

4. National consultation with young people on dealing with the past

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
June 27th 2007.

The consultation was organized by the Research and Documentation Center (BiH) and was attended by 11 members of youth non-governmental organizations and two representatives of political parties. The consultation was opened by Mirsad Tokača (Research and Documentation Center, BiH) and Marijana Toma (Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia) and the discussion was moderated by Dejana Grbić (Youth initiative for Human Rights, BiH).

The human losses data base is the most powerful tool in combating denial of human losses.

Do you really think that those who are missing are enjoying themselves somewhere on sunny beaches allowing their families to search for them? But when you have a tool as powerful as the RDC's war crimes data base containing information on human losses, that's something we all need to use in our work to dispel the prevailing disbelief.

Statement: Dejana Grbić, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, BiH, National consultations with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Dealing with the past must involve a regional approach.

The essence of the dealing with the past process is that it cannot be done locally in Serbia, BiH, Croatia, Montenegro or in Kosovo alone. We have to cooperate with young people across state borders because we are doomed to be together, so to speak. We can try to isolate ourselves in our local communities, our countries, but that prevents us from seeing the bigger picture and we lose the idea of the complexity of the entire situation.

Statement: Dejana Grbić, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, BiH, National consultations with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

The regional approach is definitely the only successful model. First of all because we all share the same destiny, we used to live in one country and secondly, our existence is very much intertwined. So, from various perspectives, we can possibly break through certain media blockades with our personal views. Now that I am able to hear other people, I understand how wrong I was in many respects, how

ill-informed I was and I really feel bad about it.

Statement: Jelena Kuzmanović, TERCA Association, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

The civil society must guide the process of dealing with the past: it cannot be appropriated by politicians.

It is a fact that war criminals are still at large and that some politicians still give incendiary speeches, etc (...) So, the dealing with the past process must be extracted from daily politics and taken over by civil society in order to begin our efforts to build a new value system based on our experiences from our bloody and tragic past. That's the crucial thing for me.

Statement: Mirsad Tokača, Research and Documentation Center, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Influencing young people should be achieved through youth organizations, and it ought to be immediate because the majority of youth are inactive.

Your target group, if you want to have an impact, are young people who are in no way affiliated with youth organizations. However, youth organizations can be a good starting point and a good resource in providing contacts with the target group simply because they are mobile; they travel, and get to know each other.

Statement: Jan Zlatan Kulenović, Youth Information Agency, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

It is necessary to come up with a well-conceived approach to young people in order to motivate them to pay attention to dealing with the past themes.

The 'Youth Friendly' approach is very interesting. It is challenging and it is difficult simply because young people find this topic repulsive. It brings them back to a time that was not so good for them, and also they find this topic highly exploited by politicians. They would rather just talk about where to have a coffee or where to study in two years and not about what happened ten years ago in their community. That is why you have to be very careful in choosing the proper methodology. It has to be provocative and strong enough to make them think about this issue and even be able to change their opinions, and I'd even say catharsis.

Statement: Jan Zlatan Kulenović, Youth Information Agency, BiH, National consultations with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

The biggest problem in the dealing with the past process is to ask a young person to go beyond his or her family and denounce a person being considered a hero for so long, labelling him or her a war criminal and leave him to be tried by the public. We have dealt with young people whose parents were direct participants in these crimes, in Bratunac for example, and it is very difficult to discuss this topic with them.

Statement: Belma Deljkić, Public Justice Representatives Network, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Participants could not agree on the age of young people that ought to be involved in dealing with the past processes.

I think high school students are the right group to start with because they are mature enough and they can participate in discussion.

Statement: Belma Deljkić, Public Justice Representatives Network, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

If we don't approach them and tell them what really happened and corroborate it with documents and arguments, they may be approached by somebody else who will teach them a different history which they will later adopt as their own. It is especially the case if they are also influenced by their parents, which means that they will adopt a wrong course at an early age. It is a longer process, I agree, than to start with high school students, but I think we will be more successful if we start earlier.

Statement: Kenan Uštović, SDP Youth Forum, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

When they reach the age of 15 or 16 they have perfectly developed the ability to recite the ideology of whomsoever. We have people who on the basis of only a little information or the views of their family or on the basis of what they've seen on the street, creates specific attitudes.

