

ABOUT THE PANELS

**FOUR VIEWS**  
**HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR**  
**HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE**

*Articles published in a special addition of the weekly magazin VREME, No. 600, 4. 7. 2002.*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE PANELS “HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR / HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE”	3
- about an idea and the need for it –	3
ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS	6
Adnan Hasanbegovic	6
Gordan Bodog	9
Nebojsa Jovanovic	11
Sasa Dujovic	13
Katarina Katanic the panel moderator	15
THE MEDIA AND PEACE BUILDING	19
About the support of local authorities	21
Associates	21
ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR NONVIOLENT ACTION	22
WHO WILL BE FIRST?!	25

## ABOUT THE PANELS “HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR / HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE”

### - about an idea and the need for it –

---

During the last few years, the states and societies generated by the breakdown of SFRJ find themselves at the start of a long lasting and painful process which is, in colloquial but also in academic terms, or the language of the ‘elite’, called *Confronting the past*. The phrase is meant to emphasise the necessity of raising numerous issues tied to the wars on different sides of once common state, the questions that more often than not remain unanswered even after a decade has passed. And with no readiness to discuss them at all.

And while, both during the war years and subsequently, the scattered and more or less audible voices insisting on responsibility, condemning the violence or attempts to legalise it in the name of ‘higher causes’ (nation, religion, fatherland) undoubtedly existed, it’s until this very day that, pretty much visible and loud, the stories of mythic -heroic genre, illustrated by the messages about all the ‘ones’ that are Radovans (or Norics) still gallop the public spaces. A great number of citizens ‘float’ in a kind of interspace, unaware of their own abilities to create the reality and society in which they live themselves, for a change, and tend to gravitate towards one or another option (between which there is no constructive communication anyway).

The wars are being spoken of mostly in contexts that are far from revising and that portrait them as an imminence encoded in tradition, history, unfortunate set of political circumstances, they’re placed in a category of facts sacred and indubitable... “and natural”, the contexts that treat a war as an unwanted, but the only possible choice. And of people who took part in the wars or supported them in any way is being judged from “a high moral ground”, the position of those who realised in time (before the others!) what all this is leading to and what consequences will follow. For the people who work on the process of peace building there have to be more than only two possible directions and two existing choices. The idea of members of Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) about organising this kind of panel discussions, the panels consisting of personal accounts of the direct participants in the war events from all three sides (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia), issued from this very wish to open a new field and a new space for

facing the past of the society the parts of which we are, but also with the individual responsibility of each and every one of us. The responsibility for what had happened, for the past, but also for what our societies currently are and what they may become. This field regards an open conversation about the reasons that drove people from the opposing sides to participate in the wars and about their experience in these events. Personal views of “ordinary” people, far from the centres of power, do, in our opinion, give plenty of material for reviewing our own position ‘then and now’, for re-examining the values in the name of which all that took place, but also for changing the perception and impression of the Other, which leads to a transformation within and around oneself.

By opening a space in which the testimonies of the very participants in the past events can be heard, people we meet daily, the work on a very significant dimension of approach to establishing communication as a first step in peace building in these areas commences. It is the conversation within a local community, outside of intellectual and elite circles, and with all the sides involved in the conflict.

The story thus conceived has an aim of making a small crack: in the stance that these questions are only for sparse intellectuals (which do it “only because they are well paid for it (from abroad)”) to deal with, in the belief that each conversation on the subject of these wars imminently points out one side (one nation) as an exclusive sinner – and thence, logically, another side as an exclusive victim, in the belief that all that happened is best forgotten...

Without any pretensions to think of these panels as a final confrontation, the attempt was to approach many issues from the very base, non-institutionally and with less of an accent on the mere facts (historical, political) and more on the feelings of people from different sides, until recently involved in war, who recount their personal dramas, fears and dilemmas and their personal insights into the ways of achieving sustainable peace in this area. We do believe that striving for a stable and sustainable peace which fails to deal with hot issues of the passed wars is barren and shaky and that no sustainable peace can be achieved until the need for it comes from the citizens themselves, those who have endured the greatest atrocities of war.

In case this pilot series of four panels initiates a more intense and broader social action directed towards even deeper treatment of these problems, that would only constitute another significant step in the process of revising everything that has been lived during the previous ten years. The direction which we wish to take includes an attempt of creating the atmosphere within the society in which it won't be possible (or at least not all that usual) to have a major political crises issue

because of broadcasting films of war crimes performed by “our guys”, as was the case in Serbia and Croatia after the films about crimes in Srebrenica or Krajina during operation “Storm”.

We wanted to take an action that would speak of confronting the past outside a cabinet approach of various Boards for Truth and Reconciliation (the work of which we consider important, but liable to constructive criticism) and outside of enclosed circles in which the like-minded ones address exclusively each other. Our intention was also to move away from the centre (Belgrade) and to work with people from smaller towns who have even less opportunity to hear stories from persons from Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina about the war. This time the choice was Indjija, Nis, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac, and we hope that the opportunity will arise to work in many other towns throughout Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia...

The support we got from various organisations and individuals was of immeasurable significance to us, because we had been aware right from the start that we neither can nor want to do this on our own. Local partners from the mentioned towns performed a major part of the organisation themselves, the understanding and suggestions we received from the people from Documentation Centre “Wars 1991-99” and Youth Culture Club of Indjija were most important for directing the whole process. This cooperation leaves us in hope that there will be even more fields in which we can work and promote the values that are important to us and that we live. It was very significant to establish cooperation with some people active in the Association of Invalids of War and thereby to possibly create a start of partnership in peace building. In this act we also see a step representing refusal of a divide between innocent and guilty, clever or stupid, because we do not strive towards polarisation and mutual accusations, but towards cooperation, understanding and joint searching for the ways in the process of peace building. All social groups are important for this process, for we believe we share responsibility for the past and the future, and that we also share peace as a worthwhile value. We also strived towards obtaining support from local authorities in the cities in which the panels took place, and we are grateful for this support, especially to the local authorities in Indjija for their unreserved support and hospitality.

Swiss ministry of foreign affairs, that has supported the entire project financially, has also be of incredible help by, apart from having utter confidence in us, letting us complete freedom in our initiative and creating things we consider to be of extreme significance for the society we live in. We mention this even more because such treatment from a donor is quite atypical in our circumstances.

