

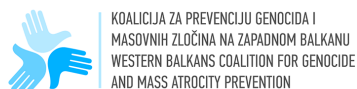
The background of the entire page is a vibrant blue sky filled with soft, white clouds. Overlaid on this background are several large, stylized white hands. One hand is positioned at the top center, reaching downwards. Another hand is on the left side, reaching towards the center. A third hand is on the right side, reaching towards the center. A fourth hand is at the bottom left, reaching upwards. The hands are simple in design, with clear outlines and no shading, creating a sense of unity and reaching out.

BUILDING A COMMON AGENDA FOR PREVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Regional Civil Society Report

Publisher: Post-Conflict Research Center
Editor: Erna Mačkić
Author: Branka Vierda
Text Translation & Proofreading: Amina Sejfić, Mitchell Welsh
(Post-Conflict Research Center)
DTP: Post-Conflict Research Center

Report created by:



Report created with the support of:



The report was prepared with the support of the regional project SMART Balkans - Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans, which is implemented by Centar za promociju civilnog društva, together with partner organizations - Institute for Democracy and Mediation and the Center for Research and Policy Making, and is financially supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The content of this research is the sole responsibility of the project implementers and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) nor SMART Balkans consortium partners.

BUILDING A COMMON AGENDA FOR PREVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

March 2024

CONTENTS

BUILDING A COMMON AGENDA FOR PREVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS	3
ACRONYMS:	5
BACKGROUND	6
INTRODUCTION	7
DISCUSSING PREVENTION: AREAS OF ACTION AND KEY INSIGHTS	14
PANEL I - CIVIL SOCIETY & PREVENTION: TACKLING INCREASED DENIAL AND REVISIONISM	14
PANEL II - VICTIMS AND REPARATIONS: A GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE	19
PANEL III - HEALING (FROM) THE PAST: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND EDUCATION	26
PANEL IV - CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN THE AGE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES	34
ACCOMPLISHING PREVENTION: KEY INSIGHTS AND CGMAP'S AREAS OF ACTION	39
RECOMMENDATIONS: A COMMON AGENDA FOR PREVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS	43
ANNEX I	49
PHOTO GALLERY	53

ACRONYMS:

CGMAP	Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention
CRSV	Conflict related sexual violence
CSO	Civil society organisation
GAAMAC	Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia
IRMCT	International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals
PCRC	Post-Conflict Research Center
PSVI	Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative
RECOM	Regional commission for the establishment of facts about war crimes and other serious violations of human rights
UNOGPRP	United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC) and the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (UNOGPRP) established the Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention (CGMAP). The Coalition aims to connect and facilitate collaboration amongst participating civil society organisations as they develop and carry out programs that identify, assess, respond to, and prevent atrocities within their communities.

Since then, CGMAP has become a collaborative coalition of over twenty leading civil society organisations (CSOs), conducting programs in genocide prevention and the reduction of ethnic-based violence in the Western Balkans Region.

The CGMAP's mission is to increase the capacity of civil society organisations working in the Western Balkans Region in the fields of human rights, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and transitional justice; thereby increasing their ability to prevent, identify, and respond to atrocities (genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity) and ethnic cleansing.

CGMAP provides a regional platform for exchange and dialogue between CSOs, regional governments, and the international community. CGMAP aims to achieve the following:

Incorporation of the ethos of the United Nation's 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) and the 'Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes' through teaching coalition members about methods of interacting with their host government.

Bridging the gaps, including borders and historical divides, between civil society organisations to catalyse initiatives that raise awareness and demand change from political, social, educational, and media institutions.¹

¹ More information about the Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention is available here: www.cgmap.org

INTRODUCTION

The high-level Conference Building a Common Agenda for Prevention in the Western Balkans, held in Podgorica, Montenegro from 21st to 22nd March, 2024 was organised by the Post-Conflict Research Center, the Impunity Watch and the Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention (CG-MAP). The conference gathered participants from the Western Balkans as well as distinguished guests from all over the Western Balkans, Europe and world.

Velma Šarić, Founder and President of the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), emphasised during the opening speech that the key purpose of the conference is to continue strategic discussions on how to improve and broaden the prevention agenda. The task of prevention is massive and victims, survivors, and affected communities should be at the centre of this new agenda. This new agenda should take inspiration from the latest Human Rights Commissioner's report published at the end of 2023; it has to go beyond the classic assessments and it has to encompass lessons from the past as a guarantee for a better future. There's an objective need to improve regional cooperation and this conference greatly contributes to that cause, Šarić underlined.

Marlies Stappers, Founder and Executive Director of Impunity Watch, noted that prevention is key to creating long-term solutions for a better future, which cannot be achieved

without solidarity among different actors contributing to the same goal. How to strengthen collaboration between grassroots actors, CSOs working on the national level, but also policy makers while moving forward is one of the questions the Conference should answer, Stappers stressed.

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and United Nations Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention, affirmed that both her commitment and that of the Office of Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention to the Western Balkans region will remain. She also expressed her willingness to support the implementation of the prevention agenda as a whole in the region, as well as in each country in the region.

The Conference entailed two main parts. The first part was dedicated to the analysis of pressing issues of increased denial and revisionism, victims and reparations, psychosocial support and education, and difficulties in the field of dealing with the past and new technologies. The second part focused on mapping the challenges civil society organisations working in the field of dealing with the past in the Western Balkans are struggling with, as well as how to further prevent atrocities.

The extensive experience and expertise of CSO's representatives working in the field of dealing with the past and transitional justice led to fruitful and productive discussions about the challenges, as well as recommendations on how to contribute to prevention in the Western Balkans.

In this report, the key insights from

the discussions and closed meeting sessions are summarised into recommendations that could serve as guidelines for establishing a common agenda for prevention in the Western Balkans.

During the ceremonial part of the Conference, Velma Šarić, on behalf of PCRC, awarded Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and the Association Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves with the Ordinary Hero award for exceptional bravery, moral courage and work in promoting the values of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

Welcome Speeches & Opening Remarks

The founder and president of PCRC, **Velma Šarić**, warmly welcomed the attendees to the Building a Common Agenda for Prevention in the Western Balkans conference, reflecting on the path that preceded this conference.

The establishment of CGMAP in 2017 at the UN building in Sarajevo, according to her, renewed a sense of commitment and trust to ensure that the words "never again" not only hold meaning but become a reality for the Western Balkans region.

Moreover, Šarić recalled what António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General, noted in 2019; he highlighted CGMAP as the main regional actor for promoting and coordinating reconciliation efforts at the grassroots level and for preventing imminent conflict.

Šarić described the conference in Podgorica as an important moment to strengthen regional cooperation around prevention. The key purpose of the conference in Podgorica is to continue strategic discussions on how to improve and broaden the prevention agenda. The task of prevention is massive and victims, survivors, and affected communities should be in the centre of this new agenda. Šarić underlined previous comments that this new agenda needs to be inspired by the mentioned Commissioner's report. It has to go beyond the classic assessments, and it has to envision lessons from the past as a guarantee for a better future.

High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Dunja Mijatović**, referred to the latest issued report "*Dealing with the Past for a Better Future*" - Achieving Justice, Peace, and Social Cohesion in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia. The report emphasises some crucial negative trends in the region. While some trends are being confronted, such as the increasing glorification and revisionism by political and intellectual elites, other trends are not. These include hate speech and the persecution of activists, a segregated educational system, a destructive transgenerational dimension of the conflict, and gender violence that remains unaddressed.

As one of CGMAP's strengths, Šarić stressed courageous activists, legal actors, and policymakers who continue to fight for justice, the rule of law, and preventative measures.

According to Šarić, the conference in Podgorica is an important moment

for strengthening regional cooperation on prevention and dealing with the past, especially in light of current global events, wars, and the ongoing environmental crisis.

“Regional work for prevention can only be done in cooperation and solidarity.” - Velma Šarić

Impunity Watch’s founder and Executive Director **Marlies Stappers** greeted the Conference in Podgorica on behalf of the co-organiser. At the beginning of her welcoming speech, she shared her concerns regarding peace in the Western Balkans region. Although thirty years have passed since the wars, war criminals are glorified, and facts are being denied. Given the accumulated experience Impunity Watch has in working in different parts of the world, Stappers stressed the importance of long-term approaches and solidarity rights. Moreover, Stappers emphasised the opposite of what one usually hears from policymakers; transitional justice is in fact process-oriented on creating a better future.

Stappers noted that prevention is key to creating long-term solutions for a better future. For prevention, it is important to think about the root causes, which can only be done in solidarity. Solidarity is one of the values important for Impunity Watch and it is the reason for supporting CGMAP’s work.

“The second thing that we learn from our work throughout the world is how important it is that if we work on transitional justice, if we work on dealing with the past, we keep the

victims at the heart of it.” - Marlies Stappers

Although victim participation is a part of the EU policy, it still seems quite difficult to achieve this and to bring grassroots voices that work on truth and justice. This requires a long-term approach to bring them to the centre and make sure that policies substantially take victims’ voices into account.

How to strengthen collaboration between grassroots actors, actors on the national level, but also policy makers while moving forward is one of the questions Stappers suggested as relevant for the conference discussions. Furthermore, Stappers raised a question regarding the ways and methods to make recommendations given by the relevant actors on regional and international levels more successfully implemented. One of the suggestions Stappers shared was to move from ‘a project mentality’ to creating a political agenda aligning with CGMAP’s efforts to implement existing recommendations.

As another relevant step to move forward and to prevent new violations, it is important to sensitise societies about the relevance of the commemoration of all of the victims. The topic of memorialisation and how to approach it as a coalition is also an important issue to collaborate on.

“I want to end with this note of solidarity. We’re here in solidarity, and I think it’s what we need to do to stand united in the long term to see how we can move this region forward.” - Marley Stappers

Mijatović gave an opening speech that was of special symbolic importance since it was her last official address as a Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights in one of the Member States.

At the beginning, Mijatović shared gratitude and thankfulness to the activists from the Western Balkans. She stressed that these activists while out in the field are exposed to all sorts of pressure and obstruction while dealing with the issues related to human rights, specifically transitional justice, which is very important for the well-being of the societies within the Balkans, but also beyond.

