

## **Regional consultation with journalists**

Novi Sad, Serbia,  
September 26th 2009

The regional consultation with journalists was organized by the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV, Serbia). Forty-seven people, founders, directors, editors-in-chief, editors, and journalists from the region, participated in the consultation. Panellists were Bogdan Ivanišević from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), Nataša Kandić from the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) Serbia, and Vesna Teršelič (Documenta, Croatia). The discussion was moderated by (Dinko Gruhonjić (NDNV, Serbia), Eugen Jakovčić (Documenta, Croatia) and Aleksandar Trifunović (Buka, BiH). News agency SRNA (BiH), TV B92, and Radio Pančevo reported on the consultation.

### **Suggestions, opinions, and recommendations of participants**

**The Initiative for RECOM has opened up a space for discussion about the past in the entire region and created a coalition powerful enough to request the creation of RECOM.**

There is a possibility that maybe one of the states involved in the process, for example, will say “no, we don’t want it”. But the result of this regional debate is the fact that we have created a space for a discussion about the past. No one will ever be able to say “no more discussion about it”. The Coalition for RECOM is such a powerful force that it will never let any government be at ease or refuse any requests from the Coalition, and that is the creation of a regional commission which would be tasked with establishing the facts about war crimes. (Nataša Kandić, Humanitarian Law Center, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009)

**Collecting one million of signatures for RECOM does not guarantee that the governments of the countries in the region will accept the Initiative for RECOM.**

*As for this idea, I don’t doubt the fact that we will collect one million signatures but I think that later, once they are collected, if the governments of the countries in the region (...) refuse to accept the initiative to create RECOM (...) then I’m afraid that we will have a hard time doing it. (Luka Brailo, Novi List, Croatia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**In addition to political will, it is necessary to secure the support of owners and editors-in-chief who can help handle the initiative properly.**

*I believe that after this conference we must sit down with owners and editors-in-chief of media outlets throughout the region because without their support and the famous political will, all these good ideas concerning the creation of RECOM will be wasted.*

(Luka Brailo, Novi List, Croatia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

*A media group that (...) would be tasked with coordinating the relations of the Coalition for RECOM and the public and other media should organize discussions with the different media profiles and determine how they should all report to the public about RECOM. (Zoran Ilić, FENA, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**In order to reach an agreement to report regularly about the RECOM initiative it is necessary to organize meetings with public TV stations and owners of all media outlets. It is necessary that each media outlet assign a journalist for this task.**

*I have (...) so to speak a strategy proposition for initiators and members of the Coalition for RECOM – a meeting should be as soon as possible organized with directors and owners of media outlets, decision makers. (Aleksandar Reljić, TV Pink, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

*We need you as media people to help us choose what journalists or editors we should invite to our gatherings. We always pay trip expenses for those attending our consultations. (Aleksandar Trifunović, Buka, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**It is necessary to investigate the role of the media before and during the conflicts.**

*My colleague (...) mentioned a very important thesis (...) in addition to investigating the role of the media during the 1990s, it is also important to establish their role for the period before the 1990s when the orchestration of the events that followed actually began. (Željko Hodonj, HINA, Croatia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

*Not only that the media prepared the scene for the conflict, they also often added fuel to it by promoting hatred, fear, etc. (Branislava Obranović, Independent Society of Journalists of Vojvodina, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**An unclear stance on war crimes along with unrealistic expectations of RECOM initiators that the same governments which are still denying crimes can become partners in this project are the main obstacles we have in BiH.**

*This project is burdened with a lot of problems, we have governments denying war crimes, especially in BiH, and yet, we are trying to include these governments in this project by making them our partners. I think that, more or less, that mission is impossible. (Senad Pećanin, Dani, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Just knowing the facts about war crimes is not enough without knowing the cause and the context, but in the case of the former Yugoslavia that would mean going back deep into the past, as far as the 14th century.**

