

Annual report

On activities realized by:

**Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in
Republika Srpska**

Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina

January - December 2012



Introductory word

– the state of human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2012

Eighteen years after the end of the war Bosnia and Herzegovina is still a country deeply divided by ethnicity, nationality and religion, whereas the state of human rights is worrying. Since one of the most important issues that Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing today, is that the authorities on the entity and state level encourage these divisions on daily basis, creating a wrong perception of the war events, obstructing the return of internally displaced persons, disobeying the rights of minorities and disabling the establishment of a functional and stable country. Numerous reports of domestic and international organizations on the state of human rights show the minor progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina in this field. Current situation has been additionally complicated by the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the process of joining EU, whereas one of the most important conditions on that way is the respect of human and minority rights.

The political crisis which occurred following the general elections held in October 2010 and the fact that the government was established 15 months later has slowed down the reforms and the harmonization of the BH Constitution with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. Bosnian politicians spent more than a year trying to reach a consensus and form the government, which caused mutual accusations often involving hate speech, mistrust and animosity in everyday communication and social trends. A normal functioning of the country was almost paralyzed, whereas the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg vs. Bosnia and Herzegovina has still not been implemented. Even though the Court ruled that in the case of Sejdic-Finci there is no objective and reasonable justification for not having removed provisions which discriminate ethnic minorities, the BH authorities failed to reach a consensus on how to enforce this judgment.

The burden of war with deeply rooted national divisions weakens the state level institutions, primarily the judiciary. Consequently, various problems keep piling up, some of which are: the issue of justice and compensation for the victims of war, the issue of missing persons, corruption, violence against women, sex and gender discrimination, discrimination of persons with disabilities, human trafficking. Close to 10 000 people have been reported to still be missing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas numerous victims of war have still not been granted the right to justice and compensation, whereas thousands of raped women have not been given any support or help from the state.

Even though political elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina still do not have a unique vision on how the country should be developed, the protection of human and minority rights should be treated as one of the most important questions in the future. Accordingly, Bosnia and Herzegovina should primarily solve numerous problems of its past since it is a condition for the establishment of lasting peace and safety, a strong and stable country which will protect human rights and guarantee it to all of its citizens. As long as the international community protects the stability and integrity of the country, Bosnia and Herzegovina will not make progress and start moving forward, especially when it comes to the EU Accession.

Branko Todorovic
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January 2013



About the Helsinki Committee for human rights in Republika Srpska

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights RS was founded on 10th May 1996 by a group of independent intellectuals, as the citizens' reaction to the violent and systematic human rights violations. It is an independent, non-profit organization of citizens which has undertaken a series of activities directed toward the promotion and the protection of human rights and, with a focus on the education of citizens on the basic humanistic and cultural values underlying human rights.

In recent years, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska has contributed considerably to the actualization and the solution of a series of problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are of great importance for the establishment of a democratic society. Since its establishment, this NGO has undertaken a series of activities (TV programs, radio programs, press campaigns, public appearances, and round tables, conferences) to inform the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the introduction of the human rights system, primarily of the European Convention of Human Rights and the basic freedoms.

In the past, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska has carried out the monitoring of the human rights situation submitting quarterly reports to the domestic and international public. These periodic reports have often initiated activities directed towards the removal of the causes leading to various human rights violations. This NGO also realized a series of significant conferences in cooperation with the ICTY Outreach program in the Hague in local communities in BH entitled «Bridging the Gap between ICTY and local communities in BH», where we initiated an open discussion on the war crimes committed in these respective communities in BH and informed the citizens about the work of the ICTY in that field.

In 2005, we started to work intensively with our partners from Croatia on a project which deals with the state of sexual minorities, i.e. the LGTBIQ population in both countries. In the second half of 2005, together with partners within the Balkan Human Rights Network we have published a book named "Confronting the past - consequences for the future". This publication deals regionally with the need to confront the past and deal with it. Authors of the articles of this book are eminent human rights activists, university professors, journalists, lawyers and intellectuals from the Balkan region.

