

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



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**SPEAKERS ON THE PUBLIC FORUMS
WERE PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN WARS
IN THE REGION OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA**

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About the public forums, the idea and the need

Should we talk about the war?

'Whatever happened it's all water under the bridge! It's everyone's fault. The war is evil. We should be trying to forget all that as soon as possible. We need to move on.'

These and similar messages constitute the basis of the answers we receive to the above question, no matter in which part of our post-war regions we ask it. People find it very difficult to remember the events of the war that marked our near past after all the horrors that thundered through these regions.

'What's important is that it'd passed, and that it never ever happens again to anybody...' - somebody said. But has it really passed? Peace doesn't begin when the shooting stops. Peace is not a condition that can be brought about by the peace keeping troops ('troops' how peace related that sounds!). Peace is a condition that needs to be built daily and systematically. Safety is not a condition in which fully armed soldiers guarding a border (be it a state, an enclave or a single house) guarantee, with the quality of their firearms, that your neighbour won't kill you. Safety is when you achieve the sense of trust, understanding and good communication with those 'on the other side'. When you're not afraid of them because you know who they are, what matters to them, what they believe in, what they like, what they miss, what their fears are...

Who's to blame?

The guilt belongs to those committing crimes and those ordering them. Responsibility for what happened falls upon all of

us, in whose name the wars had been lead and provoked. We carry our responsibility because we have either supported creating the platform for the war or because we had either done little or nothing to prevent it.

What's to guarantee that the war won't happen again? A war is not a necessity and an unfortunate constellation of political circumstances, as it is often represented. It is not 'unwanted, but only choice' that has to be made at a given moment. A multitude of things precedes a war, its escalation takes place gradually and for a very long time. Lot of the things that we hear, see, pass on leads to the escalation of fear, pressure, hatred and creating prejudices about those 'from the other side'. Three forums that took place in Serbia (including Vojvodina) in October and November are our attempt to affirm our wish and the need we have recognised to contribute to creating the room to start talking about the near past of the war and the events following it. The title of the forums 'FOUR VIEWS from the past HOW I FOUND MYSELF IN WAR? to the future HOW TO REACH SUSTAINABLE PEACE?' speaks for itself, bearing in mind that four of the former participants in the wars at the territory of former Yugoslavia spoke at each panel. The participants were not representatives speaking on behalf of the entire nations or states, but individuals with all identities they carry with them and that matter to them (religious, national, political or any other).

Why former participants of the war?

The specificity of this process is in the fact that its direct exponents and

protagonists are former soldiers, participants of the wars taking place in the region of former Yugoslavia during the nineties, people who seldom get a *public space* in which they can speak of their wartime experiences and motivations, but also about their views on the future of our states and societies and the hindrances and needs on the road to the lasting peace in the region. This is a very numerous social group that is most frequently 'pushed' to the position of 'those who might talk about the war, but never about peace'. Our intention is to step out of this stereotypical image and create an activity within which the former warriors will be able to recognise their own peace making capacities, to reconsider their personal responsibility, but also to call upon a serious and wide ranging consideration of social and collective responsibility for the past and the future. We have received a very significant support with organising this year's panels in Serbia from the Association of the Warriors of the Nineties War of Serbia, one of the most numerous and expansive associations of warriors in Serbia. Their readiness to publicly support the process that's taking place speaks a lot about the Association's standpoint, the Association in the seat of which we found ourselves several times, having constructive talks in which it wasn't difficult to recognise some of the mutual values significant for building the lasting peace. At this moment, we have also seen it as great courage on the part of people representing the Association. 'Patriotism is peacebuilding', -someone said...

We wish to give a full social legitimacy to 'ordinary' people prepared to talk about their war experiences, prepared to reconsider them. People we meet in the streets everyday, people who are 'one of us' and who, as such, have had their own reasons and their (non)motivations that made them take part in the war and carry weapons, whether they volunteered or were drafted. The readiness of some of them to join us, to travel with us and publicly display their feelings, thoughts, difficulties, fears, hopes and wishes, motivates and supports us further in our work on this very demanding programme. Their critical insights into the environments they come from and their analysis of their own responsibility for the past and the future, allow room for everyone to examine their own responsibility for what had been happening, no matter if someone was holding a gun or watching television at a given moment.

Our goal is not to search for culprits and crimes in this process. Let the courts deal with it, as is their job to do. We also don't wish to state any 'great truths' because we consider the truth to be a highly subjective category. Every one of the sincere stories of these people is the truth in itself (even if it's completely different from someone else's story) and makes for a small part of a large mosaic that could be completed only

if all of us were to tell our own 'truths', views and experiences. The story conceived thus has the objective to create a tiny crack: in the belief that these issues should be dealt with solely by a small number of intellectuals; in the belief that every conversation on the subject of recent wars inevitably defines one side (that is, one nation) as an exclusive culprit and thereby guarantees the existence of an exclusive victim; in the belief that everything that was happening is best forgotten....

When will we be able to say that we live in peace and that we 'live the peace'?

When we find ourselves in the situation in which people of different identities live freely with each other if they so wish, or by each other's side without endangering each other. Peace can hardly be a goal we reach at one point and then say 'alright, that's it, now I can return to my slumber'. It should be a process in which we constantly struggle to make the society we live in violence free, devoid of threats, intolerance, discrimination, and instead to strive for the principles of human solidarity, to respect ourselves and others, to choose and control those who are in charge of taking care of public interests, to reconsider ourselves and everyone around us. That's why we think that we're not 'living the peace' right now. That's

The three forums 'FOUR VIEWS-from the past HOW HAVE I COME TO BE IN THE WAR?' to the future HOW TO REACH A LASTING PEACE?' are a continuation of the process taking place for over a year. The panels were held in Vlasotince (October 24), Novi Sad (October 28) and Kraljevo (November 11 2003). The participants were: Adnan Hasanbegovic and Nermin Karacic from Sarajevo, Gordan Bodog, Drago Franciskovic and Kemal Bukvic from Zagreb and Novica Kostic from Vlasotince. Last summer, the panels of the same title were held in Indjija, Nis, Novi Pazar and Kragujevac, and in March this year in Zenica and Banja Luka (BH). In December, the process will continue in Bijelo Polje (November 29) in the Municipality Council Hall) and Podgorica (December 2 in KIC 'Budo Tomovic' Banja). Several more panels were planned to take place in Bosnia and Hercegovina next year.

why peace takes courage far greater than the one in the war and time that's far longer than the time of war.



Views of the participants of the panels



ADNAN HASANBEGOVIĆ

Born in 1973 in Sarajevo. During the war in BH, he was a member of BH Army. Currently a peace activist in the Centre for Nonviolent Action.

■ **Where were you at the beginning of the war? What kind of feelings were you having, what were you thinking about back then?**

I used to live a youthful life, as most people my age, and I wasn't aware that I'd soon end up in the war.

The multi-party elections take place and national parties win, which leads to a change in the atmosphere. I remember the situation getting more complex, I felt something was wrong, the relations are changing. The shootings begin in Croatia by then. We in Bosnia, or rather, myself, had the feeling it couldn't happen there, because we were different, we loved each other... I didn't want to accept that a war could take place here. We used to hang out a lot, talk about those things, I remember. And then, through that kind of talks an element of 'we, us, them' started showing up, or rather 'we, Bosniaks', 'you Serbs' and vice versa. *What do you want?* It all started rather abruptly. That was new to me, although we often joked on the subject.

The talks about secession began, and I was afraid of what all that might cause. But, simply put, nobody asked you any questions, the process developed really fast. If you followed the media, you could see it all lead to a sort of an escalation. Was there any willingness in that Yugoslavia to prevent all that in any way? So the process started, there were barricades, an increase of fear among people, divisions in different parts of Sarajevo, because it was well known which part might be Serbian, mixed or Bosniak, and the surrounding villages too. The keeping guards begins, the shootings begin, the conflict is transferred from Croatia to certain villages. I still had some hope at that time.

I remember waking up on April 5 to the

rattle of guns across the city and I remember that primeval fear I felt, being aware of what it meant. When you hear the grunts of hundreds of machine guns all around you, and an occasional detonation, you know the joke is over. The first grenade shootings by Serbian army from the positions around the city. The grenades fall around my building, I watch from my window, the mortars rattle. I was pretty terrified, I was there with my mother and some relatives who had escaped from some of the more critical parts of the town where the more serious fighting was already going on came to ours'.

At the beginning, I was in a shelter, in the hallways in which the neighbours of different nationalities socialised. We didn't really manage well, these central, urban areas... There were six Serbian families in my building, five Bosniak ones, three Croatian ones and we were all in the same basket, terrified. And all around us, different groups are being formed, the cores of the armies to be fighting for the following four years. We kept guards in the hallways, which was ridiculous, I don't know who we were trying to protect ourselves from, to watch for someone coming in the night. And that fear was dominant. So... the war begins, I'm drafted. I hadn't been to the army before, but apparently I was old enough, nineteen, to be sent to the war. I received a drafting notice from the Territorial Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I consulted my father about what to do, and he said to go and report, because I was young, they wouldn't be sending me to the war. So I decided to report. By that time, a general chaos had begun in Sarajevo, ferocious mortar fire, the city was surrounded. Many people had already left, buses full of children... a great number of my friends left town, went abroad, and we who remained tried to survive. We, as a family, decided to stay. I reported to the army, I came to some barracks and they made me a cook, as in 'you're still a kid, you're not going to the front just yet'. However, since the war kept escalating, I was simply sent to the front'. That's where this soldier-with-a-gun story of mine begins, field, shootings...