Finally, we hope that these four panels have left some doors in the heads and hearts of people who had the chance to read of them or attend, slightly ajar, but also some doors that lead even

further and deeper into much more painful processes opened by the questions “Where was I and what have or haven’t I done?”, but also “How to go on after all this?”

## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

---

### Adnan Hasanbegovic

Born in Sarajevo 1973. Took part in the war as a member of Bosnia and Herzegovina army from 1992-1995. Today, he’s a peace activist working in the Centre for Nonviolent Action. He speaks about the atmosphere and events in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of nineties from his position at that time, position of a freshly graduated high school student who could merely guess the seriousness of a situation which was soon to escalate into a years long war conflict. Remembering the months immediately preceding the war, Adnan tells of his inner drama, but also about the specific mood in Sarajevo in those days:

“When the national parties won the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the war psychosis began. I, as many other people in Bosnia, found myself in an extremely tricky position. I can certainly say that we had no clue how horrid could all that was to happen to us be. And even when the war started in Slovenia and Croatia, we thought it would not reach Bosnia”.

In April 92. The open conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina began and the conflict that took place on political and psychological grounds grows into a “real war” now. The siege around Sarajevo is closed and the first grenades that will continually fall on the city for the following three years, were fired from the surrounding hills.

“In May, the first missiles fell in front of my building. To the question on how did I get to be in this war, I can only answer that the war came under my window, found me at my place somewhere. Things went on much too fast and I was scared and confused”.

Soon afterwards, the temporary government and temporary army were formed, and in June Adnan receives an order to report to service, which he obeyed, in hope that, due to his age, he would be stationed in Sarajevo, and that he will in no way participate in the battles. However:

“Three months later I get transferred to the front, in Zlatiste above Sarajevo, where my personal war story begins. I wasn’t mentally ready for all that, I was scared and felt sick. People started

dying, and the horror of siege in the city began – no electricity, no water, no food... I was in all that with a motivation of defending my city from someone who'd attacked me, from some nationalists who wanted to tear us apart”.

The following two years are marked by the horrible seal of war experience and all kinds of violence, but also the inner questioning and rethinking the whole context of war. The great desire for the war to stop, because, in Adnan's words, it was a “complete disorder of everything”, was followed by heavy emotional breakdowns and lack of capacities to endure all that. He describes his feelings at the end of the war, when it was finally concluded by signing the Dayton agreement, as follows:

“When the bombing of Bosnian Serbs' troops took place, I wasn't happy, but felt that as a great relief because I only wanted the war to stop. When Dayton Agreement took place, I'd never felt happier.”

The first post-war years were for him marked by the attempts to overcome the post-traumatic syndrome in which he, as he says, had great help in many books he'd read, but also turning to religion and God. Parallel to that, the process of getting to know the ways and possibilities of peace activism in these regions takes place, and from the year 1998 he himself becomes involved in this infinite field of action called “peace building”. About the current situation in his country, as well as the aspects of confronting the past, he says:

“Now I do have a feeling of certain peace, because there is no direct violence, but it's still not the lasting peace. It's not war, but it's not peace, either. The traumas are still very strong, and all kinds of divides are still very deep. Confronting the past means reviewing – where did we perform acts of violence, where were we, what have we been doing. Taking responsibility for everything I've done. There are many levels of responsibility: individual and collective, the responsibility for accepting to be a part of it all in the first place, responsibility for overstepping into violence, because we'd lead this war in a truly bloody manner. It's important for us to be heard and to try to hear each other”.

The story of peace building unavoidably carries a discussion about obstacles and incentives on the road to a lasting peace. Adnan emphasises that indeed there are obstacles, but that they are by no means impossible to overcome and that overcoming them does take extremely long time, a lot of energy and courage. He sees concrete problems in the fact that people in these regions don't know enough about each other, the fact that the painful things are being buried rather than discussed. He also thinks that some soul-searching, history and culture wise, is necessary, spotting the elements that contain the “battle call”.



“There are a lot of things not communicated, different perceptions, feelings of identity (religious or national). Those are the stories we still haven’t tried to hear and understand.”

About his motivation for taking part in the panels and about what they meant, Adnan says:

“I have never remembered and thought of the days passed in the battlefields more intensely than now and it became clear how important and necessary that is for me. All these years I’ve been thinking of how to understand and comprehend the essence of the problems and causes of conflict that lead to that incredible amount of violence and destruction. The symbol of a “shrieking demon” that Dragojevic used in his “Pretty Village Pretty Flame” movie seemed to be an answer at first and I thought it was beyond human abilities of comprehension, and that one should put oneself in the hands of fate (and keep trying to be nice) because that’s what life’s like...

When an idea for these panels appeared, I felt that it could be an important map in my adventurist vision of searching for the “shrieking demon’s” tunnel and entering the labyrinths of confronting the truth and oneself as a participant and a witness of the wars. To sit with the people “from the other side” and start talking first about yourself and your war experiences and motives, to hear each other and to try to understand and learn the things I don’t know.

It seems to me that this is exactly what leads to a road to lasting peace, the peace as a condition in which people not only put up with each other, but feel each other, accept and mutually strengthen each other.

Without a time distance it is still hard for me to speak of the meaning of all this, but it seems to me that we’ve done a very important thing.

I only know that for me, personally, these panels caused so many emotional reactions and that I’ve got new inspiration and motives for work on peace building and new insights into the war events. Fear, hope, anger, happiness, sorrow... were the things I felt in this process. Actually, all the things I’m supposed to be feeling when the war and peace are discussed and the hard and beautiful human fates. Human emotions can certainly be an obstacle between people, but they can also bond them and make them more noble. We, the participants/former soldiers, and the guests, the moderator, organisers of the panels, we have all passed through our stories and experiences together and felt the emotions that might have kept us apart before. And now they can bring us back to our bright sides, and also help us see, hear and feel each other better.”



## **Gordan Bodog**

Born in Zagreb. As a member of Assembly of National Guard (Zbor Narodne Garde) he took part in the war in Croatia from 1991-1994. Today he's an activist of Centre for peace studies in Zagreb and works on strengthening the civil initiatives in Croatia, but also wider in the region.

