

# **Dealing with the Past**

**Country Report: Bosnia-Herzegovina**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

<b>I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>III. DEALING WITH THE PAST: GENERAL VIEWS, FACTORS IMPEDING AND IMPELLING</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Meaning of the construct:</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Is dealing with the past a priority?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Why do we have to deal with the past?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Can sustainable peace be achieved without dealing with the past?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Does dealing with the past achieve anything?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Is this the right time to address these issues?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>How far into the past do people want to go?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>How ready are people to listen to the histories of other groups?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>In whose interest is it to prevent the process of dealing with the past?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>What are the key questions/topics to be answered/addressed by this process?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>IV. GROUPS INVOLVED IN DEALING WITH THE PAST: GENERAL OVERVIEW AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Who is doing what?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Why are they doing it?</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>What do they hope to achieve?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>What are the difficulties they face?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>What do they need?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Do they have plans to develop this work in the future?</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>How are they doing this work?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Who are the beneficiaries?</b>	<b>29</b>

<b>Who else should be involved?</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Are they supported both morally and financially in this work?</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>What else is needed?</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Addendum: Relevant Publications</b>	<b>33</b>
What Publications Have They Published?	34
What other publications have they read and found them useful?	34
<b>V. REGIONAL APPROACH AND CROSS-BORDER WORK</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Should this process be more regional or more local?</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Who could do what in the future?</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Are there any linkages between different groups?</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Are there any cross-border projects taking place on dealing with the past?</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Do people have knowledge of truth and reconciliation processes in other countries (both within the region and globally?)</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Do people have knowledge of the sufferings and experiences of people in other countries in the region?</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>VI. SUPPORT NEEDED AND QPSW'S ROLE</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Support needed</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Can QPSW play any role in that work?</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>47</b>

## **I. Executive Summary**

A structured interview survey amongst civil sector activists was completed by QPSW to determine the need for addressing the issue of dealing with the past and describe current activities, future plans, and needs in this regard. The survey showed a fair understanding of the issue and unequivocal support for activities addressing it, but found that initiatives so far were limited, isolated, and facing formidable challenges and obstacles. There is a role for international partners to help local organizations overcome those challenges by educating the public, mobilizing the politicians, and coordinating their activities at the regional level.

## **II. Introduction**

This report is a part of a broad consultation exercise undertaken by QPSW and its consultants on the topic of “dealing with the past” in the Post-Yugoslav countries, pertaining to Bosnia-Herzegovina. The purpose of this endeavor is to provide QPSW with relevant information and input in order to allow the organization to make qualified decisions about the feasibility of launching a project to address the issue of dealing with the past and about the role QPSW itself could have in this process.

This consulting project is based on a series of semi-structured interviews carried out in each of the countries. The questions (approximately 15 of them) were agreed upon prior to commencing the interviews and standardized across the region. These questions probe into four areas:

1. Dealing With the Past: General Views, Factors Impeding and Impelling; Attitudes towards dealing with the past;
2. Groups Involved In Dealing With the Past: General Overview and Plans for the Future;
3. Regional Approach and Cross-Border Work; and
4. Support needed and QPSW Role.

Administration of the interviews in Bosnia-Herzegovina took place between December 2002 and May 2003 and comprised 48 subjects or interviewees. Those interviewed were identified by the QPSW Sarajevo Office as those who represent relevant stakeholders in the process of dealing in the past: nonprofit activists, women’s groups’ representatives, independent journalists, and progressive clergymen.

The sample of subjects was distributed evenly amongst various regions and ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The interviewing process yielded dozens of hours of recorded responses and translated into nearly 500 pages of raw transcripts. Following are the overviews and the summaries of all the answers grouped accordingly into four above mentioned categories. Additionally, a review of available written materials was performed (QPSW Regional Consultation 2001, transcripts from the Roundtable on Truth and Reconciliation, held in Sarajevo in February 2000, written inputs and notes from

QPSW Sarajevo staff) and excerpts from those materials were included in this report, where appropriate.

### **III. Dealing With the Past: General Views, Factors Impeding and Impelling**

#### **Meaning of the construct:**

Although not acknowledged in the final report outline, the question “*What does dealing with the past mean to you?*” was presented to almost all those surveyed and they invariably attempted to provide honest accounts of their understanding of this concept.

Being able to “*talk and tell one’s story*” and “*finding the truth*” transpire as the two leading interpretations of what dealing with the past meant to the interviewees. In some of the answers, those concepts come together in the sense of taking all the stories, reconciling them, and agreeing on a single history for this country and this region.

Beyond that, there is a deeper understanding that dealing with the past can provide a more sound foundation for building the future or allow for transformation from a victim into a survivor. This was further elaborated in the section on whether dealing with the past can achieve anything.

Some sample answers by participants to “*What does dealing with the past mean to you?*”:

- Finding truth about events before, during, and after the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and former Yugoslavia. (B. Rajner)
- Providing truth to the younger generations, giving them tools to build the future. (B. Bukoje)
- It means to talk about what happened to us. It means to reconcile the history, it is told that the winner gets to write the history, here we either did not have a winner or we had three winners and each of them forwards their own recounts, with all three of them being incompatible with each other. (H. Orucevic, J. Finci)
- Dealing with the past is a test of my determination to work towards the future. It helps me grow from a victim into a survivor. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- It means to question what happened to me and what my role in those events was? (I. Rajner, D. Sehovac)
- It means to look each other in the eyes. It means to tell your story and hear their story; to tell and hear the truth. It means to accept the facts, no matter how unpleasant they may be. (M. Leban)
- To deal with the past is to talk. (Z. Baljak)

- To analyze what happened and how it happened. (S. Glavas).
- We are running away from the past instead of facing it, but we fail to acknowledge how burdened with the heritage of the past we are, given the current political setup and political parties. (N. Nalic)

### **Is dealing with the past a priority?**

Dealing with the past is a priority, according to a vast majority of responses. There is a degree of difference as to how high a priority this topic is, but all of those surveyed acknowledge the importance of addressing this issue.

Those who have dedicated their time and efforts to work on dealing with the past, mostly through the initiative for establishing the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Bosnia-Herzegovina, care passionately about the issue and identify it as a top priority to be addressed by this society. These participants stated that dealing with the past should have been the priority from day one after the war ended and that we have been already very late to grapple with this issue. They maintain that dealing with the past has been and remains a priority, at least for the civic sector.

Other participants from the sector recognize the relevance of the issue, but are unsure about how to rank the issue on the “ladder of priorities”. They rank economic recovery, return of refugees, or property claims as more immediate and pressing issues. A number of subjects followed their train of thought and stated that, e.g. return of the refugees and the displaced was a higher priority, only to concede that it would be virtually impossible or at least very difficult for those same refugees to return to their previous residences without the appropriate dialogue and reconciliation with their neighbors.

A fraction of subjects stated that dealing with the past was not really a priority, but acknowledged the relevance of the issue and recognized the need to talk about it. One participant stated that he was not interested in the past, he would rather choose not to “deal with it”, but conceded that everyone else around him was “burdened with the past” and that he would have no choice but to join the dialogue.

Through their answers, participants identified two other features pertinent to addressing this issue – efforts aimed at dealing with the past have to be *broad, well-planned, well-organized, and persistent* and this needs to be an *ongoing process*, taking place concurrently with other issues.

Some sample answers by participants to **“Is dealing with the past a priority?”**:

- It is a *conditio sine qua non* for this country. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- I do not care about the past. I view it as a volcano eruption. There was this disaster, 10,000 or 15,000 people were killed, but now we cannot do anything about it, we have to move on. (N. Savija-Valha)

- Depends on who you ask, but be it a priority or not, I think it determines our lives. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- Another things have a priority... but then again, how to expect the people to go back to their homes without knowing what happened. (A. Masic)
- The nationalists have tremendously twisted history in the past decade or so through the media and mass propaganda, we need to reclaim the truth and reconcile the stories. (M. Orsolc)
- We owe it to the victims to find out what happened. (several participants)
- It ought to be, at least for the nonprofit sector. (B. Rajner)
- It is a priority, but it will not happen spontaneously, by itself. (B. Todorovic).
- It is a priority, but we need a plan, a system. (J. D. Kirlic)
- Yes, but not in the sense: it is a priority, let use deal with it right here and right now. It is a process, perhaps for the decades to come. (A. Zivanovic)
- It must not be imposed. (A. Miskovic)
- There is a need to talk about those issues, at different levels, to have all parties in the war go through that process. It is a requirement for any ensuing genuine discussion and collaboration towards our living together. It has been, and always will be a priority. (N. Nalic)
- It ought to take place concurrently with other processes. (J. Divjak).

### **Why do we have to deal with the past?**

Building the prosperous future and avoiding future wars are the common threads in the answers of most of those surveyed. All participants seem to share the understanding that at the time, there are conflicting official accounts of the history of the past decade and that those differences are the likely seeds of future tension or even armed conflicts.

There is a great deal of consensus on the “deterministic” significance of the past – present values and perceptions determine our future actions, and those values and views are greatly affected by experiences and understanding of the past.

On the other hand, there were responses explaining that the best way to deal with the past would be to delete it or ignore it.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Why does we have to deal with the past?”*:

- We cannot simply run away from it. (G. Kapor)
- We seem to have the curse of wars fueling one other with legends from the past. People here are too quick to be reminded of the past sufferings and too willing to inflict pain and suffering on someone else just to repay the “debts from the past”. You cannot build the future unless you have a clear and realistic perception of the

- past. Of course, you are running the risk of getting stuck in the past, but that is the risk you have to be willing to take. It is worth investing in it in order to avoid some future war. (I. Rajner)
- People like to refer to the times before the war with nostalgia and longing as to the “good times”, but we fail to ask ourselves: What the hell then happened to us to destroy all that we had? (I. Rajner)
  - You cannot look ahead if you cannot bear to look in the past. (S. Djulic)
  - It represents a catharsis, a painful and an emotional one, but a necessary one. (S. Djulic)
  - Unresolved issues from the past are carried over into our future. (S. Garic)
  - As Cicero used to say – to learn about the past is to grow up, a child who fails to learn that, remains but a child. We appear to have separate accounts of history and that transpires into separate economies, separate education, separate welfare programs. (A. Miskovic)
  - The ruling nationalist parties are repeating the same again and again, by forming a coalition following the last elections. People are now beginning to question the fact that they are being fooled with and beginning to think independently. (B. Todorovic)
  - People need the time and place to tell their stories. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
  - I do not think we absolutely have to deal with the past. We can simply forget it or delete it. (N. Savija-Valha)
  - My beliefs and values determine my actions; if my beliefs are based on false myths they can have devastating and very realistic adverse effects on my actions. We still discriminate against people and violate their human rights every day based on what happened in the past. (D. Sehovac)

### **Can sustainable peace be achieved without dealing with the past?**

There is a high degree of suspicion shared amongst all surveyed that sustainable peace in the region can be built without dealing with the past adequately and appropriately. True peace is not attainable in words of most of interviewees if there is no consensus on the past. They agree that some truce, some absence of armed conflict is possible, especially given the presence of international forces, but sustainable peace cannot be achieved without properly addressing the issues from the past. A few vocalize their fears that peace will be over as soon as the international peacekeeping troops withdraw. They notice negative energy and frustration steaming up and are apprehensive of that energy bursting out in form of another bloodshed.

