



HELSINŠKI ODBOR ZA LJUDSKA PRAVA U SRBIJI
HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA

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HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA
ACTIVITY REPORT
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Making Diversity Reality: Building Inclusive Society through Education and Culture

By directly engaging around 1,280 citizens of different cultural backgrounds in learning about and promoting intercultural cooperation and diversity, the project contributed to enhancing the cohesion of Serbian society and opening it up for the contributions of all interested actors.

The space for intercultural exchange was broadened by providing several different platforms for young people, professionals, and cultural actors to meet, connect and cooperate. This was particularly beneficial for high-school students who had a chance to familiarize themselves with other cultures through study visits. For the majority of them, this experience was life-changing, as they have never had an opportunity to cross the huge ethnic distance gap and experience multiculturalism.

“Prior to this visit, my impression of Sandzak and Novi Pazar was opposite to what I’ve experienced while visiting. I thought of this city as a conservative place, only to enjoy its positive energy and the high frequency of youth once I was there.”

Staša, Niš

“I can't imagine that so many people with all their differences and specifics live in one relatively small space in peace, for so many years. Vojvodina should be an example to all those who do not live in homogeneous environments.”

Viola, Preševo

Participants in the history and art workshops stated that this encounter enabled them to expand their knowledge of the history and culture of different peoples living in Serbia, as well as to form new partnerships and jointly create. The majority of them never had the chance to hear lectures promoting interculturalism, and are convinced that such an educational approach and content are very much needed. On a more practical side, workshops connected young people with different cultural backgrounds, which resulted in multi-ethnic groups jointly preparing new learning content or artworks about a culture other than theirs.

Cultural actors involved in the project praised the idea to start advocating for an intercultural Serbian Cultural Strategy and joined the Cultural Diversity Network that was launched in 2019. The network now develops joint action involving discussions about the new cultural policy of Serbia to take place throughout the country.

At least 1,278 direct project participants took part in the project. Among them were men, women, and persons with other sexual identities; representatives of the majority Serb population and minority groups of Bosniaks, Albanians, Croats, Romanian, Roma, and Hungarians; residents of the capital city and smaller towns throughout Serbia. At least 491,631 citizens have been exposed to intercultural content initiated, created, and promoted within the project.

The project was implemented in 2020-2022, with the support of the European Union and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue of the Republic of Serbia.

Project results:

- 50 young historians, social science researchers, and practitioners learned how to recognize exclusive narratives in historiography and gained skills to develop a multi-perspective and intercultural approach in working with younger population;
- 10 historians implemented newly gained knowledge and interactive teaching methodology by lecturing high-school students;
- Trilingual portal „[Classroom for the Future](#)” offers alternative tools and additional learning content in teaching history and literature in a way to ingrain principles of solidarity and respect;
- Illustrated publications „[Past Worth Remembering](#)” and “[20 Steps towards South](#)” supported teaching intercultural competencies through history and literature in an appealing manner;
- Seven [digital lessons](#) presented examples of interethnic cooperation in Serbia and contributed to formal educational curricula by providing additional content:
 - o “[Motives of anti-fascism and unity in the pop/rock music of socialist Yugoslavia](#)”
 - o “[Anti-fascist struggle and struggle for gender equality: Partisans in the People's Liberation Struggle](#)”
 - o “[The idea of unity in the monuments of socialist Yugoslavia](#)”
 - o “[Forge of brotherhood and unity: The war journey of the First Proletarian Brigade 1941-1945](#)”
 - o „[Albanian-Serbian Promises](#) (Besa)”
 - o „[Arab Valley](#)”
 - o „[The Birth on Citizenry in Serbia](#)”
- 50 young artists embraced diversity and cooperation with peers of different backgrounds in joint production, leading to a joint art creation promoting interculturalism;
- Four artworks in the form of brochures, visual art exhibitions, and collections of stories were presented to citizens of 15 different places throughout Serbia, including:
 - o Photo collection “[The Role of Art in Social Struggles](#)”
 - o Brochure “[Togetherness in the Monuments of Socialist Yugoslavia](#)”
 - o Brochure „[Anti-fascist Struggle and the Struggle for Gender Equality](#)”
 - o Street exhibition “[Partisan Women](#)”
 - o Collection of stories “[Mokrin Knot](#)”
- 84 high-schoolers who participated in three intercultural study visits to multicultural Sandžak and Vojvodina acquired practical knowledge about other cultures in Serbia and became motivated communicators of cultural diversity;
- Three videos showcasing study tour participants’ insights, impressions, and changes in their attitudes and opinions were published, including:
 - o Study Tour video: [Making Diversity Reality](#)
 - o Study Tour video: [Antifascism – Lessons for the Present](#)
 - o Study Tour video: [Together in Differences](#)
- Informal network of cultural workers assembles at least 60 members who share goal of having a pluralistic, open and democratic cultural policy;
- Recommendations for a [new cultural policy](#) of Serbia published.

