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# SUPPORTING INFORMAL CITIZENS' GROUPS AND GRASS-ROOT INITIATIVES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Reporting period  
September 2016 - September 2017

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## SUMMARY

The initiative to support informal civic groups and grass-root movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina began with the conference “Civil Society as a Factor for Change in BiH” held in 2014 in Vienna. Since 2015, several follow-up activities took place in order to continue supporting informal civic groups, the plena and grass-root movements, from all over the country. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights - Research Association (BIM-FV), the bridge and coordinator between the informal civic groups and international project partners, accompanies seven groups which have been selected: 1. Movement of the Citizens in Gračanica (Pokret Građana Gračanice - PGG), 2. Plenum Bosanska Krupa, 3. Plenum Zenica, 4. Workers' Union in Tuzla (Sindikatska Solidarnost), 5. Informal Group Srebrenik is ours (Srebrenik je naš), 6. Banja Luka Social Centre - BASOC and 7. Informal Citizens' Group for Social Justice in Prijedor. The groups receive financial support from international project partners in form of small grants, which are transferred to them by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights. The grants are small, but important contributions which allow them to implement different activities at the local level, all with the aim to empower the citizens and the local communities from the bottom-up. This way, more effective and strong citizens' networks were established based on the principles of participation and ownership, empowering the civil society in a long term and creating conditions for long overdue social, political and economic changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## BACKGROUND

The Western Balkan region is not only in the focus of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights but also a priority area of the Austrian foreign policy due to its territorial proximity, but also due to the long lasting historic, cultural and economic bonds between Austria and the region. Inspired by the citizens' protests in 2014, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights approached the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA). Both actors recognised the importance of civic movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the need for changes which were demanded and led by the citizens themselves. Therefore, a common framework was developed which later became known as “the Initiative to Support the Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (hereinafter the Initiative).

The first outcome of the Initiative was the above mentioned conference “Civil Society as a Factor for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina” which took place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2014 in Vienna. The conference was supported by the ERSTE Foundation, the Karl Renner Institute, the Central European Initiative (CEI), the European Union Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EU SR in BiH) and the British Embassy in Vienna. The goal of the conference was to offer a platform for exchange and to encourage a dialogue between various civil society actors (formal and informal) coming from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to define a common approach and to create a strong and sustainable civil society movement. The most important results of the conference were not only the exchange of ideas and the creation of networks between the participants who elaborated recommendations for a stronger civil society, but also the creation of new cooperation possibilities with international partners.

Beginning of 2015, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights (BIM) invited informal groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina to identify needs for change in their local communities and to propose activities and action plans with sustainable solutions. During a meeting in Gračanica in April 2015, seven groups were identified and selected for future cooperation with the BIM and its main partner,

the ERSTE Foundation. A cooperation framework was put in place allowing the selected informal groups to implement different activities according to the needs identified in their local communities. The Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA) also continued to support the Initiative and in 2016, the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo became part of it.

The Initiative is embedded in a wider framework. Some of the activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina are part of the Civil Society Forum, which is an important component of the Western Balkans Summit and the Berlin Process, a five-year process marked by yearly summits in order to underline the commitment to EU-enlargement towards the Western Balkans region. The civil society is a crucial partner for future dialogue and cooperation considering the Euro Atlantic integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and plays an important role for the further development of the Western Balkan region in general.

## INNOVATIVE APPROACH

The selected groups are informal, non-registered grass-root initiatives. Given this fact, it was crucial to develop an innovative cooperation and funding structure, which would enable the informal civic movements and grass-root initiatives to receive international support without the usual conditionality (proof of registration, formal demands, applying for grants, etc.).

The new cooperation structure is based on mutual trust and equality between all parties involved. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights - Research Association (BIM-FV) accompanies the groups during the implementation of their activities, being the bridge and connecting unit between them and international partners. In concrete, the BIM-FV transfers the approved grants to the groups (to one appointed person of trust), monitors and supervises the implementation of activities and provides financial and operational reports to project partners. The groups are responsible for the implementation of their activities and decide by themselves on the use of the funds. This kind of approach enables them to implement their activities in a sovereign and independent way. Given the fact that the informal civic groups are heterogeneous formations in terms of their composition and way of working, they developed their own implementation approaches, which also gives them the possibility to react spontaneously to current local developments.

The work of the groups encloses a wide range of activities: from regular meetings and networking in the plena, to public discussions and awareness raising campaigns, all with the aim to include more and more citizens and encourage them to become proactive agents of change. The groups developed mechanisms for reporting and detecting cases of corruption, they monitor the meetings and decisions of the municipal councils including the use of public funds and act as public watchdogs in their local communities.

## REPORTING PERIOD SEPTEMBER 2016 TO SEPTEMBER 2017 - ACHIEVED

### RESULTS

Since the beginning of the Initiative in January 2015, the informal civic groups achieved remarkable results. Most of them established a permanent office, which provides enough space and freedom for realising different forms of activities. The interest in civic activism and active involvement in decision-making processes in the local communities increased in general. Young people, the new generation, are getting more and more involved recognising the importance of civic engagement for a better future

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The groups established strong networks and support each other during protests and campaigns.