■ **How do you view your participation in the war and generally, your motivation to sit and talk to people who took part in the war?**

I think a great deal about the war. I feel this to be a period that transformed both me and my life. I feel that I need this kind of talk. I remember going to Pale with some friends in 96-97 to meet up with some people who were in Serbian army, which was important to me, for us to meet up, talk, hear each other out, to see what had happened. All that has an emotional impact on me. These memories... I feel sorry for all the people who were killed, who

were afraid, refugees from central Bosnia who were coming, in wounds, Serbs in Sarajevo who suffered a certain amount of violence, who were scared. All sorts of things were happening. I only feel how important it is for me to talk about it to people today, how important I feel it is for it to not be a taboo in my society and that we can talk about it. Especially since I've become a father myself, I'm watching my Adna grow and I wonder what it would have looked like to spend those days when it was extremely dangerous in Sarajevo with her by my side... I simply don't know what I would have done. This is something that has a great impact on me today and motivates me. Not just motivates, I see it as the purpose of life. I can't imagine doing something else right now and suppress all this... For me, it's a normal condition to socialise with people from the other side, I feel better since I have started travelling through Serbia, Republic Srpska, to meet people. It gives me the inner peace. On the other hand, I do feel all of my responsibility, me as an individual. And I find it very important to condemn crimes, unreservedly. I wouldn't like to catch myself supporting someone or something that has, or does, perform violence and crimes, something that was killing and banishing people. It's important for me to speak of it, about facing the past. This is an essential part of peacebuilding in these regions. It's important for us, formerly soldiers, to talk and feel solidarity.

■ **How do you perceive peace and what it takes for it?**

What matters to me is the aspect of own responsibility and look into oneself, where am I in all that. It's important for me to condemn those Bosniak crimes which had happened, to speak openly about it with people from the other side, and how I feel really bad about it. This personal responsibility is important to me, not only for what had transpired during the war, but also in the everyday life, that I can be a support to my neighbours regardless of their nationality, to confront any and all violence and discrimination against them in any way I know how. I feel a great need to help people who were through horrible things and who even now suffer from various kinds of discrimination in my country, I want to help them in any way, to change this situation. It's important for me to carry the responsibility that I have, it matters to me that we talk about the prejudices dividing us, because people fear each other, to help remove the masks off of the 'enemies', to establish human relations that are possible. To be able to and to want to understand each other, hear each other, respect each other, to work on it, not to hate certain groups of people solely for being something else.



NOVICA KOSTIĆ

Born in the village of Dobrovis, 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.



DRAGO FRANČIŠKOVIĆ

Born November 29 1932 in the village of Protulipa, near Karlovac, Republic Croatia. He was an active officer of YNA, and then the officer of Croatian Army. Retired in 93. Lives in Zagreb.

■ **Drago, how did you come to be in the war?**

As an active soldier, an officer, I could not have imagined us waging war between ourselves, colleagues, us who have been from all regions of Yugoslavia. It wasn't conceivable, that the time would come in which we would have to point our arms at each other. The more so that the former YNA was a multinational army and intended to suppress the external aggression, not the one within the country.

I couldn't imagine I'd be in the war. Unfortunately, it happened. Bit by bit, that's how it goes, one gets brainwashed, you think you're doing the right thing, not just me, all of us, however we haven't done the right thing. It all depends on the man, what he's like, what he is inclined to do, whether you do some things conscientiously and in the spirit of the law, or whether you just break away from it and do dishonourable things.

■ **What are your views on your participation in the war and on the war in general?**

Unfortunately, there was no turning back, I entered the war, not of my own free will but because of the circumstances I found myself in. I see it as a severe trial and

tragedy for all of us, especially people who participated in that war. Because, we have achieved virtually nothing with this war, we are all at a loss. That's why I'm glad to see many young people here today, they are the future, and I wish for them, our children, never to experience such horrors, I wish for the war never to happen in these regions again. And that's only possible if we all get involved in it, especially we who have been through the war. Even though we were on the opposite sides, we are friends today and we can propagate and attempt to enlighten people

through various association, to help them not be deceived and to prevent war from ever happening again.

■ **How do you see peace in these regions and what does it take to make it happen?**

It takes a lot of hard work to achieve peace. In that respect, I think that our duty, especially us that have participated in the wars, is to try and compensate in a way, to contribute to lasting peace. As I said, I never imagined a war would happen and that I would take part in it. I might've made a career out of the war, but I have tried to act normally and I had to pay the price for

it and I don't regret it. That's why I was retired in 93, as 'unsuitable'.

The war has, apart from enormous number of victims, destruction and loss, produced a horrible hatred. This hatred is still a danger to us all. I think that in this sense we are trying to call people to their senses, to realise the seriousness of it, because the ghosts, the hounds of war, still exist today and they're not being still. Let's try and prevent it from happening ever again in these regions.



NERMIN KARAČIĆ

Born in 1970 in Sarajevo. During the war in BH, a member of BH Army and then a member of MUP special forces. Currently works in catering.

■ **How did you come to be in the war? What was it like, what were you thinking about?**

How did I come to the war? The war found me at my own place, my very doorstep. It is well known that the nationalist parties in BH won the elections, and one could feel this certain warlike atmosphere even prior to the war itself. However, I was completely unaware of this atmosphere, because I was nineteen, and you know what it's like when someone's that age, my head was filled with completely different sorts of things, I haven't dealt with serious affairs at all. When the warfare started in eastern Bosnia, Visegrad, Drina, Foca, Bijeljina, I was sitting with my mates at home and we were watching TV and saying 'Check out this idiocy, no way can it happen to us in Sarajevo.' I couldn't imagine war in Sarajevo, who would be on one side and who would be on the other? However, the grenades soon started falling on Sarajevo. Even then I thought someone will probably sit down, agree on things, all this will settle, it will pass quite soon. However, that's not really how it's happened. I soon became aware that

Sarajevo was completely surrounded and that there was no way for anybody to come or leave. The more aware I was getting of what was going on, the harder it struck me. I couldn't chose whether I was going to take the gun or not, I considered it my duty and obligation at that moment, so that's what I did. In May 1992 I was wounded for the first time. I was present at almost all the frontlines in Sarajevo. In December 92, when a part of the town was conquered, I was wounded again, this time quite severely. Sometime in 94 I was looking in all possible ways to drop the arms and to be released from the army. And I succeeded, but it only lasted briefly, a couple of months, maybe, for the simple reason that I could no longer lead a 'civilian's' life, I couldn't sit at home and wait for humanitarian aid or something, wake up at 2 or 3 am and go queue for water, some containers in my arms, and then carry the water around. I felt a lot worse doing that than carrying arms. I have spent the whole war in the surrounded city, and left it for the first time in August 1995.

■ **Nermin, how do you look upon your participation in the war from this perspective, and what lead you to sit here today with people who were all fighting on different sides?**

Like I said, I didn't have much of a choice, however, I'm really angry quite often, and I don't have the answers about who I should be angry with. I'm angry for having lost a better part of my youth. It's a nonsense. God forbid it should ever happen to anyone. I have lost many friends in the war. It's not easy for me today to meet mothers of my friends and say hello to them. Whenever I meet them, they embrace me, start crying, they see their own child in me. I used to play football, I trained, I was talented, supposedly, I played for youth representation of BH, I was about to sign my first professional contract. However, once I was wounded, it all crashed, all my boyish dreams.

I think that everything that happened in these regions brought no good to anybody, with the exception of some war

profiteers. I take part in this because I think this is a good thing that can contribute to a better and a more secure future. I believe that we who took part in the conflicts directly know best about the kind of evil this is and that we should discuss it openly and see where the responsibility of us all lies for that evil that has befallen us.

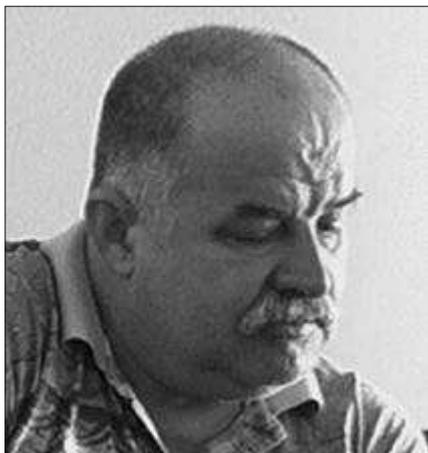
■ **Where to go from here?**

I see peace as a thing we have in common. I think it's a long and difficult process, we need to work on it a lot. I don't think we need to bury things, it wasn't pies we were throwing at each other, it was mortar shells.

