Civic engagement means doing things you believe in and want to do, even knowing that ninety-nine percent of it will not work. The moment you start thinking that others should do the same, and start blaming them for sitting in cafes while you are “fighting,” you’d better go for a coffee yourself, because your struggle will come to nothing.

Damir Avdić – Graha
Changes, Changes, and Changes

After massive human rights violations, serious crimes and many years of a state of siege, is it possible for a new generation to take responsibility in relation to that past, and start building new bridges?

This is a question I have been asking myself during eight years of working as an activist, and as the president of the regional Youth Initiative for Human Rights. On some days, enthused by the results, developments, large and small successes, I believed the answer was positive, but there were other days as well; days that caused severe depression, and prompted a desire to leave the Balkans.

The Initiative was conceived as a place through which you could do something for your community, victims, friends, enemies; for yourself but for others as well, to reduce your urge to leave. Instead of dreaming of leaving – you fight, you develop, you continuously work on yourself...

The Initiative in B&H was established in an important moment for us all. As our billboards in Belgrade and a series of interviews with the Mothers of Srebrenica impelled solidarity and the compassion of Serbia’s youth (or rather a group of young people from Serbia) because of the genocide and other serious crimes, I was somehow confident that we could do more, that what has been was only a small part of what could be done. I spent a lot of time in Sarajevo, and I had long conversations with my friends there (Senad Kahriman, Vanja Hamzić, Alma Mašić, Dejan Grbić, Edin Čolić, and others), and we all felt encouraged to form the Initiative. Supported by the British Embassy, we have moved forwards with big steps towards divided communities. The first years were difficult, turbulent, painful. Some people
have unfortunately left, others have gone back and forth. All of us, however, were of the
samemind. We needed an organization that would always bear in mind three words:
changes, changes, and changes.

The first changes are related to the society we live in – the kind of society we want,
the way it should be regulated, the way it should be organized; and in B&H that is still
an issue. It is clear that this fact is largely caused by irresponsible political elites, deep
divisions, lack of justice and many other problems.

The second changes are related to the regional approach – where the region is going,
how to build different relationships, how to deal with the responsibility for the results
of the bad policies of the nineties. Our great success in this respect is that we have
succeeded in creating a regional network.

And the third ones relate to each of us personally: for someone originating from Serbia
– which had done so many bad things to B&H – it was a big challenge to talk about
any kind of changes. Anyone could have legitimately said, and did say: “Go modify
your own home, Serbia.” I knew that we had to deal responsibly with these kinds of
things, and that there was no room for feeling personally insulted. Facts are facts,
hurtful or not. Having said that, I am aware that working with the Initiative in B&H has
changed me lot; and my world view as well.

As a founder of the organization, I am proud of the Srebrenica map, of the great num-
ber of meetings, conferences, and the support we have provided to divided commu-

nities, the campaign for RECOM, the Days of Sarajevo Festival, now held for the sixth
time, and a number of other results.

Personally, I am most proud of the fact that going from Belgrade to Sarajevo, while
passing through passport control, I have no feeling of going somewhere else, of being
“among them”, “where those people are”, but time and again I feel like I’m going home,
to the friends I love and appreciate, who just happen to live somewhat more to the
west. That feeling is worth more than any policy, at least to me.

Dear friends of the B&H Initiative, I congratulate you on these five years, it is not at all
a small thing. It is a further obligation, and a sign that there is more to come, that we
have to do more, and better, still. Those who have worked with me know that it is not
in my nature to praise, but it is in my nature to ask for more. Therefore I ask for more of
all those who come to us in the future, of those who will be joining us. For a stronger
B&H, for a better region for us all.
Peace and security can only be maintained in a community of countries that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, protecting them from arbitrary interference.

In this sense, some of the most important prerequisites for further democratization and stabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire region are a strong civil society, the promotion of full and effective implementation of human rights by the institutions of government, and careful monitoring of the process at all times.

During the five years of its existence, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H has undoubtedly grown into one of the key civil society organizations in the field of human rights, and has made a significant contribution to strengthening civil society as a whole. The Initiative team has implemented several important projects aimed at enhancing understanding and respect for human rights law, which has increased the participation of youth in the process of dealing with the past.

On the occasion of their fifth anniversary, I want to congratulate the B&H office on everything they have achieved so far, and the successful realization of their mission during this period.

To the YIHR regional network I also wish much success in the years to come.

Lukas Rosenkranz, Deputy Head of the Mission of the Swiss Embassy in B&H

As their name suggests, the core of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights are young people inspired and able to initiate change and improve their communities and their country in a way they think important. The initiative also carries one of the most important democratic values – solidarity, meaning that people must work together to build the kind of society they want. Working with other NGOs and civil initiatives, and a large number of individuals, as well as with local and state authorities, the Initiative builds solidarity across society. For the Mott Foundation it is a great honor to be part of these activities.

Walter Veirs, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Regional Director

I realized several projects in cooperation with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H and I am impressed by the various dimensions of their work: their vision and commitment to civil society, their ability to activate young people, their ability to achieve concrete results through innovative initiatives and incentives, their determination to constantly move forward despite the difficult conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In our joint work, I appreciate their professionalism and the excellent atmosphere in which our cooperation takes place.
**Who are We?**

**Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava (Youth Initiative for Human Rights – YIHR)** is a regional non-governmental organization with programs implemented in Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. Youth Initiative for Human Rights was established in 2003 by activists from these countries in order to enhance youth participation in the democratization of their societies, to strengthen the rule of law in dealing with the past, and to establish new links between the countries of former Yugoslavia.

The result of this regional cooperation development was the formation of the permanent office of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Sarajevo in February 2007, and then in Priština, Podgorica, and Zagreb, ensuring the organization’s full presence in the region. Further expansion of the organization and its activities resulted in the registration of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent non-governmental organization in 2009. The formalisation of its status enabled a significant strengthening of cooperation between the B&H Initiative and all levels of the B&H authorities, businesses, cultural associations, and other civil society organizations relevant to its activities. From then on, the B&H Initiative continued its cooperation with other YIHR offices in the region, but also with other B&H non-governmental organizations that share the same vision and values regarding the protection of human rights and freedoms, transitional justice, the fight against discrimination and segregation, and the vision of B&H society in general.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H educates young people to think critically about their surroundings, and to actively engage in social change. The YIHR B&H builds new connections between young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, paying special attention to the inclusion of divided communities, and encouraging the Europeanization of the Western Balkans through regional co-operation of young people from different countries of the former Yugoslavia. The organization encourages and supports young people in B&H to advocate for social and political action on issues important to young people. This commitment includes promoting the culture of remembrance in regard to the 1992-1995 B&H war, advocating for human rights and minority rights, promoting issues related to integration into the EU and the democratization of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans region.

The B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights successfully participated in the implementation of several projects – international gatherings such as the Regional Youth Conference (Belgrade, 2008), Belgrade Youth Summit (Belgrade, 2009), Civil Society Forum (Sarajevo, 2010) and the Days of Sarajevo Festival in Belgrade (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011).

