

FOUR VIEWS

FROM THE PAST

HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE

INITIATIVE AND ORGANISATION

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CENTAR ZA INFORMATIVNU DEKONTAMINACIJU MLADIH
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About the idea and the context of work in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Two public forums discussions titled «For Views» (From the past - How I found myself in war; Towards the future - How to reach sustainable peace), were held in Zenica and Banja Luka, in March.

Behind this long and quite a descriptive title, there is an idea of activists of Centre for Nonviolent Action to initiate a particular process in the field of *Dealing with the Past*. It is specific because its direct carriers and protagonists are former soldiers, people who participated in wars that took place in the region of former Yugoslavia, during the nineties. They have seldom been given a *public space* to talk about their war experiences, motivation, views of the future of our countries and societies and the obstacles and needs that lie ahead, on the path to sustainable peace in this region.

It's a very large social group, which has often been pushed into the stereotyped position of "those who might talk about the war, but never about peace". We intend to step out of this cliché and create an activity in which veterans can recognize their own capacities for peace activism, reexamine their personal responsibility, as well as call upon serious and thorough review of social and collective responsibility for both the past and the future.

When we implemented the first series of public forums "Four Views" in four towns in Serbia, almost a year ago, one of the things people were saying most often was the following: "This should be done everywhere, here, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia...". This sentence contains a full range of various emotions from anger and hurt expressed in the following question: "Are we the only ones that need to deal with it?" to a moving awareness how important it is that we reflect on the most painful issues we live with, within this region and across the state, entity and other borders.

At the end of last year, we decided to continue our work in this field and organize public debates in Bosnia and Herzegovina, knowing

that we were about to step into an entirely specific context, strongly shaded with frightening experiences of war, shared by almost all people from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We were aware that this process would demand tackling all kinds of complicated and sensitive issues regarding different experiences and views of the war, national and religious identities, various concepts of future. It was clear that every town and every village in Bosnia and Herzegovina had their own war story, underlined with their history of local relations, "enriched" with the multitude of symbolic connotations that put the entire groups in opposite, immobile positions of *victims and criminals*, with a certainty that was difficult to reconsider.

However, we are confident we will be able to deal with all that, because our own life stories have been in various ways and from different aspects, marked with wars in this region and the violence that accompanied them.

That is why we started to travel around Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to find allies for the implementation of this idea, people who were willing to share responsibility with us and initiate a small-scale process of dealing with the past and responsibility for violence that had happened in their local communities, and also to find those who were ready to confront a predominant system of values, expressed in the following phrase: "Let's just not start talking about the war, everything's clear, anyway". Our trip included visits to Tuzla, Bijeljina, Zenica, Banja Luka, Gornji Vakuf /Uskoplje, Mostar..., where we visited various organisations and individuals assuming they could be our allies in the work on peace building and dealing with the past. We also tried to establish some new and strengthen the existing connections with the associations of war veteran's, invalids of war and other organisations that gathered those who had participated in wars.

Our organisation recognises

media and people who work in this field, as the important carriers of such initiatives. Although the level of media sensitisation for peace work in Bosnia and Herzegovina is rather questionable, we've been somewhat surprised with willingness of some people to offer their candid support to the whole idea of public debates.

Several important points have become quite clear during many meetings we had.

Even mentioning the word WAR provokes tempestuous emotional reactions, especially if this term is not used exclusively in casual expressions like "before or after the war". Whenever it is used to describe the state, the atmosphere and the essence of the period from 1991-1995, it leads to the conflict whether it was an aggression or a civil war, religious war, war for the fatherland, homeland war, etc. All of it may sound absurd unless one realises that there are real people with their real needs, behind all these phrases and slogans. One of the possible ways we understand their needs is understanding and becoming aware of the violence committed and exposing the actual destructiveness of the whirlwind of war in this region. Pain for the lost family members, lost homes and lives we once had is the same no matter whether it was caused by an aggression or the civil war. No one should claim the exclusive rights to that pain. We should all take over the duty to perceive our own responsibility for the violence this region is fraught with. However, it is necessary to overcome looking at the world through national-colored glasses that makes our suffering hurt more than those of the others, since their suffering is more or less deserved, anyway.

There's an apparent polarisation of society of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is present in every aspect of life, especially with respect to the past war and the future life together in this country. It is permeated through every level of social and political reality, and the efforts of those who try to overcome it are being outspoken by a prevailing dissonance of

various political and ideological concepts, unable to hear anything but their own futile tirades. Those are the very patterns of social relations which generate the strongest pressure on individuals, organisations and institutions who have the power, willingness and knowledge to promote different type of values those of nonviolence and open dialogue. Judging by our experience, there's still a very few people who are willing to engage in such work, for numerous and complex reasons. One of the main reasons for such restraint is a lack of support from local community and a fear of confrontation with corridors of power (political, economical, criminal) who continue to wage war against their "palls" from the opposite side. We, as a society, should give it some serious thought.

Whereas common citizens have a great need for this kind of approach and readiness to leave a door ajar and uncover some well kept stories that they once locked within themselves. Those stories carry all the bitterness of the war, but also a great potential for peace and nonviolence. The responsibility for empowerment of this potential for peace is just as equally important as it is for dealing with the matters of crimes and wars.

Therefore, if we want sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia..., we will have to turn to the people in local communities who belong to different social groups and classes and who are clearly aware that the peace is something we all need. One of the reliable indicators we need to have in order to be able to say confidently that we "live peace" is a situation in which Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox live with each other, and not just next to each other. It is a situation in which we clearly express our different nationalities, not allowing for a moment that our identities become a shelter or an alibi for further escalation of violence. That is why peace is not just a ceasefire. It takes much more courage for it than it does for war and it also takes much longer time, than the war does.

About the participants



ADNAN HASANBEGOVIĆ

Born in Sarajevo 1973. Today he's an activist working in the Centre for Nonviolent Action. He was a member of Bosnia and Herzegovina army from 1992-1995.

What is your motivation to take part in this project?

My motivation comes from my long-term engagement in peace activism. I think I ought to participate in events like these. I consider I have the potential and the experience for it, since I'm a peace activist.

My two identities, those of a peace activist and a former soldier initiated the inner process of re-examination. I often ask myself: What is it that made me go to war, how much damage did it do to me, and how much did I gain? How much can my role of a soldier help me to understand the processes important for peace building?

Part of my motivation to work on this project comes from my understanding that common soldiers who were just cogs in a big wheel of violence, carry a potential for peace building and for opening up space for understanding the differences between war and peace, on both personal and emotional level.

Shortly after the war ended, I needed to speak to people who were on the other side, in order to understand this whole cloud of violence and war that had appeared over our heads.

I wanted to explore what had caused the events in our region, because I thought that it would be easier to understand social mechanisms that caused such big tragedies. I still think that people who come from different sides should talk and try to hear and understand each other, in order to find a useful mode to build relationships based on the principles of peace and nonviolence.

How you found yourself in war?

At that time, I was a youngster, living more or less a carefree life, just like most people of my age. I wasn't aware that pretty soon I was going to end up in war. Even though I sensed a whirlwind of war was approaching my town, I didn't want to admit it to myself. I thought there wasn't enough potential for something like that to happen and that nobody was crazy enough to start a war around here. I proved to be wrong and things started happening real fast. Very soon, the war spread from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At that time, I was going through various kinds of identity crisis, caused primarily by the breakdown of the country that I had loved and identified as mine. In the middle of that whole process which was happening right before the war in Bosnia, I was in some way, searching for some new identities.

I was taken by surprise with the outbreak of the war in Sarajevo, in 1992, very scared and confused, unable to identify whose war it was and whom I belonged to, really.

Everything happened very quickly, the first shelling started, along with the fights and the horrors of war. When the siege was lied and the phase of total war began in Sarajevo, I was hiding in hallways together with my friends, looking for a shelter from grenades, and we organised neighbourhood watch.