I find it important to tell myself where my responsibility lies. Some time ago I thought I had no responsibility in the war, I was just sitting at home and someone started shooting mortars at me, however, when I looked a bit deeper into myself, I realised I had very much responsibility. How many people may have been terrified of me at any given moment, Serbs or Croats, and taken another route thinking they're in danger? I haven't been aware of that back then. I see my responsibility in how much people living around me get the chance to express their identities, by which I mean primarily national identities. My national identity is very important to me, but this identity cannot damage any other nationality.

Essentially, it's a very long and difficult process. One needs to talk openly and one needs to shatter the prejudices. My coming here, to Serbia, believe me, what I can do to contribute to peacebuilding, it's enough for me to be able to go back to Sarajevo, just to tell how I felt in Serbia is enough for me, how people here welcomed me, what I was talking about. And believe me, I also have no fear of telling these things.

It's important to allow each other room, to look for this room in which we can freely express our opinion.



KEMAL BUKVIĆ

Born in 1954 in Zenica, lived in Zagreb for the last 30 years, but, as he says, 'deep in his soul he's from Doboj'. He was a member of Croatian Defence Council and BH Army. Today, an active volunteer of the Association of Bosniak Defenders of the Homeland war, and Home-town Club Doboj in Zagreb.

■ **How did you come to be in the war?**

It was the time when my group was 'taking out' the soldiers from the barracks in Zagreb, releasing them, the time of what was probably my first encounter with the war that was close at hand.

I went to Doboj, talked to my brother's and my sister's families. However, even though the town was overflowing with army from all over the place, they scarcely believed that the devil might show up at their doorsteps. Still, we agreed on what was to be done if things start boiling. Either for them or for me. I knew things weren't going well. The tears simply welled, and I can tell you that I cried all the way back to Zagreb, cried with some pain, anger, who knows what.

After the very first night I'd slept in my own bed, we started hunting for snipers in the neighbourhood. The shots were coming from tall buildings, with the goal to frighten someone or to encourage oneself. And then the 'attacks' on the barracks followed. It all seemed like a game during the day, in the crowd, but at night, when you're left alone and have a look at your family asleep, it all appeared a lot more serious. Some friends from abroad invited me to come over 'until things settle', but I decided to stay. I knew it was going to be a mess, but it seemed natural to stay. I guess I wanted to get to know myself? The first organising of 'volunteers' began. The new great drama of the Balkans was about to begin. I kept losing hope in the YNA, primarily thanks to the media. It was a strange situation. All of our lives we have been taught how to defend ourselves from an aggressor attacking the borders of Yugoslavia. It wasn't easy to make a decision to take a

gun and participate in this, by all criteria, senseless and suicidal war that already thundered in Slovenia. People were carrying arms in public, buying and selling them. I sensed that many will make quite a business for themselves of the mess that followed, someone will use it to solve their own frustrations, some for political propaganda, many will lose things. I couldn't guess the extent of the bloody war that was to come out of it all.

■ **How do you view all this today? What's your motivation to take part in the peace process?**

During the war itself, and even today, I have had a mental image of Czech Republic and Slovakia. A dialogue. People sat down and agreed. We, in the ex YU regions, said we understood each other, we swore on brotherhood and unity. Lo and behold. And we let a bunch of our own and worldwide hooligans lead us to the pillory. There are no more peaceful mahalas. Children's laughter is gone. Ten years of our lives were stolen. And the politicians, from the time before and nowadays, they still lead their good lives, no one from their families was killed, they're not damaged financially. I think it's about time that civil society moved to our regions, about time it worked, about time for the humanitarian studies to take place, and to reduce everything to a dialogue. I have long ago realised that violence is all around us and that it's necessary to fight against it and against everyone who are its patrons. I'm happy if a day passes without remembering the war! I think it's the peaceful sleep at the end of the road that I'm waiting for!

I have always been an optimist, but the fact that I wasn't aware of growing up in an interim between two wars doesn't mean that I need to retire and wait for another war. I must, together with all people of good will, fight against fascism of today and of the future. Or fundamentalism, genocide and chauvinism, trampling over human rights and dignity, intolerance, dictatorships... We need to fight for real democracy, tolerance of each other (especially tolerance of the big ones for the small ones), for minority rights, freedom and peace.

There, among us, there must always be a dialogue, and we must admit there isn't enough of it. That there is more of everything else, of everything that caused the drama called ethnic cleansing, rapes, banishing, concentration camps to begin with. Name one country in the world today that's ethnically 'pure'! There aren't any.

I wish the four of us were peace heroes in the real sense of the word, that we weren't here to talk about what we defended and what had brought us to war in the first place, but to talk about four good deeds, four golden stars but it seems wishes are one thing.



GORDAN BODOG

Born in Zagreb in 1962. By education a history professor. Participant in the war in Croatia from 1991. From 1997 actively involved in the work of Anti-war Campaign of Croatia and becomes a peace activist.

■ **How did you come to be in the war? What was it like, what were you thinking about?**

In the nineties, I considered myself to be aware, educated, I followed all the events, I thought I'd be able to tell if a major disaster would occur or not. I thought, should armed conflicts happen in Croatia, they wouldn't last. In spring 91, the tension was certainly there, but I believed there could be no major conflict. During the Summer of 91, the situation was really getting ever more tense. I thought a lot about my role in all that. In June, I responded to the invitation of Ministry of Defence of Republic Croatia to come to Zagreb Fair where there were several hundred men who had served in the YNA and who were assembled to estimate whether these men were ready to become members of Croatian army if such a need arose. I agreed to that. I expected to be summoned to a military exercise after that, but no such summon arrived. In August 91, war in Croatia was full blown, from south of Croatia to eastern Slavonia. My acquaintances from Zagreb, the ones I used to play football as a kid, contacted me because they organised a volunteers' squad, fifty men, and asked me if I'd like to join them, and I agreed to that. Fifty of us left for the front in mid September, and the front was around 30 kilometres away from Zagreb. That's how I got to be in the war. I had served in the YNA in 80-81, but it hadn't made me much of a soldier, so that in September of 91 I wasn't much of a soldier either. So I practically jumped into the war during that hour and a half ride from Zagreb.

■ **How do you look upon it now? What is it that motivates you to sit with the people who fought on different sides and talk to them?**

I spent several years in the army and

tried to leave it. It took me personally about two or three years to start leading a normal life. Meeting people who've had experience in the war, lots of talks with them, made me think of what's happened to those people, what's happened to people they'd hurt, what's happened to people who were the victims of the war? Starting with 96-97, I've felt comfortable enough to contact organisations within the network of Anti War Campaign of Croatia that have been doing something in that area of activities.

I am aware that a certain strong and large burden of having been in that war I still carry with me and that I will carry it all my life in one way or another. So, I will take responsibility for my participation and also responsibility for my behaviour.

■ My motivation to take part in the forums stemmed from my need to continue talking about what has been going on in the war as well as in the pre-war and post-war periods, the talks I had with tens and hundreds of people in Croatia and the neighbouring countries. Through the process of the forums it is very much possible to create room for dialogue, to create a climate of mutual trust, to

encourage and invite people to make their responsibility for the present conscious, responsibility for the world in which an individual, a person, a personality, has their active place, the world in which everyone's personal contribution is clearly visible.

■ ***How do you see the lasting peace in these regions, and what does it take for such peace?***

Peace is a stable condition in which we can trust ourselves to be able to live and to be free of the possibility of the war happening again.

I think that the peace requires a contribution from an individual, a citizen, practically every day. Because the war is not produced solely from I don't know which political intrigues, and this or that intention here or abroad, but different things come from people themselves. I've grown to be aware of it. I wish people involved in education programmes also considered it, from schools to alternative education. Education is building a character. Thinking about a series of traditional values, which I'm not going to call bad, but we do tend to take them and pass them on without evaluating them,

without second thoughts about whether anything happened to them along the way and whether these traditional values bring some initiative to deal with 'others' nonviolently. I think that's where many possibilities lie and many things that need to have attention paid to and dealt with.

In a nutshell, we can look around ourselves every day, or look into ourselves, and we'll see that we can react in all sorts of different ways, even to people who are closest to us.

I think the war was not only a political situation, but the whole series of things we kept pushing under the carpet and had the 'it's things somebody else should think about, I'm just an ordinary man who's not responsible for them' kind of approach. However, when it turns out that those who should think about these things either think in a bad way or don't think about them at all, then we go 'we left them in charge of these things, so we got what we asked for'. I'd say that there is plenty of violence all around us. A realisation that what happens to others is also what happens to us is a very good starting point.



My view on the forums



Katarina Katanić

THE FORUMS MODERATOR

I ask sometime warriors from the regions of former Yugoslavia, the forums participants, the question 'How did you come to be in the war and what was it like for you'. I talk to them at the forums. And I often ask myself the same question and am never satisfied with the answer. I have thousands of sub-questions, and I often stumble upon the ones that my inner co-locutor doesn't find too pleasant. For instance, what were you doing on the day when the Srebrenica crimes were being committed, why is it that you only learned about them some years later, what have you done to prevent them, what have you done to prevent the war from starting, or to make it stop, who have you been supporting, who have you been condemning, why were you convincing yourself that the war was none of your business, who has your hatred, anger and bitterness gone to, what are you going to do with these feelings now, where are you going to store them today... And a crucial one: do you do everything in your power today to stop wars from happening again, or are you once more going with the flow of violence, discrimination, anger and hatred?