"We should never give up fighting for justice and making sure that there is a recognition of the wrongdoings, injustice, genocide, and everything that happened in this region." - Dunja Mijatović

Mijatović pointed out the relevance of art in dealing with the past. She described the powerful impact of a theatre play directed by the young author Hana Rastoder about the Štrpci war crimes. This play sent a message about transitional justice, about how to make sure that war crimes and its victims are not forgotten, but at the same time it showed a way to heal and to do something good for future generations.

To all those who deny what happened in Srebrenica, Mijatović suggests going there, to go to Srebrenica, to feel, to recognise, *"(...) say, "I'm sorry", pay respect, pay tribute, talk to families, hug them, trust them."*

Mijatović called to recognise the suffering in other places in the world and to seek truth and justice.

Once again, she reminded the audience that the report 'Dealing with the Past for a Better Future', published in November 2023, resulted from the dedicated joint work of several bodies: team members of the Commissioner's Office, other experts and civil society representatives. The European Union's support, together with other partners and CSO engagement, is vital for the Western Balkan region. It is of great relevance to strengthen and empower the ordinary people, the citizens from the region.

"(...) Delivering justice, eliminating inequalities, ensuring that everyone in a society is respected and can enjoy their human rights. This is the roadmap for lasting peace." - Dunja Mijatović

The idea to create a report focused on transitional justice and dealing with the process in the Western Balkans region came as a result of a wish to assess whether improvements have been made. The previous report was published more than ten years ago, during the mandate of the second Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg. The issues within the 2023 report are important because it gives more power to different actors working on the issues of transitional justice to discuss it with the state officials.

Commissioner Mijatović shared that the report "Dealing with the Past for a Better Future" has been sent to the

five prime ministers of former Yugoslavia; this includes Croatia and Slovenia who are both European Union member states. The only state representatives that answered were from Slovenia and Croatia. The Commissioner shared that she wasn't happy with their answers, but appreciates that they replied. The report was orally discussed with the Prime Minister and the President of Montenegro, so the paper served as a motive to debate about the atrocities and about amnesty for some crimes that were not investigated.

"The paper paid particular attention to the work of civil society and activists on dealing with the past and it highlights the immense creativity, courage, resilience of all of you who've been working with victims for over two decades" - Dunja Mijatović

During her speech, Mijatović pointed out two important messages. First, the process of dealing with the past is a matter for the present, and second, just like the report shows, there is still a lot of work to do.

"The past is often used as a political battlefield in the region, which I find not only shameful, it's showing a lack of judgement." - Dunja Mijatović

A reason why politicians don't deal with the issues of dealing with the past properly doesn't have to be the result of their bad faith, but could be due to the lack of education and lack of courage; a problem visible across Europe.

"I just wish we had a different past. But we cannot hide behind the lead-

ers of the region and the atrocities that happened. And that's why I'm so proud of all of you. (...) I pay tribute to so many courageous women of the Balkans." - Dunja Mijatović

Human rights defenders face difficulties in their work. These challenges include a constant pressure to clamp down the work of CSOs working in the field of dealing with the past, less tolerance and support for criticism and human rights activism, the constant presence of denial and war criminals glorification, the failure to take responsibility for past crimes, and constant blaming of other ethnic groups as well as hate speech, intolerance, and violence. Given the above, there is a need for a fundamental paradigm shift when evaluating progress on dealing with the past in the region, Mijatović stressed.

At the same time, Mijatović found it relevant that CSO activists managed to put the issues of dealing with the past and its consequences on the top of the agenda after quite some time. If we want to look for a better future, then we need to find a way on how to educate the youth about the past, Mijatović emphasised. Continuing, she stated that *"you cannot have ten different histories (...), not to mention the burden they (the youth) will have to carry because we didn't fix it."*

At the end of her speech, Commissioner Mijatović reflected on the last part of the mentioned report by highlighting several areas that are extremely important in the future. Firstly, the responsibility of governments to change the course and to act.

An argument that the responsibility lies on their predecessors is not valid; it must be current political leaders who are responsible for dealing with the issues of the past. Secondly, there needs to be greater attention to the inter-generational dimension of dealing with the past to break the transmission of trauma and hatred from one generation to the next. Mijatović believes that this, as well as youth participation and regional cooperation are crucial to peace.

Ultimately, Commissioner Mijatović once again paid tribute to human rights defenders and their work. Moreover, Mijatović addressed the international community, and the relevance of financial support for human rights defenders, journalists, and activists.

“Do not forget to help as much as you can with supporting CSOs that are doing this work that is so important for the wellbeing and peace in this region.” - Dunja Mijatović

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and United Nations Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention greeted the conference via video message.

Nderitu began her speech by affirming that her commitment and the commitment of the Office of Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention to the Western Balkans region will remain steady. She also expressed her willingness to support the implementation of the prevention agenda as a whole in the region, as well as in each of the respective countries. Moreover,

Nderitu stated that the Office will follow the discussions and the outcomes of the Podgorica Conference. The need for joint voices of prevention and joint efforts for prevention is only growing, Nderitu emphasised. The burden of unaddressed legacies of past crimes, including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity remains significant. It has been politicised and misused for political gains, undermining peace and reconciliation, and efforts to prevent the recurrence of these crimes, Nderitu continued. She commended the work of CSO representatives and their courage to face many challenges, as well as underlining two points about the civil society and human rights advocates in the region of the Western Balkans. First, the tireless efforts they make, and second, the strong resistance they endure which seeks to undermine their efforts.

“When the crimes committed against them continue being denied, victims continue being victimised.” - Alice Wairimu Nderitu

As we approach the 30th commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide in 2025, attacks on the truth and the facts are impacting hard-won peace efforts. Furthermore, Nderitu explained that this has a devastating impact on the victims and survivors of these crimes.

“The persistence of speech denying or distorting the historical facts of these events or glorifying the perpetrators remains a very serious concern.” - Alice Wairimu Nderitu

Denial or distortion of the facts about the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995 or in Rwanda in 1994, in the same way as denial or distortion of the facts of the Holocaust, constitutes an indicator of risk for the Commission of Genocide, Nderitu concluded.

We are faced with the challenge of addressing growing trends of denial and distortion. These trends are often accompanied by hate speech instead of effective commemoration in Srebrenica and time spent honouring and commemorating victims; remembering, reflecting, and learning from the past. Given the above, Nderitu points out that one of the main goals of CGMAP should be to collectively address the mentioned practices, which pass by without any consequences.

Nderitu encouraged the audience to use the policy paper *'Combating Holocaust and Genocide Denial: Protecting Survivors, Preserving Memory, and Promoting Prevention'*, which was published by the Office of UN Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention in 2022, for subsequent discussions and use its recommendations as advocacy tools in the work to advance accountability.

Finally, Nderitu once again emphasised the work of CSO representatives in the Western Balkans in promoting a better future for the current generations and for the generations to come and concluded that the very existence of CGMAP is in itself a very positive example of prevention in action.

DISCUSSING PREVENTION: AREAS OF AC- TION AND KEY INSIGHTS

PANEL I - CIVIL SOCIETY & PREVEN- TION: TACKLING INCREASED DENIAL AND REVISIONISM

Panellists:

Dunja Mijatović,
Commissioner on Human Rights, Council of Europe

Nataša Kandić,
Humanitarian Law Center Serbia

Sonja Biserko,
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Ahmed Kulanić,
Sarajevo Memorial Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Moderator:
Thomas Unger, independent consultant

Sonja Biserko, Founder and President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, shared thoughts about the current political situation in Serbia with a specific focus on challenges in the field of dealing with the past. Biserko emphasised the following thoughts and challenges in Serbia's role in dealing with the past with a specific reflection on denial and historical revisionism. Biserko began with acknowledging achievements of the civil society in the region, but also international groups, individuals, journalists and many others who have contributed to highlighting what has happened in the wars in the Balkans. "It's probably the most documented war ever", Biserko underlined.

In the introductory note, Biserko assessed that Serbia presents the main obstacle to regional reconciliation as it is a country that perpetuated wars that are not acknowledged as their responsibility. As can be seen, Serbia is affected by the historical revisionism and denial that is present in the whole century, not just during the period of the 1990s, Biserko commented, adding that responsibly dealing with the past requires nurturing a victim-centred approach. According to Biserko, the new Serbian national identity presents Serbs as the main victims, constructing "victimhood nationalism" based on historical revisionism and false interpretation of the events that took place during the 1990s. In fact, denying the relevance of Yugoslavia also has an impact on the construction of the new Serbian national identity, Biserko highlighted. Going further, she

stated that "victimhood nationalism" has a strong impact on younger generations.

When assessing the roots and causes of historical revisionism and denial, she believes, it is important to take the wider spectrum of actors into account (e.g. media, the academia, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and educational institutions) and not just political actors, Biserko suggested. Biserko explained that the global geopolitical situation is being reflected in the Western Balkans region and in Serbia, as well in terms of Russian interests. Regarding bilateral relations between countries in the Western Balkans, political and diplomatic relations between Serbia and Croatia are at the lowest level since the aftermath of the war, Biserko assessed. Russia is supporting the revival of a new sort of concept of the "Serbian world", sharing similarities to the "Russian world". The Serbian Orthodox Church plays an important role in homogenising people in Serbia for the aforementioned cause. Society in Serbia is regressing; the values established after the wars are anti-liberal and anti-Western. Biserko concluded by emphasising that it is important to recognise the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the cultural and intellectual elites which created the nationalistic narratives that brought Milošević and Vučić into power.

Nataša Kandić, Founder of the Humanitarian Law Center Serbia, shared thoughts and assessments about the role of institutions in moving the transitional justice agenda forward:

Kandić expressed that there was a realistic hope that transitional justice processes would move in a positive direction after 2006 when cooperation on the regional level existed. That was a period marked by officials who understood that civil society organisations cannot and should not replace institutions, but rather provide support in dealing with the past. Nowadays it seems that true acknowledgment of the victims is not supported by concrete government policies, Kandić assessed.

The RECOM Reconciliation network succeeded in collecting data about the civil war victims in Kosovo and Croatia. Fourteen years ago, a large number of youngsters were involved in collecting signatures for the RECOM Commission to be established. Today, young people lack interest in topics related to regional cooperation and dealing with the past. Kandić's assessment is that young people perceive convicted war criminals as heroes. As a solution, she recommended finding a new way on how to open debates with young people about dealing with the past.

