



Opinions and statements of organizations that withdrew from the Coalition for REKOM

Memo of the Coordination Council of the Coalition for REKOM
May 28th 2010

The Coalition for REKOM is a regional coalition operating on the territory of the former Yugoslavia that advocates for the creation of a Regional commission tasked with establishing the facts about war crimes and other serious human rights violations. It consists of 294 non-governmental organizations promoting human rights and democracy development, 56 victims' associations, six associations of veterans, 11 media outlets, and 503 individuals (victims, members of the academic community, artists, journalists, lawyers, and individuals belonging to various civil society groups¹).

By mid May 2010, the Coalition for REKOM had held 80 consultations with different civil society groups and six regional forums on transitional justice which were a platform for a discussion on the goals, the mandate, the selection of the members of the Coalition and its composition, basic activities of the regional commission, the needs of the victims, as well as the interim results of the consultation process. The goal of the consultation process is to draft a REKOM model, build public support by presenting the need to create REKOM [One Million Signatures for REKOM Campaign, April-May 2011] and to submit a request (along with a proposed REKOM model and one million signatures) to the parliaments in the region to create REKOM on June 1st 2011.

Cancellation of membership with the Coalition

Since October 2008 when the Coalition was formed, four non-governmental organizations and one association of veterans have terminated their membership with the Coalition: Research and Documentation Center (RDC, Bosnia and Herzegovina), *Buka* Media Project (BiH), Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, and *Izvor* - Association of Women from Prijedor (BiH).

Opinions not in favour of the Initiative for REKOM

Two days following the Second General Assembly of the Coalition for REKOM (March 19th 2010) and the Sixth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice (March 20-21), Branko Todorović, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska and Edin Ramulić, a member of *Izvor* - Association of Women from Prijedor, BiH, launched an open campaign against the Initiative for REKOM and some members of the Coalition for REKOM. Further

¹ Data last updated on May 15, 2010.

negative and unfounded criticism of the Initiative for RECOM was also heard from the leader of the *Buka Media Project* Aleksandar Trifunović, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Sonja Biserko, president of the Citizens of Tuzla Forum Vehid Šehić and Mirsad Tokača, president of the Research and Documentation Centre.

1. **Mirsad Tokača, president of the Research and Documentation Center** withdrew from the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM two months after the Coalition for RECOM had been founded in December 2008. In a letter addressed to the sponsors of the project and the general public, Mirsad Tokača, announced that he had decided to withdraw from the consultation process firstly because the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) rejected RDC's proposal to split the grant of the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands with other founders of the Initiative [Documenta (Croatia) and RDC] so that all three organizations could independently organize the consultation process in their respective countries and secondly, because he did not believe that the governments in the region would accept the initiative to form a regional fact-finding commission.

The fact is that in December 2008 HLC received a grant from the Kingdom of the Netherlands amounting to EUR 960.000 for project realization, strictly determined allocation of funds and a periodic submission of financial reports which were all the reasons HLC could not act in compliance with the request made by the RDC².

2. **Aleksandar Trifunović, leader of the *Buka Media Project*** stopped participating in the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM in September 2009 without any explanation whatsoever. It was only later, on March 26th 2010, in an interview for the daily *Oslobođenje* (BiH) that he stated that he had resigned from the Coordination Council of the Coalition of RECOM because the "approach towards BiH was frivolous and arrogant and that he had had no power to influence it".

*The facts tell us that in January 2010 Aleksandar Trifunović demonstrated a renewed interest in cooperating with the Initiative for RECOM. As a matter of fact, he was nominated by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska for the position of the PR Manager of the Initiative for RECOM in BiH but he was not chosen because the commission decided he was too busy running the *Buka Media Project* to be able to dedicate enough time and energy to a very demanding job of promoting the Initiative for RECOM.*

3. Two days after the Sixth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice BiH media reported the statement of Edin Ramulić, a member of *Izvor* - Association of Women from Prijedor, announcing that this organization, along with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska had withdrawn from the Coalition for RECOM. In his statements given to various media outlets, Ramulić claimed that the Association had left the Coalition because the Humanitarian Law Center and Nataša Kandić had privatized the whole project, and because they "controlled all financial transactions, appointed all members, and because the HLC had positioned itself to make all important decisions, appoint members of the Coordination Council, secretaries who were professionally

² In January 2010 Swedish, Norwegian, and Swiss embassies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on behalf of their governments, filed a criminal complaint against Mirsad Tokača, director of the Research and Documentation Centre on suspicion of embezzeling the funds their governments granted to this organization for the conduction of certain activities.

engaged, thus securing a complete influence over the Initiative for RECOM”³. In addition to this, Ramulić accused Nataša Kandić of using the Initiative for RECOM in order to improve the image of Serbia⁴.

