

Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM

Sombor, Serbia

May 8, 2010

A consultation with the local community on the Initiative for RECOM was held in the City Assembly of the town of Sombor on May 8, 2010 and was organized by the Open Lyceum, a non-governmental organization from Sombor. The consultation was opened by Gojko Mišković from Open Lyceum, Sombor, and it was attended by 25 participants. Zsuzsanna Szerencses, a journalist from Novi Sad, shared her thoughts on the topic of “Why RECOM,” while Sandra Orlović, from the Humanitarian Law Center in Serbia, presented an update on the course of the consultation process on the RECOM model and also moderated a separate discussion on the RECOM model.

Comments and Suggestions to the Draft RECOM Statute

Like an airplane black box, RECOM should be able to tell us the truth.

The reason authorities are searching for black boxes after plane crashes is that they can give very specific facts about what happened and how exactly it happened – they make it possible to create a whole picture of the event. To me personally, this idea of creating RECOM is extremely important and valuable because it is a huge black box that can finally tell us what really happened. (Zsuzsanna Szerencses, Radio Free Europe, Novi Sad, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

RECOM should only deal with the facts about the wars, and it should not explore causes of the wars because that would result in the relativization of the entire process.

It is very important for the future mandate of RECOM to decide whether it will only deal with the facts or if it will also try to establish the cause of the wars. I think, and I don't want to anticipate your position on this, that RECOM should exclusively deal with the facts about recent wars, in those ten bloody years, because I am afraid that a debate on the causes would sidetrack the entire process and open a wide spectrum of political manipulations. At the same time, the debate on the causes may easily take us as far back into the past as World War II, the Battle of Kosovo, all the way back to the amoebas. Ultimately, that would result in the relativization of the entire project. (Dinko Gruhonjić, Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

I agree with the option proposed by Dinko Gruhonjić – that the commission should only deal with the facts about the armed conflicts. When it comes to determining a historical context, I think that the commission itself should choose a moment in history relevant for all of the subsequent events, but I don't think that the commission should focus on the very distant past. I really think that's not necessary and it would, and this is probably an understatement, lead to further complications. (Olivera Radovanović, The Green Network of Vojvodina, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

Members of the commission should be elected by an international arbiter.

If you expect to find strong, non-party individuals, independent from the policies of the states who nominate them, I think that's mission impossible. How do you think that can be done? I don't know a single person in Croatia who can function like that. After dwelling on it for hours, I think I can only come up with two, maybe three names, if that much. That is going to be an insurmountable hurdle. Maybe we should apply the Bosnian model, which did not prove quite successful, to be honest, something like an international arbiter, high representative, who would try to reconcile the differences which will inevitably occur in the interpretation of the position of our societies with respect to war crimes. (Jaroslav Pecnik, Evangelistic Faculty of Theology, Osijek, Croatia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

We must make our position with respect to each armed conflict very clear – do we consider it to be a civil war or an aggression?

The problem for RECOM is that it has to be determined for each and every armed conflict if it was a civil war or an aggression. We must reach an agreement on that because that position will help us define the victims. Of course, for those who died during a particular armed conflict, it makes no difference at all, but the rest of us should definitely know how we perceive those conflicts. I am in favour of a compromise solution – it was at the same time a civil war and an act of aggression, because whether we want to acknowledge it or not, there were elements of both in the wars waged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. (Jaroslav Pecnik, Evangelistic Faculty of Theology, Osijek, Croatia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

It is important to create lists of the killed, forcefully displaced, raped, and the victims of all other kinds of crimes.

I would like to clarify that the main assignment of RECOM is to create a database, a list of victims, and that list can be used by prosecutors to initiate war crimes trials if they are willing to do so. The list of victims is important because it can help us establish the exact number of those killed, forcefully displaced, raped, and the victims of all other crimes. It is important to know these numbers because we don't want another Jasenova-like situation where we don't know if there are 700,000, 70,000, or 7,000 victims. It is important for our children to know these numbers. (Ivan Prišing, Ravangrad, Sombor, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

The task of the commission is to make sure the results of its work make their way into history textbooks in the region.

When President Tadić and President Josipović met recently, President Tadić said that we don't have a single history textbook that is used in these two states. So, I think that this commission should definitely make an effort to ensure that the results of its work are included in history textbooks in all post-Yugoslav states. (Ivan Prišing, Ravangrad, Sombor, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

It is important to include forcefully mobilized citizens in the register of victims of human rights abuses.

I would like to add one more human rights violation to the above list of human rights abuses. It is forced mobilization and this was the reason we organized this consultation in Sombor today. (Olivera Radovanović, The Green Network of Vojvodina, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

I fully agree with this initiative to include forced mobilization in the list of human rights abuses in these wars, and it should be analysed regardless of the side that did it, the Yugoslav National Army, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and so on. (Zlatko Romić, correspondent for Dnevnik, Subotica, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

The Coalition for RECOM should propose its own members.

Some members of the commission should be from organizations that founded RECOM or maybe even RECOM should nominate, after reaching a consensus, a certain number of candidates they see fit for the job. (Olivera Radovanović, The Green Network of Vojvodina, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

There must be a consensus for the election of RECOM commissaries.

Maybe the states in the region should reach a consensus on the election of RECOM candidates from each of the states, so that when Serbia nominates its candidates, they are approved by all other states in the region by a consensus. (Duško Medić, Green Network of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

The responsibility of journalists should be carefully analysed.

I don't know how, but I think it would be a good idea to analyse the role of journalists in this whole context because their reporting has probably generated many crimes we will hear about in the future. (Zlatko Romić, correspondent for Dnevnik, Subotica, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

Exploring the context of the wars can be an attempt to find ways to justify crimes.

I am sure that we don't need in-depth analyses of the historical context of the events of the 1990s because I believe that the only reason we want to do that is to find ways to justify war crimes committed in that period. I think that we must not justify crimes; on the contrary, we should just establish the facts and find evidence relevant for the crimes committed on our behalf. Such material will in reality become an encyclopaedia of truth which should serve to younger generations and help them avoid things like this in the future. (Miodrag Tasovac, Social Services Center, Sombor, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).

Shedding light on the historical context of the events of the 1990s is an overwhelming task.

So, if we are talking about phase two, or whatever you call it, I think that explaining the historical context of these events is an overwhelming task. (Zsuzsanna Szerencses, Radio Free Europe, Novi Sad, Serbia, Consultation with the Local Community on the Initiative for RECOM, Sombor, Serbia, May 8, 2010).