The Initiative realised the Srebrenica – Genocide Mapping project, a new genre of documentary animation in which the evidence of the Srebrenica genocide is presented through 17 maps (text, images, drawings, photos, videos). The project is available at: [www.srebrenica-mappinggenocide.com](http://www.srebrenica-mappinggenocide.com).

We have successfully conducted several activist workshops for improving human resources through which a great number of activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region have been trained. In this way a network of activists, My Initiative, has been developed, which currently has about 60 active members who have subsequently independently implemented projects like Postcards for Belgrade, and Ethnic Segregation: Activism in my street, Vakuf / Uskoplje, Anti-discrimination and Young Justice. Through the second phase of the project Citizen, that’s me, the first Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism in B&H was realized.

Within the Youth in Action project, our activists took part in various workshops and seminars organized by other associations, and have made important contacts vital for our future success as we realise that constant communication with
Moj glas, Vaša plata!
individuals and organisations in all major B&H urban centres will certainly contribute to the success of any future project implementation at the local level.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights has organized a number of meetings of young people from the region, either as specific exchange projects, or as the direct participation of young people in cultural events (organizing DocuCorner at the Sarajevo Film Festival, volunteering at the International Theatre Festival MESS), where open discussions on pressing issues in B&H and the region have taken place, encouraging other young people to deal with these issues, and to take a stand in regard to these issues. This has certainly contributed to YIHR being recognised by the general public as a relevant organization in the field of its activities.

Our organization is actively involved in the Peace Building Network, the Justice Sector Civil Society Organisations Network in B&H and the International Coalition of Conscience. Our activists regularly participate in meetings related to the protection of human rights, transitional justice, issues of discrimination and ethnic segregation. We continue with projects extending visions and acting towards the creation of new capacity that will permanently change B&H society.

**activism** (lat. activus – from actus, past participle of agere, to drive, do); the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus©Cambridge University Press); in philosophy: The doctrine that action rather than theory is needed at some political juncture; an activist is therefore one who works to make change happen (The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, by Simon Blackburn© Oxford University Press).

In the past five years the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H has dealt intensively with the development of activism in B&H society. Activism is one of the key segments of our organization, as through it we hope to draw the attention of all citizens – especially young people – to the need of taking responsibility for their own future, of becoming citizens aware of the past, the present and the future.

Through this segment of activities, we have succeeded in building a network of young activists in B&H. By creating the young activists network we have reached our goal of increasing the inclusion of youth in the democratic changes in society. This network, called *My Initiative*, currently has about 60 members aged 16-30 from all over B&H, regardless of religion, sex, ethnicity, national origin or any other status.

We are aware of the numerous divisions in the society we live in, of the poor communication between the young people from the different entities, of the poor education system, and of students being taught three parallel histories; we are aware of the fear and hostility towards the Other, and of many other issues. The Initiative’s activists hope for a better future, and they wish to be a change in society, they wish to support each other regardless of any differences, and to encourage the values of coexistence.

Strengthening the capacity of the youth is an extremely important segment of our work, and one of our future priorities, as only through education we can succeed in building civil society. The topics of our informal education programme are human rights issues, with special attention to:

- civil liberties
- antidiscrimination
- minority rights in B&H
- segregation

Our young activists put emphasis on promoting integration into the EU through their network, because they see their future only in a multiethnic, democratic and free society.
Citizen, that’s me is a programme of activists of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H, a programme aimed at creating a network of young people in B&H that will promote the protection of human rights and civil liberties, insisting especially on the fight against segregation and discrimination. The programme includes visits to isolated communities, and the promotion of civic activism among individuals who have not yet met with organized forms of equality, tolerance, and human rights promotion.

Through this project we visited Pale, Sarajevo, Bijeljina, Brčko, Banja Luka, Mostar, Stolac and Sanski Most in 2010. In each of these cities a presentation was given (Who Are We?, What Do We Want?, Our Goals), and a street action was performed. These visits established a collaboration of young people from these towns, and extended the My Initiative activists’ network.

The final project was realized in Sarajevo in late December, with the participation of two activists from each of the cities. The idea of activists’ networks continues to spread from this final joint action, and we have come up with new ideas for joint projects. The Citizen lives on.
MEMORIAL MARCH
on 25 May 2010

Tuzla

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights Representatives from Belgrade and Sarajevo, Arriving in Tuzla

The Serbia and B&H Youth Initiatives for Human Rights organized a symbolic walk in three sections of the Belgrade – Sarajevo route, in memory of the slain youth of Tuzla.

The first section was in Belgrade; next the participants went by bus to the border of Serbia and B&H, where the second stage of the walk began, from Pavlovića Ćuprija to the entrance of Bijeljina. The activists then arrived by bus at Simin Han, where they were joined by friends from Tuzla in this symbolic walk, and from there they headed on foot to the center of Tuzla (Kapija).

The Initiative’s action sent a clear message that the young people in Serbia do not agree with the silence about the war crimes committed in their name. In accordance with the organizers’ announcements, the March participants did not wear any insignia other than those of the March. On their way through the city they were welcomed by the citizens of Tuzla.

The Belgrade delegation of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights was officially received by the Mayor of Tuzla, Jasmin Imamović, the Municipal Council Chairperson, Nada Mladina, and the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Council, Jozo Nišandžić.
The Individual and the Justice System is a project implemented by the B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights under the auspices of the USAID Judicial Development Project II, within the Network of Justice in B&H. The implementation of the project began in Sarajevo, and continued in East Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka.

The project consisted of an educational segment which included lectures and discussions on topics that are not sufficiently dealt with within the regular programme of university studies, and an advocacy/activist segment within which young people tried to inform the public about the key issues in the justice system and the position of citizens in the judiciary.

The workshops were attended by many prominent experts, such as Amir Jaganjac, Josip Muselimović, Mile Lasić, Božidarka Dodik, Emir Prcanović, Saša Madacki, Nedim Hogić, Nina Šeremet, and also by law students who moderated discussions and treated certain topics, such as Nikola Čvoro (Faculty of Law, University of East Sarajevo), Daniela Marić (Faculty of Law, University of Mostar), and Nedim Jahić (Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo). The workshops have involved about 100 undergraduate and postgraduate law students.
After each workshop, the students presented their conclusions and recommendations were consequently presented to citizens through street actions and petitions of support. After the last workshop held in Banja Luka, the public was presented with the final national report containing all the recommendations and ideas the students had put forward through the workshops.

We are especially pleased about the partnership established between the Initiative and local students’ organizations, like the Law Students’ Association (Sarajevo), the Students’ Union (Mostar), and the Law School Students’ Association Pravnik (East Sarajevo), and also about the support that the project received from all the faculties of the host associations, from Vaša prava B&H to the University of Sarajevo Human Rights Centre and the Human Rights Center in Mostar.
The Initiative. You are one of us.

