

FROM THE PAST: HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR  
TOWARDS THE FUTURE: HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE



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# Peace building in BH, Context and Priorities

It's been almost ten years since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed (November 1995) but there's no simple answer to the question if there's peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

There are different (and mostly vague) parameters that may be used in defining an answer, just like there is a diverse spectrum of different perceptions and experiences of peace – to start with “there's no shooting and shelling – it means that it's peace” to a gruff and unclear (incomprehensible) definitions delivered by various experts and academics, that mean very little to ordinary people and their understanding of reality. Still, there is one reliable criteria and that is the feeling and the position of ordinary people, especially those who are condemned to an existence of ethnic or religious minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, today. And, judging by their experience, we still cannot describe the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina as PEACE, with a clean conscience. The society in which a very large number of people feel enormously insecure regarding their bare existence, where the space for moving and living freely is being reduced for many people, society where any identity that doesn't fit into the “ethnic standard” becomes the threatening element hence the legitimate object of violence and discrimination, such society is not the one with a sustainable and stable peace. Even people who are quite poorly informed about the situation, are able to list the main problems that have been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina for years already: difficult economic situation, corruption, crime, weak and inefficient system institutions, heavy burden of past wars (problems of refugees and displaced persons, sustainable return, search for the missing, dubious attitude towards war crimes); relationships between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community, neighbouring countries etc.

Things enlisted above change very slowly and critical problems remain intact, mutually entangled and intertwined. Dealing with one of them in a constructive manner leads to the progress in other fields too, while neglecting any of them obstructs the progress with respect to the solutions for other painful issues. It seems that this simple fact often looks unimportant for both local politicians and international factors, therefore they tend to believe too easily that it is really possible to make a break in the economy without respect of human rights, or that it is possible to protect their own so called national interests with the help of discrimination and disregard of the needs and interest of the «others» (or someone else).

Without any desire to offer either a rose coloured or black painted picture, once again we must express what is already well known: Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a country with very unfavourable social conditions, low respect of human rights and even lower degree of responsibility that both its politicians and citizens



are willing to accept. At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that simply cries out for peace activities and promotion of peace values. No matter what different power circles may think – whether they are on the local or international level.

One of the first steps in laying of foundations for the sustainable peace is recognition of a need to make peace alliances (within and across the borders of our countries), whose bearers cannot be foreign experts, people who work on peace building professionally travelling all over the world, but local citizens coming from various professional and social groups. For these local people responsibility for the society they live in doesn't stop when they vote or in an endless complaints that “there's no one to vote for”. At the same time, there will be no improvement as long as peace initiatives are used just to bring like-minded people together as they jealously hold on to their “certificate” to dealing with the peace and to debate about it and as long as we ignore extremely bad image of nongovernmental organisations and “civil society” (whatever that means) that is widely accepted amongst the citizens. Responsibility for a widely spread picture of peace activists who travel from one airport to the other, around the world and sell hollow stories also lies upon members of many organisations and associations, at least just as much as on those nationalistic circles within society who perceive it as damaging and subversive activity of those on foreign pay-rolls, aimed exclusively against their nation. That's why it is necessary to say out loud and clear that in our opinion, peace building, is priority of this society and we are ready to carry out this process, not because we are being overpaid and instructed from abroad to do it but because our personal life histories are, in various ways and from different aspects – but nevertheless crucially, marked with wars in this region and the violence that accompanied them.

If we move the focus away from Bosnia and Herzegovina to a wider region of ex-Yugoslavia, which is necessary in order to comprehend the entire situation, we can see that outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the picture doesn't look too colourful either. Today, complete and stable peace does not exist neither in Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia nor in Macedonia ... And none of the enlisted countries/regions will not become such a society unless they choose peace building to be one of their priorities, together with other neighbouring countries in the region, because places like

Vukovar, Gospić, Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, Foča, Štrpci, Peć, Priština, Skoplje, Tetovo ... Beograd, are mutually very tightly related and certainly much closer to each other than their actual distance is, in kilometres. These are not just points on the geographical map, but also symbolic points of pain and disgrace of people from this region. Our societies must learn to deal with that heavy burden much better that they have been doing it until today, covering up their own crimes and producing national myths that place violence committed in our name somewhere within the silent gap between the vociferous stories about our “heroism” and a very quiet mentioning of the victims, that sounds usually something like “well, it was the war”.

Work on dealing with the past in Bosnia and Herzegovina is especially painful and difficult because the polarisation of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina is obvious in almost every aspect of life, and especially regarding the war past and future life (together). It permeates life on almost all levels, while efforts and striving of those who want to overcome that polarisation are lost in a chaos of political and theoretical concepts which are regularly unprepared to hear anything else but their own empty tirades.

We all bare a great responsibility not to shrug off our shoulders and sink into an overall lethargy, covered by the simulation of polyphony and proclamations of allegedly different concepts of our future and to continue to insist on “taking over” public space for the values of peace. Values that take into consideration every victim and each personal, human story, since common citizens really need 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 and encouragement of this peace potential is just as equally big as it is social importance of dealing with the matters of crimes and wars.

The stories of those common citizens are the ones that expose and make absurd horribly superficial story that it was all done by “some people with sick minds”. It turns out that the problem is «slightly» bigger and deeper, and it goes all the way up to those who consider themselves to be the «healthiest of all». And also blissfully irresponsible for everything that happened and that is happening in the present.

# Views of the Participants of the Forums



## NERMIN KARADŽIĆ

*Born in Sarajevo, in 1970. During the war he was in the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later in Special Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He is currently unemployed.*

### *How did you find yourself in war? What was it like, what were you thinking about?*

How I went to war? I was practically at my home and the war found me at the threshold. It is well known that the nationalistic parties won the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and just before the war one could feel the war psychosis. However I wasn't aware of it at all, because I was nineteen, and you know how it is in that age. I was completely preoccupied with other things, and didn't really care about serious stuff. When the war broke out in Eastern Bosnia - Višegrad, Drina, Foča, Bijeljina, I was sitting at home with my friends, watching TV and saying: "Look at this nonsense, this can't happen to us, in Sarajevo." I couldn't imagine war in Sarajevo, Who would be on one side and who on the other? However, the shelling of Sarajevo started. Even then I thought that some people would sit down and make an agreement, and it would all calm down and go away. It didn't really work out that way. I soon became aware that Sarajevo was under complete siege and that there was no way to get in or out of it. More aware I was of everything that was going on, more upset I became and more difficult it was for me. I had no choice whether to take up arms or not, I thought that it was my duty and obligation at that moment, and that was what I did. In May 1992, I was wounded for the first time. I was on almost all frontlines in Sarajevo. In December 1992, when one city block was taken and I was shot again, that time quite seriously. Sometime in 1994 I tried every way possible to give up the firearms and searched for a way to get discharged from the army. I managed to do that, but it lasted only for a while, couple of months perhaps, because I simply couldn't live the "life of a civilian" any more. I couldn't be at home, wait to get humanitarian aid, to wake up at 2 or 3 A.M. and queue in a line for water and carry cans. It was much harder for me than to carry a rifle. I spent the entire war inside the city that was under siege, and I got out of it for the first time in August 1995.

