

# Vacation from War

Dialogues across Borders



## Autumn Bulletin 2021

Dear donors,

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2021 is no ordinary year for Vacation from War - the Corona pandemic continues to have a significant impact on life in the project regions, and due to travel restrictions in Israel and Palestine, as well as in the former Yugoslavia, the possibilities for cross-border encounters and meetings are still considerably limited. This has changed the rhythm of our work - while most activities used to be concentrated in the summer months, more activities than usual are now taking place throughout the year.

A lot of spontaneity, flexibility and also the willingness to prepare meetings and activities with the risk that they cannot take place has been required from our partners in recent months. This was necessary in order to use those periods for meetings and dialogue work when infection numbers were low and the restrictions for travel and meetings in real space were relaxed. We are therefore very pleased that the partners in both project regions were able to organise a number of activities and

meetings despite the continuing difficult conditions.

In Israel, the Israeli team of the women\*seminar organised two political tours for former participants and a weekend seminar to discuss the current political situation and political visions for the future.

The Palestinian participants of the women\*seminar 2019 also met for a weekend seminar in Thalita Kumi, Beit Jala. In addition, the long-planned facilitation training for Palestinians could finally begin. For the Palestinian team in particular, it is a challenge to find young people - not only because dialogue work in the Palestinian (and increasingly also in the Israeli) context is associated with great risks and not infrequently also political repression, but also because there are only a few offers for training and further education in the field of facilitation in the West Bank. The next part of the training is planned for October. Due to the political escalation in May and the Corona pandemic, the planned binational meeting of former Israeli and Palestinian participants could not (yet) take place.

The second partnership in Israel and Palestine, which works on dialogue with Jewish Israelis, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Palestinians from the West Bank, is now in the second phase of its strategy and planning process, which aims at starting with new dialogue groups in autumn 2022. The first meetings and discussions with former groups have taken place, many alumni are involved in the process through questionnaires and interviews, and a final concept development seminar is planned for winter 2021/22 in Cyprus or Jordan.

In the former Yugoslavia, various activities took place continuously in the local partner cities, and young people from Srebrenica also visited their friends in Tuzla. At the beginning of August, on the initiative of Vlasta Markovic, a long-time YU-Peace activist, a joint visit to the "Childhood War Museum" was realised.

The highlight of the summer for all partners in the former Yugoslavia, however, was the meeting in Medena, Croatia (see next page). The numerous political workshops and discussions motivated the participants

to work (further) for peace and to oppose hatred and nationalism. Mujo Adzemovic from Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje summarised this as follows:

*"We will always and everywhere stand in the way of all those who preach hatred, and I am sure they are far fewer than us. Let us raise*

*our voices and give them no leeway whatsoever. We can do it!"*

## „Every victim is mine, no criminal is mine“

(Author: Brigitte Klaß) This statement became the motto for the participants of the meeting in Medena, Croatia, in whose home countries war criminals are still or again increasingly celebrated as war heroes. The participants came from Vukovar (Croatia), Sombor (Serbia), Tuzla, Srebrenica and Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje (Bosnia-Herzegovina). For the first time, a group from the Brcko district, where a former participant now works,

As we feared that parents would not allow their underage children to participate due to the pandemic, we agreed to accept more adult participants as an exception. We halved the size of the group, shortened the duration of the stay and adapted the content to the new circumstances.

Only four weeks before the planned date, it was confirmed that the groups from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina could enter Croatia.

The hotel provided us with our own dining room and the hotel disco with a very efficient air exchange system for discussions and workshops. So the whole group could listen to lectures and discuss together. Our concept worked: No one got infected with Corona and in fact it was the first time in 22 years that we needed neither medical advice nor medication.

In terms of content, we focused on

the effects of the war that still determine life in all three countries and invited speakers who showed how it is possible to change these conditions and stand up for a society in which people are not divided according to ethnic categories and played off against each other. The programme inspired the participants and motivated them to work for social change



Participants follow the lectures with excitement

took part as well.

Prior to the meeting, we had discussed very intensively in Germany and with our local partners whether we should take responsibility for a cross-border meeting under the conditions of the pandemic and how such a meeting could be conducted in a reasonably safe manner.

Since young people from some cities eventually received permission from their parents to come along, the group ultimately had an age range between 16 and 29 years.

