



Helsinki odbor za ljudska
prava u Srbiji



Human Rights Education for Active
Citizenship in the Western Balkans

**Regional Conference: “Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the
Western Balkans – Challenges and Opportunities”
January 21-22, 2014**

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and its partner organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo organized the regional conference “Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans – Challenges and Opportunities” on 21st and 22nd January 2014. The conference made a part of the regional program “Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans” jointly implemented by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Center for Civic Education from Montenegro, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Community Building Mitrovica - Kosovo, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska and Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The deputy head of Mission of the Norwegian Embassy in Belgrade, Mr. Roger Jorgensen, welcomed the participants saying, among other things, that more than 15,000 people have taken part in this program over the past 13 years – young people, CSO representatives, high school professors and others. Chairwomen of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Ms. Sonja Biserko, said that no other program has ever rethought the education system in such a strategic manner as this one. She also pointed out that education is of crucial importance for a change in the value system. The representative of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Ms. Mina Skouen, said that the youth in region have been supported by the Norwegian Government since 1999 in their human rights activism.

The two-day conference gathered the most active civil society actors, teachers and practitioners from the region that work on civic education, as well as professionals from the formal education sector, including key decision-makers. The first panel was titled “*Education for human rights in the Western Balkans – knowledge and skills for democratic citizenship – overview of current state in the formal education systems*” and the panelists were **Nihad Smajic**, professor at the High School in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, **Vidosava Kascelan** of the Bureau for Educational Services, Montenegro, and **Shqipe Gashi** of the Ministry of Education, Kosovo. Panelists of the second panel named “*Civil society and education for human rights – methods, achievements, challenges and opportunities*” were **Mirela Rebronja** of the Center for Civic Education, Montenegro, **Sead Djulic** of the Mostar Center for Drama Education, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **Petrit Tahiri** of the Kosovo Education Center. Panelists of the third panel “*Education for human rights as an instrument for establishing peace and reconciliation in the Region – examples and lessons learnt*” were **Smiljana Vovna** of “Mesa Selimovic” High School from Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **Demir Mekic**, human rights activist and workshop moderator from Serbia. The fourth panel was held under the title “*Formal, non-formal and informal education for human rights and active citizenship– possible models of integration and cooperation*” and panelists were **Samojko Cvijanovic**, professor at the High School in Doboj, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **Snjezana Boskovic** of the Bureau for educational services, Montenegro.

Ms. **Snezana Vukovic**, head of Department for Strategy and Development of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Development of the Republic of Serbia, attended the opening session. Unfortunately, representatives of the Ministry of Education did not participate in subsequent work groups and other conference activities. It is of utmost importance to grasp the significance of such regional meetings focused on education and to benefit from the opportunity of regional and cross-sectorial exchanges between formal education systems and civil societies. They also provide the opportunity for developing platforms for future actions and strengthen regional cooperation.

The conference was preceded by a Regional Human Rights School attended by 25 young persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. Participants in the regional school presented their recommendations to the conference, primarily addressing decision-makers. Youth groups also presented their work and years-long activism.

Some of recommendations from other participants, emerging from their joint activities in working groups were:

- Civic education should be a mandatory course in all the schools in the region;
- A regional curriculum should be introduced in all the countries in the region, whereas 60% of the curriculum should be identical for all;
- Methods that encourage critical thinking and combine ex-cathedra and interactive lectures should be developed.

Generally, conference participants concluded that civil society organizations should have a more important role in the implementation of the civic education course. Moreover, it was concluded that human rights, dealing with the past and transitional justice should certainly be a part of this curriculum.

As of 2000, the regional program “Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans” has been supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The purpose of the program is to contribute to peace, reconciliation and democratic development based on a human rights culture in the Western Balkans. From the very beginning, it has been promoting human rights education and developing educational materials and methods. The program has been focused on informal education in human rights, intercultural understanding and conflict resolution, primarily among the regional youth.

Besides working with the youth and empowering them for active participation in democratization processes of their respective countries, the program has been sharing models of good practice and lessons learnt with educational institutions throughout the region.

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