In the following, the manifold activities and achieved results in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 are presented. Each group sent regularly narrative and financial reports either in English or Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights analysed the reports and prepared the following summary which gives a detailed insight into the work of the informal groups:

## 1. BANJA LUKA SOCIAL CENTRE - BASOC

The Banja Luka Social Center stands for political equality and public and common goods (material heritage such as schools, playgrounds, parks and factories, as well as intangible assets such as socio-cultural heritage and memories) in the post-war and post-socialist Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus of BASOC are social justice and social equity, especially workers' rights, the exchange with the BiH diaspora and minorities as well as gender policies. These issues are approached through various interdisciplinary methodological approaches such as cultural and artistic, contemporary historiography, urban policy analysis, as well as critical discursive and politico-economic analyses. Being situated in a traditional ottoman house, BASOC provides a permanent space for the citizens. It will continue to build and create new post-socialist societies through a horizontal hybrid of academia, theory and activism. In this way, BASOC actively opposes the patriarchy, nationalism and economic inequality that emerged from the wars of the 1990s and the post-war transition.

In the second half of 2016, BASOC organised and hosted a variety of events, with a focus on presenting regional artists and intellectuals to the local public and promoting the Centre as a free space where tabooed topics, informal conversations and politically and intellectually charged discussions can be openly discussed. Some of the activities were: a panel on the topic "Reconciliation under what conditions?" (03.09.2016), September discussions (Rujanski razgovori) from 15.09. - 22.09.2016, open discussions on the topic "What kind of society do we want? Challenges of imagining the alternative" (05.10.2016), concert of Ah, Ahilej (06.10.2016), talk by Dženeta Karabegović on ways to mobilise the Bosnian diaspora (28.10.2016), book promotion on Historical Revisionism by Milan Radanović (06.11.2016), public book presentation: Crisis, Art, Action (26.11.2016), public readings of works by Branko Ćopić (16.12.2016), to name only a few.

For more details, please see the Interim Report September - December 2016 published on the BIM's website:

[http://bim.lbg.ac.at/sites/files/bim/attachments/supporting\\_informal\\_civic\\_groups\\_interim\\_report\\_jan\\_2017.pdf](http://bim.lbg.ac.at/sites/files/bim/attachments/supporting_informal_civic_groups_interim_report_jan_2017.pdf)

In 2017, BASOC continued to organise events, movie screenings, and gatherings of union members, collective readings and communal dinners. It hosted and supported numerous activities of the left scene in Banja Luka and Bosnia and Herzegovina in general. Some of the activities focused on finding ways to keep and improve the physical condition of the house, where the Centre is based. However, due to shortages of funding and the decreasing possibilities and willingness to conduct construction works on the house for free, BASOC decided to focus on its ongoing program and on the expansion into the (left) underground city scene. The usual activities include organising general assemblies with old and new members, conducting works on the house, organising a feminist coffee, antifa and

feminist cinema, translations of relevant texts, publishing etc. The activities were organised on weekly, biweekly or monthly basis, depending on the availability of BASOC members. Some of the activities were:

- Memories and thoughts on Holocaust (27<sup>th</sup> January 2017), the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, during which local and international guests talked about the historical revisionism, the rise of the right in Europe and in ex-Yugoslav republics, the Yugoslav wars.
- Promotion of a unionist newspaper “Rad” and a regional critical online magazine “Bilten” from Croatia (11<sup>th</sup> February 2017). Discussion with members of the editing board of the two media collectives on possibilities to actively nurture critical thinking, media literacy and to advance the support of union organising.
- 8<sup>th</sup> of March Manifestations: “8<sup>th</sup> of March - We were not born only for giving birth” (“8. Marš - Nismo rođene samo da rađamo”), organised by Oštra Nula. BASOC supported the manifestations by hosting workshops and taking part in a protest walk aiming to put under the spotlight the new ways women suffer in our society, if not because of outright violence, then because of various forms of discrimination, mobbing, doubly burdened labour, patriarchy, etc.
- Public Round Table (April 2017) with poets, writers and theoreticians to discuss the effects of war traumas on their work and on the society as a whole. Participants were Faruk Sehić, Tanja Stupar Trifunović, Damir Arsenijević, Jasmina Husanović with other guests. A series of events about lingering effects of war and ‘transition’ that block our theoretical and practical (art)work was envisaged. The aim is to organise round tables on a monthly basis once there are sufficient funds for bringing together different people who, professionally and privately, struggle with various traumatic experiences woven into the very fabric of post-war Bosnian society.
- On 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017, BASOC organised a series of seminars and roundtables on historical revisionism in collaboration with a Belgrade-based organisation, “Rex”: (Un)framing of History: Activist practices and experiences in combating historical revisionism (Seminars for everybody).
- End of April 2017, BASOC held unofficial discussions with union members from several major unions from Banja Luka.
- May 2017 was reserved for preparatory activities for BLASFEM, the first feminist festival in Banja Luka. The preparations included several events and public readings of poetry by female poets from BiH. At the end of May, the members of BASOC helped organise and took part in the “White Armband Day” in Prijedor, remembering the victims of the war, who were killed in Prijedor and surroundings.
- BLASFEM took place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2017, a festival which offered a broad program with round tables, performances, concerts and discussions on current and past struggles, not only of the feminist scene but in general of the post-Yugoslav left, with over thirty participants and around 150 guests during the two days. BASOC’s intention is to organise it next year as well.
- During July 2017, several activities were held concerning historical revisionism such as an event at the mountain Kozara (4<sup>th</sup> of July 2017), the memorial place for victims of fascism.
- Antifa and feminist cinema went on throughout the summer, with the exception of the month of August, which was reserved for the Banja Luka Summer Scene, a month-long

festival of theatre plays by local students, giving space to young and inexperienced actors and directors to put on a play every second night.

