

# Post Yugoslav Peace Link

PYPL is an informal (Special Interest) group within Britain Yearly Meeting which also welcomes non-Quakers and Quakers outside the UK to join with us in continuing to link with the Quaker-inspired peace activists and activities in the countries of the Post Yugoslav region.

## QPSW funds Summer Peace Retreat in Croatia for both 2012 and 2013

## Headington Quaker Meeting contributes towards the Dealing with the Past Publication

### QPSW funds Peace Retreats for both 2012 and 2013

We are enormously grateful to [QPSW Grants Group](#) for their acceptance of our application to fund '[The Summer Peace Retreat](#)', held in Groznan, Croatia, during July and organised by [Goran Bozicevic](#) and [Ana Bitiljanu](#) through the Miramida Centar. This project was developed to provide a rare retreat opportunity for peace activists from the whole of the former Yugoslav region.

For further information turn to page 4.

### Headington Quaker Meeting supports Dealing with the Past Publication

PYPL are very grateful indeed for the recent contribution provided by [Headington Quaker Meeting](#) in Oxford, towards the support of this publication. Although unsuccessful in obtaining funding from the QPSW Grant, we have been very appreciative of their comments concerning this work - "[We are extremely supportive of this project and commend it to any funders](#)" - at a meeting of QPSW Grants Group held on 3/4 April 2012.

We are delighted that [Anne Bennett](#) has agreed to write up this work, as a retrospective account of the changing concept of peace building over the last 20 years in the former Yugoslavia, which is being co-ordinated through a PYPL editorial group. The publication aims to capture the lessons learned from the post-conflict Peace-building work facilitated by QPS and QPSW, from 1991-2009. It hopes to demonstrate the positive things that can be done in the face of such difficulty - linked to Quaker values and highlighting the process of reconciliation from damaged relationships, lack of forgiveness, mistrust and ethnic conflict. The lessons learned from this work can be a resource in any peacebuilding situation.

An update of this work will be provided in our next Newsletter.

*"Despite Headington's generosity we still need to raise funds for the publication and Anne's work – so please do let us know if you have any further contributions to make – THANK YOU!"*

### Support from Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting

We are also very grateful to [Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting](#) for all their support for our grant applications.

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## PYPL Celebrates Funding!!

"THANK YOU" TO:

[QPSW Grants Group](#)

[Headington Quaker Meeting](#)

[Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting](#)

## Message from Goran Bubalo from Sarajevo: The Legacies of War

The successor states of Yugoslavia, and BiH in particular, are still struggling with the legacies of war. Political, economic and social progresses are hindered by a structural status quo, which is based on ethnic divisions. Most of the current political leadership is not willing and able to address the legacies of the past (particularly war crimes), to support reconciliation and to develop cooperative strategies with the other sides. In turn, large parts of BiH society are either following antagonistic rhetoric and action or are withdrawing into the private sphere as they do not see alternatives. At all levels those actors which promote dialogue, cooperation and issues of general public interest are overshadowed by dividing discourse and the inability to constructively deal with diversity and to transform conflicts in a peaceful manner.

*“BiH today is suffering from an acute case of virtual statehood,”* reads a report by the Foreign Policy Initiative BH that urged both domestic and international factors in the country to ensure some minimal institutional safeguards are in place to give the state “a fighting chance of survival.” There are still 9450 people missing from the war and mass graves are still being discovered. There continues to be talk of a possibility for renewed violence. The use of the nationalistic rhetoric has been rising over the past three years; nowadays it dominates public forums and media, leaving no space for positive stories that could perhaps help prevent further brain drain of youth from this country.

### Accession to the European Union

The European Union's accession process presents one of the few prospects to build a peaceful and more prosperous future for the citizens of BiH. However, at this point in time, at the level of civil society there is not enough exchange and cooperation focused on peace building in order to support processes of dialogue and reconciliation as a precondition for sustainable social change. Without coherent national, regional and pan-European civil society support to these broader societal processes, they will also remain low on the priority list of politicians and governments in BiH at local, regional and national levels. Instead, in the current weak civic environment the risk for violent escalations of conflict remains high.

