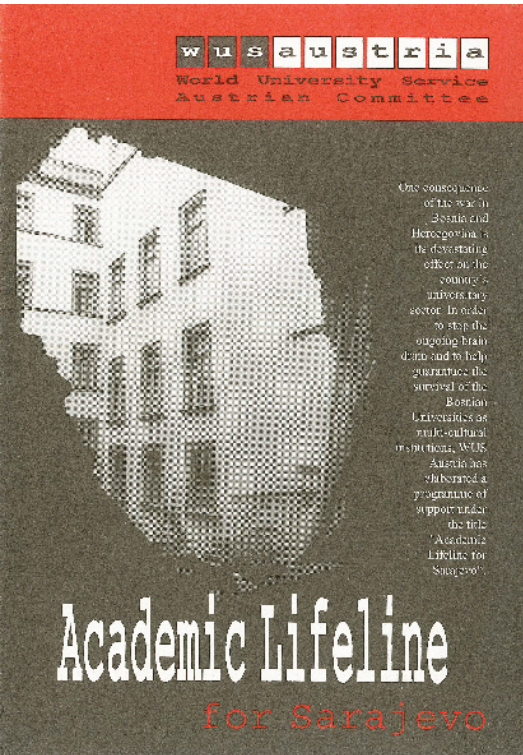
Through my active involvement in these questions, I was voted onto the board of WUS International. I still remember exactly how difficult it was to vote this board of directors in democratically, since we had a roster of requisites that was not easy to fulfil: 50% gender balance, 50% balance between teachers and students at universities and a strict regional balance with three representatives each from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the West. Unfortunately, my time with the International WUS was more filled with crisis-management than it was with debating strategies to fight poverty and inequality in the academic world. This was because at the end of the cold war, although it was a new beginning for the world, it was a very difficult financial time for WUS. As odd as it sounds, this was because the regions of the world where WUS was particularly active were improving in their human rights.

With the re-democratization of Latin America and the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, the reasons for the two largest support programs had disappeared. Apart from this, there was also a danger of being too dependent on only a few financial supporters, such as the Swedish Development Agency SIDA. With the fall of the communist regime in middle and Eastern Europe, a new set of challenges presented itself to WUS in the transition-countries, where WUS Austria was given a central role. But WUS International encountered increasing difficulties and was too inflexible and slow to adapt to the new challenges and



MEETING OF WUS INTERNATIONAL IN SHARJAH, 1998





circumstances. Nigel Hartley had served the organization well in his position as general secretary, especially as a crisis-manager, but WUS was not strong enough to cope with his tragic death.

It became clear that the idealistic and very democratic structure of the organization, without a strong International Secretary, would not be able to function well.

The centrifugal force was too weak, and WUS split into many national committees. Any committees which did not have a good enough structural and/or financial basis - those which had been organized and financed through WUS International - also encountered serious difficulties and were partly disbanded. However, WUS Austria gained in recognition and status through its major undertaking: the support for university life ("Academic Lifeline") in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Kosovo.

I will always remember our unsuccessful attempt to save WUS International with the help of petrodollars from the Emir of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. We organized, with the active help of his majesty, the 70th general meeting in his desert (something fairly unusual for a left-leaning organization) and had even not eliminated the possibility of moving the international office to Sharjah, but in the end were not able to come to an agreement about the projected role of the Sheik.

It is thanks to the tireless engagement of Wolfgang Benedek that WUS Austria withstood all these restless times. With his visionary perspective and his unique ingenuity, he could always be counted on to find funding for the teachers, students and infrastructure for the universities in former Yugoslavia and to lead the relevant WUS Austria support programs. Whoever stopped by the offices of WUS Austria either during or after the war at the universities in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Prishtina and other cities often found better organized and supplied offices than those of the rector! Even during the most difficult times for the universities, you could always find information about professorial and student exchanges, material support or just a good cup of coffee. Here, an important principal of WUS lived and lives on: the empowerment of struggling university communities through international academic solidarity. For this engagement, Wolfgang Benedek has been honoured by several awards from the Sarajevo Honor Society.

Today, in honour of the 25th anniversary of WUS Austria, we should give him an honorary doctorate from World University Service!

MANFRED NOWAK IS PROFESSOR OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA. HE WAS ONE OF THE JUDGES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS CHAMBER FOR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA BETWEEN MARCH 1996 AND DECEMBER 2003. NOWAK IS CURRENTLY THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON TORTURE, AND WAS ONE OF THE FIVE AUTHORS OF A UNITED NATIONS REPORT ON THE DETENTION OF CAPTIVES AT THE UNITED STATES NAVAL BASE AT GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA. HE IS VICE-CHAIRMAN OF WUS AUSTRIA.

## WUS AUSTRIA 25 YEARS AGO:

In the beginning, in Vienna, there were - the international students!

by GRETE KERNEGGER, MONIKA FRITZ, BARBARA WIEGELE

**T**he pre-studies work with “foreign students”, as they were still called then, was always more of a calling than a job. When WUS Austria was founded in 1983 it was a wonderful opportunity for us, as it provided an ideological base which reflected our mandate and offered active projects.

In this way, our small WUS group, clustered around Manfred Nowak, could work with the Afro-Asian Institute in Vienna and the Austrian Higher Education Group to produce an informational brochure, the first publication of which was in 1984: “Information Brochure for Foreign Students in Austria - Focal point Third World”. Further publications followed until finally the Austrian Higher Education Group took it over. Still today, an extensive informational brochure for international students counts as standard publication with this group. However, the initial impetus came from WUS!

A second continued initiative was the project “Advice-Tutorial” for international students during their preparation period. Not all the powers were convinced that such a project was actually necessary at first - in contrast to WUS who encouraged the idea from its inception. As the years went by, this project divided itself into two parts: the MAP-Project, where the new students in the preparation course were paired with more experienced colleagues who spoke their mother tongue, in order to support them and give them advice, and the Intercultural Practicum (in co-operation with the University of Vienna) where Austrian students from the Germanic institute and the international students in the preparation course could come into contact with one another in a structured setting and gain intercultural experience.

Even though WUS Austria developed from being a locally important initiative into an organization of international stature long ago: It is the original principals of borderless solidarity which are still reality today - more alive and necessary than ever!

We are proud to have been there at the beginning and offer our hearty congratulations!

GRETE KERNEGGER, MONIKA FRITZ, BARBARA WIEGELE  
PREPARATION COURSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA



## WOMEN'S RIGHTS / HUMAN RIGHTS: WUS Austria in Africa

by GERD OBERLEITNER



Who enables women (and men) from Malawi, Ghana or Cameroon to taste lard and salt on their new potatoes in Drumling? (Drumling, for those lesser-travelled readers, is on the mountain directly behind St. Martin in the Fields but in front of Stadtschlaining which lies in Burgenland.) Or, who sees to it that the weekly market in Oberwart (every Wednesday!) is bought out entirely? Or, who holds sessions at the Gruberwirt in Stadtschlaining (great Schnitzel!) on the role of women in society in Botswana? Of course: WUS Austria, who else?

