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

Interim Report

September - December 2016

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INHALT

Summary	3
Background	3
Implementation of activities	4
Achieved results in the period from September to December 2016	4
Banja Luka Social Centre - BASOC	4
Informal group Srebrenik je naš.....	9
Informal Group for Social Justice Prijedor	10
Plenum Zenica	12
Workers' Union Sindikat Solidarnosti	15
Citizens' movement in Gračanica - PGG.....	17
Plenum Bosanska Krupa	20
Partners and supporters of the initiative	21
Timetable	21

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 so-called 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 selected informal groups: the Movement of the Citizens in Gračanica - PGG and PGG OMG, the Plenum in Bosanska Krupa, the Plenum in Zenica, Sindikat Solidarnosti (Workers' Union in Tuzla), the informal group Srebrenik je naš (Srebrenik is ours), Banja Luka Social Centre - BASOC and the Informal Citizens' Group for Social Justice in Prijedor. The groups receive financial support in form of small grants from international project partners, which are transferred to them through the BIM-FV. 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 are 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 the country.

BACKGROUND

Inspired by the citizens' protests in 2014, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights - Research Association (BIM-FV) approached the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA). Both actors recognised the importance of the civic protests and were willing to establish a common framework to support the civic movements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Western Balkan region is a priority area of the Austrian foreign policy, not only due to the territorial proximity, but also the common historic, cultural and economic background and long lasting bonds between Austria and the region. From 8th to 10th September 2014 the conference “Civil Society as a Factor for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina” took place in Vienna. The goal of the conference was to offer a platform for exchange on neutral ground and to encourage a dialogue and networking between various civil society actors (formal and informal) coming from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to define a common approach and create a strong and sustainable civil society movement. The most important outcome of the conference was the exchange of ideas and the creation of a network between the participants. Together, they elaborated joint recommendations for a stronger cooperation in the future.

The conference was not supposed to be a one-off event, but a possibility to enable a sustainable framework for further engagement. Together with likeminded partners and supporters (i.e. the ERSTE Foundation) a cooperation scheme was developed allowing informal citizens' groups to implement different activities according to the needs identified in their local communities. The continuation of the initiative was also supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA). In 2016, the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo also became part of it.

The initiative is embedded in a wider framework. Some of the activists of the civic movements in 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.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

The selected groups are informal, non-registered grass-root initiatives. Given this fact, an innovative cooperation and funding structure had to be developed, which would allow the informal civic movements and grass-root initiatives to receive international support without the usual conditionality (proof of registration, applying for grants, etc.).

The new cooperation structure is based on mutual trust and equality between all parties involved. The BIM-FV is acting as a coordinator and accompanies the groups during the implementation of their activities, being the bridge and connecting unit between the groups 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 the activities and provides financial and operational reports to project partners. This kind of approach allows the groups to implement their activities in a sovereign and independent way. The groups are responsible for the implementation of their activities and decide independently on the use of the funds. Given the fact that the groups are heterogeneous formations in terms of their composition and way of working, they develop their own implementation approaches, which also enables them to react spontaneously regarding current local developments.

The work of the groups encloses a wide range of activities: from encountering and networking in the plena, to organising of public discussions and awareness raising campaigns in order to include 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.

ACHIEVED RESULTS IN THE PERIOD FROM SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2016

Since the beginning of the initiative in January 2015, the informal civic groups achieved remarkable results. Most of them established a permanent office, which offers them 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 is increasing. More and more young people, the new generations, are getting involved and recognise the importance of civic engagement for a better future in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The groups established a strong network between each other and support each other during protests and campaigns.

In the following, the manifold activities of the groups and the achieved results in the period between September and December 2016 are presented. Each group sent a report either in English or Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. The reports were written and prepared by the groups and translated, edited and compiled by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights.

BANJA LUKA SOCIAL CENTRE - BASOC

This narrative report covers two scopes of activities at BASOC: on one side the organisation of public events and community work in general, on the other side the reconstruction work. Both types of activities were of course intertwined throughout and often dependent on each other. Ever since the concert by Damir Imamović in July 2016 and up until the last activities (see below the book promotions by Husak and Radanović) and public reading groups in mid-December, we have been active in

presenting regional artists and intellectuals to the local public and promoting BASOC as an open, decontaminated space where tabooed topics, informal conversations and politically and intellectually charged discussions could be voiced openly. We have maintained our horizontal system of decision-making, with all of its flaws and insufficiencies. There have been almost daily gatherings in the front yard during the summer and early autumn, with collective child care and an upgraded offer to kids with trampoline and swing along with numerous toys donated by visitors. We have also hosted a number of events for other civil initiatives and NGO-s in our garden, using the given resource to the maximum.