As long as there are partial and conflicting “histories”, there will be a potential to inflame and inspire future conflicts. One of the surveyed accounted for at least five different sides or five different histories – one for each of the three ethnic groups, one being the history of the refugees, and another being the history as perceived by international community.



At least one participant cautiously questioned the point of dealing with the past, reflecting that perhaps “too much of dealing with the past” had caused the last war.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Can sustainable peace be achieved without dealing with the past?”*:

- We have many “truths” going around here that we have to reconcile. Each of them represents the views of one of the ethnic groups; then there is the “truth” as perceived by the international community and the “truth” that belongs to the “fourth ethnic group” – refugees and the displaced. (G. Kapor)
- We can sweep it under the carpet, but it will come back at us with vengeance. (A. Masic)
- This peace, as we have it now, is not a genuine peace, it is an imposed, artificial peace, more like the absence of war. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Serbs think they will separate as soon as the SFOR troops leave; Bosniaks think they will complete the unification process. (G. Kapor)
- These issues can be suppressed for a long time, but they demand to be addressed. Scotland became a part of Britain in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, yet they waited until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> to be granted their own parliament. (I. Rajner)
- There will be no truly stable state of Bosnia-Herzegovina without dealing with the past. (B. Todorovic)
- Well, we have not dealt with the past, yet we have peace. But that peace is imposed and illusive. There is a lot of negative energy steaming up and around that is currently suppressed by presence of international troops. People are forced to keep their eyes closed before the truth in order to keep on living with their own myths. (S. Djulic)
- Maybe we had this war just because we were being fed with all the history in the past. (N. Savija-Valha)

### **Does dealing with the past achieve anything?**

There was a variety of answers to this question, but a stunning majority of them compares facing the past and dealing with it as a process of “healing”, “liberation”, “purification”, or “catharsis”. This cathartic outcome, according to many of them, will allow for more positive processes to take place. Bold statements like “claiming responsibility for your actions in the past allows you to reclaim your future” can definitely present this process as a necessity for both the survivors and the perpetrators, or at least for the silent majority who did nothing to either commit the crimes nor to prevent them.

At the individual level, being able to tell the stories, find the truth, or receive some sort of moral redress allows individuals to add meaning to their stories, a meaning that can be universally understood and accepted, and that allows them to find forgiveness and/or resolution from the guilt they may harbor.

Past war was a horrible mess and most individuals and, subsequently, communities in Bosnia are either wondering what and how happened or dare not even tackle the issue. There is hope, as expressed by some of the subjects that, addressing this issue properly, will provide us with the actual understanding of what took place in the former Yugoslavia over the past decade.

As the most palpable outcome, dealing with the past can help us avoid future conflicts, by dispelling myths and prejudices and by preventing future manipulations with history. Further, participants expect that dealing with the past can improve communications and relationships amongst countries in the region and that would in turn foster commerce and economic recovery. One of the participants went even further, stating that our dealing with the past could serve as a learning model for others with similar experiences.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“Does dealing with the past achieve anything?”***:

- We also have to assess the following: Do we want to deal with the past? What is there to gain and what is there to lose? Who, when, where, and how should do it? (several participants)
- It means claiming responsibility for your actions in the past but also reclaiming responsibility for your life in the future. It is a requirement in order to start looking into the future. (I. Trninic)
- Finding truth, finding out how all of us were manipulated and played with, it helped me understand other people’s values and what they did based on those values and eventually forgive them for how they treated me. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- It provides the understanding of what caused this horrible war. (Z. Paukovic)
- It can enable a dialogue, a dialogue that will help us define and align our interests for the future. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- Catharsis, purification, liberation, healing. (several interviewees)
- Re-opening of the region within. (N. Horozovic)
- Opening towards each other. (J. D. Kirlic)
- Release of creative energy. (S. Dusanic)
- It could serve as a catalyst that would help put everything together and accelerate recovery and development. (J. Divjak)
- We can use it to avoid wars in the future. (A. Miskovic)
- To understand the past allows us to prevent future conflicts. (J. Finci)
- It will dispel lies and prejudices. (A. Masic)
- Truth will prevent future manipulations and lies leading to new conflicts. (S. Dizdarevic)
- On the other hand, people live in the past anyway. (M. Zivanovic)

- It helps preventing fabricating and counterfeiting history for the purpose of generating future conflicts.
- If we do it properly, the others can learn from us. We could serve as an example, this could be our contribution to building global peace. (V. Kelava).

### **Is this the right time to address these issues?**

There was not a unified view on the issue of timing and whether now would be the right time to address dealing with the past. Those who have been more closely involved with the issue have grown a bit impatient and voiced their concerns about being late with this process.

They also pointed that the pace of the activities undertaken on the issue so far that has been painstakingly slow. Some of the participants said they attempted to address the issue immediately after the war, only to be told that the “time was not ripe”. Indeed, another group of interviewees underscored the need for “historical distance” that we need to put between ourselves and the events of the past decade in order to be able to deal with it properly. Eventually, a good number of them conceded that about now would be the right time to shift gears and put more effort into the process.

Most participants recognize that this is going to be a lengthy process and that there perhaps there will never be the “right moment” for addressing the issue unless such moment is planned and prepared for in advance. In that sense, a majority of them agree that the process should commence, at least in its preparatory phase and then, as the momentum builds, the opportunities will open too. Even if a majority of general public is not ready to address the issue, that readiness can be built and strengthened.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Is this the right time?”*:

- It is the one of the most emotionally painful issues. (M. Malic)
- If we wait for the right time, we will never tackle it. (S. Pasic)
- There is no right or wrong time, this is an ongoing process. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- It is always the right time. (B. Rajner)
- The right time is coming and we ought to seize the opportunity. (B. Todorovic)
- At one conference, a participant said: We can choose to deal with the past now albeit difficult and painful or we can let the past choose to deal with us at a later time and suffer much more difficult and painful consequences. (N. Horozovic)
- It ought to take place concurrently with other processes, but it should have started already. (J. Divjak)
- The public as a whole may not be ready to deal with it, but if we keep waiting for everyone to be ready, we may as well never do it. (S. Pasic)
- I hear from many people that is still too soon. (N. Horozovic)

- It will always be the right time, to deal and deal with it. Until we reach the end and put a period to it. (N. Sekulovic)
- We may already be a bit late. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- We needed some time distance between the events and the present to be able to look back, now I am not sure if this is the right distance. (B. Bukoje)
- It is a long process and we have just begun that process. (D. Jurisic)

### **How far into the past do people want to go?**

This question yielded a variety of answers as of how far back into the past do people want to go in this process, but a majority of subjects agree on the past war (1991 or 1992-1995) as the central slice of time to be re-examined and addressed. Most of those who wish to address the issue of the last war would also like to address the events preceding and leading to the war in and around Bosnia. For almost all participants, time period following the war (1996-2000 or present) is also worth examining as a historical continuum.

Thus, beginning with the late 80s and the fall of Communism, continuing with budding nationalist movements throughout former Yugoslavia and subsequent wars, and ending with the Dayton Accords and post-Dayton establishment and reconstruction of Bosnia are the events that the majority views to be most relevant in this attempt to address and understand the recent past.

Several individual participants provided different time points that this process should start with. One of them suggested going back to 1981 and the first unrests in Kosovo that carried the first seed of future open ethnic rifts and violence, others would like to revisit Kosovo in 1989, when Slobodan Milosevic delivered his infamous speech blatantly announcing the possibility of armed conflicts.

Some other critical periods that would require a closer look at were brought up in the responses. One of them is World War II and the bloodshed and genocide that occurred then and another one is the period of 1917-1918 and the creation of Yugoslavia. One of the surveyed simply proposed that the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century be analyzed.

Several of the participants were rather flexible and proposed that we examine the last war and then, should there be the need and the will, the process could move further in the past. One simply proposed that people be allowed to as back in the past as they may wish or need.

Some sample answers by participants to *“How far into the past do people want to go?”*:

- We ought to start with 1992, maybe 1980. (B. Rajner)
- The last 10-15 years. (A. Hasanbegovic)

- Last 10 years. (M. Malic, J. Z. Kulenovic)
- Let us start with our story, the last war. We could also dwell on the 1941-45 period and the establishment of Yugoslavia in 1918. (G. Kapor)
- As far as they need. I wanted to tell my story, but I was not able to tell it before. I was not given that opportunity. (M. Penava)
- People should be allowed to go back as far as they want. (A. Zivanovic, S. Dusanic)
- We start with 1989. (V. Sehic)
- Late 1980s; (I. Rajner, S. Pasic)
- Last 20 years should suffice. Although we may end up digging deeper and deeper in the past. (L. Zivanovic)
- We should review the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. (N. Sekulovic, M. Orsolovic, D. Jurisic)
- Let us take a good look at 1941 as well as at 1991. (N. Sekulovic)
- We should start with 1941 and the World War II. (M. Leban)
- I think that the loss of social stability and welfare in the 80s led to general insecurity and that had rolled the snowball. (I. Rajner)
- We could review the last 10 years or the last 50 years. (S. Buha)
- We could start with 1981 and the first unrests in Kosovo. (J. Divjak)
- As far as we can get the live witnesses for to provide testimonies. (J. Finci)
- We should allow individuals and groups to go as far back as they want and need. (S. Djulic).

### **How ready are people to listen to the histories of other groups?**

There was a great degree of caution and skepticism amongst all participants when they tried to honestly answer how ready people are to hear the other sides' stories. At first some of them challenged the very availability of the stories from the other side, but then conceded that they themselves were able to access the stories from the other sides when they sought to. Most of them nevertheless agree that the general public had never had an open and unobstructed access to other sides' histories (with an exception of electronic media that often served as mouthpieces of the official war propaganda).

Subjects then went on to examine why people would be impassive or actively resistant to hearing histories of other groups. The most benign explanations were that people are preoccupied with their own daily problems of survival and would have little interest in hearing about someone else's misery. More personally delicate explanations are those that concern one's own role in the past, meaning that hearing other side's stories would lead to re-examining own roles in the events and that process would perhaps put the people either on the defensive or produce a sense of guilt, especially on the side that may

harbor more perpetrators. On the part of the victims, it was argued that it was easier to think of oneself as the victims, the misunderstood one, rather than to dispel this illusion and accept the fact that the truth that may not be that simple or black and white.

The most pessimistic views contend that ethnic groups have already begun to actively hate each other and that such hatred has already become an inherent part of one's national identity. However, only a small fraction of participants had such views. An equal number of subjects shared the view that a majority of public, about eighty percent, would be willing and ready to listen to the histories of other groups and that they were simply never given that opportunity.

Other subjects questioned not the ability of people to hear others' histories but the way of interpreting them and the meaning they would make out of those stories, since the truth can often be very painful and difficult to accept. Added to that concern is the issue of how those (hi)stories are to be told and someone asked a question about how should such stories be packaged to be more "palatable" to other sides, One of the ideas that resonated through several answers was to start with the positive and inspirational stories, stories of kind and compassionate acts that reflect universal human values that anyone can relate to and identify with.