By the end of the eighties he saw himself as a grown man, educated and erudite, who minutely followed cultural and political turmoil in SFRJ. He wasn't a cynicist, but it seemed to him that as early as 88 the situation got out of control. He was feeling an inner tremor and anxiety, but hoped that there would be no major conflicts. His hopes were crashed for the first time in the summer of 1990, when he had to take a different route from a seaside resort to Zagreb, because the roads were blocked, and a large number of foreign tourists left Croatia with great haste.

"The tensions grew, and it seemed to me that I have very few choices. Either take part in all that or not, either leave Zagreb and go somewhere else, or stay."

He was aware, he says, that staying at home meant an imminence of armed conflict. The events on Plitvice Lakes, in Pakrac and Korenica confirmed his fears. The end of April he received an order to report to a military exercise, i.e. gathering at the Zagreb Fair. Having gone there, he saw a couple of hundred people who had served their military duties in Yugoslav National Army.

"We were filling some kind of forms and it was long after that that I realised that those were actually some kind of statements shifting our loyalties from Yugoslav army to that of Republic of Croatia."

The couple of months that followed in his life Gordan describes as a time of anticipations during which he expected the orders for military exercises, and closely followed what was going on in the other parts of SFRJ. However, there were no information from the newly formed army, and the war was already happening in the streets of Ljubljana. He was shocked by close captioning of the events in Slovenia. At the moment when he received the order to report to service in September 91, the battles were going on in many places. Incidentally, his first war experience was also Gornji Vidusevac.

"I have to say that I wasn't a trained soldier, I hardly knew how to use the weapon and I had a romantic notion of war and about being able to cold-bloodedly take care of myself and prevent the bad things from happening."

At first he felt bad, confused, and had the impression of a general hysteria surrounding him.

"However, a few weeks later there was a transformation within myself and I turned from someone who couldn't find his way around into a very skilled person in this environment. I think that's due to the fact that war is a perverted state of mind".

All the years that followed and that he'd spent near to the war events he sees as very fast years of an odd rhythm. He belonged to neither war nor peace, nor to his previous life.

"I was some different me. I seriously wanted out of the army, out of all that. Somehow I managed to get myself out of it and it's still unclear whether I'd deserted or had been thrown out".

He states that it's hard for him to clearly recount what he had been doing in the years directly after the war, and he mentions streams of alcohol that used to flow through him. Even though he is in possession of all the necessary paperwork for receiving certain benefits based on participating in the fatherland war, he refuses to use those benefits for, as he says, reasons of principle.

In the year 1996 he meets some people from Antiwar Campaign of Croatia and gradually gets involved with peace activism, which is what he does up until this day, so that the story of confronting the past is in a way very familiar to him. He emphasises the need of confronting the violence within oneself and the ways in which the conflicts in our cultures are solved. He thinks that when the violence is acclaimed as an only option on the society level, the situation is very serious.

"We can face the past when we are ready for it, by our choice or the choice of the past itself. A conclusion that I've reached is that there is no other way. Maybe it's painful, but it gets cleaned out".

He often ponders some cultural patterns and slogans with which many generations were growing up, among which there is the one created by Roman emperor Augustus, often attributed to Josip Broz: "We live in peace as if it will last for a hundred years, and we're preparing ourselves as if the war is to start tomorrow." Or the ones about dying for fatherland as an ultimate value. He wonders if it isn't better to *live* for the fatherland.

"The war option was psychologically always there. It's somehow written in the tradition. There was plenty of wrongly interpreted phrases all around us".

From the distance of couple of years after the war, he claims there is absolutely no way for him to put on a uniform ever again.

Some of Gordan's thoughts of his own need to become a part of this kind of peace initiative:

"The motivation to take part in the panels and the whole process of events before, around and after the panels, comes from a need I have been feeling for many years and intention to speak and converse of "pre-war, war and post-war". From the hundreds of discussions about war and post-war events, from many meetings with persons who have gone, or are still going, through their own private war drama. The discussion has lasted for years now, and through our panels we could

visibly demonstrate one of its segments – four views of four former soldiers in those wars, the four views on the war past and the four views on the present and the future.

To make that visible and provoke reactions from the citizens, those who attended the panel and participated in it by their questions, impressions and comments, to provoke reaction from the media and the journalists, who both attended the panel or ignored it, to observe in what way will the organisations of civil society and activists react, in Indjija, Nis, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac, who attended the panels and supported them or “skipped” and neglected them, and the reactions of the overall public in Serbia, who knew, if they wanted to know, that this visible discussion is taking place;

This visibility and placing the events out in the open, as opposed to the obscurity and blurriness of politicians’ and political party’s spheres, fortifies me and inspires me for the further efforts in my activism.”

### **Nebojsa Jovanovic**

A historian, born in Loznica in 1963, author of the book titled “Let’s go get Zagreb – a diary with the reservists”. Participated in the war conflict in Croatia as a member of Yugoslav Army reservists, from 1991-1992. He says he had not gone to the war of his own choice and his own volition, but as a reservist receiving the order to report.

“I went to the war because I didn’t, unlike some people, manage to be released of the military duty. I went to the war for the same reason I performed the military service a couple of years earlier.”

He vividly describes the mood in Loznica, a border town, in the days when the flames of the war grow ever higher and when more and more people from Serbia (officially not participating in the war) were being involved in the war story.

“When we’d heard that we would be mobilised, we wondered why that would happen in Serbia, when everything was so far from us. At that point I thought that a real war wouldn’t take place, that Yugoslav Army only needed to demonstrate their force and thereby prevent the conflict between Territorial Defence of Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina and the newly formed Croatian army.”

The resistance to sending Serbian boys to war was also present in those days, and Nebojsa describes a scene when, beginning of July 1991, the citizens of Loznica came out in the streets and stopped a military convoy moving, allegedly, towards Derventa. Still, as was the case in

many other places at the beginning of nineties, here it was merely one of the attempts to prevent the war, the attempts that were weaker than the battle calls. September 1991 was the month when Nebojsa leaves for the front – to Hrvatska Kostajnica at first, and then to Glina, Gornji Vidusevac, Karlovac... the names of small towns and villages keep unfolding.

