



A political and territorial organization of the Republic of Srpska, which comprises municipalities and cities, recognizes the City of Banja Luka (earlier a municipality) as the biggest political and territorial unit occupying 1 239 km². As the university, economic, finance, political and administrative center of the Republic of Srpska and one of the two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Banja Luka is the second biggest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the population of 250 000.

Situated in a basin 164 m above sea level, where the Dinaric Alps from the south descend into the Pannonian Basin in the north, Banja Luka has temperate continental climate with the prevailing influences from the Pannonian plain. It belongs to the Central European Time zone (GMT +1) and. The average annual temperature reaches 10,7°C, the average January 0,8°C, whereas the average temperature in July reaches 21,3°C.

Due to many of its green surfaces - parks and tree-lined roads, Banja Luka is also known as the city of greenery. It is also called a city of young people, sport and culture. Banja Luka used to be a strong economic center with a developed industry structure - the machinery-, electrical-, textile-, food- and cellulose industry in particular. The past war calamities that struck the city in the 1992-1995 period and the post-war society transition resulted in the collapse of a majority of the industrial capacities and markets. The post-war Banja Luka started opening up more extensively to market economy countries, directing its development prospects towards the progress of trade, tourism, agriculture and food industry.

City: Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska, B&H

Surface: 1 239 km²

Population: around 250 000 (195 139 according to the 1991 census)

Coordinates: 44o 46' northwise and 17o 11' eastwise

Altitude: 164 m

Climate: moderately continental (average annual temperature - 10,7oC)

Time zone: Central European Time Zone (GMT+1)

Area code: +387 51

Postal code: 78 000

Currency: Convertible Mark (KM)

History

Banja Luka was first mentioned under its current name in the Charter of Hungarian king Ladislaus II of Jagiellon on February 06, 1494.

The discussions held by philologists and historians resulted in the finding that the city name consisted of an old adjective "banj" (ban`s), which disappeared long time ago from our language and has been preserved only in the name of the city. The possessive adjective was then added a noun "luka" (plain), which attributed the meaning ban`s plain to the name of the city.

Ever since the Paleolithic period the settlements of various tribes had been developed along both banks of the Vrbas River. They used to stay, live and progress in this fertile valley. It is known for certain that the region was settled by an Illyric tribe of the Maezaei, who were annexed to the Roman province of Illyricum along with the territory that they had inhabited.

Roman period

Numerous artefacts found in various localities in the vicinity of today`s Banja Luka bear witness to Roman`s existence in the region. The Romans were first to have discovered the healing power of mineral springs in the surroundings of the city - Gornji Šeher, Slatina and Laktaši. At that time Banja Luka was situated along an important road built by the Romans, which spread from Split (Salona) to Gradiška (Servitium). In today`s heart of the city, embellished with the Kastel fort, a monument of cultural and historic importance, the Romans had built a military fort castra, within whose walls the life of a Roman military settlement progressed. With the Roman Empire break-up, Slavic tribes began to settle the region about 6th and 7th century A.D. The Medieval Ages brought the increased number of forts springing into existence along the Vrbas banks. Unfortunately, the reliable information about the then settlement and the life of people inside and outside the walls are still hidden under the veil of history, inviting ethnographers and historians to bring them to light.

The first Oriental settlement developed around Careva mahala in Gornji Šeher after the Turkish conquest in 1582. Banja Luka became the seat of the Pashaluk of Bosnia, a Turkish administrative unit run by a pasha. This led the city to a rapid development due to Ferhat-pasha`s having mills and bridges over the Vrbas river built.

Turkish period

In that period sacral Islamic edifices of huge cultural and historic importance were built - the Ferhadija Mosque, as Ferhat-pasha Sokolović`s foundation, the Arnaudija Mosque, whose founder was a Bosnian treasurer Husan-efendija, and an important element of the Osman period urban architecture Sahat kula, a clock tower, which was situated in the vicinity of Ferhadija. During the 16th and the 17th century Orthodox monasteries were built in broader Banja Luka`s surroundings to remind the future generations of the Serbian medieval construction art of extraordinary beauty and value. The Gomionica Monastery, which was built in the Raška school style, is situated in Zmijanje on the Manjača mountain. Traditional sources report that its patron was Obrad, the prince of Zmijanje. The Moštanica Monastery, which was founded in 1562, is situated at the Banja Luka - Prijedor - Kozara triple junction, and was built in the Morava school style. The Liplja Monastery, situated on the slopes of the Borje Mountain,

near Maslovare, was built at the end of the 15th, that is at the beginning of the 16th century, with the expressive elements of the Raška school style. There was not a single developmental period to have spared Banja Luka from a disaster. After the Austrian troops had marched in, the city heart in Šeher was burnt down in 1688. The devastation went on through numerous military encounters, fires and a severe plague, which ravaged the city at the end of the 18th century.