*The next big problem (...) is whether this commission should only deal with facts or should it analyse causes, too. If we only present the facts (...) that is an easier process regardless of whether the truth is being told by a victim or a perpetrator (...) but we cannot grasp the meaning of these facts without analysing these events (...). However, if we choose to explore the cause or the context, I'm afraid we will go as far as into the past as the 14th century. Also, I don't really see any societal groups which would like our history to be factually connected. (Senad Pećanin, Dani, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

*Naturally, each story has its own context, but I think we should, at least in the beginning, stick to the facts only. (Sanda Savić, RTV B92, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**For the media, it is very difficult to report from something which is a process rather than an event. Another aggravating circumstance is the fact that there are fewer donors for media outlets reporting about war crimes.**

*It is very difficult for the media to report from 'a process' in a way similar to that when reporting from an event. What is important to stress is the resources media outlets have at their disposal. There are fewer donors for those reporting about war crimes. These donors are gone and an excellent media outlet such as Feral Tribune had to be closed because of the lack of sensitivity on the part of the donors to understand the importance of its work. (Senad Pećanin, Dani, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**There are still some journalists who had their role in preparing the war working in some media outlets. Should we have cooperation with these media and would it be possible?**

*Can we cooperate with media outlets still employing journalists who participated in the war propaganda (...)? How are they going to make a report of a story which was made on the basis of collected facts? (Branislava Obranović, Independent Society of Journalists of Vojvodina, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The idea to form RECOM is good, but in the current media, cultural, and political atmosphere it is not possible to implement it.**

*I think it's a fine idea but in our current political and cultural situation, and the atmosphere in the media, I don't see how it is going to be possible to implement it. (Senad Pećanin, Dani, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The main value of RECOM must be truth, the peace of victims' families, and reconciliation between ethnic communities. In implementing its goals RECOM must consider amnesty and protected witnesses.**

*I'd say that the main value of RECOM must be truth. For RECOM it should be more important how many families will find out the truth than how many criminals will end up in jail. So, immunity in exchange for the truth (...) in order to secure the peace for victims' families who will find out the truth about their loved ones and give them a proper burial if possible. So, in view of that, RECOM must consider amnesty and protected witnesses (...). The main value of RECOM must be truth, the peace of victims' families, and reconciliation between ethnic communities. (Željko Tvrđišić, Association of Journalists of Kosovo and Metohija, Kosovo, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**States in the region which do not recognize the facts established by the ICTY will have a hard time accepting the initiative to create RECOM.**

*So, it is indisputable that the ICTY established the facts about all sides in the conflict, but politicians do not recognize them and that's why I think it is going to be difficult to convince the governments to accept this project. (Damir Šimić, TV BH1, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**We should start with the facts established by the ICTY and national war crimes trial chambers – no one will stand against it.**

*I think that in the beginning we should only stick to the facts because we have ICTY judgements and decisions of domestic courts and I think that we should use these legally binding judgements handed down by independent judges and nobody will be against them. And that should be spread further. (Dženana Karup-Druško, Dani, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**In BiH the figure of 200 000 killed Bosniaks is still being manipulated, although the Research and Documentation Center established that there were approximately 97,000 killed and missing.**

*In Bosnia and Herzegovina we had a promotion of a political leader, a media magnate (...) a few days ago, who is known to have manipulated (...) the fact about the total number of killed and missing in BiH and he mentioned the figure of 200,000 killed Bosniaks again despite the fact that the Research and Documentation Center established a figure of approximately 97,000 victims in BiH. (Damir Šimić, TV BH1, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Croatian media reporting war crimes trials of Croatian generals are obviously biased and favour the defendants.**

*It is a very difficult position for you that ask for the support of the media. I am quite familiar with the Croatian media (...) and I can tell you (...) that they report on the war crime trials of Croatian generals with an obvious favouritism towards the defendants. (Damir Šimić, TV BH1, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Regardless of whether RECOM will establish the facts and help future generations what happened, it will not prevent manipulation with facts and figures.**