“There was no one there to explain to us what’s going on, where we are going, why, and to what end. I think that’s the greatest mistake from our side. Later I realised that even those who were in charge hadn’t known...”

Coming back from the war, he hasn’t been spared the inner breakdown further strengthened by the situation in Belgrade, where no one seemed to be aware of what was happening a couple of hundred kilometres away. The sight of young men playing tennis near an elite Belgrade hotel (paying an hour at the tennis court the amount of his current monthly pay) is something that, according to him, well describes the state of affairs in those years:

“I could’ve been called back in a fortnight, and some guys still kept playing tennis.”

About the ways in which he experienced the war and his own participation in it, he says:

“My participation in the war is a participation of a man who was lead not by his own will and who tried to understand the objective of that war, which I haven’t been able to understand to this very day. My prevailing feeling about this war is an insult that war brings to an individual, taking his personal integrity away and turning him into a part of the multitude, a simple figure that one or the other general might need. I felt it as turning myself into a gun-carrying instrument.”

He believes that what he’s currently doing is an aspect of reconsidering the past and adds that he’s of the opinion that this is the way in which the conversations should have been lead after the World War II – many things would seem different now if that had been the case.

“There was an interesting scene during the war when we’d captured five Croatian soldiers and everyone ran as fast as they could to come and see those “monsters”. And they were just the ordinary, normal, scared people. The war makes all the notions distorted.”

He doesn’t fail to mention the responsibility of the politicians, but also the “scum from all three sides”, who turned this war into business and had previously arranged deals in it. That’s exactly why it is important, thinks Nebojsa, to overcome the emotional block that exists within us all and that those who participated in the war find the space to state their opinions, “because, if the draftees and the reservists had any say in this, there would have been no war whatsoever.”

“The story of state borders should be finished already. They are what they are and should be accepted. The most dangerous condition is when stupidity is raised to the level of official government’s position.”

About his need to participate in the conversations about the war with the people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia:

“The ideas of the project coincided with some ideas of my own that are as old as this war. I have been thinking about all that so much, that I even had to write a book about it, but could never find someone to talk to. Like a mindless optimist, I have been believing all along that we will still be able to somewhere sometime sit down and have this kind of conversation. This panel occurred at the moment when I lost all hopes of existence of such a thing. During the launch of my Book in Zagreb, I said all that was bothering me, so I might have spent all the words then. I’ve felt an enormous tiredness all the time, but I also knew that that’s what I’ve been looking for. What was important for me was fulfilling the personal feeling about which I have up till now had no one to really have conversation with. I’m very glad we’ve done it”.

## **Sasa Dujovic**

Born in Belgrade, joined Serbian Guard and Republic of Srpska Army in the period of 1991-95. Active in the Association of Invalids of War.

According to his own words, he was brought up in a patriarchal orthodox family, who celebrated *slava*, traditional Serbian religious holiday, and had ‘some sense of state, nationality and nation’. Apart from the influence of the family and the values transferred there, he emphasises the influence of school and what was taught there about the sufferings of Serbian people throughout various historical periods.

By the time the inter-ethnic conflicts begin to sharpen, he was 25, had his own family, a job. About his view on the situation at that time, he says:

“The war caught me by surprise, but I started to feel anger and revolt about the World War II being repeated with all those extinction of Serbs. I was of the opinion that this war was forced upon Serbian people.”

After the armed conflicts in Croatia had begun, he was one of the many citizens of Serbia who received an order to join the armed forces. Potential destination was Vukovar, but Sasa didn’t want to answer the call because he didn’t want to be in the same squad with the officers who, in his opinion, brought all this about.

“I didn’t want to be cannon fodder for some generals who just wanted to gain another star on their uniforms.”

At the same time, the majority of the media in Serbia was constantly reporting on the atrocities performed on the Serbian people. Partly under the impression of such an image, Sasa voluntarily joins up and goes to Lika. After a short time in the battlefields in Croatia, he starts having his first dilemmas about the sense of that kind of solving the problems, as well as about the relation of the media image and the reality, which he found there. He was wounded for the first time in September 91, but returned to the same front. After being wounded for the second time (in December of the same year), and the recovery that lasted for a few months, he returns to the battle, this time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Sarajevo front. He remained there until the signing of Dayton Peace Agreement.

Explaining the reasons that drove him to spend so much time in the whirlpool of war, he states that war is a special kind of drug, a kind of opium.

"I was getting deeper and deeper into it. You start thinking you're big, strong, you have the uniform, the weapon.... All the time I was being bitten by a doubt, but opium is stronger than the doubt and it goes on until you see a dead friend and start asking yourself WHY?"

After the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended, he returned to Belgrade and was forced to face an extremely hard existential situation and the completely unsolved status, because, for the current regime, Serbia never took part in the war. At that time he began the struggle for realising the rights of the invalids and the families of the soldiers who perished, and it's the struggle he fights until this day.

He says that his feelings during the participation in the war were mixed and divided.

"I often wonder if I'd been cheated, and if yes, by whom. Was it my dad who brought me up an orthodox Serbian, was it the society, history? I felt obliged and took the gun at that point. It was the worst possible way to chose. I'm not sorry for being in the war, because I thought I was doing the right thing, but I'm sorry this war ever happened."

Thinking about how to deal with the burden of the past, he accentuates the opinion that we all bare responsibility for the previous events because we have lightly accepted what had been served to us by the politicians from the "travelling caravan." That's where he starts from his own responsibility for taking the gun in his hands so easily.

"I realised my responsibility the very moment I glimpsed the thought that I cannot leave all this clean handed. I often call myself a split personality – I'm not all for peace, but it's time for that story to be opened. I don't want our children to experience anything like that. It wasn't easy to face men from Bosnia and Croatia, that took strength. I do wish no war would happen ever again, believe me."

He believes the peace is encouraged by the regular people, people whose part he considers himself to be. Overcoming and emotional “processing” of everything that happened takes a most honest story, straight from the heart.

“We can do all that is within our power – talk and try to reach certain people. And to be able, some day, to go to a football match in Zagreb. I’m not sure that can happen very soon, but I can at least try.”