Nedim Jahić, a YIHR activist

Young people are standing up. We, you and me. The Unpredictable. Those of dangerous intentions. The Intruders. Ready to thwart the already laid plans. Precisely, they are those who are not naive, and, as such, no longer innocent. They are not the hope for the future, they already have the power. I hope you have been given time enough to get scared. We are coming to claim that which belongs to us.

Four years have passed since then. During those months, I was writing a blog, trying to throw something clever down on paper, anything. Ten or so organizations had not even deigned to reject my quest for meaningful volunteering and activism. Civil society will be civil society, which meant you had no chance of starting anywhere before you had already started somewhere. I was wondering where all those people who showed no intention of ever finishing had started, but that’s another story. But with the Initiative anyone could start, and that is what makes it different from everything else. So how did I start?

To cut it short, I stumbled on the call on a bulletin board. “Dealing with the past” – that is what was written there. Seemingly, anyone could apply. I know that my homeboy and I applied, and we were the youngest ones there. Everyone rolled their eyes when they saw us, but we wouldn’t be put off. And that was the Youth Initiative for Human Rights. We talked about the commissions for the truth, the work of the ICTY, and war crimes. I learned then that in South Africa a commission had been formed, and all the criminals went home undisturbed – under the terms of the amnesty. I remember I found all that interesting, and I tried to prove I was cleverer than I really was, which killed my reputation among the individuals present.

They gave us contacts. You might not believe it, but they were the first people who actually responded to my e-mails. I dragged to the Initiative whomever I came upon. Old friends, random passers-by, people from both sides of the hill, all those who did not know where to start. We went everywhere, got to know all kinds of things, changed attitudes about everything that we had once believed was set in stone. There we could learn, work, and make mistakes.

Alma, Luna, Dinko, Irena, and the others who had been there before them, and all those I have met in Bosnia and Herzegovina and throughout the region, each and every one of them has left a trace. And everything I’d do later in life had something to do with the Initiative. So much support, understanding and faith in the people I have not seen anywhere else. Now that I think about it, I was lucky that they were the first who answered my e-mails ...
WHAT DOES THE INITIATIVE MEAN TO YOU?

Anita Primorac, Mostar: Through the initiative I have met people who think like me, and I finally realized that I was not a dreamer who wanted the impossible. I got a chance to see how ideas were born, seemingly unattainable ideas, and I saw them come true. In the society in which we live, where the motto is that everything is wrong, but there’s nothing we can do to change it, the Initiative has repeatedly proved the contrary.

Emina Mameledžija, Sarajevo: After the several years I’ve spent as an activist with YIHR, Dodik & Co. cannot frighten me with their empty rhetoric any more. Now I know that throughout the region there are young people willing to break down the barriers that older generations set between us. To all young people from the region, I highly recommend you to join YIHR, and thus to get rid of imposed attitudes and prejudices.

Adis Hukanović, Sarajevo: Participating in the YIHR B&H projects and their Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism, I became an active citizen of the community, aware of my rights as well as the rights of the others. In my opinion, the projects dealing with the past are the most important contribution the YIHR has given to the process of reconciliation and the establishment of new relationships between the postwar generations in the region.

Ivana Nikolić, Mostar: I first heard of the YIHR last summer, and I participated in their project Citizen, that’s me. After that I simply fell in love with working in YIHR. I would dare to say that I have never met so many young and relaxed people, and so ready for work, and ready for a change.

Lejla Hasandedić, Mostar: In the last two years my life is richer for my membership in the Youth Initiative for Human Rights. I have had the opportunity to participate in their numerous projects such as the Citizen, that’s me, street actions, Days of Sarajevo Festival in Belgrade, the first Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism, to visit the camp in Kozarac, etc. Thanks to the Initiative, I have met amazing, creative, ambitious people who have done specific things to make this society a better place for all of us. I had a chance to see mass graves, and I witnessed the tears of mothers – a Muslim and a Serb alike; and a person whose father had been shooting on my city has offered a hand of apology to me. I have become...
aware of the fact that members of my nation committed crimes as well, and that a crime is equally horrific no matter who commits it, and the tears of a mother are equally bitter regardless of whether the mother is a Bosniak, a Serb or a Croat. Persons have become important to me, much more than their nationality.

Aldijana Okerić, Sarajevo: To me, as a young person living in a transitional society with disrupted, bad and distorted value systems, a society that boasts of nepotism, corruption and inaction, the Initiative has offered an alternative, a possibility to expand horizons and break stereotypes, to realize how important my own actions and work are towards a change in the future whose stakeholders will be us – the young. To me the Initiative means a form of resistance to lethargy and the starting point of change.

Aida Mia Alić, Sarajevo, (Justice Advocates Network participant): Do you know the feeling of fear and helplessness arising from seeing thousands of people in Serbia chant slogans of support for Ratko Mladić? If in that moment you receive a message from the Belgrade YIHR members, saying: “Sorry, we are deeply ashamed,” you realize that you are not alone. For me, the YIHR has erased all boundaries between people, and of those who once were “other and different” it has created FRIENDS. That is the largest and most valuable gift that the YIHR has given to me.

Ivo Andrić, Travnik: Long-term slavery and a bad administration can confuse and twist the understanding of a nation so much that their common sense and right judgement can get thin and weak, and fully distorted. Not only that the people so disordered can no longer distinguish the good from the evil, but they can neither distinguish their own benefit from the obvious damage.

Nedim Hasaković, Sarajevo: I became a Youth Initiative activist some seven months ago, and I couldn’t have guessed then that my engagement, work and contact with people of this organization would contribute so much to the building of my personality. The Initiative has become a part of my character, and for that I am extremely grateful to its activists and employees.

Nermina Hadžiomerović, Sarajevo: I think that the projects initiated and implemented by the Initiative highly contribute to the education of young people willing to acquire new skills, to socialize, to participate in projects and implement them successfully.

Emina Zahirović, Sarajevo: With the Initiative I have began to act myself, and started being aware that it was high time I did something concrete, and that changes occur in individuals first, and then in communities.

Elma Bećirović, Sarajevo: The Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism was my first experience with the Initiative. It came to my attention quite accidentally. I think that in the three weeks of the Summer School I have learned a great deal more – not just in theory but in practice as well – than throughout my entire formal education.

An anonymous Internet user: Hey, I’ve heard about that Summer School of Civil Liberties, when’s the next one, I want to apply ...? Anyone there with info on the previous one?
The first Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism took place in Sarajevo from 1 to 19 August 2011. The school was attended by 18 young activists from Livno, Zvornik, Foća, Mostar, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Novi Travnik and Pale. During the three-week course 20 lecturers and coaches helped the activists, aged between 18 and 24, to increase their knowledge of human rights issues, and of other areas essential for active civic engagement.

“During the first week, participants will be given the opportunity to organize ad-hoc street actions, simulate negotiations, learn about nonviolent communication, and practice specific skills of public presentation delivery, stated Luna Kalaš, the School coordinator.

This was the first time that the B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights organized such a school. The Youth Initiative continuously improves the young people’s civic education by developing their capacity for critical thinking, and encouraging them to actively engage in changing society.

