

REGIONAL POLICY BRIEF

NEW AGE OF RECONCILIATION – GENERATION Z AS THE ENGINE

MAY 2020

This policy Brief is a product of the Erasmus+ funded project “Walking the path of reconciliation-empowering communities for a peaceful society, implemented by BBA and Partners during 2019-2021.



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INTRODUCTION

This document is developed based on findings from 6 desk research reports that mapped good practices and analysed the state of play in reconciliation, education for peace building, as well as hate speech policies in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*¹, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The document is developed in the frame of **Walk ON²** project and it will contribute to the overall intervention that project partners planed in order to support development and increasing the competences of youth workers, teachers, young people and community youth leaders in the Western Balkans, to address and work with reconciliation, countering hate speech and promoting peace building.

Walk ON or “Walking the path of reconciliation- empowering communities for a peaceful society” is a capacity building project financed by European Union under the Erasmus + Programme. The lead organization is Beyond Barriers Association from Albania in cooperation with five other partners from: Bosnia & Herzegovina-Mladi Volonteri, Croatia- LDA Sisak, Kosovo-Lens, North Macedonia-Youth Cultural Center, Serbia-Educational Center Krusevac.

This document is designed in order to be used for the following three purposes:

1. **To serve as an advocacy tool** that will support policy dialog with relevant stakeholders (decision makers, community of practitioners, donors etc.) by explaining the position, role and mandate of the youth sector in the overall reconciliation eco-system, as well as by providing the recommendations for the policy improvement;
2. **To serve as a solution based roadmap** for the youth sector in the reconciliation and hate speech program and policy development;
3. **To serve as an educational/capacity building resource** for the regional community of practitioners, in order to support synergy actions and networking on these topics at the regional level.

The audience to which this policy paper is addressed are, the donor community, the EU institutions and other international organizations, other actors that are able to support alternative bottom up approach, while suggesting to WB and Croatian governments the traditional top-down approach to reconciliation that should be led by political elites in the region.

¹ *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

² Original project title: “Walking the path of reconciliation- empowering communities for a peaceful society”

RECONCILIATION AND HATE SPEECH IN OUR CONTEXT

The concept of reconciliation is not a self-evident one nor does it follow the same pattern in all post-conflict societies. Moreover, it is accepted that in principle the process of reconciliation “involves mutual recognition of a common violent past and the transformation of a harmful relationship and behaviour to promote a shared future towards sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997; Bloomfield, 2003).”³ As a process that occurs in the aftermath of massive human rights violations and destruction, reconciliation is connected to dealing with the violent past while establishing a future that will counter violence and extremism. Its fundamental role in post-conflict societies consists of the fact that it enables a better understanding of the violence that has occurred in the past but also to take relevant initiatives for tangible social, political and economic changes to restore society and ensure lasting peace⁴. Hate speech can generate harmful effects in various aspects. It has the potential of destabilizing social peace, shape attitudes and control behaviours that might be violent and dangerous ⁵ (Müller & Schwarz, 2018), leading in severe hate crimes such as genocide⁶ (Maravilla, 2008).

Reconciliation in the context of Western Balkans and Croatia is a very complex and multidimensional process of establishing long term stability and peace in the region because in order to achieve the change we have to deal with the reconciliation at micro community level, local, national and cross-border or regional level, what also differs from country to country.

Beside this multidimensional aspect, in regional context we have to be aware also that in some countries reconciliation is happening between minority ethnic groups and majority ethnic population while in others, the equal state constitutive are coming from different ethnicities and none of them is perceived as a minority group at the state level (BIH).

We also have to differentiate the process of reconciliation happening in the post-conflict communities after the armed conflict (ex-Yugoslavian countries) and among the communities which are post-conflict, but were not involved in armed conflict.

Hate speech in the context of this policy brief is understood and analysed as part of the reconciliation and human right policies as developed by the Council of Europe⁷. This policy brief analyses and focuses more on the online hate speech, as the new rising phenomena in the Europe.