Some sample answers by participants to ***"How ready are people to listen to the histories of other groups?"***:

- People are still preoccupied with their own misery and have little interest in hearing other people's miserable stories. (B. Rajner)
- Public was never given the opportunity to hear all the stories. (H. Orucevic)
- It is always good to hear the other side. (B. Bukoje)
- "Women of Bosnia-Herzegovina" are ready to hear. "Women in Black" were ready to hear". I was delighted to learn, after the fact, how much effort against the war that association was putting in all those years. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- No, no... never. They will never be quite ready. But we have to look for the ways and allow everyone to have their own closure, their own satisfaction. (N. Nalic)
- No, not even those who were the victims, who could benefit the most from the process, are not willing to deal with it. (I. Rajner)
- It really depends on how you try to "sell" it. We could start with some of the uplifting and positive stories and then move on with the process. It is going to take time. (A. Masic)
- People are not yet ready to hear the other side, it is easier to think that only the other side had the camps and the mass murders and they themselves didn't. I have tried to do it on all three sides and none of them welcomed it. (G. Kapor)
- When issues of the past are brought up, people by default become defensive, almost as if they feel guilty, like in "collective guilt". It prevents them from looking around and saying: yes, I acknowledge that, I admit that and that

- happened, I feel sorry, and I am not the one who was responsible or the one who committed that. (A. Masic)
- Dealing with the past means dealing with your own self in that past, and that is not easy to do. (L. Zivanovic)
  - It is not only about whether are they willing to hear it, it is also about how are they going to interpret it and what are they going to do with it. (A. Hasanbegovic)
  - People have always been interested in hearing the other side, it is just that they never had the opportunity. (I. Trninic)
  - I have been exposed to the other side through their media already, now I do not know if that is the right way or the right way would be to get together and talk about it face-to-face. (J. D. Kirlic)
  - We had this traveling film festival last year and we visited several cities in the region. We had very fruitful discussions and people were open to hearing the other side. Unfortunately, two of the films (“The Red Rubber Shoes” and “Do You Remember Sarajevo?”) were not shown in Banja Luka and Belgrade. It tells me that people are not yet ready to hear everything. However, at least we had a discussion about why those two films were not shown. (N. Savija-Valha)
  - About eighty percent of the people are ready to hear those stories. (S. Garic)
  - I do not think the public is ready, that public does not have its public opinion. Unfortunately, ethnic groups have started to hate each other. This now belongs in a psychological, mental, or medical realm – it is already an issue of social pathology.(M. Zivanovic)
  - Public is not ready to hear the truth, because the truth can be very painful. (M. Malic)
  - We want to talk about the other side, not to hear its story. (M. Leban)

### **In whose interest is it to prevent the process of dealing with the past?**

Politicians are the central figures obstructing and impeding the process of dealing with the past. Most of the respondents seem to agree that the key political players or political parties from the beginning of the 1990s who *de facto* started the war and participated in it as decision-makers are still in offices and they definitely may have a vested interest in preventing the truth from being unearthed.

Fear of exposure for wartime deeds is stated as the principal reason that renders the politicians a major obstacle in the process of dealing with the past. High-ranking officials were often the direct perpetrators or indirectly responsible for atrocities that took place during the war. These individuals and groups clearly fear legal sanctions that may arise from such a truth-revealing process.

Another very compelling reason could be described as the “monopoly on the past” that nationalist parties claim when the past of their own ethnic group is concerned. These

nationalist parties present themselves as the only legitimate and genuine interpreters of their ethnic group's past. They derive power from manipulating with the past and are going to be very unwilling to relinquish this source of power that translates into votes.

Closely tailing politicians and political parties in the respondents' answers are those closely affiliated with them – religious zealots, nationalism-imbibed academia, and media serving the purpose of nationalist propaganda. All these groups, like politicians, have a double-vested interest in preventing the public from dealing with the past: one, to avoid being held accountable for their own roles in the past and the other, to continue to manipulate the ethnic sentiment by abusing the history.

Amongst the less frequently identified groups that may present an obstacle to the process of dealing with the past are the general public, younger generations, and international community. General public could be reluctant to openly deal with the past because, in words of one of the subjects, “there would be tears and many would be afraid to face them” implicating perhaps that the general public may not have the strength to face the past at this (or any) time. Younger generations were singled out because of their disinterest and sometimes too enthusiastic embracing of the nationalist ideologies. There were no explanations of why and how the international community may represent an obstacle to this process.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“In whose interest is it to prevent the process of dealing with the past?”***:

- It is difficult to question the actions and decisions of your leaders, as it inevitably leads to their being taken off the pedestal and people have a hard time looking at their fallen heroes, but it may be necessary. (A. Masic)
- Politicians, decision-makers from the last war who are still in power, nationalist politicians. (B. Rajner, N. Nalic, A. Masic, B. Todorovic, S. Djulic, A. Zivanovic, M. Malic, M. Leban, S. Dusanic, D. Sehovac, D. Jurisic)
- Political, constitutional setup. (M. Zivanovic, M. Leban)
- Political parties, selfish political interests, nationalist oligarchies. (A. Hasanbegovic, G. Kapor, N. Sekulovic, Z. Baljak)
- All the perpetrators who may fear legal sanctions or loss of their privileges. (M. Penava, S. Dizdarevic, J. Finci)
- Those who started the war. (V. Kelava, Z. Paukovic)
- Religious zealots and extremists. (B. Todorovic)
- Nationalist ideologies. (M. Orsolcic)
- Media. (A. Hasanbegovic, H. Orucevic, S. Buha)
- We are all trying to suppress it and forget about it. (N. Nalic, S. Pasic, S. Bradvic, V. Sehic)



- We know there will be tears and we are afraid to face them. (S. Hadzihalilovic, M. Gvozdenovic, M. Penava)
- We are the obstacle because we are lacking a consensus about what we are trying to accomplish. (I. Rajner)
- Not everyone has the strength to face the past. (A. Miskovic)
- Criminals thrive on divisions and suspicion. (G. Kapor, M. Leban)
- Nationalist-imbibed academia. (N. Savija-Valha, M. Zivanovic)
- Younger generations are absolutely disinterested in this. (M. Zivanovic)
- Even peace activists are sometimes confused and unsure how to feel about this issue or feel too powerless. (A. Hasanbegovic, M. Leban)
- International community. (M. Leban)
- Adverse economy – poverty feeds prejudice. (S. Dusanic)

**What are the key questions/topics to be answered/addressed by this process?**

This question was also not a part of the standardized set of questions to be answered in this report but most interviewees were asked this question and provided a broad gamut of very interesting answers. A majority of subjects wishes to shed more light onto events leading to war and the war itself – they want to learn exactly what happened, how it happened, who participated and made decisions, and, if possible, why such a tragic course of events took place.

Some of these questions are more past-oriented (*Who committed war crimes? Was it an aggression or a civil war?*) whilst others are future-oriented (*How to reconcile histories? How to integrate youth? How to bring the war veterans together?*). Other answers provided here are highly variable and often very personal. Following is the summary of the most remarkable answers:

- How ready are people to take the responsibility for their action or inaction during the war? (B. Rajner)
- What happened, how it happened, why it happened, was there any other alternative? (B. Bukoje)
- Why did Bosnia-Herzegovina opt for independence? (N. Nalic)
- War crimes. (A. Masic)
- The events leading to the war during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Who incited all three ethnic groups? Who tried to prevent the war? How to reconcile history? How to integrate the youth today? How to allow the war veterans to pursue their rights? (G. Kapor)
- Was it an aggression or was it a civil war? (B. Todorovic, M. Leban)

- What was the war about? Who was the victim, who was the perpetrator? (M. Gvozdenovic, S. Garic)
- What generated a conflict of such magnitude? (N. Sekulovic)
- Who committed the crimes and what were their motives? How did we end up with “ethnic cleansing”? (S. Dizdarevic)
- How was history written on all sides? (N. Savija-Valha)
- Why did I spend my youth or a good part on my life in this? (I. Trninic)
- Identity. (M. Zivanovic)
- Interfaith dialogue. (M. Orsolic)
- The role of the Hague Tribunal. (M. Orsolic)
- Would you allow your child to marry outside your ethnic group/religion? (S. Buha)
- Do we accept Bosnia-Herzegovina as our own (and only) homeland? (D. Sehovac)
- The role of media and religious institutions. (V. Sehic)
- Intergenerational transfer of trauma/emotions/prejudice. (M. Penava)

#### **IV. Groups Involved In Dealing With the Past: General Overview and Plans for the Future**

##### **Who is doing what?**

The answer to this question was obtained through both research of background resources and the analysis of respondents’ answers. There appears to be a slight discord between the two sources. Background resources are available only on the initiative for *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Bosnia-Herzegovina, because other efforts in dealing with the past have neither been publicly recognized nor identified themselves as such.

Subjects’ responses, on the other hand, do not reflect the amount effort already put in the TRC initiative. Many respondents barely knew anything about the initiative and even the key TRC participants said very little about that project, be it due to modesty or perhaps the assumption that the interviewers were familiar with that initiative.

Based on both sources, it is possible to differentiate three layers of activities aimed at dealing with the past:

- 1) Organized initiatives that involve networks of organizations;
- 2) Individual activities that involve single organizations or individuals; and

3) Indirect activities – programs implemented by various organizations that can be viewed as bordering with this process or indirectly fostering dealing with the past.

1) There is presently only one organized effort to address the issue of dealing with the past in Bosnia-Herzegovina and that is the *Initiative for Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. It has been established as a registered nonprofit, but effectively it is a coalition effort backed by the Forum of Tuzla Citizens, Citizens' Alternative Parliament, Circle 99, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights from Sarajevo, and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska from Bijeljina.

This effort, spearheaded by Mr. Finci (Circle 99) since 1997, has resulted in several serious deliberations (including the one in February 2000 in Sarajevo that summoned representatives of the South African TRC and ICTY from the Hague) and, eventually, in the parliamentary initiative to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The bill has been in the procedure for a while now without much hope it would be passed into a law in the near future, as there is an evident lack of interest, support, and consensus amongst politicians who are supposed to endorse it.

Unfortunately, little is known about this valuable initiative amongst the general public or even amongst the other participants from the civil sector. Its initial exposure had been effectively sabotaged by allegations that the Commission would serve to replace the Hague Tribunal without legally persecuting the perpetrators and war criminals and these accusations deflated any kind of enthusiasm that general public might have had for this initiative in the end of the 90s.

Moreover, some interviewees expressed their impression that the Commission initiative has so far been “too exclusivist” (not aiming for broader participation) and “too purist” (aiming not to include individuals who held any decision-making posts during the past war). On the upside, the initiative has maintained very good contacts with similar initiatives in Serbia and Croatia. Despite its shortcomings, this initiative remains the most serious attempt to deal with the past ever undertaken in Bosnia so far.

2) Throughout the interviews, several names and organizations were repeatedly singled out as the ones recognized working on dealing with the past. Those names include Svetlana Broz, who wrote a book about Good People in Bad Times, highlighting the positive and uplifting stories from the war. Jezdimir Milosevic, who wrote the book *The Light at the End of the Tunnel*, was mentioned in a similar context.