I listen to those brave men who speak publicly of their past, who seek roads to the future, who carry their internal wounds and don't put bitter herbs of everyday life to them, but instead they apply the balm of sincerity, respect and understanding for themselves and the others. I often find it very emotionally difficult to deal with what I hear at the forums: my eyes well

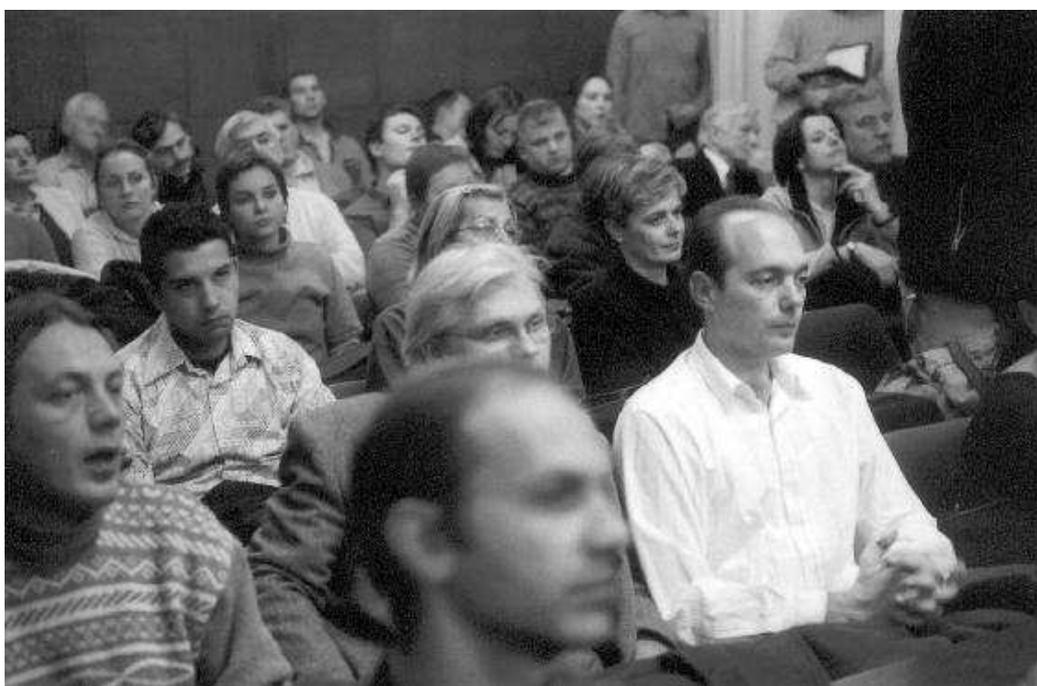
with tears when I hear Nermin speak of Sarajevo before and after the war, when Novica doesn't want to speak about the medal he's received for rescuing a young man from a burning tank, when Kemal testifies about his family, and about the conversations lead before the war... And while they're speaking, I always notice someone in the audience surreptitiously drying their eyes. And I do understand that no one asks, 'Who did it to us?', but the tears flow from our eyes because of the question, 'Why have we done this?'

From such stories and such tears, and the million questions streaming at the very forums, or after them, as we chat an have coffee, exchange information of the life on the other side, wherever the other side may be, that's where my motivation to take part in this process comes from. And I'm not angry when I meet people who don't want to understand me, who ask me what I am doing with those 'chetniks', 'ustashas' and 'balias'. When they ask me if it's 'brotherhood and unity' that I'm spreading, when they mockingly inform me that 'Tito died, you know', and conclude 'water under the bridge...' I'm not angry because what follows such remarks is a confession of their own participation in the war, of difficult situations, of children not recognising their fathers coming on leave, young men

lived in the war (the wars?), what we felt, and how we are today. At the forums, as a rule, we hear at least ten other stories from the audience, apart from the four stories of the participants, stories moving or hard in the same way... It takes a lot more work to hear millions of stories, but we're on our way, and it encourages me.

President of Serbia and Montenegro has recently apologised to peoples of Croatia and Bosnia for the crimes my people has committed. Even though I consider this act to be a brave one, I know it doesn't really speak of a step forward, as long as the sports clubs' supporters fight at the sports courts, as long as these matches are assigned a 'high risk' label, as long as my mother is anxious and apprehensive when I leave for 'former republics', as long as the fact that I was born and live in Serbia is quite sufficient for somebody to hate me and to have the need to clearly demonstrate the hatred.

I don't want to reconcile, make peace or point my finger to named or unnamed culprits, I don't want to accuse or advise, to speak of my morally 'pure' past and someone else's 'being seduced', I don't want to deny either mine, or my people's responsibility and to give one or a couple of persons' names and surnames. What matters to me is that we talk about what'd happened, with all the hard and painful



who died, parents who needed to be told, husbands who hadn't slept for nights on end, who'd woken up in a traumatised sweat.

Prior to the fallout of Yugoslavia, we used to number 22 million, as far as I remember. There are 22 million stories about how we fought the wars, how we

emotions, in order to prevent them from finding me again, as a member of one of the peoples from 'the bloody, hilly Balkans'. Because, I think that Balkans can be described with a thousand more beautiful adjectives, and I want to be a part of discovering them.

Public forum in Vlasotince

24.10.2003.

The public forum in Vlasotince was held in the auditorium of the Municipality of Vlasotince. The speakers were: Novica Kostic from Vlasotince, Nermin Karacic from Sarajevo, Kemal Bukvic from Zagreb and Gordan Bodog from Zagreb. We organised this forum in co-operation with the Association of Warriors of the 90s, Vlasotince. The organisation of the forum was also supported by the Municipality of Vlasotince and Youth Council of Vlasotince. The number of visitors surprised us, we have expected by far fewer people, but luckily, the hall could be expanded by opening the additional doors, so around 110 people were able to attend. The first part of the forum consisted of the stories of the participants of the wars – how they got to be in the war and their views on the lasting peace, while the second part was dedicated to the audience's questions and thoughts. We are listing some of the questions and reflections, but also the answers of the participants of the forum.

A question for those from other republics: Was there a division going on there to patriots and the other ones, a homogenisation, a division into traitors and the other ones?

Nermin: Sarajevo was a specific environment, many people had left the town, and I felt betrayed. I couldn't say what the politics was back then.

Gordan: The polarisation took place in Croatia in 91 and also during the war, the HDZ authorities did their best to proclaim the idea of 'everyone who's not for us and our idea of an independent Croatia, is against us'. The status that all people opposing the HDZ politics were indeed treated like traitors, that's a fact. In July of 91, the Anti War Campaign of Croatia began, a network of citizens' organisation and it wasn't until 2000 that they stopped being treated as traitors, or people on foreigners' payrolls, to name but a few descriptions. The pressure was very



strong. These days, the selfsame politicians interpret these things in entirely different ways.

Firstly, a question to Novica, and then to all of you. How does Novica feel in the company of one-time opponents?

Novica: How do I feel sitting here now? I have to admit it's very difficult. Not because I have people from Croatia sitting next to me. I think it's very hard to sit like this in one's own environment. What will people think about me tomorrow? It's a huge problem, also because I respect my fellow-citizens, because I like to respect everyone in order to be respected myself. I really wished to sit down with some people who want to discuss peace. I know these people and I don't see them solely as Croats or Bosniaks.

Suppose the drums of war start beating again, would you do the same thing you did ten years ago?

Nermin: I could say, if the situation was as it was 10-11 years ago, then I haven't had the option of choice at all, even if I

wanted to desert I don't know how I'd do it. But in a different situation, oh, believe me, I wouldn't be there. I'd even go to this Bush character, if I had to.

Gordan: Every day since 1996, I've been working on these drums never being heard again, that's why I consider your question unnecessary.

But if it did happen just the same?

Gordan: I wouldn't carry arms.

Novica: I see the war as the greatest evil of humanity and I would try and avoid it in any way possible, with the exception of being attacked at my own place.

Kemal: If the violence escalated again, if war happened again, I'd only put on a fire-fighter's uniform. I wouldn't take a gun.

Are solely Serbs to blame for all the crimes that happened?

Nermin: I haven't heard Serbs being blamed in this forum or anyone being to blame. I'm speaking for myself, not on behalf of Bosniaks. I'm looking for a culprit within myself, first of all, and I'm looking for one in my part of the people. I wouldn't like to deal with Serbia or other peoples in that respect, I wouldn't want to blame someone or judge something. I think everybody is responsible for all events, all three nations, and I think it is my duty and obligation to condemn every crime, so if it was the Bosniak who committed them, and they have been committing them, then it is my duty to condemn the crimes they committed.

Gordan: There is a great difference between my personal responsibility for something and my guilt for something, there is something that is also our collective responsibility, but then, where is our mutual guilt, so I really don't

It is important for us to note that the forum in Vlasotince was organised thanks to **Novica Kostic** who had a strong wish and the initiative for this forum to take place in his environment. That's why Novica has had the role of an organiser, apart from his role as a participant, which was really very demanding, and which only speaks of his great motivation to take an active part in the peacebuilding process. His colleagues from the Association of people who fought in the war of the 90s supported him in the organisation of this panel, as well as the Youth Council and Municipality of Vlasotince.