### *How do you Nermin, look at your participation in the war today and what made you sit down with the combatants who were fighting on different sides?*

As I said, I couldn't really choose. However, I am often angry and I haven't got the answer to who I should be angry at. I'm angry because I lost a good part of my youth somewhere. It is foolishness. Good forbid that from happening to anyone. I lost many friends in the war. It's not easy for me to meet their mothers and greet them. Whenever I meet them, they embrace me, start to cry, they see their children when they see me. I used to train football, a was supposed to be talented, was a member of national youth team of Bosnia and Herzegovina and was supposed to sign my first professional contract. But when I was wounded, all of that went down the drain, all my dreams. I think that all that happened in this region didn't bring any good for anybody, except for some war profiteers. I take part in this, because I think it's a good thing and it can to some point contribute to a better and safer future. I believe that we who were directly involved in armed conflicts know best what a bad thing that was and we should talk about it openly and find out where the responsibility of all of us is for the evil that had happened to us.

### *What's next?*

I look at peace as something that belongs to all of us. I think it's a long and difficult process, and we need to work on it a lot. I don't think we need to cover up anything; we didn't throw cakes at each other but grenades.

For me peace activism means promotion of certain values in society. Righteousness. And righteousness means that ALL those who committed crimes are put on trial. Righteousness means also transparency in one's political intentions, and I think that we miss that. Those are for me also religious and human values. Things that are now valued in the society are wrong, so if you want a change it's normal that there's going to be a mess.

Except for religious one, I added another identity to myself – the one of a peace activist. The essence I'm talking about is in ayet from Koran which says something like this: there are people who get involved and those who isolate themselves, so those who get involved are better.

I can say good-bye to this society and go somewhere, to the mountains. But, only to the mountains. I cannot isolate myself in Sarajevo, I don't have the right to do that. I am still a member of the society and I must react and confront with my environment.

That's where the essence of my motivation is.

Being an ordinary man, how can I have my own story? Why wouldn't I have the credibility to share it with other people? By being critical towards my own people and my own community, I send the same message to the others – you re-examine yourself, too! I am ready to condemn

my own, but I want you to condemn yours, also!

Basically, it's a very long and hard process. One should talk openly, dispel the existing prejudices. It's important to give each other space, to look for space where we can express our opinions freely.



## VOJO VUKOVIĆ

*Born in Mostar in 1974. Spent his whole life in Nevesinje. Graduated from technical. Fought in the war as a member of the Army of the Republic of Srpska, from 1992 – 1996. Married, father of one.*

### *My motivation for going to war*

In order to be able to describe this well, I must go back a little further, to the period just before the war broke out. In the beginning of the nineties, national parties came to power in Bosnia and Herzegovina. People recognised some of their own identities that those parties had offered or served to them. All of a sudden, most people became "ethnically aware". This course of events started to permeate all the social segments quite quickly, therefore young people in schools were no exception, especially those from rural areas. The process of ethnic homogenisation started and suddenly it became very important what you were: Serb, Muslim (as they used to say then) or Croat. Just many others, my class was also ethnically mixed, therefore one could feel a little bit of that ethnically-inspired intolerance. I was sitting in the class next to my friend who was an Albanian. Our parents knew each other and we were a bit sceptical toward it and we took it as a joke. Then, in 1991 we graduated from school. I didn't really like that school, I wasn't thinking of continuing it and going to college. All I was interested was R'N'R and the other things young people were into. In September 1991, some reservists of former Yugoslav Army came to Nevesinje, and there was a mobilisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. People from Nevesinje, mostly Serbs and some Bosniaks were called to reserve units. Most of us, young people weren't aware of what they were doing there and how it could all end up. We were kidding with the nationalism, but on both sides, there were individuals who were "a bit more

serious" into it.

In January 1992, I was shocked for the first time when I saw reservists and people carrying Croatian insignia (shahovnica) driving around on the streets of Mostar. I was startled when I saw it and realised that there was something serious going on.

Then I was called to the army and my parents tried to talk me into postponing it while my relatives from Novi Sad, Serbia, called me up to go to them. Still, I went to the army stirred up by some direct experiences I had with soldiers (especially those from Montenegro) who were molesting us on the streets, only because of our looks. I didn't want to leave Nevesinje and let it look like "we're defending your Nevesinje". That's what I thought then. There was this case with the breaking of the reservoir in Mostar, which also affected me. I was afraid. Lot of refugees from the Neretva valley came to Nevesinje. I was emotionally shaken. The panic struck. I had been on an active training for two and a half months, and afterwards I stayed at some reformed army (that later became the Army of the Republic of Srpska). I went back to Nevesinje and continue with military service on the frontline. All kinds of things went through my mind at that time, there was confusion and fear... Then, there was this attack at Podveležje and a lot people from Nevesinje got killed. I also saw some formations, they weren't from Nevesinje nor from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (I'm not sure if they were called White Eagles or what) and not controlled by any army. Frontlines to Mostar had already been established and the ethnical cleansing of non-Serb population was finished.

I joined the Nevesinje brigade, but soon afterwards, those paramilitary formations disappeared.

I stayed in the army because I didn't want to leave my family and friends and I thought that my family would not be safe. I also stayed to defend Nevesinje, so that I wouldn't have to run away. That's how I looked at it back then – "where, how, what should I do?". I was really sad, couldn't believe that everything was happening that way that some people turned into animals and those who were thinking differently were afraid of those "decorated" with hand grenades who were acting disorderly all over town.

That is my motivation, in brief, what I was thinking at that time. I have many questions regarding all that, now.

#### **Motivation to take part in forums and in peace building**

Even in the prime of the war, while no one knew when it would end and if it would end at all, I was thinking about some internal anti-war diversion, to gather around progressive forces to stop it. And I was thinking that such people existed on the other side. The whole situation after the war seemed shaky. Responsible people had neither a vision, nor courage to try something, for prosperity. Instead, we keep sinking into this large swamp, if it's even possible to sink any deeper than this. We were

waiting for a train to pick us up and take us to a better future, but it doesn't happen because people aren't ready to join some new processes and use the chances that were offered to them. I started to work in an organisation from Nevesinje that deals with ecological problems. Through that work with children from all three sides I have realised that young people can understand each other because they have the same needs.

After that, I started thinking about something "bigger", to spread those contacts in other areas of life. Through some friends, I became acquainted with an organisation that worked on nonviolence. They bring together combatants from all three sides, to talk and share their personal stories with others. I saw myself in all of that and I think it's a great relief for me to have a chance to talk in several towns, on forums and in media. I wanted to hear the opinions of other people, from other sides, primarily those who went to war and also young people to whom stories were being served in three different ways.

I think it's very important that people think about ways to reach sustainable peace. Most people don't have a clue or don't get a chance to think about it, because they are swamped with some irrelevant and wrong information. One of the basic preconditions for us to deal with the past is not to cover up things (like war crimes, and personal responsibility) because we must learn from the period that passed and we must draw lessons about our own behaviour and our own role. We must reduce those prejudices and disbeliefs that do not allow us (or we don't want them to allow us) to think about ourselves and many people who suffered in this war, whatever side they come from.

I see my personal responsibility in the fact that I took up arms thus having become one cog in a circle of violence that happened to us in the past.



## **MARKO MARTINIĆ**

*Born in Split, Croatia, in 1974.*

*Enlisted to the Croatian Army as volunteer, from January 1993 till August 1995. Fought in the frontlines around Zadar, Croatia and in the area of Grahovo, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lives and works in Split.*

#### **What was your motivation to go to war and to join the Croatian Army?**

When it all started I was 17, and all I was

interested was having fun and fooling around.

I graduated from high school in 1992, and I was faced with a usual choice: either to start working, go to college or join the Croatian Army, because I felt that my country was attacked. I felt it the most once when I was supposed to travel to Zagreb, and there were all those occupied territories we had to bypass. I felt that some «foreign» army had taken a part of the territory of my country and was shelling Croatian towns where civilians were killed.