Finally, about the experience of participating in these panels and what he received from them he says:

“I don’t want to fight any more wars and I suggest the same to everyone. I have a great desire to talk about all this in Zagreb and Sarajevo, and see how I will be understood there.”

### **Katarina Katanic the panel moderator**

#### **My view on the “For Views” panels**

I’m fully aware that in the world I live in (and by that I mean the planet Earth), the conflict, especially the armed conflict, is a good business deal for someone, a means of self realisation for the others, a way of dealing with their own frustrations for someone else, and, ultimately, a piece of good time for another group. But I’m also fully aware that the horror, misery, blood and suffering isn’t being experienced by the small groups mentioned above, but the entire nations that are always constituted by mere individuals, turned to one another and joined by the same misfortune (that’s often their only common denominator), and I entered this project with a clear wish to hear and experience the mechanism leading to conflicts.

I know many people who were in the war.

I don’t know a single person who wanted the war and who says he enjoyed it.

Now I met people that have been in the war, but who have come out of it with a clear desire to live in peace.

The approach used by CNA team as a method in the nonviolent conflict transformation seems to me to be a realistic approach to all that has been happening to us, and that is about to happen to us. So, the conflict should be admitted, acquainted with, and overcome through constructive solutions. The phrases such as “there is no alternative to peace” sound a lot better, but they can render no results unless there is a feedback between the ways in which a conflict is generated and



the ways in which the conflict is solved. That, I admit, sounded like the only realistic approach to the problem that I have (as all of us in this part of the Balkans, or Europe, if that's more politically correct) been a witness to, and for which I have my part of my own responsibility.

All four participants clearly stated they went to the war to defend. Gordan – his civilisation right to a different opinion, Adnan – his hometown, Nebojsa – his country (SFRJ) from those who wish to tear it apart, Sasa – Serbian people from genocide. They were all right and – all of them were wrong. The truths and rights they, as individuals, wished for, couldn't be found in the war. But they gathered strength and will to talk about their experience, to analyse themselves and reconsider their attitudes, prejudices, what they want and if there is any value in this, than it's the fact that each of them in this process searched for the truth within themselves. I, as a moderator, find their truths helpful in finding my own.

It's clear to me that this isn't the end of a long and certainly hard work on building the lasting peace. It only started here, and the end of it is hard to predict. Candidly speaking, I'd be happy if, at the beginning of the next century, someone of my descendants lived in the space in which there had been no war for a hundred years now, but also no possibility for a war to happen in the future. A Utopia? Let's see why a lasting peace is always a utopia, whereas the war is a reality. Where and when in the wide space between the terms war and peace do we exist, we as the individuals, that realistically form a single group, no matter what kind (religious, lingual, social, blood type...)? Do we deny ourselves by denying the peace as reality, deny our opinions, our mind and finally (and maybe first of all) our own existence?

Then I'm being asked a question if we're brave enough to work for what's labelled as a utopia in the first place, with no wish to find a part of our own responsibility in this widely accepted condition?

The participants, organisers, me as a moderator, the beautifully constructive and creative audiences in Indjija, Nis, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac, the journalists and the media that had the time and space for this subject, the organisations that gave us support, they've all showed a significant amount of courage to talk, or hear, the stories of four heroes, not war, but peace heroes. And all this is the courage. And at this moment I do admire it as such.

*The reactions of persons from the audience were diverse – from curiosity to the honest wish to hear and understand, from anger and opposition to some of the expressed opinions to the opinions that it's all very nice, but we were all merely players in major world wide games. But, there's a thing that certainly deserves attention, and that is a very high intensity of different*

*emotions appearing in the interaction of the audience and the participants, which only points out the vast sea of things unsaid and troublesome fears about the previous wars that lie hidden in most of us.*

*A part of people found in these events a very necessary space to talk about the difficult experiences and the deepest personal dramas that are the consequence of the wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia (and also some other previous wars), a place at which the force of fear and suffering will become visible and audible, and thereby an inseparable part of a social and public space for the climate for which we should all be responsible. It's hard not to wonder how many of those stories there are all around us, but also how many micro-spaces in which these stories get to be told. Because, after the wars are over, and after them the need for the production of the pathetic and bombastic stories of "our heroes" or "evil fate of the suffering nation" (always anonymous and collective, depersonalised) subsides, there remains only the naked, and hence horrifying, personal suffering of parents who remained childless, of people who 'misplaced' their entire lives in the horrors of war, the persons whose views are directed to a distant spot from which their friends, children, brothers or sisters should come back, those who went away fleeing from the wars the part of which they never wished to be...*

*No matter if it is about the story of a father who has been trying for years to transport the mortal remains of his perished son from Bosnia to Serbia, or a case of a woman who perceived this panel as an opportunity for stating her anti war and anti military stance as clearly as possible, they all accentuate the need to strongly and openly speak about what the wars have brought us and what kind of wasteland they've created within the people, as well as for the society (us) to seriously deal with it.*

*When you read the words left in the "impression box" after one of the panels:*

*"My brother died on a Yugoslav Army transporter in Split, as a 19 year old lad, and I'm not the one to forgive easily." (and there are similar stories on each side) you think of how infinitely long the road to peace between people is, but also within them.*

*But, each attempt we make to hear and understand shortens this road by a meter or two.*

*Therefore – let's all think about it.*

*In the first (and we hope, not the last) series of panels titled "For Views: from the past, how I found myself in war - to the future, how to reach sustainable peace?" we visited, during the month of June, four towns in Serbia – Indjija, Nis, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac. These four towns have been selected because they're all in the different regions and have different national, religious and cultural specifics.*

*The questions posed to the participants by the audience were indeed diverse and directed to the personal opinions and the experiences of the participants, as well as to the need for rational explanation of certain events that constituted a groundwork for this war, and are present in our societies today. It's interesting, in any case, to see which are the things the people in this country recognise as significant elements in the story of the war, but also (or even more so) of the peace.*

*Thus, the subject of world conspiracy, new world order whose foundations are also made by organising panels financed by the very people whose guinea pigs we were right from the start, was also addressed this time (which is, it seems, inevitable here).*

*But also many questions with the need to find out about the experiences of the people from “other” sides could be heard, such as the question of whether the participants felt their war experience to be an honourable and patriotic act, and what was their opinion of the Hague Tribunal, to which the participants answered as follows:*