### Grassroot Peacebuilding

Numerous non-governmental organizations that have valuable experiences with grassroots peace building initiatives, are rooted within local communities, and some already participate in political dialogue from local to national levels, particularly those with offices and regular activities in urban centers. However, the widespread lack of organizational capacity and the non-existence of a coordinating body for peace building NGOs lead to focusing on individual projects. As a result, there is a lack of mutual awareness, contact and cooperation between organizations pursuing similar goals. Potential synergies are not fully developed, mutual learning through exchanging knowledge, experiences and resources remains sub-optimal. A targeted civil society contribution to peace building in BiH, which by definition would need to follow an all-BiH strategy, is thus dissected into a myriad of unconnected small initiatives.

Inter-ethnic cooperation and the promotion of an all-BiH peace building agenda for reconciliation and cooperative development is currently not visible enough and finding little access in the media as well as in public and political debates. With a coordinated approach, NGOs committed to peace building would have the potential to give an important impulse in this regard. Additionally, the capacity for engaging in political advocacy and for entering into political dialogue are currently low. Nation-wide outreach and visibility actions to mobilize larger support from within the broader BiH public will need to be developed if we want to advance peace building and cooperative development and remind governmental authorities about citizens' public interests.

### Network for Building Peace

Several studies and surveys indicate that most organizations and activists committed to peace building in BiH are aware that the current lack of national networking is hampering their overall impact. As a reaction to the initiative by UN General Secretary Kofi A. Annan, the European Centre for Conflict Prevention supported local initiatives, and the

Nansen Dialogue Center organized regional consultations for South East Europe. As a result, in February of 2010, NGOs (mainly local, but also a few international), which are working in all parts of the country have united to form the "Network for Building Peace".

Network for Building Peace (NBP) aims for a comprehensive renewal of social and economic life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for long-term enhancement of the whole society to deal with difference and conflicts in constructive and non-violent ways by creating a framework for joint, coordinated activities of a number of civil society organizations, local authorities, business sector, media and governmental institutions.

Today Network for Building Peace has 107 members and leads peace and human rights activities with organizations working in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region, and all over the world. The Network continues to grow and improve its activities, while helping its members in their own activities.

### **NBP Aims**

The goal of Network for Building Peace is to influence and contribute to concrete actions related to the following areas of the public policy which are recognized as crucial for long-term building peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

1. Education,
2. Security,
3. Regional development,
4. Protection and promotion of human and minority rights,
5. Dealing with the past and transitional justice,
6. Gender equality,
7. Culture of public dialogue and democracy,
8. Strengthening civil society and building true peace,
9. Building trust between BiH people and nations,
10. Constructive influence towards political structures in BiH, and
11. Improving coexistence in BiH.

### **NBP Events**

This year the Network organized the celebration of the International Peace Day in 12 towns throughout BiH. In Sarajevo, the celebration had over 240 volunteers and there were more participants in other towns. For the second time we are preparing a Human Rights Day celebration followed by a literary competition for primary and secondary schools. The central celebration will be organized at the national Parliament with 200 participants and guests.

We are very proud of our Peace Newsletter (Mirovne novosti), published on monthly basis for almost two years. The Peace Newsletter provides information about peace organizations, and other NGOs in the region. The Network is preparing the third issue of the Peace Calendar followed with the exhibition of the selected photos. So far we have published 6 editions of Directory of Donors working in BiH and regionally, where we have listed over 200 donors. Through our informative web-site [www.mreza-mira.net](http://www.mreza-mira.net) and mailing list we regularly share information to our members and other organizations in BiH and the region with open calls for proposals, seminars, trainings, conferences, etc. Additionally, we are working at the policy level to prepare a National Strategy for Development of Positive Environment for Civil Society.