For a long time I was denying that the war was any of my business, especially in my last year of high school. In 1992, I finished high school and suddenly I found myself realizing that it was my business.

My last dilemma was either to go to college just to avoid going to the army, to go to my relatives in Slovenia or to go to war.

My motivation to join the Croatian Army had several segments. I perceived the army against which we were fighting as the aggressors, but there were other things as well. Difficult economic situation in my family, no job and small discomforts we were exposed to due to the fact that even though we were Croats, we weren't "typical" Croats who voted for Croatian Democratic Union and swore to shahovnica and to Franjo Tudjman.

My final decision to enlist to the Croatian Army had to do with the fact that it was the most useful decision, for me, my family and my fatherland.

I went to the military department to ensure they speed up the process of me going to the army, as much as possible.

After that, I was in military service and even though I wasn't supposed to take part in combat, on the fifth day of my training, the army barracks were shelled and for the first time I was directly faced with the horrors of war.

After I finished the training, I was transferred to 141. Brigade and sent to Zadar area. I spent some time there on frontline which was quite a stormy and wild. However, despite everything, I didn't have any moral doubts about why I was there and what I was doing because I thought I did the right thing, according to what I had mentioned before. After a while the truce came, the brigade was disbanded and I went back to the normal life, without any feeling of guilt.

In August of 1995, I was called up again to my unit and sent to the Grahovo area, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I accepted it because I felt it was my duty again, but at the same time I became suspicious, because I couldn't figure out what I was doing in another country, although on the other hand I was aware that everything was all right legally, because of the agreement between Croatia and Bosnia on mutual support.

What bothered me the most and what was sobering about that entire experience was the moment when my unit entered the villages that were obviously left in a hurry. I became aware that those people had left their homes because of what I represented. At that time already I had a feeling that we were doing ethnical cleansing, that could not be justified with the fact that the



Serb Army had done in Croatia. At the moment when I was there, I didn't know much about Grahovo and its surroundings, who lived and who had lived there, but I found that out several years later, from some people who were better informed.

That's when it was confirmed to me that it was a Serb population and it intensified my feeling that I had been a part of something that could only be called ethnical cleansing. Thinking about that role now and then, I feel that I was an aggressor and I am not at all proud of it.

**What are your motives to join this activity and work on peace building?**

My motivation comes from my reflection about the role I had in the war and reasons I joined the war in the first place. Most simply, my conscience and my civic responsibility for the society I live in tell me to do what I am doing now and to condemn militarism and every violence in resolving any kind of conflicts.

My peace engagement is present on two levels. On one level, I work in an association for direct protection of human rights and civil liberties where I help and work with people who are in any way affected by war, from legal side. On the other level, I do it through other projects I am involved with, as well as in my everyday life and through personal example I try to help everyone I can and I fight against the atmosphere of hate and prejudice that exists in our societies.

The basic idea that guides me in my work on both levels is to work on annulment of all violence and discrimination that come out of war.

Regarding the past war, it is very important to me to condemn all war crimes and crimes committed by the Croatian Army whose member I was once, too. I don't want to carry a stigma of a former member of the Croatian Army and a member of a Croatian people in whose name war crimes were committed, without being condemned by the people, and those who had committed it were perceived by the majority as defenders of the country according to the principle that everything was allowed in war, even if it meant killing women and children just because they were other and different and they belonged to some other nation.



## AMER DELIĆ

*Born in Zavidovići, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lives and works in his hometown. From 1992 to 1995, was in the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

**What was your motive to go to war and join the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina?**

I was born in Zavidovići and that's where I went to primary school and finished high school. When the war began, I was a freshman at the Faculty of Economics in Sarajevo. Due to what happened in March, I returned to Zavidovići after my parents had called me, and I was taken by surprise with the situation there. I learned that most of my Serb neighbours had left the town. People organised neighbourhood watch and patrols and I joined them. The attacks on in Eastern Bosnia and Sarajevo started which aroused my feelings of patriotism and motivated me take up arms.

With the beginning of shelling and fighting that broke out around the access roads around the town, I felt rage and fear inside of me growing, because of my family's existence. The culmination was when I volunteered to go to the frontlines. Since I had never been to the ex-Yugoslav Army, I was not trained for warfare, so I only "did" a few shifts and was sent, upon my own request, to the recruit training centre in Zenica.

After the training, I was sent to the unit of municipal defence headquarters, detachment «Rujnica – Mečevići» and stayed there until the beginning of the conflict between the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatian Defence Council. That's when I was transferred to the 318. Mountain Brigade and took an active part in all defensive and offensive tasks in the wider front of Zavidovići (in Dubravica, Vozuća, Ozren). It continued until the Dayton Agreement, after which I was discharged.

**What are your motives to join this activity and work on peace building?**

As an immediate participant of war, I realised how destructive were the atrocities of soldiers and even then I wished to meet "the other side", which happened in 1993 when I had several contacts with soldiers of the Army of the Republic of Srpska. I had another chance after 1995, but at that time it was with the captured soldiers. I felt their fears and tried to imagine myself in the same situation. That's when I realised fully how meaningless was the war and I felt how "high politics" and prejudice affected lives of ordinary people.

Today, nine years later, my memories are still very much alive and I draw the energy and motivation to work and mark out the rout to sustainable peace from all the sufferings and agony. The gap is deep and problems are big but we haven't got an alternative. Violence doesn't solve anything in our region. We must clearly deal with the past and persist in punishment of war criminals, end once for all with prejudices and stereotypes about violence in this region as something normal which happens periodically. We need to join our forces and say: STOP VIOLENCE, HATE AND PRIMITIVISM!



## NOVICA KOSTIĆ

*Born in the village of Dobroviš, municipality of Vlasotince, in 1960. Participant of armed conflicts of August 17 1991 in Croatia, as a reservist of the former Yugoslav National Army. Currently retired.*

**How did you come to be in the war? What was it like?**

How did I come to be in the war? The question that troubles me, that I'm looking for the answer to from myself. I was thirty, I was full of strength, the will to work, the will to live, full of love for everyone, but, unfortunately, at that time I was unable to recognise: the abuse of the media that have performed a constant brainwashing and, unfortunately, what had been in store for us starting from the future war profiteers to the powerful ones throughout the world and the insane, sick minds of certain politicians.

As a citizen of the former SFRY, I considered it to be my country and that my duty was to be loyal and that I had the obligation to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, which I also had sworn to do. This is the product of that honest work of mine and the relation to the society, and in those days I'd respected all the laws, so I'd responded to the drafting notice, knowing neither where I was going nor why. Nobody with an ounce of sanity had wanted that greatest evil of mankind, so I hadn't either, I'm not among that kind of patriots either, but there, I don't even know how, I fell into that trap with no possibility of a return until I got severely wounded. I might've not been thinking, I might have not been trying to do anything before, to prevent it from happening. I must've thought 'It's far away and none of my business', but once I got drafted, it was too late. I don't know if it was fortunate or unfortunate for me, but my warfare period was brief, I have been wounded soon and transferred to a hospital.

**How do you view the war in general and your participation in it? What's your motivation to be sitting here right now?**

I look on my participation in the war as on a participation in a great evil. That's why my motivation for participating in this kind of forums is terribly strong. When I got wounded, I don't know what was harder for me during the convalescence period, whether it was my wounds or the wounds of that children of ours

who were lying in those beds, boys who seem to have been a burden to both society and their families. Even then I've wondered if there was a person on this Earth who can stop such evil. In 2000, when I had re-amputation of my left leg, just two hours following my operation a nurse came and said a policeman from my southern Serbia, from Vranje, was lying in the hallway, who also lost his leg, just like I did... The moment our eyes met, when he was looking at me and my crutches, standing there with only one leg, the look in his eyes saying 'Why all this?' That's my motivation for being here today.