Rev. Marko Orsolc and the International Multi-religious Intercultural Center were underlined as the ones working to mend the rifts amongst different religious communities and their clergymen. Several participants pointed at the example of Biljana Plavsic (who was at one time the President of Republika Srpska) who came forward at her trial in the Hague and offered her confession and her regrets for all the loss of human lives.

These individual efforts have neither been coordinated nor included to be a part of a broader initiative. However, since they have an undeniable reputation and visibility it

would be a wise move to have these individuals, organizations, and their activities somehow incorporated into a wide-ranging program to address the issue.

3) The third layer of activities, as it was resonated through a majority of answers, had a tangential relationship with dealing with the past, as direct goals of such activities were somewhat different issues (e.g. return of refugees, conflict resolution, women's issues). Many of these activities, however, were recognized as relevant to dealing with the past, and vice versa, many participants, admitted that dealing with the past will have to be addressed, or already has been addressed, as they try to achieve their primary objectives.

These statements cannot simply be taken at face value since many of the participants in this survey have learned to pitch their organizations' activities by making them sound relevant to potential funders' objectives. They nevertheless convey an important point: if dealing with the past is to be tackled seriously, it will have to happen at different levels with many different target groups and having numerous organizations addressing the issue through their own populations (e.g. returnees, women, youth, war veterans) or their own activities (e.g. films, psychosocial support, role-playing) can only help build the momentum for the success of the endeavor. It could be useful if these organizations were asked to join the initiative and provide public endorsements for a future project of this kind.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Who Is Doing What?”*:

- Peace building teams, there is a Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but we know little about it. (B. Rajner, J. D. Kirlic, M. Zivanovic, N. Horozovic, D. Sehovac)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but I am not too happy with its setup. (G. Kapor, J. Divjak)
- Women's organizations. (A. Hasanbegovic, L. Zivanovic)
- Women for Women, Udruzene zene from Banja Luka. (L. Zivanovic, S. Pasic, S. Dusanic)
- Mr. Matic and the group around B-92, Drinka Gojkovic. (J. Finci)
- Dubravko and Ivan Lovrenovic, both of them, S. Avdic. (I. Rajner)
- M. Zivanovic in Banja Luka. (I. Rajner, B. Todorovic)
- Slavo Kukic in Mostar. (B. Todorovic)
- M. Orsolc in Posavina and Sarajevo. (B. Todorovic, M. Orsolc)
- V. Sehic, Nedjo Milicevic, Citizens' Forum in Tuzla, they did a lot on so-called reciprocal return between Bijeljina and Tuzla. (B. Todorovic, L. Zivanovic, M. Malic, D. Sehovac)
- Serbian Civic Council (SGV), Bosniak Intellectual Congress Council (VKBI), and Croatian National Council (HNV) worked together a lot. (M. Malic)
- Jakob Finci in Sarajevo. (B. Todorovic)

- Zdravko Grebo; (B. Todorovic)
- Some media: Slobodna Bosna, Dani, Reporter. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Circle 99. (A. Hasanbegovic, B. Todorovic, M. Leban, J. Finci)
- Women in Black, Duska from Zenica, Dijana Sejjic from Banja Luka, the Commission has adhered to its very strict principles, Jasmina Husanovic in England, Yannis from Greece, Zarko Papic, Mirza Kusljugic, Kadrija Hadzic, Mr. Ognjenovic, International Crisis Group. (N. Nalic)
- Returnees, detainees – their organizations, but that has always been done on the side. (S. Hadzihalilovic, S. Garic)
- Returnees and civil rights organizations in Canton 10: in Livno – CGS; in Drvar – Izbjeglicki servis, Demos, Lasta; in Grahovo - Grahovo, Struga; in Glamoc - Glamocko kolo, Bolje sutra; in Kupres – Kup-Li. (S. Garic)
- Associations of families of missing persons. (M. Penava)
- CEDEUM from Belgrade, ANET from Zagreb, Drustvo za Pik from Ljubljana. (S. Djulic)
- CNA. (J. D. Kirlic, M. Gvozdencovic, A. Zivanovic, S. Pasic, D. Sehovac)
- Youth Center in Gornji Vakuf. (S. Pasic)
- Center for Communications from Banja Luka. (S. Djulic)
- Human Rights Bureau in Tuzla. (A. Zivanovic, S. Pasic)
- Bosnian Institute from London. (J. Divjak)
- Human rights groups. (L. Zivanovic)
- Forum Bosnia. (N. Sekulovic)
- Natasa Kandic from Humanitarian Law Center. (S. Dizdarevic)
- Jezdimir Milosevic from Maksa/Protector through his workshops, he also published a book The Light at the End of Tunnel. (S. Dizdarevic, D. Sehovac)
- Svetlana Broz with her book Good People in Bad Times. (D. Sehovac)
- Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs (DISS) – we decided to stay in Sarajevo after the reintegration and have been building dialogue and tolerance ever since. (D. Sehovac)
- Peace Schools. (J. Z. Kulenovic)
- Hi, Neighbor from Banja Luka. (V. Kelava)
- QPSW, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch. (M. Leban, S. Pasic, D. Sehovac)
- HCA. (A. Zivanovic, L. Zivanovic, S. Dizdarevic)
- Helsinki Committee. (J. Finci)
- Vesna Terselic from Zagreb. (J. Finci)

- Role playing and theater. (S. Djulic)
- Biljana Plavsic did an absolutely amazing thing. (I. Rajner, N. Nalic)

### **Why are they doing it?**

Deep understanding of the relevance of the topic transpires as one of the major reasons why participants who have done it in the past continue to pursue this issue. Basic reasoning on relevance of this issue was provided in the “Why do we have to deal with the past?” section and it can be summarized into the need to resolve the issues from the past in order to build a lasting peace and to avoid armed conflicts and bloodshed in the future.

Several individuals also stressed their personal reasons – some of them were persecuted for their views and calls for tolerance during the war, now they want to see that tolerance will prevail. Others are stating that these activities reflect their universal human and civic values and that such work is expected from them as civil leaders and intellectuals. A few of them acknowledged that working on this issue has been a part of healing of their own emotional wounds.

Some other respondents are jokingly questioning their own sanity, because they are often being perceived as idealists by the general public; yet, they continue to put their quest for truth above all. Additional benefits on addressing this issue are, for some, getting to meet people, to hear their stories, and to learn or travel. Finally, it was assumed that some people would take a part in this process for the money.

Following are examples of the most interesting answers to this question:

- I am looking to heal myself and heal my country. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- I find it necessary in order to revalidate the very existence and role of women. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- Organizations do it on the side, when they have to deal with it, like with returnees. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- Because I intend to live here and I want to make it possible for my children to live here in peace. (G. Kapor,)
- I want to build the future on stable foundations and lasting peace. (B. Todorovic Z. Baljak)
- For my personal satisfaction. I was persecuted during the war for standing for those who were persecuted; I stood for tolerance and I want to pass it on. (B. Todorovic, V. Sehic)
- It makes me feel good, it asserts my identity as a human being. (L. Zivanovic)
- I really do not know why I do it, all I can say is it’s the right thing to do. (J. D. Kirlic)

- They are hoping for the better future. (A. Zivanovic, S. Pasic)
- To ascertain universal human and civic values. (D. Sehovac)
- As intellectuals and prominent members of our communities, we are expected to speak out and to act. (M. Malic)
- For peace of mind; (M. Zivanovic)
- I like to meet people, to hear stories, to learn. (A. Zivanovic)
- I see it as a challenge. (S. Dusanic)
- I have decided a long time ago: I can afford to lose everything, but my integrity. That is my motto. (V. Sehic)
- I am still wondering whether we are altruists or masochists. (V. Kelava)
- Because we are bloody fools, but tolerance and living together have been deeply embedded in our tradition. (M. Malic)
- Some do it for the money and resources, some to pursue the truth. (several respondents)

### **What do they hope to achieve?**

This question was not asked directly in the structured interview, thus yielding a very few answers that addressed this question. The general answer, however, can be deduced from the statements pertaining to the relevance of dealing with the past or why people do it – in addition to idealistic goals such as hoping to find the truth or rebuild tolerance and understanding amongst ethnic groups, participants also aim to achieve reconciliation in order to build a lasting peace and avoid any future reenactment of the war that devastated the region.

Like those who are hoping to achieve personal healing by fostering healing process at the national level, some participants are hoping to regain their civic identity by rebuilding the civil society in Bosnia and they view dealing with the past as an important step in that direction.

In addition to these broader or strictly individual goals, some of the participants are focused on more practical outcomes of their activities. For one them it is very important to establish a forum that will allow people to discuss the past freely and openly. For another, after such forum is in place, a lasting interfaith dialogue is the next step that needs to take place.

Some sample answers by participants to *“What Do They Hope to Achieve?”*:

- We hope to give people a forum to discuss the past. (N. Sekulovic)
- We are aiming to establish a lasting interfaith dialogue. (M. Orsolcic)

- I hope to regain my civic identity I had before the war. I was a member and an officer in many professional and sports associations before the war, I was made to be a soldier for four years, now I want to reclaim my civic persona. (D. Sehovac)

### **What are the difficulties they face?**

Difficulties that individuals and groups face when attempting to address the issue of dealing with the past can be arbitrarily grouped into four different categories:

- 1) ***Political obstructions and filibustering*** – especially when the initiative for Truth and Reconciliation Commission is concerned. The initiative calls for the Commission to be a parliamentary sanctioned body, like in other countries. With the Commission bill in the procedure, there is a serious threat that the Government can take over the Commission and abuse its purpose or, if the Government fails, the Assembly can hold the bill virtually indefinitely.
- 2) ***Accusations and threats by nationalist extremists*** – activists are facing the accusations of betraying the national interests and, frequently, open threats when they continue to pursue the truth and/or publish stories that reveal one's dark dealings from the past.
- 3) ***Lack of resources and support*** – most participants complain of a lack of resources, funding, and also support by both domestic public and international agencies. They would welcome more funding, more resources, and more training and support on the part of international donors. At the country level, they would welcome more understanding and participation on the part of general public in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- 4) ***The sensitivity of the topic*** – many participants acknowledge that this is not an easy topic to address and that pain may be inflicted when there is an honest and open dialogue about the past. Participants who identified this as an obstacle also stated that they would like to learn more about how to address it properly.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“What Are the Difficulties They Face?”***:

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is awaiting approval before the legislature. If the Government decides to completely take over the Commission, it would undermine its credibility. If such takeover is resisted, then the Government can filibuster indefinitely. (B. Todorovic, S. Dizdarevic)
- Lack of funding. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Lack of resources. (G. Kapor, B. Todorovic, S. Garic)
- Lack of education, taxing schedule. (M. Penava)
- Lack of communication. (N. Horozovic)



- Lack of understanding and support within the community. (B. Todorovic, N. Horozovic, S. Pasic)
- Lack of support from international organizations. (S. Pasic)
- Pain inflicted when people are dealing with the past. (N. Horozovic, N. Sekulovic)
- Accusations of treason of national and ethnic interests, threats. (G. Kapor, D. Jurisic)
- The fact that I have to act discreetly and obliquely instead of openly and directly. (M. Malic)
- Returnees and their property are often exposed to attacks. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- When journalists tell the truth, they jeopardize their lives, receive numerous threats. (D. Jurisic, D. Sehovac)

### **What do they need?**

This was another question not directly addressed in the interviews and was in good part answered by participants when they spoke of a lack of support and resources they have been facing in their efforts so far. Throughout the interviews, the respondents reiterated the need of more support and understanding on the parts of international community and domestic public.