The other scope of activities was the reconstruction work. With Adnan Dervić as the main architect along with the enthusiastic engagement of the entire community (up to 15 people), we managed to increase the house's used space from some 40% back in August to up to 80% in December. This meant tearing down walls, replacing rotten beams and floor planks, and setting up a heating system with several donated and improvised furnaces, setting up the electrical and water installations, etc. The ground level is now ready for use. We also solved the major issues we had with the first floor of the house. All this has been done with minimal finances, relying on organised work-actions and reuse of the old and found materials (windows, planks, beams recycled from the neighbourhood). The photos might indicate the progress made in this period and give evidence of the financial aid collected and distributed through the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights. Without this support the social centre would have hardly survived its first year without resorting to or fully turning into a classic NGO.

The activities dwindled down due to harsh winter conditions so we focused on the reconstruction works and organised activities whenever we could find wood for heating up the space.

Study trip visit to BASOC by Dita factory workers 20.08.2016

Dita workers have become a singular phenomenon in transitional Bosnia and Herzegovina, re-establishing the production after several devastating waves of violent and pillaging privatisation. They have become the only bankrupt company to receive a plaque for the quality for their product in B&H. We have been keeping in touch with them, and have been visiting the company and offered them to come to Banja Luka and enjoy their day off while telling us (the public) their experiences during years of defending their right to work. We agreed to keep in close touch and will be visiting and cooperating with the people from Tuzla more often.

Collegial Panel: Reconciliation under what conditions? 03.09.2016.

After years and years of reconciliatory discourse and practice in Bosnian cities, we decided to reframe and discuss the phenomenon of reconciliation in Banja Luka with theoreticians and activists from the region. How is this concept motivational and can it fuel productive discussions without producing new rifts between our peoples? Where does the term come from and what is its ideological background? What is the interest of international organisations and local elites concerning reconciliation? How are the newly formed Serbian and Croatian states reconciling with their fascist and collaborative histories? Can we talk about the importance of commemorating events from the antifascist struggle for the newly formed states and their elites? Do they bear any legitimacy? How to read Srb, Kozara, Kozarac? What is being commemorated in these historically important sites? What about the phenomenon of unscientific historical revisionism and the building of a nation/state consensus about the past within a consolidated ethnic group? Revolutionary and counterrevolutionary terror? Croatian homeland war and its parallels to B&H? The existence of the narrowly defined public interests of the official politics,

elites and the mainstream media? War crimes of the nineties: what was their role and what were they a part of? How can/do we remember and build alternative collective memories outside of the party-controlled public? Three hours conversation with panellists and guests was held on these important questions that still needs to find its way into the public through postproduction.

September discussions (Rujanski razgovori) 15.09. - 22.09.2016

15.9.2016 (18h) Archive: theory, research and institutions

Guest speakers: Željko Radinković, Institute for philosophy and social theory from Belgrade, Danijela Majstorović, University in Banja Luka, Marijana Todorović Bilić, Republika Srpska Archive.

19.9.2016 (18h) Call me Esteban - Zovite me Esteban: literature, gender and ethnicity

Guest author: Lejla Kalamujić, writer from Sarajevo

21.9.2016 International peace day: poetry session

Guests: Šejla Šehabović, poet from Sarajevo and Darko Cvijetić, poet and theatre director from Prijedor (hosted by BASOC and organised by Oštra nula and the youth centre Kvart).

After the official part, a conversation took place with Marina Mimoza (Mostar): Nu Jazz, Electronic, Ambient

22.9.2016 (18h) Doing political science research 'at home'

Guest speaker: Dragana Švraka, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Open discussions: What kind of society do we want? On the challenges of imagining the alternative 05.10.2016

As we have witnessed, the last two decades have seen a diminishing or marginalising of the role of public discussions, or its reduction to farcical events. This voluntary abandonment of the public sphere in the light of the all present media spinning, false argumentation and other communicational manipulations has been increasing the power of the elites over our political and economic everyday life. The open discussions stand for an informal citizens' forum where everyone can critically address regional and local problems in the society. The basic premise of these discussions is to allow for intellectual and practical exchange that could inform our discussions and understanding of the society we live in. Through constructive conversations and argumentation we hope to come to mutual understanding and potential common ground for the common future work.

Panelists: Srđan Prodanović, Institute for philosophy and social theory from Belgrade (IPST), Dražana Lepir (NVO Oštra Nula), Dražen Crnomat (BASOC), Marjan Ivković (IPST), Goran Zorić (NVO KVART)

Speakers: Adriana Zaharijević (IPST), Zoran Vučkovac (BASOC), Danijela Majstorović (Faculty of philology Banja Luka), Gazela Pudar-Draško (IPST), Olga Nikolić (IPST), Gordana Katana (Daily news 'Oslobođenje'), Željko Radinković (IPST)

Concert of Ah, Ahilej 06.10.2016

Concert of the band Ah, Ahilej (New wave cabaret, Vienna/Belgrade). Experimental underground band that promoted its newest work: Kapetane, brate!

Talk by Dženeta Karabegović how to mobilise the Bosnian diaspora 28.10.2016

Dženeta Karabegović from the University of Warwick, Political Science Department gave a talk on basic premises for mobilising the Bosnian diaspora to support the positive changes at home. The talk was titled 'Bosnia i Hercegovina outside its borders! On the transnational mobilisation of diaspora.'