Srebrenica Theatre Play

More than 840 people from four European countries were connected in learning from history and drawing lessons for today and the future. Among them were civic activists, journalists, intellectuals, academics, students, artists, book publishers, young people, and a large number of ordinary people.

Through a unique theatre play about the genocide in Srebrenica, inclusive discussions about the civic responsibility to preserve peace in Europe, art masterclasses for young people, and a broad media campaign, the project succeeded to 1) unpack the correlation between extreme forms of nationalism and basic rights abuses, 2) discuss shared European legacy of crimes, 3) engage youth in keeping the memory of Europe's tragic past alive, and 4) recommend measures for increasing resilience to violent tendencies. The action also paid tribute to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

The first-ever theatre play in Serbia to thematize the Srebrenica genocide was staged on September 24, 2020, in Belgrade. The theatre play reminded Serbian public of the holders of responsibility for the war crime of genocide that was committed in Srebrenica in July 1995. It went beyond the crime and the perpetrators, and shed the light on the actors who prepared the ground for atrocities to be committed. Namely, the organizers, commanders and the perpetrators have largely been prosecuted, but the inspirers remained unpunished and are still distinguished members of Serbian society. The play also went beyond the usual notion of Srebrenica being a fabricated crime, disconnected from us, and revealed the ideological, psychological, and business mechanism for denying crimes. The action was dedicated to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide and was among the rare events in Serbia commemorating the 25th anniversary of their suffering.

The author and director of the play was Zlatko Paković, and it was performed by renowned actors Ivan Jevtović, Milena Moravčević, Boris Milivojević, Katarina Jovanović, Vahid Džanković, and Andreja Kargačin; scenographer: Nikola Dzafo; costume designer Vesna Teodosić, composer Božidar Obradinović.

"I am glad to have a chance to see this play in Zagreb. It was therapy for me. Thank you for that flag". (referring to the Serbian flag with the names of victims that was presented at the end of the play)

After the premiere and replays in Belgrade, the play was staged in Zagreb (Croatia), Tuzla (BiH), Novi Pazar (Serbia), and Brussels (Belgium). The final performance was held in Belgrade-Serbia, on July 11th, marking the 26th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. On the occasion of theatre play performances and public debate that unfolded afterward, the citizens discussed this issue of responsibility for war crimes, as well as the ways of expressing solidarity with victims. In addition, around 5,500 people watched the online screenings that were organized periodically.

„The biggest problem of literature - that has to do with theatre also - is actually a problem of nationalism and ideological readings that we, as professors, carry in classrooms. We must talk publicly about those problems.“

In parallel with the theatre play, master classes held by the theatre director Zlatko Paković empowered young artists to seek intercultural understanding and employ art in building a culture of peace, creating and disseminating anti-xenophobic and humanistic narratives, and opposing misusing culture for political purposes.

The project was implemented from 2020 until 2023, in cooperation with the Documenta-Center for Dealing with the Past, Perforacije Festival/Association Domino, Tuzla National Theatre, Cultural Center of Novi Pazar, and the Brussel-based International Partnerships for Human Rights. It was supported by the European Union, the

National Endowment for Democracy, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Project results:

- The 24th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica was [commemorated](#) through a lecture held by Zlatko Paković with participation of more than 200 citizens of Serbia;
- The first-ever Serbian theatre play on the Srebrenica genocide, directed by Zlatko Paković and produced by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia was written and staged 10 times in four countries;
- The 25th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica was marked by staging the theatre play in Belgrade, Serbia;
- Debates on issues of responsibility for past crimes, solidarity, public remembrance and joint peaceful future were held in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Belgium;
- 70 young artists participated in masterclasses on the role of theatre in social changes, led by theatre director Zlatko Paković;
- The legacy of the genocide in Srebrenica placed in the center of public attention, so that the discussions and memory of it expand beyond the anniversaries;
- Civil society activists, journalists, artists and young people inspired to take a more active role in advocating for truth and responsibility in Serbia.