At the very beginning, many of my friends left town and went abroad, while the rest of us stayed, trying to survive and make some sense out of the whole situation.

After that, I enlisted to draft. At first, it wasn't with the intent to go to war, but more to fulfil my civic duty.

I spent the first couple of months of the war in the army barracks, as a cook. The war was stirring up heavily, there was some troops restructuring and by the end of the summer I ended up at the front line. When I got there I realised I was scared and insecure, and both mentally and physically unprepared for war.

In those first days, I was going through some very stressful situations at the frontline and in the city, which was under heavy artillery and sniper attacks. I got used to this situation quite quickly and gained some confidence as if the fear had disappeared.

I accepted the role of the soldier as something normal, and I felt it was the only thing for me to do.

I was defending my town and my home from some nationalists who were attacking us. What followed was the period of my life when I carried arms, fighting on the frontlines in and around Sarajevo, some kind of usual life of a soldier with occasional breaks when I would go home to rest.

I remember I was really worried because it seemed there was no hope things would end soon. I was constantly torn between opposite feelings: my wish to stay there until the end and overcome the temptation and a desire to try to flee the country and go abroad like many people I knew had done. However, the feeling that I should stay, always prevailed. It was my town, that's where my family was, and that was it.

I have some nice and some bad memories from that period, and all of them left a deep impact on me.

After two years, I lost my motivation and didn't have the energy to continue fighting, therefore in 1994 I spent some time on a kind of vacation, because the truce was agreed.

In 1995, severe fighting started again in the city area and I went back to my unit and spent my days at the frontline. I welcomed the end of the war feeling happy and relieved that the war was finally over.

Long after the war, I was suffering from psychological aftermath and felt exhausted and

somehow lost. I was looking for motivation and a new meaning of life.

I devoted myself to religion and God, started to go to Mosque and study religious documents. I tried to study psychology.

I was lucky to get to know some peace activists and their work, and I found my new identity in it. I devoted myself actively to peace building, and that's what I've been doing ever since.

How do you see your participation in the war, today?

Speaking from this time distance, that period determined my life and influenced my identity and me. I felt then, just as I'm feeling today a great need to understand and comprehend what happened to all of us in this region. I need to clarify what I felt back then and to share it with other people.

I've realised that there is a lot of violence and injustice in the world, that man very often has a tendency to evil, but I've also realised that the things we've been through give us a chance to learn from our own mistakes and from those of others. It is up to us to try to deal with everything that happened, learn some lessons and draw potential for peace building out of it.

How do you see sustainable peace in this region and what do you think it takes for it?

It is necessary that all people from this region take over responsibility for their own lives, deal with everything they did and with things they are doing and thinking now, and try to perceive all kinds of injustice and violence that happened in our societies in the past.

We ought to try to find ways and modes to achieve the affirmation of our identities and ourselves but not by denying the same to the others and to give everyone the same amount of space.

The society of Bosnia and Herzegovina demands a permanent re-examination of all the processes that go on inside of us on both personal and social level. We need the state in which peace building is the only true patriotism.



NOVAK GRBIĆ

Born in Banja Luka, 1969. He is as an expert for sport of the disabled people and a spokesperson for the Republic Department of Sport and Youth of the Government of Republic of Srpska. He was a member of the Republic of Srpska army from 1991-1993.

What is your motivation to take part in the public forums?

My motivation to take part in these discussions and in this project is to try to tell the public where the people who once participated in war are, how they live now and to tell the people that soldiers from all three sides live on the social margins.

My goal is to try to make the leaders of our countries think positively, instead to promote nationalism. Of course, one should never forget certain facts, we didn't play hide and seek, we shot at each other, but we should do everything so it never happens again. I don't think we should forget about national characteristics, we just shouldn't gamble with them. I think this is the way to step forward to something better and to try to make people think positive. One should get to know other nations and religions in order to live a normal life in this region because if I want to live in peace in this country, I must get to know and accept my neighbour.

How you find yourself in war?

In 1991, after the secession of Croatia and the Serb exodus, column of refugees, as long as 40 kilometres was passing through Banja Luka. People were walking, travelling in trailers or in their cars, it was horrible.

That's when my patriotism awoke, I wanted to do something to change things. I thought those people weren't guilty of anything at all and I went to war to help them.

In the beginning, I was in a support and delivery unit, and later I transferred to engineer corps that was in charge of clearing mines.

I didn't spend much time at the frontlines in Croatia. I was there only a few times, when we were rescuing some soldiers and civilians from the army barracks in Karlovac. That was the first time I got in contact with the actual war.

I had no idea what the war was, I only saw it in films. However when I first experienced shelling I realised it was no joke, and that those were serious matters. No way I was able to identify with all that, I didn't even like guns.

I was under too much pressure and at one point it was just too much, I thought I couldn't take it any more. I was transferred to a sport unit where I played football in a club from Banja Luka. I even spent one month in Serbia, playing football in Kragujevac. However I could not adapt to it, knowing that the war was going on here and that my friends were getting killed.

The most painful moment for me was the death of 12 babies in the Banja Luka hospital, because the hospital couldn't get the oxygen delivered. I still wonder why they died, what they were guilty for?

What happened afterwards were a corridor and a breakthrough to Serbia, because we were closed in here, in a total blockade. I didn't think a lot about the other armies, their soldiers were just enemies for me. We broke out of the corridor with the only goal to get to Bijeljina and to Serbia and try to get some medication and food.

Once again, I was fed up with it and I had a break. Shortly afterwards, a colleague of mine was killed so I enrolled to the service. I couldn't bear being away from the frontline while my friends were

getting killed.

After that, my engineer unit was sent to Doboj, and later to Orašje. I wasn't stationed at the frontline, but in a command guard. It was at the frontline near Orašje, where I asked myself if the war made any sense. I was fairly confused. I remember Croats and us, shouting at each other across the frontline, going to each other for a cup of coffee. It was complete nonsense. Once I went home to Banja Luka for a break and



saw buses full of Croat soldiers passing through the town and I really couldn't understand any of it.

Afterwards, we were clearing up some minefield for young soldiers that were supposed to come, on the hills near Derventa. There weren't any armed conflicts so I helped clearing up mines. I didn't know enough about explosive devices so I got wounded. The bomb blew up in my hand and that's how I lost it.

After that, the war was over for me.

How do you look at all that, now?

I like to say that it was my mistake to go to war and it was my mistake I lost my hand.

At the beginning, when I was going to war, I didn't think of it as a mistake. I realize that we, Serbs and Croats, were deceived the most, they really fooled us. I think it is better that we are good neighbours, than to be in the same pot again, because in this region it is easy to stir up people against each other and then violence escalate.

I feel betrayed because I cannot

accept the fact that I was an aggressor, which is how people in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina perceive me.

Veterans are on the lowest social margin, completely neglected and forgotten. That is what hurts me and irritates me the most.

How do you see a sustainable peace in this region and what do you think it takes for it?

In my opinion, we can reach sustainable peace if people think positive. Our goal should not be to switch responsibility from one side to the other. That won't bring us sustainable peace for sure.

We should all accept the fact that this was not an aggression, but an ethnic, religious and a civil war. Only then we can talk about sustainable peace.

I don't have to apologize to anybody for defending what's mine.

I accept responsibility for being a part of that whole madness, that entire national mechanism that had started everything. I was a part of the Serb wheel, and there was the same wheel of Croats and Bosniaks. I often wonder what would have happened if all of us had refused to go to war.

We need to sit together and have a heart to heart discussion so we can find solutions that won't be at anyone's expense.

We need to get down to a human side of the story, to get to know each other and break down some prejudices that were created by media or by some other sources. We must have a talk on a healthy, human basis.

The artificial peace was created, and it should be transformed into an actual peace so that nothing else happens. All the things that are artificial have their expiry date, and after that they decay, sooner or later.