At the forum in Novi Sad, Novica stated: *"This was my second forum, the first one was probably the hardest one, in my own environment, in my own hometown of Vlasotince, in front of my own fellow citizens. I knew my own responsibility, I knew what was in store for me tomorrow, but fortunately for me, what I got the day after was the incredible support. Prior to this forum, there were some reservations, lack of trust and understanding what all that was about because everybody seems to be afraid of some politics. But I got enormous support the day after"*.

understand your question about the Croats, the Serbs and the Bosniaks who are all to blame for something. I can understand what you meant, but if I'm responsible for my environment and the society I live in, I don't have the guilt. A crime has its name and its surname. A war crime never ceases to be valid. The guilt is individual. In my opinion, it's beside the point to speak of which nation is more to blame than the others. There is a thing that is our joint responsibility on which one really should take a stance.

Kemal: There is no collective responsibility, a whole nation cannot be blamed for the crimes individuals committed in the name of the nation, and often against the nation and solely to their own benefit. The idea to create ethnically pure states in the region of former Yugoslavia was just as insane, is there a single state today that's ethnically pure? This is an idea that was doomed from the very start.

I'd just like to ask one question, can this hate talk ever stop and can there be love between us?

Kemal: It's all up to us. I don't see a reason why we wouldn't manage to build a lasting peace, regardless of how idealistic it may sound to someone.

Novica: I think this is exactly what we are doing now and that this is an example of how we indeed can talk.

How much do religions help in reaching peace?

Nermin: My view is that religion can contribute a great deal to peacebuilding. The thing I have a lot of problems with in Bosnia is the proverbial sword with two

blades, 'damn if you do, damn if you don't.' A religion can be really abused for the purposes of the war, just as it was the case in the previous events, in my opinion, but as I understand religion, I draw all my peacemaking activities from it.

Some more questions and comments:



- I want to thank these people, thank you for coming, because that's courage... We are all to blame, all of us who wanted to learn the truth now could've done so during Milosevic too. In my environment, there were young men with machine guns who acted like heroes, and we accepted them a such, they wouldn't be acting like that if we weren't the ones to accept them. We can't, if we still admire people accused of war crimes...

- Have you considered the possibility of deserting, once you were in the war?

- Have there been thoughts about someone from Kosovo joining the forum?

- What about Croatia? Do they have this kind of forums there too?

- Are only the Serbs to blame for all the crimes that took place?

- Someone said earlier on that women were not in the war, through our fathers, brothers, sons, of course we were in the war. I'd like to ask the guests from Croatia and Bosnia this question. I'd like to know if you had some 'drafting computers' that selected you over there, because it's interesting that, all of my relatives were in the war, so whoever got the notice they were elected by the computer, it's interesting that there were many peasants, workers, workers' and peasants' children, and that some people guarded their own sons and I think many people who were in the war will agree with me. (Applause) Two of my cousins were in Kosovo, true, it's a different thing, but it was similar for Croatia and Bosnia, and my aunt died five days later. So I went to the gentlemen from

the drafting office and they said they had no idea where my cousins were. So I asked what about this mother that had given birth to them, who is going to bury her, and they evaded the answer. And in front of the office, there were twenty women waiting to hear about their brothers', sons', husbands' whereabouts. I'm asking you, I hope I'm not offending anybody, I'd like to know whether you were selected by this war computer, or was computer only in charge of some poor environments?

Public forum in Novi Sad

28.10.2003.

The public forum in Novi Sad was held on October 28 2003 in the auditorium of the AP Vojvodina Parliament. The speakers were Nermin Karacic from Sarajevo, Drago Franciskovic from Zagreb, Novica Kostic from Vlasotince and Gordan Bodog from Zagreb. This panel was organised with our friends and colleagues from the Society for Nonviolent Action (DNA) from Novi Sad. We received great support with the organisation of the forum from representatives of the Parliament of Vojvodina, the Parliament of the City of Novi Sad, Culture Centre Novi Sad, Radio 021 and Dnevnik.

The number of visitors surpassed all our expectations. The room that seats 80 people was crowded, great number of people remained unseated, even in the hallways. After the forum, that lasted for two hours, most of the guests have, along with the participants and the organisers of

the forum, left for the MPs' Club, where the talks continued in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. We're more than pleased with visitors' interest, reactions, question, feedback we received. We're also very pleased with the media coverage of the forum.

In this text, we list some of the questions and answers that could be heard at the forum.

Do they tell this same story in Bosnia and Croatia and other republics too, or does the story depend on the place?

Nermin: Let me tell you one thing, I've cleared things with myself. That is, I wouldn't want to engage in hypocrisy. This is the third forum I'm participating in, one of them was in BH. I find it important to admit the crimes committed by the Bosniak, Muslims over non-Muslim, non-Bosniak people and so I, as a religious-oriented man, my duty and obligation is to

condemn the crimes. I have done that in my own environment too. What do you think the media had to say about me, or how did the people in the streets look at em? Their story went like this: 'They've been killing us, cutting our throats, raping us, and now you sit with them and talk about some peace? What peace are you talking about man!' These were these people's reactions. But I didn't falter because of them. I'm working on it, and will work on it, God willing, as long as I live, I will speak about these things loudly and clearly. Primarily in my own environment.

Have the gentlemen ever been at a same place at the same time, some front? Have you looked at each other through the sight of a weapon? If yes, how do you live with it now?

Drago: I'll tell you an episode. Novica lost his leg near my home town. We have

met each other at the seminar in Ulcinj, and as we were talking, it turned out that he was leaving the barracks Logoriste upon Korana, near Karlovac. And he lost his leg while they were withdrawing, across Korana. Two days later I came to that barracks, to perform an inquest, but we hadn't know each other, we were on the opposite sides, unfortunately.

Novica: That's a good question for me. I'd had the role of rescuing the barracks, people and vehicles. I was wounded in the barracks while rescuing a soldier, a 20 year old one, I jumped in to pull him out. And I'm glad for it. Sometimes, when I look at my prosthetic leg, I remember the boy. At the very first seminar in Ulcinj, Gordan told me about the place where he fought, and he said it was in Karlovac. So, yes, we have met through the sight.

The tension should be lowered. One should be full of respect for people who are ready to speak of their vision of things after ten years, unlike politicians do. We need this because many of us are the victims of political tricks. One should have respect for those things. I'd like to ask Nermin, the Sarajevo man, a question, because I myself am from Sarajevo. Do you remember, have you been there on April 5 1992 when the mob went from Dobrinja, where I'd used to live, to tear down the barricades? ... Has there been this critical mass amongst your folk to support something that was a distance from all three parties, I think Sarajevo was really put to shame by the national parties winning.

If you speak about the national identity, which I respect, do you consider yourself to be more free than you were in 92? And do you think that Sarajevo, as it is today, can be a multi-cultural, multi-national town. Many people will praise it, but I don't think they've realised its essence. Its soul needs to be restored. We, the ones who'd left it pure and chaste, know it, the ones who'd refused to take part in all that. We're not ashamed of it, we were victims, and we are so today too, a more profound note should be given to all that. Every man is still responsible for what had transpired, whether he was electing the government, or supporting, or indifferent.

Nermin: First I'd like to say hello to my fellow countryman. I have an empathy for him, regardless of the nationality, and I'd say it's different. You're my man from Sarajevo, and you will always be that for me. Was there a critical mass – I was, believe me, very young, and couldn't get anything about what was happening. My folks at that time were of four different nationalities, and they're still my folks. I do agree the spirit has changed. The spirit of Sarajevo was specific, because different nations, peoples living in it, were the source of Sarajevo's greatness. For instance, Zabranjeno Pusenje exists both



in Serbia and in Bosnia, but I don't think that's really it. I'm proud of the fact that Bijelo Dugme is from Sarajevo, Zabranjeno Pusenje, Elvis Dz. Kurtovic . Can that be restored – I'm working on it. I'm getting back to personal responsibility. No one has to do anything, but I will do it. Bit by bit. If all of us did what was up to us, things would look way different now.

What do participants think about the character of the war, do you think it was a civil war, was it the aggression of Serb people, was it a civil war provoked by the insane ideas of people from all three sides, not just one, people who wanted glory, to be great leaders and have lead people to misery and disaster...?

Gordan: There have been elements of aggression in that war. You'd expect me to say who was an aggressor. The official title in Croatia for the events of 91-95 is homeland war, there's also a consensus about Croatia winning and the aggression being performed at its territory. It's also said that Croatia only helped Bosnia one tiny bit with its defence. That's not my standpoint. What are the consequences? The 1991 census showed that there were 17% or 19% of Serbs living in Croatia. Their number is now reduced to under 5%. Was there a civil war in Croatia? It would mean that the citizens of RC, because they don't agree on different things, engage in conflicts. There were people in Croatia from the other, the third, the fourth side. It could hardly be called a conflict between people of Croatian nationality and those of Serbian nationality. It definitely hasn't happened. There has been the intention to present it like that. I personally experienced a huge amount of aggression from the media, politician, all over... They have often asked me what is it that I had fought for. I hadn't fought against Serbs, neither the Serbs in Croatia nor Serbs as a people, but I

have stood against a system that, sacrificing the interests of ordinary people, even national interests of Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks and others, did everything to keep some privileges, solely for their personal interests.