I also have a huge need to talk to people who were on the other side in order to be able to understand what has happened to us and why this form of violence has happened to us, where all that hatred among people who live in the same region and speak the same language comes from. I would so much like to talk openly about all events, in order for us all to see where the mistakes are and in what way and how we can influence to help such madness never be repeated.

We're not looking for culprits, we want to see if we can talk normally. I've had a terrible need to talk to people from the other side, to see what has befallen us, what it was that we've misunderstood. How can it be that we have lived in the same region, spoken the same language, and still haven't been able to find a common language?

As a man who personally suffered greatly from the consequences of this joint madness, because I have primarily harmed my family that had suffered from stress ever since I got drafted, through being severely wounded, to the final operation, I not only have the motivation, but also an obligation to fight against this kind of evil. I will fight for peace with every means available as long as I live, it's my obligation, not just motivation!

**What are your views on peace, what does it take for it? What do you expect and wish to be changed in your environment?**

First off, we need to talk openly. One should be brave and sit here, and one should be equally brave and sit in that auditorium. One should know and recognise what war is, war is not just an armed conflict. First of all, we have a dangerous media war, propaganda war. One should know that war is the greatest evil of the mankind. War, three simple letters that place man lower than animal, because animal will kill to survive, and man kills both the body and the soul. One should sit, talk, not forget, not forgive too much, but we must be more tolerant, we must respect others in order to be respected ourselves. I think that through my participation in this kind of a panel, especially in my own environment, I change a lot. I change myself, first of all. One needs to realise their own responsibility. What was it that we hadn't done before 1990? We might not have been able to stop the wars, but there might have been less violence, not this much hatred, this many innocent people might have not been killed.



## DŽEVAD BUDIMLIĆ

*Born in Sisak, Croatia in 1963. Joined the Croatian Army as a volunteer in the period from 1991 to 1995. Married, two children, lives and works in Sisak.*

**What was your motive to go to war?**

Before the war, I worked in Sisak Steel Plant which at that time employed about 12.000-13.000 workers. Population of my town was made of all three ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. About 70% of the workers in the Steel Plant were Serbs and Bosniaks, and the rest were Croats. In my environment, there were people from each of those three nations. When things started to happen in Slovenia, there was some kind of euphoric feeling amongst us, a feeling that something might spread to Croatia. For example, euphoria began when some people who had lived in my street started to disappear and to move overnight. There were less and less Serbs in the plant and people on the streets started to gather into groups. Euphoria became more and more intense when ex-Yugoslav Army started to leave Slovenia and move over to the Croatian territory. Massive military technology was being transferred over the Croatian territory and state of conflict was coming into sight. I sensed unrest and could not believe that everything was going to turn out good. When the first shelling of my block started, I joined the war. I enlisted as a volunteer, and at that time I had a wife and one child. I went to the front and the demarcation line was about three kilometres away from the part of town where I lived. It started with the "log revolution", that's where they made a line.

I was in the war until the end of 1995, when I was wounded. That's when I stopped taking part in war operations. I got out of the war and was retired.

At first I was enraged and angry, because all those people were from my community and we were working together. We shared the good and the bad, went to voluntary mass, there were elderly people amongst them, and we knew each other. There were about 12.000 in the part of town where I lived and we knew each other. It was killing me to know that they weren't in the factory and at their homes, but that they went "over". I knew who was there, and I couldn't believe it at first. I felt an anger inside of me towards all of it and I was wondering what the point was, what was wrong, why people did it, why we came to a point to separate from each other. I was the most enraged when the grenades started to fall

on my part of town and on the steel plant. Something snapped inside of me and I decided to take up arms and volunteered to go to the frontline. As far as I was concerned it was good as long as I was defending my home and stayed in Sisak. The problems began when my unit started to change location and we went to the south front, in Slavonija. I was away from home; therefore I wasn't defending my home and was away for as long as two or three months, and wasn't in touch with my family. In fact, that's when something started to break inside of me, in a psychological sense, and I was wondering where I stood, what happened with my family, if I needed all that or not, why I never left and went abroad. I was psychologically racked. I felt that the most when I got out of the war. I think that two or three years after the war were even worse than the war itself. Both to me and to my family, which was going through all that with me.

**What are your motives to join this activity and work on peace building?**

I've become aware of the personal responsibility that we all carry and have for everything that happened in this region. Some less and some more. When I look at the situation back home, in some way, either with their silence or intolerance, everyone contributed to what happened in our societies. It is difficult to reach some kind of tolerance since there were so many disgusting things in this war and it is difficult to expect that people would forget some things. They should not be forgotten, we should discuss them honestly. We need to be more tolerant with each other, if not for our own sake, then for the sake of our children and the children that will be born, so they don't experience what we experienced. In my opinion, it is important to tell the truth about the war. The real truth is much more important to me, than what I can read in my child's history books, and everyone writes history in their own way. It is important to me to tell my child, after all, that history was not as they describe it, at least that it wasn't honestly described. That's the essence for me. By doing what we do, I think we can have an impact on people in our communities. I am aware that it's very much up to me how the community and the society I live in will look like and that's what I want to work on. If I try to do something on my own in my block and try to get others to know that I meet people from the other side, exchange information about the missing as well as those about the territories where land mines were placed, perhaps it will motivate someone else to do something and to try and start things up. If people from all sides start to communicate it's for the welfare of all of us, because if a child or any other person from whatever side is blown of by a mine, now 10 years after the war, it's a tragedy that regardless of nationality. As long as we keep silent and are unwilling to tell the truth about things like that and to say what we know publicly and honestly, I think this war will go on. I think that it is necessary to talk and what we do is good. It's one of the ways, but I think all of us can do lot more for both ourselves and for others. I cannot be all right if it's not all right for my neighbour who's right beside me. I cannot feel good if he doesn't feel at least bit as I do. This is where I start from.

# ABOUT THE PUBLIC FORUMS



## Forum in Nevesinje

The first one of this series of forums in Bosnia and Herzegovina "For Views: From the past – How I found myself in war; Towards the future – How to reach sustainable peace" was held on November 19, 2004 in the Municipality of Nevesinje.

Speakers at the forum were: Novica Kostić from Vlasotince, Serbia, Nermin Karačić from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Marko Martinić from Split, Croatia and Vojo Vuković from Nevesinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moderator of the forum was Katarina Miličević from Kragujevac.

Almost a decade has passed since the end of the war and most of the people of this town are affected by the bad state of the economy and forced to fight for bare survival while the nationalistic structures that are in power remain entrenched in their positions. At first sight, it doesn't seem like there's too much space for opening up and re-examining the story about the war and everything that have been going on in the recent past.

It was important to us with respect to our

intention and strategy to go to small, closed communities where almost regularly there are very few activities, especially peace activities.

In the first part of the forum, people who have experience of fighting in the war spoke about their reasons to take upon arms, but also about their view of peace with a clear message of re-examination of their own responsibility for the situation in our societies now as well as in the past, that does not call upon new violence, wars and hatred.

We were a bit afraid if anyone would show up at the forum, because people started to come in only 5-10 minutes before the event. There were mostly young people in the audience who were able to identify with the participants because of their age and war experience, but there were also middle aged and elderly people who all shared the same experience of combat. We are very sorry that none of the town authorities showed up, nor was there anyone from the veterans' associations, although we had invited and expected them.