Statement: Ivana Kešić, Civitas, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

The sooner education begins the better. I was in grade five when the war was over and it was only then that we started having what's called 'normal education'. Then some people came to school and they gave us history books in which texts referring

to the recent war were highlighted (...) Then it was very difficult to discuss it with us. Any mention of what we had been through in the past four years and we would become very upset, because the people who marked the text would appear (...) When you use a marker, you know, you can still figure out some words, letters, and they used better quality markers, and that meant 'stop' – that should not be discussed.

Statement: Ehlimana Memišević, Association Education Builds BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Political party youth organizations should be involved in the dealing with the past education process.

It is not only about teaching young politicians how to talk and how to behave, but in essence about encouraging political maturity and basic values, such as respect for human rights and the importance of dealing with the past so when they are mature politicians they can represent us.

Statement: Dejana Grbić, Youth Initiative for Human Rights, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

The established facts must find their way into history books in all countries in the region so that history does not repeat itself.

The established facts, as a conflict resolution tool, are for me something that already exist and they must find their way into history books of each school in the region which will mean that we will all be learning the same history and in ten years there won't be a dispute about what happened in the region.

Statement: Ehlimana Memišević, Association Education Builds BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

It is necessary to use artistic expression as a tool to communicate with young people about the events of the past.

Art is very important because it is close to young people. So, you can have hundreds of different art projects, from music to photo exhibitions, plays, concerts, where these things can be presented. That is something that will attract the young population and inspire them to take part in it.

Statement: Jan Zlatan Kulenović, Youth Information Agency, BiH, National consultations with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

It is necessary to establish a common denominator for all people in BiH because without it is not possible to discuss the past and have a future together.

If we want to discuss the past and the future it is crucial to understand why we want to talk about it. If we try to talk to people who have absolutely nothing in common and who have no interest in building a better state for themselves and they have nothing in common and who are trying to be as different as possible, then it is impossible to have a discussion.

Statement: Edin Čolić, Young Liberals of BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Trips to places where crimes were committed are a good way to help the young deal with the past.

I believe that trips are a good idea, to visit memorial centres, places where crimes were committed.

Statement: Jelena Kuzmanović, TERCA Association, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

Regional debates between representatives from different social groups can be very useful in the dealing with the past process.

When speaking about the dealing with the past process it is important to organize regional debates and to include as many speakers from different backgrounds.

Statement: Jelena Kuzmanović, TERCA Association, BiH, National consultation with young people, Sarajevo, BiH, June 27th 2007.

5. National consultation with young people on dealing with the past mechanisms

Belgrade, Serbia,
July 8th 2007

The consultation was organized by the Humanitarian Law Center (Serbia). It was attended by 25 youth organization activists from all over Serbia and was opened by Nataša Kandić (Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia) and Andrej Nosov (Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia) while Marijana Toma (Humanitarian Law Center,

Serbia) moderated the discussion. There were three discussion topics: the role of young people in the dealing with the past process in the former Yugoslavia, the importance of establishing the facts about war crimes for post-conflict generations, and the role of young people in truth-seeking and truth-telling in combating denial and relativizing crimes.

It is necessary to create a regional connection of young people and encourage discussion among them about the past and the crimes committed in the past.

I believe that young people should start from the very beginning, meaning young people from non-governmental organizations in one state should get to know their counter-parts in non-governmental organizations in other states in the region so that they can initiate the exchange process idea. There is a big problem not just in terms of what people know about what happened in the past, but they also don't know what's going on now. Maybe it's necessary to start from the beginning, to build a new kind of communication.

Statement: Ana Batočanin, My Initiative – Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia, National consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, July 8th 2007.

We need to develop a method which will create a clear picture for young people in the region portraying our past and the past of our politicians who were in power in those critical years. I am talking about the events in the former Yugoslavia from the 1991 onward.

Statement: Mile Novaković, Sigo ando Them, Serbia, National consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, July 8th 2007.

Convincing the media to stop blocking war crime topics is an indispensable condition for the public to change its opinion on these issues.

Putting economic and social topics in the forefront as important topics while dealing with the past is left to the margins is common practice, and our task should be to push it to the forefront. It's the work of every organization. We have to use every opportunity to promote this topic.

Statement: Hajrija Bogujevci, Intergra Association, Kosovo, National consultation with young people, Belgrade, Serbia, July 8th 2007.

I really think that once we break through the media blockade, we will be able to talk about everything