The new narrative, the "new truth", about the past is not based on facts nor empirical research. Moreover, civil society organisations that worked in the field of transitional justice had better cooperation with academia; which is no longer the case Kandić noted. Correspondingly, there is a lack of interest in the mainstream media for the issues of dealing with the past. This is problematic since the media is the main resource of information for the wider public.

Regarding the role of the European Union in the transitional justice process in the Western Balkans, Kandić highlighted the relevance and need that the EU supports regional cooperation and reconciliation efforts financially, but first of all politically. It is important to open discussions about the role of the European Union in the transitional justice process in the Western Balkans.

Ahmed Kulanić, Director of the Sarajevo Memorial Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina shared his insights and thoughts about the work of the Sarajevo Memorial Center and the role of education in transitional justice processes.

Kulanić emphasised that the Sarajevo Memorial Center is a governmental institution. It was founded in 1997 with the name the Memorial Fund, then the Canton Sarajevo Memorial Fund, and recently, it was transformed into the Sarajevo Memorial Center. In the academic year 2024/2025, the Sarajevo Memorial Center will open its first educational centre.

Education about the past is the main field we have to work on; the youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina don't learn about the war in their homeland. From his personal experience, Kulanić shared that the youth gains information about the wars during the 1990s from their families, local stories, their ethnic group, the streets, and to some extent even the media. History education in Bosnia and Herzegovina must include lessons about the wars during the 1990s in Bosnia

and Herzegovina and in the Western Balkans based on facts and cooperation between academia, universities and schools, Kulanić underlined. Regarding ICTY's Information Center in Sarajevo, Kulanić stressed that it is "very closed off and it's not accessible to the general public". Furthermore, the Center gives access to raw data, but it doesn't have general information about the war crimes displayed. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs an institution that will present the facts established before the ICTY about the war crimes that have been committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This type of institution should exist on a national, not ethnic level, Kulanić recommended.

War criminals' presence in media and fake news are easily and widely represented via social media and the primary audience is the youth, Kulanić highlighted.

Dunja Mijatović, Commissioner on Human Rights, Council of Europe, shared thoughts and insights about the media and media freedom in the context of glorification and revisionism.

The media plays an important role in terms of glorification and revisionism as it largely incites everything that has happened in the Western Balkans. Many scholars analysed the issue of how propaganda and the media were instrumentalised to create fear.

Mijatović pointed to the importance of understanding and distinguishing the line between free speech and censorship. War criminals are given a platform to present their books

publicly, "that's a kind of free speech rehabilitation. There is no public outrage, no reaction. Apathy is spreading.", Mijatović noted, continuing that war criminals who have never apologised present their books which are publicly broadcasted, and this goes by without any reaction or statement given by the politicians.

Mijatović pointed out that one of the biggest dangers is the perception that the previously mentioned behaviour is perceived as "business as usual" that goes by without proper reaction, or demonstrations to oppose it.

Mijatović highlighted the lack of more free, independent media in the whole Western Balkans as another obstacle in terms of media freedom and a need to address the issues of dealing with the past in a factual manner.

Discussion's key insights

Emphasis was placed on the rule of law in the prevention, as well as the need for investigating and prosecuting cases of glorification and/or denial of genocide and war crimes by judicial institutions.

It was recommended to put more emphasis and pressure on the national level, and on the judiciary system to prosecute cases of denial and glorification of genocide and war crimes following the Criminal Codes. It was recommended to form a working group that would advocate for improved professional development programs for the judiciary and police, as well as the extension of European

standards for war victims in line with European Commission regulations, given that there is an EU directive on the rights of war victims.

It was emphasised that CGMAP has the strength and potential for advocacy on the European Union level and on the United Nations Human Rights Council. It was recommended that the process of accession to the European Union should be used to advance transitional justice processes and to collaborate more intensively with the Special advisor on genocide prevention.

Regarding the political culture in Serbia, it was stated that it is on a very low level. Accordingly, there is no political willingness to obey and respect the rule of law. Values nurtured in Serbian society don't align with European values. The need for more active engagement of European Union representatives in Serbia, as well as the need for more vigorous education and training to enable a higher level of presence of European values, was underlined throughout the discussion.

Participants highlighted the indifference of the mainstream media to cover the issues related to the processes of dealing with the past as a very pressing challenge. It was stated that all those who are advocating or implementing transitional justice mechanisms are widely perceived as traitors of their own ethnic group. This aforementioned evaluation needs to be taken into account when assessing the implementation of transitional justice

mechanisms in the Western Balkans context.

The EU conditionality cannot be used as a mechanism to solve all the problems Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing but could be utilised as a platform to put an emphasis on the prevention agenda.

The international community's recognition of the current threats in the field of peace and security in the Western Balkans could represent driving forces for positive changes, participants noted.

PANEL II - VICTIMS AND REPARATIONS: A GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVE

Panellists:

**Branko Ćulibrk,
Youth Center KVART, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**Daliborka Uljarević,
Center for Civic Education, Montenegro**

**Bekim Blakaj,
Humanitarian Law Center, Kosovo**

**Selma Korjenić,
TRIAL International, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Moderator:

Marlies Stappers, Impunity Watch

Graciela Gatti Santana, President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, greeted the Conference via video message. Judge Santana pointed out that she is also very aware of the disturbing rise of denial, glorification, and historical revisionism, concerning the atrocity crimes committed during conflicts. Questioning the facts established before ICTY and IRMCT is a path to perpetrate divisions and undermine the truth.

Santana noted that it is of great importance to consolidate the legacy of the ICTY and IRMCT. Therefore, significant efforts are made in order to ensure that the judicial findings reach the widest audience possible. This is done by providing access to online databases, facilitating the establishment of information centres in line with the Security Council Resolution 1966, and conducting outreach activities in the region of the former Yugoslavia with the support from the European Commission. Moreover, every year, the Mechanism responds to numerous requests for assistance by national jurisdiction, allowing for evidence and other materials to be utilised in domestic procedures, Santana concluded.

Even though ICTY and IRMCT haven't had a mandate to address reparations for victims of the crimes within its jurisdiction, the victims' stories and testaments of the resilience of the human spirit also serve as reminders for the imperative of "never again".

Ultimately, Santana pointed out that the IMRCT remains resolute in its mission to preserve and ensure access to the judicially established facts, both as a tribute to the victims and so that the broader goals of international criminal justice, including prevention, may be better served.

Bekim Blakaj, Director of the Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo, shared his thoughts, insights, and challenges on what working on reparations means in the context of Kosovo and how to take this approach of inclusivity so that victims can participate equally in reparations.

In the beginning, Blakaj stressed that the role of civil society is very much limited in the field of reparations. This suggests that the role of civil society related to this particular mechanism is to monitor and report problems that are around reparations and try to give some feedback to the authorities.

The case of Kosovo shows that although state authorities dealt with the issue of reparation for the victims, they didn't include the victims' community and their representatives, which caused "a pretty big mess". The legal framework burdens the reparation process, which consequently causes the state to provide financial compensation, in some cases on a discriminatory basis, without being aware of the victims' specific needs or being aware of the bigger picture, Blakaj explained.

Furthermore, financial compensation is not the type of reparation representing the needs of all the victims.

Some groups of victims want to gain reparations from Serbia because the damage was done by Serbian forces, and not Kosovo's. To summarise, victims want recognition from the perpetrators' side.

Although some experts recognise the memorialisation as a fifth transitional justice pillar, it is still understood as a part of symbolic reparations, in the field of memorialisation. In Kosovo, a lot of memorials have been erected by private initiatives or enterprises with no included narrative about what happened. For this reason, younger generations, or those who haven't witnessed what happened, could build a false narrative based on false information. Some of these memorials even include hate speech or are not inclusive.

Memorials in general are not inclusive, they commemorate victims from only one ethnic group, sometimes even denying the total number of victims of that particular event. Equally, memorials do not provide information about the perpetrators nor do they invite the community to reflect and empathise with the victims. A concrete example Blakaj shared is a memorial in Podujeva, erected by the municipality.

In terms of symbolic reparations, civil society has a bit more space to use art, and create some exhibitions and performances to provide different kinds of culture of memory. Similarly, cyberspace is also a space to create different memorials and online exhibitions, using animation to create a kind of memorial for victims in an ac-

curate manner and highly visible. The recommendation Blakaj proposed is to include an order for financial reparation in the cases of war crime perpetrators, although it could be difficult to implement it if the convicted perpetrators don't have assets. Nonetheless, perhaps the financial fund for the victims' reparation could be established.

Selma Korjenić, the Program Director of TRIAL International in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared her thoughts, insights, and recommendations about her work in the field of transitional justice, reparations, as well as her direct work with victims, specifically victims of sexual violence in the war, as well as sharing some success stories, positive achievements and instructions on how to move forward.

Civil society, including TRIAL International and the victim's associations, and the victims, had to engage in advocating, capacity building, and awareness raising. All those steps led to a type of measures of reparations. Support from the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is lacking. "Without our voices and without the voices of the victims, I wouldn't be able to sit here today and talk to you about positive examples and achievements", Korjenić underlined.

The basis for advocacy for the implementation of reparative measures and policies exists in international standards. Moreover, while advocating for the realisation of victims' needs it is crucial to adopt the victim-centred approach which TRIAL

has been dedicated to since 2010. The victim-centred approach is bringing closer the transformative potential of reparation in some kind of concept of justice because it enables us to perceive justice differently. The definition of justice is not the same for different groups of victims, from Europe or from South Africa, for example. The international community played an important role when it came to the prosecution of sexual war crimes. The establishment of international justice and standards, as well as putting the gender perspective of war crimes into the focus, gave civil society a platform to move in a positive direction on the national level. When it comes to victim-centred approaches and reparations the key aspect to working with victims is understanding their needs and enabling and empowering them with the knowledge and skills to understand and demand their rights. Civil society can be the voice of the victims, but victims have their voices too; it is important to support them to raise it widely and loudly, Korjenić pointed out.

An increase in the prosecution of the CRSV (conflict-related sexual violence) in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a result of the implementation of the PCVI (Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative) initiative, an international standard within the national context. This successful increase in prosecution changed the narrative. Korjenić emphasised that generally, the reparation system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the Western Balkans, is not fair. She also noted that although civil society organisa-

tions are working with the victims by providing them with information about reparative mechanisms accessible to them, there are groups of victims which don't want reparations from their country. In this case, Bosnia and Herzegovina, because the country is not one to blame for the harm from the perspective of victims, administrative reparations cannot replace public acknowledgment from the perpetrators' side that crimes have been committed and caused pain and harm.