We will continue to share information about the planning for the Sarajevo Peace Event for 2014 in cooperation with a number of other international partners and several hundred participants from all over the world. We hope to lobby the BiH government to declare 2014 as Year of Peace and Nonviolence, and have a number of activities linked to this.

As said by one of our members: ***"For the first time in our hands we have what is most important: PEACE!"***

**We are inviting all of you to contact us and work with us. Our doors are open for cooperation!**

# The Summer Peace Retreat, Groznjan, Croatia

## Message from Goran and Ana Bozicevic from Croatia

### Aims

The summer peace retreat aimed to provide an opportunity for spiritual renewal. Violent conflict casts a long shadow and those who have both experienced war and who work to transform the conflict that remains carry a heavy burden. This project was developed to provide a rare retreat opportunity for peace activists from the whole of the former Yugoslav region. These volunteers continuously work within an environment of trauma, grief and anger, often in very isolated circumstances.



### The Participants

Following approval of funding, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 10 applications were received: 3 from Croatia and 7 from

Bosnia.Hercegovina. There were several (5-6) other positive written responses but without applications. The final numbers were 5 accepted participants + 1 partner who covered his costs. This group were a mix of women and men, including war veterans and peace activists from, Croatia, Pakrac, Sanski Most, Sarajevo, Tenja and Zagreb. The final number of participants was smaller than originally planned, largely because of the constraints of work loads and the relatively short notice. The long journey may have presented a difficulty for those who might have come from Serbia. Because of the low numbers, it was agreed with PYPL that funding towards a second retreat would be in order. This

was held immediately after the summer peace retreat, from 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> July. It was by invitation for 18 peace activists from the organisation Documenta, the centre for Dealing with the Past in Zagreb.



### The Programme

The peace retreat lasted six days and each day was organized into a number of activities including yoga, trauma counselling, trips to the beach, and relaxed eating. The Documenta retreat included a visit to an observatory where they learned about challenges to the planet. This was such a success that Goran and Ana plan to include it in next year's retreat.

### Evaluation

General impressions after the retreat reflected extremely positive feelings from relaxing to re-energising, "like I have arrived with time machine into some earlier epoch when simple things were making day/life beautiful". Feelings of

renewal and strength were also underpinned by, "...fresh perspectives and new friendships", "...got enriched by people to whom peace work means the same as it means to me".

The usefulness of the retreat was emphasized by all in a number of different ways from considering, "...concept of using one day's maximum for different options," to "...I came to some cognitions, meaning you reminded me that what matters in all this is human (being), that everyone is precious and special and I have to work more on myself".



Many recognized the need for self-reflection, admitting there is little time for this in normal daily life and in caring for their families. There was excellent feedback from all concerning the organization, accommodation, food and resources, which demonstrated the valuable support and co-ordination that both Goran and Ana provided for all participants.

Reflections upon improvement for future retreats focused upon the diversity of participants, and the need for such a retreat, with some valuing talks and activities and others seeking presentations from group members, a little more sleep, less conversation and more quiet contemplation. The difference in participants' attitudes and needs were recognized by each other, although in some cases, "...it was problem to me to get into discussion/ polemic on issues with war veterans point of view. That part drained my energy". This leads to some reflections over the activities within further retreats, which have been accepted by Goran and outlined in his report.

The final thoughts of all who wished to recommend the retreat experience has been ably summed up in this quote, "...these days I thought a lot about dear people who need such kind of break. I am looking forward to share my impression with them and to recommend to them to apply. One should come to Retreat, experience all this, charge his/her batteries and return home ready to continue in his/her commitment to work on peace".



### Future

It is not easy to find funding support for activities which are responding to psycho-social and spiritual needs. The grant from QPSW has made an important contribution to the continuing work of peace activists in the region. The other half of the grant means that there is secure funding for a similar retreat in 2013, with more time to organise it. PYPL hopes to find ways to contribute to the travel costs for those who were prevented from coming this year, especially from Serbia.