From 1993 to 1999, the yearly held positions in the post-graduate training courses on women's rights (where many other noteworthy events took place as well) wrote a bit of Austrian history concerning human rights education and joint development projects. WUS Austria was 'invented' by, among others, Dorota Gierycz (then in the New York UN division for the Advancement of Women), Dorothea Gaudart (then at the University of Vienna and the Austrian UNESCO commission) and Wolfgang Benedek (Chairman of WUS Austria). The OEZA took on the responsibility of financing the post-graduate study of women's rights in Anglophone Africa which WUS Austria would develop, offer and run. The fact that the OEZA was represented by a member of WUS - namely Lydia Sadaat - was helpful and in addition, more evidence of the productive strength of the WUS.

The first two courses (1993 and 1994) were held in Austria, at the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining. There, or perhaps more particularly in the incomparable 'International House' lead by Ms. Mader, the WUS-team (including the author) took up residence, strengthened by the team from the Viennese Ludwig-Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights. Subsequent courses (from 1995 - 1999) took place in Kampala/Uganda in cooperation with WUS Uganda. WUS Uganda was, in all reality, best represented in the person of Irene Kisuule, who not only participated in the first course but also soon became the 'African soul' of the course which she continued to be for years. The regional office of the Austrian Development Agency in Kampala and the Human Rights and Peace Centre at the Makerere University in Kampala also joined in. This long list of partner institutions is witness to WUS Austria's facility to act both as inspiration and compass for cooperative projects, a characteristic which became useful in various ways during the years of cooperative projects undertaken in the Balkans.

The courses on women's rights were thought of, over all, as 'Translation aids': the abstract human rights codes became practical tools, adjusted to fit the situation, needs and experience of all those who understood them. The encouragement of 'legal literacy' for women (but also for men) in the area of human rights was the overall goal. The practical



application of international standards in the African context was the challenge this course posed. How could one use and honour the experience of decision-makers in the areas of economics, law and politics, as well as society and cultural life, while at the same time allow access to international women's rights and the international institutions and debates belonging to the subject?

How could one make a difference to the society as a whole, through the discussion of equal opportunity and women's rights? The course offered a broad pallet of topics which were a mix of specific information and critical reflection. These ranged from more general significant questions about the role of the United Nations, the special and regional organizations, and the UN-women's rights convention to specific concerns which were often formulated by the students themselves about women as refugees, women in prison, women in armed conflicts and women in Islam.



Today, courses, degree programs and summer schools concerning women's rights are much more wide-spread; in the beginning of the '90s, the courses that WUS offered were quite unique. The presentation of women's rights as an aspect of human rights seemed, to some, as suspect an idea as highlighting the role of the United Nations. To not only respect African reality but also seek to influence it through education - thereby understanding education in human rights as a formative societal influence - was a controversial topic. Other programs of study followed soon after, in specific regions in the French language, with new topics. But WUS Austria can, once again, claim with authority to have been one of the first.

The Austrian Development Agency financed the project year after year (in the first two years, support from the Austrian Academy of Sciences could also be used). Over the years, recognized authorities in theory and practice taught courses and lead workshops with a total of more than 150 participants from 28 different nations. Many of these were recipients of stipends from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Students, ministers of parliament, lawyers, NGO workers - they were chosen for their breadth of experience to achieving a wider dissemination. Hearing back from alumni was always interesting and encouraging: a new law initiative here, a trainings program there; a conference, a newly founded NGO or perhaps even only a slowly growing network of graduates of the program who not only broadened and deepened their understanding of women's rights but also were unofficial ambassadors of WUS. Over the years, interest and applications to the program have never diminished.



MEMORIES / GERD OBERLEITNER

Even though the many efforts to institutionalize and further conduct the course within the University of Makerere came to naught, the collaborative efforts of participants and teachers during those years yielded an important gain in knowledge, understanding and analysis collected in a text book (Wolfgang Benedek, Esther M. Kisaakye and Gerd Oberleitner (eds.): *The Human Rights of Women – International Instruments and African Experiences*, London, ZED Books, 2002). This course was also very instructive in a time in which human rights education was understood as an independent field and it was necessary to better understand its goals, methods and mechanisms. Not everything in the course was a success, but everything was instructive with respect to the way human rights are reflectively, critically and constructively conveyed, spread and understood.

The 'African years' of the WUS Austria were a new experience: the transfer of developmental political ideas into concrete cooperative projects, the engagement in the area of human rights as a part of WUS mandate, and the cooperative work with so many different partners - from the university of Hong Kong to the African commission for Human Rights and the people in Banjul, from the Commission on Prisons in Uganda to the Council of Europe in Strassburg, and from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London to the office of the high commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. It was the time that the sister organizations WUS Austria and WUS Uganda created a close bond and learned many things about European and African realities. And it was the time in which WUS Austria was present from Casablanca to Cape Town, crossing borders and making connections, in keeping with the character and mandate of WUS.

GERD OBERLEITNER IS LECTURER AT THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ. HE HOLDS A DOCTORAL DEGREE IN LAW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ (1996). HE IS CO-FOUNDER OF THE EUROPEAN TRAINING AND RESEARCH CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN GRAZ AND WAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CENTRE FROM 1999 TO 2002; PRESENTLY HE IS ON THE CENTRE'S BOARD.

## SMALL ORGANIZATION FOR BIG THINGS

by JOSIP KREGAR

**A**lthough I do not remember the exact date, I remember clearly the period when WUS Croatia was established. One decent man with a well-looked-after beard came to Zagreb and introduced himself as a someone who would like to establish WUS in Croatia: that was Professor Wolfgang Benedek. Apart from him, there were not very many 'normal' things in Croatia at that time. People in uniforms were walking the streets, some of them carrying weapons; predominant topics in newspapers were patriotic topics to promote the fight for independence, and nobody was involved in human rights issues, not to mention the right to education.

The establishment and the registration of WUS was a real nightmare. The administration required that all procedures were followed and in the chaos of war that was understandably difficult. The first task was to help students from former Yugoslavian countries who were in Croatia when the war started and who had become separated from their families. But this implied that we had to find documents which did not exist to allow us to work legally, to find locations and people. Honestly, from my perspective it was impossible, but that was the time of miracles and I believed that we will be able to do something. I had never thought that the task would be so comprehensive and so difficult. I believed that we would be able to manage something for possibly a hundred students who needed assistance. I thought that the Croatian Government would easily waive tuition fees for people who suddenly became citizens of different countries, and because of that they had to pay tuition fees in order to continue with their education. The first surprise was the number. It was not dozens, but a few thousand students. They approached us because they heard that we could provide help and they all came with their devastating life stories. They were the real victims of war. I was shocked and disheartened because I learned that some of them were exiled by the Croatian Army. I will never forget the expression on the face of a student from Jajce who stated, as a clear fact, that he was expelled by the HVO, and that they had killed his father and that now he was in Croatia with no money, acquaintances or friends. We were helping Serbs, Croats and mostly we extended assistance to Bosnians. I remember the cynicism of the Minister of Science who knew what was happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and whose response to our request for



JOSIP KREGAR, VESNA SMITRAN,  
THOMAS WOLKINGER AND  
STUDENTS, 1994

assistance was that all students are deserters.