It is necessary that everyone accept that they are responsible for it today, as well as to accept responsibility for the future so that in 50 years from now we don't have another war. We need to build some solid foundations for a superstructure, and that is an innate or actual peace.



ROMEO ZELENKA

Born in Mostar, 1972. He is a lawyer and a postgraduate student of international criminal law at the Law school in Mostar, currently working as a secretary of the Auto-club in Mostar. He was a member of the Croatian Defence Council from 1991 - 1994.

What are your motives to take part in these discussions?

I responded to the invitation to take part in the forums because I wanted to share my wartime experiences from the time when I had participated actively in the Homeland War as a member of Croatian Defence Council, with members of other military forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I participated in both wars, against the Serbian forces and against the Bosnia and Herzegovina army. I was driven by the desire to talk in a normal and open way to people who were shooting at me and whom I was shooting at. In my opinion the whole project is a good thing, and there should be more like this one. They should have started sooner, right after the armed conflict, with a basic idea to reach sustainable peace. I think that with my participation in these forums I contribute to sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I want to secure a normal future for my children, so that some day they don't go to war against the children of these people who are together here with me.

I was also motivated by a wish to express my feelings through my

confession, and to deal with the war from a specific point of view. I want to see if I have any responsibility for the war, if I was able to do certain things differently and if someone used me in that war.

How you find yourself in war?

For me, the war started much earlier than it officially began in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in April 1992. For my family, the war started in February 1991, when some members of Serbian Democratic Party and the State Security attempted to assassinate my father. After that, we escaped from the East Side of Mostar, where we used to live to the West Side. I say it as a joke sometimes that I was the first refugee in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All the things that were happening in Croatia had an influence on me as a Croat from Herzegovina.

In June 1991, we started to arm ourselves and prepare for the war, which was inevitable. I got involved in the organisation of the Crisis Staff of the City of Mostar, and the initial armed formations in the area. I attended the training of the National Guard Assembly in Baško polje, where I was being prepared for the upcoming events. I like to say that the war didn't take me by surprise. Unlike some friends of mine who were hoping until the very beginning it wouldn't happen, I was ready for the war.

In September 1991, reservists from Serbia and Montenegro arrived in Mostar area. They attacked the Herzegovian village of Ravno, and from that moment on the war started for me in a usual sense, with the first shootings and actions.

I went to war willingly, I was taken and carried away by the Croatian national question. I believed that after the war, the part of Herzegovina where I was living would become a part of Croatia. At that time, it seemed important to me, because our ideological leaders were telling us that was the only way. For me it was like the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia didn't exist because I was travelling all the time to bring arms we received from the National Guard Assembly to prepare the

troops for war.

When Mostar was surrounded but the reservists of Yugoslav Army, we took two points thus saving the town from falling into their hands. Who knows what would have happened to the citizens of Mostar otherwise?

I was feeling proud to defend my people, my town and my home. The town was shelled, we were in war, and by mid-June Croatian Defence Council liberated Mostar. Besides Croats, members of those units were also Bosniaks and Serbs who remained loyal to the Croatian Defence Council.

Afterwards, a period of relative peace began, without close armed conflicts although the shelling continued. I enquired about my Serb friends and acquaintances that joined the Serb forces, when I had a chance to. I was interested what ever happened to them and if they were alive.

In February 1993, the events in central Bosnia and the conflict between the Bosnia and Herzegovina Army and the Croatian Defence Council had their impact on the events in Herzegovina, although I thought that war should never have happened. However, there were people on both sides who had thought otherwise, and the conflict between the Bosnia and Herzegovina army and the Croatian Defence Council started in May.

I was really surprised with that war, and the intensity of it. Everything happened really fast.

It was very peculiar and confusing. There were some Bosniaks who remained in Croatian Defence Council units, and one just didn't know how to treat those people. I thought it would end soon and we would come to an agreement, but then my 17-year old brother got wounded at the front-line against Bosniaks. It was some kind of a turning point for me and I started to take that war seriously.

I couldn't wait for the war to end. When the Washington agreement was signed, I couldn't feel anything at all. I didn't know what kind of a future we were going to have. Stopping the shooting was all that was important to me.

Immediately after the peace was established, there were very few

contacts between the east and the West Side of Mostar. Since there wasn't enough food supply on the East Side, I needed to help some friends I had grown up with. I gave a pair of jeans to a Bosniak friend of mine, because he told me he had nothing to wear after he took off his uniform.

These kinds of episodes had in impact on me, and I realised how big a nonsense the war was. After the end of the war I wanted to get out of it and take off my uniform. When I realised how many people died on all sides, how many civilian casualties there was, everything in my life somehow deflated.

After November 1994, I managed to get back to normal and to reality. I took off my camouflage jacket and started working for the customs services. As a customs official, I was sent to some areas to set up customs offices in towns like Kupres, Mrkonjić Grad and Glamoč. I was once again involved in war events, but this time as a part of the civil institution and I didn't carry a gun. However, the whirlwind of war once again influenced my life.

How do you look at all that, now?

I think that war is a great nonsense, a stupidity that can only inflict physical wounds, as well as mental, that is sure, because everyone who had participated in war had some psychological traumas that came out sooner or later.

From my point of view, war is the worst thing that can happen to people or individual, and that goes not just for war but for any kind of violence whatsoever.

I think dialogue is the only way people should behave, whether they're politicians or us, ordinary, common people.

It is quite likely that the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, would not have happened if the politicians were less of megalomaniacs and if they tried to resolve things with dialogue, because that way everything could have been resolved differently and easier.

I like to say for myself that I'm 20 years old instead of 30, because I lost 10 years of my life for nothing. The only good thing that happened to me in

the past ten years was getting married and having a child. I don't look at the ideals I had when I first went to the war, because I crossed them all out. I've realised that there is no good from ideology and politics, and that I have to and I am able to do everything on my own.

How do you see sustainable peace in this region and what do you think it takes for it?

The very fact that we participate in these forums means a step forward to sustainable peace. I think that all of us in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who care about life together and who think about it, should turn to mutual dialogue and give our contribution to sustainable peace.

I contribute to sustainable peace by doing my job in such a way that I don't spread warmongering speech but help people to realize facts, not by escaping from the truth about the past events and reasons for them. I'll also first accept my responsibility for the war, and then think about the responsibility of others. In that way, I want to secure peace for my children and for the generations of those who will come after me.

I will raise my child as a Croat, but I will also raise it to respect other people. However, that is how I ask others to raise their children, too. We certainly need support from state institutions and educational system to do that.

I move freely all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is how I want every other citizen to feel, wherever they go, whether they participated in the war or not. All of us, and not just politicians and European institutions ought to give our contribution to building of sustainable peace in this region. We must work on abolition of borders, we must respect religion and tradition, both ours and other people's. We should try to integrate into Europe, as much as we can. In Europe, people don't care too much whether you're a Croat, a Muslim, a Serb or an Arab. However, everyone works and has a safe existence. More we work and more jobs we have, there will be less of those who sit around and think about some bad things.



NERMIN KARAČIĆ

Born in Sarajevo, 1970. He was a member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Army from March 1992 - April 1993, and a member of the Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from April 1993-1995. Currently in restaurant business.

What are your motives to take part in these discussions?

My motivation to take part in the public forums is primarily to give my small contribution and help building of our society. I want to talk openly about all the things that happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because I want to deal with it all and take over not only my responsibility as an individual, but also the responsibility of the community and groups for the war that happened to all of us.

I am familiar with the work and the mission of the Centre for Non-violent Action and I hereby support work on peace building in the region.

How you find yourself in war?

I happened to be in my town, Sarajevo when the war started and I thought it was my responsibility to take up arms and defend my town.

In that period, shortly before the war, one could feel the war psychosis. I could feel it amongst my crowd, my friends. In the beginning it seemed impossible that the war might start, I didn't think it could happen to us. We were watching TV in disbelief, wondering what was going on in Bijeljina, Višegrad and Foča.

