

War and Peace at UNH

Eastern Europe Meets East Coast New Hampshire

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UNH News Bureau

October 12, 2000

DURHAM, N.H. -- "Gotov je!" reads the email on Danijela Dabic's computer screen at the University of New Hampshire. It's one of several messages from friends and family in Serbia saying "He is over!" referring to the political demise of Slobodan Milosevic.

Dabic is thousands of miles from her home in Bosnia and the revolution in neighboring Yugoslavia, but email has kept the 24-year-old political activist connected. "They are so excited that he is finally out. I wish I could be there with them.

"After all the previous attempts to get Milosevic out of power, some people started losing faith," she says. "I know a lot of young, educated people who were trying for the last few years to leave Serbia and emigrate to the United States. (With Vojislav Kostunica winning the election), I now have a feeling they may stay. And that would be a good sign that Serbia has a future."

Dabic is one of three Bosnian students attending UNH, under a \$77,000 U.S. State Department grant, to study United States laws and society. She is joined by Emina Ahmetovic of Tuzla and Nihad Nakas of Sarajevo.

UNH History Professor Cathy Frierson, director of the UNH Center for International Education, secured the grant money to fund the international visitors. She says their presence adds a worldly dimension for UNH students who interact with them. The recent historical events in Yugoslavia make their conversations all the more engaging.

"We believe it is vitally important for our students to have as many international experiences as possible," she says. "International students add new cultural and political perspectives to the community and introduce UNH students to their viewpoints and experiences."

Experiences, in this case, of war and destruction.

"Most of the time I feel very lucky because my family got out of it alive, and I lived in a town that was not on

the front line," Dabic explains. "Most people were not that fortunate."

Dabic says it angers her that four years of her life were "wasted" in war time, and she envies other people her age who have led normal lives. "Most of the things you learn in war are of no use for you in peace, and sometimes can even become an obstacle for normal living."

Her immediate family moved from Croatia in 1992 to Bosnia -- a dramatic transition from peace to war. Then in 1995, Dabic's grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins escaped with the rest of the 250,000 Serbs from Croatia to an independent post-war Bosnia and present day Yugoslavia. Another transition, another struggle.

"Refugees and displaced people are still a big problem for all the countries in the region," she explains. "Until we help those people we won't really be able to put the horrors of war behind us and start moving forward."

When she returns home next year, Dabic plans to graduate from the University of Banja Luka and go into politics to help the region rebuild. She hopes to return to Bosnia with first-hand knowledge of American values, government and diversity. "While I study at UNH, I want to learn how multi-ethnic democracies function in practice," she explains. "I want to understand the view Americans have on the modern world." In exchange, if she could teach her American peers one thing, she says, "I would hope they understand that nothing can justify war and killing."

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