BASOC's activities expanded to different fields of action, including the work with unions, writing about acute social hurdles, organisation of festivals and events that require more stable funding which would not limit BASOC to project-based activities, but allow to redistribute the funds to other members of the collective who do not have a stable income. Building up of capacities of the Centre and its members as well as a critical mass in Banja Luka that actively questions and critically assess the contemporary BiH society, proves to be the biggest challenge and something BASOC hopes to continue doing in the upcoming year.



Photos from left to right: Feminist Coffee, invitation for Union talks, Union talks, Banja Luka Feminist Festival - BLASFEM, BASOC Lower floor.

## 2. INFORMAL GROUP SREBRENİK JE NAŠ

By its regular protest at the main square in Srebrenik, the informal group, which was formed during the citizens' protests in 2014, mainly consisting of former members of the Army of BiH, is constantly reminding those in power of their duties and responsibilities towards their citizens. The group informs the public of cases of corruption and nepotism and raises the awareness on the importance to become more active and involved. Due to the tireless engagement of the group members, the local authorities are constantly in the focus of public interest which led to a more responsible use of the local budget and influenced the decision making process in favour of the citizens.

From September 2016 until September 2017, the group continued to hold their regular meetings and organised protests and gatherings every second Thursday at the main square of the town. They continued to print and distribute posters and flyers, with the aim to show cases of corruption, including naming and shaming of those who were directly involved in such practices.

The group members remained politically involved. During the local elections in October 2016, they supported independent candidates, hoping to establish a balance in the municipal council which was dominated by the ruling political parties.

Informing the public on current social and political developments and inviting the citizens to public tribunes is one of the most important tasks of the Informal Group. On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016, a public discussion was held on the topic "Bosnia and Herzegovina today". The invited panellists were prominent professors and supporters of the citizens' movement, Mr. Esad Bajtal, Mr. Zlatan Begić, Mr. Edin Delić, Mr. Vedad Pašić and Mr. Izudin Kešetović. The tribune was very well received by the citizens of Srebrenik who listened to the experts' opinions about the difficult situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and discussed the main reasons for it. Another panel discussion on the topic "What will bring 2018 - Changes or new lies?" is planned in December 2018, which will be accessible on YouTube. (More details will be published in the next report in March 2018).

Networking and cooperating with other civic groups and grass-root movements from Bosnia and Herzegovina continued throughout the second half of 2016 and in 2017. The IG Srebrenik je naš supported the unemployed workers from Canton Tuzla who were deprived of their rights during the corrupt and non-transparent privatisation and insolvency processes. The group participated in the protests which were organised by the Workers' Union, Sindikat Solidarnosti, in front of the government building in Sarajevo. They also visited their colleagues in Gračanica and provided support during their activities and protest actions. In Mai 2017, the group was part of the White Armband Day, commemorating the victims of the war in Prijedor.





© I.G. Srebrenik je naš

### 3. INFORMAL GROUP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PRIJEDOR

The Informal Group for Social Justice is a network of young, enthusiastic people from Prijedor, who believe that social activism in its various forms such humanitarian work, fight for human rights, active monitoring of political decisions and access to information, can initiate changes in their local community. The group was formed during the protests in 2014 and operates in close cooperation with the Youth Center “Kvart” in Prijedor. During the second half of 2016 and in 2017, the group achieved remarkable results on various levels:

#### Voluntary work

The voluntary work was mainly focused on the small town Ljubija, near Prijedor. The goal of the Informal Group for Social Justice was to include as many young people as possible, which turned out to be a difficult task, influenced by many factors. Many of their former volunteers and members were high school students who, after they had finished high school, left the city for further education. During that period, the IG for Social Justice redirected their efforts to finding new volunteers and involving new members into socially responsible work. To achieve this goal, they also published a public call for volunteers. However, the response was small, which proved that social responsibility in the local community is still at a low level.

The volunteering activities mainly consisted of working with the public kitchen in Ljubija and its users. In addition to the public kitchen, the group organised painting and house cleaning actions to help the elderly who were not able to do it by themselves due to their health and financial conditions. Of special importance and success was the action of sowing seeds in order to grow vegetables and fruits in a sustainable way. The users of the public kitchen benefited from this activity very much, as it had direct impact on their social and economic position. Despite the lack of volunteers during this period, all the activities were implemented and completed successfully.

### **Monitoring the work of public institutions and conducting advocacy campaigns**

Monitoring the public institutions and their work remains one of the most important activities of the IG for Social Justice. For this purpose, a working group was established in order to send requests for free access to information and to monitor the use of the municipal budget.