In the beginning of April, those events spread from other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Sarajevo.

When I saw some tram cars in flame in Skenderija and talked to some eyewitnesses, for the first time I became aware of everything that was going on around me.

The city was shelled, day after day and we were becoming more aware that we were surrounded and unable to get out of it.

I first started to participate in military actions in the middle of May 1992, and at the end of May I was wounded for the first time.

That is when I first confronted my personal fears. It wasn't that much the fear of losing my life, but more the fear of facing the enemy soldier and reacting in that situation. I couldn't imagine what would it take for him to do to me, so that I was able to kill him with my full conscious.

I was going through different emotional states of anger and fear and was sincerely hoping it would all end soon. I was constantly under the impression that we would win and send away "those from the hills". I thought that we were right and that justice had to prevail.

I remember comforting those people around me, who were depressed, because I thought that the whole madness was going to end soon.

It was hard to face death for the first time.

I was very much aware that some of my friends could die, and when it happened and my friend Slaven was killed, I was sad and angry. However, there was no time to think about it in the middle of the war because death was something normal, and we were just waiting for our turn.

In December 1992, I found myself in a face-to-face combat with the enemy soldiers and I was thinking I'd certainly be dead in less than 10 minutes. That's when I said to myself: "I'm off to sell my life dearly" and continued to fight. I only prayed to God, and God helped me.

I was shot then, and my thighbone was broken in 13 pieces, but I survived.

It happened early in the morning, and during that day I was being moved from one house destroyed by grenades to another one, and I saw many dead people. It wasn't until the evening that I was transferred to the

hospital. All of my friends were shot, but luckily none of them killed.

When I recovered I joined the Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where I also took part in armed conflict.

Shortly before the end of the war, I was discharged from the service for a while, but I couldn't stand being a civilian, and I enrolled myself again to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Army. That's where I was when the war ended.

After that the Dayton Agreement was signed. It brought us a kind of a peace I didn't want. Too much blood was shed before that agreement. I think it should have happened much earlier. I don't like the political solution but I live with it, I mean I have to live with it.

I was happy when the Serb troops were bombed, because I saw the end of the war was approaching.

How do you look at all that now?

I think the war was planned and controlled from some centres where it was agreed to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Great Serbia and the Great Croatia. The plan did not work out the way it was supposed to, because whether they like it or not, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a sovereign state consisting of two entities.

Regardless of all this, I have some responsibility for the escalation of violence.

In March 1992, when I joined some Bosniaks who put up barricades, and stopped and controlled some Serbs I certainly made them feel scared and threatened.

I am a religious man and I know that religion doesn't allow any crime or injustice whatsoever. The religion forbids us to kill women, children and people who are not soldiers. It probably happened on Bosniak side, too. I don't want to talk about figures and compare it to the others but it is my duty as a believer and a human to condemn those crimes.

How do you see sustainable peace in this region and what do you think it takes for it?

Before and during the war I was living with Serbs and Croats, and those who I was in war against are present here now. I have a chance to

either fight with those I once already fought or sit down and find out how to live together from now on.

One of the basic preconditions for sustainable peace in this region is for everybody to take over their responsibility for both the past and the present. Not in such a way to forget, or to bury the past but to take over responsibility for the war and discuss it openly, thus clearing a path to a peaceful future.



DUŠAN ŠEHOVAC

Born in Sarajevo, 1951. He has a master's degree in sociology. Currently unemployed. Co-founder of the civil association called Democratic initiative of the Serbs of Sarajevo and a director of the Human Rights Bureau.

What is your motivation to take part in these public forums?

The forums gave me a chance to shed some new light on these events with the experiences of other participants of these tragic conflicts and my own and with the help of the honest and responsible partakers of what was the hardest part of these events merging a man with a gun and confronting it to other people. I wish that we opposed these preconceived stereotypes about the meaning of war and about people who participated in it, on different sides, together, here in these forums. I hope these forums and other appearances will encourage mutual dialogue amongst all sides.

How you find yourself in war?

I felt that the war was being prepared. There were some different signs: from hate-speech rattling to saber rattling. In March and April 1992,

together with some representatives of the opposition political parties and respectable citizens, I engaged in some peace activities and the work of the Red Cross in an attempt to oppose to hate and war. I had been doing that until September 1992, when I was drafted to the Republic of Srpska Army. The night I was drafted, I spent in a stranger's apartment in an Airport housing project. In the morning I was sent to the frontline as a common soldier, although I held the rank of reserve captain of former Yugoslav army.

I got scared when I was told that two Serb soldiers had been killed on the same place I was, in a destroyed hallway of an apartment building, two days before. There were no military fortifications whatsoever and I couldn't understand what kind of a war it was without even a minimum protection for a man on a frontline. That's when I realised that it was the kind of war where neither men nor the territory were protected.

I demanded that we set up fortifications and secure ourselves, and I spent most of the first year working on engineering fortifications.

One day we were told that a sniper killed an old woman. I went with a friend of mine to get her body off the street and bury her. While we were carrying her towards the building, the sniper shot her in the head although she had been dead already. I saw there were people on both sides who wanted to kill anything alive.

In 1993, I was transferred to Golo brdo, on the Igman Mountain. That's where I saw soldiers of Republic of Srpska army who were getting from one point to another pretending to hide themselves behind blankets or small trees! I was making engineering fortifications there, too and I lived to see Bosniak snipers shoot and kill Serb soldiers while they were digging trenches to protect themselves. Since we were very close to each other, I was begging Bosniak soldiers not to shoot the ones that did not shoot back. We had managed to set some kind of an agreement, so afterwards there wasn't any more dead or wounded on that frontline on neither one of two sides.

Before the Dayton Agreement we were used as a guinea pigs by the

international community that managed to throw 10 grandees in between two trenches without hitting the trenches with people in them. I understand why the soldiers of the international community were shooting at me, but I can never understand why they shot the garlic patch in Ilidža or my mother.

I went to war to defend my home, my homeland. My home and my homeland were severely attacked twice by the Bosnia and Herzegovina army, in April and May 1992. I didn't take part in the attacks on Sarajevo which was under siege, I was only defending surrounded Serb Sarajevo which was also under complete blockade, except for one small exit in Vogošća. My participation in the war had nothing to do with support to any great idea. I was simply in "war for the homeland".

How do you look at all that now?

In January 1996, together with ten other Serbs I went to Sarajevo, which was still under siege. I wanted to show I had done nothing to be ashamed of, nothing I was morally or legally responsible of or punished for. I stayed in my hometown to show I wasn't supporting or fighting for the idea of a new "Pan-Serbian homeland" the Republic of Srpska. I do not feel as an aggressor either because I didn't go anywhere to conquer people or territories. I condemn every crime no matter who committed it, but I struggle against stereotypes, giving rough estimations and imputing crimes to an entire nation. As if Bosnia was a market and we bid on a number of crimes committed. When it comes to the good, there are only few of those willing to bid. If someone wants to judge me for participating in the "war for the homeland" I am ready to take responsibility for it. I wasn't even the smallest part of the aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina, but one of those who defended the most sacred things: my life, the lives of my family members, my home and my homeland.

Most of the soldiers of Republic of Srpska army in Bosnia and Herzegovina, defended their homes, while some others took part in something that had elements of aggression, civil war, fratricide,

religious war and finally robbery. The same goes for members of other forces, and those from Bosniak and Croat side, too. Today, I realize that most of the soldiers were just means of production of new national tycoons who understand each other and make deals together quite well.

When one mentions Srebrenica, unfortunately we do bear a collective responsibility for everything that happened in Srebrenica, Krajina and Sarajevo. Individuals did some things in our name and in their own interest. All these big crimes were conceived in the beginning of the spiral of death where Bosniaks killed a few Serbs, than Serbs killed some more Bosniaks, afterwards Bosniaks killed even more Serbs and finally on the Serb side there was Srebrenica. Srebrenica should be remembered as a warning that we need to fight against the words of hate which are the first step on the spiral of death.