³ Ahmetaj, N, Kabashi-Ramaj.B, Jaquot.M, Buzhala.Y, Hoxha.A, (2017),“Deconstructing Reconciliation in Kosovo”, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication

⁴ Status quo on reconciliation and no hate speech in Kosovo

⁵ Müller, K., & Schwarz, C. (2018). Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 3082972). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network.

⁶ Maravilla, C. S. (2008). Hate Speech as a War Crime: Public and Direct Incitement to Genocide in International Law.

⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign>

RECONCILIATION AND PREVENTION OF HATE SPEECH – STORY FROM THE PRACTICE AND HOW URGENT IS THE SITUATION

In policy design, reconciliation is mostly seen through two policy dimensions: 1) the vertical one that gives a clear framework for the reconciliation process with instruments and measurable goals and 2) the horizontal policy that has to be incorporated in all other relevant policies that can contribute to the reconciliation (education, housing policy, discrimination, labour policy etc.).

In order to assess the achievements in reconciliation process, countering the hate speech, then measure the level of policy implementation and role of relevant stakeholders, we will use the analyses and findings from desk researches developed in the frame of WALK ON project in WB and Croatia.

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN RECONCILIATION PROCESS

The establishment of the Berlin Process provided a new momentum for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. In particular, it contributed to bringing back the attention to the role and importance of achieving reconciliation and inter-societal dialogue in the region. The declaration of the first high level summit in Berlin mentioned clearly that the collective endeavours are expected to generate additional real progress in the region as well as achieve reconciliation within and between the local societies⁸. It also inspired intergovernmental cooperation through entities set up during its course: the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Western Balkans Chambers Investment Forum (WBCIF) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF). Civil society organizations from the Western Balkans region represent an important part of this process. CSOs have quickly understood the importance of the initiative and created the Civil Society Forum – a platform that exists since 2015 for monitoring the progress of the initiatives and feed the process with the policy proposals.

MAIN FINDING

International community, mostly EU is aware of the reconciliation status quo in WB6 and through its own policies and initiatives set the reconciliation and peace building agenda as a one of top policy priority.

All documents from international community highlighted role of young people as a crucial for the reconciliation process in the Balkan;

Croatia is not part of many regional programs which are dealing with the reconciliation in the region.

⁸ Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 28 August 2014, <https://bit.ly/2F3LlPw>

Beside the Berlin process, in 2017 the strategy “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans” was introduced by the European Commission. This strategy confirmed the European perspective of the WB and investment in a “stable, strong and united Europe based on common values.” It is known as a Western Balkan strategy that includes 6 Flagship Initiatives while one of them is– support to reconciliation and good neighbour relation. Anyhow, both initiatives are recognizing youth and youth organizations as main drivers of establishing peaceful WB6 societies.

GOVERNMENTAL APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION

According to the findings from “Walk On” desk-researches, the governmental approach and commitments in dealing with the past are not so significant on the impact level when it comes to achievement of the ultimate goals of peace building and stability. The nature of these attempts was mainly around institution building and legislation development in the entire Western Balkan countries and Croatia. These normative and legal acts were taken to arrange commitment to the fulfilment and respect of human rights, freedom, and the rule of law and protection of minorities against discrimination. Despite the initiatives and legal framework in place, an all-encompassing strategy was missing on dealing with its past and reconciliation, even though this appears vital to

MAIN FINDING

Reconciliation - *there is widely spread opinion that, especially in ex-Yugoslavian countries reconciliation didn't happened in last 25 years and it is rather seen as a coexistence of groups that had a conflict and declarative will of political elites to work on the reconciliation and long-lasting stability in order to meet criteria's imposed by foreign community (Ademovic 2016, Zagar 2010). This status quo is also visible on the level of policy implementation which is very low in all WB and Croatia.*

Education for peace building and reconciliation – *formal education system in almost all countries shows low commitments of the governments to take systemic approach to reconciliation; education system is considered as the most important infrastructure for reconciliation and peace building.*

Justice matter - *public opinion also shows low trust in the system that should provide justice to the victims.*

society. In terms of legal regulations⁹ all the researched countries have adopted specific constitutions, laws, strategies, and documents (specified in the reports). However, there is a distinct disparity between legal regulations and the implementation of reconciliation policies, especially when starting discussions in the issue of war crimes, which is rounded by political decisions and interests.