Book promotion on historical revisionism by Milan Radanović 06.11.2016

First Bosnian book promotion by the historian Milan Radanović, presenting his seminal study on historical revisionism in post-Yugoslav Serbia and whitewashing of collaborationist forces by the new, democratic elites both in scientific communities as well as in political ones. The title of the book is: Punishment and Crime: Collaborationist forces in Serbia. Responsibilities for war crimes (1941-1944) and military losses (1944-1945).

Public book presentation: Crisis, Art, Action 26.11.2016

20:00 A friendly conversation and a book presentation with the title: Crisis, Art, Action by the editors and contributors to the volume, Amir Husak and Hajrudin Hromadžić with other guests.

The publication maps key points of artistic and theoretical discourse on one place with the focus on the cultures of crisis and the aesthetics of the social upheaval in Bosnia during 2014. This is a part of BASOC's ongoing engagement with the social rupture created by the 2014 protests, their symbolic and material heritage to the socially active individuals and groups in the past two years.

Pasta on bicycle (tjestenina na biciklu) workshop 12.12.2016

An interesting Italian and French trio of chefs on bicycles prepared Italian pasta with the workshop for pasta, along with the dishes-experience sharing. On their way to Turkey they stopped by in Banja Luka recording their trip. Pasta Ciclabile. The crew is traveling back the so-called 'wheat route' from Italy to Turkey and has been exchanging experiences and recipes wherever they stop. They stayed several days and discussed the food industry and habits while preparing meals with the locals.

Public readings of Branko Ćopić 16.12.2016

Public reading of a prominent Yugoslav writer's - Branko Ćopić - novel "Ne tuguj broznana stražo" that comes in the wake of revisionist attacks against his private and public engagement. We have recognised this novel about colonisation of Vojvodina by the people from North-West Bosnia and Hercegovina as very critical of the Yugoslav party-induced migrations and decided to revisit some of the most influential works by Ćopić to see why he was forgotten in the national narratives of the post-war Bosnia. Around twenty guests from Banja Luka and Zagreb participated and contributed to the discussion on important writers from the canon as they cannot be tagged as proper nationalists. This will turn into a regular activity not only dealing with Ćopić but revisionism in literature and history as a whole.

New Year Celebration 31.12. 2016

First New Year Eve celebration in BASOC, where we welcomed everyone. It was an open night where people brought wood, food and drinks in order to make the party possible under a heavy wave of coldness.

Continuous activities:

1. August until the end of October 2016: Feminist coffees
2. August until the end of October 2016: Antifascist cinema was established, screening more or less known films that discuss the resistance to fascism around the world. Projections have been running every week until October
3. July until December 2016: Ongoing house reconstruction work
4. July until January 2017: Assembly meetings, establishing work groups, planning, fund raising etc.

Writing, interviewing, translating...

In July, Stefan did an interview with Nenad Porobić titled 'Stay away from Mladen, Kozara echoes crimson' - about historical revisionism and its repercussions for stable peace and a vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is undivided by nationalist populism.

In August, Dajana Bjelovuk interviewed Damir Imamović, philosopher and sevdah singer and songwriter after he donated a sevdah concert to BASOC. In a text titled 'Sevdah, equality and brotherhood', Damir talks about the inspiration he finds in people and cities across the region falsely divided across newly formed state/entity lines.

Series of translations of contemporary texts (from English to BHS languages), retyping-revisiting published texts from after WWII period by Banja Luka intellectuals and writings by our collective members that theoretically and practically engage with violence, ethno-nationalism, capitalism, socialism and the fight against fascism.

Some of them: Fašizam kao leglo korupcije: Milan Gorkić (Josip Čažinski), Današnjica i mi (Safet Krupić), Fašizam i zadrugarstvo (Veselin Masleša).





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INFORMAL GROUP SREBRENİK JE NAŠ

The group held meeting on a regular basis in order to discuss current issues and to plan their activities.

- Protests and gatherings at the main square of the town, on Tuesdays, every two weeks.
- Printing and distribution of posters and flyers, with the aim to show cases of corruption and nepotism, including naming and shaming of those who are responsible for the damage done to the citizens.
- Public tribune with professors and public figures on the topic “Bosnia and Herzegovina today”. The panellists were: prof. Esad Bajtal, prof. Zlatan Begić, prof. Edin Delić, prof. Vedad Pašić and prof. Izudin Kešetović. The citizens of Srebrenik showed a big interest in the topic and the professors’ opinions on the difficult political and economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the reasons which led to these problems.
- Networking and cooperation with other civic groups and grass-root movements continued throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina such as giving support to the workers of the canton Tuzla who were deprived of their rights during corrupt and intransparent privatisation processes. The Informal Group Srebrenik je naš supported the protests which were organised by the Workers’ Union Sindikat Solidarnosti in front of the government in Sarajevo and Tuzla.