From international organizations they also expect to receive a more tangible support in terms of funding, resources, but also trainings that many underscored as a very important component. From the general public, they would welcome general interest and participation in the process.

Another part they find crucial as the issue of safety and security for those who choose to pursue this issue (particularly in some parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina). This, they feel, is a part that can be provided from both local and national authorities.

Finally, looking back at their own efforts, some of the participants noted that the initiative itself needs some kind of a well-defined strategy, a master plan and a time frame that will help all participants coordinate their activities and achieve more. Most participants who mentioned this also conceded that at this time such plan or strategy is inexistent.

### **Do they have plans to develop this work in the future?**

All the participants who have been working on this issue intend to continue working on it in the future. Additionally, a good number of participants who have not worked on dealing with the past intend to start doing that in the future. There were a few participants who do not have plans to work on this issue in the near future but would gladly endorse such activities because they understand the importance of dealing with the past.

In addition to the *Initiative for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* there were several other individual initiatives that merit attention and that could be conveniently incorporated into and supported through any future coordinated project.

Such initiatives involve different population groups, like war veterans (bringing veterans from all sides to discuss the past, but also difficulties they are presently facing), the educators, the youth (through summer camps where youth will be given hands-on training in tolerance and conflict resolution), or organizations (organizational strengthening for nonprofits working on this issue).

Some other answers are highly individual and do not refer to any particular target population, instead, they range from writing a book on dealing with the past to participating in a social study pertaining to this issue to dealing with individual events from the past (such as the Sarajevo Assassination that anteceded WWI).

**Some sample answers by participants to “Do They Have Plans to Develop This Work in the Future?”:**

- We intend to work on reconciliation regarding the events leading to the WWI and the Sarajevo Assassination that took place here. (G. Kapor)
- We are holding public panels, with war veterans, in several towns, where they will look back at their role during the war. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- We are working on two panels with war veterans and their roles in the war. Those are really just testing the waters, to assess if the time is ripe for more intensive work with veterans. We also plan to have similar panels in Serbia and Montenegro. (N. Horozovic)
- We will organize summer and winter camps for the youth from all parts of the country and we will discuss the perception of the past, reconciliation, and tolerance. (B. Todorovic)
- I intend to educate people about it in the future, especially the educators. (A. Zivanovic, A. Miskovic)
- I am writing a book about dealing with the past, I reckon it will take me about two more years to complete it. I am also trying to put together a team, a group of reliable witnesses from many cities and we will try to answer the question: What happened to us? (M. Zivanovic)
- I am continuing to work with the young individuals from the former Yugoslavia on peace building, it inherently contains dealing with the past as an important component. (S. Pasic)
- Our plan is to campaign hard for the TRC bill to be passed into a law and then we ought to start dealing with the logistical issues: training of investigators, initial database, and then we can go into collecting testimonies. We hope to come out of that process with a single and common interpretation of our history and with a set

- of recommendations and guidelines to all major stakeholders – political entities, religious communities, international community, organizations of the civil society. (S. Dizdarevic)
- Whatever we do, we ought to build it onto what we already have in place, like the Student Council here in the RS. (N. Sekulovic)
  - Our contribution will be the capacity building of the nonprofits. (Z. Paukovic)
  - We will have several panels on historical events, but more from the theological point of view. (M. Orsolovic)
  - I would be delighted to participate in a methodologically well-founded research, together with other serious participants who would investigate this process. (D. Sehovac)
  - I started working on “civic dialogue” back in 1996, I came up with this Commission idea, the Truth Commission, not the Reconciliation part back in the end of 1997, but I think we have not accomplished much so far, I feel disappointed and let down. We have not galvanized, mobilized enough participants so far. (V. Sehic)

### **How are they doing this work?**

The principal issue of what is being done on dealing with the past in Bosnia is discussed in “*Who Is Doing What?*” section. What respondents focused on here was the way they did their everyday work as related to dealing with the past.

One of the principal components that transpire through a majority of answers is the process of *establishing the dialogue*. Whatever their target population or the nature of their work, the respondents stress that providing a forum, a place for meeting and establishing a dialogue and then fostering that dialogue is the key issue. Some of the participants cleverly noted that such forum can be found in the media and offered their examples of successful debates and honest discussions on TV that they either organized or participated in.

The opportunity to talk or to hear and tell stories and personal experiences is recognized one of the missing avenues for dealing with the past. Also, when telling and hearing stories, respondents acknowledge that the process itself can be emotionally taxing and draining. They understand that the issue has to be addressed indirectly and some of them have been doing it through theatrical expression and role playing; they have found it to be a rather cathartic experience.

The issue of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* was not discussed here, except by the answers referring to how this work should be done in the past. Like with similar other Commissions, the bulk of the work would entail identifying those who would testify – in the role of participants or witnesses, or of survivors who harbor the need to have their stories heard.

Several participants stated that the process should begin at the level of local communities, whilst several others wanted to focus on particular populations: returnees, torture survivors, war veterans, youth, or educators. Some of the responses stressed the need for reconciled history that ought to be taught in schools as soon as possible. Others want to primarily focus on the clergymen and want to foster interfaith dialogue and build and foster tolerance.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“How Are They Doing This Work?”***:

- I never deal with it directly. I work in a theater, we do a lot of role-playing, metaphors, but participants coming from all ethnic groups, all sides, are able to find themselves there, to get the message. The trick is to get the actors/participants to identify with the role and have a cathartic experience. (S. Djulic)
- We bring all these participants together. We provide them with the forum and the opportunity to talk. We work a lot with the youth through the Student Council. (S. Dusanic)
- We discussed, with Circle 99 and Citizens’ Forum from Tuzla, the idea of establishing a Circle of the Just. (M. Malic)
- We have fostered communication and taught conflict resolution. (Z. Paukovic, J. D. Kirlic)
- We foster interethnic dialogue through workshops. (N. Savija-Valha)
- We had this TV-show, a TV debate “Truth or oblivion?” and I was quite satisfied with the participants and the process that took place. (B. Todorovic)
- At the Youth Center, we sometimes sit together and discuss the past with the beneficiaries. (J. D. Kirlic, M. Gvozdencovic)
- As a journalist, I tell stories accurately and responsibly. I tackle some very difficult topics pertinent to dealing with the past. (D. Jurisic)
- I have German and French officers working together to help our foundation. They tell stories, we tell stories, we all learn. (J. Divjak)
- We use religious contexts to promote universal values and messages. (M. Leban)

Some sample answers by participants to ***“How this work could be done in the future?”***:

- Get different accounts, pinpoint as many facts as possible. (J. Finci)
- Different groups, organizations, and entities should first sit together and discuss the issue amongst themselves – local communities, religious groups, and individual should take a look at their past role, their actions, and responsibilities. (several participants)
- Role playing. (S. Dusanic)

- Focus groups. People need time to digest, we need the right dosage and the right pace. (V. Kelava)
- Informal discussions, joint campaigning on neutral issues. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Reconciled history to be taught in schools. (G. Kapor)
- We need to identify the prejudices and deal with them. (S. Dusanic)

### **Who are the beneficiaries?**

This question was not clearly outlined in the interview set and the answers provided vaguely fell into two categories – current beneficiaries and potential or desired beneficiaries.

When current beneficiaries are concerned, it appears that they have been identified through populations that the organizations had already worked with. For example, an organization working with the returnees introduced the topic of dealing with the past to its existing beneficiary pool. On the other hand, efforts that primarily focused on dealing with the past, were struggling to define who their beneficiaries were. One of the prominent activists in the field actually said that the current initiatives ought to pause and carefully define their beneficiaries and target groups, before launching any actions and campaigns. This represents an evolution in thinking, since before the initiatives aimed at dealing with the past loosely defined “general public” as the sole beneficiary.

In addition to current beneficiaries, some participants provided their thoughts about desired potential beneficiaries. Quite surprisingly, war veterans ranked high amongst those groups, followed by youth organizations and politicians. One participant responded that beneficiaries should be identified amongst those who most actively resist the process, naming the politicians, media, academia, and judicial system as the top priorities.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Who Are The Beneficiaries?”*:

- Young individuals, their organizations. (several participants)
- War veterans. (N. Horozovic, A. Hasanbegovic)
- Refugees, returnees, and displaced. (B. Rajner, S. Bradvic)
- We ought to target politicians, have them as our beneficiaries. (B. Rajner)
- We need to carefully define the target groups. (M. Zivanovic)
- Our beneficiaries ought to be the ones who are refusing to face the issue, those who show the most resistance – politicians, media, academia, judiciary system. (J. Divjak)
- The whole public. (several subjects)

## **Who else should be involved?**

Building on the previous question, the question about who else should be involved in this process concerns the beneficiaries as well as the active participants. Subjects provided a variety of answers and suggestions and they reflect the diversity of ideas and positions they have on this issue in Bosnia.

A greater involvement of the whole civil sector is a credible suggestion that most participants agree on. Nongovernmental organizations as a group or civil sector as a whole are perceived as the key participants in successfully addressing the issue of dealing with the past and moving it ahead on the national agenda. Several participants pointed at the instrumental role that the nongovernmental sector in Croatia had in shifting the public political sentiment there prior to 2000 elections, stating that the civil sector can, at times, be very vocal and powerful. It was, however, unclear, what role the sector should play in the process of dealing with the past, as none of the participants offered concrete ideas or suggestions.

Other participants reiterated that the general public ought to be mobilized and turned into an active participant in this process; yet again, no practical advice on how to achieve that was offered in the participants' answers. Those who mentioned the general public also pointed that any progress in dealing with the past would be impossible without broad society involvement and participation.

Many other participants offered their ideas of which groups or professions ought to be (more) involved in this process. In addition to refugees, returnees, youth and war veterans' organizations that were already outlined in the previous question, other groups whose involvement would be welcomed in this process were intellectuals, historians, cultural institutions, universities and educational system, women's organizations, and even mental health professionals.