Bosnia and Herzegovina have been trying to maintain peace in the first place and establish a civil, legal state. Regardless of the changes done in the last 25 years, the process of reconciliation has not ended yet. Currently, the state is still divided into two entities and district Brčko, which are operating almost completely independent in terms of politics and policies. The entity of Federation of BiH is mostly inhabited with Croats and Bosniaks while Republic of Srpska has Serbs as a majority of the population what in both cases is reflected on elections by having governments which are mostly composed of parties and representatives from majority ethnicity in certain entity. On the other hand, even it is on the higher instance, the state government is manifesting weakness and fragility in the overall coordination of the joint affairs under the BiH state. These political and social divisions, which extend along ethnic and entity lines, have direct implications for the processes of dealing with the recent past in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to recent research on reconciliation, there is wide spread opinion that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in other ex-Yu WB countries reconciliation didn't happened in last 25 years (Ademovic 2016). On the other hand, the process of dealing with the past remains a key step in establishing a stable and enduring peace in the country¹⁰ (Letic, 2015). International Criminal Tribunal in Hague for Former Yugoslavia is closed in 2017. In its 24 years of operation, the ICTY has indicted 161 persons and 90 persons have been convicted. One of the most significant judgments of this court is the verdict for the Srebrenica genocide. This court has sat for more than 10,000 days, heard the testimonies of nearly 5,000 witnesses, 90 persons have been convicted of crimes they have committed, including genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity (Guterres, 2017). However, there are different opinions about work of this court and the general opinion that justice is not completely satisfied what further influences reconciliation process.

Attempts towards reconciliation between the Albanian and Serb communities in Kosovo have been initiated by international actors, at the international level as well as at the national level, ever since the NATO intervention in 1999. The nature of these attempts was mainly focused on institution building and legislation¹¹. Regarding Kosovo, despite the initiatives and legal framework in place, Kosovo does not have an all-encompassing strategy on dealing with its past and reconciliation, even though this appears vital. Moreover, the general efforts designed so far in Kosovo to reach reconciliation have not generated the expected outcomes¹². Available past and

⁹ Divided past joint future (2016). Process of Reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A Qualitative Study

¹⁰ Zašto je važno izučavati tranzicijsku pravdu u procesima formalnog obrazovanja, Aleksandra Letić, 2015.

¹¹ Ahmetaj, N, Kabashi-Ramaj.B, Jaquot.M, Buzhala.Y, Hoxha.A, (2017),“Deconstructing Reconciliation in Kosovo”, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication. p.14

¹² Adamović, M, Gvozdanović.a, Kovačić.M, 2017, Process of Reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A Qualitative Study; Published by: Compex d.o.o, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ), p.103

ongoing research, show that for a long time there was no common understanding of what reconciliation in Kosovo and the Western Balkans is, considering also the lack of official and

unofficial publications that enable the development of a trustworthy regional understanding and strategy.¹³

A low willingness of the decision makers to fully commit to the reconciliation is visible in the educational system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are three different history narratives, “two schools under one roof” phenomena of ethnocentric schools with two educational programs that cohabitate in the same building. The similar situation with ethnocentric education is also present in Kosovo. While in Croatia they try to include these topics as part of the civic education curricula. When considering the initiatives of the government in Croatia directed at youth and educators with a focus on improving the process of reconciliation and hate speech, it remains crucial to respond to the question related to the systematic education which would promote democratic culture and critical thinking, as well as objectively introduce youth to these topics. Despite heated public debate and numerous political promises, education in Croatia does not offer a well-organized civic education. The same situation is also with Serbia, while in North Macedonia the situation is slightly better than in other countries, but it is still not at a satisfactory level.