Facts:

The most important organ of the Coalition for RECOM is the General Assembly of the Coalition, tasked with adopting the Operations Plan of the consultation process, media campaign, as well as One Million Signatures for RECOM campaign. The consultation process is governed by the Coordination Council consisting of 13 members, 2 of which are members of organizations that started this Initiative – Humanitarian Law Center and Documenta, elected by the General Assembly of the Coalition for RECOM. Everyday operations are handled by the Secretariat of the Coalition for RECOM consisting of national coordinators and PR Managers of the Initiative for RECOM, as well as leaders of partner organizations [HLC, Documenta, BH Journalists, Center for Civic Education, HLC Kosovo] who offer their expertise and administrative support to the consultation process. In accordance with the Statute of the Coalition for RECOM and based on an agreement signed with donors, the engagement of associates on this project is the responsibility of organizations implementing the project. HLC manages the projects funded by the EU and the government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and decides on the engagement of associates and consultants, taking into consideration proposals made by members of the Coordination Council and members of the Coalition for RECOM. The fundamental criteria applied in selecting the candidates for the job is their expertise, knowledge, and ability. Routinely, the Coordination Council performs quarterly reviews and evaluates the work of national coordinators and other associates in conducting the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM. HLC manages the project approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the European Commission amounting to a total value of EUR 2, 3500.00 for the development of a regional support network needed for establishing and disclosing the facts about war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. As stipulated in the contract, HLC submits periodic project implementation reports to the donors and two financial reports annually. Also, as provided by the contract, HLC is responsible for conducting an independent financial spending control. In April 2010, Konsultant Revizija, an auditing firm, conducted a financial spending control of the Fifth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice and their report is available at www.korekom.org.

Three days prior to the beginning of the Sixth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice Edin Ramulić called the HLC office in Belgrade inquiring why he had not received an invitation from the organizers of the Forum [Independent Society of Journalists Vojvodina]. It was explained to him that the main reason he had not been invited was that there was going to be a discussion at the Forum about the RECOM model and that he had very clearly expressed his opinion during the consultations with non-governmental organizations held in BiH in November 2009 that he did not want to participate in the debates on the RECOM model because he considered them useless.

³ Reporter, April 14, 2010, *The price of unsatiable appetites of Nataša Kandić*.

⁴ *Oslobođenje*, Who does not want the truth about war crimes to be known, G. Katan, March 25, 2010.

4. **Branko Todorović, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska** was a member of the Coordination Council of the Coalition for RECOM until March 19th 2010 when the General Assembly of the Coalition General Assembly of the Coalition for RECOM accepted his resignation. At the meeting of the Coordination Council held on September 26th 2009, Todorović was strongly against the decision of the Coordination Council to engage another coordinator in BiH with an office in Sarajevo. On that occasion he announced that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska would withdraw from the consultation process and he also said that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights would bring other organizations with them, too, mentioning the Citizens of Tuzla Forum. Two days prior to the beginning of the Sixth Regional Forum, Todorović e-mailed the decision of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska to withdraw from the Coalition for RECOM to the General Assembly of the Coalition for RECOM. Two days after the Second General Assembly of the Coalition and Sixth Regional Forum on transitional Justice, Todorović informed the media that the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM was interrupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the regional project to create RECOM had failed. In addition to this, he also claimed that Nataša Kandić had contacted the governments in the region and that she had had no success in obtaining the support of the government for the creation of RECOM, which she “carefully concealed from the public in order to continue receiving funds from international donors and to win awards”⁵. Also, on several occasions Todorović gave an ugly and untruthful account of the consultation process, claiming that the gatherings attended by Nataša Kandić are held in luxury hotels, mentioning Splendid Hotel in Budva and Park Hotel in Novi Sad, as well as Dubrovnik as an upscale location for holding meeting, “while meetings with ordinary people and victims are held in provincial parks: with a sandwich, a piece of bread with salami, and occasionally a glass of juice.”⁶ In his interviews for various media outlets, Todorović accused journalist Dženana Karup Druško of publishing an interview with Nataša Kandić in the *Dani* magazine in order to be appointed coordinator of the consultation process in BiH with a salary of EUR 600-700⁷. In addition, he disputed the right of the BH Journalist association to be involved with victims and the reconciliation process in BiH. In his recent public appearances aimed against the Initiative for RECOM, Todorović stated that this initiative did not have any future because it was not supported by associations from Republika Srpska and that the real reason behind the decision of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in RS to withdraw from the Coalition for RECOM was that “associations of victims’ families in RS and in Federation of BiH, are after all, more in favour of creating a commission which would only deal with war crimes committed on the territory of BiH”⁸.