*If this project succeeds in its intention and establish the truth, its long-term goal of leaving something for the future generations, will not prevent the practice of manipulating with the facts. (Damir Šimić, TV BH1, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**In Kosovo we have a problem with identification of mortal remains which is why it is necessary to start with the national/state level and then connect on a regional level.**

*We have one problem in Kosovo, we buried 2,000 people without DNA analyses while at the morgue in Priština (...) there are over 400 mortal remains whose DNA does not match the analyses provided by family members. We have a problem within the country (...) and I think it is far better to start from a national level and later meet on a regional level. (Ardijana Fači, Koha Vision, Kosovo, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Facts are not sufficient. It is necessary to present war crimes within a context which is something the governments in the region will not accept.**

*I am a pessimist when it comes to that because we know where money and power come from and these people (politicians) they don't like the truth. In Montenegro, three or four years ago (...) a documentary was made (...) about the attack on Dubrovnik. The film was full of facts (...) but the political dimension of the entire story was ostensibly missing. The film showed bearded, drunk men, attacking the world's cultural heritage driven by some cosmic energy etc. I am exaggerating it, of course, but I want to say that the context must be given. (Brano Mandić, Vijesti, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The media campaign must be serious and it should be under the leadership of truly dedicated persons.**

*Your media campaign should be very serious (...) I suggest you form a team for that (...). It should be done by dedicated people; (...) those with enough power; (...) strong individuals. It should be handled by those who take their work home. (Brano Mandić, Vijesti, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

*RECOM should raise awareness and create an alternate approach to people since what matters most is to raise awareness and deal with the past. (Idriz Seferi, Koha Ditore, Kosovo, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**RECOM is important in order to open up discussion about Albanian victims in Serbia and about Serbian victims in Kosovo.**

RECOM is important for the future of each and every one of us, so we should work on it and support it (...). Many people here don't know that approximately 10,000 people were killed, in Kosovo they are afraid that only Serbian victims are going to be mentioned and so on, while here (in Serbia) we only talk about Serbian victims. Idriz Seferi, Koha Ditore, Kosovo, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**Throughout the region we hear media reports about their “own” victims.**

*In Bosnia and Herzegovina since the beginning of the war, and also in Kosovo since 1999 (...) we have a system to tell just one part of a story, a story that is acceptable by one side only (...). We should stop doing that – talking only about our own victims. For example, when reporting from war crimes trials, if a Serb is being prosecuted, they only report about what is contained in the indictment completely ignoring what the defence is saying and the other way round if a Bosniak is being tried, they just report about what the defence said and ignore everything that's in the indictment. (Sanja Škuletić, Avaz, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Media outlets will begin reporting about the activities of the Coalition for RECOM if consultations become a political event.**

*We will report about your activities if you really make a political breakthrough, if you become a political event (...). You really have to try to do it, intentionally or unintentionally, like the people who wanted to organize the gay pride parade, they became a main political story in the country. (Sanda Savić, RTV B92, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**As soon as it is created, the commission will be challenged by an anti-campaign.**

*As soon as the news becomes public that the commission was created, I can see a thousand headlines against it and we can all predict who will be behind it and what will follow. (Vesna Sladojević, RTS, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The most valuable result of RECOM's work will be the opportunity young people and future generations will have to know everything that happened in the recent wars and it will come as a firsthand experience told by people from all over former Yugoslavia.**

RECOM is important for future generations (...) I want my child one day (...) to be able to know exactly what happened in the country where her parents lived, to learn the facts as close to the truth as possible and it will be best if it is through the stories told by the people who experienced it and took part in it. That's the biggest value of this project. (Vesna Sladojević, RTS, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**It will be difficult for RECOM to obtain data and documentation owned by state organs.**