When it comes to hate speech, there is also a visible influence of the international community and organizations on adoption of the policy measures that should support prevention and countering hate speech online and offline. International and EU institutions are paying increasing attention to the phenomenon of online hate speech and acknowledge this as a growing problem across and beyond Europe. In this regard, the 2015 ECRI¹⁴ report highlights online hate speech as one of the main issues, emphasizing that “hate speech through social media is rapidly increasing and has the potential to reach a much larger audience than extremist print media was able to reach previously”. Moreover, UNESCO has recently focused on this growing issue, mapping and analysing the existing initiatives to combat online hate speech in their comprehensive 2015¹⁵ report “Countering online hate speech”.

CIVIL SOCIETY APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION

MAIN FINDING

The role of civil society is crucial concerning the mass fatalities and human rights violations from the past and the political agenda of the region¹⁶ (Kostovicova, 2013 and Ademovic 2016).

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ ECRI (2015) Annual report on ECRI’s activities covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2014. Available at https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/Annual_Reports/Annual%20report%202014.pdf

¹⁵ UNESCO (2015) Countering online hate speech

¹⁶ Kostovicova, D. (2013). Civil society and reconciliation in the Western Balkans: great expectations? U: Prifti, E. (ed): The European Future of the Western Balkans: Thessaloniki@ 10 (2003-2013).

Bottom up approach in peace and reconciliation that should support societal reconstruction and trust building among communities is mostly on civil society organizations and they are doing important job in this field. The CSOs have a genuine insight into the “situation on the ground” and in the way, the policies are implemented at the local level. They can also access areas and groups which are difficult to

CSOs are providing peace building education to youth what is of the great interest for the peace building process taking into consideration that formal education system is not open for the multiple perspective history education as well as peace building education and development of the critical thinking.

reach and they can also make social change more efficient than the government structures. Organizations that directly work in the local environment have built a trustworthy reputation, assurance and legitimacy by citizens. Such elements contributed to the promotion and success of their project activities. The weaknesses or limitations of CSOs in building reconciliation are related to limited organizational capacities and funding, as well as their focus only on the local level¹⁷.

There are distinguished interventions by the civil society educating youth on reconciliation and post-war interethnic tolerance, as well as those training activists and teachers on how to educate on these topics. Undertaken interventions included various activities organized in different models of education of young activists and students, school presentations to facilitate an open and inclusive discussion, motivating youth to critically think about the dominant national discourse, etc. Researchers welcome interventions on reconciliation which were implemented on a regional level involving discussion and collaboration between youth and educators of different ethnicities. This is even more important taking into consideration the ethnocentric formal education systems in all countries of the region.

RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RECONCILIATION MECHANISM

The need to strengthening minority rights, peace and security both at the national and the regional level became, in particular, apparent at the beginning of the 1990s with the conflicts in the Balkans, involving the persecution of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious minority groups¹⁸. A recent study exploring the promotion of human rights and minority protection in South Eastern Europe concludes that there is low awareness on minority rights, which is highly visible among minority groups rather than non-minority groups (European Union and the Council of Europe, 2015). The data shows that this negative trend is more obvious among young respondents than adults and is reinforced and increased as the education level gets lower. This is a concerning issue to take in consideration, as it is expected that minorities should be more aware of their rights than other people in society, involved in minority protection either as professionals or volunteers.

¹⁷ Divided past joint future (2017). Process of Reconciliation in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A Qualitative Study

¹⁸ EU (2012). Mainstreaming human and minority rights in the eu enlargement with the western Balkans

The main barriers perceived by the respondents are lack of commitment, awareness and interest, as well as lack of funding. The international community and minority are deemed as responsible actors for taking minority protection measures, while civil society, local and regional authorities are seen as actors with less responsibility. Concerning the responsibility of actors for taking minority protection measures, the international community is seen as a saving hand implementing and ensuring that such rights

are protected for minorities. Instead of a responsible actor, it is assumed to be one of the most trustful actors (European Union and the Council of Europe, 2015).