- Supporting independent candidates during the local elections for the municipal council in order to establish a balance in the municipal council which is dominated by the ruling political parties.



© N.G.G. Srebrenik je naš

INFORMAL GROUP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PRIJEDOR

Voluntary work

We organised volunteering work actions/activities with young people, members of our informal group as well as other volunteers, in order to help and ease the everyday lives of socially endangered and neglected groups of the municipality Prijedor and Ljubija. Our volunteer group consists of 15 people, who have actively participated according to each of the member's available time, and helped in our activities. In these actions, we, as a group, tried to help and cooperate with the more disadvantaged groups in our society, such as children and people with special needs, socially vulnerable and those with four or more children. One of our activities was volunteering at the day center "Neven", which cares about people and children with special needs. These volunteering activities consisted of creative and educational workshops which included handmade jewelry, lamps, learning how to write and read.

Due to the fact that the people with special needs are discriminated against and rejected by their society, we have decided to make a trip to Banja Luka in order to facilitate their adaptation and inclusion and to encourage the society to accept them.

Members of our group prepared New Year's gifts for the youngest members of families with four or more children. The gifts were distributed to 80 children from the association "Roda".

During the New Year's holidays, our activists distributed 13 packages of assistance for 10 families which are socially vulnerable in the area of Ljubija. The package is made up of food and hygiene necessities.

Monitoring the work of public institutions and advocacy campaigns

As in previous years, one of our most important activities is monitoring the work of public institutions, which is of great importance. Our members attended the meetings and assemblies of appointed representatives who discuss the use and allocation of the budget of the city of Prijedor for 2017. We think that it is very worrying that the costs for the public kitchen were reduced although the number of its users increased significantly. We came to the conclusion that the discrimination against the most vulnerable groups is increasing. During one of the sessions of the assembly, an employee took our recorder without any authorization. This situation was promptly reported to the police and later covered by the media.

We still continue our engagement in order to obtain access to information that should be available to all citizens. We still have not received a response to our requests, so that we agreed with our lawyer to file a lawsuit against the municipality. At this point, one procedure is ongoing, while five more will start soon. We also went on an advocating mission with one NGO from our town which is in contact with the public kitchen. Together, we prepared common standpoints for a public discussion considering the budget. When that public discussion happened not only us but also other subjects debated on various topics concerning the problems the public kitchen has to deal with. All of the topics discussed were related to social issues and the budgetary distribution.

Organising of street actions and public events

We participated in a street action which was held on 10th December, the Human Rights Day. Younger activists participated and helped to organise protest walks. We wrote banners and posters that were related to the rights of vulnerable minority groups.

In cooperation with and with the support of the youth center "Kvart" this quiet protest walk was held in the center of the town of Prijedor.

The protest walks lasted about an hour and were attended by many associations from Prijedor. We can say with satisfaction that we did not lack the support from other cities. Activists came from Banja Luka, Zagreb, Sanski Most and Sarajevo. With the help of the youth center "Kvart", our mission of uniting young people in the struggle for human rights succeed.

Work on public relations

We made an internet blog where we inform the society on our past activities in a form that, we think, suits the current political situation the best. We also have a Facebook page "UstajPrijedore", where we try to produce and share texts that would be beneficial to our readers, in terms of sharing information that concerns our work and/or political statements that are similar to ours.

Our activists support other similar groups, most notably BASOC, in which activities we regularly participate. We took part in various workshops, presentations and actions they organised. Therefore, we also learned and widened our circle of acquaintances.

Groups and people involved who benefited from the activities

Our target group are mostly young people, because we believe that they should be involved in first place and that they can contribute to this society the most.

Our activities were attended by many young people from different cities from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The most important activities are those where we have established contacts and cooperation with people with special needs. We are sure to contribute at least a little to initiate changes for the better in this regard.

How the implemented activities contributed to empower citizens and local communities and in which way the activities contribute to strengthening of the civil society

All of our activities are pointed directly towards the local community/region and the people living in it in terms of empowering civic activism, voluntary work, fighting social injustice and fighting against the revision of history initiated by nationalistic cliques. We had a strong influence in the municipality of Ljubija, where our activities contributed to improve the lives of our beneficiaries most directly. Our voluntary work goes hand in hand with the fight against social injustice on a more political level. We tried to have an impact on other fellow citizens who are not socially endangered and to motivate them be more involved in the struggle for more solidarity, political and social equality, as well as in political strategies which are opposite of those of the mainstream politics.

During the course of this project, members of our informal group, young people from Prijedor, gained a lot of new experiences in dealing with political themes, social justice, organising of actions, as well as many other practical and administrative tasks. Furthermore, we became more aware of our possibilities, taking into consideration that we recently started to deal with the tasks and topics mentioned above. We formed connections with other groups from our town. We will continue working on these issues together with them in the future. Also, we developed a strategic plan on widening the scope of our activities geographically, focusing on the region of Krajina mostly (Bihać, Sanski Most, Prijedor, Banja Luka) but also working on the state level when possible. Widening these circles in efforts of fighting the criminals in power, social injustice, and the politics of segregation and fascism is crucial if long-term results are to be achieved.