I'm Vladan Beara, psychologist-psychotherapist, Centre for War Trauma, and I've worked with veterans of the war for 9 years now, psychotherapy and counselling. I'd like to commend the organisers for this gathering, and I wish to thank our veterans, participants of the forum, for the courage and honour which they showed in coming here tonight. Since I've worked with veterans for many years now, I think I have some insight into how hard it is to come and sit here, take part in this kind of a forum, and I'm really impressed with what you have started and with your coming here. I have the impression that I am a part of this forum, with regard to reconciliation and the process that's going on. I have the experience, because I'm a member of more than one reconciliation group, primarily that in Dubrovnik, a reconciliation group lead by professor Klajn, from Zagreb. How is the process coming along? At first, once people get in a group, they're all sort of reserved, they say 'how manipulated we had been, that's how it happened'. It's an initial phase, but precious. This is the beginning of the conversation. Then we start talking about how we felt, how it felt for us, when someone was killing us, when someone was wounding us, and we think it's important for the other one, 'the enemy', merely listens to that. And then comes a third, healing phase: 'and how about what we did to you, how many of you have we killed, how many wounds, how much evil did we do to you?' What follows is a quality reconciliation and I think these people are on their way to that.

Organisers' of the Novi Sad forum view

A dialogue realised

As a local partners organisation, the Society for Nonviolent Action from Novi Sad took part in the realisation of the forum in this town. Why Novi Sad? Someone will think – there has been no 'brother killing brother' war in Novi Sad, no houses have been burned down. However, people from that self same Novi Sad had been drafted and sent to the wars, wounded soldiers have been treated in the Novi Sad hospital, many Croatian and Hungarian families moved out of Novi Sad, and thousands of refugees from war afflicted areas have been arriving.

People of different national, religious, ethnic and cultural identity live in Novi Sad. And whilst on one hand all these differences enrich us, on the other hand the fear remains that they can become means that someone will use in order to promote their own values by disregarding the other/different identity. This is the very reason why we want to work on getting to know the differences, on establishing a dialogue and promoting personal responsibility and re-evaluating our own opinions, prejudices, stereotypes.

As members of a multiethnic environment, we believe a dialogue is a step towards peacebuilding and that it's always the RIGHT time for it. What had motivated us to support the realisation of

the forum is the fact that the participants are not political analysts or commentators, but people who have taken part in the war and who are now prepared to fight for peace. People of different nationalities who were on the opposite sides and now sit together, at the same table, with the same motivation – to engage in peacebuilding. It took incredible courage of these participants' to sit at a table and openly show their motivation for taking part in the war, their feelings and actions. And that it's those very people who have participated in the war who are now giving us their views on how to reach a lasting peace. And we thank them for that courage.

We consider the forum a very significant step in the direction of peacebuilding and we believe that we have thereby made our contribution to the process of reconciliation in the regions of former Yugoslavia. We hope the people who had a chance to be at the forum will be encouraged to think and re-evaluate their own responsibility in the events of the war, and also encourage them to understand 'the other' sides better. And that, encouraged by the example of the forum participants, we will understand that, whenever there is a problem, we must sit down, talk, co-operate and look each other in the eye, but never again

through the aiming lens.

After the support from the official institutions, the citizens' response to the street action 'Why should we (not) talk about the war?' that we performed, the media response, the number of people who attended the forum, we are certain that there are brave people who are ready to talk about their participation in the war and that there are brave people who are ready to hear. And that there are the media that find the dialogue at the forum interesting and that have dedicated their pages and minutes to it.

What has become obvious is the need for dialogue, and it's up to us to get further engaged in order to meet this need and in order to take further steps leading to lasting peace.

We thank everyone who supported us in this action, and particular thanks to: AP Vojvodina Parliament, Novi Sad City Council, Culture Centre of Novi Sad, Bureau for General and Joint Work of the province organs, NS Police, Association of the warriors of the 90s of Novi Sad and all the citizens who have attended the forum and took an active part in it.

In Novi Sad, October 14 2003

DNA Team

(Danica Novakovic, Eleonora Cabradi Sijacic, Sanja Dimitrijevic)

Public forum in Kraljevo

11.11.2003.

The forum in Kraljevo was held on November 11 2003 in the hall of Kraljevo Municipality Council. The speakers were: Novica Kostic from Vlasotince, Adnan Hasanbegovic from Sarajevo, Kemal Bukvic and Gordan Bodog from Zagreb. Local partner with the organisation of the forum was the Youth Organisation KVART.

The number of the audience was fairly small, especially in comparison with the forums in Novi Sad and Vlasotince.

We list some of the question and comments of the audience, and the participants' replies.

... I don't mean to minimise the crimes committed by the Serbs, may God save me from Croatian culture and Serbian courage. And I do think it's important to say that both sides have committed crimes and that this war was a horror... It's important to have an open dialogue between the Serbs and the Croats, because I think all the evil spread throughout Bosnia. Where do you see the beginning of future correct relations

between these two nations, the Serbs and the Croats?

Gordan: I don't think, nor have I thought so before, that the things in these regions are defined by the relations of the Serbs and the Croats, because they are also defined by other peoples and nations. What would the relations between people and even nations look like? We should all know the culture we have and share very well. What we have as things transferred from the past is the spiritual wealth. Croatian culture has been created by Croats, Serbs, Slovaks, Germans, to mention but a few; a whole series of persons from the past and the history. To know one's own identity, to know one's heritage, identity and culture of one's neighbours, that is the road to co-operation between two peoples.

Prior to these wars I had carried a spade and a shovel in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Ogolin and Knin. I had also carried a gun, but I'm interested in one thing: what do you think, why have all Serbs left Croatia and who is to blame for it; a small number

of Serbs has remained in Republic Srpska and Kosovo. Are Serbs to blame or someone else?

Adnan: People who failed to stop it are responsible, whether from Serbian, Bosniak or Croatian peoples. There is a great number of politicians who have encouraged by, for instance, in Sarajevo, offering peaceful integration – to stay in the Federation, that they have the guaranteed right to do so, but SDS has warmly recommended their supporters to leave the Federation and move to Republic Srpska. I also see it as a version of ethnic cleansing, but from the other side. Of course, we can talk about politicians' responsibility and other structures at all three sides. Ethnic cleansing is one of the worst consequences of the war. But we all need to ask ourselves whether it was us who supported it.

It is evident that in Serbia this problem of facing the guilt is being swiped under the carpet. Even the very apologies the two presidents offered each other were formalised to avoid this tricky question,

you can never see it on TV. I'd like to know about the general condition of the state owned media in this respect in Croatia and Bosnia. Is it possible to get the media interested? Are there any people who are interested in this subject? It's all being forgotten and swiped under the carpet.

Adnan: We did have the forums in Bosnia last Spring, in Zenica and Banja Luka. We were almost fascinated by the media support, we hadn't expected it. I was surprised when the Federal TV asked the four of us (but we were all from Bosnia at that point) to appear in one of the leading political programmes. There are people who have a feeling that there is something to all this. I have had the prejudice that they can't, won't...but some individuals, editors, have the potential to support something like this. Although general image of Bosnia is not all rosy when it comes to speech of hatred.

Gordan: I still don't feel a significant support from these major media. I think that some of them still don't understand what this is about. On the other hand, fortunately for us, there is a great number of persons, editors, who have a sensibility for civil society initiatives and those of the NGOs. I think this is the road toward sensibilising the major media.

Some more questions:

- Gordan said he voluntarily went to the war. Three or four years is a very long time. What happened after all that time, what's the motive for you to be against what you had done? There has to be a strong reason.

- I wanted to ask Novica how he felt because I know he was in the war. Has he done a humane thing when he helped

A reaction from a man who attended the forum

I'd like to know about what's the point of a forum that's conceived as a way to discuss these things, to relieve our souls of all that we carry within ourselves. I'm a participant of the war. Adnan, I know well what Sarajevo is and I know where you have been, just as you know where I have been; we're both natives of Sarajevo. Kemal, I know very well where Dobojs, Samac, all of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. I also know the officials who are now the authorities in Bosnia. All of them remained where they had been before, and I didn't. I'm not gonna blame anyone.

So there you are, the three of you. I won't count this boy as the fourth, because we were at the same side. I think the point of this forum is for us to speak of all that's bothering us to one another. I want to talk to you! Not just myself, a lot of us. I know my guilt in the war, how big it is, what it is. I'm ready to answer for it. Just like I demand those who had judged me and called me an aggressor, a chetnik, a villain, enemy, whatnot, to apologise to me. That's why I'm asking what's this forum for? Don't rush. Is this space rented or bought from the Municipality? If you paid for two hours, I'll pay for another two to have this talked about. Don't just rush this, nobody even finished what they were saying. I want to talk about it all openly. Just like I want to ask all four of you, where did our country go? I was born in Yugoslavia. And I want to ask where is it? Who has stolen it? Do you consider these countries to be yours: you, Croatia, you, Serbia, you BH, you Federal BH? All the problems that be, don't put it in five minutes...