The Initiative builds new connections between young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, paying special attention to the divided communities. The organization encourages and supports young people in B&H to advocate for social and political action on issues important to youth. This commitment includes promoting the culture of remembrance of the B&H 1992-1995 war, human rights, minority rights, EU integration issues in B&H, and democratization issues in Bosnia and the whole Western Balkans region.

The Summer School of Civil Liberties and Activism is a part of Citizen, that’s me, a project supported by Civil Rights Defenders.
Antidiscrimination

Antidiscrimination is a programme implemented by the Association for Democratic Initiatives, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H. The programme promotes antidiscrimination mechanisms, and has been supported – through various forms of cooperation – by the OSCE, the Ombudsmen for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and numerous student organizations and academic institutions across the country: the Law Faculty in Sarajevo, Faculty of Law in East Sarajevo, the Faculty of Law of University of Mostar, Faculty of Law in Tuzla, Bihać Law Faculty, University of Banja Luka.

Supported by the media, primarily the eFM Student Radio, and web-portals RadioSarajevo.ba and Buka.ba, we have been able to provoke public reaction to the negative trends in society, while our website www.antidiskriminacija.ba, staffed by student-activists, has become an arena for international news and ads.

The first project cycle was implemented from September 2010 to May 2011. It included 120 participants through the Winter School of Fight Against Discrimination (January 2011), and peer-trainings held inPale, Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar. We are currently finalising the programme’s second cycle which comprises Tuzla, Zenica, Sarajevo, Mostar, Bihać and Banja Luka, and the final conference to be held in Sarajevo. The trainers were many distinguished professionals with different expertise: Goran Miletić, Saša Madacki, Marta Valinas, Nedim Hogić, Sanel Huskić, Una Bejtović, Maša Durkalić, Kenan Efendić, Adnan Kadribašić, Nina Šeremet, Emir Prcano- vić, Emin Mahmutović, Predrag Radosavljević and many others.

Our activities, primarily performed by young people, were extremely successful in gathering a large number of citizens around the programme. Our intentions are genuine, and based on the desire to promote an Antidiscrimination Law, in order to raise awareness about the need to prosecute the violators of human rights in the country.
The Way the Initiative Came Into my Life

Dalibor Tanić, zurnal.info online magazine

I imagine you have already heard a lot about the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). Many positive things that have happened in recent years, and which concern the whole region, actually resulted from the efforts of this organization. I have been lucky enough to become a part of this big family of activists who have built bridges between the former YU republics, bridges that now anybody is free to cross – without any limitation.

I presume that all those who are reading my original text have so far noticed that I write in Serbian dialect. And you have probably concluded that I am from Serbia. Which is true. I am from Serbia, from Niš precisely, but for the last three years I have been living in Sarajevo. If you ask how I ended up here, my answer is: YIHR is to blame for everything.

My political views, my views of the past, my respect for the human rights of all persons are only some of the reasons for which people have often felt uncomfortable around me. At one point I believed that my thinking was wrong, and that my attitudes would never be accepted. This lasted until the moment I became an Initiative activist, because only then did I realise that there were hundreds of young people who thought the way I did. There were things I already knew, but I have learned many other thing there – because the Initiative also provides the opportunity for further education. Having learned certain things, and having realized there was nothing wrong with my world views, it became irrelevant whether I lived in Niš, Belgrade, Zagreb, Priština, or Sarajevo...

Coincidentally, a few years ago I met a certain Selma in Sarajevo, and she is now my spouse. Both of us are activists, and we both belong to the generation of young people raised (and still taught) by the Initiative. We have learned that we need to deal with the truth, and that we must continue to live building new bridges. And that is exactly what has been happening. I have moved to Sarajevo, begun to live with Selma, and the Initiative has provided the “first aid”. The activism that began in Serbia, has continued in Sarajevo.

I’m not from Sarajevo, but I am proud to live in Sarajevo. I have friends I love, and most of them are with the Youth Initiative. If you have not become a member of this large family already, now is the right time. It does not matter what your name is, or which language you speak, because in the Initiative a name means nothing, and a language is spoken there which everyone understands. Once you become a part of this big family, you will understand the real values, you will learn what you were not taught in school or in college, and you will become more mature, and you will look at the world with different eyes.
Talking about the past, dealing with the past, trust building, the promotion of human rights – all this has always been the core of the Initiative and its activities.

We are talking with Dejana Grbić, the first Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H. Could you tell us what led to the idea of establishing the office of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H?

Maybe my story will sound somewhat more personal and emotional than expected, because that was an amazing period for me. At the time I had already decided to stop working in the private sector. The moment Andrej [Nossov] offered me the chance to participate in setting up the Initiative’s offices in B&H, I made a decision: “OK, I start from scratch.” My task was to set up the office - and you know how implacable bureaucracy can be. Those few months were very complicated.

And then we got a promise from donors that funds for our projects would be made available. I remember this period as a time of madness; we were preparing projects for which we had been promised funds, while struggling with bureaucracy at the same time. It was only sometime in early January 2007 that we succeeded in obtaining official registration, and started implementing the first project, which was funded by the Swedish Helsinki Committee. The project involved building a network of young advocates of justice, that is forming a group of 16 young people from all over B&H who would be willing to talk about their own past, and the past of their parents, about the war. This proved to be one of the key issues, and the Initiative has never stopped dealing with it.

So the first projects were about dealing with the past, which is also one of the main priorities of the Initiative today?

In early 2008 we started a really great project funded by the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office. We established links within the project with five non-governmental organizations which acted as our local partners, in places where really bad things happened during the war. We launched something called Trust Building Schools, through which we tried to bring together young people from local communities, as all these areas were “border areas.” We worked with young people from Foča and Goražde, for example, and young people from Milići, Srebrenica, and Bratunac. These micro-regions are all linked, in all of them war crimes occurred, and some of these children’s parents took part in events which have never been clarified. The children were “filled up” with hatred, taught to reject the Other, “closed up” in the truth they had learned – and all that was really difficult to cope with. Often there were tears, but incredible friendships and companionship were born as well.

I will never forget the girl from Višegrad. A part of her family had disappeared in Goražde and had never been found. The girl, who had lost family members in the war, said at the end of a seminar: “Now that I’ve realized, now that I’ve understood what happened in Srebrenica, I’m pleased that my father had been wounded and was lying in a hospital at the time when Srebrenica happened.” I still feel horrible every time I think of what she said, but
that perfectly illustrates what we have tried to achieve in children – and I think we have succeeded. Not entirely, of course, because complete success is practically impossible in such matters, but given that the Initiative continues with this work through activism, and tirelessly works with young people, I’m sure these young people make a better society today.

The initiative in B&H started with cultural activities at an early stage. In your opinion, what is the effect of joint efforts of culture and the fight for human rights in practical terms?