PLENUM ZENICA

The meaning and importance of the office

It is very important to us to have our office regarding the manifold activities the Plenum is implementing and the functioning of the Plenum in general. Due to the office we have, the Plenum is able to discuss different issues with the citizens in Zenica. Most importantly, the office enables the regular organisation of meetings and citizens' gatherings. It is important to know for the citizens that there are premises in the city, a space, where they can meet, express their opinion, share their experience and discuss about their problems.

Pensioners

A very active group of the Plenum are pensioners, who have contributed a lot to the functioning of the plenum: they organised petitions in order to point to the problem the pensioners are facing in Zenica

and the whole country, which was very well supported by the citizens. In the forthcoming weeks, they are planning to organise a meeting of pensioners from other local communities.

Local elections

Before the elections, many citizens visited the Plenum and asked for advice and recommendations regarding the choice of candidates. Our members refused to give instructions or names, but advised the citizens to make a rational decision and to vote for those 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 polls. One of the reasons is the fear of the citizens to make a random or false decision. They did not know for whom to vote and rather decided not to vote at all. This is a widespread problem. On the other side, the low voting rate shows that the citizens are in a way more critical towards the politicians and also more conscious regarding whom to give their vote. The Plenum has contributed to raise the awareness of the citizens considering the election and the meaning of voting in general.

Bulletin

The bulletin became very popular. More and more people are interested in it. The bulletin offers the possibility to all citizens to express themselves and to write about the problems in their local communities. The bulletin is also very popular amongst the police, the judges and the municipality. Until now, the Plenum published 18 bulletins on monthly basis.

Registration of the association “RAD” Razvoj Aktivizma i Demokratije (Development of Activism and Democracy)

The registration of the association “RAD” is ongoing. The meaning of the association is to provide support to the Plenum in terms of managing the financial part, thus enabling the Plenum to remain an independent platform for the citizens. The association will be part of the Plenum and operate under its statute.

Recordings

In the plenum a group of young people was formed which was especially interested to support civic activism through short sketches and video tapes, and this way to motivate the citizens to engage more. The group recorded a play called “Mirror”, which shows how citizens could take a proactive role in the society. Further sketches and videos are in planning. The group established a cooperation with the organisation “Friends of Srebrenica” which will support them in finalising the recordings, so that the sketches and short videos will be published on the YouTube channel of the Plenum. The making of video clips about different social problems not only improved the practical skills of the group concerning the preparation and realisation of these activities (dealing with social issues, writing short sketches, role plays and recording), but also raised the awareness of the young participants about the existing problems in their municipality and strengthened their confidence to express their opinion.

Gallery “Hoću da pol(j)udim”

We have the intention to open a gallery in the city centre, with the aim to raise the awareness of the citizens about the importance of a peaceful social engagement and peaceful activism. The Plenum shares the opinion that positive and sustainable changes can only be achieved in a peaceful way and that every individual is responsible to contribute in order to change the society. We have already

collected artistic works (photos), which however proved to be too small, so that new pictures have to be printed. We are however sure that the exhibition will have a strong impact on the citizens.

Meeting with the association “Friends of Srebrenica”

We organised a meeting with the association “Friends of Srebrenica” on 09th December 2016 during which the two groups exchanged information about their work and activities. The meeting was very successful and the two groups established a network and agreed upon further cooperation possibilities. Friends of Srebrenica were very impressed by the work and achievements of the plenum. The director of the association explained that they are trying to establish a similar way of functioning, however they had some difficulties to succeed. After the meeting, the participants visited the memorial centre in Srebrenica.

Public debate on how to change the system

On the initiative of Meliha Bajramovic, the Plenum agreed to organise a public debate on the topic ‘How to change the system in Bosnia and Herzegovina’. The initial plan was to organise the public debate on the national level and to invite panellists and participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Meliha’s research showed however that there is a big interest in this topic, so that the Plenum will organise the debate on the international level. The preliminary plan is to organise a big media campaign in order to collect the opinion of the citizens and to let the panel discussion happen in October 2017.

Skopje/Prizren

Members of the Plenum participated in regional conferences of activists in Skopje and Prizren. Meliha Bajramović represented the Plenum, and shared her impressions about the work of other groups after she returned to Zenica. The younger members of the group are very interested to become involved in these activities. Thus, they are planning to attend English classes in order to be able to cooperate with organisations outside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Work of the Plenum

The younger members have taken over the coordination of the Plenum. The former coordinator is currently briefing the new members on questions of administration, finances and all other aspects which are important for the Plenum to become more effective.

We are in contact with the new mayor who showed great interest to organise a formal meeting with the activists although he already met some of them, talked with them and read the bulletin of the Plenum.