Srebrenica: Ingraining the Crime Prevention Mechanism into Serbian Society

The project has successfully fitted youth and educators to recognize, prevent and counter tendencies that can create social tensions and lead to human rights abuses. Moreover, it sensitized them to recognize elements or cases of hate speech and actively engage to prevent them from escalating into violent conflicts.

16 high school teachers 38 high school students from throughout Serbia participated in two theatre workshops exploring the nationalistic elements in school curricula and developing skills to prevent human rights abuses.

For most teachers, the workshop offered relevant and much-needed content for improving their knowledge about violence caused by nationalism and hate speech. Particularly important was a multiperspectivity enabled through in-depth discussions.

Teachers also felt more capable to spot hate speech and violent nationalism in the community. With all these insights and new skills, they now feel significantly empowered to prevent human rights violations in their surroundings and combat tendencies that threaten to endanger interethnic relations in Serbia.

"I think I am now able to perceive the problem of nationalism from a different point of view and minding diversity of environments young people are growing up in."

For high schoolers, the workshop provided knowledge of other nations and religions, the skills of tolerance and empathy, and most importantly a critical overview of phenomena that greatly shape their lives. These skills will help them to react to cases of discrimination and violence more determined and by the force of arguments. Youth particularly enjoyed the safe and supportive learning environment where they were free to fully express themselves. All students consider education on preventing nationalistic and hate speech important. Moreover, they plan to actively engage in building a society free of violent ethnonationalism, by organizing discussions in schools, sharing the video output of the project with peers, teachers and school staff, designing and holding a lecture, screening a movie, conducting a social media campaign, or engaging in the youth group of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia.

"I've learned to interpret the terms of nation, ethnicity, and identity, and that has enabled me to define myself as a person and explore ways I can contribute to society in terms of eliminating nationalism and hatred."

The project was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, and implemented during 2021 and 2022.

Project results:

- 16 high school students and teachers skilled to prevent and oppose tendencies that can create tensions in society and lead to the abuse of human rights;
- High school students and teachers sensitized to recognize the elements and cases of hate speech and engage in the prevention of the escalation of violent conflicts;
- The path to conflict prevention promoted through three documentaries that show the attitudes and opinions of young people and teachers expressed in the form of sociodrama sketches:
 - o [To What I Believe When I Say That I'm a Believer](#)
 - o [If the Noun "Nation" is the Subject of a Sentence...](#) (1)
 - o [If the Noun "Nation" is the Subject of a Sentence...](#) (2).

Youth Campaigning for Civic Citizenship

At least xx high school students of different ethnic, religious, gender, and socio-economic background were involved in addressing the growing ethnic distance that significantly affects their current life in Serbia.

These young people participated in study visits to Sandžak and Vojvodina, where they visited cultural and historical places, shared views and discussed issues of mutual importance, and experiencing different local lifestyles, cuisines, and traditions. Such an opportunity enabled them to get to know other cultures and connect across ethnic and religious lines. As a result, participants furthered their intercultural competencies and remained motivated and skilled to spread tolerance once they got back to their communities.

After returning their homes, the most active ones continued their engagement by organizing youth dialogue sessions in their communities. Such sessions were held in Novi Pazar, Bujanovac, and Novi Sad, with the goal to get relevant input from people often subjected to exclusion, intolerance, or even the limitations of human rights, as well as to enable young citizen's participation from the most underdeveloped municipalities in Serbia.

Youth dialogue sessions facilitated shaping policy recommendations based on true experiences and the opinions of most deprived and often underrepresented citizens.

“Even though they live in peace, some nationalist and fascist ideas are seemingly infiltrated in people and if we don't react on time consequences can be huge.”
Luka, Novi Pazar

The project was implemented from September 2021 until February 2023, and was supported by the Embassy of the United States of America to the Republic of Serbia.

Project results:

- During two visits to the multi-cultural regions of Sandžak and Vojvodina, 49 high school students from throughout Serbia increased their knowledge about how to spread tolerance in their community;
- The Youth Group, consisting of the 10 most active youth, were empowered to initiate six dialogue sessions on overcoming ethnic gaps and nurturing a diverse cooperative community of equal citizens involving xx their peers;
- A recommendation on a way forward for building a sense of civic identity through education was compiled and publicly presented peer-to-peer, involving 25 high-school students, teachers, and representatives of line ministries.
- The youth call for civic identity was also shared through videos disseminating ideas on togetherness, including:
 - o [Youth Advocating for Civic Identity](#)
 - o [High-school students' debate in Novi Sad](#)
 - o [Let's break down prejudices and be equal](#)

“I see these kinds of opportunities, such as this study visit, as a way of fighting fascism today.”
Ajša, Tutin

Providing Resources for Effective Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism

The project aims to support the process of creating a comprehensive strategic framework and designing meaningful approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in Serbia. It builds on the results of previous project that aimed at supporting the state to successfully implement the National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering Terrorism, by going into further research in order to illuminate all relevant factors that are influencing radicalization, extremism, and terrorism.