Wolfgang Benedek organized financial assistance and we provided aid and scholarship to poor students in amounts that would be enough for them to live a day or two. With the assistance of different funds and organizations he managed to organize the covering of tuition fees. In organizational terms - I specifically remember Vesna Šmitran - we resolved trivial problems of premises and accounting. As far as I remember, we changed six different locations in short period of time; we worked in the attic of an undertaker's, in a part of the flat of a friend, in areas of suburbia, a region that I did not know existed. We provided assistance to associations of Bosnian students, we received aid from different humanitarian organizations, and we extended aid and scholarships, procured textbooks and looked for rooms for students, and we helped students go to other countries to study. The greatest assistance came from Austria, University of Graz, but from many other organizations: Islamic, Catholic, American and Canadian associations and humanitarian organisations came to Croatia. WUS became an organization and the office was frequently visited by different people who came to ask for help, but also for advice, references and words of comfort. Everything appeared out-of-time and surreal. We assisted professors to leave besieged Sarajevo, we wrote letters against division of the University of Mostar and we asked for fair treatment of Bosnian students. Moreover, that was the time when, in Bosnian war, there were conflicts between Croats and Bosnians and we were therefore often considered to be traitors, helping enemies. We were providing help to people in distress, and we helped students for whom we were the only hope.

Over time, the number of volunteers and assistants increased. The office became an organized institution with working hours and employees, accounting service and a sign at the entrance. However, the atmosphere remained the same, the atmosphere of a campaign for which the work is not measured and paid, the atmosphere of a society run on inspiration where work often extended past normal working hours. The students' problems were being resolved; they got Croatian citizenship or they left Croatia, they received assistance from and were accommodated by at least thirty universities all over the world. Instead of few thousands registered students, the number decreased to few hundreds and finally to a few dozens. We were the logistics basis for the assistance to Bosnia. The role in Croatia was changed from a humanitarian role to tasks related to protection of human rights and right to education.

Indeed, it was an enormous and important mission. It was not a simple establishment of a NGO and routine operations. It was the task of the moment: a mission that required courage and risk-taking, as well as faith in success. This is the reason why am I underlining the example of Wolfgang Benedek. He had noticed the problem, he had the vision, and he turned that vision into mission and the mission into dedicated work. Back then I didn't understand what motivated him to travel all the time between Graz, Zagreb, Bruxelles, Vienna and Sarajevo to persuade people who did not have power and optimism to undertake their obligations. It did not just seem hard, it seemed impossible to do what he asked. I was not able to understand his motives, his strong



will and the time that he invested. Obviously, he had to sacrifice other things – I supposed that he sacrificed his family life and academic ambitions among others. How is it possible to give oneself selflessly to work and assistance for people that one does not even know? What did he believe in and what kind of reward was he expecting to get? I could not comprehend the reasons for his sacrifice.

Two years after that I was a visiting professor at Yale University for a year. Even though it has good reputation, this brilliant university is located in a shabby little town in New England. One day, just by a chance, there was a girl in front of me in a shop, and she started to cry and hugged me. I did not realize what happened and she kept saying that I had saved her life. She said that with WUS' assistance she left Bosnia and then Zagreb, said that WUS got her a scholarship and provided her with the possibility to start a new life. She kept crying. I looked at her face and I did not recognize her. I did not remember her "case". She was an unknown face to me. And only then I realized what kind of pleasure Wolfgang must have felt. It is the pleasure of helping others, not for your own benefit and interest, but because you should, because it is a moral requirement, not a deed you do to get a reward, or to earn eternal life or to placate fear. The true and unselfish altruism and humanity lives on the feeling that you are doing the right thing.

Thank you, Wolfgang.



VISIT TO WUS ZAGREB, 1993

JOSIP KREGAR WAS HEAD OF THE WUS OFFICE IN ZAGREB.  
CURRENTLY HE IS DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB.



## AN EVENT FOR WINTER SHOES!

by PETER RIEDLER



When I began to work for WUS Austria in 1994, the war in the former Yugoslavia and the siege of Sarajevo were the events at issue. During this time, I undertook a certain activity which lasted several months.

The situation for students in Sarajevo was such that there was a groundswell of students in Graz who wanted to contribute some sort of support. At some point, the idea of starting a donation event was born. Since it was nearly wintertime, it was decided that winter shoes would be needed and welcomed by the students in Sarajevo.

The idea blossomed into a project. The Austrian Student Union had come up with the idea of inviting everyone to a festival to the *Eschenlaube*, requesting that a pair of winter shoes or boots be brought as tickets to attend. The challenge, or rather, invitation, went out over the Antenna Styria airwaves.

The campaign's success exceeded all expectations. *The Eschenlaube* was full of people and hundreds of pairs of winter shoes were donated. People from Graz and those who did not attend the festival added more shoes to the ÖH (Austrian Student Union). In this collection were shoes of very good quality as well as, of course, some (including ski-boots) which caused us to question the sincerity of the donors.

The project took on unanticipated proportions. For weeks, the shoes took up temporary residence in the "command-central cellar" (which they took up almost entirely), packed in boxes and awaiting transport.

What no one had thought about during the initial stages of this shoe-drive was how difficult it would be to organize a shoe-transport to Sarajevo. Our shipment was deemed "strategic goods". It took countless deals and interventions until we could finally load up a truck on an already-late winter morning.

The experiences I had during my time with WUS, I count among the most exciting and full of emotion I have ever had, despite my many career moves since then. The days were full of cooperative engagement, and the unforgettable mood somewhere between anticipation, frustration and also, happily, high spirits.

PETER RIEDLER IS HEAD OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE AFFAIRS WORKING IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE CEO IN THE AVL LIST GMBH IN GRAZ.

## WUS AUSTRIA IN A BESIEGED SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

by VESNA BESIREVIC

**N**obody could have imagined that – at the same time when computers were started at other European offices in the morning – we in WUS Austria Sarajevo Office, back in the cold war winter of 1994, started fire in our old office stove: We were using logs or even pieces of the office carpet, scarified to keep us warm in order to implement the 1st Program of WUS Austria in Bosnia and Herzegovina, financed by the Federal Chancellery of the Republic of Austria.

Just a couple of months before, in August 1994, the greatest news in our academic community was that Professor Wolfgang Benedek, the Head of WUS Austria, was coming to Sarajevo to investigate possibilities for starting a BiH WUS Office and a Program.

It seemed quite impossible – but it was true: Professor Benedek would arrive in a couple of days. Bombs were falling on the city, its main streets were kept under snipe shooting – and Professor Benedek was on a fact-finding mission to identify the most urgent steps to give support to the University of Sarajevo.

During the talks he had in Sarajevo, the two of us had a brief conversation and quickly identified a common ground and possibilities for WUS Austria's work in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Back then, WUS Zagreb strongly supported BiH students – refugees in Croatia - in their living conditions and academic needs. Wolfgang regarded it as smarter to create proper conditions for the academic community to remain in Bosnia thus enabling universities to stay alive. Brain-drain had seriously exhausted capacities of the Sarajevo and other universities, threatening even their physical survival. I assumed he considered me energetic and visionary, a perfect match to the mission.