When deciding about the advocacy strategies to influence decision-makers, it is important to have a deep and accurate understanding of the political situation and choose an adequate momentum to react, to address, to demand action. That is precisely what TRIAL, together with their international partners, accomplished. For the first time, the government of Republika Srpska decided to recognise CRSV survivors as the victims of torture, and they even doubled the budget for the reparations.

Korjenić called for the need to pay attention to the time frame as well. Thirty years after the war, victims are ageing, losing the will to fight. This fact has to be taken into account when thinking about victim-centred approaches in terms of reparations.

Daliborka Uljarević, Executive Director of the Centre for Civic Education, Montenegro shared her insights, thoughts, and recommendations about reparation strategies in Montenegro and about the role of the civil society.

At the beginning, Uljarević stressed that when it comes to reparation policies in Montenegro there is systematic negligence, regardless of the differences within the authorities. This undermines the efforts of civil society. Uljarević emphasised the fact that rights, although once adopted and implemented, shouldn't be taken for granted. To support her argument, Uljarević shared the example of civic education which was a mandatory lesson in schools that was immensely relevant for multi-ethnic Montenegrin society. Unfortunately, since 2017 that's no longer the case.

Montenegrin society is deeply polarised and widely politicised. Recent empirical research shows that the strong influence of the majority of politicians and religious communities is not influencing Montenegrin society to move forward to progressive values. The rehabilitation of war criminals² and historical revisionism has been recognised by 41% of citizens. Only 36% of Montenegrins do not perceive the historical revisionism, and less than 20% have no conclusive views on the issue. Moreover, almost half of the citizens see the rise of radicalism in society, Uljarević stressed. Due to formal education deficiencies, when it comes to history figures, it is no longer clear who the "good", and who the "bad" guys are.

Uljarević strongly recommends putting efforts into formal, as well as informal education. He continues by emphasising that one of the roles of civil society in this context is to pro-

2 The term rehabilitation in the context above stands for social rehabilitation

duce assistant teaching materials for teachers and organise training for them.

To illustrate the political climate in Montenegro, which is influenced not only by the politicians, but also by the lack of citizens' interest to oppose negative trends, Uljarević shared an example in which the mayor of the multiethnic city Pljevlja came into power by de facto ethnically cleansing the city's public administration. The mayor has also recently declared that he doesn't recognise Kosovo as an independent state. Additionally, an amendment providing benefits to exclusively one ethnic group of victims wasn't voted for during the plenum session, but if it had been, Uljarević believes it would have been adopted.

When it comes to symbolic reparations, the political climate is completely regressing in comparison to what it was a couple years ago. For example, the Montenegrin government was the only one who gave official support to RECOM. Nowadays, civil society is advocating for memorial plaques or monuments to honour and remember the victims, and one local government is planning to honour the war criminals by naming a street after them.

Uljarević called out to be included into regional cooperation, regional coalitions, and efforts to exchange knowledge and information. If different stakeholders are included and synergised, influence on the authorities is higher and more influential. Another recommendation Uljarević

underlined was to engage citizens to oppose harmful local and national governmental decisions, as well as to recognise that the system of reparations is holistic and that it should serve to heal the victims, not individually, but collectively, making it a type of societal healing. This kind of treatment is missing in Montenegro, Uljarević concluded.

Branko Ćulibrk, the Executive Director of the Youth Center KVART in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared his thoughts, insights, and recommendations in the area of advocating for reparations, as well as his work with youth in communities, including the most challenging one—Prijedor.

At the very beginning, Ćulibrk presented that KVART's work aims to contribute to achieving social justice and making a positive impact on the local community, which necessarily entails working with the youth and working on post-war reconciliation issues. On a local level, the process of dealing with the past is divided in the same way as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in mono-ethnic narratives that nurture and hold the memory of victims of exclusively their ethnic community, Ćulibrk stated.

Ćulibrk stressed the relevance of cooperation between younger and older generations of activists. He also showed appreciation to activists Emir Hodžić and Edin Ramulić. Collaboration through intergenerational understanding and support is relevant for the exchange of knowledge and experience. To give visibility and public recogni-

tion to war victims was the main reason why the initiative 'Jer me se tiče' ('Because it concerns me') was established in 2013.

In 2014, the initiative started advocating for the erection of the memorial to honour 120 killed children in Prijedor during the war in the 1990s. During the war, 2176 people were killed in Prijedor, more than 30,000 people were held in concentration camps and more than 50,000 people have been displaced from Prijedor, Ćulibrk pointed out.

There is a huge division in perception about the facts of what happened in Prijedor during the 1990s, but also about what happened during the Second World War. Even today, the past has a strong influence on the present and on the relationship between people in Prijedor, Ćulibrk emphasised.

Prijedor's local authorities are not providing a platform for an open dialogue. On the local assembly agenda, there is no debate about past events. Instead the authorities are creating administrative obstacles, or just disabling civil society or concretely the 'Jer me se tiče' initiative for erecting memorials to honour the memory of the killed children during the war. Although there is resistance from local authorities, international community representatives are quite interested in supporting civil society initiatives in Prijedor, which is appreciated.

Ćulibrk also noted that civil society organisations are persistent in mo-

bilising people, organising different kinds of public commemorations and gatherings, and in creating a space for basic solidarity between people.

Discussion's key insights

Participants expressed support to platforms and coalitions such as the RECOM Reconciliation network and bilateral connections that are enabling civil society actors across the Western Balkans to discuss current challenges in the field of reconciliation, exchange information, and find ideas for prevention. Moreover, it was highlighted that if joint actions towards authorities are stronger, and the greater the pressure CSOs put on legislators, the higher is the chance that harmful policies or decisions won't be passed.

In the last thirty years, civil society organisations have achieved relevant and impactful results. At the same time, what participants find challenging is how to more efficiently influence decision makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It was pointed out that regional co-operation has been weakened in the last several years. Therefore, participants recommended fostering cooperation between different organisations from different countries, including associations of families of missing persons.

Work in the field of reparations, especially in the area of symbolic reparations, has to be done together with the victims and victims' organisations. From the experience of CSOs working in the field, artistic interven-

tions, such as exhibitions created in collaboration with the victims and victims' organisations, have proven to have a positive influence on empathy, solidarity, and mutual understanding among the victims.

Reparations are a strong mechanism for facing historical injustice. Moreover, they stimulate reconciliation by acknowledging the suffering of the victims. The character of the reparations is preventive, it aims to stop the violence cycle and is related to the past, but oriented towards the present and the future by making society more resilient to the recurring nature of atrocities.

Positive achievements in reparative policies can be reached if different actors are advocating in synergy for the same goal. Success is more achievable if the international community provides concrete support and a consequent push toward national and local decision-makers. Reparative strategies should adopt trauma-informed leadership practices that reduce transgenerational trauma and cultivate a culture of empathy and trust.

PANEL III - HEALING (FROM) THE PAST: PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

Panellists:

Margareta Blažević,
Youth Initiative for Human Rights - Croatia

Velma Šarić,
Post-Conflict Research Center, Bosnia and Herze-
govina

Jasna Zečević,
Vive žene Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Jasmina Lazović, Heartefact Serbia

Moderator:

Kate Ferguson, Protection Approaches

Christian Guillermet-Fernandez, Chair of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC) welcomed the Conference via video message. In terms of healing from the past, psychosocial support and education, GAAMAC contributes to this effort by convening its members, bringing together a diverse range of actors from governments and civil society organisations that join forces of commitment to strengthen national resilience to atrocity crimes. Guillermet-Fernandez highlighted that genocide and other atrocity crimes don't happen overnight. They are the result of the systematic growth of human rights violations and impunity.

“Genocide is a process whereby discrimination, intolerance and hate speech are part of the very early stages of dehumanising the target group. Therefore, before we get to the endpoint of genocide, we have more of an imperative to address and tackle these precursors. We need to start mitigating and learning from the past, changing from a culture of discrimination, tolerance and violence towards a culture of inclusion and accountability. To accomplish this, we all must work together and bridge the gaps between a multitude of stakeholders. Bridging the gap between the stakeholders through networks such as GAAMAC or the Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention and troop conferences such as this one, (...) is crucial,” Fernandez concluded.

Margareta Blažević from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights - Croatia shared her thoughts, opinions and recommendations about the role of youth education in prevention. At the beginning, Blažević emphasised the relevance of NGO representatives at the Conference. Although Croatia is not always perceived as a Western Balkans country, it is of crucial importance to have representatives from Croatia included into the prevention agenda for the Western Balkans.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights is a non-governmental organisation based in Zagreb, with branches which work in other Western Balkan countries as well. Namely, in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo. The mission shared among all branches is to equip the youth from the Western Balkans with knowledge and skills on how to responsibly deal with the unresolved issues of the past wars that happened during the 1990s, but also to encourage its local communities to start dealing with the past in such a way, Blažević explained.

‘Wartime Nineties from the Perspective of Young People’, a research initiative conducted in 2021 by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights - Croatia, provided many useful insights. Among these is the fact that Croatia’s youth has a very low level of knowledge about the role of Croatia in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If the level of knowledge is low, it enables or limits the youth’s ability to critically assess the information they get about the mentioned event

in the media or the public sphere. To be exact, the information about the 1990s wars, the youth usually gets from their parents or their closest relatives, which is a textbook example of transgenerational transmission of not only trauma, but also of narratives and information about what happened in the 1990s, Blažević pointed out.

Blažević stressed the relevance of working with the youth in deconstructing dominant narratives in their respective countries; to give the youth an active role in transitional justice processes by for example, including them in commemorations or discussions and panels, and by encouraging them to self-organise. It is impressive to see the ability and creativity the youth has to create potentially impactful and relevant campaigns or contributions to shift the narrative about the past into a more inclusive one, Blažević highlighted. Moreover, Blažević shared an example of the positive impact of youth participation at a recent commemoration she has attended: YIHR Croatia, together with other civil society organisations, organised a visit to former concentration camps Heliodrom, near Mostar, and in Bugojno, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The youth's efforts may have a positive impact on victims or participants.