Within its operation, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights has paid particular attention to young people and consequently it is coordinating Youth Groups of some 60 young people between 16 and 21 years old. They are involved in youth activities at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina and they have a series of independent activities at local and regional levels. Within their activities, the young people intend to promote the values of civil society, tolerance, communication between different ethnic groups and universal humanistic values.

In the implementation of its goals, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska is particularly devoted to:

- ☞ systematic monitoring of the state of human rights in the Republic of Srpska
- ☞ registering the violations of human rights and undertaking the protective measures, collecting and distributing information on the practical solutions in the area of human rights all over the world
- ☞ voicing proposals for the improvement of the state of human rights in the Republic of Srpska, including initiation of new regulations and the change of the existing ones
- ☞ providing professional assistance to citizens in the area of human rights
- ☞ establishing a database on the violations of human rights
- ☞ contacting the media with the aim of promoting all aspects of human rights



Key activities realized in 2012

Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans

„Education for Human Rights and Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans is a regional program focused on human rights education and peace and has been implemented on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. The program was initiated by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in year 2002. The importance of this program for the countries of Western Balkans arises from the fact that young people as well as those who work with them lack the basic knowledge on fundamental human rights since in most of the countries such contents have still not been integrated into the formal education system. The program was created and developed primarily by partner organizations from the region, striving to accomplish a mutual goal - to contribute to peace, stability and democratic development.

The emphasis from the start was put on the promotion of human rights education with a special focus on young people and those working with them, as well as on the creation of preconditions for young people to become informed and educated in the field of human rights, intercultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution. The program was further developed through time, gradually broadening its activities directed towards young people and other target groups, changing the methodology and the focus of work. The program nowadays is based on the transfer of skills to young people to know and protect their rights and the rights of other people, but also on building capacities to become advocates for positive social changes in the countries of the region long term.

The program is composed of diverse activities some of which are the organization of basic, advanced and regional Human Rights Schools for youth, trainings for Civic Education teachers, creation and publishing of adequate literature, and monitoring of the activities and projects implemented by Youth Groups from all over the region.

We have worked upon the Evaluation of Civic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with the representative of CIVITAS in order to be able to plan and work upon the future advocacy towards the formal education institutions with the aim of improving the state of Civic Education in B&H. In this year we have cooperated with 15 secondary schools, the Association on Roma „Otaharin“ from Bijeljina, partner organizations (mostly through YG project) and other stakeholders (schools included in the program and the YG project/s). We continued our cooperation with the representatives of informal education and also encouraged our cooperation with the formal education system as a result of the Training for Trainers of Civic Education held last year and by continuing to include them as participants.

Human Rights Schools

In year 2012 we organized and held three local Schools of Human Rights and one Advanced Human Rights School. Secondary school students from Zvornik, Teslic, Maglaj, Bijeljina, Lukavac, Doboj East, Prnjavor, Visoko, Tuzla, Doboj and Brcko District BH participated in these schools. During the School, the participants had a chance to learn about democracy and human rights, peace and tolerance, EU, the sociological perspective of religion, stereotypes and prejudice, peaceful conflict resolution, youth politics, regional program, transitional justice, ICTY, youth activism and many more, through lectures and workshops. In addition to these lectures, which combined both theory and practice, the participants had an opportunity to express themselves in a creative way, mostly through the workshop „Theater in education – Peace and Tolerance“. Within the program the participants were also given the chance to visit existing religious facilities in Bijeljina and talk to the representatives of these institutions, but also to watch several documentaries on the post-war period in B&H, thanks to the representatives of the IWPR, who provided us with this footage.

The representatives of our organization and Helsinki Committee Youth Group participated in two Regional Human Rights Schools, held in Budva and Koprivnica, together with the Youth Groups and the partners from the region.

Youth Activism

The members of the Helsinki Committee Youth Group from Bijeljina implemented two projects in 2012 – “Youth Activism at High Schools” and “United in Diversity”, whereas the Helsinki Committee Youth Group from Doboj finished the implementation of the project “Mini School of Human Rights”. The members of our youth groups organized and attended frequent meetings on which they discuss and plan the activities and projects in order to increase their activism and encourage more young people to join them.