During the forum, it seemed that none of

the people from the audience was even blinking because they all listened very carefully which made the entire discussion gain importance. It was as if the people in the audience were taken by surprise by the level of the discussion in which participants were re-examining their own responsibility, criticizing the current situation and were ready to condemn the crimes that had been committed "in their own name" thus having tackled the existing prejudices against those "others".

In the second part of the forum, the audience had a chance to ask questions and give comments.

There were much less questions than we had expected, and the first came together with the praise to both this idea and the initiative: *Who bears responsibility for all those things that were happening in the war?*

In their answers, participants looked back at their own responsibility as ex-combatants, and one of them said:

*When the war starts, that's the phase which is difficult to change, that's something that is finished. I was young,*



*and I wasn't neither aware of the political situation nor of what was going on. That is not the reason to justify myself for what happened. I see my responsibility in what I do, not to let it happen and I recognize it on many levels. To say it to my friends, out loud and clear, firstly to my family and to the people around me that the man who killed Serb civilians in Sarajevo, is no hero, but a criminal and that's how he should be perceived and looked at.*

*Very often I see and hear hate speech: nations, people and individuals are called belittling names because they are members of a certain nation. As a man who aspires towards a religious identity, I cannot justify some inhumane things that happened and the hate speech which is present. What I can do is condemn it.*

The questions that followed, very well showed how deeply the way of thinking is enrooted into prejudices and inability to comprehend responsibilities of one's own side. They also showed some commonplaces of the discussion about the war and past of the entire Bosnia, therefore participant from Sarajevo was asked *whether he thought that the grenade fired at Markale market came from the Serb positions or from the other side as an obstruction to signing of the peace treaty in Lisbon*. Participant of the forum from Split was asked *if the Yugoslav Army was the aggressor in Croatia regardless of its constitutional task to protect former Yugoslavia, at that time*.

All of the participants were asked *if they had witnessed any war crimes, and if they would have testified in the Hague Tribunal in case they were*. They answered that they never witnessed any war crimes, but if they had, all of them would have testified about it in the Hague Tribunal.

At the end of the forum, participants got the applause from the audience, and we find that the event was especially valuable because afterwards, people came up to the participants and needed to talk to them and to share their own hard experiences and dilemmas about the war. Participant of the forum from Sarajevo was approached by some people from Nevesinje who needed to talk how some of them were shooting at Sarajevo, during the war.

We are very glad that this forum was organised and we hope that for some people it opened up some different perspectives regarding reflection about their own responsibility for violence in the past and for the existing discrimination in our societies, that is supported by different power circles. However, that too is a step forward...

## "4 VIEWS" FORUM from my point of view

**Boris AVRAM**

LOCAL PARTNER IN NEVESINJE

The idea to hold the forum "For Views - From the past - How I found myself in war; Towards the future - How to reach sustainable peace?" in Nevesinje, came out of the need or even necessity that I recognised, to hear the story from the other "side", the story of the other and different. To satisfy human curiosity, interest as well as concern for those from the other side thus creating the preconditions for new approach and rapprochement of people.

Nevesinje is an ethnically homogenous community, in which one can hear just one side of the story, just one opinion, one picture and one view of the past events after the war. For the first time the community faced a public forum as an attempt to offer space primarily to ordinary people, to hear as well as to say something other and different. As a man and a person who works on rising awareness and encourage others to start that processes I feel bad about many things I hear. Unfortunately, in this part of the state where I live and work, I was several times shaken and upset with the way some people think regarding the crimes and all the things that were done in the name of some nation. That's in my opinion the importance of such a project. Its value also lies in the attempt to build bridges of

communication, build trust, respect differences, build the shores that will soon see the return of those who want to come back and live together in this region.

The forum itself, nice as it was its spontaneity, was very important and crucial to me, because of all the things one could hear from participants and especially because of the way they were accepted by the audience, the contact and interaction established after the event.

Of course, one should look at it only as a modest, first step on the path to peace building and dealing with the past.

I hope we will all continue to talk about the war together, continue to re-examine and ask questions both to the others and ourselves.

I think about my everyday work so far and about the future context of peace building. I see work on my personal development as a priority - where I stand in all this, where my responsibility is for the things that have been going on around me, what I can do to change things.

Just like the war was a sad stage on which we all played our parts, peace building is something for what every individual should take part of their responsibility and actively contribute to its implementation.

*Boris Avram  
Info Centre Nevesinje*



# Forum in Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje



The second one of this round's forums in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was held in Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje, on November 30, at the local post office (HTP).

Even though it's been nine years after the war, Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje is still a divided town. One street divides the town, thus separating two nations. Although in 2002, local authorities were formally united, there are still two schools, two medical centres, two post offices and people rarely cross from one side of the street to another. The war which was blazing between Bosniaks and Croats brought a lot of pain to both of them and that pain is present as if it talks through the walls of this small town in central Bosnia.

Nevertheless, there are some people in this town, who resist the voices of the others, deeply tucked into their positions that are result of the whole situation and who keep warning that the time hasn't come yet for peace building. They are still working on a change and they make some small steps to open up space to talk about war, suffering and frozen prejudices that came out of it. We think that having the forum "Four Views" is one of those small, however valuable steps of those who were fighting one against the other, but sat down together to honestly discuss how they went to war, and how to overcome all wars that have been going on in this region – wars of prejudices, hate and discrimination.

Participants of the forum were: Nermin Karačić from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dževad Budimlić from Sisak, Croatia, Vojo Vuković from Nevesinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Marko Martinić from Split, Croatia.

Moderator of the forum was Sanja Deanković from Split.

We were all surprised by the attendance, since there were about 60 people present.

The auditorium of the local post office was full of young and elderly people who came to hear something and perhaps to get an impulse and an inspiration to tell their own story to those from the other side of the street.

We are sorry that there weren't more Croats, but still we are glad that some of them came and gave a concrete contribution even to this symbolic suspension of the line of division. It was partially alleviated with the detailed and valuable coverage of the event on TV Kiss which is at the same time the TV station with the prime ratings amongst that part of population.

After the first part of the forum in which participants told their stories about the war and their visions of peace building, what followed was a whole minute of painful silence before the first comment:

*I don't have any questions, but my congratulations go to the organisers of the forum. I am worried because of the young people who are becoming ethnically-charged and it is turning into something of a warrior-like. I say to the organisers of the forum and to you guys that we should take such forums and discussions down to schools, to those who work with children, that's something that should be worked on...*

Having in mind the routine practice imposed in our societies, that those who touch into and try to re-examine responsibility for war and crimes of their own side, are usually characterised as the "enemies", we found the following questions

to the participants interesting:

*Do you feel like traitors of your nations because you're sitting there with some "balia", "chetniks", "ustasha", no matter? How do you feel about it?*

Here are some of the answers:

*I don't feel like a traitor of my people at all, because as someone says I was on the frontline for 1470 days, protecting my town and I'm not a chetnik. I have never felt like that and I think that what I do is the right thing for me and my people.*

...

*There's hardly anyone of those who know me, who can call me a traitor of my people, at least in Sarajevo. I encounter criticism from those who do not know me. This is my opinion, and if I'm wrong, it's my mistake, not of the people. It is important to emphasise that a good Bosniak is not the one who hates others and commits violence against others no matter what comes from the community. My arguments for that are in my religion.*

...