I have accidentally seen the announcement at news at seven. That's why I came, to see this, to see all of you. I am able to look anyone in the face because I consider myself to be pure, just, haven't done harm to anyone, but I don't know why it is that I'm roaming the world with my wife and two kids. And I can ask you a lot of questions, and I want you to ask me questions too.

Why weren't you called a chetnik being 30 km from where you'd lived? I was 4,5 kilometres from where I lived and I was called a chetnik. I lost my house within an hour, just by crossing to the other side of Miljacka. And I'd only crossed it to save my life. The last thing anybody asked me was whether I'm a good person, the last people looking for me were the ones who knew me, the ones who never knew me were looking for me, people who never saw me, but knew my name was Bane. What we lived in that Yugoslavia I was in, you were in, it's gone. And we were the ones to tear it down: me, you and everybody else.

There, what have we done? That's why we must sit down and talk and explain some things. I'm not mad at you for being in the 'ZNG'. I have no idea what I had been and why. They wouldn't let me leave. I understand you completely. We didn't even want to be soldiers. I never wanted to shoot at Adnan, Sahib or who knows who. But that's how it'd turned out, he shoots at me, I shoot at him.

When things are accounted for, the result, we ask ourselves what we needed the war for to begin with. Yes, because we hadn't thought about it earlier. We're not aware that the war and the price of the war is to kill and to burn a house. If we can't do that, we shouldn't have done it either. If we took the guns in our hands, then we must pay the price of responsibility for being in a war. And now, how much has who been shooting. If I killed anyone, let me stand trial, and if I didn't, I don't want to carry the sins of the one who did. So, I want to talk to you about it openly. No more than that.

those young men, when he took them out, would he do it again, do you have a guilty conscience or do you feel honest about

helping those young men?

- What are the relations between the Serbs and the Croats today in Croatia? A friend of mine is a refugee from Croatia so I ask him about the relations and he tells me about a graffiti he's seen: 'We Croats don't drink wine, but the blood of Serbs from Knin'. Is that true? And how do you see the co-operation, to bring markets close together, like they used to be? A long time will have to pass before they're close again.

- Are you a member of a party, why is there no similar action in Croatia?



Impressions from the box

We're pleasantly surprised by the number and the contents of impressions the audience has written down and placed it in our impressions box following each of the forums. We state some of them here.

What are your impressions from the forum?

'We realise it's hard to open up, after so many dreadful experiences, but people tried to come close for at least a moment and to reveal the real image of those ugly events'.

'I have the impression that you're trying to approach this extremely delicate matter fairly. The fact that you allowed ordinary people to express their stance on the tragedy that has befallen us all is really commendable'.

'At last! I've waited for you for ten years now!'

'We understand how hard it is to be self critical, honest to oneself, and admit it before others. I admire the courage of the speakers to firmly stand behind their ideas knowing that some people they speak in front of don't share their opinion and are ready to engage in conflicts masked as patriotism'.

'My impressions are moving and profound. The talk at this forum brought tears to my eyes and reminded me of the most difficult period of our lives'.

'Facing the past leads us to reconciliation. An attempt to speak about it openly'.

'Firstly, the courage of the people who are ready to talk about something 'most of us suppresses', their readiness to face the environment and different reactions to something that's very personal and painful. This is the way to point out the attitudes that enable a normal life in a multi-

cultural community, although I have the impression that people with 'firm stances' come to the forum solely to make them even more firm (the intolerant ones).'

'This is good, there should be more of this. There's hate and ignorance and madness here too – these people are very brave. I congratulate them'.

'A very good start towards the lasting peace'

'I realised my town has finally come to life'.

'The forums are much needed and deserve to be commended. But, are they possible in Croatia and BH as well? Why is peacemaking and suffering, tolerance, expected from Serbs and why does it need to start in Serbia?'

'Today, when I'm a thirty year old woman and when I remember 91, 92, 93... I remember my wonderful student days, concerts, parties. Soon afterwards I feel guilt. At the time, a huge number of people had horrific things happening to them (Srebrenica, Medacki dzep...) Could I have done something? My defence is – I hadn't known about it at the time. That's why these forums are needed, in order to know, in order not to forget it, for the sake of the ones who will come after us'.

What do you think it takes for peace?

'Peace takes a lot, but not too much. Peace is right there, beside us, we only need to notice and accept it. Nermin put it well: 'We should all do the little we can and everyone will be fine!''

'To face our own responsibility, take responsibility for our life and the lives of the ones we care about, the ones we meet, responsibility for our actions towards other ones and different ones.'

'First of all, an attempt to understand people around us, not to see it as an 'us – them' situation,

but as a personality, as an individual. No grouping and no 'collective' responsibility 'one hides behind'. In every demographic group, one should see individuals, not a homogenous mass'.

'Never forget the crimes, always talk about them'.

'Tolerance, respect for others whose opinions differ from mine. And always work on reconciliation'.

'One should talk first, and then fight. We have chosen the inverted sequence'.

'What it takes for peace is people'

'First of all, it's talking – in order not to forget it! Only thorough talking and remembering will we help prevent this ever happening again!'

'Understanding between people and seeing others without prejudices'.

'Just the sense and honour, because it's fools who lead us to wars'.

Comments, suggestions, questions, messages...

'It would be good to hear women's angle too; women's view on the war, destruction and peace'.

'There should be as many forums like this as possible, and young people should be involved in this as much as possible, because they're the ones responsible for the future. Considering that the history repeats in the ways in which you present the past for them, you can hope they will do the same in the future – the way it has been done so far is certainly not the one it should happen in'.

'The forum – useful. Next time, it would be more useful to bring in some 'indirect' participants –journalists, for example!'

The media support

During the period of preparation and realisation of this series of forums, one of the most important sources of support was the media coverage of our activities. One of the reasons is the fact that there is not a very developed habit of visiting public forums in our society, so we have tried to inform and invite as many media as possible, in order to also inform people who would sooner see something like this on TV or listen about it on the radio, or read about it in a newspaper. Apart from that, we wish to promote the idea of peacebuilding through the media, because they have both great impact on society and the responsibility for it.

We're particularly pleased and pleasantly surprised by response of the media that covered forums in Vlasotince and Novi Sad. We have primarily our local associates to thank for it, Novica Kostic and the activists of Society for Nonviolent Action from Novi Sad, who have made a great effort to inform the media companies.

In numerous contacts with the media

we encountered a lot of understanding and support in the real sense of the word, which we were really happy about and empowered by, because we had the feeling of not being alone in the process.

Unfortunately, we have also had a small number of unpleasant experiences, at the times when the media would 'offer their services' at a price we couldn't possibly afford to pay. We suppose that these situations are a result of a prejudice that exists about NGOs, about them being 'loaded', so that every service should be charged for accordingly. This prejudice completely overshadows the question of what it is we do, why, in what way and with which motivation. It also overshadows the issue of responsibility of us all, individuals, and particularly the media who have a very significant impact on public opinion, responsibility for society we live in, for the past, but also for building the future.

Another kind of unpleasant experiences was by all means the interpretations of certain media,

something that appears to be inevitable, due to the lack of sensibility. We were bothered by sensationalist titles in the newspapers (ones that certainly failed to express the essence), then cutting the statements of the participants' out of the context they were made in. Due to a sudden resurfacing of the story of Vietnam, or Balkan, syndrome, it happened that the participants' statements were placed in that very context, without any explanations about what these people really do and why, and ignoring their strong peace message. One of the disappointments are some of the media we considered our allies in promoting peacebuilding and social values, and who have in turn ignored us.

Some TV companies informed us that the viewers called and asked for reruns of the programmes in which we appeared, or reruns of the forums coverage. We thank for this, and other, feedback, because it's great support in our work and in the increase of our personal motivation. Communication, information, reactions

give us a sign that we're not working and talking in vain.

We'd like to thank all the media companies who covered this programme and took an active part in it, and especially journalists and editors who supplied

strong, warm and human support.

We'd like to thank the following media: Danas, Dnevnik, Ekspres, Gradjanski list, In Radio, Kanal 9, Magzar Szo, Multiradio, NS nedeljnik, Pan Radio, Radio 021, Radio Dunav, Radio Kisac,

Radio Sajam, Radio Signal, Radio Stotka, RTV 4S, RTV Jesenjin, RTV Kraljevo, Studentski radio Jesenjin, TV Apolo, TV Kanal 9, TV Leskovac, TV Melos, TV Novi Sad, TV Panonija, TV Rosulja, Vecernje novosti

About the Centre for Nonviolent Action

The core of the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CAN) is formed by eight people from Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia and Serbia. We have offices in Sarajevo and Belgrade and we work on peacebuilding in the region of former Yugoslavia, from Macedonia, through Kosovo, to Croatia. Those who wish to do so will read through our names and count members of certain nations from these regions: Adnan Hasanbegovic from Sarajevo, Nedžad Horozovic from Doboju, Helena Rill from Sombor, Ivana Franovic from Belgrade, Milan Colic Humljan from Babusnica, Sanja Deankovic from Split, Tamara Smidling from Belgrade, Nenad Vukosavljevic from Belgrade. What we find important is that we are linked by a feeling of human solidarity – not limited by the existing borders, dedication to peace work and change for a more just society through nonviolence. We also find important that all our differences connect us in respecting them, they help us to learn from each other and to change ourselves and the society around us.