Project "Open Your Eyes, This is Your Past", Advanced School of Human Rights

Within the regional program „Education for Human Rights and Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans“, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska started the realization of the project „Open Your Eyes, This is Your Past“ in June, 2012. The project is supported by the US Embassy to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the main goal of the project is to support young people from Bijeljina, Brcko District and Tuzla in creating mutual dialogue based on established facts from the recent war past, in order to create mutual trust and initiatives towards overcoming the negative consequences of the war and a better future.

These goals were realized through a sequence of activities which we performed in cooperation with the representatives of the secondary schools involved – Grammar School „Mesa Selimovic“, Tuzla“; Grammar School „Vaso Pelagic“, Brcko District; Grammar School „Sveti Franjo“, Tuzla and Technical School „Mihajlo Pupin“, Bijeljina.

The crucial activities within the project were:

- ✓ The realization of the Advanced level Human Rights School for Youth, named „The School of Solidarity“, which lasted for five days and involved theoretical lectures on transitional justice, war events in these three local communities in the period from 1992-1995, based on established facts. 17 secondary school students from Bijeljina, Tuzla and Brcko District participated in this school and in addition to the theoretical knowledge; they had the chance to visit the places of suffering from that period as well as to talk to the witnesses of these events/victims in Tuzla, Bijeljina and Brcko District BH.
- ✓ Following the realization of the School of Solidarity the participants of the project created and organized presentations and photo exhibitions in their schools in order to present their knowledge and experience obtained during the school to their peers, professors and school principals).

In the forthcoming period, we will organize a TV show in which the participants will talk about the activities in which they participated and the project itself. A special focus will be put on the goals and accomplished results. Afterwards we will organize street actions in all three cities included in the project in order to inform the citizens about our project, but also to promote the activities of the Helsinki Committee Youth Groups in order to attract young people to join us.

Transitional Justice

Transitional Justice at Universities

Transitional Justice at Universities is a project started in 2010. The aim of the project is to create preconditions for the incorporation of Transitional Justice content into the existing subjects taught at five universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through their official curricula. Thus the project helps create domestic cadre and expertise from the domain of transitional justice for at least five professions: lawyers, politicologists, sociologists, journalists and philosophers.

The project will be realized through the following activities: strengthening and maintaining the cooperation with the representatives of the five included Universities from BH; the development of curricula including transitional justice concepts adapted to the needs of five different professions; the evaluation of curricula with 80 students from five universities through specialized trainings, which are of great importance for their future vocation and engagement; the foundation and coordination of the network of advocates for introduction of transitional justice into formal education system; the organization of conference with stakeholders to discuss the possibilities of introducing transitional justice as a subject at these institutions; the realization of the first cycle of transitional justice lectures at universities which accepted to include this subject into their official curricula.



During 2012 the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska organized project team meetings, during which they informed the participants of the project about previous activities and the current status of the project. The plan of activities which will be realized in the forthcoming period within the project was also created on this meeting.

A specialized training for the students of Law was held in Bijeljina, where they had an opportunity to discuss criminal justice, the issues of justice for victims and the relation of transitional justice to various education disciplines such as sociology, journalism, political sciences and philosophy. They also discussed the international experiences so far in the domain of transitional justice and the activities which they can



conduct within their faculties, communities and the society in that respect. The lecturers were: professor Miodrag Zivanovic (University of Banja Luka), Slavo Kukic (University of Mostar) and Enes Osmancevic (University of Tuzla), Goran Simic and Aleksandra Letic (Members of the Expert group on Bosnia's transitional justice strategy BH within the BH Council of Ministers), Vehid Sehic (Forum of Tuzla Citizens) and Dragan Popovic (UNDP consultant for transitional justice).

The realization of the project „Transitional Justice at Universities“ will be continued in 2013 with increased engagement of students and university representatives in the project activities. The activities planned for the forthcoming period are: the meeting of the project management team, the second training of students of sociology and political sciences, the third training for the students of Philosophy and Journalism; production of the Transitional Justice Manual; final training for 25 students followed by a public campaign.