Facts:

In accordance with the Operations Plan of the consultation process for RECOM, the debate on the establishment of a Regional Commission will continue to be conducted within the civil society until December 12th 2010, when the Coalition for RECOM will adopt the proposed RECOM model at the Eighth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice, and soon

⁵ *Daily Avaz*, March 23, 2010, *Living large on account of money donated for investigating war crimes*, F. Vele

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⁸ *Reporter*, April 14, 2010, *The price of insatiable appetites of Nataša Kandić*.

after that the Coalition will organize a campaign to collect 1 million signatures for RECOM in order to be able to submit on June 1, 2011 to the parliaments in the region a request to pass a decision to create a Regional Commission for facts about victims and war crimes⁹.

Center for Civic Education, organizer of the Fifth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice held in May 2009, chose the Splendid Hotel in Budva as the venue for the event due to the fact that the hotel offered the lowest price of board and lodging for 350 participants as well as the use of three conference rooms at no extra charge. In an identical situation, the Independent Society of Journalists from Vojvodina, organizer of the Sixth Regional Forum on Transitional Justice, chose the Park Hotel in Novi Sad as the only hotel with a conference room big enough to host 250 participants. In February 2010 Documenta and Association of the Former Detention Camp Inmates from Dubrovnik organized a debate on the creation of a Regional Commission with former prisoners from the entire region in Dubrovnik which was chosen as a symbolic gesture with respect to prisoners from Dubrovnik who were imprisoned in 1991 in a prison in Morinj, in neighbouring Montenegro. More than half of participants of these gatherings were victims.

The aforementioned interview with Nataša Kandić in the *Dani* magazine was published in November 2009 following statements made by Sonja Biserko and Edina Bećirević published by the same magazine that the Initiative for RECOM would result in an equalization of victims and a relativization of war crimes.

BH Journalists Association is one five organizations in the region, in addition to the HLC, Documenta, Center for Civic Education, and HLC Kosovo offering expert and administrative support to local organizations in the RECOM process. Just like the other four organizations, BH Journalists Association receives EUR 350 a month in administration expenses incurred for organizing the RECOM process. The Republic Association of victims and families of the imprisoned and missing in Republika Srpska took part in the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM until the end of 2009 as an observer. In January 2010 they announced their intention to organize a debate in Banja Luka, but due to their involvement with the creation of the Coordination Body for Investigating War Crimes in BiH, they postponed the consultations for a later date. Later that same month, the president of the Republic Association of victims and families of the imprisoned and missing in Republika Srpska Nedeljko Mitrović informed Nataša Kandić about the decision of the Coordination Body not to recommend associations of victims from Republika Srpska to join the Coalition for RECOM thus giving the Initiative for RECOM legitimacy.

5. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia was formally a member of the Coalition for RECOM until May 15th 2010 when the organization sent hundreds of e-mails informing the public of their intention to terminate their membership with the Regional Commission RECOM¹⁰.

Even before May 15th 2010, Sonja Biserko, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, had on more than one occasion told the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the concept of RECOM was premature, that the idea was too simple

⁹ Operations Plan of the consultation proces, media campaing, and One Million Signatures campaign is available at www.korekom.com

¹⁰ The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia could not have cancelled its membership with the "commission for RECOM" because such a commission **does not exist yet**.

because it only focused on victims, that it would make all victims equal, that it was inspired by international organizations, and that it did not consider the fact that BiH was a victim of aggression. In a debate on the Initiative for RECOM with non-governmental organizations in Serbia held on December 17th 2009, Sonja Biserko advocated the creation of a national commission in Serbia, but she did not stay to hear opinions of other participants.