How do you see sustainable peace in this region and what do you think it takes for it?

It would be nice if sustainable peace existed also in dreams of individuals and nations. Distress, insecurity and fear exist in this region and that will continue for a long time. Fear and worry about the ugly and tragic events that had been happening for the past ten years, define individuals and nations in an absolute way. We must dispel that fear by all means and develop trust among nations, but we should never forget what has happened or let the ones who were creative spirits or perpetrators of crime escape from prosecution. We should also speak about those who carried the good in their heart and showed it.

All ethnic groups should also learn and accept the truth that their people sometimes commit crimes and contribute to their misfortune. Finally, I'm not asking people not to be Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs who love their own, but I do ask everybody to leave some acceptance, understanding and love for others, as well.

Participants of the forums - former soldiers, the audience and media in both entities showed that there's much more acceptance, understanding and love for others than what our overpaid national leaders in charge ever told us.

Words of the moderators...

I have known young people from CNA for a long time. I know what they have been doing and for how long and I know how many other young people have passed through their workshops on nonviolence and peace initiatives.

I accepted to be a part of this project and to moderate the forum in Zenica.

Why did I accept? That was not the issue for me. I simply felt I belong to this project and to a great family of people who work for peace, love and peace.

I should say why I participated in this forum. Unfortunately, it's because, I've know what war is. Because I've been living in this place where one street divides two nations, and there are two schools, two kindergartens and two health centres... and because I cannot stand it. Because former soldiers from my local community can discuss things that Novak, Adnan, Nermin and Romeo talked about in Zenica, only within the intimate circle of friends, so that nobody else hears them, especially not those from the establish-



ment who still haven't decided that it is something that should be discussed. I was in the forum because these young people shared their truth with me, and I listened to them and spent two days with them. Because their experience was valuable to me. Because what they did

was brave. It was more brave than what they had done in the war, because they began to discuss how to work on sustainable peace.

Why did I participate in the forum?

Will this public forum open up some questions about my own responsibility in the war and will I be able to ask people in my community the same question and start discussing our responsibility with people like me?

Will I get an answer to the following questions: Am I responsible? When will I start being responsible so that we do not have another war again and I have to ask myself the same questions about responsibility and if I could have done it

differently?

War is behind me. I cannot change that now. What can I do? I can start being responsible. This is the moment for my responsibility. This forum. My participation in peace, my peace action. At least I know I didn't wait for others to resolve my dilemmas on my behalf. At least I believe that some Adnan, Novak, Romeo, Nermin can open the eyes of the people in my street and make it to be just a street, instead of the street of division.

A dream?

So be it. I believe in it. And it is quite possible. At least, I can answer the question about the things I am doing now and here in Zenica to give peace its face. I am here. In the forum with other citizens of Zenica, listening to warriors and listening to these people when they talk about themselves and their experiences, listening to them asking questions and thinking that there are plenty of us in this country who want to tell our story to people. Because peace has a chance.

*Jasminka Drino Kirlić,
Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje
Moderator of the forum in Zenica*

I had a double motive to accept moderating "Four Views" public forum in Banja Luka: a personal and a professional one.

I had been living in an area where the war was taking place, for four years. I witnessed the war events in former Yugoslavia myself. It significantly affected the life of my family and influenced my opinion about "those from the other side" former neighbours, friends and fellow countrymen.

It took a lot of time for me to deal with my own prejudices, to learn about their roots and it also took a lot of attempts and efforts to break them. I managed to do that by re-examining the credibility of information which were usually biased and tinted with hate, by reconsidering my own perceptions and thanks to the direct contact with "the others".

I wanted to hear the stories of people who had participated in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the opposite sides and to try to understand their reasons for doing that.

I also wanted to find out what they felt, and how they perceived themselves and the outside world during the war.

I've been working for an NGO called



"Nansen Dialogue Centre" in Banja Luka, for two years. The organisation is engaged in promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue with an aim to build, encourage and open up democratic processes and build civil society ensuring the acceptance of all the ethnic groups in the process, on the bases of equality.

That was an additional reason for me to take part in the project of my colleagues from Centre for Nonviolent Action and to support it, so we can work together on opening the process of understanding the different sides in the conflict and on emphasising the need for a nonviolent conflict transformation in this region.

The public forum in Banja Luka was very important because it opened up space for personal stories of former soldiers and it initiated the process of re-examination of wars, as well as personal and social responsibility for their beginning.

Communication with the participants of the forum was extraordinary, both before and during the event, with expressions of mutual trust, friendship

and cooperation necessary for the implementation of this project.

Participants of the forum listened very carefully their colleagues' discussions, complemented each other thus creating a good dynamics of the event.

The reaction of the audience was positive, with understanding and expressions of support, without provocative questions or judgements.

It was very important that the participants delivered a message to the audience with an emphasis on the need to continue with similar discussions, as one of the possible ways towards sustainable peace.

View of the future was another important aspect of the forum, as a part of which participants described their view of Bosnia and Herzegovina and themselves as "fighters in peace" as one of them put it.

At the end of the debate, the audience spontaneously applauded thus showing that stories like those needed to be told more often, in public. That will demand a sincere support from the society which is suffering from a widespread apathy and which needs to be continuously encouraged to act for the purpose of establishment of sustainable peace.

*Dragana Šarengaća,
co-ordinator of the
"Nansen Dialogue Centre" in Banjaluka
Moderator of the forum in Banjaluka*

The Public Forum in Zenica, March 15, 2004

The first public forum "For Views" (From the past: How I found myself in war; Towards the future: How to reach sustainable peace) was held in Zenica, in the Old People's Home. We were slightly nervous because it was the first one in Bosnia and Herzegovina and we were wondering if people would come at all: it was snowing, and the subject was painful, too. However, as the beginning of the forum approached, more people gathered and our expectations were exceeded.

The participants of the forum were the following: Adnan Hasanbegović, Novak Grbić, Romeo Zelenika and Nermin Karačić. The public forum moderator was Jasminka Drino-Kirlić.

There were mostly young people in the audience, but very few of those who we primarily expected to come: people who had participated in the war or had been on the frontline. Judging by the questions and reflections that followed after the first part of the public forum, all of them, more or less, had had some hard experiences from the war and it continued to affect their lives. It made the whole debate gain in importance. Interaction between participants and the audience opened up some space for the questions and opinions of the visitors: about the war, present situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, expressions of feelings of pain, fear and loss. Plenty of emotions came out. Regardless of what side people were from, or what milieu they came from,

they showed that the face of the war was the one of suffering. As one visitor said, thus starting with questions from the audience: "a lot of blood was shed".

Variety of questions was asked: in relation to participant's personal adventures, their opinions and experiences. Additionally, individuals from the audience spoke about their reflections and their own life stories, as much as it could fit in just a few minutes. People needed to talk about many things that hurt them, to exchange things with others, especially after hearing the stories of participants, in the first part of the forum.

One of those stories about war and peace was told in brief by a man who according to his own words, "had been taking care of 1200-1500 people on the frontline". He feared that the biggest confusion was yet to come because we lived in a "state of an unfinished peace". People from the audience also commented a highly controversial issue of apology: "As if someone should apologize to anybody. For me, it's extremely irritating. I am a Muslim and a refugee from Dobož. I don't think anyone should apologize to us, because if we ask for that, it means we're the victims, and that *I am not!*"

It was interesting to hear the same question repeated in both public forums, in Zenica and Banja Luka. It's the following: "What would you do with the experience you have

now if it was 1991-92". Here's the answer from one participant:

... When we come to the point that guns are being distributed, it means that the process is over. We should think about it much earlier, before the escalation of violence, because when it happens, like it happened here, than it's over. I love my country, my town, I want to change things to make it better, to try and prevent 1992 from repeating all over again. That's the only way, because when push comes to shove I feel like I have no choice. I'd do anything to prevent that from happening.