MAIN CONCLUSION

Hate speech - Hate speech in all WB5 and Croatia is regulated by law, but in almost all countries prosecution of the cases and implementation of the law is not satisfactory and laws didn't ensure significant impact on protection of the victims of hate speech in practice according to findings from desk researches design in the frame of Walk ON project.

Albania has a variety of minority groups, some of them persist facing barriers and challenges based on their ethnicity. Problems faced by Roma and Egyptian communities are a priority in the context of the fulfilment of the European Commission recommendations for Albania and remain as five key priorities for opening accession negotiations. One of these five priorities is the protection of human rights (including non-discrimination policies, the Roma community, and the implementation of property rights)¹⁹.

In North Macedonia, the problem of ethnic discrimination is evident, perceptions about members of other ethnic groups are slowly changing in a positive direction, though the formal educational system is not supporting the integration among dominant ethnic communities²⁰. The regular Progress Reports on North Macedonia by the European Commission are pointing the facts about continuing separation along ethnic lines in education. According to the recent "Youth Study of North Macedonia 2018/2019", in the past, a dominant ground for inequality was the social and racial belonging, based on which political mobilization was conducted, however, nowadays it is manifested via the cultural belonging, if we are to include in this notion the racial, ethnic, religious and language social groups²¹.

¹⁹ Ministry of European Integration, National Plan for European Integration, June 2014.

²⁰ Local report of North Macedonia

²¹ Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019, Topuzovska, Laktovich M., Borota Popovska, M., Serafimovska, E. Cekich, A. Starova, N. (2019), Friedrich Ebert Foundation - Skopje, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15266.pdf>

ONLINE HATE SPEECH - IMPACT ON PEACE AND STABILITY

International and EU institutions are paying increasing attention to the phenomenon of online hate speech and acknowledge this as a growing problem across and beyond Europe. As previously mentioned, the 2015 ECRI²² report highlights online hate speech as one of the main phenomena, emphasizing that “hate speech through social media is rapidly increasing and has the potential to reach a much larger audience than extremist print media was able to reach previously”.

Online hate speech is a problem raised by different researches who have done research in the Western Balkans and Croatia. The research conducted in 2019 on hate speech among Croatian youth on the Internet showed that 90% of youth indicated a high level of hate speech present on social media, while 70-89% indicated there is a high level of hate speech on the internet forums, as well as in political gatherings, media, graffiti or banners in public space. 96% of youth witnessed hateful and intolerant comments in the period of 3 months prior to the research. Hateful comments were mostly based on nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical appearance, religion or region²³.

MAIN FINDING

Hate speech in online public space is increasing and beside the citizens it is also present in many online media who are also the main drivers for the further dissemination of the problematic content making it viral.

Civil society organization mostly has watchdog role and do monitoring of the hate speech in online space in order to make a pressure on responsible institutions to act according to law.

Research conducted in 2019 in Serbia about the “Communication Aggression in Serbia 2019” by the Center for Media Professionalization and Media Literacy (CEPROM) showed that eight daily newspapers and the 20 most read portals in the country in one day alone, publish an average of 644 texts containing elements of aggressive communication, hate speech and sensationalism. One of the conclusions of the research stated that the most dangerous consequence of such reporting is the increasing polarization in society and the division into “we” and “them”, which occurs precisely as a consequence of the absence of a culture of dialogue and simultaneous strengthening of extremism of various kinds.

The majority (56 %) of youth in Kosovo access the internet all the time in one form or another²⁴. The amount of information young people are exposed to on daily bases through the internet, is enormously high and the sources of these information are not always traceable. Therefore, they are at a great risk to be exposed to fake news and hate speech. The information that youth absorb

²² ECRI (2015) Annual report on ECRI’s activities covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2014. Available at https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/Annual_Reports/Annual%20report%202014.pdf

²³ Tena Šimonović Einwalter, “Predstavljjanje istraživanja: Govor mržnje među mladima na internetu [Presentation of research results: Hate speech among youth on internet],” Presentation (The Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia, September 12, 2019).