Analysing the city budget, the group found a lot of inconsistencies. In concrete, the analysis focused on public procurements and especially on the law on public procurement and its implementation (whether the law was respected and whether the local authorities acted within the law). The findings show that socially relevant aspects were not included in the budget in general, and that it contains several irrelevant and unnecessary budget lines which could easily allow manipulation.

Concerning the free access to information, the group sent several requests to town authorities which remained unanswered. To react on this, the group informed the public about the obstacles and difficulties they encountered by publishing their research results on their blog and Facebook page. In addition, they will continue to cooperate with lawyers in order to deal with situations in which the public authorities do not act accordingly to their duties and the law.

### **Street actions and public events**

The IG for Social Justice continued to organise public events and to support other groups and organisations. They took part in the organisation of a peaceful march on 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2017, in cooperation with other NGOs in Banja Luka. In addition, they took part in a peaceful march on 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2017, which is organised every year in Prijedor to commemorate the disappeared and killed children of Prijedor during the war. The group continued to approach actively the citizens in Prijedor and to exchange experiences and opinions on the current social situation. Many citizens believe that efforts of the political elites to manipulate the public are not to be taken too seriously, and that it is important to support the younger generations in order to achieve socio-economic progress in the long run. Many of the citizens also agreed that interethnic tensions are only attempts of some members of the political elite to divert the public's opinion from real issues such as unemployment, corruption, crime and poverty, which are the real problems of the Bosnian society today.

In June 2017, the IG for Social Justice established contact with the Youth Association "Balkanac" whose members are citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. In agreement with them, they organised a screening of the movie "Isn't it better this way?". The premiere was held in the cinema in Prijedor. Participants had the opportunity to watch a movie made by young people traveling to the countries of former Yugoslavia, to hear what the citizens of these country think and how they live. After the film, the audience took part in a panel discussion with the members of the association "Balkanac".

## Public relations

The IG for Social Justice has their own internet blog where they inform the public about their activities. They also have a Facebook page with the same name as the blog “Ustaj Prijedore”, where they publish and share texts. To gain more publicity they also use the blog and Facebook page of the Youth Centre “Kvart”. A big part of their activities is implemented in joint action with other similar groups, most notably the Youth Center „Kvart” in Prijedor, the “Banja Luka Social Center - BASOC” and „Oštra Nula”. The members of the IG for Social Justice took part in various workshops, presentations, actions, which at the same time offered them the possibility to learn, help and widen their experience and expertise. They also cooperate and receive support from the association of women in Ljubija.

During the course of this Initiative, the young members of the Informal Group gained new experiences in dealing with political issues, social justice, the organisation and implementation of activities, as well as many other practical and administrative tasks. Furthermore, they became more aware of their own competences and know-how, which is considerable, taking into account the relatively short period of time they are dealing with these topics. Despite the difficulties the group encountered, such as the lack of volunteers or the lack of motivation of young people to engage in humanitarian activities, the group was able to overcome these obstacles. They are still eager to address the issues of social injustice and to deal with all parts of the society that are neglected and require a lot of engagement in the future.



Photos/Images: Protests in Prijedor (May 2017), Invitation to take part in voluntary actions in Ljubija (April 2017), Invitation to the premiere of the movie of the youth association Balkanac (June 2017).

#### 4. PLENUM ZENICA

The Plenum of the Citizens in Zenica was formed during the citizens' protests in spring 2014. Like the plena in other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it assembled different groups of people, especially pensioners, unemployed workers and the youth who were eager to introduce changes in the city of Zenica and beyond. During the course of the Initiative to support informal grass-root movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina excellent cooperation was established with Meliha Bajramović, who became the main contact person in Zenica. The Plenum in Zenica rented premises near the city centre, which serve as an open space for citizens who are welcome to use the premises, participate at the Plenum's meetings and to express their concerns, problems or ideas, thus becoming proactive agents of change at the local level.

The dynamics of the Plenum changed since 2014. The first enthusiastic months were followed by a period of scepticism and even lack of trust. Some citizens who were not involved in the Plenum or did not have accurate information about its way of financing and operating, had the wrong impression that the members of the Plenum receive salaries for their engagement, which was not true. The Plenum in Zenica receives small grants for the purpose of maintaining the premises and most importantly for the implementation of activities at the local level, which is based on volunteering. Despite these difficulties, the Plenum remained active and initiated a remarkable number of activities and projects, whereby the main focus was to involve especially the youth and to establish a cooperation with other citizens' organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the second part of 2016 and until September 2017, the Plenum in Zenica was active during the local elections motivating the citizens to become politically involved, inform themselves and vote for those candidates they consider the most promising and competent. The Plenum was very disappointed about the fact that only 40% of the citizens in Zenica went out to the elections. However, their general impression is that the Plenum has contributed to raise the awareness on the meaning of elections and voting.

The bulletin, which is published on a regular basis, remained one of the Plenum's main activities. The bulletin offers the possibility to all citizens to express themselves and to write about the problems in their local communities. It is not only popular amongst the citizens but also amongst the police, the judges and officials of the municipality. In 2018, all editions of the bulletin will be published in form of a book.