One of the first such events were the *Days of Sarajevo in Belgrade* where, among others, some Sarajevo intellectuals participated; and the Trebinje Theatre, Andrej Đerković and a bunch of other people were also there. We brought some young people from B&H; for most of them it was their first time in Belgrade. It was great for them to experience Belgrade in such a way, through art, and become familiar with the Other. Through such events people experience diversity in a special way, realising opportunities that otherwise they would never experience. I think it is precisely the incorporation of culture and the arts in its activities that makes the Initiative what it is: not a mass activist organization, but neither an activist salon club of poseurs. The Initiative may not have thousands of activists, but it has a critical mass of people, sufficient for spreading a way of thinking. These are people who readily cross borders – not only physical borders but mental ones as well. Actually, the mental ones first of all.

Do you still follow what the Initiative has been doing? Seen from this distance, what is the effect of the Initiative’s efforts over the past five years?

Unfortunately, not as much as I would ideally like. But looking back to the times the Initiative was founded, when we were thinking the first action through, and dealing with the early childhood ‘illnesses’ ... and seeing the Initiative in B&H now that it has become an experienced, serious organization with many successful projects and activities ... I think, if we imagined the Initiative as a student, we could say that it has graduated first in its class.

What are the NGO sector priorities today, in B&H, and in the region? Are they still the same or have they changed over the past five years? Have we moved from a standstill; and if yes, how much?

A difficult question. Primarily because sometimes the non-governmental sector is at the same time a governmental sector. Because the NGO sector is not exactly the same as civil society, and our civil society is definitely not strong enough. The citizen as an individual does not have a strong enough voice; and neither do citizens as a group. To make a strong civil society, for NGOs to really represent civil society, the NGOs have to speak with citizens more. The state, or its representatives, from the local to the highest level, have not developed communication skills and are not able to speak with citizens, but unfortunately the same applies to many non-governmental organizations, I am afraid.
Dealing with the Past

In any disease, denial and shoving problems under the carpet inevitably lead to a malignant condition and even more severe consequences. The first step to healing is the recognition of a problem, and the willingness to deal with it. Confronting the past is almost never easy, especially if the past is similar to that of the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s; and it is easy neither for the victims nor for those on whose behalf the crimes were committed. But confronting childhood traumas is also painful, and yet therapists keep trying to bring their patients to address the root causes, as that is exactly what is needed: to confront the fears, guilt and frustration; as that is the only path to healing.

This process should, of course, have started immediately, but it was not to be expected that those who had created and committed crimes would get a sudden attack of remorse, confess everything and prosecute themselves. Instead, they decided to deny everything and pursue comprehensive cover-up campaigns, always blaming the other side, as they, of course, only “defended their own people” all the time.

It was mostly the non-governmental organizations who started indicating that all crimes needed to be detected and punished. All around, the NGOs have started the process of dealing with the past and the truth, whatever it was. Dealing with the past has been one of the Youth Initiative’s priorities from the very beginning: from Trust Building Schools in the so-called border areas, through the project Srebrenica – the Genocide Mapping, to the RECOM consultations, and numerous other activities and projects. Since 2007, every 11 July the Serbian Youth Initiative for Human

“To me, as a former concentration camp prisoner, it helped enormously to see that other people, of different nationalities, can understand what I suffered, and I’ve realised that we have suffered in much the same way and that was why we could easily understand each other, and empathize with each other. Certainly, it was a good therapy for us given that we, specifically the former concentration camp prisoners, were not understood - neither by our own people, those who did not experience the concentration camps, nor by the government, not to mention the members of other nationalities. We are mostly used for propaganda or as a measure of who was more to blame. I am deeply convinced that this country lacks sincerity, and that we, ordinary people, are also to blame because of our greed and self-pity; we never think about others and we don’t try to understand other people’s suffering and their problems. I believe that no one was completely guilty, or completely innocent; in this war, I believe that there are no winners, we are all losers, and in fact, I am one of those who sincerely regret that this war happened at all. So I think it is high time to break this stalemate and move on and, as much as possible, to catch up and to make up for the years lost in vain, and create conditions for a life worthy of man.”

Jankica Samouković, a former concentration camp prisoner, who participated in a number of seminars held within the “Let’s Choose Peace Together” programme. He is also an active participant of the project entitled My Story. Together with the Initiative’s activists, he participated in the School of Civil Liberties and Activism, as one of the speakers who shared their personal stories.
Rights’ activists, together with their B&H peers, visit Srebrenica and at Potočari Memorial pay tribute to the genocide victims.

Crimes should be named and investigated in order to find culprits or, otherwise, eliminate any doubt. There is no nationality when it comes to crimes; there are only offenders, with names and faces. And there are victims, in Tuzla, Grabovica, Sarajevo, Kazani, and too many other places for us to still be waiting.

A phenomenon even more worrying than denying a crime is its proud public announcement. Slogans like nož, žica, Srebrenica (a knife, wire, Srebrenica) can often be heard at football stadiums and they – to make matters worse – come from the young people.

But there are different examples as well. To conclude on the same note as we began with, in the words of former concentration camp prisoner Jankica Samouković about his experience with workshops on dealing with the past: “And, lo and behold! Instead of ending in disputes, or making it worse, which could reasonably have been expected, we talked the way people do, and we fully understood each other. We were moved by other people’s stories, sometimes so much that tears could be seen. We soon realized that we had all experienced the same or similar things, and that all of us were simply prisoners of those unfortunate times.”

It seems that victims can understand and sympathize with each other.
Which of the previous two examples is going to prevail also depends on how we act, and how much we act.
Srebrenica – the Genocide Mapping

In July 2010, on the 15th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights B&H launched Srebrenica – the Genocide Mapping, a project realized by the FAMA International team led by Suada Kapić. The Srebrenica Genocide Mapping consists of 17 animated maps of a total duration of 220 minutes. The maps are composed on the basis of documentation of the institutions dealing with the Srebrenica genocide research. The maps follow a chronological sequence of the genocide. The sources used in the project creation include UN reports, the archive and publications of the Helsinki Human Rights Committee – Serbia, and the Republika Srpska’s Commission for investigation of the events in and around Srebrenica Report.

The 17 maps introduce a new genre of documentary animation, through evidence (texts, images, drawings, photos, videos) from hundreds of sources, presenting a detailed chronology of the execution of the Srebrenica genocide i.e. the period from 6 to 19 July 1995.

The project aims to inform wider audiences about the genocide which took place in Srebrenica during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was successfully presented to NGO representatives, educators, and the general public. In July 2010 the project website was launched: www.srebrenica-mappinggenocide.com. After the Sarajevo and Belgrade presentations, with help provided by the regional media, the project was presented in many cities in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The project was finalised in June 2011, by activating the bilingual interactive website which provides access to all information, materials, video clips and other “documented documents”. After the website launch, the project became available worldwide, and the Initiative wishes to place it as a universal educational model for the interpretation and understanding of the mechanism of genocide, hoping it will become a part of the school curricula.
Umjesto uvodnika

www.srebrenica-mappinggenocide.com
Prosecution of War Crimes in B&H

Although the Initiative in B&H focuses on working with young people, the victims of the wars are not forgotten either. During January to September 2011, as part of the Promotion of Justice project, the Initiative organized a series of debates for the families of the victims of war, county and state prosecutors, and the media. The subject was: “The prosecution of war crimes in B&H – how much time do we have?”. After public meetings held in Bihać, Mostar, Travnik and Tuzla with representatives of victims of war crimes, and in the presence of cantonal prosecutors who prosecute cases of war crimes suspects, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina organized a closing conference in Sarajevo, with all stakeholders of these processes. Through a discussion involving all the actors of the war crimes processes, the conference aimed to contribute to the process of true catharsis of the B&H society.