Shortly after Professor Benedek's visit, which was concluded by my official engagement as the Representative of WUS Austria and Head of WUS Sarajevo Office, I was able to announce WUS Austria's presence in Sarajevo to local authorities and to the international NGO community.

Our plans, which seemed to be a daring overstatement at that time, started to become reality.

In October 1994, a provisional WUS Austria Sarajevo Office was established, kindly hosted by my husband's company „Profil“. My husband provided the „Profil“ premises to WUS free of charge for





WUS AUSTRIA OFFICE IN SARAJEVO



MEMORIES / VESNA BESIREVIC

any service or utility. My daughter Nina joined me in my new engagement from the first day, as the very first WUS Austria student volunteer in Sarajevo. The shipments from Austria started to deliver valuable books, textbooks, magazines, equipment and other donations to our provisional office situated in the very center of Sarajevo, the Olomanka Building in Marshal Tito's Street. It was a symbolic support of the Austrian students to the war-stricken Sarajevo University and its students, streamlined and collected through the WUS Austria Head Office Graz.

In due time, other student volunteers joined WUS Austria in Sarajevo, so a small but firm capacity was established for the day-to-day work, while we were negotiating the office placement in a more academic environment at the Sarajevo University.

On Wednesday, April 12, 1995, the Office of WUS Austria was officially opened in the premises of the Sarajevo University, Kulina Bana 7.

Due to total isolation it was a matter of life and death to defend the idea of survival of the universities as multicultural institutions, to promote the right to education, the preservation of core university teachers and staff who remained in the state and were willing to continue their work. It was also a matter of life and death to establish and maintain a two-way flow of information, people, goods and ideas. We did it by using the WUS Austria chain: Wolfgang from his side, me from the inside and my dear colleague Vesna Šmitran, Head of WUS Austria Zagreb Office, lobbying for BiH in Croatia. WUS Austria Zagreb Office also served as the most precious communication link between WUS Sarajevo and WUS Graz.

In spring 1995, shortly after our moving to the University, WUS Austria BiH launched „The Academic Lifeline for Bosnia and Herzegovina“. Through the program, the first salary scheme for teaching staff and a scholarship scheme for students was created and implemented, firstly at the Sarajevo University, then at the Universities of Mostar and Tuzla. Short-term upgrading programmes were provided for our teaching staff at the European universities, enabling them to catch-up with current knowledge, technology and practice novelties. The knowledge and communication blockade of the BiH academic community was lifted and the revival of the universities had started.

Nina shot a short film „How to be a Student in Sarajevo“. The film captured images of the students attending the classes at the heavily damaged premises of the Sarajevo University: no window glass, roofs hardly existing, students sitting in their caps and gloves on, with no basic conditions but a strong will to keep on.

WUS Austria Graz organized a promotional tour for the BiH academic community and invited me, Nina and a couple of student counterparts from Sarajevo to travel to Austria, Germany and France. Our schedule included visits to student organizations, universities, political parties and



international conferences and meetings with influential people willing to help. Unfortunately, the parents of other invitees feared for their safety and decided to not let them go. In June 1995, two days before the start of the last major attack on Sarajevo, Nina and I left Sarajevo using the only way to the outer world - a tunnel dug under Sarajevo airport. After that, we climbed the Igman mountain under heavy rain and reached the safe territory. Via Split and Zagreb, after a 28-hour drive, we reached Austria. In our bags we carried a valuable testimony on the agony of the besieged city.

The film reached and moved our audience wherever we presented it. We had talks with our hosts afterwards. The wave of understanding and empathy was raised and helped to re-establish links which led to concrete proposals for the support to the BiH academic community.

The story of the brave beginning of WUS Austria in Bosnia and Herzegovina happened 14 years ago. I dare to say - the rest is history.

Professor Wolfgang Benedek, now Honorable Citizen of Sarajevo, is still the Chairmen of WUS Austria. WUS Austria Sarajevo Office is still adding value to our academic space.

My daughter Nina joined WUS again in 2005 – this time as a Program Unit Coordinator at WUS Austria Graz Office. I have remained in international development programs in various fields, now in the capacity of the Program Manager for Child Protection in the organization “Save the Children UK” in Sarajevo.

VESNA BESIREVIC WAS THE FIRST HEAD OF WUS AUSTRIA SARAJEVO OFFICE FROM ITS FOUNDATION IN AUGUST 1994 UNTIL THE END OF 1995. AFTER LEADING A NUMBER OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN BIH, SHE IS CURRENTLY PROGRAM MANAGER FOR CHILD PROTECTION WITH THE SAVE THE CHILDREN UK SARAJEVO.



## HOW WUS AUSTRIA HAS INFLUENCED MY LIFE

by AMIRA DERADO



AMIRA DERADO, WOLFGANG BENEDEK AND SREBREN DIZDAR AT STUDENT CONFERENCE IN GRAZ 1994



MARIA EDLINGER WITH MEMBERS FROM THE FACULTY OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING FROM SARAJEVO, 1994.

If you are in your twenties and you live in a „normal“ world, many doors are open to you. Even if you are not aware, you are able to choose your own way. But if you are at the beginning of your twenties and you find yourself in the middle of a senseless war, then many doors are closed and you struggle to survive. It was the summer of 1994; we were in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We were in the war, which had hardly any perspective of reaching its end. We were students without a faculty. The Faculty of Electrical Engineering, its building, all the equipment and documents were occupied and were not reachable for us students in Sarajevo anymore. And then WUS Austria came to Sarajevo, and opened for me and for thirty of my student-colleagues from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering the closed door with the project “Right to Education“. We were invited to the Technical University of Graz for one summer term to finish our obligatory laboratory practices, which were the prerequisite for continuing our studies. That’s how I met WUS Austria, Graz and many Bosnian refugee students who lived and studied here. Strengthened by the experience I had made in summer 1994, one year later I had moved to Graz, and had continued my studies at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, at the Technical University of Graz. Since that time and until the end of 1999, I became a fix part of the WUS Austria team, contributing to the realization of various educational projects in Ex-Yugoslavia. I was fascinated by the enthusiasm and energy of all those people around WUS Austria, who have opened their ears, hearts and their minds to us, students and professors who had survived the brutal war and were hungry for education and better future. They gave me, even if they were not aware of this, an emotional drive to build the future I live today.

I am grateful to be a beneficiary of one of the first WUS Austria projects to help the University of Sarajevo and make its students students again. I am proud to be part of WUS Austria team which has introduced much progress in the Higher Education in Ex-Yugoslavia in the post-war time. The experience and the knowledge I have gained working with the WUS Austria team have helped my personal development and is very valuable to me.

I would like to express my thankfulness to the chairman of WUS Austria, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benedek, and to all those nice people around WUS Austria and the Austrian Government, for their tireless effort to constantly drive changes in the direction of a fair-minded world.

Happy Birthday, WUS Austria! I wish you many, many successful projects!

AMIRA DERADO WAS WORKING FOR WUS AUSTRIA FROM 1996 TO 1999 AND IS NOW AN EXPERT FOR CONTACTLESS MEMORIES AT INFINEON.

## IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN MY EXPERIENCE WITH WUS AUSTRIA

by TANJA DEDOVIC

I, like so many others, began as a volunteer worker with WUS, returning from Fribourg, Switzerland, where I had completed my studies in political economics in 1994. Like all freshly-minted graduates, I was looking for a job opportunity where I could gain some experience and had the pleasure to work with two other volunteer workers from WUS, Jürgen Schick und Thomas Wolking and innumerable Bosnian students in Maiffredy street. The work was fun and it evolved into even more. Soon we began to prepare the first submission to the European Commission for the “Academic Lifeline for Bosnia-Herzegovina”.

I am proud to say that I was WUS’ first “real” employee working on the first project to be granted to WUS, the EC Project, and through this, I was able to become the office manager of WUS Austria. Through that project, the office on Maiffredy street grew and became the place where the transport of many books, textbooks, and teaching materials to Bosnia was organized, as well as where the long list of stipends and recipients of various financial supports was managed.

I enjoy remembering back to the hours we spent together, working - and having fun - with the students from Bosnia; the trip to Hamburg, where we advertised our T-Shirt campaign for Academic Lifeline in a German magazine for women, and the work with Radio Helsinki, and all the other “crazy” campaigns we staged.

I am very grateful for the valuable experience that I was able to gather during my time with WUS as an “apprentice”. These first meetings with young people from Bosnia in Graz and the stories they told me about their families, their work and how they sang and celebrated, offered me a totally new perspective on the Bosnian people. For the next 4.5 years, I used this perspective in my work on the ground there with IOM projects.

And so, after many years, I find myself working with my old WUS colleagues again on the “Migration for Development” in the context of a joint project for development which will bring the experience of the IOM and WUS in South-Eastern Europe together. And I am excited!

TANJA DEDOVIC WAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WUS AUSTRIA AND IS NOW WORKING FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM).





## IDEAS WITH AN IMPACT

by JÜRGEN SCHICK



FIRST ROW  
JÜRGEN SCHICK AND ADI KOVACEVIC

MEMORIES / PETER RIEDLER

JÜRGEN SCHICK WORKED FOR WUS AUSTRIA FROM 1994 TO 1997 AND IS NOW AT THE AUSTRIAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, THE ARTS AND CULTURE - COORDINATION OF EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION WITH EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE.

As a former staff member, I feel honored to write a short personal note on the occasion of WUS Austria's 25th anniversary. Being at that time confronted mainly with scientific articles, legal texts and media coverage on the wars in the former Yugoslavia, joining WUS in 1994 gave it all a face. All of a sudden, my days were much less about the tasks of UN Blue Helmets, another failed peace initiative or a new Security Council resolution, but about hundreds of individual destinies of refugee students who were, one way or the other, forced to leave their homes and look for possibilities to continue their studies in Austria and other countries.

Under the leadership of Prof. Wolfgang Benedek who continuously advocated for the idea of the right to education, WUS Austria successfully secured funds for a substantial number of scholarships for these students. Moreover, WUS Austria managed to mobilise for joint efforts on the European level to support academic life at universities and faculties in the region, of which many were severely devastated. This, for instance, was also the case with the laboratories of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Sarajevo with the effect that students were unable to finish their studies. WUS arranged for a few students in their final year to complete the missing practical laboratory exercises at the Technical University of Graz.

An outstanding initiative but needless to say how disturbing and deeply saddening it was to see these students and their professors embark on a bus back to the besieged Sarajevo, still under shelling and accessible only through an improvised tunnel below the airstrip.

Overall, it is truly impressive how the programmes and activities of WUS Austria have developed and constantly broadened their scope throughout the years. WUS became well-known and one of the most respected partners in higher education cooperation in the whole region.

One can only congratulate WUS on the successful work having a sustainable impact also on system level reforms! To me however, one of the biggest success stories of WUS brings me back to the beginning and the story of the once refugee students. I am happy to say that quite a number of them not only became close friends of mine, but recognised and active members of society, both in their respective home countries and in Austria. The current WUS staff roster alone clearly underlines how important and wise it was to provide as much support as possible. To be a member of the wider WUS-family is a privilege and very often a „door-opener“ in South-Eastern Europe, something I also benefited from after I had left Graz and WUS in 1997 for Sarajevo on behalf of the Austrian Ministry of Education. Both personally and professionally I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for the many experiences and opportunities WUS Austria provided me!

Dear Wolfgang, dear Adi and all other team members, my very best wishes for your anniversary and all the best for the challenges ahead!

## HOW WUS MADE A LASTING IMPRESSION ON OUR LIVES

### Two Austrians on civilian duty find their personal and professional future

**W**e had driven our fully-packed car with Austrian licence plates for hours already through an area of north-east Bosnia that had been totally destroyed. The drive was eerie - everywhere ruins in the dark, no light from anywhere, no people, no signs. We strayed several times into the Serbian-controlled area of Republika Srpska. In the middle of the night and so soon after Dayton, what we were doing was not considered completely safe, especially considering our precious cargo. We had a high-tech computer for the University of Sarajevo in the trunk and money for the WUS office in Sarajevo - the WUS grant-in-aid for the professors at the university there - hidden in our money-belts. We were the first two Austrians doing our civilian duty with WUS in Sarajevo. Peter Wolf (26), a freshly minted graduate in computer science and I, Gerd Wochein (27), a graduate in architecture from Graz. We were both still wet behind the ears and full of vim and vigour to be in Sarajevo doing our civilian duty with WUS. We had no idea at that time that this experience would shape the rest of our private and professional lives.

Peter Wolf soon installed WUS-sponsored supercomputer and with that, created the first public access to the World Wide Web for the university and the people of Sarajevo - a giant step forward, especially since Sarajevo was still totally isolated from the outside world in 1996. After four years of war, the people had no money to travel - apart from the fact that there was a strict visa-regime applied at that time - and there was practically no foreign television channels, no internet, and international phone calls cost a fortune. Long before the telecom companies, WUS and Peter gave them their first public and affordable way to connect to the world.

While Peter Wolf was giving instructions at the electro-technical faculty, I taught at the architecture faculty in Sarajevo on the subjects of city planning and residential buildings. Our university buildings were badly damaged and, in the beginning, we had to crawl over piles of debris to get to class. These classes took place, in the winter semester 1996, in ice-cold classrooms that had plastic-wrap instead of glass on the windows. We huddled near the wood-oven to get warm and discussed modern architecture in our gloves and hats... We knew that the ones in those classrooms would be the ones who would someday rebuild that country.