## About Women in Black

### Message from Zorica Trifunovic from Belgrade Who are Women in Black?

Women in Black is a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. As women experiencing these things in different ways in different regions of the world, we support each other's movements. An important focus is challenging the militarist policies of our own governments. We

are not an organisation, but a means of communicating and a formula for action.

On 9th October 1991, WiB in Belgrade began a public nonviolent protest against the war; the Serbian regime's policy; nationalism; militarism and all forms of hatred, discrimination and violence. Thus far, they have organized more than 500 protests, most of which took place in Belgrade streets and squares, but also in other cities of Serbia and Montenegro, throughout the former Yugoslavia, many cities of Europe, and around the world. In October this year the following event took place.

### The second round against cluster munitions

After the first petition and more than 850 signatures collected all over Serbia, Women in Black continue action to pressure on institutions of Serbia to STOP Cluster bombs and sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Women in Black have organized a new petition to sign the Convention. `Action of the petition is the highest act of civic responsibility and solidarity with all the victims of cluster munitions. The signing of the Convention is important because victims of cluster bombs in Serbia are not eligible for international



assistance, because Serbia is not a signatory of the Convention,` it is said in the statement of Women in Black, issued on 25th October.

It is evaluated in the statement: `Continuing Action of the petition we remind institutions and citizens that Serbia is the only country in the region that has not signed the Convention yet, as well as that during the NATO bombing all over Serbia 300,000 cluster bombs were thrown around and in 97 % of cases civilians were the victims of cluster munitions.`

Except of Women in Black from Belgrade the statement joined Women in Black from Serbian Network (Hourglass-Krusevac, Independent Women's Center-Dimitrovgrad, Roma Association-Novalja, Roma Association Danica-Pancevo, Women for Peace- Leskovac, Esperanca-Novı Sad, Women Alternatives-Sombor, Help for women and children victims of violence-Vlasotince, Women`s of the south-Pirot, Center for girls, Women's Space, Olivera Nosov-Nis, Phenomena-Kraljevo, Alternative Circle-Kragujevac).

They invited the public to join the action of 25th October and as a responsible citizens contribute towards signing a petition for Serbia to become a country of peace, health and solidarity! For: `In Serbia, there are more than three million pieces of illegal guns.`

The participants of the protest in Belgrade carried placards with the inscriptions: `Serbian government is responsible for signing of the Convention`, `Sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions`, `The signing of the Convention=HELP FOR THE VICTIMS`; `Stop exporting weapons`, There must not be new victims`, `Disarm

Serbia-sign the Convention`, `One signature changes everything.`



By signing request in Serbian towns, some of the victims explained why they do it: `I lost both legs and sight in my right eye therefore I lobby to ban and promote the Convention`; `In Nis children sick and pregnant women were killed by cluster bombs. It just shows what kind of relationship country has toward those who were lucky enough to survive.`

On the anniversary of the passage of Resolution 1325 – on 31st of October, submitted postcards and petition signatures by the citizens will be delivered to the Minister of Defence of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic.

# PYPL Goes to College

## Message from Alan Pleydell

On 15<sup>th</sup> March this year I took part as a regional advisor for the Politics Department of Dundee University in a one-day diplomatic crisis *simulation exercise* about our PYPL region - or the southern end of it. It was held for some twenty final year students majoring in International Relations, as well as for some postgraduates with the same specialism. I felt it was an ideal opportunity to help educate the participants, none of whom had direct or detailed experience of the regional politics of South-East Europe, where they chose to seek the available advice, about the more detailed real specific susceptibilities, fears and likely alliances and antipathies of the differing parties and populations in the potential conflict, in the light both of their traditional mutual stances and their recent historical experience. This applied not only at the intergovernmental level but amongst the varying subsections of national populations locally on the ground.