Nonviolence what?!

Nonviolence is non-acceptance and non-performing injustice.

Nonviolence is acting against injustice and discrimination, when we also try not to perform injustice ourselves and to leave and give everyone a chance to change, not to judge people because we have no right to do that, but to criticise the actions that endanger others. And to apply the same criteria to everybody.

We don't see nonviolence as an

ideology, but rather as a constant process of re-evaluating our own actions, thoughts and events in society. Our individual motivations overlap at this point, whereas individually, they have their roots in faith, experiences of injustice and solidarity with those who were exposed to injustice.

Let's face the future and forget about what's happened in the past...

If we swipe the past under the carpet again, we will not learn anything and maybe the ones who come after us will have to go through all the sadness, anger and despair through which many from the Balkans have been through during the past years again. Let's not forget the crimes, especially not the ones committed on our behalf and allegedly to protect the nation and the people. Let's not deny and negate the differences that do exist, but rather let us get to know and respect what we do not know. The war hasn't happened because people are of different nationality and religion, but because the differences had been abused and because we didn't know how to stand up against it, and many of us hadn't even known where the praising oneself and dismissing others lead to.

The inflicted pain cannot be forgotten or hidden, nor it should be. Let's respect the pain and learn from it, so it may never be repeated, but let's also respect the pain of all people, those from the 'other side' too.

What does CNA do?

From 1997, by founding the office in Sarajevo, we have started our work on peacebuilding.

The central part of it consists of educational courses in nonviolent conflict transformation with people from former Yugoslavia (with the exception of Slovenia). People from different parts of the region attend these, as we call them, trainings in nonviolent conflict transformation, people who are motivated

to work against discrimination in their environments, on overcoming the ethnic hatred and lack of confidence and towards equality of all people. Apart from the participants involved in the citizens' associations, journalists, people in education, political party activists and participants in the wars also take part in the trainings.

Whenever people from the Balkans countries and regions gather for ten days, there is a lot of hidden and overt prejudices, unhealed wounds caused by the wars, loads of fears and hopes for the future. We who lead this group work try to create room for mutual communication, for establishing trust and broaching all the painful issues, in order to process them and then look for other ways to treat our similarities and differences. We try for the people to get some insight into what it is that 'the others' experience as violence and thereby inspire responsibility for protecting our own rights, and the rights of our neighbours.

We see the beginning of the peace in recognising and respecting the pain that those from the 'other' side experienced, awakening of the feeling of human solidarity, compassion and understanding. The Belgrade office, sister office to the Sarajevo one, exists since 2001. Everything we do and decide we do together, living what we believe in and what we're trying to promote.

Apart from the work on nonviolence trainings, CNA works in other areas of peacebuilding as well, such as public peace appeals, participation in public forums and organising them, publishing newspaper articles and the like.

The experience that people of different nationalities and religions in Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, can indeed understand each other, support each other and recognise the joint interest in peacebuilding, the experience we have frequently had during the past six years of our work, gives us strength and faith to persevere in our work. In spite of everything that had transpired and that shouldn't be forgotten but re-examined, our future is, if in no other way but geographically, closely linked.



About peacebuilding and peacebuilders

It's interesting and inspiring to think about words and their meanings. Especially if the words are recently 'imported' and you instinctively feel that at least some of their numerous meanings relate to you, that they oblige and point their finger at you, so to speak.

Some of these words are 'peacebuilding', building, constructing peace, civil society, non-government organisations, third sector etc, the much used and often insufficiently understood words, that have come to our regions during the nineties, all together, in a single package.

What does this expression mean in *our* context? And what is *our context* to begin with? Why build peace? and... What is peace?

Every question raises at least one other, new one, but to believe that the number of questions is the reason to give up thinking about them means giving oneself a dubious alibi and settling for a cosy, but problematic, role of a disinterested observer.

If we begin from the beginning, from another simple question of "Do we live in peace?", there is a great chance for us to stumble on the very first step. We will stumble upon the overall, dominant social awareness that includes, nurtures and dictates thinking about key social and political categories exclusively in third, neutral person. *IT LEAD US TO WAR. IT BROUGHT US PEACE.*

Who did? What? Well, the 'IT' that's beyond us, beyond our comprehension and powers. If "IT" brought us peace, then the question of whether we live in peace is, of course, superfluous.

But is it really superfluous?

A society in which a large number of people feel enormous existential insecurity, in which the space of moving and living freely decreases for a significant number of people, a society in which any identity outside the 'national canon' becomes a threatening element and thereby a legitimate object of violence and discrimination, such society is not the one in which a lasting and stable peace reigns.

Such society, the one of peace, doesn't exist in Serbia, Croatia, BH, Kosovo, Macedonia... And none of the listed countries/regions will become such a society until they choose *peacebuilding*, together with other, neighbouring countries, in the region, as one of its priorities, because the spots such as Vukovar, Gospic, Srebrenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, Foca, Strpci, Pec, Pristina, Skoplje, Tetovo... Belgrade are very closely connected and the distance between them is much smaller than the actual physical distance in kilometres.

These are not solely spots on a map, but also symbolic points of pain and shame of people from these regions.

One of the first steps in setting the grounds for a lasting peace is recognising the need for creating *peace alliances* (within and without the borders of our respective countries), whose bearers cannot be some foreign experts, people who are professionally in peacebuilding around the world, but local citizens from diverse professional and social categories. *Local* people for whom their own responsibility for the society they live in does not end with voting at the elections or with incessant nagging about how '*there, there's no one to vote for here*'. At the same time, no step forward can be made as long as peace initiatives only serve to network men and women who share the same opinion and who jealously clutch the 'licence' to deal with peace and talk about it.

The existing gap between the 'peace-makers' and 'warriors' is one of the most serious hindrances that must be overcome if we wish to turn these and similar stories into something more than a letter on a piece of paper. Can we offer a quality alternative to militant and violent option if we delete the large group of people who have taken part in the wars from the list of potential allies? To allow people room to truly change in respect of viewing their own responsibility for the past and the future, that is the value we wish to promote. The possibility for that room to be abused does exist, but the risk pays, especially with regard to social benefits that strengthening and expanding of the peace capacities brings.

The other significant problem lies in a tendency for the interest in neighbouring countries to be reduced to 'peeking into neighbour's garden over the fence', in order to count how many of 'their people' went to the Hague, what's the number of "their" war criminals, and achieving a sedating conclusion that 'their' nationalism is bigger than ours after all, which makes it logical for them to deal with these problems more than 'we' do. Drawing attention to the 'log in our own eyes' is therefore a necessary act of civil awareness and *patriotism*, the term that must be decontaminated after long years of its fascination and abuse.

How will we overcome all this depends largely on us ourselves. Will we know how to choose between 'peacekeeping forces' and 'peace groups', that is, will we know how to offer a third and a fourth quality peace option – that is a huge joint responsibility. If sending soldiers to Afghanistan or Iraq is the sole contribution

to world (and thereby our) peace that this society can produce, than we really have a big problem. And the problem is not only daily-political, but also (and primarily) ethical in many of its aspects – starting with non-existence of the awareness on what is actually supported by that action, to strengthening the old, all too well known mechanism of 'wherever there's a problem – send the troops'.

Questioning the widespread syntagmas such as 'Euro Atlantic integrations' also builds peace. Criticising such concepts doesn't imply autistic withdrawal into our own enclosure, nor does it indicate rejecting any integrations whatsoever, but is a clear demand to call things their own names and to transparently discuss the values that are immanent to such alliances.

In the context of peace work, supporting *European* integrations means supporting the standards of social solidarity, health care and social security, uncorrupted economic system, respecting human and minority rights, high level of environment-consciousness; in short, it means trying to include one's own society into the group of societies in which there is constant exchange of responsibility between the state and its citizens. European integration *should* mean all this. Reality, however, often tells us otherwise, especially with regard to different criteria for different European countries. That's why it is of an extreme importance to be sure whether by joining the 'European integration' we really affirm the above mentioned values.

To criticise the phrase 'Euro Atlantic integration' means to express disagreement with joining a *military* alliance (NATO pact) that cannot, even with most benevolent of intentions, be recognised as a factor that can bring peace, of which the fact that all 'peace interventions' of this alliance so far have been military quests producing large numbers of casualties and destruction speaks clearly enough.

Is there a true peace without the feeling of security for all people, regardless of their national, religious, gender, sexual identity? It's worth thoroughly thinking about.

... And about many other things as well. Because the 'it brought us peace' from the beginning of the text is simply not possible. Just as it wasn't possible for the wars and various other violence to happen without us playing some roles in it.

WE WISH TO THANK

ASSOCIATION FOR NON-VIOLENT ACTION FROM NOVI SAD
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