When it comes to self-organised street actions, a group of Croatia's youth was inspired by Serbia's youth, and decided to visit as many cities in Croatia as possible, to record hate speech graffiti, put some positively noted stickers to cover it, and advo-

cate towards local authorities about the harmful effect hate speech has on society.

Challenges of working with the youth on difficult legacies of the past can be very stressful and emotional for them, which is important to address, as well as the challenge of facilitating social interactions between the youth of different nationalities. The mentioned obstacles require CSO activists to be very well equipped in different fields of this specific youth work, Blažević underlined.

Blažević concluded by recommending fostering intersectional partnerships between organisations that work with the youth, but not necessarily in the field of dealing with the past and transitional justice. Furthermore, Blažević stressed the importance of keeping in mind that short-term goals, when it comes to the prevention agenda, need to be taken seriously as well. These goals serve as a positive push to move forward in creating and sticking to long-term agendas.

Velma Šarić, PCRC's Founder and President, Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared her thoughts, insights, and recommendations about innovative mechanisms either formal or informal, as well as educational programs that PCRC is conducting in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. Thirteen years ago, when the PCRS was established, it was most likely the only organisation looking into stories of moral courage and positive changes in the community. The leading and still ongoing project, Ordinary Heroes, highlights stories of moral courage amongst different

ethnic groups by bringing positive change amongst the youth as well. Another project Šarić highlighted is the Balkan Diskurs. Balkans Diskurs is a pan-ethnic youth multimedia platform that equips young people with basic understanding of journalism and photography. Having the mentorship support all the way, attendees go back to their communities and continue to write stories that usually would not have ended up in the media. This platform is very important because eleven years ago, it was the first platform raising the voices of young people, trying to highlight those positive examples from grassroots communities.

PCRC is dedicated to creating options for interdisciplinary cooperation between organisations in the Western Balkans. Even during the period of the COVID pandemic, they organised an online commemoration for the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, together with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights branches from Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia, Šarić emphasised.

Šarić underlined the relevance of international partners, such as Impunity Watch or Protection Approaches, and academia representatives and practitioners. These actors could together create solid, interdisciplinary, multi-layered approaches, as well as establish peace and a prevention agenda for the Western Balkans. Academia, such as King's College London or London School of Economics and Political Science, has a relevant role for PCRC because they provide methods and tools for eval-

uating and measuring the impact of art and other PCRC's innovative approaches in the reconciliation processes.

PCRC creates its own independent content, whether by producing documentaries or curating exhibitions. To be more precise, fifteen documentaries produced by the PCRC's team had an outreach of 300 million people worldwide and have been translated into eight different languages. In the concluding remarks, Šarić emphasised the impact PCRC had in the formal education process and in the work with the youth. After around eight or nine years of PCRC's efforts to incorporate peace curricula into high schools, PCRC finally succeeded with the curricula named "Holocaust and Peace". The curriculum is to be implemented in the canton of Sarajevo and was put together by professors and teachers from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the entity Republika Srpska. For eight years, it was piloted in many different municipalities while constantly improving its content. Last year, with the support of the Ministry of Education of the canton of Sarajevo, PCRC officially broke into the educational curriculum and it can be freely said that for the first time in the history of the post-conflict history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a peace curriculum, which according to the Pedagogical Institute, will reach around 400,000 pupils, from elementary and high schools.

Despite so many obstacles and fragile structures, PCRC has achieved this huge success in a country of 180

ministries, with no state ministry for education, Šarić summarised. One of the informal education programs PCRC is providing is the Srebrenica Youth School, the result of collaboration between PCRC and the Srebrenica Memorial Center. Šarić also highlighted the informal educational program that PCRC runs in collaboration with the Sarajevo Memorial Center. Each year, these programs bring together over fifty young people from the Western Balkans, Europe, and beyond. Speaking about the Srebrenica Youth School program, she explained that it includes lectures and workshops led by experts in the field of transitional justice. What makes this summer school particularly significant, according to Šarić, is the fact that participants attend the official commemoration for the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, held on July 11 each year.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in the surrounding region, society is struggling with the consequences of wars that took place during the 1990s that were fought on stark ethnic lines. To omit these obstacles and burdens, regional cooperation has to be our priority, Šarić emphasised.

Jasna Zečević, Director of Vive Žena Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, shares her thoughts, insights and recommendations about the work on trauma issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the beginning, Zečević talked about the organisation she is a part of, Vive Žene Tuzla, which was established thirty years ago. When Vive

žene Tuzla was established in 1994, the first phase of their work was on healing the trauma of women who came to the organisation. The second phase was to encourage women and survivors to start to speak up, a process they were involved in for 20 years. The organisation worked on healing trauma on the individual level and on amplifying their voices so that women and survivors can be supported in lobbies and advocacy work, in laws, in networks, and other areas. During the third phase, Vive žene Tuzla started to work with institutions. They also supported the witnesses of war crimes, before, during and after the trials.

Vive žene Tuzla is a psychosocial and psychotherapy-centred organisation that collaborates with other organisations to provide support to witnesses of war crimes, as well as to educate professionals and institutions on how to approach and work with war crime survivors and witnesses. In particular, they want to help survivors of sexual violence from the war.

Alongside their long standing work to recognise and heal trauma, Vive žene Tuzla is dedicated to creating links between different ethnic communities in terms of human rights. This approach means working on reconciliation, but Vive žene doesn't use the term 'reconciliation'. This is because the beneficiaries usually comment that the victims and witnesses haven't fought against anyone, so there is no need for reconciliation. Therefore, Vive žene sticks to a human-rights approach.

Vive žene also works with children from north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina, striving to prevent trauma transmission, which is a very difficult task. Zečević underlined that the process of talking with the families of victims is very challenging. It is completely understandable that survivors want to forget what has happened to them. It is also painful to talk about what they have been through, but at the same time, if there's no discussion about the past, there's a higher possibility this will happen again. Silence, together with politicians ignoring the past, may have serious consequences for society, Zečević stressed.

To clarify the difference between healing from the trauma and learning from the past, Zečević said that it is important to understand that individuals and society cannot be healed from the past. She clarified the difference stating that it is important to understand that while individuals and society cannot be healed from the facts of the past, they can heal their trauma. The issue with the past is the problem of how to accept it, and not how to heal it. In both processes, acknowledging the facts and healing, on individual and collective levels, the institutions have an important role. It is also important how they behave; whether they are in support or in opposition of the processes. Zečević concluded by emphasising the fact that there is a high level of domestic violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the fact that for thirty years society didn't heal from the trauma with all the required steps. In turn, the youth and the new generations took on the trauma of the past

generation, perpetuating negative behaviours.

Jasmina Lazović, Coordinator for Exchange and Cooperation with Kosovo at Heartefact Serbia, shared her thoughts and insights about the role of art in dealing with the past and transitional justice processes. Lazović remarked that she is not an artist, but a human rights defender and researcher in the field of the fall of Yugoslavia and dealing with the past. For many years, Lazović has been involved in producing and organising different kinds and forms of artistic content in the field of human rights.

Heartefact is a multidisciplinary organisation based in Belgrade, Serbia, and is mostly recognised for its work in the field of arts and culture thanks to the Heartefact house, which is an independent, professional and engaged theatre space in Belgrade. Lazović emphasised the relevance of reaching out to the audience which is not already familiar with the court-established facts about the 1990s or is simply not on a progressive standpoint when it comes to the issues of reconciliation and dealing with the past. This means, Lazović continued, that you have to bring the content to cities and places outside Belgrade, in addition to organising debriefing sessions after exposing the audience to the content they didn't previously know anything about as well as clarify the potentially abstract artistic forms of transmitting the message.

Heartefact is engaged in creating this type of content which addresses

the difficult legacy of the past since 2009. Lazović also pointed out the fact that artists, while preparing for a theatre play or a movie, go through the process of education in the field of dealing with the past. This helps them be better equipped not just with factual knowledge, but also the skill to further advocate the relevance of responsibly dealing with the past for the benefit of society.

An important aspect of the creation process is to actively involve a member of the affected communities or civil society activists to both get their feedback and to acknowledge the impact a concrete artistic piece has on them.

Another important role Heartefact plays is in the support of the young artists who want to create pieces addressing the past. Heartefact provides at least three pillars of support; financial through subgranting, advisory by providing information about resources where to find facts about the conflicts (how to work with ICTY/IRMCT archives), and psychological on how to deal with push backs and strong negative reactions from society members opposing honest addressing of the past, Lazović concluded.

In 2013, there were positive examples where state institution representatives were in favour of supporting exhibitions presenting facts about the role of Serbian armed forces during the 1990s. Nowadays this space of opening dialogue through artistic forms about the past is exclusively reserved for civil society. Although Lazović was kindly asked

to share her thoughts on how art can be directed to break transgenerational trauma, Lazović explained “(...) that it would be way easier for me to talk about the role of art in nurturing transgenerational hate because that’s really something that I can talk really a lot about because art has been very powerfully used by those nationalistic segments of the society to push us back and to fight us back with all this effort.”

Discussion’s key insights

It was recommended to approach trauma healing holistically, both on an individual and a collective level. Likewise, when working on trauma on an individual and societal level, patriarchal roots deeply integrated in Western Balkan societies must be taken into account.

Regarding support to the victims in terms of their role during criminal proceedings, it was highlighted that war crime protection must be sensitised enough for the needs of the victims, during and after the trial in order to break the cycle of trauma, as well as to give courage to the victims to speak up.

Breaking the vicious cycle of trauma requires the following steps: firstly, punishing the perpetrators, secondly, giving reparations to the victims, and thirdly, the state’s guarantee of non-repetition. The biggest issue there is the will to do as described. For the healing process, all phases must be completed.

Participants shared that their experience of working with victims of sex-

ual war crimes showed that victims talk about their experience much easier if they live in Sweden, for example, than in Bosnia and Herzegovina because work on their trauma has been done properly, in a more professional way than it is done in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Victims were better prepared to testify and felt much safer because they were not in the country in which the crime had happened.

Non-responsive institutions and multilayered divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina will remain a burden for future generations if policymakers are not invested into making a significant shift.

Another concern participants raised was about how the tension of the possibility of another conflict might affect the victims in the Western Balkans who are still in a state of an unfinished war.

It was pointed out that one of CSO's roles should be to create a place for positive stories about the individuals who oppose hateful and harmful rhetoric, with one example of good practice being PCRC's Ordinary Hero Recognition.