More controversial was the inclusion of politicians and political parties, religious institutions, and the media. On one hand, they were perceived as the major players in the war-related atrocities and as some of the major obstacles to dealing with the past; on the other hand, many participants acknowledge that these groups and entities have to be taken into account by any serious attempt to move ahead with the issue of dealing with the past. Some of the participants also stressed the regional peculiarities: one participant, for example, stated that the most relevant factor for Western Herzegovina would be the participation of religious communities.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“Who Else Should Be Involved?”***:

- Nowadays we can expect to find a sympathetic ear in most of the media and there are a lot of progressive individuals. (B. Rajner)
- Youth and youth organizations. (B. Bukoje, G. Kapor, S. Djulic, S. Garic)
- Nongovernmental organizations; (A. Hasanbegovic, A. Masic, S. Dusanic, V. Kelava, M. Orsolc, D. Jurisic)

- Civil society. (N. Nalic, A. Masic, B. Todorovic, L. Zivanovic, S. Dizdarevic)
- The whole public. (N. Horozovic, S. Pasic, V. Sehic, J. Finci)
- The government, public officials. (S. Hadzihalilovic, N. Sekulovic)
- Political parties could not be involved, they are too responsible. (G. Kapor)
- Intellectuals. (G. Kapor, I. Rajner, S. Dizdarevic)
- Cultural institutions. (H. Orucevic)
- Historians. (G. Kapor)
- Refugees, displaces, and returnees. (G. Kapor)
- Religious institutions. (I. Rajner, J. Z. Kulenovic)
- Religious institutions are crucial, especially in Western Herzegovina. (S. Glavas)
- Business people. (I. Rajner)
- Women's organizations. (S. Djulic)
- Universities and educational system, but they have been disempowered. (B. Todorovic, N. Savija-Valha, J. Z. Kulenovic)
- Media. (J. D. Kirlic, J. Z. Kulenovic)
- Mental health professionals, like in Estonia. (J. Z. Kulenovic)

### **Are they supported both morally and financially in this work?**

Although they receive some support for their work, the overall sentiment amongst participants is that the level of support is far from sufficient and that they could use a lot more if they want to be successful in what they work. They state they could use more moral support from the national public and financial support from the international sources, but even when that support is available, it comes with restricted or strictly allocated resources and makes it difficult for organizations to implement their activities aimed at dealing with the past.

They recognize that this lack of support directly stems from a lack of understanding and awareness within both national and international community. There are very rare situations in which the domestic public and international funders recognize the importance of this issue and acknowledge that it merits a greater deal of public attention and financial resources.

Where they get their support from is the beneficiaries, similar-minded organizations and individuals in the country, and their affiliated organizations in Europe (like in the case of The Helsinki Committee). Whilst it may be sufficient to sustain their activities and their high spirits, it is far from adequate to help them move this issue ahead on the public agenda.

Finally, some of the participants frankly admit that they get no support whatsoever from any level of the government. They, however recognize that this support, especially at the level of the local government, would be crucial for success of current or future initiatives. Of particular concern is the reasoning offered by some participants that, in the long run, it will be easier to get (financial) support from the international agencies than the (moral) support from the national public.

Some sample answers by participants to “*Are they supported both morally and financially in this work?*”:

- I think there is some interest on the part of the donor community, so I think the funding, at least for the time being, should not be a problem. When it comes to support from within the community, I am less confident. We are in the process of doing a research on public support for this work and so far we have gotten some mixed results. It will be very to get significant support from the local governments. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- I get support from our beneficiaries and, frankly, that is the only thing I care about. (M. Gvozdenovic, S. Pasic, V. Kelava)
- We get moral and verbal support, and I find it encouraging. (M. Zivanovic)
- We get a lot of support from our sister organizations Europe-wide. (S. Dizdarevic)
- We do not get support from the local government. (Z. Baljak)

### **What else is needed?**

A clear and unanimously adopted strategy, better coordination, and a broad campaign are the key factors that the current efforts are deficient in. By preparing and launching a broad campaign, the issue could get the exposure it needs resulting in the interest on the part of the media, politicians, and the public in general. As far as dealing with the past is concerned, such coordinated effort has not taken place in Bosnia so far.

Several participants spoke of the “*need to educate*” – because educating the progressive politicians or religious activists about the issue could mean winning them over. In words of many participants it was essential that politicians become an inherent part of this initiative, although many others remained skeptical. By education, however, they did not mean only educating general public or the politicians about the issue, but also making this issue a part of a national educational curriculum, so that the future generations could receive the important education about the past as well.

Collaboration with local governments, as stated above, was viewed as one of the key factors missing so far. Other participants focused more on the international community and voiced their disappointment with the fact that some international agencies prefer to deal with die-hard nationalists, rather than to support the nonprofit organizations more openly.



Some of the participants were quite optimistic, stating that all that was needed was more self-confidence and faith in the sector's ability to see the things through. Other stated that far more was needed, including establishing a war crimes tribunal in Bosnia to replace the one in the Hague. One of the participants offered an interesting suggestion that more emphasis be put on individual stories, individual experiences and histories rather than on "national histories" and "national events".

Some sample answers by participants to *"What Else Is Needed?"*:

- We need clear and unequivocal arguments and facts. We need to better utilize media. (H. Orucevic)
- We need a broad campaign (also M. Gvozdenovic). Politicians have to adopt it as their issue and push for it. We need more funding and determination on the part of the international community. Instead, they prefer to work with die-hard nationalists. We could also benefit from a criminal court here in Bosnia – for war crimes. (B. Todorovic)
- Dealing with the past is not the news and not in the news. It needs more exposure. (J. D. Kirlic)
- We need to collaborate more with the local governments. (S. Garic)
- We need a system, a broad strategy. (L. Zivanovic, S. Pasic)
- We need to recruit and mobilize more parts of the society to participate in this process. (S. Pasic)
- In addition to advancing further with the Commission, we need to make this issue a part of educational curriculum. (S. Dizdarevic)
- Politicians need to embrace the issue. When Mr. Svilanovic (Serbia's foreign minister) spoke about the need for true understanding of the past and true reconciliation, I felt touched. (S. Dusanic)
- We need to hear more individual, not "national" stories. We need this individual perspective. (V. Kelava)
- We need more self-confidence and faith in our abilities to see this process through. (J. Finci)
- We need participants from religious communities. We need to educate the public about this issue. (Z. Paukovic)

### **Addendum: Relevant Publications**

In the course of the interview, the participants were asked whether they themselves have published anything related to the issue of dealing with the past. They were also asked if they had read publications on this issue and which ones they found pertinent and/or would recommend to others to read. This may give an overview of what literature on dealing with the past is currently considered relevant amongst the key advocates of this

issue; likewise, it may identify what other publications may be needed, but have not been introduced to the Bosnian civil sector or have not been translated into Southern Slavic languages.

Following are the summaries of their answers:

### **What Publications Have They Published?**

- I have published a lot of articles, op-eds in papers on all three sides. (G. Kapor)
- We published a brochure summarizing discussions from four panels we held on this topic. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Our plays, our workshops, and handbooks have been published and translated into many languages. (S. Djulic)
- We published a periodical about this Traveling Europe Film Festival and it contains a number of texts from all parts of former Yugoslavia next to each other. (N. Savija-Valha)
- I published a brochure “Media: Your Allies” that helps nonprofits work with the media to their advantage. (A. Zivanovic)
- I published two books of my editorials “The Glass Eye” and “Acta Politica Serbica”. (M. Zivanovic)
- We published quite a few brochures on human rights, Dayton Accords, issues of return. (M. Malic)
- We published materials from workshops on human rights and conflict resolution. (V. Kelava)
- I published something on conscience objection. (J. Z. Kulenovic)
- We intend to publish. (M. Leban, S. Pasic)

### **What other publications have they read and found them useful?**

- Svetlana Broz and her book “Good People in Bad Times” was quoted more than once.
- Jezdimir Milosevic, one of the members of the Association (future Commission) for Truth and Reconciliation, published a nice book about people helping each other during the war. (A. Masic, G. Kapor)
- Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed. (S. Djulic)
- QPSW brochures. (J. D. Kirlic)
- The brochure by the CNA. (M. Gvozdenovic)
- There are good books published here in Bosnia, but none of them provides a comprehensive overview of the topic. (M. Zivanovic)
- A book by Enver Djuliman “A Difficult Reconciliation”. (N. Sekulovic)

- I read some materials from South Africa. (S. Pasic)
- A very nice workshop material “Playing With Fire”. (S. Dusanic)
- There was a book, by Norwegian Helsinki Committee, I think, about this topic, translated into our language. (M. Orsolic)

## **V. Regional Approach and Cross-Border Work**

### **Should this process be more regional or more local?**

Regional approach to dealing with the past is necessary for this process to succeed. Although post-Yugoslav countries remain separate states, their common history and intertwining roles of key players during the years leading to the war make it essential to examine stories, reasoning, and positions at all sides of the ex-Yugoslav prism, as underscored by a number of participants in this survey.

Most participants agree that the process itself need not be regional. Majority of them advocate a position of each country having its own process of reexamining the past, but with a great deal of coordination and sharing amongst similar processes. They also think that the timing and principles need to be aligned – it would be impossible to have an independent commission in one country and a government-run “puppet-commission” in another country operating on the same principles and working towards the same goal.

The chain of events happened to the region as a whole, and although there are differences, the reconciliation can only take place at the regional level, in opinion of many participants. No one (except J. Finci) points at the possibility that different countries may be at different levels of need and readiness to deal with the issue. People involved with the TRC initiative strongly believe that the Commissions should exist at the national level, but call for close coordination amongst Commissions in the region.

Hence, it is very important that there is an intensive communication amongst civil sectors from all participating countries so that the process can succeed at the regional level. Another issue when regional problem is concerned is what constitutes a region in this case? A large number of participants consider that all ex-Yugoslav countries ought to be involved. An equally large number of them think that, in case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, only the surrounding countries (Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro) need to be included. A few of the participants provided an even broader definition of the region to include the whole Balkan peninsula.

Despite this need for regional coordination, several participants made it clear that each country has its own peculiarities and particular questions that need to be answered and that the process should be managed and implemented at the country level.

Very few participants had objections to this kind of approach and considered the country level the top level at which this process should be conducted. Even those participants recognized the need for regional coordination. As far as the timing is concerned, some participants thought that the process should start simultaneously at all levels, whilst others thought that the process should commence at the country level and then later on different countries should be brought together at the regional level. One of the participants suggested an even smaller level at which this process should start – the level of local communities. The process should then build up to the country and, subsequently, the regional level.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“Should This Process Be More Regional Or More Local?”***:

- Primarily regional. (B. Rajner, A. Hasanbegovic, N. Nalic, S. Hadzihalilovic, A. Masic, Kapor, H. Orucevic, I. Rajner, S. Djulic, N. Savija-Valha, A. Zivanovic, N. Horozovic, S. Pasic, S. Bradvic, S. Dusanic, M. Orsolc)
- To include Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Croatia; (I. Rajner), What is “the region”? (N. Savija-Valha)
- We need to bring war veterans together, not only from Bosnia, but also from Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- Even now, we have regional networks, albeit informal. (L. Zivanovic)
- On one hand, regional approach is good, but then each country has its own peculiarities and own questions awaiting answers. (B. Todorovic, Z. Paukovic)
- There is a need for regional approach, provided we have the similar conditions for work of the Commissions. You cannot have 15 highly moral, independent individuals in the Commission here (in Bosnia) and a group hand-picked and appointed by Kostunica in Serbia. (M. Malic)
- Now we have to start at the local level, may be some day we reach the need for regional coordination. (M. Leban)
- The Commission in Serbia has a different mandate and purpose and they may already have the answers they were “looking for” – the others are responsible for the breakup of Yugoslavia. In Croatia, the activists have arrived at a conclusion that there is not enough interest for such a massive endeavor – the most we can expect to see there is a Parliamentary Commission that Serbs and Milosevic are to blame for everything. (J. Finci)
- It should not be a primarily regional project, but it will require a great deal of coordination amongst the local projects. (V. Sehic)
- These ought to be a country-level process, with a great deal of regional coordination. (S. Dizdarevic)
- We need to work simultaneously at both levels. (J. Z. Kulenovic, S. Glavas)
- We need to start with our own yards first. Later on, we can connect at the regional level. (J. D. Kirlic, M. Gvozdenovic)

- We need to start at micro-local level, and then build towards national and regional approach. (M. Gvozdenovic, N. Sekulovic)

### **Who could do what in the future?**

As outlined in previous questions, a coordinated network, a broader campaign is necessary in order to effectively address the issue of dealing with the past. Such formal network does not exist at this time and is viewed as a prerequisite for a regional campaign. Overall, answers to this question seem to reflect a lack of vision amongst participants, as none of the interviewed offered a clear foresight of what steps need to be taken to bring the region closer to effectively dealing with the past.