Since these were the participant's personal stories in which they discussed their motivation, what they were feeling, their views of peace, the audience was interested in the present moment, too. The questions were asked regarding participants' feelings, which were the aftermath of the war. Here is one participant's answer to the question about the way he feels now, if he has any flashbacks, trauma as a result of his injuries, if there is still some fear left inside:

I was wounded by both sides, and psychologically we are all wounded somehow. Only we know how we dream and how we wake up.

With respect to the fact that participants came from different belligerent sides, one visitor wanted to hear whether it was possible to feel something for the other one, if they felt sorry for the other one: "Novak, how sorry do you feel about the loss of women from Srebrenica; how sorry are you Nermin for Novak's lost hand?" That's why the following question remains: is there a need for revenge?...

Since the public forum was titled "... how to reach sustainable peace ", the real question is How to go on? For instance, what will the participants say to their children about the war: "What will you tell your children about the other one, when you put them to sleep? Will you talk about it and what will you say?" Here is one of the answers:

My daughter is still too small. I'll try to talk to her about nonviolence as a philosophy, and since I'm a Muslim I will try to pass onto her some values I see in faith. I will try to guide her not to distinguish people on the basis of race or



nation. I would like to take her to Belgrade, I plant to do that, that's where my friends are. For me it is important to build a soul from within.

There's a concern about the future: what will happen when the international community leaves? What about multiculturalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the American or some other model needed in this country? Would it be possible for participants to, let's say, move from Banja Luka to Zenica and live there, and the other way around, how safe would they feel? These are all different issues. For many people the war hasn't even ended yet, but it is important to talk about it, reflect, and reconsider. One could find some of these things in the "guest box".

What are the comments, views and

visions from the "guest box"? Here are some of them:

"My vision of peace is the one of the end of manipulation with politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This especially refers to us, and in general it refers to respect, mutual respect of the nations and acceptance of each other. Respecting the tradition of the others and being proud of one own. Everyone talks about it, but little has been done." (Tanja, 16).

"It is difficult to forget the past and the future is hard".

"This should happen more often: first steps to personal peace and opening up guarantee mutual success".

And at the end: "My vision of peace. I think we should all live in harmony, regardless of who and

what we are. Whether you are a Muslim or an Orthodox or a Catholic. We are all just people and we have some humanity. That's what we should keep no matter what and at any cost. We, young people, need a better future because if things continue the way they are now, all young people will leave Bosnia and Herzegovina. We should all help this country so it doesn't break down."

It is up to all of us to make further steps towards peace. What encourages us to go toward that, is a support we felt during this public forum, where we heard lot of questions and opinions. It means a lot to us because we don't want to work on peace alone. It's a responsibility of us all.

The Public Forum in Banjaluka, March 30, 2004

On Sunday, March 30, 2003, the public forum was held in Banja Luka, in the festive room of the Banski Dvori presidential palace. It was the second public forum in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the first one in Banja Luka. Even though there were fewer people in the audience than the first time, the intimate atmosphere of the room made it possible for both the audience and participants to feel comfortable.

Participants of the forum were Novak Grbić, Adnan Hasanbegović, Romeo Zelenika and Dušan Šehovac. The forum moderator was Dragana Šarengaća.

In the first part, participants discussed the actual subject of the public forum «me in war how to reach sustainable peace». Afterwards, the audience had a chance to ask questions and express their opinions. People weren't just talking about Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the whole region, too, especially neighbouring countries: «I cannot talk about my own house, without looking at the events in my neighbourhood...». Some of the questions, of course, were in regards to the situation in the country as well as to the Bosnian internal relations.

As an illustration of what is stated above, here is the following question

for all participants, Novak, Adnan, Romeo and Dušan, if they were in favour of abolition of all three armies. One participant considered that the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina army could be resolved by taking over a Swiss model. The other one said that he was in favour of abolishing the army and having some forces similar to French gendarmerie that was nothing like the army. Here are the answers of the other two participants:

I think we need to be realistic. I think that the armies should exist, but well organised and controlled and that will be a guarantee of stability. The army will be needed as long as people realize that the country in which they live is not a jail for nations.

When we look at the resources spent for civil initiatives and peace building in the world today, the score is 10:1 in favour of war and army. I think that demilitarization can be good for everybody. It would be different if we had civil police to take care of security, and if we dismissed the army. There is a little discussion on that matter today, just as it is on joining the NATO and its advantages and disadvantages.

The discussion about war, army and aggression added to a previous issue. Regardless of the fact that it

was a hypothetical one, it was an illustration of the existing relationships between the members of major nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, would Serbs and Croats help Bosniaks if, let's say, America attacked them? However, let's get back to this war - in Bosnia and Herzegovina it ended with the Dayton agreement but the question from the audience remained: «Is there a peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and if so what indicates to that? And if not, what indicates to that?».

Here in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is plenty of turmoil and conflicts. Firstly, internal conflicts. As a consequence of what was going on there's a high suicide rate. Then, there are conflicts between large social groups, a big conflict about affairs of state, army, police, customs services... There's too much turbulence.

I think this is not peace. It is in the sense that there's no war. It is not the peace I'd like to see, an active peace in which citizens take care of their neighbours and they are active members of the society. I think there's a polarization of the society, lack of communication in many aspects, with various perceptions of nature of the war. Peace building requires a lot of work on oneself, re-examining of

one's own responsibility as a precondition for discussion, in the first place. Today, there is no sustainable peace in a lot of places in the world. Most people think war is a way to resolve things. It seems that violence still exists in Bosnia.

Peace exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no war, there is no violence in the usual sense, but there will be in 20 years from now. The problem is in the way we raise our children, they don't remember communism and then there's the educational system...

Really, what about young people who grow up in an environment polluted with nationalism? Where does it come from? What to do with it? within relation to this issue, there was a question from the audience: "How will the child live in 15 years from now? Nationalism basically works in such a way to flatter the primal human feelings. You can see plenty of people in coffee shops, imbued with nationalism; they never got the other side of the story. People who are sitting here are perceptive to what we are talking about, but what about those people, over there?"

A colleague of ours did research on schoolbooks and found plenty of hate speech in them. That's what our children learn and it takes them towards nationalism. It easily leads to extreme. Everyone has responsibility within the family for the upbringing of children, how we teach them and

raise them. Since I'm an activist, it is very important to me to work and change these things, and not just blame it to politicians and the international community. We are all responsible that people do certain things in my neighbourhood, if I pretend that it is not my business the violence will come back as a boomerang and affect all of us.

Nationalistic parties, however, continue to win the elections. That is why there was no surprise that people from the audience asked for participant's opinion on those parties. Here are some different answers and views to that question:

I consider it to be an expression of peoples' will.

I think that some parties are still doing well with the national patriotism. It can be monopolised and I'm afraid it might drag us into a one-party way of thinking. I am more in favour of a complex political pluralism. It is important for me to have an ethnic side to the whole story, but the collectivisation is dangerous if it's for the purpose of others' rather than our own values.

One of the basic human rights is a right to political organising, expressing one's opinions, political gathering, and I have nothing against that. The problem lies in manipulation with the most sensitive national feelings. They want to use wars to accomplish their own interests. As a Serb in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I cannot be a

political subject.

* * *

So, how do we go on? How much the ideas of dealing with the past, presented to the audience in the forums and on these pages, can be useful to the society? Here are some answers we found in the "guest box":

- It may be useful, but only if it visits as many towns as possible.

- A lot, I really think a lot, because stories of people who were directly involved in those events mean lot more than the demagogy that some shallow politicians are selling us.

- A lot is an understatement.