Today, 12 years later, we former "WUS-Buam" (the way we were lovingly referred to by the Austrian consulate members) are both married to Bosnians and have Bosnian-Austrian children. Thanks to the experience we gained during our civilian duties with WUS, we were able to get excellent jobs after our time had finished in that capacity. Peter worked for years for the OSCE in Sarajevo and has become quite the sought-after computer expert, travelling around the world for the EU, the UNO and the OSCE in charge of computers during elections.

by GERD WOCHIN







NIHAD CENGIC AND DINO MUJKIC  
IN FRONT OF ACCESS CENTRE,  
SARAJEVO, 1999

To begin with, I worked for several different NGOs for a few years on rebuilding projects and later, under Wolfgang Petritsch (then the High Representative of the International Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina - or the OHR), I worked for restoration and returning refugees in southern Bosnia. With this experience, I was then asked to plan and build the newly created National Justice Institution by the OHR and the Bosnian minister of Justice. Today, these courts only house the most difficult trials of major organized crime leaders or war crimes hearings. Since this job was too large for me alone, I was lucky to have the last Austrian to do his civilian duty with WUS, the engineer Christoph Hinterreiter, who came from his completed studies in architecture in Linz to help me. Together, we planned and built the courts and then many other large building complexes on behalf of the BiH justice ministers and the international community.

Now, 12 years after my “Bosnia Story” with Peter Wolf and WUS Austria began, I am self-employed and operate, together with Christoph Hinterreiter, an architecture firm called OSNAP in Sarajevo. Our customers are mostly foreign investors, who feel good about planning and building with an Austrian company.

Since our offices were within the justice buildings for years, we were constantly confronted with the horrors of the war crimes. Therefore it was a special challenge for us when we entered an architectural contest to build a memorial in Srebrenica. We could hardly believe it when our design was chosen by the jury. It’s a special honour for us to think that our memorial, standing today in Potocari (Srebrenica), might help the people there remember their families and work through their grief.

It’s hard to tell how we would have reacted, that September night in 1996 on our way to Sarajevo, if someone had prophesied this long story - a tour of civilian duty that would change our whole lives forever? Impossible!

There is always so much more to tell - from the pain of the Bosnian people in their fight for a normal life and an orderly city; the so-called “Internationals” who arrived here with no respect for the country and changed all the local structures, leaving behind only chaos; the Austrian men and women who make sacrifices to be of help to others and make trips to Bosnia again and again; the remarkable Austrian ambassadors, consulates and professors; the difficult struggle Bosnia has against the Mafia and against the hatred left over from war which surfaces in social contexts; and my personal happiness, the one I found in Bosnia. But I’ll leave all that to the next story.

GERD WOCHEN WORKED FOR WUS AUSTRIA IN SARAJEVO IN 1996 AND HIS STILL WORKING THERE AS AN ARCHITECT.

## IT'S GOOD TO THINK BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS...

by **KLAUS HANUS**

**I**n retrospect, things are clear and it's good to think back to the good old days. In my case, these were the years from the beginning of 1997 to the end of 2000, during which I, as Head of the Graz office, coordinated the WUS Austria activities, together with Univ.-Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Benedek, Amira Omerbegovic (Amira Derado) and Almir Kovacevic.

It was a transitional period in two respects: On the one hand, WUS Austria was developing more and more from a humanitarian aid project into a structured and specific aid in higher education. On the other hand, the political situation in former Yugoslavia made it possible and necessary to extend the activities to Montenegro and Kosovo.

The strength of WUS Austria was, even then, its ability to react quickly to the pressing needs on site and to impress upon both their partners in the project and the financial supporters the fact that efficient support for higher education constantly needs consideration and further development. This creativity and awareness has obviously been WUS Austria's strong point in newer circumstances as well. I would like to congratulate the team very much and wish all the best for the next 25 years. The years with WUS were exciting and influential for me and I am proud to have been a part of their story of collaboration.



KLAUS HANUS, WOLFGANG BENEDEK WITH RECTOR KELMENDI OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA, 1999

KLAUS HANUS WAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF WUS AUSTRIA FROM 1997 TO 2000. NOW HE IS HEAD OF THE "GESELLSCHAFT ZUR FÖRDERUNG SEELISCHER GESUNDHEIT".

## THE BALKANS DO NOT EASILY LET YOU GO...

by MARTIN BOTTA



Anyone who has lived for a longer amount of time in the so-called “Balkans” will understand when I say that this region does not easily let one go - that there will always be a part of it in one’s heart, for as long as one lives. Above all, it is the people there who remain vivid in memory, what they lived through, and how they overcome their memories and the horrible events which took place during the war. I felt life in Sarajevo, during my time there as a foreigner on civil duty for WUS, with a kind of intensity and directness that I had seldom felt before. Above all, it became clear to me, as a member of a generation who took a peaceful Europe for granted, how important the peaceful forces of pan-European agreement were.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank WUS Austria and, above all, Wolfgang Benedek. In the area of higher education, I don’t think there is any NGO responsible for reconstruction and development of the university structure in South-Eastern Europe which has done as much as WUS. It was an honour for me to contribute what little I could.

I began my tour of civil duty on “peace duty” with the human rights centre of the University of Sarajevo, the *Centar za ljudska prava*, in September 1997 and left Sarajevo in October 1998. The centre, which had just opened several months before, was then located on the highest floor of the *Alma Mater Saraievoensis* in the *Obala Kulina bana*, which was still scarred from the war and conflict in the previous years. My position at the human rights centre extended to several jobs, including the development of the library, the networking of the centre with other national and international NGOs in the area of human rights and the Bosnian organizations concerning seminars and courses (like those held in the Summer University Tuzla), the development of the TEMPUS-project on “Human Rights Curriculum Development” and running concrete projects on the ground, with the help of European and United Nations offices.

One episode which I will never forget (like so much of my time in Sarajevo) is the night I spent in the library of the Human Rights Centre: during the preparations for the aforementioned TEMPUS Project, it had gotten late, as I was working on the computer. As I locked up, I went around to get my friends Kristof Bender and Borna Krempler who worked in the same building,

but their doors were already locked - a sign meaning that it had, indeed, gotten very late! And to my unpleasant surprise, both the main and side doors of the university were locked as well. After an unsuccessful attempt to find any open door, I eventually went back to my office and began writing for the project once more. When exhaustion finally overtook me, I could find no more comfortable place to sleep than the felt carpet in the library; for a pillow, I used some library volumes and the only thing I could find for a blanket was a 1 x 2 metre European flag, which had been given to the centre by a representative of the European Commission.

My colleagues at the centre were, obviously, very surprised and amused when they found me as described, the next morning. The EU-blanket was a good omen, though - our TEMPUS project was awarded a grant and still keeps my successors there busy.



MARTIN BOTTA, HEIDI BASSIN, CHRISTOPH BENDER, BORNA KREMPER, DOING THEIR PEACE SERVICE AT WUS IN SARAJEVO 1997

MARTIN BOTTA WAS WORKING AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO FROM 1997 TO 1998. HE IS NOW MEMBER OF THE STATE SECRETARY'S CABINET AT THE MINISTRY FOR EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.



## MY TIME IN BOSNIA

by KRISTOF BENDER



BANJA LUKA, 1998

**M**y first job in the Balkans was in Bosnia: 14 months in WUS Austria's Sarajevo office. At that time it was located in the Law Faculty, right next to the heavily damaged central post office.

In winter we would work with jackets on due to lack of proper heating; and during power cuts, which were frequent, we often could not work at all. That was in 1997/98. It was a time when war criminals were openly walking the streets, when minority returnees were frequently attacked, sometimes murdered, their houses set on fire.