*If we ask institutions to give us these documents and the data they have so that we can find the facts easier, that is not going to happen, they will only give them when they are ready. Unfortunately, we witness that every day in war crimes trials.* (Vesna Sladojević, RTS, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**Info Programs of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation (RTS) will report from consultations but the quality of their work will depend on the personal interest of the reporter. Victims' testimonies should be aired as special broadcasts for a better impression and as such they attract more viewers.**

*RTS will always report from your consultations, but the quality of the report will depend on the reporter's personal interest in the topic.* (Vesna Sladojević, RTS, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

*These broadcasts should be aired in separate time slots and not together with daily news. Victims' testimonies are always more attractive to viewers when done by individual authors.* (Vesna Sladojević, RTS, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

*Have you thought about a possible association or a network support of the media for the Coalition for RECOM? Maybe you can sign a contract with some media outlets to report from your consultations and make special shows about it?* (Rajko Šerbet, Montenegro TV, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**RECOM has to define the concept of 'victim' and that definition must be used in all countries or the entire idea will be compromised.**

*RECOM must come up with a clear definition of who can be considered 'victim' and apply it steadfastly (...) in order to avoid standard compromising situations such as discussion about "our" and "their" victims.* (Zoran Sekulić, FONET, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**Victims are victims, there are not “our” and “their” victims and they must be treated in an identical manner. That approach will guarantee credibility, authenticity, and truthfulness to the entire initiative.**

*Not all criminals are the same, but all victims are always the same and there are not our and their victims and if the whole point of this commission is make the voice of victims be heard, then they have to be treated in an identical manner (...) We, as media outlets, and you as the Coalition for RECOM can win the hearts of the public if what we do is perceived as credible, authentic, and truthful from the beginning to the very end. (Zoran Sekulić, FONET, Serbia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The initiative for RECOM has the public turned against it, the same public that advocates punishment of all perpetrators always convinced that the perpetrators come from other ethnic groups.**

*Polls show that 80% of the people from my neck of the woods, Banja Luka, believe that all war crimes perpetrators should be brought to justice but in the same polls they say: “the Serbs, no, we did not commit war crimes”. That is the public we are now about to provoke with this project. (Aleksandar Trifunović, Buka, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**We have to open a debate on the fact that the very act of “doing nothing” means participating in the war.**

*We have to go past the brainwashing and explain to people that we were engaged in a war, that there were victims, and that we took part in that. The fact that we ‘didn’t commit any crimes’ only means that we took part in it. (Aleksandar Trifunović, Buka, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**In BiH the initiative cannot have political support without the pressure of the international community.**

*I talked to my colleagues in BiH and they are all quietly telling me that this initiative will never get political support and that only because of the political protectorate, it may do it under the pressure of the international community. (Saša Kosanović, Croatian Radio Television, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Western Balkans countries should be asked to transform all conflicts between them before becoming members of the European Union.**

*If the political elites in the countries formed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia truly want to join the European Union – then we need to end these tribal wars as soon as possible in order to become serious EU candidates. (Saša Kosanović, Croatian Radio*



Television, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).

**Croatia adopted a Declaration on the Homeland War which flagrantly denies Croatia's participation in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From their point of view, the events in BiH have nothing to do with Croatia.**

*How do you think you can cope with the problem we have in Croatia – they are not interested in anything outside Croatia; not even a million signatures will prompt them: they will closely monitor how many Croats or Serbs or Chinese signed the petition. The Croatian Parliament adopted a Declaration on the Homeland War and they outright deny Croatia's participation in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian politicians and Croatian citizens don't care about what happened in BiH, in Serbia, in Kosovo or in Montenegro. (Saša Kosanović, Croatian Radio Television, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**RECOM should make a list of concentration camps and other detention places and recommend that memorials be built in these locations.**