## The Scenario

The **fictitious** scenario, though one grounded in some aspects of reality, was an international conference convened to try to avert a large-scale regional diplomatic crisis or tipping into all-out war in the southern end of the Balkan peninsula. The set task of the conference for all participants was, without wholly surrendering their own core interests, to work to damp down the quickening flames and prevent an escalation to all-out regional war and, if possible, to come to a negotiated common statement which would cool tempers on all sides. Fully honouring the Ohrid Agreement in the most explicit, guaranteed, visible and pro-active ways, for instance with proper Albanian access to jobs, higher education, integrated proportional participation in the police and civil service, etc., was the implicit but never-stated key for all parties towards resolving this crisis in this particular scenario. It would naturally take the heat out of the situation by satisfying most of the local minority and once again isolate the *agents provocateurs*.

Simultaneously with the running of the conference, new factors and incidents were introduced into the scenario, some irrelevant, some critical and threatening to destabilise the situation further. This was designed to oblige the participants to think on their feet, separate the wheat from the chaff and act under pressure.

### **The Students**

Taking part in the conference were students playing the parts of an inner circle of directly involved regional powers: Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Greece and, in a proxy position, Kosovo (in that their official presence would never be tolerated by a Serbian government), together with representatives from a league of regional human rights and peace-oriented NGOs. Beyond the inner circle lay the major powers with a regional interest, with representatives from the EU, Russia and the USA.

### **The outcome**

In the event, the participants were unable to reach any such desired agreement or statement in the allotted time. However, there was a marked difference in levels of overall comprehension of the inherent logic of the situation and performance between the different teams.

### **Reflection on the scenario**

The big learning for me in the whole exercise was the value of asking when you know that you don't know rather than ploughing on regardless – and of developing the antennae to be keenly aware of knowing when you don't know. I thought it was a real and sobering reflection of the differing levels of realism and responsibility to be found in human groups at any level, including those of high politics in the actual world, and hope that that was also evident to the participants themselves, some of whom may become diplomats and politicians.

To add a specifically Quaker note - Live Adventurously, perhaps; but it all depends what you mean by true adventure. Quite often it is by far the less spectacular or less obviously prominent actors who are the true, unsung and most adventurous heroes. And overall that would have to be judged to be true also of those people that Quakers chose to support in post-Yugoslav countries over the last two decades.

## Visit to Makedonia, Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina

### Message from Diana and John Lampen about their visit in April 2012

We have been visiting former Yugoslavia in most years since 1995, offering training and consultancy to a number of projects which became close friends and partners. This visit was planned as a goodbye to them, and a chance to evaluate informally the impact which our infrequent visits might have had. But we immediately had requests to undertake various training activities too! We have kept this report short because we have been given funds to publish a retrospective view of all our work in the region going back over twenty years: a Small Share in History, published by the Hope Project ([www.hopeproject.co.uk](http://www.hopeproject.co.uk)).



War damage, Uskoplje/Gornji Vakuf

#### Itinerary:

We first visited our partners in Skopje: Megjashi—First Children's Embassy of the World. They advocate for children's rights in ways which can be politically risky but have earned them recognition as the media's first point of call when issues arise. We were asked to give a two-day training in peer mediation to their staff; we also played with their group of Roma (gypsy) street children. We then went to Zagreb to stay with Mali Korak, which develops and publishes peace education materials; the founder and main trainer, Maja Uzelac, has recently received a lifetime award from the Croatian government. While there we worked with three groups. We then went to our longest friends, Goran Bozicevic and Ana Bitoljanu in Groznan, Istria, with whom we had worked in many contexts. From there we visited Goran Bubalo in Sarajevo, who used to send us to work with small peace organisations working in remote towns; and Sezam in Zenica, an agency which we trained and supported for many years in peace education for children. Our Sezam partners said, "The vision of Sezam was nurtured and empowered with the Quaker values that respect the dignity of each and every living creature. Their way of living their work inspired some of us in a true quest to determine our lifelong vocation." We also made a brief visit to the Youth Centre in Gornji Vakuf (for Bosniaks) or Uskoplje (to the Croats), a very polarised town which still bears many scars of the fighting; even the secondary school is ethnically divided. The Youth Centre is almost the only organisation there which brings together members of both communities.