The 350-year long Turkish rule had demonstrated a reckless disregard for the Banja Luka administrative unit, which did not make a considerable contribution to its urbanization and modernization.

First Serbian schools in Banja Luka were founded at the end of the 19th century. The first telegraph was put into operation in 1866, and the first railway along the Banja Luka-Dobrljin route had been officially set into operation in 1873, only two years prior to the Bosnian and Herzegovinian uprising, due to which it was forcibly put out of operation.

As a result of the Congress of Berlin came the decision that the Austro-Hungarian troops were to come to Banja Luka. The troops were received rather peacefully and faced no resistance. Under the Austro-Hungarian protectorate Banja Luka became an industry and craft center.

Austro-Hungarian period

The foundations of such a progress were laid by the monks of the Franciscan Monastery Trapisti, which was built during the seventies of the 19th century. They started the construction of a mill, a brewery, brickyard, a fabric factory, and the hydroelectric plant in Delibašino selo as well as the construction of industrial plants for pasta and the famous cheese trapist.

The Austrians undertook rapid road and bridge construction, and provided Banja Luka with a railway connection with Vienna and Budapest in 1891. The ore from the deposits in Banja Luka's quarter Lauš and in the surroundings of Kotor Varoš were started to be exploited, and new industrial plants, educational and health institutions were opened.

The hospital was built in 1879, the tobacco factory was set into operation in 1888, and the first students found themselves in the Banja Luka's Grammar School in 1895.

Ever more people from abroad came to live to Banja Luka. The systematic Austro-Hungarian authorities conducted the first official census of population on April 22, 1895, which showed that Banja Luka had 13 566 inhabitants.

And even though the Austro-Hungarian authorities were less oppressive than Turkish and proclaimed the principles of freedom and equality, the spirit of resistance and labourism was getting stronger in ordinary people's minds. They were going on strikes, initiated mutinies and incited to the liberation from the occupying forces.

After the centuries of oppressive foreign tyranny, World War I came, bringing along a waft of freedom.

20th Century

The Enlightenment ideas were spread under the Turkish occupation through different social milieus by two distinguished personalities sharing the same destiny: Vaso Pelagić and Ivan Franjo Jukić.

Both of them were into clerical, political and cultural work, which gave them imprisonment, prosecution and banishment. Death caught them far from their homeland, whose liberation they did not live long enough to witness and to which they were faithful and loyal to their last breath. A distinguished fighter for freedom and a voice of truth against the Austro-Hungarian authorities was the writer Petar Kočić. His resistance to the tyranny was publicly shown by his launching „The Fatherland" magazine in 1907.

It was for his literal creation permeated with patriotic spirit and for the public uprising against the tyrannical regime that he was being prosecuted and put to jail. He did not live long enough to see his homeland liberated from the occupational forces. Spiritually and physically exhausted, he died in Serbia in 1916).

Within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians Banja Luka underwent a period of genuine progress. It became the center of the Vrbas Banovina, the administrative unit ruled by ban, and got a significant geo-strategic place in the newly founded country.

Banja Luka owes its rapid growth to the first ban, brisk and energetic Svetislav Milosavljević (Svetislav - Tisa Milosavljević, born on September 07, 1882 in Niš, Serbia).

The most severe calamity that befell the city in the post-war period was the disastrous 1969 earthquake. With the consequences of it remedied, Banja Luka got its recognizable looks and significance.

In the wake of Former Yugoslavia`s break-up, Banja Luka was the second biggest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the tenth biggest one in Yugoslavia. According to the 1991 census Banja Luka had 150 000 inhabitants.

During the war that raged in the territory of the entire Former Yugoslavia, Banja Luka was not directly affected by war actions, but its demographic structure suffered significant changes.