The main problems noted in these public discussions were:

- War crimes and their witnesses: Vulnerability of witnesses, lack of psychosocial support, insufficient preparation to testify as witnesses, uncoordinated processes, poor communication with prosecutors, slow processes, separating the processes on the grounds of their complexity, and transfer to the local authorities – these are some of the problems which affect the victims of war crimes.

- War crimes and the prosecution: Lack of prosecutors dealing exclusively with war crimes, lack of resources and bad technical conditions, changes in the witnesses’ testimonies, lack of physical evidence – were some of the issues the prosecutors pointed out as obstacles to the efficient processing of war crimes.

- War crimes and the role of the media and society: Starting from the fact that the successfully completed trials of alleged war crimes should contribute to the process of reconciliation and acceptance of the fact that individual guilt must be punished, and that war criminals should not be celebrated as heroes in any national corps, the participants of the public debates discussed the role of the media and civil society in the trust building process.

The main conclusions of the debates and the conference were that efforts should be continued to provide better protection to victims, more resources to prosecutors, and encouragement to the media to positively present with stories that build trust, while drawing more attention to the cases not yet being prosecuted.
Excavations of Human Remains at Lake Perućac

From the very beginning of its activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights proved to be a significant factor in the development of interethnic relations; it has implemented some important projects, and has been a meeting place for young leaders whose attitudes keep changing the social reality of B&H. In addition, the Initiative’s activists and humanitarians participated in several voluntary actions, including one on the site of Lake Perućac (on 29 September 2010) where they were involved in the search for the remains of Bosniaks killed during the war. For some of the people searching for their loved ones, the action presented the last hope, as the lake was to begin to fill up with water, which prevents further excavations. Together with volunteers from all over B&H, the Initiative activists contributed to an attempt to find the remains of the victims.
Flowers for the “Sarajevo Roses”

06.04.2011.

On the occasion of the City of Sarajevo Day, ten activists from Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H organized a street action of marking the Sarajevo Rose memorials.

Remember, Sarajevo Roses are the visible traces of mortar shells fired on the city during the four year siege of the city, 1992 to 1995.

“From the Cathedral to the Children of Sarajevo Square, we found only three roses; we laid flowers there and surrounded them by ribbons to draw attention to them,” stated Adis Hukanović, one of the activists who designed and participated in the action.

Noting that this symbolic action was meant to draw attention to these neglected monuments which bear witness to the siege of the city, he expressed his regret that many of the “roses” no longer exist – they were either damaged or removed due to a number of reconstructions.

The Initiative hoped this action would bring out of oblivion authentic monuments of the Sarajevo siege, and we are pleased that the citizens reacted positively to our campaign on-site. The activists also laid flowers at the Monument to Sarajevo Children Killed in the War, and in front of the Eternal Flame, where they wrote YIHR using a paper tape and thus pointing out that remembrance and paying tribute do not require expensive bouquets, but only a bit of imagination, and initiative.
Kozarac 
Summer Camp

The Initiative in B&H successfully realised the first summer camp in Kozarac from 22 to 26 August 2010. Activists from Serbia (Novi Sad, Niš and Prijepolje), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and two guests from Iraq interested in the topic, stayed in the Srcem do mira (Reaching Peace by Heart) house. The summer camp’s theme was “Dealing with the Past, the Role of the ICTY and the National Courts’ Trials in Dealing with the Past.” The summer camp participants also visited the Memorial and the Museum in Mrakovica, as well as concentration camps from the last war: Omarska, Trnopolje and Keraterm.

The Initiative’s activists also visited the Association of Families of the Killed and the Missing of the Prijedor municipality, as well as surviving concentration camp prisoners. In Prijedor, they were met by Mayor Marko Pavić. The first camp Facing the past was finalised in a street action and a symbolic march through Prijedor. The camp was organized again in 2011, and will carry on in the future.
The Sarajevo Days in Belgrade, a Prelude: Messages of Sarajevans to Belgraders

Each year, as a prelude to Sarajevo Days in Belgrade, the activists organise a street action to collect messages written by Sarajevo citizens to the citizens of Belgrade. The activists place a booth with T-shirts, paints, and flyers in the center of Sarajevo. The action regularly causes great interest and gives good results, and messages are written by citizens of different ages – from high school and college students to senior citizens. In some years it is on postcards, in other years on T-shirts ... but no matter the medium, the messages are always interesting, giving hope and promise of better communication between people.

Jovan Divjak about the Initiative

A number of NGOs in B&H hardly make ends meet, they have been working on bits and pieces for years, advocating for human rights, especially youth and women. But their results have not been satisfactory.

In contrast to them, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H is held in high esteem by the Association Education Builds B&H. We appreciate all that has been done by their “hardened” enthusiasts, sincere young volunteers, and B&H citizens during these five years. When the Initiative talks – mostly to the young people in the former common state – about truth, justice, reconciliation, tolerance, human rights, it is much more powerful than any of the speeches of our ambitious national chauvinist party leaders. Therefore a “Bravo” for these clear and sharp words resonating throughout the region.

For the Education Builds Bosnia and Herzegovina stakeholders, the participation in the Days of Sarajevo in Belgrade festival is not as much symbolic, as it is a courageously and clearly defined need to link people from Sarajevo and from Belgrade in establishing new links based on principles of mutual recognition in the light of civilised European values.

Organising the Days of Sarajevo in Belgrade Festival, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights has made a worthy effort to enable us to easier endure the 1992-1995 period dilemmas, traumas, individual personal painful experiences, and prejudices.

In our opinion, the Festival resisted the false – and mainly politically motivated – stereotype about the common past, present and future of Sarajevo and Belgrade, which is also that of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, in a broader sense. What a “still water” this area would be were it not for you, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights!

Sincerely,

Jovan Divjak, Obrazovanje gradi BiH (Education Builds B&H Association) Executive Director
The Sarajevo Days in Belgrade Festival

The Serbian Youth Initiative for Human Rights have been organizing The Sarajevo Days in Belgrade Festival since 2007. The festival was originally conceived as a way of marking the beginning of the four-year siege of Sarajevo, and an incentive for building links between young people of Sarajevo and Belgrade. In the five years of the Festival, it has become an important cultural (and social) event. During these few days, the Sarajevo cultural and art scene moves to Belgrade, and with it a large number of young Sarajevans. Initiative activists from the whole region are among them, of course. It is their efforts that year after year make the Festival bigger and better organized.

