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**BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Exposing the Truth at Any Cost

**Helping journalists build a strong, independent media**



Photo: USAID/Kasey Vannett

An employee reads a copy of the Bosnian newspaper *Nezavisne Novine* hot off the press.

***“Journalists in Banja Luka never printed a truthful story about what was going on during the war,” said Dragan Jerinic, the managing editor of *Nezavisne Novine*.***

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Zeljko Kopanja’s newspaper was the only one in Serb-dominated Republika Srpska that would publish articles about Serb war crimes against Muslim Bosniaks. The editor paid dearly for letting the truth be told. Shortly after *Nezavisne Novine* began publishing articles about war crimes committed by members of the Serbian police, Kopanja’s car was wired with explosives. The bomb spared his life, but he lost both his legs. Kopanja was not intimidated — he continues to publish investigative articles, and *Nezavisne Novine* is still the region’s only newspaper that tackles issues like war crimes and local corruption in a serious, unprejudiced manner.

USAID supported *Nezavisne Novine* through a number of projects, including a loan to build the only private printing press in the Republika Srpska, now used by local publications, government pamphlets, and Croatian magazines. USAID also helped train editors, managers, reporters, photographers, and designers.

The paper has earned a strong reputation for investigative reporting and is now one of the largest dailies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is widely read by Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

Today, nearly 100 reporters work in the Banja Luka and Sarajevo bureaus. “Our staff is Serb, Croat, and Bosniak. We have a mixed hierarchy,” said Managing Editor Dragan Jerinic, adding that this helps the newspaper’s editorial objectivity.

“Journalists in Banja Luka never printed a truthful story about what was going on during the war,” he said. “We needed young people not burdened by those prejudices who would write about anything.” The average age of *Nezavisne Novine* journalists is 26.

Jericin told a story to illustrate why youth mattered in Bosnian journalism. He once asked an older reporter to cover a ceremony at a mosque that was destroyed during the war — locals disrupted the ceremony, throwing stones at Bosniak visitors. The reporter refused to go. “He wouldn’t admit the reality, he couldn’t write critically,” Jerinic said.

Since 1996, USAID has supported media projects in Bosnia, working with radio and television stations, as well as magazines and newspapers. Of the outlets that received assistance, a dozen now represent the core of Bosnia’s independent media.