Court Support Network

The judicial system is an essential segment of a reconciliation process, whereas the establishment of a more efficient judiciary is only possible if all the actors of society understand and support its work, importance and role. Despite the fact that judicial institutions have shown commitment to field work and the willingness to communicate with the representatives of local communities, the judicial system cannot fully respond to the needs and requests of the BH society which is still influenced by the events from the war past. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska has been the member of the Court Support Network since 2006. We realized numerous activities which helped strengthen and promote the role of the BH Court, the Prosecutor's Office and the Criminal Defense Section BH in pursuing justice for victims, a more efficient judiciary and fight against impunity for serious crimes committed during the war.

The goals we want to accomplish through this project are: to strengthen the capacities of civil society in supporting the work of Judiciary; to encourage war crimes victims to testify; to increase the transparency of judicial system in war crimes processing; to reduce the space for war crimes denial in local communities and increase the compassion with the victims of such crimes.

The activities upon which the project was based are: increased knowledge of citizens on the work of the BH Judiciary (debates in local communities, round tables in local communities, TV shows, visits to the BH Court); increased support of civil society for the work of judiciary in war crimes trials.



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska organized two conferences in Bugojno and Kiseljak in 2012, with the aim to present the work of judicial institutions to the representatives of local communities, through specific cases. The representatives of the BH Court; the Prosecutor's Office and the Criminal Defense Section; Victim's Associations; Families of missing, killed and war veterans; students and representatives of NGOs and media all participated in these conferences. During the conferences, the representatives of judiciary presented the facts established beyond reasonable doubt to the representatives of local communities through presentation of trials and guilty pleas in specific war crimes cases. The participants were also familiarized with the structure, functioning and accomplished results in the work of these institutions so far.

The activities planned for the forthcoming period are: visits of students to the BH Court and conferences in local communities.

Economic and Social Rights

Together Against Corruption

The healthcare sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not immune to corruption, whereas it is often stated that corruption in this field is the most prominent one since the citizens are „the most vulnerable when they are sick“. Helsinki Committee For Human Rights in Republika Srpska has started the realization of the project „Together Against Corruption“, whose main goal is to contribute to the increase of transparency, efficiency and quality of medical services within the General Hospital „Sveti Vracevi“ in Bijeljina, in order to find systematic solutions for protection of the rights of patients and to reduce the perception that corruption in healthcare system is socially acceptable. The activities envisaged by this project are: consultative meetings with stakeholders, review of current state of corruption in healthcare system, formation of working group which will work upon the production of the „Action plan for suppression of corruption in the healthcare system“, the creation of network of interest groups and a public campaign.



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in RS has realized a sequence of activities directed towards the creation of mechanisms for fighting corruption in healthcare system. Based on the analysis of secondary data sources and records made during consultative meetings with stakeholders, an inspection of the current presence of corruption in the healthcare institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been conducted. In cooperation with the management of the General Hospital „Sveti Vracevi“ in Bijeljina, the Working group consisted of the representatives of the Prosecutor’s Office, the Public Security Center Bijeljina, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in RS has been formed and engaged in the creation of „Action plan“ including specific measures for the prevention of corruption at the local hospital. In order to familiarize the public on how the anti-corruption mechanisms are being created, we started an intensive campaign in 2012, which consisted of the following activities: posting info stall in the „Sveti Vracevi“ hospital in Bijeljina, created groups on social networks, organized press conferences and a radio show, creation and broadcast of a radio jingle, creation of newsletter showing the progress of projects and other corruption related news.

An informal network of stakeholders was formed within this project as well. Its main purpose is to bring together the most frequent users of services of the „Sveti Vracevi“ Hospital in Bijeljina. The information on the realized project activities has been exchanged through this network on daily basis, which makes the process of communication with stakeholders involved in the project easier.

In the forthcoming period the following activities will be realized: the finalization and application of measures for prevention of corruption in this hospital, the Open Day, further public campaigns and advocating towards the application of anti-corruption measures.

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