The Sarajevo Days have enabled young Belgraders (some of them for the first time) to meet part of the B&H musical, cultural and theatrical scenes, and talk with their peers from Sarajevo who survived the siege. The Festival has brought many famous artists to Belgrade, including Damir Imamović, Dubioza kolektiv, Jadranka Stojaković, Amira Medunjanin, Bojan Zulfikarpašić, Skroz, Dvadesetorica, and institutions like The National Theatre, Sarajevo, Sarajevo War Theatre (SARTR – Sarajevski ratni teatar), and many, many others. The Sarajevo Days in Belgrade have become an important meeting point for artists, and an important meeting point for exchanging ideas and planning joint projects.

On the other hand, young people from Sarajevo also get an opportunity to visit Belgrade (again, many for the first time) and meet their peers from Serbia. Many new friendships have been made, some walls torn down, and some bridges built during these few days.
One could say that Damir Imamović and the Youth Initiative have a long relationship: twice already you have performed in Belgrade within the Sarajevo Days Festival, and this year you were a Festival selector. How would you describe your experience with the initiative? What attracted you to this collaboration?

I was introduced to the regional YIHR when I received an invitation to participate in the Sarajevo Days Festival. We arranged a concert of my former Trio, we held the concert, and everything went great. Throughout the process I kept meeting people, ideas and initiatives that made me realize that there was a whole generation working – with growing dedication – towards the removal of nonsense, and the consequences of nonsense from our lives. By nonsense I primarily refer to the stupidity of nationalism, the denial of war crimes, the turning our heads from the questions of responsibility, the absence of concern for the future. All this made me wish to maintain contact not only with the Sarajevo Days, but also with YIHR, as an organization.

You are not new to the NGO sector?

Before I started as a professional musician, I had conducted a debate programme in Sarajevo’s “Buybook” for several years. It was an attempt to bring in different social actors to the same table. Before that I had volunteered in various NGO actions.

The Sarajevo Days Festival was initiated with the aim of dealing with the past, building trust, establishing new relationships. Has the festival succeeded with that, in your opinion? Given that you are a frequent participant in the festival, could you draw a comparison between how it was, for example, three years ago, and how it is now?

I think the festival has done a lot. When I first participated in a TV program there – to promote my concert – I went there with Maja Mićić, today YIHR Serbia Director, and we nearly had a row with the TV-hosts regarding the phrase “the siege of Sarajevo.” Three years later, the same TV-hosts utter the phrase themselves, fully aware of its meaning. Important steps have been made, and today this cooperation becomes more and more a cooperative production of different artistic backgrounds, and less a pioneering, “humanrights” action.

Over the past five years of the Sarajevo Days festival, Belgraders have had the chance to familiarize themselves with the newer cultural scene in Sarajevo; and given that during the
festival much of “cultural” Sarajevo “moves” to Belgrade, it has been a two-way process. What are the reactions? Is there any interest in cooperation after the festival is over?

There is more and more interest in cooperation. I am one of those who cooperate with Belgrade’s cultural scene not only during the Festival, and I’m glad to see how the festival manages to reach out not only to the audience of actual events, but also to professionals who establish connections that operate throughout the year. Naturally, it is extremely important for the Sarajevo cultural scene to learn something about itself in this process. As its protagonist, I have learned how thin our scene is, how provincial, inactive, unimaginative, etc. Sarajevo is a big enough city to have ten more active bands of different types, two more very agile theaters, at least one more serious orchestra, and the like. When you find yourself in a situation of having to present the Sarajevo scene not as a one-off choice, but over several years (always trying to freshen up the programme), you come to a very realistic picture.

How are things now when it comes to the Belgrade’s general public? Is it easier to reach the ears of the people?

It is indeed. Among other things, thanks to the YIHR’s extensive efforts, today it is much easier for the theater, and music, and film ...

The B&H Youth Initiative included cultural activities in their work pretty soon after they started here. What, in your opinion, is the effect of the combination of culture and the struggle for human rights in general? What can this combination realistically accomplish?

I think the combination is a very logical one. Artists usually travel a lot, see very different faces of the world, and very quickly learn how stupid national borders are, and often only imaginary. On the other hand, a creative act is a liberating process, and the people who often engage in it simply have to be more sensitive to noises, screams and obvious violations of human rights. It is possible to do quite a lot in this sense: you can raise your voice, publicly announce your opinion, protest against the stupidity, or similar. It often happens that we overestimate our own importance, or underestimate it. However, the importance does exist, and as long as it does, it has to be used.

What is the social role of arts and culture? Should artists stand aside in times like this? And if not, what can be done, how can they contribute to change?

Political/social engagement in the arts usually means “let’s sing/video/depict politicians and issues.” Truth be told, I don’t WANT to do that. I believe in music too much to do that; I would not degrade any song/video/performance with worthless topics or people who will go back to anonymity once their offices are over. I am simply not one of those artists who appreciate art with contents “overcrowded” by any kind of “attitudes”. However, artists do have the responsibility to speak politically! It is not an aristocratic, but a civic responsibility. Artists have to speak politically as citizens: because they have special experience, because they have more opportunities of being heard ... The view that artists have a “special” kind of responsibility because they are involved in art is terribly harmful and unproductive. On the one hand, it makes the views of some fools seem important only because they learned how to play three chords and made two musical hits. On the other hand, this view once again sooth the crowd, who then disclaim their responsibility and become a war-mongering, genocide-mongering machine. Why is it that nobody thinks important the views of a lathe operator who has ended up as a truck driver and makes secondary mass graves from the primary ones? Why is that considered “just a job”? And why is playing in a band that only performs remake hits not considered “just a job”? Both of them have the same civil / human responsibility.

It may sound trite, but - politicians are people as well, and political relationships are also relationships between people! Political relationships often fail due to reasons only too human; I think that the engagement of public personalities is essential here, to cross borders and to challenge, both people and politicians.

What is the social role of arts and culture? Should artists stand aside in times like this? And if not, what can be done, how can they contribute to change?

The choice of musical genre often “aligns”, in some way. It seems that you, and some other artists of your generation, managed to avoid the cliche ...

I hope so. I have been working a lot in order to avoid the cliche, not always successfully, and the struggle still goes on: not to be limited to a certain repertoire because of my family name, not to limit sevdah as a genre to one ethnic/religious group only, the “old people music”, and the like.
Andrej Saharov, the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was an eminent Soviet nuclear physicist, dissident and human rights activist. Sakharov was the creator of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, but later on he became an implacable adversary of nuclear proliferation, and an advocate of civil liberties and reforms in the Soviet Union. He was born in 1921 and passed away in 1989. More than 150,000 people bade him a last farewell in Moscow.

The B&H Initiative for Human Rights activists staged a performance every day from 23 to 26 November. The performance was very well attended; among the audience there were many activists and friends of the Initiative, as well as school and NGO visits.
YIHR Performance

Traveling exhibition Andrei D. Sakharov: Alarm and Hope comes to Sarajevo

An exhibition inspired by the life and work of Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet Nobel Prize winner, dissident, and one of the leading human rights defenders.