We agreed on strict Corona rules: All participants, including vaccinated ones, had to arrive with a negative PCR test, fever was measured every morning and every two days the whole group was checked with quick tests brought from Germany.

themselves:

*"Tahir Zustra is a former participant who is now implementing what he once learned at a camp. As a journalist for Nova BH Television, he is one of the few who work objectively and very professionally to improve people's lives. (Editor's note: Through one of his reports he achieved, for example, that severely disabled children got wheelchairs). His work is an inspira-*

tion for us and an impetus to also do something for those who need help." - Adrijan Prodan, Sombor

"This camp opened my eyes and changed my view of the whole world. When you live in an environment where people spread hatred and judge other people's worth by their nationality, religion or sexual orientation, it is very hard to form an independent opinion and not 'judge the book by its cover'. I was really amazed at how friendly, loving and above all peaceful everything was. We worked together to develop as individuals and discussed positive changes in our cities.

This project shows us a way to improve the world and spread the message of peace." - Erna Sabitovic, Tuzla



"Peace is a very special and precious state. While in war we are reduced to what we need to survive, peace allows us to spread our wings and develop all our talents and abilities. We should never take peace for granted, it is not a constant state but a process that

we have to work on again and again. We don't want to look at diversity in our societies through gun barrels, we want to be the generation that prepares the ground for a better life for their children." - Mujo Adzemovic, Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje

## Finding new talents: Facilitation training for former participants from the West Bank

(Author: Rana K.) On 14 August 2021, the kick-off workshop of our facilitation training took place, attended by a total of eight women\* from the seminars of previous years. It was a very intensive meeting: for many it was a reunion after a long time, others got to know each other anew - and for all of them the meeting triggered a renewed reflection on their own past seminar processes.

The aim of the training series is to teach the women\* the skills to facilitate a dialogue group and to accompany its process throughout a seminar. There are otherwise no trainings to learn these skills available in the West Bank. We decided to start the training with our own experiences in bi-national double facilitation (one Israeli, one Palestinian facilitator), which we practise in the dialogue seminars. In addition to an introduction to facilitation methods, we also shared tools for self-reflection and talked with the participants about

the particularities and pitfalls of facilitating political dialogue processes.

The women\* were very inquisitive and engaged in the day's programme. They brought many topics for discussion, especially the challenges they have recently faced in the wake of the pandemic, but also those challenges resulting from the effects of the dialogue seminar in Germany on their lives in Palestine (...).

At the same time, we used the space of

learning together to build a network between the women in which they can support each other in the future.

The next part of the facilitation training will take place in October. There we plan to try out different moderation methods and especially talk about difficult situations while facilitating.



Facilitation training for former Palestinian participants of the women\*seminars



Speaker's tour in September: "Creating dialogue spaces is my form of resistance".

From 9 to 13 September, we went on a speaker's tour through five different cities with the two coordinators of the Palestinian-Israeli women\*seminar. Every evening they told an interested audience about their experiences in dialogue work, the successes and challenges and the dialogue process that the participants go through. At the same time, they described their very personal life journeys that led them into dialogue work. Rana K. (name changed), Palestinian coordinator, described what motivates them to continue: *"We can't go on living like this - creating dialogue spaces is my form of resistance against the occupation and I am convinced that this is the path to real change."*

Attendance at the events varied, no doubt the renewed increase in corona numbers was one reason. We were particularly pleased with the great interest in Marburg and Ludwigsburg. We also held events in Frankfurt a. M., Cologne and Heidelberg.

*"The current political situation gives no cause for hope,"* said Dina G., who coordinates the project on the Israeli side. *"Seeing how many women\* go through an intensive process in just two seminar weeks, which is profound and often eye-opening, always gives me new motivation."* The fact that the path of dialogue work is a slow and arduous one

became just as clear in the lectures as the deep conviction that it is one of the few long-term effective and sustainable ways to convince people to critically reflect and often also to rethink their point of view.

In the discussions that followed the lectures, many exciting questions were asked: from the question of the long-term impact of the dialogue work and its methodological implementation, to questions about the political situation in Israel and Palestine, and questions about the role and relevance of cooperation with German partners.

Dina G. concluded her presentation with a personal appeal: *"Change must happen on many levels. We are working for a political dialogue at grassroots level, but we also need other initiatives that address politics, for example. And also, on the international level we need people who take a stand"*.

We will report in detail about the events in our 2021 annual report, but overall this pilot series was a success for us in any case. We received friendly financial support from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation as well as its regional foundations in North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg and Hessen.

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### Editorial

Brigitte Klaß, Katharina Ochsendorf, Tessa Pariyar

### Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy

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