Facts:

Although Sonja Biserko, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, has repeatedly expressed opinions that are contrary to those of the Coalition for RECOM, the Coalition never moved to expel this organization.

Our opinion is that all victims deserve the same amount of piety, and that war crimes are different and they should be categorized in accordance with their gravity and legal qualification. National mechanisms are insufficient; they can be legitimate only on the territory of the country that formed them. The regional approach, however, removes the shortcomings of the national concept, makes it possible to establish the facts about all victims, and restores the dignity of the victims. And last but not the least, the key argument: wars waged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia had a regional character and only a regional mechanism can successfully clarify them.

The Initiative for RECOM is a local response to an ever-growing societal need to deal with its past. It represents the interest of all victims and all societies in the region. It has the potential to reduce tensions, and bring people in the post-Yugoslav societies closer together.

Contrary to war crimes trials which are dealing with a responsibility of individual perpetrators, RECOM is an extra-judicial mechanism designed to establish and tell the facts about victims, war crimes, and war crimes perpetrators.

6. **Vehid Šehić, president of the Citizens of Tuzla Forum** was an active participant of the consultation process on the Initiative for RECOM until the end of 2009. He organized four consultations with the local community in BiH. In January 2010 he informed the Coordination Council that he had obtained a grant for the Statutory Reform Project in BiH and that he would no longer be able to actively contribute to the consultation process as he did in 2009.

Facts:

Vehid Šehić did not withdraw from the Coalition for RECOM but he is no longer active in the consultation process.

Meaningless for the consultation process

It is an act of will to join the Coalition for RECOM and also an act of will to withdraw from it. At the moment when the Coalition consists of 870 associations of victims, organizations, and individual from the entire region of the former Yugoslavia, it is quite natural to encounter different opinions which result in the decision of certain members to cancel their membership with the Coalition. What is more important is that in April 2010 alone, the Coalition for RECOM was joined by six non-governmental organizations, nine

associations of victims, victims' family members, and veterans, as well as 46 individuals, victims or victim family members. Most of them come from BiH.

On March 27th 2010, at the time the campaign against the Initiative for RECOM was fully blown in BiH Nataša Kandić, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) addressed students at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Banja Luka, BiH, upon an invitation by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Center for Student Democracy, and the Faculty of Philosophy. In a lecture prepared for this occasion, Ms. Kandić said that dealing with our past and our own crimes is a prerequisite for the democratization of society and in that context she talked about war crimes trials before national jurisdictions and the RECOM process.

Before addressing the students, Ms. Kandić spoke to members of the press (Radio-Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), Federal Television, BH Television, Alternative Television (ATV), BN Television, Banjaluka BEL Television, SRNA News Agency, daily papers Independent Newspaper, Glas Srpske, Blic, Focus, Oslobođenje, and Daily Avaz) about the claims made by the president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska that the regional project to create RECOM had failed.

That same day, in their evening news program, TV station RTRS broadcast, professionally and without comment, a segment on the HLC Executive Director's visit to the Faculty of Political Sciences and her statements to the press. Parts of her visit to Banjaluka were also aired on ATV, BN, FTV, BHT, and BEL Television. In addition, all TV stations aired the press release of the Coordination Council of the Coalition for RECOM denying allegations made by Branko Todorović, president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska that the RECOM process has been privatized and had been discontinued.

On Saturday May 29th 2010 the Coalition for RECOM held a national consultation in Tuzla, BiH, with associations of victims and victim family members. Two days before the consultation representatives of 10 local Serb associations of victims cancelled their participation because of "instructions" from their representatives in the Coordination body of the Government of the Republika Srpska for investigating war crimes and missing persons not to support the Initiative for RECOM and not to participate in the consultation process.

Consultation process in BiH is underway. Consultations with local associations of victims were held in Žepče and in Sarajevo, and consultations with artists were held on the margins of international Mess Festival. Participants of these consultations, approximately 30 film directors, writers, and actors from the region gave their support to the Initiative for RECOM and promised their support in an effort to create more sensible societies able to demonstrate compassion, solidarity, and the respect for all victims.