One of the concerns that was raised during the discussion was that, in Serbia specifically, there are just a few actors and directors willing to act or direct the plays addressing the issues of the past in a fact-based manner.

On the other hand, engaging movies dealing with past issues, such as Jasmila Žbanić's 'Grbavica' or Angelina Jolie's 'In the Land of Blood

and Honey,' have a significant role in contributing to an inclusive culture of memory. In addition, international broadcasting may be utilised for significant and successful advocacy for advancing the rights of victims.

It was emphasised that youth work can be quite important to break this cycle of violence because it aims to change the narratives that the youth has already internalised. The aim of working with the youth is not to replace current narratives with others, but to equip the youth with enough knowledge so they can critically evaluate those narratives on their own and hopefully create new, inclusive ones.

Doubts regarding the positive influence of criminal justice on both the victims and society were also raised during the discussion. Nonetheless, it was highlighted that criminal verdicts, punishing of the perpetrators, and criminal justice are necessary steps in healing trauma.

Furthermore, it was underlined that achievements in criminal justice play an important role in understanding, accepting and acknowledging concrete facts about what occurred during the war. Court archives and accessibility of factual knowledge give hope that future generations will build narratives based on the truth. The concluding discussion focused on the ICTY legacy, and how it has influenced international humanitarian law development, especially when it came to sexual war crimes and recognition of these crimes as crimes against humanity which is one of ICTY's accomplishments that was specifically pointed out.

PANEL IV - CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN THE AGE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Panellists:

Sofija Todorović,
Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia

Mirza Avdić,
Center for Investigative Journalism,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Vesna Teršelič,
Documenta - Center for Dealing with the Past,
Croatia

Moderator:

Branka Vierda, independent consultant

Vesna Teršelič, Director of Documenta – Center for Dealing with the Past, shared her opinions and thoughts about the options on how to benefit from the new technologies, especially social media, in dealing with the past processes. Teršelič noted that the organisation from which she is coming, Documenta - Center for Dealing with the Past, through the years collected a huge archive that, among others, entails more than 500 video records of personal memories with data on human losses on the fate of killed and forcibly disappeared persons.

The documentation of war crime trials and reports on war crime trials makes the content complex, multi-layered; it needs additional contextualisation before you publish it. When thinking about the usage of social media, and adopting the content for this purpose, the task is even more difficult.

Moreover, there is an open question regarding consent. How to navigate the process of creating and publishing short videos or campaigns suitable for social media without the specific consent of the victim or survivors to use their testament, which they voluntarily previously shared, and have even given the consent to film, but for this purpose, you need additional consent. “What if they are no longer alive?”, Teršelič asked. Teršelič emphasised that during the last few years, Documenta has realised the relevance of the localisation of the victim’s and survivors’ stories used to present a certain place or a certain part of town. If you organise

study visits and walks, your group can reach around thirty people, but if you publish certain content on social media, the number of views is going to be much higher. At the same time, online and offline content resonate differently.

Young people are of course more eager to absorb content via social media, and Teršelič shared that Documenta had some success in using Instagram to disseminate relevant information. However, subsequent questions are raised from this. For example, how many languages should the story be presented, what the available resources and expenses are, and so on.

Teršelič also pointed out that oral history and personal stories as a method to present some historical events are now more popular in the mainstream media than they were ever before. This again opens the question about consent, because occasionally victims are not satisfied with how they presented their experience many years ago, and they don’t want to publicly broadcast it.

The interest of mainstream media to inform the public about the recent wars from the perspective of dealing with the past and reconciliation is lower than it was before, Teršelič agreed with the conclusion the previous panellist made.

Regarding the use of online spaces for commemorations, Teršelič firmly believes that online spaces cannot and should not replace physical events and experiences present

through the physical interaction gained in real life.

Teršelič continued by underlining the relevance of positive stories on the local level, showing examples of other sides of the war. When attending or organising a commemoration for the victims, attention has to be paid to always try to care about all the ethnic groups, and victims from different ethnic groups. Paying tribute to all the victims shows and proves that all the victims are relevant and will not be forgotten. She concluded by saying that it is just as important to try to describe the complexity in online spaces in order to avoid the critique of being biased.

Sofija Todorović, Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, Serbia shared her thoughts and insights about ethical challenges while using new technologies to cover the issues related to transitional justice and wars of the 1990s. She also detailed her insights about the examples of positive impact on the youth made through communication via social media.

Todorović emphasised that the organisation she is coming from, Youth Initiative for Human Rights from Serbia, is putting a lot of effort, creativity, and time into developing content suitable for social media to reach the wider public. In order to disseminate the content in a way that is suitable for the wider audience, it has to be short and simple. Of course, complex material cannot be easily transformed into short posts appropriate for social media, but what can be

done is to combine different activities, such as street actions, together with social media coverage.

To explain this more broadly, Todorović stressed the relevance of combining past events with the present to share the wanted message more effectively. For example, when commemorating Štrpci war crime victims, YIHR's activists have put leaflets on train seats. In a storytelling form, leaflets contained information about the crime on the train seats that was committed against civilians driving in a train from Belgrade to Bar. By putting the leaflets in the train, YIHR wanted to raise empathy towards victims and try to engage people to stand in solidarity with the victims by explaining to them that that could have happened to them; in 1993, while driving in the train, passengers, civilians, were pulled out of the train and killed just because of their ethnicity. The content presented on social media was a short video covering this activist commemorative action. To conclude, Todorović underlined that when presenting certain events on social media, the content must be engaging, but at the same time it must respect the dignity of the victims. This takes time, a creative team and adequate funding.

Concerning the impact on a wider audience, YIHR is trying to be accurate and tries to influence the change of the dominant paradigm in society in a way that shifts this militaristic, monoethnic narrative into a more inclusive, peaceful one. YIHR does it by, among other things, providing mentorship for young researchers to anal-

yse ICTY verdicts, creating a platform for debates, and by including the youth with different, even completely opposing standpoints about the past events and role of Serbia in the 1990s, Todorović shared.

Todorović pointed out that it is very important to understand social media policies in terms of algorithms and how to approach hate speech in online spaces, which is often a reaction on social media posts that are not in line with the dominant narrative about the role of Serbia during the 1990s wars.

If you're in Serbia, and you type "the truth about Srebrenica" in the Google search bar and click enter, the first twenty searches you get, that are very visible, will be very obscure results, like denial websites. However, when you do the same search in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo you will get a completely different result. These are the conclusions that need to be taken into account. We have to be creative to reach the audience with the content we want to disseminate, Todorović highlighted.

Todorović furthered the discussion, explaining that it is important to acknowledge that human rights in virtual spaces are not under the regulation of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, but depend on the individuals and entrepreneurs who own particular social media channels' interpretation of what is or isn't freedom of speech.

One of the very serious consequences related to artificial intelligence

(AI) is that "we will stay trapped in our own knowledge and preferences, that we will not be able to be exposed to something different, to a different perspective or anything, because the paths of that logic will constantly lead us to where our online preferences and we will not be able to get out of that.", Todorović pointed out.

Todorović concluded by pointing out the relevance of extending alliances with partners, the youth and journalists who are not necessarily well equipped with the knowledge in the field of transitional justice but share the values and are eager to positively contribute and are willing to advance their knowledge in the field of dealing with the past.

Mirza Avdić, Project Manager at the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ), Bosnia and Herzegovina, shared his thoughts and opinions about journalism in the online sphere, the challenges in working in online media, the role of artificial intelligence, and the challenges it could cause in dealing with past processes.

In the beginning, Avdić shared a few pieces of information about the Center for Investigative Journalism, which is a non-governmental media agency based in Sarajevo working in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Center for Investigative Journalism is at the same time a media outlet and a civil society organisation.

Regarding online hate speech, Avdić noted the importance of understanding that online media can be used

as a weapon to fuel hatred among young people specifically. As part of the project Reporting Diversity Network, CIJ has detected more than ninety hate speech narratives in online media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main actors in those narratives were political leaders, key decision-makers, and influencers. The basis for hate speech was ethnicity and gender, as well as migrants, Avdić underlined.

Since there is no legal framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina to regulate and punish hate speech in the online sphere, the only measure accessible is to monitor the trends in the online world.

Another important obstacle online media is challenged by is the inadequate fact-checking capacity. One of the strengths investigative journalism has over online media is to provide fact-checked non biased information to a wider audience.

Avdić emphasised that the hate speech narratives are the consequence of a lack of media literacy among the youth. Moreover, Avdić commented that despite the growth of tools such ChatGPT and other AI, the primary problem is still the hate speech on preexisting social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok). These platforms have only 5% of the total amount of hate speech comments erased. On the other hand, X administrators delete, block, and erase 1,000,000 X accounts per day, every day because of hate speech.

Discussion's key insights

Emphasis during the discussion was put on describing the online environment to point out that in the digital area, CSOs are not only 'competing' with far-right organisations, but are 'competing' with big budgets and corporations. On the other hand, strategies for opposing nationalist rhetorics and politics have taken online spaces over. Participants noted that counter-narratives that entail exclusively PR strategies to oppose the dominant narratives using the online space are insufficient.

The challenging aspect when merging dealing with past processes with new technologies is how to bridge the gap between offline expertise and online spaces.

It was underlined that CSO representatives dealing with issues of the past from the Western Balkans should be included in debates on how to regulate freedom of speech in an online space. Moreover, there is a need to harmonise regulations between the internal ruling of certain social media networks and a particular country's legal framework on hate speech and genocide and war crimes denial. It was recommended to regularly evaluate the implementation of communication strategies on social media when it comes to presenting the data and court established facts about the war crimes.

Each CSO dedicated to the issues of dealing with the past doesn't have to be necessarily involved in disseminating information and managing social media content. It is recommended

that organisations engaged in collecting data and research collaborate with an organisation more engaged and better equipped with knowledge and capacity for online content dissemination.

It was recommended to utilise social media in approaching the youth. Social media platforms can also serve to educate a wider audience in the field of transnational justice.

Some pressing issues not closely related to the issue of new technologies and dealing with past processes during concluding remarks were stressed as well. Besides the accountability of the institutions, there is a huge problem with public institutions' transparency, that is, with access to information, participants underlined. A very limited number of verdicts and indictments for war crime cases is accessible online.