Another activity which became very popular especially amongst the youth is the production of sketches and videos, which in their satiric and funny way aim to motivate the citizens to engage more in their local communities. A group of pupils recorded a play called "Mirror", demonstrating possibilities to take a proactive role in the society. The group also established a cooperation with the organisation "Friends of Srebrenica" which promised to support them in finalising the recordings, so that the sketches and short videos can be published on the YouTube channel of the Plenum. The making of the video clips raised the awareness of the young participants on the existing problems in their municipality and strengthened their confidence to express their opinion.

A gallery with the title "Let's go (in)sane" was planned for December 2017, however, due to some postponements, the installation will be finished in February 2018 (Valentine's Day) with the message to share peace and love. The aim is to raise the awareness of the citizens on the importance of a peaceful social engagement and peaceful activism. Positive and sustainable changes can only be

achieved in a peaceful way whereby every individual has to play a part. The activists collected artistic works (photographs) and will install them at the main square in Zenica.

Suggested by Meliha Bajramovic, the Plenum agreed on organising a public debate with the title 'How to change the system in Bosnia and Herzegovina'. The preliminary plan was to organise a big media campaign and collect the opinions of the citizens in different towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The panel discussion was planned for Autumn/Winter 2017. However, since the organisation, funding and involvement of respective authorities and international partners, especially the OHR, proved to be very complicated, the debate is also postponed for 2018.

### **Work of the Plenum needs to change**

Considering the above mentioned difficulties, the way of working of the Plenum will need to change in the future, in order to find new and better ways of social engagement and civic activism. The situation in Zenica showed that understanding the meaning of volunteering is still at a very low level. Also the initial concept of direct democracy, whereby everybody is invited to contribute without any forms of hierarchical structures, proved to be inefficient as people did not take the implementation of the agreed activities in a serious way, leaving the work unfinished behind, unwilling to take over any responsibility, especially when they understood that their engagement will remain unpaid. It has become evident that a movement based on the idea that everyone is equal in terms of power and responsibility is very difficult to put into practice. This mode of activism will need to change because it did not prove to be the most effective in its existing form, especially not in social frameworks in which corruption is still at a very high level and the majority of the population still fears for their existence. Even though a lot has been achieved through the Plenum in Zenica as well as other plena throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the lessons learnt show that the society was not ready yet and it did not use its full potential to change the prevailing system.

One proposal to deal with the lessons learnt from the past and to initiate new forms of activism is to establish a new organisation, "TANGO" (Teaching and Assessing Non-Governmental Organisations) for the purpose of developing activism and NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This however does not mean that the Plenum, which is an important platform for the citizens, will disappear. The Plenum will remain in function, first and foremost because the citizens need possibilities and ways to strengthen their capacities and learn how to work as a team. Nevertheless, its form and structure will be embedded in a wider, more structured process: The Plenum will become a project led by the organisation TANGO with the title "RAD - Plenum". RAD means "work" and it is an acronym for "Razvoj Aktivizma i Demokratije" – Development of Activism and Democracy. RAD will have an open policy for all citizens who want to get involved or have an idea for their own project. In this way, the Plenum will remain an open platform for activism. However, those who are willing to be part of it, will need to prove their commitment and willingness to take over the responsibility for their activities.

Another of RAD's priorities will be the democratisation of the system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereby possibilities will be discussed how to reduce the size of the government in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to become more effective.



© Plenum Zenica: entrance to the premises of the Plenum; workshops in Srebrenica

## 5. WORKERS' UNION SINDIKAT SOLIDARNOSTI

The Workers' Union Sindikat Solidarnosti primarily focuses on the fight for labour and workers' rights. Accordingly, their main activities are oriented towards this goal. In the course of the Initiative to support informal grass-root movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights established excellent cooperation with the Workers' Union, especially Mr. Sakib Kopic and Mr. Enes Tanovic, the initiators of many activities of the Union and leaders in the fight for workers' rights. The Worker's Union has conducted many activities and protest to support the disempowered workers.

On the initiative of Sindikat Solidarnosti the Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided on 23rd May 2016 (the decision was not published before 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017!) that the Law on Insolvency, which allowed the exploitation of workers and the breach of workers' rights throughout decades, was unconstitutional. This was a big victory of the Workers' Union and the disempowered workers! However, despite this important decision, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, rather than approving the amendments to the Law, decided to send a

request for revising the decision. Sindikat Solidarnosti interpreted this reaction of the Government as a political act to exercise pressure on the Court. Considering the fact that the decision was unanimously issued and that all eyes are now directed towards the Court, the Workers' Union doubts that it will be revised. They also decided to react and send an answer, which again, will be prepared pro bono by Professor Zlatan Begić, who supports the Workers' Union and is one of their prominent members.

More information on the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be found in the previous interim report:

[http://bim.lbg.ac.at/sites/files/bim/attachments/supporting\\_informal\\_civic\\_groups\\_interim\\_report\\_jan\\_2017.pdf](http://bim.lbg.ac.at/sites/files/bim/attachments/supporting_informal_civic_groups_interim_report_jan_2017.pdf)

In addition to that, Sindikat Solidarnosti intends to write an appeal for assessing the constitutionality of the existing Law on Public Assembly in Canton Tuzla. Currently, they are collecting the necessary number of signatories for sending this appeal.

