



Human Rights Education for Active  
Citizenship in the Western Balkans

**Human Rights School for Youth,  
Kovacica, March 2014  
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia**

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia held a Human Rights School for Youth between March 28 and April 2, 2014 in Kovacica.

Twenty secondary school students, who were chosen out of 160 applicants, came to Kovacica from secondary schools in Sremski Karlovci, Sopot, Nis, Krusevac, Valjevo, Bor, Kikinda, Lebane, Novi Sad, Mokrin and Belgrade. Aim of the School is to introduce the youth to the theory of human rights and its ideas, principles of democracy, tolerance, solidarity, non-violent communication and to develop and improve participants' critical thinking skills. We want to encourage and empower young people (between the ages of 15 and 19) for the respect of human rights and integration of human rights practices in their everyday life.

On the first day of the basic level of School, Pavel Domonji, Chief of Staff of the Provincial Ombudsman, lectured about the human rights concept and its development, human rights and democracy, multiculturalism and freedom of the individual. On the second day of School psychologist Tamara Tomasevic talked about language as the means of (mis)understanding between people and stereotypes and prejudices in the service of discrimination. Topic of the third day of School was mapping of the position of women and LGBT community in contemporary Serbia and the lecturer was Jelena Visnjic of BeFem, the Feminist Festival of Culture and Action. Afterwards, David and Aleksandar of the Helsinki Committee's Youth Group in Belgrade and Anel and Sabahudin of Youth Group in Novi Pazar presented the work of their groups and talked about youth activism in general. Snezana Congradin, a journalist in the daily newspaper Danas, spoke during the fourth day of the school about dealing with the past and the role and responsibility of the media.

On the last day of the School, sociologist of religion Srdjan Barisic gave a lecture on secularism in Serbia and civil/moral disobedience and courage.

This is an open-concept and interactive teaching, which provided the students with theoretical lectures as well as with other teaching methods such as various workshops, watching films and documentaries, and forum theater which was held every day.

One of the participants, Ivan Slavkovic from Sopot, wrote his impressions about the School: *„Human Rights School that I attended was a wonderful experience which provided students and coordinators with the opportunity to develop as young persons in our own ways, through active interaction. Compared to the formal school system, which is sometimes monotonous and limiting, Human Rights School allowed us to synthesize critical thinking and to support it with basic terminology in the human rights field as well as with communication skills that we developed in a spontaneous and fun way during the workshops. We were thus equipped with a specific tool that will enable us to increase the number of active citizens, which will have long-term positive effects on the community that is significantly wider than our everyday encounters. Lectures were dynamic and they covered a wide spectrum of current issues, while the lecturers dealt with very important problems in an interdisciplinary way. These lectures opened up other questions and motivated the students to be more active and we even discussed many of these topics with each other until late at night. I advise those persons who want to broaden their horizons and learn something about human rights and tolerance, while making good friends, to apply for this school and have their own story to tell.“*

Impressions of Stefan Jeremic from Belgrade: *„I learned about many important and useful topics related to the field of human rights and I also expanded my existing knowledge at the Human Rights School. I believe that connections that I made and persons whom I met during this seminar will assist me in improving everyday lives of people in Serbia, their interpersonal relations and general attitude. It is very important for the youth to be aware of the situation in their surroundings already when they are secondary school students so that they can focus on finding adequate ways to resolve potential problems of the contemporary society. I recommend Human Rights School to all young persons who are motivated for responsible engagement in all spheres of social life and who want to learn about human rights and meet numerous persons with similar interests. Remember, the*

*path of life that you take consists of efforts that you put into it. Think today what you can do for the people in your surroundings and thus for yourself as well.”*

So far, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia organized 50 local Human Rights Schools with more than 1500 participants. Also, 25 Regional schools were organized in cooperation with partners from region.

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