© Plenum Zenica

Distribution of bulletins in front of the Plenum; invitation to a meeting of the Plenum “Open for all”

WORKERS' UNION SINDIKAT SOLIDARNOSTI

Disempowered workers

The workers' union Sindikat Solidarnosti continued their fight and engagement for the realisation of workers' rights and justice for disempowered workers.

A great success of the workers' union and the activists is the judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Federation in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the unconstitutionality of the law on insolvency proceedings. The activists found that the law is not constitutional and that it is against human and workers' rights. Professor Zlatan Begić, professor for constitutional law, confirmed their observation and accepted to write an appeal in the name of the workers' union, all pro-bono. After some difficulties to find the right person willing to bring the appeal before the Constitutional Court in FBiH, the workers' union finally found the suitable person, Mr. Milan Dunović, the vice president in FBiH, who accepted. On 18th January 2017, the Court published the judgement in which it found that the law on insolvency proceedings is unconstitutional, thus breaching workers and human rights. Such a law allowed the exploitation of workers during insolvency proceedings for more than 10 years! A striking fact proving the widespread corruption in the country is that the judgment was kept from the public for several months, in order to enable a new law to be enacted, which however would contain the same problematic provisions and regulations breaching human and workers' rights. Passing the new law would have meant that the old one ceases to be effective all with the aim to undermine the judgment of the Court. The judgment will allow the disempowered and exploited workers to take action and bring their cases before the courts. The judgement is a very important step to restore the justice and give the workers back their salary and pension compensations.

In addition, Sindikat Solidarnosti tried to solve the problem of 14 workers of the garment factory "Borac" in Banovići and for 6 workers of the same factory in Zenica, who fulfilled the conditions for their retirement, but could not realise their rights. The reason for that is that the employers did not pay the necessary social contributions and insurances in the past, so that the workers were missing several years of service, or in other words, they worked without social insurance. The activists first tried to solve this problem by telephone calls directed to the Minister of Industry of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which did not bring any results. Therefore, the activists decided to organise protests in front of the federal government on 29th September 2016, which happened to be the last day of the election campaign for the local elections. Their intention was to build up a protest camp in front of the building. However, this did not seem to be necessary because an agreement was made with the minister: The government decided that the amount of 220.000 KM (112.465 EUR) will be transferred from the accounts of the factory Borac in Travnik in order to cover the missing contributions for the twenty disempowered workers. This important step to restore the justice for the disempowered workers was covered by the local media. However, the director of the factory Borac in Travnik refused to respect the government's decision! Due to these unsatisfying developments, Sindikat Solidarnosti will realise their initial plan and build up a protest camp in front of the government in Sarajevo in the near future.

As of mid-November 2016, Sindikat Solidarnosti began to deal with another case of insolvency: the shoe factory Fortuna in Gračanica. The case was immediately brought to the public. A meeting was held with the disempowered workers, the members of the workers' union, the mayor of the municipality of Gračanica and members of the municipal council consisting of representatives of all

political parties. The workers' union will be invited to an extended meeting of the municipal council, where all representatives of the federal parliament of the canton Tuzla will be present, with the aim to solve the problem. The months November and December were dedicated to providing support to the workers of Fortuna. Due to the directions and advice provided by Sindikat Solidarnosti, the workers managed to register at the employment office in due time, so that those workers whose length of service amounts to 35 years will have social insurance and receive an unemployment compensation of 330 KM (169 EUR) for two years.

On 13th December 2016, the workers' union, together with the workers of Fortuna, the Citizens' Movement Gračanica and the Informal Group Srebrenik, organised peaceful protests in front of the federal parliament. The protest were held against the draft of the new law on insolvency proceedings, mentioned above, which would bring many disadvantages for the workers. After the meeting with the department for labour and social politics, where the members of Sindikat Solidarnosti brought forward their position and asked for a permission to address the parliament during its next session, the request was rejected. The next possibility to address the parliament will be when the draft on the new law on insolvency proceedings will be put on the agenda of the parliament. In order to prepare, we will organise public debates in three cities, Tuzla, Gračanica and Sarajevo and invite all representatives of the parliament, professors of constitutional law and of course workers and citizens to contribute to the discussions. The aim is to revise the draft for the benefit of those who are mostly concerned by it, namely the workers.

Cooperation with other civic movements

Sindikat Solidarnosti is closely cooperating with other informal civic groups and movements, in especially the Citizens' Movement in Gračanica and the Informal Group Srebrenik belongs to us. Beginning of September, we supported the protests against the pollution of the river Spreča organised by the Citizens' Movement in Gračanica.

Sindikat Solidarnosti participated in the public debate on the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina organised by the Informal Groups Srebrenik (see above).

In addition, we participated in the conference dealing with the topic "obligation to confidentiality during the recruitment procedure", which was held in Lukavac. Sindikat Solidarnosti is an opponent of the above-mentioned obligation due to its misuse and manipulation by political parties in order to employ candidates on grounds of party interests and not qualifications, thus contributing to nepotism, intransparency and corruption.