*My view of The Hague is extremely negative, just as it is my opinion of Milosevic. We should’ve tried him here.*

*The Hague has both faults and advantages. It stimulates us to think and reconsider (who did what and the like). The form, who constituted this court, their ways of operation – that is a problem for me, because it’s politics that’s made out of all this. I’d like to see war crime tribunals in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo.*

*The wish expressed by some people to hear explicit answers of whether the participants performed any war crimes themselves, or whether the other armies (apart from Serbian) have robbed and killed was very interesting. The answers were to the point, too:*

*Yes, I have seen people in the Croatian Army uniforms robbing houses and performing violent acts and crimes. All that I have been a witness to, and all I know, I have stated in a trial that still goes on today and that I follow closely. I’d recommend the same to everyone who might have some kind of evidence, or who has seen anything.*

*Another interesting bit is a question that was asked on almost all the panels and concerned the dilemma “Would there be a war if the four of you said I DON’T WANT THIS WAR, and if all who were carrying the weapons said the same thing?” Some of the answers to that question were:*

*I believe the war would still take place. All of that had been cooked and fried for a very long time. There would always be someone who would initiate it, and then the devil’s ring in which many have danced would start.*

*When the war starts, it’s too late. The things are already screwed up by then. We should have been working on that a lot earlier, as early as 87. The order to report to service was a pure formality then, because the line had already been overstepped. At that point the mere refusal of the gun is not enough, although that too can be a significant step.*

*The audience expressed a pretty great interest in the current situation in the neighbouring states and the possibilities of having similar panels over there too. There have been thoughts and questions about young people who left their countries in order to avoid being drafted. The answers were different:*

*As far as the people are concerned, I had a negative opinion from the start. Now I can see that many of it was derived from the treatment they have been receiving from the state. I’m sure that many of them will never return, and I don’t really have an interest in them coming back. There is one thing that’s important, however – we have a story about over two million people leaving Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and less than 500 thousand people participating in the war on all three sides. They let four times fewer people lead a war on their behalf. If they’d organised resistance on all sides then, who knows what would happen? I think it might have been different.*

*Someone left, someone stayed, everyone has their own story. I don't like this kind of comparison about who was more righteous and better. That should be understood. I had big problem, however, with those who left, and then got into a war provoking mode.*

*Many people left Croatia in 90, 91 and 92 and their motives were diverse. From those who said (I remember the hard words of an acquaintance) "let the fools kill each other", to some who have left for reasons based on principle, not wanting to fight and take arms. Let's not observe them collectively, let's hear the real motives first and give them a chance.*

*There was a lot more questions than we have space to mention, but for someone who intends to deal with the problem of peace building in the future it could be of use to know that for citizens of Serbia the conversation of sustainable peace building also includes the following elements: re-thinking nationalism, who defended what, thoughts on who is guilty, the awareness that war is not only fought by guns, the responsibility of historians, especially those who write textbooks, the ways in which we bring up our children, how much we know of other peoples, the importance of knowing other peoples, religions and cultures...*

---

## THE MEDIA AND PEACE BUILDING

---

The influence of the media on the development of the society is unquestionable and they do have a great responsibility for the atmosphere within a society.

During the wars in these regions all the informative media have had their war themes, whether anti-war or war provoking. Peace activities, however small or big steps they might have been taking in the process of establishing trust and lasting peace, are not interesting enough to the media. Unfortunately, the peace activities are not sensational, they don't make for good news story, and hence they are almost completely absent from the media. However, any kind of violent incident (for instance, a hate filled speech of a celebrity or a racist action) will almost certainly provide a media space for itself. This high rate of news on violence in the media can have the promotion of violence as a consequence, or at least presenting the violence as a normal state of society. The news on activities directed towards the prevention of violence are very rare.

Wishing to influence the change of the rule that 'war is more interesting than the peace' we decided to invite a great number of the media representatives in Serbia to join this action titled "From the past: How I found myself in war? To the future: How to reach sustainable peace?" We had particularly great expectations from the media which, we believe, have the values similar to ours, the media that have during all these years represented a bright spot in the general media blackness. All these years, these media haven't only transmitted the news, but also worked for

and promoted the repressed and general social values, acted responsibly and thus were useful to the society, mostly by initiating or supporting the social changes.

It is our general impression that the media in Serbia (with few exceptions) are still unapt to recognise their role in a process that can be called work on building a sustainable peace and opening an cross-border communication in the post-war circumstances. Some media haven't answered our invitations at all. Most of the media wanted to charge us (most often by quite high commercial rates) for each 'service' they would provide. There we recognised the lack of awareness of the ways in which the peace groups operate, about the fact that peace activism is of general social benefit, something that is not used for promotion of a commercial company, but promotion of the social values and social changes. Not recognising the responsibility of the media in developing the better future through participating in these or similar programs, as well as the danger this lack of interest or awareness carries along, truly shows us the need for work on sensibilising the editorial as well as executive media structures for these problems.

While doing that, the situation in the media themselves should be taken into consideration; the great part of them are having troubles making the ends meet (financially). Regardless of the hard financial situation that doesn't distinguish that particular sector from any other in Serbia, we consider it very important that it's development should be invested in, due to its role and responsibility for the future. We consider it necessary to change taxing policies towards the media, and introduce a policy that would support the media working in the public interest, and on the bases of the values and objectives promoted, such as: respecting the human rights, developing democracy, rights of the minorities, peace building, education etc.

This time we have, thanks to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, who were ready to partly support this media "support" financially, and thanks to the rare media representatives who joined this action with no financial benefits, and to those who have lowered their prices significantly, we managed to fulfil our wish to have these four panels relatively well covered in media.

It's the bright side that's gives us hope. During this action we encountered the media representatives, individuals, who have the awareness of the need for the peace building work in these regions and confronting the responsibilities for the past. Thus we have received a great deal of support, mostly from individual journalists. This support was incredibly significant to us and it gave us the motivation to carry on. We will take this opportunity to thank them individually:

#### WE THANK:

TV Sveti Djordje from Indjija, TV5 from Nis, Regional Television and TV SAN from Novi Pazar, RTV Kragujevac, TVKG9 from Kragujevac, Production company URBANS from Novi Sad, TV B92, the newspaper: VREME, Puls Indije, Sremske Novine, Gradjanski List, Narodne Novine, Sandzacke novine, Nezavisna svetlost  
Nebojsa Grabez (Radio Free Europe) and Velja Petkovic (Radio Nis)

We particularly wish to thank

Jasna Jankovic Sarcevic and the crew of Catharsis B92

Dragan Kocic and the crew of CITY radio from Nis

For their support, understanding and cooperation which was a great pleasure for us.