²⁴ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, (2019), Youth Study Kosovo 2018/2019, p.39

shapes their opinion, knowledge and their attitudes, influencing thus their behaviour in the community and society at large.

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in North Macedonia is responsible to manage the platform where people can make reports of hate speech on the social networks/media reports, where on average, 40 cases per month are registered, and many of them are related to hate speech due to ethnic background, as well as to sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2018 the report presented cases related to ethnicity (79 incidents) and political affiliation (31 incidents), which constituted the main grounds on which hate crimes were committed. The trend of committing this kind of hate crime was particularly striking before and during the elections or before some significant political events in the country.

In Albania, the legislation on hate speech, peace, and human rights is in line with international standards, however, their implementation still remains challenging. The danger of hate speech towards minorities when someone is being targeted as a result of joining a group is high and it can lead to severe cases of hate speech. Independent Media Commissions were established in some of the Western Balkan countries, which are independent regulators to ensure media (audio-visual) pluralism as well as to set standards. Despite the provision of Commissions with sufficient regulatory, monitoring and enforcement powers, there are still difficulties addressing the online hate speech problem. In addition to politics and justice, the regulation of hate speech also plays an important role in constructing realities and as such in reconciliation processes and in building democratic values in post-conflict societies. Hate speech regulation is considered to be of high importance, a first step toward an independent press which plays a key role in promoting democratic values of societies. The civil society organizations unquestionably played the strongest role in creating and implementing interventions on hate speech. Different organizations held activities on local or national levels which mostly included education and workshops with youth and youth educators, promotion of existing support services, advocating and promoting the importance of the issue.

GENERATION Z: A NEW AGE FOR RECONCILIATION

According to different international flagship initiatives and policy documents (i.e. Berlin Process, Strategy for WB), both in EU and national levels, which include reconciliation, peace building and antidiscrimination, put youth in focus as the central key players in the new wave of reconciliation. In order to make this achievable we have to take a close look at the insight of who are the youth nowadays in WB and if they are ready to take that responsibility. Another question to be looked at, is if these are the youth who should lead the transformation of the region.

These young people belong to the post-war generations (1995+, but mainly the so called generation Z of year 2000+), and are the most vulnerable group in the region, highly exposed to mass media, used to inflammatory rhetoric, that could easily push them in a potentially new

conflict in the close future. The economic instability and the migrant crisis (Balkan migrant route) are new drivers of the xenophobic rhetoric and rise of the national populism that start with hate against refugees, but also slightly open up the dark boxes of the recent violent conflicts from the past and, transfer hate speech on the neighbours. These tensions keep people in constant fear of the new conflict even if we don't have an open conflict in the region. Thanks to the digital era, youth live in a kind of parallel reality, in which them but also us adults, are not sure anymore what is true, half-true, manipulated information, or what is the lie! If we add to this the fact that we didn't have a structured and supported regional response to dealing with the past, then the confusion but also the vulnerability of this post-war generation, is even bigger.

This danger for the new generation is verified by various research findings and trends among youth in the region. For instance 27% of Albanians from North Macedonia do not have Macedonian friends; while 32% of Macedonians don't have Albanian friends from North Macedonia; There is also a big ethnic distance among Serbs and Albanians at the south of Serbia, while also 70% of Serbs will never marry someone of Albanian nationality (Besic 2017, Ademovic 2016, CESID 2016, Milosavljevic 2011), etc. An interesting social distance and prejudice of youth from the so called ex-Yugoslavian countries related to the Albanians, is also visible. According to recent regional FES research, 29% of youth respondents from the region feel frightened by the war in the region.