At the universities most basic things were missing: equipment, new books, computers, internet access and international contacts. Cooperation between the Bosnian universities was very difficult. We were proud to have participants from Banja Luka at a conference in Sarajevo in October 1997, though during the evenings we had to drive them from Sarajevo over to Republika Srpska where they would stay overnight in a small shabby pension. The Banja Luka rector would not allow them to stay in Sarajevo overnight.

Today Bosnia – like the whole region – is a very different place. More than 99 percent of disputed property has been returned to their pre-war owners. Bosnians move freely all over the country. Many areas, including those where some of the worst atrocities had happened like Prijedor, Dobož and Central Bosnia are again ethnically very mixed. Inter-ethnic crime is very rare. Students from all Western Balkan countries participate in joint projects like the *Balkan Case Challenge*, and link up at summer schools and on virtual meeting places like facebook.

WUS can take some credit for these changes and particularly for working on the often neglected issue of higher education that is crucial for the countries of South-Eastern Europe in their struggle to catch up with the rest of Europe and become prosperous democracies.  
Happy Birthday!

KRISTOF BENDER IS VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE EUROPEAN STABILITY INITIATIVE (ESI), A THINK  
THANK WORKING ON SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE, TURKEY AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS.

## WUS AUSTRIA'S KEY SUCCESS FACTORS: COMMITMENT, FLEXIBILITY, IMPARTIALITY

by BORNA KREMPLE

**I**n the late 1990s I had the pleasure to serve for WUS Austria in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. I say pleasure since my impression was that our work made a real difference to those who in the development terminology are usually referred to as 'beneficiaries' – in our case the academic community.

WUS Austria enjoyed the trust of its partners because they felt the sincere commitment of the organisation and its staff to supporting higher education in very difficult times, when other sectors received much more attention and many other agencies hesitated to take action. Trust was also built by listening carefully and understanding properly what the partners needed most and when. WUS Austria acted flexibly and constantly adapted its approach, delivering emergency aid when Sarajevo was still besieged, and gradually shifting the focus to capacity and institution building when the time was ripe.

Support measures targeted individual students and teachers as well as university institutions, and the decisive factor for whom and what to support with the limited resources was always priority need and academic excellence, never ethnic, political or religious affiliation. This impartiality enabled WUS Austria and me personally to operate and effectively deliver support even in highly conflict laden environments. And together with the national and international networking and cooperation character of WUS Austria's programmes, this may well have made a small contribution towards rebuilding not only the academic community, but also society at large.



BORNA KREMPLE, FORMER PROGRAMME ADVISOR TO THE SARAJEVO OFFICE (1997/98) AND HEAD OF PRISHTINA OFFICE (1998-2000) IS NOW PROGRAMME COORDINATOR AT ICMPD.

## CIVILIAN DUTY IN PODGORICA

by HANS-JÖRG HUMMER



I worked in the WUS office in Podgorica from August 1999 to August 2000. It was chance and luck - but also a bit of historical circumstance - that I came to be there, although I had only first decided to pursue my interest in the peace duties in South-Eastern Europe a few months earlier. At this point the bombs were dropping over Yugoslavia and I was the only applicant interested in a position with WUS Austria in Podgorica. I knew next to nothing about the country or the work I was to do, other than that it was surely going to be exciting - these, my first steps into my career after my studies and my year under report.

People in Montenegro are still, to this day, in awe of how WUS Austria stayed when all the other international organizations and NGOs were fleeing the country. WUS Austria not only kept its small offices and Walk-in-Internet Centres up and running, but it allowed the students access to their high-performance internet connections, so that they could keep in contact with the outside world.

The 14 months in Montenegro were hard and sparse: It would have been impossible to go visit home or even telephone there, with only 500 Mark per month, unless one was lucky enough to find a place in an OSCE airplane from Sarajevo to Vienna. For that, however, it was necessary to either take a bus or a ramshackle Opel through the mountains where the Balkans are apparently their wildest. In the winter, this was an adventure devoid of any romance; one time there was no way but with the ferry and train through Italy. In a cash-for-trip train ride two days before Christmas, an American television preacher who originally came from Montenegro told me not to get on the boat if I hadn't gone to confession lately, as he predicted an accident.

In contrast to today, there were only a few foreigners in Podgorica; the Serbs were the only people who found it worth the trip to the coast which was, only a few years later, sold out. In the former 'Titograd' there was nothing to do; one passed the days with work. Our projects, on civilian duty, were edifying and challenging and did not diminish with the hindsight of retrospect. But who would have been able to work through the nights and weekends if there hadn't been a measure of fun involved?

Looking back, it is astounding, the amount of trust and responsibility we were unceremoniously sent out with to Sarajevo, Prishtina or Podgorica. We were all, even then, completely aware of what a unique chance we had been given; personally, I would like to thank WUS Austria for the beginning of my career for which even now, 10 years later, I continue to feel enthusiasm. But above all, I would not have wanted to miss the friendships which grew up through those years.



WUS AUSTRIA  
IN MONTENEGRO, 1999

HANS-JÖRG HUMMER DID HIS CIVILIAN DUTIES AT THE WUS AUSTRIA OFFICE MONTENEGRO (1999 - 2000). IN 2001 HE WAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF WUS AUSTRIA. SINCE MARCH 2002, HE HAS WORKED IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES FOR THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND THE AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.



## THE START OF THE BALKAN CASE CHALLENGE

by THOMAS M. KLEIN

In 2000 and 2001, I had the honour and pleasure to work for WUS Austria in the regional office Sarajevo. My expectations for this project were more than fulfilled. As I look back, I can see that this time was not only exciting and interesting but it also taught me many things and determined the course of my further development. A personal highlight of mine was the instigation of the *Balkan Case Challenge*, a student case-study competition for “High Potentials” from the CEE/SEE region which grew in its breadth and professionalism to be a standard-setter as it is still conducted.

After years of work in management-consultancy with a focus on public management and non-profit organizations, I would like to take the liberty - in honour of its 25th anniversary - of offering my euphemism-free analysis of the organization. WUS Austria is an example of what sorts of success factors in the area of joint-development initiatives are required of an NGO: the organization has clearly defined core competencies, years of experience in project development, locally-anchored ownership as well as a good mix of experienced professionals and apprentices. With this, the groundwork for a sustainable effect in a centralized sector of politically developed interventions - education - is laid, and WUS Austria’s contribution for European integration of the west-Balkan countries is evident.

I would like to congratulate the founder Prof. Dr. Benedek and his committed team and heartily wish them success in their further endeavours.

Vienna, September 2008

THOMAS M. KLEIN DID HIS CIVILIAN DUTY AT WUS AUSTRIA SARAJEVO OFFICE FROM 2000 TO 2001. HE IS NOW MANAGER IN CONTRAST-MANAGEMENT CONSULTING OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT.



ON THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE OF A TEMPUS PROJECT, THE APPLICATION IS BEING MADE READY FOR SENDING AFTER A LONG NIGHT OF WORK (SPRING 2000 IN SARAJEVO).