ACCOMPLISHING PREVENTION: KEY INSIGHTS AND CGMAP'S AREAS OF ACTION

Closed meeting' key insights:

During the closed meeting, participants discussed the content and operational aspects of the future of CGMAP's work on the prevention agenda.³ Unger and Šarić moderated the discussion. The most relevant remarks discussion participant made are as follows:

One of CGMAP's goals which was highlighted was the need to foster regional cooperation and coordination on the issues of prevention in terms of higher efficiency, and impactful advocacy on a national, regional, and international level (the EU, the UN) as well as mutual support.

³ During the closed meeting session, Kate Ferguson presented the work of Protection approaches which is based in London, United Kingdom and has discussed with participants how to make the practice of prevention more inclusive.

To utilise CGMAP members' broad knowledge, expertise, and experience in contribution to transitional justice in the Western Balkans to create new ideas and approaches on both bilateral and regional levels for accomplishing visible and relevant results in the field of responsible dealing with the past.

In order not to repeat the same mistakes again, experience of the CSOs which have already been affiliated or involved in cooperation with other CSOs from the region should be used as lessons learned on what the challenges for the cross CSOs cooperation in the field of dealing with the process are.

To find successful ways on how to make CGMAPs work purposefully by also recognising available human and financial resources CSOs have at their disposal, and to work both autonomously and through the Coalition.

To acknowledge that the Coalition's goal is to create and implement a common agenda on prevention which (the agenda) is stricter than a vision, but not as binding as a strategy.

Not to underestimate the political context in addressing the needs and requirements of each Western Balkan country in terms of dealing with the past. Take into account how to make impactful CGMAP members and their mutual collaboration work on a national level, besides on the regional level.

Improve the communication within the Coalition to be accurate and informative by both making the Coalition inclusive and encouraging for other CSOs working in the field to join in, with special emphasis on smaller, grassroots, locally based organisations, as well as by providing reports, meetings (online and offline) and other relevant channels for sharing information.

To understand how to gain transitional justice, and correspondingly how to efficiently advocate for the implementation of particular mechanisms, it is important to be conscious of the current political context and details. Therefore, in order to map the agendas' topics and themes, the Coalition is going to be concentrated on firstly framing the context, and then the themes.

The power of collective civil society of those who are the most proximate to the challenges has a stronger potential to influence the international community in terms of political pressure and fundraising, than an individual CSO has.

Since the Coalition has a prevention goal, it would be necessary to establish an urgent communication protocol in order to be able to get in touch and (re)act fast.

Additionally, the Coalition should take into consideration joining already existing civil society networks committed to prevention on a global level.

Explore the possibilities of creating greater public and international attention on the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica that will be commemorated next year, in 2025. This coincides with the 80th anniversary commemoration of the liberation of the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz. Utilise attention of international community on the year which marks two round anniversaries of genocide victims on European soil. Assess the possibility of collaborating with other CSOs working in the field of prevention from other parts of Europe and world, for example the Auschwitz Institute for Prevention of Genocide and Atrocities.

The EU accession process doesn't have a preventive lens, which is very relevant for countries in the accession process, and the Coalition should fill that gap by making it more visible and relevant. Accordingly, the Coalition should fight for participation, for an active role in raising political awareness of decision makers on the European and global level.

Utilise the ten-year membership of Croatia in the European Union to push the prevention agenda to the European Commission and keep insisting not to drop Croatia from the Western Balkans frame, since Croatia is an inevitable actor in building and achieving reconciliation and regional cooperation in the transitional justice processes.

Engage in a more proactive push towards the international community and also international organisations, the EU, the UN, the Council of Eu-

rope, the Human Rights Council, but also in "activating" embassies in WB countries to raise the alarm to the highest level about the imminent risks of new potential conflicts both in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo.

Take into account "activism fatigue" and the fact that work in dealing with the recent past requires a high level of focus and resistance to external factors that are non-supportive and are strongly opposing responsible and honest dealing with the past processes. Utilise the Coalition as a safety net for human rights defenders and CSOs working in the field by nurturing solidarity and mutual support.

Plan what the strategic places where CGMAP would like this agenda to land are, to change a little bit of this discourse of the international community as well.

Coalitions' work could benefit if it operates through working groups formed based on their particular expertise (education, direct work with victim and victim organisations, psychosocial support, research, and archives, etc.).

Share a list of current (short-term) and future (middle-term) planned goals and activities in the field of dealing with the past among CGMAP's members to alleviate bilateral and regional cooperation on concrete achievements.

Define CGMAP's ethical standards and protocols for newcomers.

CGMAP's areas of action: three clusters for future CGMAP's work on the prevention agenda

Advocacy: The Coalition should focus on advocating, campaigning, and influencing policymakers at national, regional, and international levels to prioritise prevention efforts related to genocide and mass atrocities in the Western Balkans during the 1900s. CGMAP activities should entail activities such as advocating for policy changes, raising awareness, and mobilising support for preventive measures.

Protection and Communication: The Coalition should focus on ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals actively engaged in the prevention agenda, including human rights defenders and activists. It should focus also on creating an inclusive environment that welcomes newcomers to join the Coalition's efforts. The Coalition should facilitate effective communication and collaboration among its members as well as ensure that communication is accurate, timely, and transparent, providing continuous updates on advocacy goals, emerging topics, and relevant activities. Additionally, the Coalition should establish communication protocols to enable swift responses and effective coordination during critical situations.

Platform for sharing and increasing knowledge: The Coalition should provide a collaborative platform where members can exchange ideas, activity plans, share best practices, and build collective knowledge to enhance prevention efforts. The Coalition should be involved in organising workshops, conferences, and online/offline forums for knowledge sharing, as well as to facilitate research and documentation initiatives related to dealing with past processes and transitional justice mechanisms in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A COMMON AGENDA FOR PREVENTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Based on the insights shared during the presentations, discussions and the closed meeting, it is evident that the prevention agenda in the Western Balkans requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders. These stakeholders should include civil society organisations, governmental institutions, the media, academia, and international bodies and organisations.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The main conclusions of the panel discussions and the closed meeting can be summarised into the six most pressing issues for fostering and enabling prevention of genocide and mass atrocities in the Western Balkans:

Embrace a victim-centred approach - Recognize the needs of civilian war victims and involve victims and victim representation organisations in developing strategies for dealing with the past. Nurture victim protection before, during, and after war crime trials in addition to developing effective reparative strategies.

Adopt a holistic approach to dealing with the past - Devise and implement policies aimed at sincere and consistent recognition of peace as the foremost societal value. Besides legal processes involving trials for war crimes and material reparations, acknowledge the significance of non-legal processes in confronting the past, specifically symbolic reparations (e.g. public acknowledgment of the committed war crimes, public apologies, inclusive commemorations, memorials, museums), and ensure non-recurrence, including youth education about the 1990s based on legally established facts.

Mobilise international community support with a special focus on the European Union - Integrate the prevention agenda into EU accession processes. Utilise the pre-accession period to stress the relevance of a holistic approach in dealing with past processes. Acknowledge Euro-sceptic trends in Western Balkan countries and inform the broader public about the benefits of EU integration. Influence the broader understanding of EU integrations as an alliance established on striving to maintain peace.

Foster regional cooperation among CSOs - Create platforms that enable opportunities to exchange knowledge, experience and expertise among CSOs operating on the national level, grassroots initiatives and organisations, victims' organisations, and missing persons' organisations. Promote cooperation between CSOs working in the field of dealing with the past with CSOs of other backgrounds (youth-led, human rights oriented).

Promote an interdisciplinary approach - Foster critical and analytical assessment of the roots of nationalist ideologies that recognises contribution of various actors, the media, religious, cultural, and academic experts and institutions, in understanding the rise of nationalism in the 1990s and today.

Establish and strengthen early warning systems that incorporate historical analysis and involve a wide range of stakeholders to identify and address potential genocide and related crimes early on. These mechanisms should include analysing conflict roots and histories of enmity and engaging diverse actors in the process, including the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect as well as other international, regional, and local partners.

Acknowledge specificities of countries - Approach the adoption of the prevention agenda as a regional goal, including specific

nuances and challenges of each Western Balkans' country. Especially focusing on the issues of full international recognition, EU negotiations and membership, the organisational differences in governments, administrative regulation, legal frameworks, educational policies, bilateral relations between countries and other specifications of particular Western Balkans countries.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

More narrowly, a common agenda for prevention in the Western Balkans should include decreasing denial and revisionism, engaging grassroots perspective, focusing on the victims and reparations, enabling psychosocial support, education and healing (from) the past as well as CSOs adapting to the media and new technologies while working in the field of dealing with the past.

How to contribute to prevention by tackling increased denial and revisionism:

Strengthening legislation and accountability: Enact or strengthen laws that criminalise denial and revisionism of genocide and mass atrocities. Ensure the independence and effectiveness of judicial institutions to hold perpetrators of revisionism and denial accountable.

Monitor and document human rights violations: Strengthen monitoring and documentation

efforts to ensure accountability for human rights violations, denial and revisionism to prevent future atrocities. Collect and preserve evidence of past abuses and atrocities and hold perpetrators accountable through legal and advocacy channels.

Advancing comprehensive education and awareness: Developing comprehensive educational programs that accurately teach the history of the 1990s in schools and universities about the wars in the Western Balkans and its respective countries.

Promote community engagement and dialogue: Foster opening inclusive spaces, centres or museums which will provide information about the established facts before international and domestic courts about the war crimes committed during the 1990s in a way that is understandable to a wider audience without prior knowledge about transitional justice and dealing with the past processes. Provided content should include information both about the victims and the perpetrators, but also about how the key to non-recurrence and prevention is to responsibly deal with the past.

Promoting media integrity and ethical reporting: Encourage responsible and ethical journalism that accurately portrays the historical context of past atrocities and challenges denialist narratives. Provide training and

resources for journalists to sensitively report on issues related to genocide and mass atrocities. Monitor and combat misinformation and hate speech propagated by media outlets that promote denial and revisionism.

Enhancing international cooperation: Foster cooperation among Western Balkan countries and international organisations to collectively address denial and revisionism. Engage neighbouring countries and international partners to support efforts in combating denial and revisionism, recognising that denial often transcends national borders. Utilise diplomatic channels to advocate for the recognition of past atrocities and the importance of solidarity in countering denialist narratives at the global level.