Megjashi Roma children's group, Skopje

#### Our own legacy

We used a questionnaire to elicit reaction to our visits; but the problem with this approach was that we got plenty of praise, but problems or inadequacies seemed to be forgotten! We

can see some tangible results. In the case of Sezam, they developed and refined their work over the fifteen years we have known them, although reductions in funding have reduced the team from eight active workers with support staff to two who must be both trainers and office workers. We have helped to guide them step by step from their early work with traumatised children into peace education in primary schools, then in secondary schools, and finally by training and guiding groups of teachers to deliver it; and because this was an inter-ethnic project, our Irish experience was useful. They said, “At a time when Sezam needed to move into a new phase, our project with teachers, your contribution was enormous. You literally showed us how to form groups, the number of groups, the monitoring processes—in a word, the whole methodology of the work.”

Our initial work in Makedonia in 2007 was a training in peer mediation in Ohrid, organised by Megjashi and funded by the German charity Forum ZFD. Following this ZFD has continued to develop a programme, and has produced a very good peer mediation manual in Makedonian. The training we did on this recent visit for Megjashi belongs to the same field of work.

Our practical experience in delivering peace education in a divided community informed our visits to Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje; the Director of the Youth Centre said, “You showed us ways to plan workshops and adapt activities for people of all ages. We still use those ideas.” One of her young people told us: “Your workshop was important to me because I saw you create an open and stress-free environment. You respected our right to our own opinions. It was good and unusual for me to relate to visitors from another culture.”

Mali Korak is a highly skilled and experienced organisation in our own field; so our meetings always contained exchanges of ideas, new methods, difficulties we had experienced and mutual encouragement. Some of our ideas feature in the excellent Croatian manuals which Maja Uzelac and her colleague Karmen Ratkovic produce. They were always interested to watch us at work: this time we were asked to give a training session on mediation to a group of law students, and to speak to the Croatian Mediation Association, and at the Centre for Peace Studies.

Elsewhere the results are more intangible, but perhaps no less helpful. “John and Diana's *regular* visits brought a contrast to [our experience of] broken trust, and the hope that there are people who care and are willing to be on-going supporters.” “Diana and John are my friends and teachers, and very valuable! ...What I learned from them is so vital and relevant. In my daily work they are always with me through the [group] exercises I do, and I learnt from them by thinking through ideas together that I then got to practise. I thank God for having brought them into my life.”



Diana and John Lampen



Our partners in Sezam

# Visiting Groznjan

## Message from Penny Robbins about her trip to Groznjan in August 2012

Groznjan in the summer is a great place to visit. It is a small hill-top village in the north of Istria near the Slovenia border and not far from the coast. My sister, her friend and I flew to Rijeka; Croatian airlines have a weekly direct flight there from Heathrow. We hired a car because Groznjan has no public transport and it would have been much more difficult to get around without a car. Goran and Ana had arranged for us to stay in private accommodation in



the village. My sister and I were with a couple who restore antiques. We had the top of their house, right on the village square. We did sight-seeing in the first week, then when my sister's friend left we were able to spend the time drawing and painting. Groznjan is full of art and crafts galleries in the summer and also hosts Music Summer Schools. So music of many varieties emanates from buildings all over the village almost all day and in the evenings the students give their Final Presentations in the concerts. The countryside, coast and villages in this part of Croatia are lovely. There are also a lot of historic towns and cities.

It was good to have time with Goran and Ana, and to meet their two children briefly; also to hear first hand their enthusiastic account of the successful peace retreats they held previously in the summer.



Penny, painting in Croatia, near the village of Završje