*One of the lists to be included in the upcoming report of RECOM will be a list of all detention camps and concentration camps and along with that a recommendation to build memorials in these locations. (Vesna Teršelič, Documenta, Croatia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**The Coalition for RECOM should form a media team which should be tasked with connecting all public service TV stations in the region to ensure that the voice of the victims and war crimes trial chamber decisions are heard throughout the region.**

*I think that the Coalition for RECOM should consider (...) maybe, forming a media team tasked with (...) insisting that national TV stations cooperate because (...) they are public services and they are representing the public interest (...). One of the ideas or recommendations should be for them to air public testimonies of victims (...). For example, we have war crimes trials in Serbia and BiH and (...) in Croatia (...) and I would suggest that the team should try to connect these TV stations so that we in Montenegro can hear what the court in Belgrade or a court in Sarajevo ruled in war crimes trials. In Montenegro, we are entirely isolated. (Sonja Radošević, freelance journalist, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Public persons recognizable throughout the region should be engaged to conduct the promotion of the RECOM Initiative.**

*It would be a wise choice to use public persons well known in the entire region and perceived as positive, successful persons (...) and it would be good to have a popular person from Croatia speak about a crime committed in Croatia in Belgrade or elsewhere in Serbia (...) and the other way round (...) strongly emphasising the stress that the*

*Initiative for RECOM is behind the whole project. (Brano Mandić, Vijesti, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Alternative media outlets are also important – they have their specific support.**

*Ignoring alternative media outlets is not a good idea because they have their specific audience and their specific strength and I think that at a regional level they should be somehow connected in a network. (Jelena Svirčić, H-alter, Croatia, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**All media outlets will write and report about people's life stories.**

*I can say with certainty that the topics we discussed here today (...) are very interesting and they will certainly be on front pages of our papers, I am 100% sure (...). What is interesting for all both print and electronic media are life stories and I am sure we will write and report a lot. (Mladen Milutinović, Dani, Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Media outlets are ready to put their archives at RECOM's disposal.**

*We, FENA, have war archives of different events and various interpretations of these events and crimes (...). Together with our colleagues from HINA and SRNA we can offer you our archives. (Zoran Ilić, FENA, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

*On behalf of BETA news agency, I can also offer our war archive which is quite sizeable. (Dinko Gruhonjić, Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**There is no media campaign without a lot of money.**

*Let's be realistic, I think that we are going to need a lot of money. If Dodik can give five million to the media in the Republika Srpska, I think that you will spend the same amount of money in that entity. I doubt it very much that without money anything will be done, despite the fact that we all claim that everything is great, super, and important. I think that money will have to be spent. (Sanja Škuletić, Avaz, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**Journalists should be trained and given full support if they report about war crimes.**

*The Coalition for RECOM should be open towards (...) journalists who write about war crimes. They should be trained and offered full support if they encounter any problems while doing it. (Aleksandar Trifunović, Buka, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**ERNO Regional Service whose members are public service TV stations from Slovenia, BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania can help in promoting the idea of RECOM.**

*Public service TV stations in the region are still cooperating through the ERNO regional service. We have everyday exchange of daily news and daily pictures from the entire region. We cooperate on a number of important issues such as human trafficking, modern day slavery (...). We can do the same thing here, have each centre do a segment and then put it all together and make a story about the entire idea. Members of ERNO Regional Service are Slovenian TV, HRT, BHT, Federal TV, RTS, Radio TV Podgorica, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania (...) (Željko Tica, FTV, BiH, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*

**A TV show about RECOM, titled for example ‘YES or NO’ should be made and aired by all TV stations in the region.**

*Maybe it would be a good idea to prepare a 60 minute TV show and use all materials owned by FONET and Sarajevo and all other TV stations (...) in the region (...) Maybe a 30 minute program about RECOM, yes or no, those for and against it, and then the 60 minute show. (Budimir Raičević, Radio Montenegro, Regional consultation with journalists, Novi Sad, Serbia, September 26th 2009).*