Utilise the enlargement of the European Union: Require that conditionality discussions and decisions include concrete recognition of the Prevention Agenda. Put higher effort into recognition of the European Union as a peace project encompassed with a set of values. Organise workshops and public discussions to make European Union institutions approachable to a wider audience in the Western Balkans.

Acknowledge the underlying foundations of nationalism in the Western Balkans: Encourage critical analysis of cultural, religious and intellectual narratives that created nationalistic hysteria prior

to the 1990s and are perpetuating historical denialism and revisionism in the present. Civil society organisations need to collaborate with academia to promote research that exposes historical distortions and challenges nationalist ideologies.

Empowering CSO engagement: Provide support for civil society organisations working to combat denial and revisionism through advocacy, research, and grassroots initiatives. Amplify the voices and experiences of survivors, victim's families, and marginalised groups in efforts to address denial and revisionism. Encourage civil society to utilise advocacy tools such as the policy paper "Combating Holocaust and Genocide Denial" published by the Office of the UN Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention.

How to contribute prevention from the grassroots perspective: having the victims and reparations in focus

Promote a victim-centred approach: Prioritise the needs and voices of victims in reparations policies and initiatives, ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. Produce case studies to underline mistakes and omissions in the current reparation policies in order to advance advocacy for the new reparation policies.

Ensure access to justice: Advocate for the implementation of

international standards in prosecuting conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and ensure fair reparation systems that acknowledge the suffering of victims.

Enhance regional cooperation and strengthen CSO's engagement: Revitalise regional cooperation between diverse civil society organisations to facilitate dialogue, information exchange, and joint advocacy efforts across the Western Balkans. Diversity of CSOs included into advocating holistic reparation policies can make a stronger impact. CSOs working in the field of advocacy for reparations require capacity building, they have to influence awareness raising and the mobilisation of citizens to oppose harmful policies and decisions.

Support international engagement: Seek concrete political articulation and support from the international community to push national and local decision-makers towards implementing victim-centred reparations policies effectively.

Facilitate inclusive memorialisation: Encourage the creation of inclusive memorialisation initiatives that honour victims from all ethnic groups. Provide accurate historical narratives based on facts to promote empathy and mutual understanding.

Support trauma-informed approaches: Promote trauma-informed leadership practices

within civil society organisations and communities to create safe and supportive environments for victims. Prioritise empathy, trust-building, and healing-centred approaches that recognise long-term impacts of trauma and prioritise survivors' well-being.

How psychosocial support, education, and healing (from) the past contribute to prevention

Holistic approach to healing

trauma: Organisations such as Vive Žene Tuzla have demonstrated the importance of addressing trauma on both individual and societal levels. By providing psychosocial support and promoting dialogue, contribution to reconciliation and resilience-building within communities will be improved.

Youth engagement and education:

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights has underscored the significance of empowering the youth to critically engage with historical narratives and participate in transitional justice processes. Investing in youth education and advocacy efforts fosters a culture of inclusivity and accountability, which is essential for long-term prevention of atrocities. Youth education based on facts about wars opposes the trans-generational transmission of both trauma and narratives about war.

Artistic expression and cultural initiatives:

Organisations

like Heartefact Serbia utilise art and culture as powerful tools for truth-telling and reconciliation. By amplifying diverse voices and promoting dialogue, artistic endeavours contribute to challenging dominant narratives and to fostering empathy across (smaller) communities.

Interdisciplinary collaboration and international partnerships:

PCRC emphasised the importance of collaboration between civil society, academia, the media, artists and international partners. By leveraging expertise and resources from diverse sectors, comprehensive approaches to peacebuilding and prevention can be developed and implemented effectively.

Community empowerment and positive narratives/stories:

Highlighting stories of resilience and acts of solidarity from the past can inspire, hope, and promote social cohesion. By elevating positive narratives alongside efforts to address historical injustice, communities can build a shared vision for a more peaceful and inclusive future.

How to contribute to the prevention of mass atrocities through civil society & media and dealing with the past in the age of new technologies

Leverage digital archives: Organisations like Documenta - Center

for Dealing with the Past and the Humanitarian Law Center have accumulated substantial archives documenting historical events and/or personal narratives. These archives, including video records and trial documentation, represent valuable resources for understanding the past and for fostering reconciliation. By digitalising and strategically disseminating this content on social media platforms, a wider audience could be engaged and public awareness could be raised about the complexities of the region's past.

Ensure ethical content creation:

Ethical considerations, such as obtaining consent from survivors and victims' families, are paramount when repurposing archival material for social media. While digital platforms offer opportunities for storytelling and "online commemorations", it is essential to uphold the dignity and privacy of those involved. Transparent protocols for obtaining consent and contextualising content should be established to mitigate potential harm and to ensure respectful representation.

Localise and engage: Recognising diverse audiences and narratives within the Western Balkans, efforts should focus on localising content to specific communities and regions. By organising study visits, walks, and other physical events supplemented by online content, it is possible to bridge the gap between offline and online engagement. This approach

acknowledges the differing preferences and the accessibility of audiences while fostering meaningful dialogue and reflection.

Implement counter-narrative

strategies: Addressing the prevalence of hate speech and misinformation online requires proactive counter-narrative strategies that have been learned from the mistakes previously made. Civil society organisations and media outlets must collaborate to challenge divisive narratives as well as to promote inclusive, fact-based discourse. By amplifying positive stories, highlighting diverse perspectives, and by fostering media literacy, communities could be empowered to critically engage with digital content and resist harmful ideologies. However, counter narratives cannot easily replace dominant narratives, on the contrary, they have to be well thought out and it must be taken into consideration that the prevention agenda requires political contribution.

Advocate for regulatory frameworks and collaboration:

Protecting human rights in the digital space is important for combating online hate speech and ensuring accountability, which requires cooperation and advocacy for regulatory frameworks.

ANNEX I

Post Conflict Research Center awarded Dunja Mijatović, Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Association 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves' as Ordinary Heroes for 2024. Munira Subašić, President of the Association 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves' greeted the meeting and the conference. Subašić emphasised the relevance of working on the issues of peace and dealing with the past. She continued by saying that "differences between people are good, but divisions are not, and if you want to do any divisions, divide people into good and bad people, and people who do something good and people who don't do anything."

Subašić informed the participants that next year, 30 years since the genocide in Bosnia and Srebrenica was committed will be marked. This is why the 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves', together with the Srebrenica Memorial Center and Post-conflict Research Center, are working quite a lot on marking next year's anniversary. Subašić kindly asked all of the participants to help by amplifying messages and by marking the genocide's anniversary every year, and not just next year's anniversary.

"And to also show the world, but especially people from the Balkans as well, that this genocide was evil and how we can learn from it to not repeat it, at least in the Balkans, even though unfortunately, in the rest of the world, we keep seeing it repeated, first in Ukraine, and now in Pal-

estine, and it is a vicious cycle that, unfortunately, does keep repeating." - Subašić highlighted

Subašić invited the participants to engage in finding ways to work together and "present more of this good in the world, because you, the participants, are the good in this world."

Kada Hotić, Vice-President of the Association 'Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves' shared that in the suffering and fight, she has met people from all around the world who were and still are willing to help, at least to help victims reach a certain level of recognition in this fight to get judicial verdicts for genocide, and try to help them carry this burden a bit more easily.

Hotić noted that it took a lot out of them to create the Srebrenica Memorial Center and to ensure that they now have a space where they can all come and remember the people who were taken from us and bury their bones in this one place where they were taken away.

"We had many roadblocks on the way to build the Srebrenica Memorial Center, especially from the Republika Srpska Government, local and national, but we did again have a lot of support from the international community, High Representatives and such, in supporting our efforts to build this", Hotić emphasised.

"Our hope for the future is that in some time we will create a pillar of honour and a pillar of shame to honour all the people that did help us in

this fight, a very long fight, but also to call out and shame everybody that was standing in our way, preventing us from doing our work,” Hotić pointed out.

Hotić concluded by thanking all present participants, especially the young ones for being in these tough topics. “These topics can be very hard and difficult to deal with, and your youthfulness and your fresh energy help us a lot in this cumbersome road to pursue justice and human dignity, and nobody is free until everybody is free,” Hotić explained.

Subašić and Hotić spoke at the opening of the Memento exhibition created by the PCRC in cooperation with the Srebrenica Memorial Center, which opened on the first day of the conference, when the association “The Mothers of the Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves” was presented with an award.

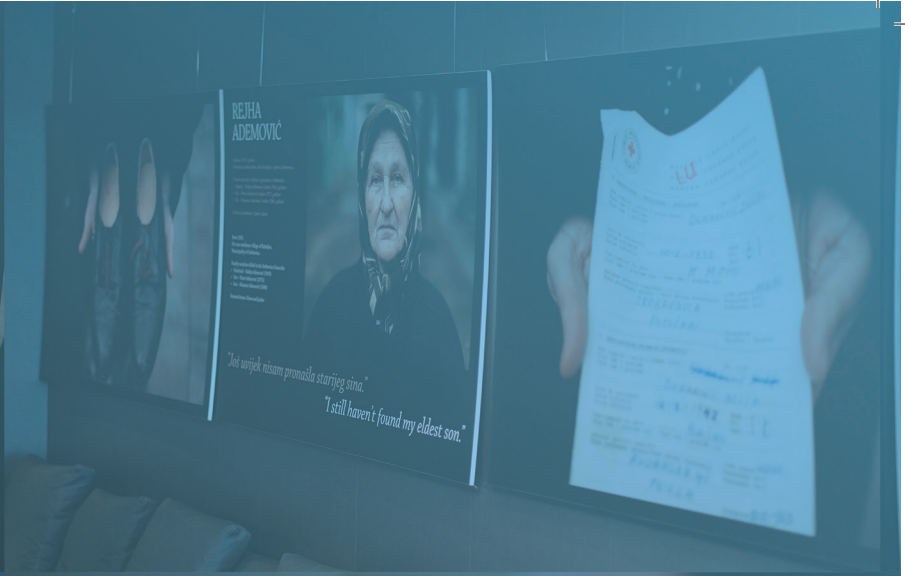


PHOTO GALLERY



The Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC)

Centar za postkonfliktna istraživanja (CPI)

Dedicated to Restoring a Culture of Peace in the Western Balkans
through Peace Education, Creative Multimedia, Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Research

Posvećeni obnovi kulture mira na Zapadnom Balkanu