Additionally, they continued to analyse cases of privatisation, insolvency and economic crimes and to exercise pressure on the Prosecutor's Office of Canton Tuzla and the Government of the Federation in order to finally pass a comprehensive law which would allow to band together the years of work and duty for employees in state-owned enterprises as well as employees in private companies considering to their right to pension. During April and May 2017, the Union organised protests in front of the Government building in Sarajevo with the result that the Government finalised the decision to provide funds for paying contributions to 16 workers from the company "Borac" from Banovići and 6 workers from Zenica.

In addition, the Union continued to fight for the rights of workers in companies such as Polihem, Poliochem, Fortuna, Rudar invest, Guming, Aida, TTU and other insolvent companies which were sold for nothing, leaving thousands of workers without salaries and contributions they are entitled to. Consequently, a vast number of these workers is not in a position to realise their right to pension due to non-paid contributions of their former employers to the pension fund.

Moreover, the Union provided support to war veterans who were protesting in front of the building of the Government of the Federation for almost two months, seeking their fundamental rights, namely to finally publish a unique list of veterans, which would allow more transparency. Currently over 250 thousand fake soldiers are on the list, who are in fact a voting machine for the ruling parties. The government is currently financing 1600 veteran organisations, which are under direct political influence. Each year, over 200 million KM is allocated to these organisations from the budget, which would be enough to fulfil all the demands of the veterans, such as the establishment of only one politically independent association of war veterans and very humble monthly compensations of only 326 KM. Of course, these demands and protests were completely ignored by those in power who created a media blockade, inserted their players into the ranks of the veterans and this way tried to force the activists to remove their protest camps in front of the Government building.

Moreover, the Union discussed the idea of establishing a political movement in BiH. They have a lot of supporters for this project. The support comes from associations from Sarajevo, as well as from other cantons. They will also establish contacts with related organisations from Republika Srpska with the aim to prepare a joint meeting and define their goals and ideas. To form a political movement became

a pervading need in order to gain more influence. Naturally, for this initiative, the Union will require additional financial resources.

In September 2017, Sindikat Solidarnosti hosted a meeting with the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and Mr. Vedran Džihčić, project advisor and expert for the Western Balkan region. The meeting took place in their premises in Tuzla and had the purpose to share the recent achievement of the groups, discuss obstacles and think about possible ways for further cooperation.



©Sindikat Solidarnosti: protest organised by the Workers' Union, meeting in Tuzla with partners of the Initiative



## 6. CITIZENS' MOVEMENT IN GRAČANICA - PGG

The movement is a public watchdog and a corrective force of the local government and public institutions. Its presence in Gračanica is well noticed by citizens and decision makers who started to act in a more responsible and accountable way. During the course of the Initiative to support informal grass-root movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, excellent cooperation was achieved with the Citizens' Movement in Gračanica and especially Larisa Šušić, the main contact person and the initiator of many activities of the group. The Movement is active at several levels and achieved many results for the benefit of the citizens in Gračanica.

### **Humanitarian work**

The Citizens' Movement Gračanica is part of humanitarian activities in their town and always willing to help and support citizens in need. They publish invitations for humanitarian activities on their webpage and social networks, which are followed by the broad public.

### **Protection of the environment**

The Movement is part of environmental activism and co-initiator of protests and awareness raising campaigns for saving the environment in cooperation with other non-governmental organisations and local self-government units. Significant progress has been made in the fight against environmental pollution. PGG managed to establish a committee for environmental protection together with the non-governmental sector and local self-government, where they directly address questions and define long-term and short-term goals during their meetings. Together, they launched significant prosecution and investigation processes and initiated lawsuits. In addition, PGG is conducting education campaigns on this matter in order to educate the children from their earliest days to get involved and interested in environmental matters. The actions conducted by the PGG are very well received and serve as an example for other communities.

### **Strengthening the youth**

A large number of educational workshops were conducted in cooperation with their partners from non-governmental organisations, especially the league of young pacifists. PGG made a great contribution to strengthening the youth councils offering conceptual solutions and expert advice for creating an on-line blood donor database that will come to life eventually in whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, the Movement launched a significant action with the title "Stop Violence against our children". Based on this action, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, a revision of all social welfare centers was carried out. The results were not good for Gračanica. The movement will continue to engage in that field and implement further activities and campaigns in order to save young lives. This year, PGG also supported and with their group of young activists called "OMG PGG" directly participated in the organisation of the youth camp, Vis 2017. The young activists from Gračanica made a significant contribution in creating a strategy for the youth and become certified educators for several programs which are implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During these programs they lead activities for the youth on topics such as peace and reconciliation and advised them how to form a youth center.

## Strengthening the local self-government and local communities

Including the citizens in local decision making structures is another goal of the Citizens' Movement in Gračanica. The members of the group are constantly working on creating systematic solutions and fighting corruption. With their support a rulebook on the systematisation of the work of the municipality was developed and is now in use.