*I'm aware that some people perceive me as a traitor. I don't feel that way because I do this thing now in order for my country to become a better place. I work on it concretely. Those who perceive me like that, how do they work on it?*

Participants were asked what patriotism meant for them:

*For me, patriotism is to do something for the welfare of my environment and my community, regardless of who it is about and I want to be a person who is useful to society, no matter who it*

is about. Patriotism for me includes love for my home country but it's also being a useful member of society.

...  
In our region, patriotism is perceived as being ready to die for your fatherland, and I'd rather be willing to live for it ...

...  
If I was a god patriot when I took up rifle, what I do today, what we try to do is also a form of a good thing that I do for my country, since I cannot find a forum like this one in my Croatia. Perhaps some people will say: 'they were brave enough to go to another country to try something

they couldn't do here'. I think it will happen in Croatia, too and that is one form of my patriotism.

After numerous questions that every participant was asked separately, organisers were asked why they didn't make sure to bring some member of the Croatian Defence Council, because the conflict between Croats and Bosniaks was central for the area of Gornji Vakuf – Uskoplje. It's a legitimate observation, in our view, but through our contacts we were unable to find anyone from the Croatian Defence Council who was ready to discuss their participation in the

war, which definitely doesn't mean that there weren't such people at all. We can only guess if it is either because of the internal struggles and conflicts or because of pressure from the environment. Still, responsibility to make some initial steps for opening, re-examining and reflecting the story about the past and steps towards peace belongs to all of us, because we do not want to work on it alone.

We are certainly encouraged by the reactions of the people from the audience who expressed their perception of the forum and its usefulness for their community through their comments in the "guest box".

## View of the Local Partners

**Jasminka DRINO-KIRLIĆ**

**Anita GRABNER**

LOCAL PARTNERS  
IN GORNJI VAKUF - USKOPLJE

The forum "For Views - From the past – How I found myself in war; Towards the future – How to reach sustainable peace?" that was held in Gornji Vakuf–Uskoplje showed that people were interested in themes that address some painful problems from the past, that were still untreated in this community. Gornji Vakuf–Uskoplje is a community in which the theme of dealing with the past is avoided: we were in the war, we took part in it in our own way either as combatants or those who were in the cellars, listening and worrying about our families and those who were fighting; it's all over now, the important thing is that we don't shoot, don't fear for lives of our dear ones; why start with the themes that we should forget, let's turn to the future ... those are the stories we listen every day and worry what to do with so many truths that are covered, what to do with those who were fighting that we know nothing about, what's it like for them to be alone, how they feel, do they need to talk, do they need someone to listen... questions, questions, questions.

For two years, CNA and Youth Centre have been trying to organise "Four views" forum. The time wasn't right? When will it be right?

We've learnt that patience is the only strategy to bring success in communities like this, so we have been working patiently on preparations for the forum.

And, we succeeded. The auditorium was filled with people (although we had worried if anyone would come) of all ages, young people, their parents, ex-combatants, many women.

And, there is silence in the room. The story goes. Nermin, Vojo, Marko, Dževad are talking. Pictures of war, emotions, fear, confusion amongst the young. In front of us are the people who decided to talk publicly about their experiences, about their decisions to do something, not to wait for the others to start talking about what they experienced and went through. To start talking about patriotism, back



then in the war and now, in peace. "My patriotism is not to die for my home country, my patriotism is to live in my home country."

To actively take part in its life, to get involved, to take over the responsibility for my life. To work on peace building with an awareness that I was a warrior and to give another warrior a chance to talk, together with me; we were once on different sides, now we're on the same one, because we

don't want anyone to have the same experience ever.

I believe that we, who listened, heard the message. It is going to be easier, now. Maybe this community opens up for the stories of its combatants, maybe kids in schools will learn history from these people.

Jasminka Drino-Kirlić  
Anita Grabner

# FORUM IN SARAJEVO



The last of this year's round of "Four Views" forums, and the last one of the entire three-year circle, which had started in 2002, was held in Sarajevo.

The decision to have the forum in Sarajevo was taken after a lot of thought. Although our strategy so far was mainly focused on small communities that often remain on the sidelines of the main social (as well as peace) course, we chose Sarajevo because of the symbolic meaning that this city has in a sad and brutal story about the wars of the nineties. We are aware that Sarajevo doesn't mean just another city whose war destiny was extremely hard, but it is also one of the symbols of victims, war and war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That's why we decided to try to organise such an activity in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The preparation of the forum clearly indicated that it would not be easy to "push through" something like this in Sarajevo, primarily because of the voices of those who opposed to the idea. However, what helped us a lot in pursuing the whole thing was the support from different media, institutions, veterans' associations, etc.

Therefore, we were very tense and we waited for the event with great expectations.

Participants of the forum were: Marko Martinić (Split, Croatia), Amer Delić (Zavidovići, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Vojo Vuković (Nevesinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Nermin Karačić (Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Alma Mašić was the moderator of the forum.

The crowd of people of different age and identities filled the main auditorium (ex-combatants, representatives of the Association of the Families of Missing and Dead, activists, etc. – both young and elderly people most of whom experienced war personally and who now have different views of the past and the future).

It was noticeable that there were very few journalists and reporters present. There must have been many reasons for that – disinterest, overload or lack of support for this kind of activity that may shake things up regarding the stereotypes according to which everything is clear about the war, and there is nothing to talk about.

The forum was held in quite a tense and heavy atmosphere, marked on one hand with difficult war experiences of the participants and the audience, and not very friendly messages from a small number of visitors who addressed speakers with provocations and insults, thus having managed to "grab" almost all the time that was planned for questions from the audience. Due to the high tension, some of the participants' stories remained indefinite and a bit unclear, but what was still clear was the refusal to justify crimes and violence committed by "my people", as well as readiness to call things their real names, without beating around the bush or avoiding. Regardless of those aggravating circumstances, the impressions remain that most of those present at the event were ready to hear stories of the speakers and

to recognize their honesty and deep personal motivation for this type of work. Unfortunately, the majority of visitors of the forum didn't manage to find a way to clearly express their opinion and confront it with the attitudes and comments that were delivered by the minority of people in the audience.

Many people stayed in the auditorium after the forum, to talk to the participants and the organisers. They had different reactions and comments, but what they all had in common was that they were shaken and upset. That tells us that this kind of discussion is very painful, but also very much needed in our community.

There weren't that many questions from the audience. There was more a need to give comments and tell at least a small part of personal experience and thoughts about those themes.

Some of the questions were the following: *What were your real motives to go to war? Did anyone make you do it? What was in your opinion the nature of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Do you suffer any kind of pressure from your environment because of what you do and how do you deal with it? Vojo, where were you on the frontlines, what did you defend and how much all this cost? Would you go to Potočare Memorial Centre and pay your respect to the victims from Srebrenica?*

# "4 VIEWS" FORUM

## from my point of view

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**Nermin DKARAČIĆ**  
LOCAL PARTNER IN SARAJEVO

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Why is it important for me to have the forum "4 Views" in my town, is a question I have been thinking about a lot but without a real answer and I'm afraid I might answer it only partially. I had a double role in the forum, one of a participant of many forums with the same subject in different towns in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other role of a local partner in organisation of the forum in Sarajevo, which was held on December 11, 2004.

Every town in which the forum had taken place, had its own story, starting from the context of the town, to the auditorium where the forum was held and the people who came to it, how many of them were present and how media covered it, to the content of the actual discussion which brought some new details.

With respect to that, I had some expectations about Sarajevo, city in which different civilisations have been intertwined together for centuries, city that have been carrying the idea of living together and tolerance among people of different religious, ethnic, cultural and other identities, that have passed many test in its long history and which is now at the beginning of a new century, again on the hardest tests of all, as it seems to me.

