

## **National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative**

Selce, Croatia  
December 3, 2009

A national consultation with young people in Croatia was organized by the Croatian Youth Network and Documenta, a non-governmental organization from Zagreb, Croatia. The gathering was attended by 46 participants. Introductory speeches were given by Eugen Jakovčić (Documenta, Zagreb, Croatia), and Ivan Novosel (Legalis, Zagreb, Croatia). The discussion was moderated by Emina Bužinkić (Youth Network of Croatia).

### **Opinions, Suggestions, and Recommendations of the Participants:**

**Increased mobility of young people, intercultural cooperation, the production of movies tackling the issue of dealing with the past, and the inclusion of the media should be key elements in approaching young people.**

*I think that young people of my generation are also indirect victims of war... simply because our chance of a normal life is seriously compromised when compared to that of our peers in Europe and around the world... What I see as a possible approach to young people, except, of course, for formal and informal education, is to increase the regional mobility of young people. That is absolutely the most important step. Secondly, another significant issue is the role of the media and the so-called independent production houses. We have all seen what influence movies such as 'A Storm over Krajina', 'Vukovar – the Last Cut', or 'The Erased' can have. Those movies exploded in our societies louder than any bomb. It is absolutely necessary to produce more movies like that and make sure they are put in the main-stream – i.e. aired on prime time TV as often as possible. I would also like to add that it is very important to act on a national level and influence our governments to encourage intercultural cooperation and exchange in the region, which should primarily focus on the cooperation of young people in co-producing cultural events. (Katarina Pavić, the Croatian Youth Network, Zagreb, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**Young people should request the Government of the Republic of Croatia to replace facts for the mythology contained in text books.**

*...Countries like Germany, Poland, France, and so on, put in a lot of effort into improving their [school] textbooks. Would it be worthwhile to submit a request to the Government of the Republic of Croatia to substitute facts for the mythology contained in our textbooks? ...Maybe it would be a good idea for young people to request that the governments in the region form such a Regional Commission... Maybe that can be an initiative of youth organizations to advocate for. What do you think? To include into the recommendations addressed to the government the suggestion to form such a commission?... The Croatian Youth Network will be included in the One Million Signatures Campaign through the activities of its Board of Directors and its Operations Team and we will also support any other local initiatives. (Emina Bužinkić, the Croatian Youth Network, Zagreb, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**One of the long-term goals for the education system is to encourage the adoption of history and sociology curriculums containing more facts and less political interpretations of events, thus helping our societies build a sustainable peace. Young people should be taught tolerance and other skills necessary to interact in multi-cultural environments.**

*We believe that the education system is a building block for the creation of a systematic approach to building a lasting peace in our society... Our text books for many courses taught at schools, primarily history and sociology text books are full of what we call 'tainted' interpretations of the war-related events. We believe that it is important to stop interpreting information and we are convinced that it would be much healthier for our society to include more facts and leave it to the discretion of young people to interpret them, and the way they understand them. In other words, we think that a history book should provide, for example, an exact number of people killed in such and such village, so many civilians, that this or that army was stationed there at the time of the execution of civilians and so on. So, give us information. As far as I know, we still don't have accurate information on the number of civilians killed. ...Also, it is important to teach young people the skills necessary for interacting in various situations they may find themselves in, including (presenting) their position on the events from the past and the critical thinking they should apply when analyzing those events. Also, valuable lessons can be learned with respect to interacting in multicultural environments, with young people from the states we were instructed to consider our enemies at some point. (Lovorka Bačić, Center for Peace Studies, Zagreb, Croatia. National Consultation with Young People on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**Is it possible to organize public hearings of victims in schools so that students can hear their experiences first hand? Also, it is important to hear testimonies of war crimes perpetrators who are hiding behind victims, because they can tell us how low a human being can stoop.**

*There are organized visits to the Jasenovac memorial center – people go together to places like that, which is a good thing to do. So, my question is: is it realistic to expect – since Documenta is already in the business of helping our society deal with the past through collecting the testimonies of victims of war crimes – is it possible to arrange for some of the victims to testify in schools and other public places and talk about their experience? However, for me personally, it would be more interesting to hear the story of a perpetrator than the story of a victim of war crime. I think that victims always sound almost the same and it would be more useful for young people to hear those who committed crimes, tell us about what they did and how they did it; to understand what it means to commit a crime. It is important to present the gravity of one's decision to kill another human being... Perpetrators of war crimes are hiding behind the victims, and we all know that young people can be violent... We all carry that trigger and we may all benefit from meeting those who have committed crimes in real life. Also, it would be a good idea to meet some of the scouts. You know what scouts did during the war? They cut off ears, noses, and so on. It is important to show young people how low a human being can stoop. (Marina Globočnik, FadeIn, Zagreb, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**It is important to tell children and young people about the things we had in common and the life we lived before the war of the 1990s and to explain how the war happened.**

*... There is a lot of mythology taught in schools. However, apart from dealing with the war, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, and the crimes committed during the war, it is crucial to tell children and young people about the things we shared before 1990. Our history books only mention it on a page or two, if that. That is an important passage, as well. It is important for young people to understand how it was possible for a society like ours to end up in such a bitter conflict. It is important for educators to be objective. The same goes for families and the society itself. The entire education process must rise above bias. (Marija Hrebac, the Croatian Youth Network, Zagreb, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**I don't support the idea of holding public hearings of victims of perpetrators in schools. There is much more work to be done in our dealing with the present than dealing with the past.**

I would not allow my child to attend a public hearing session, regardless of whether it is the hearing of a victim or a perpetrator. I am absolutely against it. I think there is much more we need to do in our dealing with the present than dealing with the past. We need to open our eyes and understand the things happening around us now. (*Vesna Vilus, Domaći, Karlovac, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*

**Schools and universities across Croatia should have information desks offering information on RECOM and organizing short lectures on transitional justice issues.**

*...the most important recommendation here is to put up info desks in schools and universities across Croatia to inform young people about RECOM and to organize short lectures on transitional justice within regular classes... Our colleagues from the Croatian Hostel Organization offer their volunteers, some 200 of them, to help with the One Million Signatures Campaign. ...it is also important to put up info desks in hostels run by the Croatian Hostel Organization, there are six of them, where young people from Croatia and all others will be able to get information on this topic... Our colleague from K.V.A.R.K., Križevac, said that his association could be organized to help with the signature collection campaign and that they could also organize workshops to play films and offer a place to discuss RECOM. (Darija Marić, Documenta, Zagreb, Croatia. National consultation with young people on the RECOM Initiative, Selce, Croatia, December 3, 2009).*