The respondents did, however, bring up their ideas as of who else could contribute to the process, i.e. that “nationalism-free” groups or unbiased, educated individuals should be invited to join the process and perhaps participate in the interviews. Other participants suggested that a greater role be given to religious communities that could promote interfaith dialogue; whilst some other subjects considered the war veterans, detainees, or families of missing and killed persons as the ones who deserve more attention and a greater role in the process.

Some of the interviewed focused more on “what” part of the question and proposed that reconciliation and dealing with the past become a part of national educational curriculum. One of the participants pointed at the difficulty of organizing such efforts at state and regional levels, because it is still unclear what entities, what states are going to address the issue of dealing with the past. One of the interviewed honestly conceded that no one, at this point, would be able to sensibly answer that question.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Who Could Do What In the Future?”*:

- We need to get organized, we need the supporters, the leaders, a network. (B. Rajner)
- The state is not ready yet. I don’t even know what state we are talking about. (G. Kapor)
- Interfaith dialogue supported by religious communities. (H. Orucevic, Z. Paukovic)
- It ought to become a part of the educational curriculum. (V. Kelava)
- At present, no one can answer that question. (M. Zivanovic)
- Nationalism-free, healthy groups. (M. Orsolovic)
- Educated individuals, not burdened with politics or religion who could interview individuals. (J. Divjak)
- More work with war veterans, war disabled, detainees, families of missing and killed. (N. Sekulovic)

- This is going to take a very, very long time. (S. Dusanic)

### **Are there any linkages between different groups?**

There has not been much advancement regarding establishing the connections amongst groups that exist in the region and work on this issue. Organizations and their representatives usually meet at trainings and conferences and express general will to work together, but not much has taken place so far.

There is always exchange of opinions and experiences, they share similar views or frustrations, but there have been no formal joint activities or joint projects. There are no regular communications, updates, bulletins, or reports. Organizations maintain rather loose connections, usually related to their other activities (e.g. human rights, conflict resolution, youth groups).

Several conferences on this topic with regional participation have taken place over the past few years, but no lasting, visible initiative has grown from those conferences. What exists today could best be described as informal networks, without clear vision, goals, or leadership. In fact, one of the participants clearly stated that, at the regional level, the process lacks sound leadership and coordination it needs to be successful.

On the upside, there has been a pool of civic activists with similar vision and understanding of the issue across the region. They have been known to foster communication and exchange of information. Curiously, even the participants with the least knowledge about the process in Bosnia (i.e. those unaware of the TRC initiative) could name at least one regional organization outside Bosnia that they could recommend for participation in this process.

It indicates that there has been a lot of grassroots level regional cooperation and that the participants have demonstrated their determination to work at the regional level. What may be needed now is a better degree of communication and a strong, suitable regional leadership with regional vision and regional plan.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“Are There Any Linkages Between Different Groups?”***:

- No linkages so far. (S. Hadzihalilovic, S. Pasic)
- The process is lacking the leadership. (L. Zivanovic)
- There are connections, but no collaboration. (S. Dizdarevic)
- Detainees and camp survivors have begun with regional contacts. (S. Garic)
- Veterans, refugees, camp-survivors have started to work together, but they are limited by their political connections and they are limited by the governments that support them. (A. Zivanovic)

- Most linkages are between the same types of groups (youth organizations, educators, etc.). (V. Kelava)
- There have been some regional projects, like Peace School. (J. Z. Kulenovic)

**Are there any cross-border projects taking place on dealing with the past?**

No formal projects to address dealing with the past at the regional (post-Yugoslav) level have taken place in the past few years. What has happened, instead, are several initiatives that examined this issue regionally. These initiatives mostly had the form of meetings and conferences – participants emphasized meetings in Hungary, the Igman Initiative, or the Reconciliation conference in Sarajevo in 2000.

Despite their limitations, these initiatives are important as they indicate the relevance of dealing with the past amongst civil sector activists throughout the region. Several of the organizations actually tried to implement their projects across the borders, not necessarily directly aiming at dealing with the past, but certainly pertinent to this issue; best known were the Women in Black (from Belgrade), Miramida, and the Center for Peace Studies (from Zagreb).

The absence of such projects at regional level at this time is not greatly discouraging, since there have not been any comprehensive projects at national levels either. It is reasonable to assume that, should such activities be under way in each individual country, a regional cooperation will follow suit, given the existing level of communications and agreement amongst the regional activists and given the track record of cooperation on previous projects. A corollary outcome of regional approach could be in the positive effects that the process of dealing with the past in one country could have on similar processes in neighboring countries.

Some sample answers by participants to *“Are There Any Cross-border Projects Taking Place On Dealing With the Past?”*:

- Several round-tables in Hungary. (G. Kapor)
- I think Women in Black tried. (A. Masic)
- Another organization from Montenegro, Princess Ksenija has invited Women from Srebrenica to their exhibition on sufferings of Srebrenica. (A. Masic)
- The Igman Initiative has attempted to address this issue. (N. Sekulovic)
- Some cross-border activities of Miramida and the Center for Peace Studies. (S. Bradvic)

**Do people have knowledge of truth and reconciliation processes in other countries (both within the region and globally?)**

Although individual answers may vary, most of the participants agree that people (meaning general public) know very little about the processes of dealing with the past, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, within the region or globally. Subjects usually assumed that, if they as the civil sector advocates knew little about the process, the general public would know far less. The main reason for such ignorance is perceived to be in the absence of stories about those processes in the media.

In most cases, such processes, taking place in distant countries, are not news, nor are they deemed to be interesting by the local media, thus receiving very little coverage. Despite such limited exposure to the topic, a majority of people would know at least something – in words of one of the respondents, over two thirds of the people have heard of it. TRC from South Africa was identified as the process most people would be familiar with.

However, even those who knew anything were assumed to be familiar only with the general terms and concepts, not the actual projects, processes, and activities. Given the fact that there have been some initiatives, but not actual processes in the region, it would be impossible for general public to know about initiatives in Croatia or Serbia that have not gotten any significant attention on the national agenda, let alone any regional exposure.

The subjects themselves quoted a number of initiatives in the neighboring countries, thus demonstrating that, as prospective leaders in this process, they possess the necessary information and contacts required to take this process to the regional level. Further education about similar process globally, geared both towards the general public and the activists, is viewed as one of the components sorely needed for the success of this project.

Some sample answers by participants to ***“Do people have knowledge of truth and reconciliation processes in other countries (both within the region and globally?)”***:

- Natasa Kandic in Serbia, Sasa Popov in Vojvodina, Women in Black. (G. Kapor)
- Slobodan Schneider and his plays in Croatia, Franjo Starcevic from Gorski Kotar in Croatia, who almost single-handedly prevented conflicts in Gorski Kotar with his Peace School. (H. Orucevic)
- Zarko Papic, Nebojsa Popov and his book “The Serbian Side of the War”. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- In general, people know little about it, there has been very little of that in the media. (B. Rajner, B. Bukoje, G. Kapor)
- They have heard of general terms and concepts, not of concrete activities and processes. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- People have heard of South African TRC and that is about it. (N. Savija-Valha)
- Very few people know about this. (J. D. Kirlic, M. Gvozdenovic)
- People have not heard of success stories, like the one with the Peace School. (H. Orucevic)



- At least 70 percent have heard something about it. (A. Masic)
- There have been some good initiatives in Serbia, but I know little about it. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- People know little about it, but we could learn so much from these experiences. (J. Divjak)
- Being very active in the civil sector, I only recently learned of the TRC in, say, Uganda. General public has very, very limited knowledge about it. (N. Sekulovic)

### **Do people have knowledge of the sufferings and experiences of people in other countries in the region?**

There is not enough knowledge about the sufferings and experiences of people in other countries in the region. Participants think that this lack of knowledge can be only partially attributed to a lack of information available. Hence, the media, at least not at present time, do not bear the major responsibility for people's ignorance of the experiences from other countries.

What seems to be the major motive, in words of many respondents, is the difficult time many would have should they try to acknowledge and accept that information and there are several reasons for that. The central reason is that people seem to be self-involved with their own past experiences and present-day survival that they simply do not have the time or the emotional energy to absorb more suffering or to sympathize with another victim. Another reason is that other countries, more often than not, represented the "other side" and people generally have little empathy for the sufferings sustained by the "enemy". Additionally, they may be quick to discard the information about suffering from the other side as "lies and propaganda".

Despite these discouraging facts, many respondents believe that people "intuitively know", especially those who want to know. Others state that people know as much as they are ready and willing to know. This resistance to receiving information could represent a formidable challenge to those projects aiming to address this issue at the regional level, because the amount of information about other experiences is likely to depend on the readiness and willingness of individuals to "hear" and acknowledge those stories and not merely on the readiness of the media to pass the information on.

One of the plausible strategies could be to seek to connect those with "higher empathizing capacity" (e.g. some women's groups, mothers) or those with similar experiences (e.g. war veterans, families of missing persons, youth groups, etc.).

Some sample answers by participants to ***"Do people have knowledge of the sufferings and experiences of people in other countries in the region?"***:

- I think that people intuitively understand. (B. Rajner)
- They know little, women know more. (A. Hasanbegovic)

- People do not know and do not want to know. (S. Hadzihalilovic)
- Those who want to know, know. (M. Gvozdenovic)
- I think they know, I am not sure they are happy with that knowledge. (N. Savija-Valha)
- There is some understanding, but little is actually known. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- People know, but they refuse to acknowledge it. It is a normal defense. (I. Rajner)
- Some people sympathize, but a majority refuses to be drawn into it. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- There is a lot of mistrust, people are preoccupied with their own sufferings. (S. Djulic)
- People distrust media, they are quick to discard media as biased. (B. Todorovic)
- Even when they receive the information, people do not “feel” it. (M. Zivanovic)
- Unfortunately, they know; But they think: I dealt with it, so should (s)he. (M. Penava)
- People decide what they are willing to hear and learn. (M. Leban)
- People are quick to dismiss unpleasant information as propaganda. (S. Bradvic)
- People live in denial.(J. Z. Kulenovic)

## VI. Support needed and QPSW’s Role

### Support needed

As in their answers to "What Else is Needed", the respondents gave a set of various resources needed, ranging from funding to help with campaigning. These answers can be grouped into five broad categories:

1. **Funding** - organizations need funding for their core organizational setup, their staff, and their activities aimed at dealing with the past. Participants did not specify the exact purpose or amounts, but more than one emphasized that they would like to see a longer-term commitment on the part of prospective funders.
2. **Education and capacity building** - organizations recognize that they need further education on this topic. Learning about experiences from countries that have successfully addressed this issue can be a valuable resource to local groups. Additionally, organizations would need more support with capacity building, especially when it comes to campaigning and coalition building. Apart from education for activists, there is a consensus that education should also be provided for other key participants, such as

teachers, politicians, and the general public.