The greatness, beauty and strength (of this city) lie exactly in its diversity and I think it can only exist as being such. And who ever try to take that away will not succeed.

During the past war, some wanted to take it using their force and weapons, while today in some kind of "peace" others think it belongs to them. That is why I think that the forum is a place where a message will be send out via Sarajevo, to everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina and further. The message is about freedom that should be usurped and endangered and about diversities that must be cherished and protected.

I cannot leave out the fact that some people wanted to have an exclusive right to the truth, and that is: there are no any other victims but theirs, and there are no crimes but those of others.

That is the story that comes from

some political circles and from religious community, which is why it gains importance, but, in my opinion, stories like that haven't got a future in this region. Therefore, no matter how difficult all this is for me, I am glad about the fact that as a participant of this event and a local partner, I am one of those who support the story about true multi-ethnicity, living together, tolerance and everything else that foster true

human values, where our future lies. I know and believe that justice, truth and good will prevail, even though those who deny it will be sorry because of that.

Finally, I'd like to mention CNAteam as a true advocate and carrier of such values and that it was an honour for me to be their local partner and help them in a project like this.

*Nermin Karačić*





# IMPRESSIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE



***After every forum, visitors had an opportunity to write down their impressions about the forum and put them in the «guest box». Here are just some of the impressions we got.***

***Your impressions from the forum (what did you like and didn't like)?***

Positive

I liked the seriousness of people, former combatants, if that was really their attitude. I think we finally must look at people as themselves, and not just Croats, Serbs and Muslims.

The forum was well organised. I'm glad all those young people have negative conceptions about the events of war.

Forum was OK.

Everything was OK.

I am happy that there are people who have started to use their own head and to build a better life for themselves on their own. I greet all of you from the bottom of my heart. Straight A (mark).

These are very good and useful project for enlightening and directing young people in a good and useful way.

They have been very striking in a positive way, and I hope they will reduce many prejudices that

resulted from everything that was going on.

I like all of it.

I have to hand it to all four of you!

Forum was very well planned and implemented. I liked it that participants were combatants who belonged to different nations and came from different parts of former Yugoslavia, and that they told us their opinions how to reach sustainable peace. I didn't like it that no one from Croatian Defence Council forces took part in the forum.

I liked the participants and their courage, to stand in front of the audience and talk about things they did, meant really a great courage. Forum is A+.

There should be a deeper discussion about morality.

You're great. There you go.

People are honest, self-critical, and powerless.

I liked the atmosphere in this auditorium. Openness and strong determination to tell and discuss everything that has been covered up in this region affected by war. Condemnation of war criminals and acceptance of responsibility and a view of the future.

I liked it that you reject hate speech.

I only wanted to congratulate to people who managed to open up, opposite from the influence of their own communities and give this problem a

start, and especially to young people who told their war stories. I think that this is a very good method for some people to hear the truth and get rid of their prejudices.

It's good that there were a lot of people.

I liked it that people were courageous and determined to discuss this subject, I just want to know what is in the background, is it some personal interest?

I liked it that people were courageous to talk about everything they survived and experienced.

Extreme courage, very simple language, honesty.

It is good that everyone is free to say their own opinion, and how honest is that ... We've heard all this so many times – what's next?

Forum is totally necessary because of our society in general, and for the future generations.

Courage of persons to talk about some truth.

Many, many rivers will go by, before people get smart and realize that the idea of life together in this region is inevitable! The only problem is that people see everything in black and white, there's nothing in the middle, no compromise! I think it would be positive to hear experiences from elsewhere!

Moderation was bad.

I like honest answers.

A lot of hate and a lack of tolerance! Is there a place for me in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

**How much are ideas like these useful for your community?**

The beginning is tough; it would be useful to have more of them.

They are very useful for every community, especially ours. There are still narrow-minded people, who are inhibited by prejudices, who would, in my opinion, make the same mistake again. Some people didn't learn anything from the war.

There should be organised as many of them as possible.

They are useful!

Very much.

Because of the eventual reduction of prejudices that are, unfortunately still wide spread here.

Very useful.

For me, very much, for the others I don't know, because there's a certain number of narrow-minded people who do not recognize anything that is beyond their ability of comprehension.

Excellent, they are very useful.

Very, very, very useful, because this is one of the ways to reach sustainable peace.

There should be more forums like this in our community which is the same like it was in the war, even though it's been 10 years from it.

They can help really well in education of a spirit...

Useful in the true sense, if only Croatian people would gather. Unfortunately, there were only two Croats present here tonight.

I think they are very useful, but for a wider public.

I think they are useful and very important for every community, because without discussions like these and stuff like these we cannot expect that things will be solved and we move towards a better world.

Excellent.

They are very useful for us, because our town is divided into two parts. But I am sorry that there weren't more young people present to hear the stories that weren't delivered by people who are charged with nationalism (in a negative sense) and to hear the truth.

Not just for ours, but for anyone else's.

They would be good if participants were those who created the war, and not those innocent.

The situation in town is still very tense (schools are divided). It would be good to have this forum just for the students of «MSŠ G. Vakuf» and «SŠ Uskoplje» high schools, and that most of the audience were Croats, because there were just two Croats here tonight.

Extremely, but my community is stiff for this and other similar efforts. Nevertheless, we are encouraged (by this and other similar forums) to slowly work on our personal development and others' within our small circles.

Not much, until we accept responsibility for all that happened. Ideas were not displayed here.

Very much, there is almost no other way that can help all in such a good bay.

It would be very influential in my community.

A lot, because it promotes tolerance and the idea of living together.

It is very important to see people who are ready to deal with themselves and to take over responsibility for their actions; it reminds me of a long lost concept/characteristic HONOR.

All these and other similar initiatives should be supported, so we can create normal life for all of us.

Plenty, but the environment doesn't see it!

**Comments, suggestions, questions for the organisers, participants...**

Work also with individuals in certain groups.

Perhaps they should organise these forums more often, with some additions to it and more participants.

There should be as much of them.

As much of those forums as possible should be held in these small communities. Greeting and support to all of us.

A lot of support and just go on like this. We are all eager to hear voices of young, uncorrupted and normal people.

All the best!

It is very risky to do all this, Bosniaks are in favour of cooperation, Croats from Uskoplje will not cooperate and they don't dare to.

What do you think what use will there be from this forum of yours?

How do people from Nevesinje experience Bosnia and Herzegovina, as if it was their fatherland or as property that should have been united with Serbia?

What's the attitude of people in Split province towards non-Croatians and non-Catholics?

Congratulations to the organisers and participants. I wish you lots of luck and success.

You are great, be persistent.

Especially congratulations to the girl who answered honestly about the indolence of members of Croatian Defence Council.

Go right ahead...

I suggest a message as a final part of the forum. For example each participant should send an (honest) message to young people, so that they could take over their role in the future (I mean a role of peace activists) and get up courage to resist to the pressures from their community.

In the future, get down to the grass-root level.

You must look in every community for one more combatant from the armies that were in the war.

You live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, you have a Bosnian passport, and how is it that you see yourself as a Bosniak, after all you have been through? Thank you very much.

Thank You. Tough, painful, needed. Needed in large quantities. Completely new, special experience. I'm overwhelmed with admiration.

All of us Bosniaks and Herzegovinians should be ashamed because we allowed all of this to happen. And we are so «clever» that it seems that after all, we follow the same path and think the same way. Srebrenica was mentioned – all right. It is known what happened there. But, was anyone else killed except for people from Eastern Bosnia?! Where are the representatives of those victims?