The research will focus on the far-right extremism, the minority extremisms, and the gender dimension of both, with an aim to provide resources that will enable a thorough understanding of these phenomena and support creating effective preventive and countering approaches. In addition to research, the project will support the families of women and children, citizens of Serbia who have gone to Syria, are now stranded in camps there and wish to return to their community. This activity will aim to provide a community supporting programme for their return from Syria and reintegration into the society that was inclusively developed with the contributions of all relevant beneficiaries.

The project has been implemented since July 2022 and will last until December 2023, with the support of the Dutch Embassy to the Republic of Serbia.

Project results:

- Report on analysis of far-right extremism in Serbia, published as a chapter “The Extreme Right” in the report “[Serbia: Captured Society](#)”
- Workshop for representatives social and health institutions, relevant associations and professionals involved in the process of resocialisation, rehabilitation and repatriation of returnees from foreign battlefields;
- Workshop with members of families of women and children from camps in Syria.

Cooperative Western Balkan as a Prerequisite for European Security

The project aims to contribute to the creation of a cooperative regional order in the Western Balkans that rests upon political, economic, and security interdependence and collaboration, thus contributing to a stronger and safer Europe. During the first year of the implementation, it did so by promoting a foreign policy that would be aligned with the EU and more constructive relations with the neighboring countries.

Critical aspects of Serbia's bilateral and multilateral engagement were mapped and alternative approaches recommended.

Based on the analysis of bilateral relations, and the regional and international standing of Serbia, an alternative approach to foreign affairs has been sketched. It proposes abandoning any great state concepts, a decisive turn and alignment with the European Union, full implementation of reforms, and cautious cooperation with the countries which pursue their own interests in the Western Balkan region. In order to be effective, the approach must be supported by the EU and US, who will offer protection and a concrete perspective to the region for the future as soon as possible. The role of the opposition parties, media, and civil society in shaping the new foreign policy and gaining public support was also recognized.

These ideas were disseminated through periodical bulletins that were sent to diverse domestic, regional, and international actors, and shared over the Internet and social media networks. A value-based foreign affairs policy has also been promoted through two episodes of the podcast.

The implementation started in February 2022 and will continue through 2023, with support of the European Union.

Project results:

- Six bi-monthly e-bulletins thematized important regional external action issues, including:
 - o [Serbia: Between Two Worlds](#)
 - o [Serbia: The War in Ukraine and its European Path](#)
 - o [Serbia and China: Unequal Yet \(Still\) Close Partnership](#)
 - o [Russia and Serbia: Together Against Liberal Values](#)
 - o [Turkey: A Regional Power in the Balkans](#)
 - o [Croatia: Constant Rival](#)
- Two podcast series episodes promoting the value-based regional external action of Serbia:
 - o [Episode No 1](#): Serbia and Russia's Aggression on Ukraine
 - o [Episode No 2](#): The Serbia and China Steely Friendship.

Books and publications

[The Rise of the Right: The Case of Serbia – Extremism, Terrorism, Foreign Fighters, 2022](#)

The research in this publication brought together psychologists, lawyers, cultural scientists, political scientists, journalists and activists, in order to look at the phenomenon of extremism from different perspectives. The analyzes are based on information obtained from a large number of sources, including more than 60 interviews conducted by the Helsinki Committee team during 2021, court verdicts for terrorism and foreign fighters, official data of institutions in Serbia, the media and the academic community.

[Towards a New Cultural Policy – Against Dogmatism, 2023](#)

In 2020, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia initiated the development of guidelines for a new cultural policy in response to the Cultural Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2020–2029. The Helsinki Committee started this process together with a group of artists, sociologists, culturologists, philosophers, political scientists, and representatives of civil society organizations, whose works are included in this publication. The publication contains recommendations for a new cultural policy that were created based on the experience of practitioners and the knowledge of experts, as well as the presentations of the participants of the round tables that are in the period 2021-2023 organized in Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Novi Pazar and Belgrade.