In the region, youth living out of capital cities are more likely to be influenced by populist rhetoric. Ethnic distance is bigger in small and remote communities among its community members and there are not enough youth programs which are dealing with the reconciliation and promote intercultural learning and literacy in those small communities. (Ademovic 2016). There is a decline and low level of trust towards institutions responsible for democracy implementation, as well as decline of the political and civic participation of youth (Lavric 2019).

The most prevalent solution to change the above mentioned statistic is to increase participation of young people in political, social, economic and cultural life and to make them more influential, intercultural literate and tolerant, in order to be able to maintain good neighbouring relation and cooperate for common good. This is not an easy task giving the fact that in WB region we are witnessing unacceptably very low level of youth political and civic engagement. According to FES research (2019) more than 90% of youth are not practicing civic engagement and voluntary activities. Comparing to the last round of the survey done in 2008, volunteering shows a rapid decline in the most of the WB countries and those results are upsetting considering "the importance of the civic engagement for building social trust, reproducing civic values and contributing to democratic fabric".

If we also consider the fact that the topic of reconciliation and intercultural dialog is not "IN" at all for the new generation, but there is a visible trend of the rise of the ethno-nationalism over the patriotism in the region, we have then a serious situation in which youth are highly exposed and

easily influenced by mass media inflammatory rhetoric and authoritarian leader's narratives that all together keep this region on "tiny peace legs" and unpredictable future. (Lavric 2019)²⁵.

YOUTH WORK, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND PEACE BUILDING EDUCATION FOR STABILITY AND JOINT PEACEFUL FUTURE

One of the major problems of youth remains the exclusion from social and political life, which means that participation of young people in politics, policy making and social change is on a low scale. The lack of participation of young people in political and social processes also means that their perspectives and needs will not be reflected in the design process or implementation of policies.

Youth play a crucial role in the reconciliation processes and act as transformative force in post-conflict societies that are often characterized by continued distrust, suspicion, resentment and segregation²⁶. In North Macedonia the quality of interactions among young people of different ethnicities in formal and non-formal education is still insufficient, having in mind that there is no systematic engagement of national and local authorities responsible for education policies, school management, teachers and all students in interethnic activities, including those who hold negative perception of other ethnic communities.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no unified curricula for learning about the common past, nor a unified version of history in the causes of war, the death toll, or a shared vision that will enable these curricula to be created. One of the main reasons for the lack of a common curricula is political parties trying to keep themselves in power, using national rhetoric (Pejanovic, 2017). Considering that education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a "state job", major decisions in this area are taken by administrative units, which are mainly run by mono-ethnic political structures, we must unfortunately conclude that schools have become new arenas for conflict, employing sophisticated methods to educate young generations about divisions, irrational fear, and distrust of neighbours (Letic, 2015)²⁷.

Youth work has offered an important contribution to the European integration process by fostering young people's active engagement in society, civic education, cultural diversity, youth

²⁵ *Youth Study South East Europe 2018 / 2019 – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*

²⁶ <https://policyblog.uni-graz.at/2019/08/kosovo-these-days-empowering-youth-in-the-reconciliation-process/>

²⁷ *Zašto je važno izučavati tranzicijsku pravdu u procesima formalnog obrazovanja*, Aleksandra Letić, 2015.

participation in democratic processes and contributing to youth policy development. Programs such as Erasmus+: Youth in Action and the structured support offered by the network of SALTO Resource Centres and National Agencies have offered support for many years, not only by offering to young people and youth workers access to mobility and education across Europe, promoting the fundamental values of Europe and fostering discussion and acceptance of diversity, but also by empowering them to play an active part in policy making. Youth is identified as a distinctive social group of relevant actors in the process of reconciliation and peace building.

WHAT IS THE GAME CHANGER APPROACH? WHO ARE THE CHANGE MAKERS?