## Culture and education of citizens

Activists of the Movement are members of various social and cultural organisations. After the local elections, the community experienced a strong cultural and social development. The new government is open to innovative ideas, thus supporting a new, flourishing cultural progress in their municipality. Many ideas of the Movement were immediately realised. Aware of its position and influence, the Movement, which is guided by the citizens' needs, directly shapes the political processes and decision making procedures!

Educating the citizens to become proactive agents of change is another goal the Movements pursues since their establishment. For this purpose, they organised educative meetings on the topic "How to become an active citizen" and published brochures and info material about citizens' duties and responsibilities which is very well received. Also, they organise public debates with prominent and respected public figures, such as Srđan Puhalo, in order to analyse and discuss the reality in which the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina live today. This way, the Movement has a broad impact on the society not only on the local level, but also throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the future, the Movement suggests to strengthen the cooperation with smaller communities in the sense: "Your problem is my problem" and to highlight the results and visibility of the joint efforts of the activists. This could be achieved by joint actions such as distributing the same message at the same time in several towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Their enthusiasm is unique. The Movement of the Citizens' in Gračanica is one example how small civic initiatives can bring along significant changes at the local level. They will continue with their engagement to return the faith to the citizens in a better tomorrow and just institutions by fostering good relations between them. They will continue to motivate and educate the citizens and provide their services as a base of trust. Their slogan is now more accurate than ever: "WE ARE THE CHANGE"!





**Pokreni se i dođi na...**  
INTELEKTUALNI DERNEK

NGG Pokret Građana Gračanica u saradnji i sa podrškom BKC Gračanica i Radio Gračanica organizuje aktivističko druženje. SVI STE POZVANI ...

**Petak 08.09.2017. god.18:00 sati**  
BKC velika sala Gračanica

PRVI DIO VEČERI REZERVISAN JE ZA PROMOCIJU KNJIGE: OD 18:00 DO 18:30

Promocija knjige **"Samo frontalno"** Srđana Puhala u Gračanici  
Za Gračanicu je rekao:  
„Dok su sve oči uprte u RS i najavu njezine nezavisnosti ... ja se plašim da se Gračanica, Tešanj i Goražde ne otcjepe od BiH jer ih ona koči u privrednom razvoju“  
Srđan Puhalo

Ovo je zemlja za nas, ova je zemlja za svu našu djecu...

DRUGI DIO VEČERI REZERVISAN JE ZA: JAVNU DEBATU OD 18:30 DO 20:00 ILI DUŽE ...

**JAVNA DEBATA**  
„Naš MICRO DOPRINOS u kreiranju MACRO SLIKE DRUŠTVA“

**Dragi ljudi ŠTA SE OVO DEŠAVA ?**

Učesnici pored našeg gosta experti i stručna lica , građanski aktivisti, borci za ljudska prava, SINDIKAT SOLIDARNOSTI, experti, predstavnici lokalne samouprave i drugi...

BKC BOSANSKI NATIONALI CENTAR GRAČANICA

POKRET GRAĐANA GRAČANICE

Radio Gračanica FM 87,5 i 95

Zaštitimo djecu od nasilja

**STOP**

**NASILJU NAD DJECOM**

GRAČANICA neSIGURAN GRAD

POKRET GRAĐANA GRAČANICE

**HUMANITARNA AKCIJA**

PETAČEK 13.01.2017. OD 10:00 DO 18:00  
SUBOTA 14.01.2017. OD 10:00 DO 15:00

"HUMANOST NA DJELU"  
GRAČANICA IMA SRCE

**IMAŠ JAKNU VIŠKA OSTAVI**  
**TREBA TI JAKNA UZMI**

PROSTORIJE POKRET GRAĐANA GRAČANICE PREKO PUTA HOTELA

Photos © PGG and PGG OMG: humanitarian action, education and empowerment workshops for citizens, youth camp 2017, protest for a healthy environment, invitations and posters for the public debate, the initiative "Stop the violence against children", invitation for humanitarian actions.

## 7. PLENUM BOSANSKA KRUPA

The Plenum in Bosanska Krupa, a small town situated at the wonderful river Una near the Croatian border in the north of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was formed during the February protests in 2014. Since then, the Plenum experienced a lot of ups and downs and has dealt with numerous obstacles. Like in other small communities, the town is dominated by the major ruling political parties, which control the everyday life of the citizens. Those, who are not part of this system, are socially marginalised and have no access to jobs or are exposed to direct treats and bullying. The town experienced a decline in population, as everybody who had the chance to leave and work abroad, took the opportunity for doing so. This is why the only high school in town remains closed for there are simply not enough pupils. During the summer months, the Bosnian diaspora returns, fills the cafés and restaurants while enjoying the wonderful nature of their former hometown, and for a short moment revives the glance and shine the town once had.

At its beginnings, the Plenum in Bosanska Krupa had numerous members, people who were not satisfied with the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and who were hoping for changes. As the time passed, most of them lost hope and left the Plenum due to several reasons, one of them being the lack of a structured approach and clear division of work and responsibilities. Those who remained were mostly pensioners, unemployed workers and citizens who were not part of the dominant political parties.