Messages to the young people!!!

Organisation of the same kind in the Republic of Croatia.

Keep going! (message in English)

Similar forums should be organised with other categories of people who were in any way used (really used) in the war: mothers / women, girls, disabled, detainees. My congratulations and respect.

Just keep it up, you have my full support.

Perhaps you should include civilians who were the victims of war in your presentation!

## ABOUT MEDIA SUPPORT

In this year's round of public forums, we've had significant support of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, without whom it would be impossible to implement this idea.

The forum was announced in several media, and we were also invited to appear as guests in several radio and TV programmes, where we had plenty of time to introduce the whole idea of forums and also to talk about dealing with the past and peace building.

We would especially like to underline appearances in the following shows: "Without Anaesthesia" on BHTV 1, 50-minute report from the forum in Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje on TV KISS from Kiseljak and the appearances in radio shows on Student eFM radio from Sarajevo, Radio 202 from Sarajevo, Radio Bugojno and "Pegaz" Radio from Trebinje.

We especially want to thank to the people from Media centre from Sarajevo, who supported us in so many ways.

### We thank the following media:

"Pegaz" Radio - Trebinje,  
"Nevesinje" Radio,  
RTRS,  
BHTV 1,  
TV KISS - Kiseljeak,  
RTV Bugojno,  
Student eFM Radio—  
Sarajevo, Radio 202 —  
Sarajevo,  
RTV of Federation of  
Bosnia and Herzegovina,  
NTV Hayat,  
TV Sarajevo,  
"Oslobođenje" Daily.

# EX COMBATANTS in Peace Building



Ever since the end of armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the process of establishing relations between belligerent sides was burdened with the experiences of violence and suffering of several million children, women and men – those who had survived. As a consequence of that, there are deep division and distrust. Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is especially complex with respect to the issue of dealing with the war past, because it revolves around the relations between nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as relations with the neighbouring countries Serbia and Montenegro and Croatia which were the direct protagonists of the war and parties that signed the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and former Yugoslavia went through the different phases, from cease fire, opening borders, establishing cooperation etc., all the way to the process of constitution of institutions that should enable functioning of the democratic state systems.

One of the more important segments of

peace building is dealing with the past, i. e. critical re-examination of the things that had happened, with respect to the war itself, and to its causes and consequences. In that context, processing war crimes is also an important factor, primarily because of the aspiration towards justice as a universal human value, as well as because of recognition and reduction of mechanisms that contribute to the violence and injustice. What is even more important is to condemn all kinds of war crimes committed in “our” name, by the citizens and the public opinion. Unfortunately, with respect to that in our communities, we are still not far from silent public support or even solidarity with the criminals and structures that committed and created those crimes and visions of war.

In the period between 1991 and 1995, over 500.000 people from the region of former Yugoslavia were members of dozens of military formations that participated in warfare in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In various ways, with different motives and ideas, those people were an active part of the war

tragedy which remained to be the most important distinction of social and personal relationships between individuals, nations and states, that live or that once lived in this region. Today, most of these people are left to their own devices, being a subject of attempts of manipulation by the nationalistic corridors of power who want them to adopt radical ideas and political solutions. At the same time, because of their war past, the “other” side suspects they are carriers of nationalistic and pro-war options, regardless of their political views.

However, from the aspect of peace building, former combatants represent a significant potential, because many of them need to give their contribution to the building of a more just society and they feel responsible for everything that happened and that is still happening in our communities. Their war past is the temptation both for them and their societies, because that experience may prove to be a difficult obstacle in relations with people from the “enemy” side, while at the same time offers an immediate

Their public support of the values such as empathy and solidarity with the victims of violence and discrimination, aspiration

Besides, they are publicly accused that behind their peace engagement are material interests, which is humiliating for people who publicly speak about the painful issues and expose themselves to public interrogation of their identities and emotions, while they additionally do a lot more “invisible” things in the field of peace building.

Story about the responsibility for war does not end in legal and state institutions. It concerns all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, it means courage, honesty, mutual solidarity and empathy and it is a precondition for true reconciliation amongst ordinary people. Only then apologies, forgiveness and remorse will gain some importance, and they will stop being subjects of political demagoguery.

# ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR NONVIOLENT ACTION

## Basics

Centre for Nonviolent Action Sarajevo - Belgrade is a peace group that works in the entire region of former Yugoslavia (except Slovenia).

Core of CNA is made of eight people, peace activists from different towns, parts and states of our region - Adnan Hasanbegović from Sarajevo, Nedžad Horozović from Doboj, Helena Rill from Sombor, Ivana Franović from Belgrade, Milan Colić Humljan from Babušnica, Sanja Deanković from Split, Tamara Šmidling from Belgrade, Nenad Vukosavljević from Belgrade. Judging from our names, those who want to may search and count members of certain nations from this region, but nevertheless we like to put our emphasis on readiness for joint cooperation and mutual solidarity in which our diversities help us and enrich our work.

Hence, it is a local initiative, whose carriers sure well care how our societies are going to look like in the future and what are the values they will be set upon.

Basic value that we strive for is nonviolence. We are devoted to it through everything we do – peace education, public forums, production of documentaries, public appearances, street actions etc.

An finally, besides the eight people above mentioned, an important segment of CNA is made of many individuals, scattered all over our region, (from Tetovo, Macedonia, to Karlovac, Croatia, from Subotica, Vojvodina to Nevesinje, Bosnia and Herzegovina) together with whom we work, revolve, change and raise our voice against violence and injustice.

## Nonviolence, what was that?

Simply speaking, nonviolence is for us a way

of living and working that excludes accepting and doing injustice.

It is also acting against injustice, violence and discrimination, regardless of who are their protagonists.

It is also, readiness to equally condemn injustice committed against «us», as well as the one that is committed (both intentionally and unintentionally) by the members of our (ethnic, religious, local) group.

Finally, nonviolence means constant confrontation with various levels of violence in society, but also permanent re-examination of one's own actions and opinions.

*Far from any ideology or escape into passivity, nonviolence is active and creative, and it draws the roots from faith, experiences of injustice and solidarity with those subjected to injustice.*

## What Does CNA Do?

**We organise peace education programmes.**

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, in their communities, attend these, as we call them, training events in nonviolent conflict transformation. Except for participants who are involved in nongovernmental organisation, they are attended by journalists, teachers, activists of political parties, former combatants etc.

Whenever people from Balkan countries and regions 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,

instead of sweeping them under the carpet thus finding some new ways to treat all our differences and similarities. 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 are working in the field of dealing with the past.**

Because we don't want «to forget the past and turn to the future». We want to know about the past, to «master» it constructively, instead of being smothered by it and being held hostages by it for many more years and decades. It's only then that the future will make since.

That's why we organised 14 public forums, had many media appearances and tried to make our public message of peace as clear and visible as possible.

That's why we will continue with our engagement in this area through production of documentaries focused on simple, human stories, and their questions, fears and dilemmas.

Experience of having people with different ethnic and religious identity, in Kosovo, in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro who can understand and support each other and recognise the mutual interest in peace building, which we have been experiencing very often in our work during the past years, gives us strength and faith to persist in our work. Despite everything that happened and that should not be forgotten but re-examined, our future is, if not in any other way, than at least geographically, tightly connected.



Photos: Nedžad HOROZOVIĆ, Nenad VUKOSAVLJEVIĆ i Tamara ŠMIDLING, Layout and cover design: Ivana FRANOVIĆ



## WE WISH TO THANK

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