#### About the support of local authorities

---

In organising and realising this idea, we found it very important to establish cooperation with local authorities in the towns where the panels were held. Their support meant a lot to us, and we owe special gratitude to Municipality of Indjija and Municipality of Novi Pazar.

#### Associates

---

The series of panels was performed in cooperation with the organisations from the towns in which they were held. The partner organisations expressed their interest and readiness to participate in the organisational preparations and carrying out the public panels, supporting their objectives.

We consider it very important that the people from a local community who recognise the need for work in this field get involved with this process in the local level, because the problem of (not) confronting our own responsibility for the past and the future is of everybody's concern and it's most important that everyone does whatever they can in their own environment, as much as possible.

Our partners in holding these panels were:

**Youth Culture Club - Indjija**

Blok 63, objekat 10  
22320 Indjija  
tel: 064 1380 113  
e-mail: freeokk@yahoo.com

**URBAN-IN - Novi Pazar**

ul. Prvomajska bb  
36300 Novi Pazar  
tel: 020 313 966  
fax: 020 314 966  
e-mail: urbanin@ptt.yu

**Centre for development of the civil society**

**PROTECTA – Nis**

Ul. Generala Boze Jankovica 15  
18000 Nis  
tel/fax: 018 523 499  
e-mail: protecta@bankerinter.net  
www.protecta.org.yu

**MillenniumM - Kragujevac**

ul. Vojvode Mišića 19  
34000 Kragujevac  
tel: 034 366 434  
e-mail: ngo@eunet.yu  
www.millennium.org.yu

We take this opportunity to thank them for the support we received from them in the realisation of the panels in the cities in which they are active and in which they perform their various programs directed towards developing the local community and development of citizens' activism. Their support was of greatest significance in the sense of approaching the local communities.

Thank you!

CNA Team

---

**ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR NONVIOLENT ACTION**

---

When, a couple of months ago, during a conversation with peace activists from England and Northern Ireland, a member of our team tried to explain who were the persons from this CNA and what exactly they were doing, he said: „We're just a bunch of people working on tough things.“



This sentence turned into a private joke of ours.

Anyway, CNA team consists of seven activists who live and work travelling from Sarajevo to Belgrade and back, where our two offices operate. People who work and are active in the CNA are the following: Adnan Hasanbegovic from Sarajevo, Helena Rill from Sombor, Ivana Franovic from Belgrade, Milan Colic from Babusnica, Nedžad Horozovic from Doboj, Nenad Vukosavljevic from Belgrade and Tamara Smidling from Belgrade.

So, we are a group of people who jointly act in the region (regions) of former Yugoslavia in the field of peace building and nonviolent action in the society.

Do we work on tough things?

We're trying to work on things we recognise as very important for the society in which we live, we're trying to be responsible citizens acting against violence and injustice in the society, and to promote nonviolence, human rights, developing peace and building confidence, cross-border cooperation, human solidarity and nonviolent work on the existing conflicts. We don't see nonviolence as an ideology, but as a constant process of reconsidering one's own actions, thoughts and events in the society. Our individual motivations overlap at this point, whereas individually, they are rooted in faith, experience of injustice and in solidarity with those exposed to injustice.

We exist since 1997. The idea for founding this kind of peace organisations was generated as a consequence of the perceived need for the local people to work on peace building, for we believe that they are the ones with the greatest amount of responsibility, but also the greatest potential for trying to understand and transform the conflicts through the process of nonviolent action.

How do we see the conflict and its possible transformation?

The conflicts are part of everyday life, we encounter them almost constantly and we find ourselves in the different roles within those conflicts. Conflict is not the same as violence, although we cannot help asking why is it that most people perceive it as such and are there some experiences that serve as bases for that kind of opinion. Applying violence in its various forms is, unfortunately, almost always recognised as the only way to solve conflicts of all kinds, which often leads to progressive increase of violence at each society level and to wars, in extreme cases. Regarding that, CNA sees a great need for work on preventing the violence and developing the alternative, constructive and challenging ways for transformation and work on the conflict within

the society. We're not, therefore, resolving conflicts, because we don't own a magic formula that only needs applying and always works. We wish to work on creating social atmosphere in which it would be possible to face the conflicts openly, no matter how painful they may be, and in which there would be room for the conflicting sides to hear each other and try to understand each other. We don't want to work on it alone, and we don't just want to be a drop in a sea. Therefore we feel it's very significant to strengthen, support and be supported, to criticise and be criticised, to open the conflicts and work on them.

How do we do that?

Most of all, by organising trainings in nonviolent conflict transformation, which are held several times a year. Participants are from various parts of former Yugoslavia, primarily activists, journalists, politicians, as well as people involved in education. Through work on diverse subjects, such as: conflict analysis, violence and nonviolence, nonviolent communication, power, gender roles in the society, identity and diversity, discrimination etc, we attempt to open a process of sensibilisation for the violence, understanding the mechanisms and dynamics of generating conflicts and developing the abilities of operation within a team, group, society.

The space that is being opened during the training for getting to know each other and exchange experiences of people from areas that were in the war until recently. The exchange of experiences and emotions leads to disintegration of prejudices and creates foundation for empathy and solidarity, for deeper insights of fears and feelings of people who are otherwise often perceived as a mere part of an „Enemy crowd“.

One of the important aspects of our work is the multiplication effect, through motivating the participants to apply what they'd learned in their own communities which we particularly try to achieve through the program called Training for Trainers. Mutual connecting and opening the perspectives of cooperation through existing borders is one of the most important goals of all our activities.

Apart from the basic activities, the CNA also operates in other fields of peace building such as public peace appeals, participation in the public panels and organising them, publishing the newspaper articles and the like.