3. ***Needs assessment and coordination*** - a project so massive and ambitious that it can potentially change the course of nation's history deserves a thorough needs assessment, a comprehensive overview of situation, and a great deal of coordination amongst participants. Many participants feel that there is a role for an international organization such as QPSW to provide this substantial aspect of support, perhaps working as an umbrella organization or as a logistics coordinator.
4. ***Networking*** - organizations need an actual forum for meetings, communication and exchange of information, they also need better and easier ways of communicating with each other. Further, they want to expand the pool of organizations and activists working on dealing with the past so that the project can really grow at the regional level. Finally, this support with networking will also help build partnerships with international nonprofits that have interest and/or experience in this area.
5. ***Lobbying for political support, both nationally and internationally*** - respondents understand that the support on the part politicians is crucial and that without participation of the government the project has little chance to succeed. This is why assistance with educating politicians or lobbying on behalf of dealing with the past is recognized as very important. Additionally, the project can benefit from international political support and endorsements and participants feel that they will need help with that as well.

Some sample statements by participants about ***what support is needed***:

- Education. (B. Rajner, S. Garic, M. Penava, S. Bradvic, S. Buha, V. Kelava)
- Funding. (B. Bukoje, G. Kapor, B. Todorovic, M. Malic, S. Dizdarevic)
- Political support on the part of the international community. (G. Kapor)
- Conflict resolution trainings. (A. Hasanbegovic)
- We need to learn from the experience of those who have successfully done it elsewhere. (G. Kapor, B. Todorovic)
- We need to expand the network of contacts internationally. (H. Orucevic)
- Literature – translations. (H. Orucevic)
- Partnership with international nonprofits. (B. Todorovic)
- Forum to exchange information and experiences. (S. Djulic)
- Capacity building for local organizations and individuals. (N. Savija-Valha, N. Horozovic)
- Coalition building assistance. (N. Savija-Valha)

- Capacity building for campaigning, advocacy, and lobbying. (A. Zivanovic, J. Z. Kulenovic)
- A thorough needs assessment. (I. Trninic)
- This needs to be legally sanctioned and the government must provide support. (J. Divjak)
- Government endorsement is needed. (M. Leban)
- We need a system, need to identify the key players. (L. Zivanovic)
- We need to provide basic safety and pressure-free environment for those who are willing to work on this issue. (M. Malic)
- Long-term commitment. (S. Pasic)
- We need an umbrella organization to coordinate the process, we could start with small-scale, pilot projects. (S. Bradvic)
- Endorsement from the religious communities. (S. Dizdarevic)
- More education for teachers. (S. Dusanic)
- A system for helping the helpers. (V. Kelava)
- Education of politicians. (Z. Paukovic)

### **Can QPSW play any role in that work?**

Not only does QPSW have the resources and the experience required to boost this process, it also, in words of many participants, has the unsurpassed credibility and impeccable reputation amongst local nonprofits and that in particular makes it a primary candidate for a partnership with regional nonprofits on this task.

Although those interviewed almost unanimously welcome the participation of QPSW it is far less clear what role QPSW should play in this process. From their statements it transpires that QPSW could play an important supportive role by providing capacity building and support and by facilitating communication amongst participating local organizations.

Some participants think that the QPSW should directly sponsor an organization that will deal with this issue. Since currently there are no organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina that would have dealing with the past as their mission, except for the TRC initiative, that would mean supporting a new organization and overseeing its organizational development and its activities, at least in the beginning.

Alternately, QPSW can serve as some sort of a coordinating agency for local and regional organizations working on dealing with the past. In that case, QPSW would perhaps have a role better aligned with its own values, a role that would entail logistical support and capacity building for local organizations that would actually implement projects and initiatives.

Other participants came with a few other valuable suggestions. One of them underlined a need a thorough needs assessment, a situational overview of this issue in the region that would help potential activists better plan their activities – something that could be an outcome of this survey. Following this survey, a decision or a recommendation should be made about the feasibility of undertaking a project on dealing with the past, in words of another participant.

Finally, some of them pointed at the importance of working with politicians and leaders and defined the QPSW role as helping local organizations communicate better and work together with local authorities. Helping local organizations build partnerships with honorable and credible local leaders and gaining endorsement from the local authorities seems to be yet another potentially relevant role for QPSW in this process.

Regardless of their individual suggestions, all participants consider the participation of QPSW in the process of dealing with the past as both welcome and necessary.

Some sample answers by participants to “Can QPSW Play Any Role In That Work?”:

- You have got the experience and the resources. (B. Rajner)
- You have the credibility and the right values. (S. Hadzihalilovic, N. Horozovic)
- You can be the coordinator, you can be the catalyst to accelerate this process. (G. Kapor, M. Leban, S. Dizdarevic)
- You have got the organizational capacity. (B. Todorovic)
- Your work is transparent, you are committed, and your mission is peace. (J. D. Kirlic)
- You could start the snowball effect, you have got the spiritual credibility for such work. (N. Savija-Valha)
- You could sponsor a nonprofit that could start the process, the dialogue; you could organize a big conference or a round-table on this topic. (J. Divjak)
- You could coordinate cooperation with the academia and amongst the nonprofits themselves. (M. Zivanovic)
- You can provide capacity building. (N. Horozovic)
- Needs assessment, situation overview. (S. Pasic)
- You need to pair up with a reputable, honest local leader. (S. Buha)
- You have the impeccable reputation. (V. Kelava)
- You can help coordinate our communications with the government and local authorities. (Z. Paukovic)
- You have our vote of confidence. (D. Sehovac)

- You need to decide if it is feasible to undertake an effort in this direction (J. Z. Kulenovic)

## **VII. Discussion and Conclusions**

This survey has several flaws in its design that seriously limit its validity and applicability in the decision-making or planning process and each interpretation has to be made with great caution and with these limitations in mind. Two of the most evident defects are the inconsistency in question-developing process and the biased sample selection.

There is a significant incongruence between the questions as they were outlined for this final report and the questions that were actually asked. In some cases, 15 questions asked throughout the interviews differ dramatically from 24 questions that were to be addressed in this report. Thanks to the extraordinary efforts on the part of the Sarajevo office, many of the interviews were adjusted to reflect the greater set of 24 questions and some of the lengthy answers were extrapolated and “translated” into answers to several questions, as they were listed in the final report requirements.

The sample as selected for this survey, despite its regional and ethnic balance, is remarkably biased, because it comprises only those individuals who invariably have a positive attitude towards dealing with the past because of their own personal/organizational involvement. As this survey has demonstrated, dealing with the past requires a much broader participation – from politicians to general public, and none were represented in the sample. Hence, the attitudes of the general public and elected officials towards dealing with the past remain unidentified, yet their participation and support may be crucial for success of any project addressing this issue.

Finally, the theoretical frame for this survey is very thin and little was done to provide substantial background on the relevance of dealing with the past based on experiences of other countries or social groups.

Despite its limitations, this survey is a project of paramount relevance for at least two reasons. First, it represents a groundbreaking study of the indigenous efforts aimed at dealing with the past over the past several years in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It provides valuable information about the current state of activities dealing with this issue and it will feed essential information into any future project.

Second, this is a first-hand report from the “trenches”, containing stories of individual who have been working on this issue, some of them dedicating the last 5-6 years of their lives trying to further the issue of dealing with the past. These individuals provide invaluable accounts of their activities and the impacts those activities had, of the obstacles and problems they have encountered, and they described in detail what else is needed for this project to succeed.

Being the first of its kind in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the whole post-Yugoslav region, this survey has demonstrated the following:

- ◆ There is a strong interest in addressing dealing with the past displayed by a core group of enthusiasts around the TRC initiative who have been trying to advance this issue over the past five years.
- ◆ There is a moderate understanding of the issue and universal support for addressing it amongst the civil sector activists.
- ◆ It is widely recognized that is difficult to pinpoint the right timing for this kind of project, but it is also understood that this is an ongoing process that can take place simultaneously with other relevant processes.
- ◆ At the regional level, there are informal networks of activists who understand and are interested in tackling the issue of dealing with the past.
- ◆ The initiatives so far, especially the TRC initiative, failed to gain public support and to be inclusive (viewed by some participants as too preferential and narrow).
- ◆ There is a striking gap between all the initiatives and the politicians that virtually control the success of any serious endeavor in this direction. Little was done to educate the politicians about the importance of this issue and to enlist their endorsements.
- ◆ There is tremendous need for support in the aspects of needs assessment, funding, education and capacity building, networking and coordination, and assistance with lobbying and public education for all groups and activists that seek to address this issue in the future.

## **VIII. Recommendations**

Following the above listed conclusions, here are the recommendations to be considered when making further decisions:

1. ***Decide on participation, consider alternatives:*** There is substantial enthusiasm amongst some of the activists and considerable endorsement on the part of the civil sector as a whole to pursue the issue of dealing with the past. Two crucial elements that will perhaps determine the success of this endeavor are, however, missing at this time: the attitude and support of general public and the collaboration with the politicians. QPSW needs to consider two other alternatives before making a final decision – what will happen if no effort whatsoever is put into this issue (i.e. doing nothing) and what would happen if the issue of dealing with the past were to be addressed inappropriately and unsuccessfully?

2. ***Interview politicians, get a pulse of the general public:*** Whilst preparing the final report and deliberating whether or not to undertake this project, QPSW could implement a much smaller-scale survey in order to get the sense of how general public feels about this issue and what politicians are willing to endorse it, and how?
3. ***Decide on QPSW's own role:*** Different participants provided different suggestions for the role of QPSW in this process – some would like to see QPSW directly implementing the program, some would like to see QPSW serving as an umbrella for a number of local /regional groups implementing the activities aimed at dealing with the past, other would like QPSW to limit its role to logistical support and coordination and leave the largest portion of activities to its local partners.
4. ***Decide whom to support*** – many participants in this survey offered merely their general support to this issue, without any commitment or specific ideas for activities. It is, however, quite possible that some of them would divert their efforts and activities to more directly address dealing with the past, provided more funding were available.
5. ***Figure out how to involve politicians, academia, media, and the general public:*** little was done so far to educate the general public and other segments of the society, particularly academia and politicians, in order to enlist their support for this issue. Any future effort in this direction will have to address this problem with more assertiveness and with better organized public activities.
6. ***Manage networking:*** beyond informal networks, this process at the regional level will require an intensive facilitation of cross-border communication and coordination. This is a task for an international organization, with resources and offices established within the region.
7. ***Match the length of the process:*** Dealing with the past is recognized as a lasting process and it will require a long-term commitment on the part of all participants and those who support them. QPSW should compare its mid- to long-term plans and objectives and determine if its commitment and available resource development can match the length of the process of addressing the issue of dealing with the past.