From 23 to 26 November 2010, the exhibition was accompanied by a performance carried out by activists of the B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights. The performance speaks of human rights, the struggle between fear and hope, between freedom and tyranny; it is inspired by the lives and works of leading human rights activists. The exhibition is an initiative by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, and it has been produced in co-operation with the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center and with Memorial, the Russian human rights association that received the 2009 Sakharov Prize awarded by the European Parliament. The exhibition tours the European states, and its presentation in Sarajevo announced the November visit of the EU Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The exhibition revisits selected ideas by Sakharov concerning the most acute challenges of present-day society: human rights, war, nuclear weapons, global famine, environmentalism, intellectual freedoms, equality. These messages still contribute to non-violent changes and benefit freedom and human rights.
Sarajevo Film Festival

Sarajevo Film Festival is certainly one of the largest and most important cultural events in the region. From the very beginning of its work, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in B&H entered into cooperation with the SFF. DocuCorner, a part of the Competition Documentary programme, is a result of this cooperation. Following the screenings, Live Forum debates take place in the Festival Square, during which young people have the opportunity to voice their opinions on the documentaries, and debate issues relevant to the societies of Southeast Europe. The Initiative’s activists from all around the region moderate and participate in these debates.

Sandra Ruch, documentary film producer and the honorary director of the International Documentary Association, noted that this initiative is a unique event in the world of film festivals.

Besides participating in DocuCorner, the activists always take advantage of their stay in Sarajevo to visit Education Builds B&H Association and talk to Jovan Divjak, or to visit the Tunnel of Salvation, Oslobodjenje, etc. And they hang out together a lot. Which is extremely important.
“My first encounter with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights took place when I first started working at the Sarajevo Film Festival, in 2009.

My expectations were low, given my previous experience of various non-governmental organisations whose main activity was making money at the expense of the youth, and whose meetings boiled down to meeting each other, mere form without any content. But they made me change my mind very quickly, as I listened to hot discussions every day in DocuCorner, on the important issues which these people obviously saw as their own. This trend continued in the following two years, and now my expectations have risen, and I believe these people will continue to spread the spark of common sense, continue to spread this initiative of open discussion without taboos, until there will be no young woman, or man, who is not able to examine critically the way they think, or yield to the facts.

To the Initiative’s activists I can only wish all luck and every success in their work; some of them have become my dear friends, I sincerely hope they feel it.”

Bojan Popić, SFF Competition Documentaries Project Coordinator
The B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights brought an ethical approach into our public space, regarding the traumatic memories of the past, because they very bravely confronted us with manipulative and constructive collective memories. Through their specific civil actions, with an educational emphasis, the B&H Youth Initiative for Human Rights manages to recast the past as a space supposedly superior to the present. Their actions and projects do not allow the past to keep us in its palm, as a ghost or a long dark shadow over our human rights to a future and a life without hatred and divisions. The positive energy and the hope that this organization emanates, and the patience and dialogue they promote as means of pacification and prevention of violence are of immeasurable value to our community. A kind of “cosmopolitanism of remembrance” allows the young generations in B&H to develop a culture of remembrance based on common experience, as opposed to pernicious ethnic nationalism; a culture of remembrance that goes beyond the scope of a nation and becomes the basis of global human rights policy.

DINO MUSTAFIĆ, MESS Festival Director

The Initiative Activists at MESS Festival

In 2009, the MESS International Theatre Festival for the first time had an audience of YIHR activists from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Kosovo. In addition to numerous performances, the so-called MESS conversations were also organized for the first time. The activists of the Initiative openly discussed issues of identity, individual liberty, and freedom of movement with professors of the Sarajevo Faculty of Philosophy. The discussions related to the subject matter of the Festival plays, and were conducted from several points of view: from the perspective of dramaturgy, philosophy, and human rights.

During their stay, the activists also visited the Information and Documentation Centre, and the editing room of the daily newspaper Oslo-bodenje.
‘Activism of my Street’
– the Best YPF Project

In late 2009 and early 2010, the Sarajevo activists team *Moja inicijativa (My Initiative)* and the Youth Centre in Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje implemented a project which dealt with solving real problems in an ethnically divided community, coming to terms with the past, and the expansion of youth activism. The project was supported by the Schuler Helfen Leben (SHL) Foundation through their YPF (Youth Project Fund) programme.

Each year SHL organizes a competition for the best project they supported financially. *Activism of My Street* was shortlisted among the top fifteen of 57 projects funded in 2009, and won the competition as the Best YPF project in 2009, chosen by the competition participants themselves. The prize was a trip to Berlin and a visit to SHL headquarters, where the winners were introduced to the Foundation’s activities and activists.

The contest was a great opportunity to socialize and get acquainted with the work of other NGOs in B&H. For the *My Initiative* activists the award is an incentive for further collaboration with SHL, and also the obligation and responsibility to continue their good work and improve it even further.
A Word at the End, for a New Beginning

Luna Kalaš, coordinator for capacity building of activist groups

This is what we hope to see in the publication issued in five years, on the 10th anniversary of YIHR in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- The fifth generation of graduates at the School of Civil Liberties and Activism
  The diplomas were presented by the first generation of graduates, Class of 2011, who are now scientists, inventors, (responsible and honest) politicians, artists, and B&H representatives in the European Parliament.
- Activists and other citizens now regularly visit the long denied war crime scenes.
- Activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina held a training for youth groups in ... (any country that needs concrete help five years hence).
- Melisa, Nedim, Saša, Vedran, Nikola, Aldijana, Adi, Ruba, Emir, Inela, Anita, Daniela, Dejan, Boris, Davor, Ivana, Dalmir, Enis, Omar, Lejla, Nermina, Elma, Alisa, Adis, Marijuana, Naida, Zlatan, Ljubica were able to fulfill their dreams and have become the best at what they do. The 30th anniversary publication will report that one of them (or someone like them) has become the Secretary General of the United Nations. Or the B&H president.
- Reports on articles in international scientific journals on the blooming youth activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Researchers would conclude that, unlike the NGO sector boom in the late nineties caused by the influx of huge amounts of money by foreign governments, this is due to the genuine uprising of young people tired of the perpetual fatigue, depression, and eternal status quo.
- There is only one school under every school roof in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Every young person feels free to speak their own language, celebrate their own holidays, practice their own religion, or declare to be an atheist, and no one associates them with “those who have harmed us.”
- We all empathize with those who do not celebrate the same things as us.
- A wave of the Antidiscrimination movement swept the whole country and region. Apparently the majority of the young were more interested in the Antidiscrimination’s central event than in Dino Merlin’s farewell concert.
- Just days after the Pride Parade peacefully ended, the traditional International Human Rights Day parade of B&H activists began; it was the largest one so far.
- The YIHR’s hall is full of postcards from all over the world. Our activists like to travel and they do so a lot, as they can afford to go wherever and whenever they desire.
Freedom is what you do with what is done to you - Jean Paul Sartre

The Initiative. You are one of us.

We go on!
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