- It is absolutely useful. Unfortunately, processes like these seem to be "reserved" for the same group of people, which leaves me speechless. I'm afraid that this group is getting smaller rather than bigger... It is sad that process like this didn't happen earlier with people who recognised their own responsibility while they were in charge. I have a dilemma whether the reconciliation process should start: from the top or again from the underneath?!

- We have to start. We mustn't wait to see who's going to do something first. Like one elderly gentleman said at the forum: "Nationalism has reached its peak. I think that youth ought to act so that war never happens again. I'm asking and begging young people to struggle for the integration; that's how Europe's going to become great". We will be able to grow, only if we take some action. So, let's do it!"



ABOUT MEDIA SUPPORT

One of the aspects of the entire process of preparation and implementation of the debates we were extremely satisfied with was our cooperation and contacts with media. Support we got from people who work in media, deserves to be mentioned, primarily because it exceeded our expectations and pointed out to a variety of new ways to implement our idea. During the process of preparation, we were sometimes sceptical with respect to the interest the media with highest ratings would show for this subject. However, we must admit now, when the activities are finished, that there is certainly space for it but it must be created and pointed into a certain direction with the help of our colleagues from media. We are glad that there are many peace activists amongst editorial staff of media all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. It seems to be quite possible to recognize common values and work together on their implementation. It is our duty as organisers, to create future activities that are going to continue this kind of cooperation, and mark even more intense presence of peace initiatives in public, media space.

And finally we shouldn't forget to mention that we owe special gratitude to our local partners from Zenica and Banja Luka, thanks to whose effort and knowledge, the media support was provided for.

We thank the following media:

Alternativna TV, Banja Luka
Balkan radio, Banja Luka
BEL TV, Banja Luka
Boom radio, Banja Luka
«Buka», Banja Luka
«Dnevni avaz»
Federal TV
«Glas srpski», Banja Luka
«Naša riječ», Zenica
«Nezavisne novine», Banja Luka
Nezavisna TV, Banja Luka
«Oslobođenje»
Oxygen radio
Radio television of the Republic of
Srpska
Radio Zenit, Zenica
«Slobodna Dalmacija», BH edition

Two views from outside

When a man who participated in the wars in the region of former Yugoslavia, thinks about the causes of those wars, the actual events and their consequences, from a time distance, it is impossible to stop the memories from pouring out like a mountain river in springtime. It is difficult to halt and sort them out in some kind of normal order. One cannot help feeling responsible and crushed deeply inside. It is hard to reorganize the nightmare in one's head and offer a clearheaded analysis of everything that happened.

As a human, I feel deeply responsible for all the casualties of those wars as well as for all of us who survived the madness of war by a lucky coincidence. All of us together must take responsibility and commitment for future generations, to which we must not leave our traumas and prejudices. Not for ours and the sake of our generation, but for the sake of our children's generation and those that will follow. I feel we are obliged to open the taboo and Pandora's box, regardless of the fact that for our generation and us it is an extremely unpleasant and painful thing to do. We were the ones who went astray so we have to find a way out of it.

It is obvious that we didn't learn any lesson from the experiences of previous generations, those of our grandfathers'. We fell into the same trap instead. It was the trap of discord, inter-ethnic conflicts, religious intolerance, in a socio-political, unstable situation of an undefined civilisation. It all happened at the end of the 20th century in Europe, the most prosperous civilisation of the modern world, which makes it even more tragic. All the more we are responsible in a moral, civilised and cultural sense.

In the process of transition from a communist authoritarian socio-political system towards democracy, we got lost and allowed the right wing extremists in the country and from abroad to monopolize the leadership position, introduce themselves as an actual democratic, political subject, the guardian of allegedly endangered national interests and the ones who would lead the country in the future.

In the same process, the extreme left lost their political positions, became aggressive and adopted the national prefix, all with the same goal to win in the fierce struggle for absolute power without any responsibility whatsoever.

In their battle for unlimited power, these two extremes created political empty-space, thus disabling democratic structures, NGOs and civil initiatives to act.

Conflicts between political and personal interests and desire of some individuals and groups from their environment for an absolute power, climaxed in the outbreak of war in the region of former Yugoslavia. What followed were media blockades, warmongering propaganda, manipulation with information and disinformation, military and police pressures and threats, making people feel frightened and helpless. People were then given guns and sent off to war.

Now, when we've fired all the ammuni-

tion, sobered up from the war, waited for the smoke and dust to clear up, and inhaled some fresh air, we have to look around ourselves and see where we are.

We are sitting on a pile of dead bodies, and all around us there are bloody, wounded, sad and ruined lives. What once were happy homes, children's frightened looks, little girl's eyes filled with tears, mother's cry for a missing son, never experienced youth and the happiness of love, plucked and scattered rose buds.

If we look around, we will see perversion, prostitution, smuggling, criminal, and our joyful, happy leaders, each of them in THEIR OWN, nice, ethnically clean ...

War profiteers deliver political speeches about the best of all todays and tomorrows in THEIR democratic... Lords of the wars wash their hands drenched with blood... And in my soul, there's pain, misery, wail and sorrow for my youth and for the scattered hopes of my generation...

*Zoran Stevanović
Medveđa, Serbia*

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It is up to you to feel and judge for yourself if I can possibly write about the view from an outside position, when I am way too much inside of this whole story. It's the view of the process, the happening in which group of inspired people encourages all of us to think about ourselves and things that surround us, today as well as yesterday. They encourage us to take a peek into our life's experience and deal with ourselves. Many of us carry a heavy burden because of what we went through during the war and the horrors we experienced. Literally, nobody was spared or untouched and we continue to carry around that heavy load.

People who participated in wars, members of belligerent armies, are talking to us, as open as they can, about their experiences from the war, how they survived, how they live today and what they think and feel. They have mustered up courage to talk about it in public, in front of the audience in public forums or in media. They are telling a story, about their memories of going to war, but they are at the same time opening up a discussion about going out of all the wars, ever.

I was a participant of the war, a volunteer in Croatia, in a war, which is being called differently. The Homeland War is the name universally accepted in Republic of Croatia. Whatever we call it though, it was a bloody, horrible war.

How do wars begin and who invented them? What's the source of the war? How big is the responsibility of the warriors-soldiers? Is it possible for the soldier to remain honourable during the war and afterwards? What caused the war/wars, and what and who was in the back of it? Can we say that participants of wars, warriors/soldiers provoked them? Or, were they also the victims and those who suffered, regardless of their share of responsibility? These are just some of the questions I might ask all of us, just as I believe than many of us have asked themselves already. The participants of the

forums "Four Views" answered some of them.

Last spring I participated in public forums that took place in Indija, Niš, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac. I still remember every detail, not just from the forums. I would have been almost unable to open my mouth without the support from CNA team. I remember a woman who was looking at me, for the entire three hours. Without any gesture, silently, looking me in the eye.

The "Four Views" forums offer an insight into a possibility of work on prevention of any potential preconditions and reasons for some new war. They encourage us to make further efforts, additional steps, to take over initiative. It's them that make us become aware of our part of the responsibility for strengthening and building of peace in our everyday life and in the future.

Someone may say: what about the victims, sufferers, exiled, raped women and girls, children who were born and raised in the war/wars? They should speak in public forums and appear on TV programmes. But, they have been doing it for years, although many of them still haven't said a word. Did we hear them? How can we encourage them to keep on talking? How can the things they've been through change us?

The forums "Four Views/How I found myself in war/How to reach sustainable peace?" are part of the process of dealing with the past. There is an old saying: those who did not learn from the past and draw some lessons, are doomed to repeat it all over again. Could anyone wish that to happen?

I've been thinking of writing about the importance of support: to former warriors so

they can talk and manage to deal with everything, as well as support to all the others who have been trying for a long time already to work on peace building in their own environment or community; about too much or too little memory; about the search for truth that is buried inside all of us, truth that wants to speak up, makes us wonder what we are not telling when we want to tell the truth: about the process of return of dignity, which was so badly damaged in wars; about treating and healing our wounds and pain.