The activities of the Plenum varied, from humanitarian work (such as providing material support to the poorest members of the community, reparation of houses and distribution of food in soup kitchens), to cultural and sportive activities, political engagement during the local elections, to community work (such as cleaning of the orthodox and catholic cemetery in B. Krupa). One of the main groups the Plenum provided support for were the demobilised members of the Army of BiH, who were deprived of their rights. To support them, the Plenum participated in several protest in 2016 and 2017. Also, it established a cooperation with the association of parents of children with special needs “ADA” in Bosanska Krupa.

In the first half of 2017, the Plenum seemed to function well. It had its own premises which were open to all citizens and served as a basis to meet and discuss current happenings. In March 2017, the Plenum hosted a meeting with their main partners and supporters, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo. The meeting was very well organised and had the goal to exchange current developments and, also, discuss the latest achievements of the groups.

In the second half of the year, however, several difficulties appeared, causing misunderstanding and mistrust between the members which even led to a splitting up of some members who formed another informal group and named themselves “Plenum Rezolucija”, referring to their main goal, namely to support the war veterans and their attempts to issue a resolution which would be adopted by the government. The other half remained with the initial “Plenum Bosanska Krupa”, following similar goals, namely to continue to support the socially marginalised citizens by proposing sustainable solutions such as the installation of a green house in order to grow vegetables for the poorest, to monitor the decision-making processes at the local level and to observe new faces who appear at the political scene in Bosanska Krupa. The parallel existence of two informal groups which pursue the same or similar goals in such a small community does not make any sense.

The internal problems the Plenum in Bosanska Krupa experienced are a phenomenon which appeared in almost every plenum which was formed during the protests in 2014, except a few. Lack of clear structures and operational procedures, the lack of responsibilities and the prevailing of personal interest in some of the plena (which was also the case for Bosanska Krupa), led to its collapse and dilution. Nevertheless, the experiences gained in the informal groups are important and showed that changes are possible, if the citizens support each other, which primarily depends on a joint strategy and the willingness to remain persistent in their demands. A lot was achieved, a lot still needs to be tackled.



Photos: young athletes who were supported by the Plenum and won at a national competition; Meeting in Bosanska Krupa in March 2017

## PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE INITIATIVE

Coordination: Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights - Research Association (BIM-FV)

Main partners: ERSTE Foundation, Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo, Foreign Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria (BMEIA).

Informal civic groups and grass-root movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Movement of the Citizens in Gračanica - PGG and PGG OMG, Plenum Zenica, Informal Group Srebrenik je naš, Plenum Bosanska Krupa, Banja Luka Social Centre - BASOC, Workers' Union Sindikat Solidarnosti Tuzla, Informal Group for Social Justice Prijedor.

## TIMETABLE

Month	Year	Description
<b>Sept</b>	2014	Conference "Civil Society as a Motor for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in cooperation with the BMEIA, ERSTE Foundation, Central European Initiative - CEI, EU Special Representative in BiH, British Embassy in Vienna and Karl Renner Institute
<b>Jan</b>	2015	Follow-up Meeting in Sarajevo, 21.01.2015, invitation for further cooperation, launch of the call for proposals
<b>April</b>	2015	Follow-up Meeting in Gračanica, 27.04.2015, selection of informal groups
<b>May</b>	2015	Meeting with potential international partners and supporters to join the Initiative in the Austrian Embassy in Sarajevo, 11.05.2015
<b>June</b>	2015	Signing of the Cooperation Agreement between selected informal civic groups and project partners in Sarajevo, 18.06.2015
<b>July</b>	2015	Begin of the <b>first implementation period</b> (July 2015 to December 2015)
<b>Jan</b>	2016	Follow-up meeting in Banja Luka, presentation of achieved results, 25.01.2016
<b>May</b>	2016	Submission of interim reports (operational, financial) to the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo
<b>July</b>	2016	Meeting with project partners in Sarajevo to ensure further funding in order to allow the groups to continue their work
<b>July</b>	2016	Follow-up meeting in Zenica hosted by the Plenum in Zenica, 13.07.2016
<b>Aug</b>	2016	Submission of final reports for the first implementation period to the ERSTE Foundation
<b>Sept</b>	2016	Begin of the <b>second implementation period</b> (September 2016 to December 2016)
<b>Jan</b>	2017	Submission of interim reports (operational, financial) to the Swiss Embassy
<b>March</b>	2017	Follow-up meeting in Bosanska Krupa, hosted by the Plenum Bosanska Krupa, 27.03.2017
<b>Sept</b>	2017	Follow-up meeting in Tuzla, hosted by Sindikat Solidarnosti, 22.09.2017

<b>Oct</b>	2017	Begin of the <b>third implementation period</b> (October 2017 to March 2018)
<b>Dec</b>	2017	Submission of final reports for the second implementation period (operational, financial) to the ERSTE Foundation and BMEIA
<b>March</b>	2018	Final Meeting in Srebrenik and Round Table in Sarajevo on the topic: Four years after the protests - obstacles and achievements

The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights would like to thank all the partners and supporters of the initiative and especially the activists who are actively involved with all their hearts in order to create better conditions for a life in dignity, based on democracy, rule of law and human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina!

**Thank you very much! We are proud of knowing you and providing you the needed support!**