The main findings from the field, show that despite the existence of the various policy documents and even implementation of some of them to a certain level, we are living in a status quo in the field of reconciliation. Besides that, due to various socio-economic factors, xenophobia and hate speech are rising in the region and by taking into consideration the low level of prosecuted cases, the legislation in place shows no effectiveness. Education for peace building and reconciliation as well as intercultural learning, critical thinking and citizenship education, are perceived as the most important pillars for building the long lasting peace and stability in the region. However, the formal education system is not very open to multi-perspective history narratives and peace building education, while non-formal education for peace building is not so widely spread for the systemic change. Through international and national policies, the youth population is seen as a lead in the new wave of the reconciliation. On the other hand they do face low participation and there is a visible low interest for the topic, while they are very fragile to be influenced by ethnocentric rhetoric and education taking into consideration one narrative.

Civil society organizations have a crucial role in both, the top-down and bottom up approaches. On the first scenario CSOs should influence policies through advocacy actions and active participation in policy processes. While on the bottom up approach their role is important to support education of young generation for peace building and active participation in society, targeting the low youth participation and interest about the topic. In these terms, youth organizations who have the power to represent the voice of youth, have to play a crucial role in this process by leading an open dialog and consulting the youth they represent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support greater funding for youth groups and youth-led CSOs at local levels, for example through supporting youth peacebuilding networks and fostering local youth leadership. This should include flexible funding structures needed to build organizational sustainability at local levels. The engagement of youth in peacebuilding in a wider perspective can be ensured through the arts, culture, tourism, sports and by exposing youth to diversity, as well as by engaging them in promoting intercultural understanding through innovative approaches.
2. Establishing a tight network with other CSOs and state institutions that tackle these issues significantly contributes to the development of social capital, trust, knowledge and expertise exchange among different actors by significantly increasing public visibility and impacting such interventions. This includes the organization of conferences, platforms and common resources to be commonly used by various actors. Therefore, the mapping of good practices, tools and methods presents a perfect example of such resources and should be actively shared with all relevant actors, as well as made publicly available.
3. Improving the process of reconciliation and hate speech, raises a crucial question regarding the systematic education which would promote democratic culture and critical thinking, as well as objectively introduce youth to these topics. Including young generations in education that promotes the idea of human rights, tolerance, intercultural dialogue among young people, as well as indicates how the current system needs to improve its focus and methods by recommending compulsory education on human rights in all educational plans and programs, especially concerning equality and non-discrimination.²⁸
4. Regarding the formulation and implementation of interventions, youth should be included in the processes such as the formulation of strategic documents and intervention objectives, development of tools and methods, and implementation of activities. Youth participation in different aspects of the intervention not only contributes to the social relevance and effectiveness of the intervention itself but directly contributes to usual goals of these interventions including the development of various skills and competences, empowerment, inclusion, participation or sense of ownership over an intervention.
5. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust-building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources. By recognizing youth capacities and supporting them in efforts to build or strengthen inclusive and pluralistic societies they can bring a positive contribution. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, in an education process that supports people to both understand the culture and interact with people from cultures.

²⁸ ECRI, “Report on Croatia (Fifth Monitoring Cycle).”

6. Advancing education and awareness-raising regarding online hate speech. Education and awareness-raising are essential as a starting point. Those especially targeted by hate speech must be made aware of the fact that this can and should be reported, and be motivated to do so.
7. Improve regional and international cooperation in the field of youth policies. Hold regional initiatives that would foster co-operation in the field of youth policy by promoting the participation of young women and men in various programs and projects of regional and international cooperation in the field of youth policy.
8. Develop communication and cooperation programs between the various social groups to which youth belong by supporting peer education and intercultural learning programs that promote tolerance, understanding, and anti-discrimination, and initiate integrative information models that portray minorities as part of a broader social group instead of isolating them.
9. The Western Balkan countries should invest more in their younger generations as future EU citizens and offer them a perspective for the future. Successful initiatives developed so far need to be deepened.
10. Development of a regional youth strategy/policy paper that addresses issues of peace and reconciliation based on the specific needs addressed by social actors and in the practices and experiences of other countries.