The experience of people of different nationalities and religions, in Kosovo, in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, can understand each other, support and recognise the mutual interest of peace building, which we have often experienced during the previous five years, gives us strength and faith to persist in our work. In spite of everything that

happened and that should not be forgotten, but reconsidered, our future is, if not in any other way, then geographically, tightly intertwined.

## WHO WILL BE FIRST?!

---

When we say *sustainable* peace we think of the state of society where social justice exists, where there is no discrimination of any kind, or hate speech, and even if they exist, they are not generally accepted by the society. We are talking about the state of society where every individual has a feeling of belonging, acceptance and security and has a right to their own identity. There is no such peace in this region. We cannot expect anyone from outside to “bring” it to us, or to expect ruling structures to “impose” it. It should be built from *underneath*, by citizens who are aware of their responsibility for the society they live in and who have chosen to take action against injustice and discrimination, together with authorities and institutions.

One of the big obstacles in building sustainable peace in the societies of former Yugoslavia is the overall *victimisation* of these societies. The victimisation is multiple and it exists on three different levels: people feel like victims of “the others” whom they were once in war against, (the others are often blamed not only for the war, but for all the consequences of the war, too: difficult economic situation, many refugees and displaced persons, ruined economy, increased crime and violence rates, etc.). Then, there is the feeling of being a victim, of helplessness and dependence on “one’s own” politicians (one can often hear the following “What can we do about it, we know who’s deciding our fate”) and also on world powers (“We are just guinea pigs in their experiments”). Role of the victim is one of the *most comfortable ones*, because it frees us from any kind of responsibility whatsoever: for our own destiny (because all of the levels stated above affect us), but also for the society we live in, too (because “we know who’s deciding our fate”). It is clear there will be no substantial change in this region as long as we stay buried in the role of the victim.

Opening the discussion about responsibility for the war and all the things that were happening to us and all around us, initiates the resistance towards dealing with responsibility. Even when there is an awareness that we all share responsibility, a question comes up: *Why must we start first* with the process of reexamination of responsibility for the past? “we Serbs” or “we Croats” or “we

Bosniaks"... Having this kind of attitude means that we should be ashamed if we "started first" with this process, instead that we should be proud of it (although it's difficult to determine who started first, because different groups and individuals have been working on it in this region, for quite some time already). By dealing with our own responsibility for the past, we offer a hand and make space for the way to reconciliation, thus supporting the others to start that process, too.

It is obvious that social values are distorted because going to war in the name of one's own nation is estimated as a *patriotic act*, while on the other hand, anti-war actions are by no means associated with patriotism.

If there's awareness that "our side" or "someone in our name" committed war crimes, they are easily justified by saying: "But the others did it, too". We find it very important for peace building process to deal with war crimes committed "in our name". Yes, *the others* committed them, too, but that's not an excuse. Let's see first what's in our own backyard, and then criticise the neighbour's.

Giving people a chance to hear what it is like for the *others*, Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians, Serbs, *them*, what their problems are, their fears and hopes, is a very important step towards mutual understanding, and thereby towards peace building. These stories are often very much alike, mostly hard and simply human. They inevitably initiate compassion and feelings of solidarity, demystification and humanisation of *the enemy*. It also causes people to loose their prejudice that *they are all the same, chetniks, ustasa, balia*.

How does, for example, an Albanian feel in Belgrade, where prejudices against this ethnic group are very strong and one can often hear *they are* "savages", "dirty", "they breed (like rabbits)", and their ultimate goal is The Great Albania? How do Croats and Serbs feel in Sarajevo, if they are almost exclusively hired by a few Croats or Serbs who run their own businesses? How do a few Serbs or Gorani feel like in Priština, when they cannot speak their own language on the street, for the security reasons? How do Bosniaks in Banja Luka feel when they're not allowed to rebuild The Ferhadija Mosque, which was destroyed with mines during the war? They all certainly share one feeling: lack of security, freedom to express their own identity and prospects, something every human needs.

Within such framework, it is very important to have public debates on identities, especially national identities. What does it mean for a person to be a Serb, Bosniak, Albanian or Croat? What values does this bring along? What prejudices and fears?

We did *live together* once, or we lived next to each other, but we didn't really know each other. We were smothered with the idea of "brotherhood and unity". According to it, we were all the

same and expressing one's ethnic or religious identity was either suppressed or *sign of bad taste*. Not knowing or quasi-knowing each other was something that created a fertile soil for the growth of many prejudices of one against the other.

People who have the need to express and live their ethnic identity are often stamped as nationalists. The missing element, in our opinion, is an affirmation of ethnic identities through values that they bring along, values that are not based either on the *battles we once won* or on those things in which *others are worse than we are*. These values are based on *the wealth of cultures* – which does not endanger or depreciate anyone. This is something we need to work on. The different and the unknown are mostly perceived as a threat. It is followed by distancing, instead of getting to know the unknown, communicating and creating security through mutual cooperation and trust. "Country's own" army is often publicly presented as the security guarantee, while the neighbouring countries perceive it as a threat and they respond with further armament. Spending funds from small national budget for the army, weakens the country's economy, provokes social discontent, increases violence, and creates a fertile soil for extremism, thus increasing chances for the abuse of the army. The circle is closed. It's a paradox that after all these wars, militarism is perceived as the way to provide security. Still, there's a lack of alternatives to this widely accepted pattern. There is no magic formula, but the alternative way certainly is communication and cooperation with the closest neighbours, which must be preceded with mutual trust building.

In our opinion, important steps in the process of building of sustainable peace include sensitising people for violence and condemning violence by society. By this, we mean that there is an awareness that violence is not just physical and direct as hitting somebody or throwing a bomb at a confectionery owned by an Albanian in a mostly Serb populated village in Vojvodina. Threat of violence is also violence, as well as discrimination, insult or disdain. Violence is when they correct your ekavica dialect to ijekavica dialect, in a bakery in Sarajevo; or when an Albanian woman refuses to sell her tomatoes to a Macedonian woman, at the market in Skopje. Violence is also when we feel unsafe in towns and villages we live in.

In the very moment when all of us start to condemn violence, regardless of who the victim is and why, regardless of who committed it and what their motive was, in that moment we can say we're on the way of building a sustainable peace and that we did our best to prevent any future war in this region.