On 29th December 2016, Sindikat Solidarnosti organised the distribution of New Year's presents for children and grandchildren of their most disadvantaged and marginalised members. More than 70 presents were distributed.



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CITIZENS' MOVEMENT IN GRAČANICA - PGG

In the period August-December 2016, the Citizens' Movement in Gračanica and the section of the youth of the Citizens' Movement PGG OMG implemented the following activities amongst many others:

Strengthening the youth

The main focus of the PGG is strengthening and empowering the young activists. Our group of young activists continued with educational and networking activities together with other organisations from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some of these activities are volunteering "volontiraj kreditiraj", organising of a youth camp "Fifth Element", organising of activities on the topic of protecting the environment, networking with the organisation "Horizonti Tuzla" und the association BIRAČ regarding the development of a strategy for the youth and reconciliation projects, holding of internal workshops on raising the number of young activists and inclusion of the youth, creation of a database for blood donors, organising of education workshops for women politicians "Voices of empowerment", creation of networks with the organisation KVART in Prijedor, to name just a few.

We created a lobby group for the youth and established a cooperation with four councillors from three political parties who advocate directly for the interests of young people.

A youth council was established. Talks are ongoing considering the use of premises in the cultural centre for purposes of the youth council. We planned to register the organisation and to create possibilities for self-sustaining structures.

Supporting disempowered workers

Another focus is to continue to support disempowered workers in their fight for justice and to integrate them in the society. In this context, PGG organised and participated in several protests together with Sindikat Solidarnosti and held several workshops for the disempowered workers. Due to our engagement, public financial means were reallocated for the benefit of the disempowered workers and 10.000 KM were reserved for purposes of short-term support for the disempowered. In addition, we created a database for registering the disempowered workers and for issuing a social card for the most endangered and marginalised individuals. To indicate the importance of this matter, several meetings were organised with clubs of councillors and with the municipal councillor of the Municipality of Gračanica of whom we asked to propose initiatives in order to solve the long lasting systematic problems. We support the disempowered workers to file complaints and lawsuits in cooperation with the workers' union Sindikat Solidarnosti. The procedures are long lasting and exhausting and demand a lot of patience and perseverance. Justice is restored very slowly, but we achieved important results nevertheless, which encourages us to continue with our work.

Education, culture, sports

Our activists organised several activities:

- Seada Delić implemented three projects: applied arts, ecology and design and a workshop for children and adolescents with special needs
- Larisa Šušća, mentor for youth projects, implemented several projects: voices of empowerment for young activists and women, several smaller initiatives in cooperation with the Association of Women "Pribava i Plodovi Zemlje Lukavica".
- Due to lobbying campaigns and critique addressed towards political parties, more cultural events and public happenings were organised.
- We supported activities of other groups and individuals (primary schools and high schools, fishing associations, ecological associations etc.) in terms of offering them our premises and material.

Empowering the citizens and exercising pressure on those in power

We continue our engagement and fight against corruption and nepotism and promote free speech and democracy. In this sense, we organise public tribunals on the topic "Security for citizens" on the territory of the whole municipality of Gračanica. Another method to increase the participation of citizens in decision making processes is to include them more in municipal councils and political parties. Our activists are becoming more and more active in this sense. Our aim is to strengthen the local community through participation and education of the citizens.

During the local elections we animated and motivated the abstinent voters and the youth to go to the elections. In this context, we visited several local communities and organised workshops in order to create a new approach in order to make a decision based on objective grounds and organised awareness raising workshops for the voters. The result is that Gračanica now has an opposition of 11 councillors in the municipal council. The sessions of the municipal council can be followed online. We

noticed that the interest of the citizens is constantly rising. For the first time, the opposition, supported by the activists of PGG, was able to exercise pressure on the political body of local rulers.

We filed several complaints and asked for amendments of several laws on the territory of the canton Tuzla with support of political representatives from Gračanica. We ask for more responsibility and accountability of those in power, no matter what political fraction they belong to.

We established a cooperation with several political parties and involved them in our activities such as the ecological protests “You poisoned us long enough” when we asked for more ecological responsibility. By including them, we hold those in power more accountable. We also strengthened the cooperation with the local media and exercised pressure on them in order to provide more space to the citizens and to allow them to enjoy their freedom of speech and expression.

We played an active part in public discussions, participated in all municipal meetings and contributed our part in important questions on the distribution of the municipal budget. We provided several proposals and analysis in order to solve existing problems in our municipality. Due to our insisting, several controls and revisions of public institutions such as the centre for social work, the health centre, the employment office etc. were undertaken. We will continue with our work in this sense.



Photos © PGG and PGG OMG, youth camp, education and empowerment workshops

PLENUM BOSANSKA KRUPA

Plenum Bosanska Krupa implemented several activities in the period from August to December 2016 and achieved important results in the municipality:

Supporting marginalised groups

One of the main groups the Plenum is supporting are the demobilised members of the Army of BiH, who are deprived of their rights. In order to support them, the Plenum participated in the protests in August 2016 whereby the border of Izačić was blocked with the aim to raise the awareness of the authorities about this problem. In addition, we participated in the meetings organised by the Council of the Demobilised in several cities (Bihać, Cazin, Velika Kladuša, Buzim and also in Bosanska Krupa) in order to agree on a joint Resolution.