LAST ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE BALKAN CASE CHALLENGE IN DECEMBER 2001 IN SARAJEVO



## THANK YOU!

by MICHAEL WEINER



**T**hank you, WUS, for my time on foreign civilian duty at the University of Sarajevo between November 1999 and the end of 2000. Thank you for wonderful, exciting, educational months - in which I learned more and faster than in almost any other phase of my life. “Capacity Building in Education about European Human Rights Standards through the Bosnian Law Faculties” was my project - it sounds daunting. However, I was well prepared to contribute to it through my studies and my work at a legal institute in Austria.

The realities one faced at the Bosnian university were quite challenging. There were professors who actively tried to hinder their assistants from furthering their education, perhaps because they themselves had been named to their positions during the war for reasons other than their knowledge. There was the constitutional lawyer who decorated his room with thank you cards for his “service during war”. There was the law students with army weapons fastened to their belts who, during a “Human Rights”-course lead by a great Catalan professor, interrupted to ask the translator, “What is this Moslem doing here at our university?” Sometimes I had to doubt my own senses.

Fortunately, there were also always the many gifted and motivated students who recognized and benefitted from the quality of the courses being offered to them. The assistants, despite all the at their institution, lectured their subjects brilliantly and remained committed to further education. And the professors, who saw clearly the challenges in their situations after the war and wanted to affect change. All these people convinced me that my work was not without purpose. And for all of them, WUS is an indispensable bridge to a better future.

MICHAEL WEINER WAS ON FOREIGN CIVILIAN DUTY BETWEEN NOVEMBER 1999 AND DECEMBER 2000 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO. FOLLOWING THIS, HE WORKED IN SEVERAL DIFFERENT CAPACITIES IN BOSNIA AND TODAY IS ACTIVE WITH THE AUSTRIAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.

## CIVILIAN DUTY IN MONTENEGRO

by CHRISTOPHER OPANCAR

Communicationally competent, team- and solution-oriented are known today for activities in the international arena with indispensable qualities; inter-cultural understanding and excellent soft-skills the necessary abilities for cooperation with international initiatives and organizations.

In connection to my time doing civil service at the WUS Austria office in Podgorica at the University of Montenegro, I could take advantage of all these abilities to form the basis for my own future career path.

The strongest motivating factors for me to do my civilian duty in a foreign country were the ideas of helping students to achieve a better education and future, their desire to have a European experience, of helping in kinds of causes.

The project of WUS Austria was to pursue the modernization of the Montenegro Higher Education System as well as to build its connections to the wider, European Education System. I was able to benefit from the kinds of dialogues led by the university between professors and students, as well as representatives of the international community, and to use the developments and implementations of projects to build a wide experience-base from which I profit even today in my career on a daily basis.

I would like to thank WUS Austria and the *Austrian Peace Service* for the opportunity to do my civilian duties in Montenegro. Undertaking this period of civilian duty in a foreign country was for me - and probably also for all young people at this stage - one of the most wonderful and influential moments in my life thus far, and a decisive compass for my life to come. Where and how could I have gathered such experience under any other circumstances?

With these words of thanks, I attach the sincere hope that more and more people will complete their civilian duty outside of Austria. The opportunity to gather all this valuable experience in one's youth should be used by future generations of men doing their military and civilian duty. Then the supply of people with qualifications such as I mentioned at the beginning would not diminish in the future.

CHRISTOPHER OPANCAR DID HIS CIVILIAN DUTY AT WUS AUSTRIA IN MONTENEGRO FOR 14 MONTHS FROM 2000 TO 2001. PRESENTLY, HE IS THE HEAD OF THE AUSTRIAN COORDINATION OFFICE IN TIRANA.



## I AM PROUD TO BE A PART OF WUS AUSTRIA

by DINO MUJIC



ZORAN SELESKOVIC AND DINO MUJIC

I am proud to be part of WUS Austria, part of the WUS family. WUS Austria was in 1992 the first organization to realize that Bosnia and Herzegovina was facing the most difficult period in its history and that there was a need for immediate reaction and support.

Today, after so many years, WUS Austria's focus is no longer on humanitarian aid but on the development of higher education in BH and the support of reforms in this country. In many cases it is partnership, cooperation and joint work which help to build a better Bosnia and Herzegovina. I'm really proud of being part of WUS Austria, proud of my occupation. I'm doing that for a better life, a better country and I hope that many similar organizations will come to bring such light to BH.

I'm delivering a simple message from the academic community of BH: "Many thanks to Prof. Benedek and all people from WUS Austria for the support which was given to our country, to our education and our students which enabled them to create a better life and a better Bosnia and Herzegovina."



DINO MUJIC HAS BEEN WORKING FOR WUS AUSTRIA IN SARAJEVO SINCE DECEMBER 1998. IN 2003 HE BECAME REGIONAL MANAGER FOR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA.



## TO NOTE: 25 YEARS WUS AUSTRIA

by HELMUT STROBL

**25** years WUS work, unspectacular but efficient, competent and goal-oriented, shows the kind of balance that can hardly be matched by any governmental or partial governmental institution in this area.

The scientific and educational initiatives in South-Eastern Europe, the encouragement to meet EU standards there, and the strengthening of the region through the help of many young people, hungry for an education are the goals which set up the necessary conditions for achieving peaceful, successful development in the areas of economics and social life - the basics for the development of every society. Since 1983, WUS achieves wonderful things - often under very challenging conditions hardly imaginable here at home. It gives a positive outlook on the future of our neighbours when one is able to experience the idealistic but also professional engagement of the young WUS team around Adi Kovacevic and Wolfgang Benedek.

It is a joy to be able to support this work - an investment which definitely yields returns!

Ad multos annos!

Helmut Strobl  
(WUS-Fan)



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF BOSNIAN STUDENTS ABROAD 1995,  
HELMUT STROBL SITS NEXT TO GEORGE SOROS.

HELMUT STROBL WAS COUNCILLOR FOR CULTURE AT THE CITY OF GRAZ AND IS A MEMBER OF WUS AUSTRIA.

## WUS AGES WELL!

by EDITH ZITZ



**E**veryone loves to celebrate 25 years!  
I would like to cordially congratulate WUS on its anniversary.

As a former board member of WUS, I have many memories of intense debates on education, vibrant and highly professional collaborative events, strategy meetings and the practical connection between human rights and education.

The access to this is more important and relevant than ever: it is the basis for social sustainability, for a functional and respectful development in the south AND the north, and thus, an important political contribution for peace.

All the best, and a great 'further ripening' to all who are connected with WUS!



VISIT OF TASK FORCE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA IN KOSOVO, 1999

EDITH ZITZ IS DEPUTY OF THE STYRIAN PARLIAMENT AND WAS MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF WUS AUSTRIA IN THE EARLY TIMES.





World University Service (WUS) Austria was founded in Graz in 1983 and is since 1993 operating in South-Eastern Europe. During this period WUS has gained a lot of experience in the field of Higher Education in South-Eastern Europe, notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The ceremonial act and the then following symposium offer the opportunity to evaluate those experiences with renown speakers and to develop perspectives and priorities for the future of Higher Education in South-Eastern Europe.

The Austrian Development Cooperation finances most of the projects implemented by WUS Austria.

## Austrian Development Cooperation

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