Finally, I will only say that you are here to act, to build sustainable peace. You are "the ones" on whom it depends, not just "us". "The ones" who have responsibility don't let it slip out of your hands easily.

*Gordan Bodog
Zagreb, Croatia*

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR NONVIOLENT ACTION

Eight people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia are the nucleus of the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA). We have offices in Sarajevo and Belgrade and we work on peace building in the region of former Yugoslavia, from Macedonia, across Kosovo and all the way to Croatia. Judging from our names, those who want to, may figure out how many members of certain nations we have in our team: Adnan Hasanbegović from Sarajevo, Nedžad Horozović from Doboј, Helena Rill from Sombor, Ivana Franović from Belgrade, Milan Colić Humljan from Babušnica, Sanja Deanković from Split, Tamara Šmidling from Belgrade and Nenad Vukosavljević from Belgrade. What is important for us is that we are joined together by a feeling of human solidarity unbounded by the existing borders and by dedication to peace work and transformation towards a social justice in a nonviolent way. It is also important to us that all our differences bring us together in respect we have for them, help us to learn from each other and transform ourselves and the society around us.

What nonviolence?

Nonviolence is not accepting and not doing injustice.

Nonviolence is acting against injustice and discrimination, whereat we try not to do injustice ourselves and to offer and leave everyone a chance to transform, not to judge people because we don't have the right to, but to criticize the actions that endanger the others. And to apply the same standard to everybody.

We do not see nonviolence as an ideology but as a permanent process of re-examination of one's own action, opinions 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.

Let's just turn to future and forget what happened in the past...

If we try to sweep the past under the carpet again, we won't learn anything and perhaps those who follow will have to go through all the sorrow, anger and despair many people from the Balkans have gone through for the past several years. Let's not forget about crimes, and especially not about those committed in our name and allegedly in the name of the protection of nation and ethnic group. Let's not annul and deny the existing differences, but get to know and respect what we don't know, instead. We didn't have war because of people of different religion and nationality, but because those differences were abused and we didn't know how to resist to it, while many of us didn't know where the glorification of ourselves and looking down on all the others lead to.

The one cannot forget or conceal the inflicted pain, or should it be done. Let us respect that pain and learn from it, so it never happens again, but let's respect the pain of all people including the ones from "the other side".

What does CNA do?

Ever since 1997, when Sarajevo office was opened, we've been working on peace building and the central part of that work are training courses in non-violent conflict transformation with people from former Yugoslavia (except from Slovenia). People from various parts of the region who are motivated to work against discrimination, for overcoming ethnically-inspired hate and mistrust and for equality of all people, attend these, as we call them, training events in nonviolent conflict transformation. Our training events are attended by participants who are involved in work of NGOs, as well as journalists, teachers and political activists.

When people from countries and regions of Balkan gather up for ten days, there are lot of hidden and open prejudices, unhealed wounds caused by wars, fears and hopes for the future, in one place. We, who conduct the work of the group, try to create space for mutual communication, trust building and opening up of all the painful issues, in order to process them, thus finding some new ways to treat all our differences and similarities instead of sweeping them under the carpet. We make efforts to give people insight into the "other one's" perception of violence and arouse their responsibility for protection of their own rights, and rights of their neighbours.

We see the beginning of peace in recognition and respect for the pain of people from the "other side" which will arouse the feelings of understanding, compassion and human solidarity. In 2001 we opened CNA Belgrade office, which was a sisterly office to the one in Sarajevo. All that we work on and decide about, we do together, thus living what we believe in and what we wish to promote.

Apart from the work on training events in nonviolence, CNA is active in other areas of peace building such are: public peace appeals, participation in public forums and their organisation, publishing newspaper articles and alike.

The experience of people of different nationalities and religions, in Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro who can understand, recognize and support 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 instead, our future is, if not in any other way than geographically, tightly intertwined.

PATRIOTISM IS TO BUILD PEACE

When we say *sustainable peace* we mean 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 the responsibility for the society they live in and who have chosen to take action against injustice and discrimination, together with authorities and institutions.

The process of building of sustainable peace cannot take place without treating our past and dealing with it. It is marked with terrible wars during which many people were killed, and all of us more or less still suffer from their consequences. The approach based on “peace-at-any-cost-no one-is-to-blame” and “let’s just better forget about it all” is impossible in the process of peace building, since these horrifying wars cannot and should not be forgotten. They represent a terrible experience, warning us that it should never happen again. That is why we must not forget it.

The important segment of the process of peace building, and thereby dealing with the past is a condemnation of war crimes by all of us, regardless of the fact who committed those crimes and in what name. In order for the society to generally condemn war crimes, it is extremely important to know everything that happened. It is just as important that our courts, that is courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro process war crimes, so we can condemn the crimes committed “in our name”, take over responsibility for it, therefore nobody else does it instead.

Even if there is awareness that “our side” or “someone in our name” committed war crimes, they will often be easily justified with excuses like: “But the others did it, too”. We find that it is remarkably important for the process of peace building to deal with the war crimes committed “in our name”. Yes, the *others* did it, too, but that is not the excuse. Let’s take a look what we have in our house, first and then criticize the neighbour.

The other segment of the peace building process and certainly the crucial one is work on rebuilding the destroyed bridges between people and developing solidarity amongst them, giving people a chance to hear what’s it like for the *others*, Croats, Bosniaks, Albanians, Serbs, them, what are their problems, fears and hopes. 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 like in Belgrade, where the prejudices against this ethnic group are very strong and one can often hear they are “savages”, “dirty”, “they breed (like rabbits)” while their ultimate goal is The Great Albania? How do Croats and Serbs feel in Sarajevo, if they are almost exclusively hired by a very 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 like when they are not allowed to rebuild The Ferhadija Mosque, which was destroyed with mines during the war? They all certainly share the same feeling: lack of security, of freedom to express their identity, of prospects, things every human being needs.

People who need to express their ethnic identity are often identified with nationalists. The missing element in our opinion, is an affirmation of national identities through values they bring along, values that are not based either on *the battles we once won* or on those areas in which *others are worse than we are*. These values are based on *the wealth of cultures, which* do not endanger or depreciate anyone.

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.

Opening the discussion for responsibility for the war and all the things that have happened to us and all around us, initiates resistance towards dealing with responsibility. Even when there is an awareness that we all do share responsibility, a question comes up: Why must we start first with the process of re-examination 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 to be proud of it (although it is 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.

An indication of distorted social values is the fact that going to war in the name of one’s own nation is considered to be an act of patriotism, while on the other hand, anti-war actions are by no means associated with patriotism. But, let’s say it out loud and clear: WE ARE PATRIOTS just because we are against the war, just because we support nonviolence in society, because we love the societies we live in, develop them, struggle against injustice and in favour of equality of all social groups and preserve

basic social values. So that they are not forgotten. Just because we are Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, ... who are sick and tired of leaving these identities to the ones whose “patriotism” has one quality only and that is to hate all the others.

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 most often 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”). The 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 (because “we know who’s deciding our fate”). It is clear there will be no substantial change of the situation in this region as long as we stay buried in the role of the victim.

Those responsible for war aren’t just the ones who directly participated in it. The entire society is responsible. Including the ones who were against the war why weren’t they any louder, did they start to warn the others about it in time? Even those who kept quiet, pretending it was none of their business why were they quiet, could this mean that silence gives consent?

Let’s take responsibility for the societies we live in, let’s participate actively in their development and their life and raise our voice against injustice and violence.

An important step in the process of building of sustainable peace is to sensitise people for violence and to condemn 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 confectionary 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 moment when we all start to condemn violence, regardless of who the victim of that violence is and why, regardless of who committed it and what their motives was, we may say that we’ve moved quite ahead on the way towards building of sustainable peace and that we’ve really made an effort to stop any future war in this region. And it’s only up to us, local people to stop any further saber rattling.

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