In December 2016, the Plenum established a cooperation with the association of parents of children and adolescents with special needs "ADA" in Bosanska Krupa. New Years' presents were distributed to children of the most marginalised families.

Strengthening the community and increasing the tolerance and reconciliation

The members of the plenum are working hard to strengthen the community and to raise the responsibility of the citizens towards their fellow citizens. In order to achieve better results in this matter, the Plenum organised joint activities where all citizens were invited to participate and join. One of these activities, which was very much appreciated, was the cleaning and taking care of the catholic and orthodox cemetery in Bosanska Krupa. These joint efforts contributed to increasing the tolerance, reconciliation and coexistence in the local community. These activities will be continued in the future.

In November 2016, the Plenum organised several meetings with returnees of Serbian nationality and agreed to implement different activities which will contribute to the coexistence and the reconciliation process. The activities will be implemented in spring 2017.

During December, the Plenum formed a network with the Bosnian diaspora from this region with the aim to discuss the current situation in the country and in especially the problem of emigration and brain drain due to the very problematic economic situation. Members of the diaspora are not very optimistic. They are rather disappointed in the long-lasting gridlock in the country due to the widespread corruption, nepotism and lacking possibilities for employment.

Local elections in October 2016 and political engagement of the citizens

The Plenum was very engaged during the pre-election campaign. Our aim was to raise the awareness of the citizens about their civic duties and responsibilities. Through regular meetings, we motivated the citizens to become more involved and to inform themselves about the programme and work of the existing political parties in order to make an objective decision. We participated in the meetings and gatherings of political parties and followed their pre-election campaign. We organised several meetings with the candidates for the municipal council and with candidates who run for the position of the mayor. We formed our clear opinion about the ruling political parties which we discussed openly. The consequence was that members of the parties we criticised blocked our facebook page. Our efforts however resulted in a change of the allocation of voices, so that for the first time after the

war, the ruling parties which dominated the political landscape for years, could not obtain the majority of the votes.

We not only took a proactive part in the pre-election campaign, but also during the elections. On the Election Day, we observed and followed the work of the political parties and undertook several activities in order to prevent the manipulation of voices. All irregularities we noticed were reported to the organisation "Under scrutiny" ("POD LUPOM"), which had the task to follow the regularity of the elections.

During the month of October 2016, a political coalition was formed, which will constitute the majority in the municipal council. We follow the work of the municipal council and will intervene in case we notice the slightest irregularity of its work or corruption.

The elected mayor of our municipality, Mr. Halitović, with whom we established an excellent cooperation, has gained our support.

The Plenum is worried about the current political discourses at all government levels. We will continue with our work and efforts to improve the current situation not only in our local community, but in the whole country and we will continue to engage for changes, reconciliation and tolerance between all citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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 Citizens Group Srebrenik, Plenum Bosanska Krupa, Banja Luka Social Centre - BASOC, Workers' Union Sindikat Solidarnosti Tuzla, Informal Group for Social Justice Prijedor.

TIMETABLE

Month	Year	Description
Sept	2014	Conference "Civil Society as a Motor for Change in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in cooperation with BMEIA, ERSTE Foundation, CEI, EUSR in BiH, British Embassy in Vienna and Karl Renner Institute
Jan	2015	Follow-up Meeting in Sarajevo, 21.01.2015
April	2015	Follow-up Meeting in Gračanica, 27.04.2015
May	2015	Meeting with potential partners and supporters in the Austrian Embassy in Sarajevo, 11.05.2015

June	2015	Signing of the Cooperation Agreement between informal civic groups and project partners in Sarajevo, 18.06.2015
July	2015	Begin of the first implementation period (July to December 2015)
Dec	2015	Submission of reports (operational, financial) after the first implementation period for internal monitoring
Jan	2016	Follow-up Meeting in Banja Luka and presentation of achieved results, 25.01.2016
Jan	2016	Begin of the second implementation period (January to August 2016)
May	2016	Submission of interim reports (operational, financial) to the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo
July	2016	Meeting with project partners in Sarajevo to ensure the funding in order to allow the groups to continue implementing their activities
July	2016	Follow-up meeting in Zenica, 13.07.2016
Aug	2016	Submission of Reports (operational, financial to the ERSTE Foundation)
Sept	2016	Begin of the third implementation period (September 2016 to December 2016)
Jan	2017	Submission of Interim Reports (operational, financial to the Swiss Embassy)
Feb	2017	Begin of the fourth implementation period (February 2017 to July 2017)
March	2017	Follow-up meeting in Bosanska Krupa
July	2017	Final meeting
July	2017	Submission of Final Reports to all project partners

The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights would like to thank all 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 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on democracy, the rule of law and human rights!

Thank you very much! We are proud to know you and work with you!