

annual report

2025



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★ INSTEAD OF AN INTRODUCTION

The year behind us was exceptionally challenging for the entire society of Serbia, and consequently for our organization as well, particularly for the young activists who consistently stood up against various forms of violence.

The democratic capacities of Serbia's institutions have been significantly eroded, with the institutions themselves often acting against the interests of citizens. Throughout the year, the Initiative provided support to young people, students or otherwise, reaffirming the importance of regional cooperation and long-term relationships built in times of crisis.

A special place in this period belongs to the young people who spent most of the year outside the country. Politically motivated legal proceedings are still conducted against them. The abuse of institutions, through which individuals exercising their rights and freedoms are portrayed as a threat, must not become an acceptable pattern of behavior.

The Initiative will continue to support young people who, due to their beliefs and opinions, find themselves targeted by representatives of any authority. We have directed the knowledge and experience gained over two decades of work toward providing support in accordance with our capacities. The role of human rights organizations entails not only public advocacy but also concrete action in protecting those rights in specific situations.



The violence we continuously point to, as well as its normalization, marked the year behind us. It was no longer directed exclusively at activists, but rather became a means of pressure against anyone expressing critical opinions. Serbia's European path seemed and continues to seem more distant than before, stripped of the substance and values that should accompany it.

At the same time, these crises opened up space for new energy and connection. We particularly highlight the more intensive networking between youth of the Sandžak region and other parts of Serbia. The values of unity, tolerance, and mutual respect proved to be an important foundation for social dialogue and cooperation. We strived to preserve and further develop this solidarity, mindful that such processes require continuous work and dedication.

Despite the circumstances, we continued organizing exchange programs, public events, artistic activities, and educational workshops, opening up topics that are often marginalized from the public sphere. The Pride March was also held, and we marched despite receiving messages that the spaces and rights won should be abandoned because "now is not the time for such things"; It is always the right time for human rights. This report contains everything we did through our programs, and we are proud that the pages of this report are filled with content that truly made a difference in real life.

Our work on preserving a public space free from hate speech continued through various initiatives. At the same time, we pointed out the abuse of the past in contemporary political narratives. The report "Dossier: Croatia. Coordinated hate" documents the violations of the rights of individuals with Croatian citizenship and demonstrates how historical narratives are used to fuel tensions. For us, regional cooperation remains a key indicator of social progress.

Prospects for the coming period indicate that the challenges will not lessen. In a changed global context, preserving solidarity and mutual support remains essential. In a time when security is often used as a justification for restricting rights, it is crucial to insist on the principle that peace and security are mutually dependent and require a consistent, professional, and responsible approach.



HIGHLIGHTS

Freedom for Novi Sad Activists

The previous year, 2025, was marked by mass protests led by students and university professors under blockade, who demanded accountability for the roof canopy collapse in Novi Sad. Just before one of the largest citizen gatherings in the past 25 years, held on March 15 in Belgrade, several pro-government media outlets published a wiretapped conversation from a meeting of activists from the informal student group STAV and the Movement of Free Citizens from Novi Sad, which included Initiative activists Mila Pajić and Dorotea Antić. From the very beginning of the political persecution of this group, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights has been monitoring the violations of their rights, reacting, and reporting to the public on multiple occasions in order to put an end to the staged legal proceedings.

The Fight to Defend Media Freedoms

As part of the authorities' repressive response to the mass protests, Aleksandar Vučić's regime announced the shutdown, or rather the illegal takeover, of independent media outlets within the United Media group. After investigative journalists published an audio recording of a conversation between the CEO of United Group, Sten Miller, and the CEO of Telekom Srbija, Vladimir Lučić, discussing plans to weaken United Group's media business in Serbia, the Initiative filed complaints with numerous regulatory bodies and competent institutions in the United Kingdom, calling on them to urgently react to the troubling allegations regarding the involvement of the British investment firm BC Partners in undermining media freedoms in Serbia.

Promotion of the Book "I Am Alen" in Belgrade

Alen Muhić was born in 1993 during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His mother, a survivor of wartime rape, abandoned him at the Goražde hospital immediately after birth, where he was found and adopted by the hospital janitor. He only learned the truth about his origins at the age of nine. In his book "I Am Alen", which was presented in Belgrade before an audience of more than 100 visitors, Muhić spoke about the love that raised him, resilience, and healing.

Three Decades of Remembering the Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide

In memory of the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, during the year marking its thirtieth anniversary, the Initiative participated in the joint commemoration of the International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, under the slogan "People Remember People," from mid-June to mid-July 2025. The program included theater performances, book promotions, a series of discussions, and commemorative actions, as well as the publication of an itemized list of the victims in the daily newspaper "Danas".

On the same occasion, the Initiative organized a screening of the film "Samir Mehić Bouwie – Letters from Srebrenica," a generational meeting of young and more experienced activists fighting against genocide denial in Serbia, and the departure of 20 activists to Srebrenica. It also gathered 100 Serbian citizens for a commemorative event at Republic Square in Belgrade, where the artistic performance "Mother's Scarf" was held as part of a global action to remember the victims.

In August, we organized the third annual "Drina Summer School," where 20 young human rights defenders from different parts of Serbia visited the Potočari – Srebrenica Memorial Center for the first time. In cooperation with Cardiff University, in 2025 we published a publication in English titled "Killing the Truth – Genocide Denial and Historical Revisionism in Serbia as State-Sponsored Violence: Trajectories, Challenges and Opportunities."

Cultural Cooperation Between Serbia and Kosovo Through the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!"

As part of the activities under the auspices of the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!" festival, the documentary film "Connecting...", directed by Idro Seferi, premiered on January 31, 2025, in Belgrade and on February 7, 2025, in Pristina.

The twelfth edition of the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!" festival was held from November 20 to 22, 2025, in Pristina. Once again, this year, the festival served as a space for dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, connecting the artistic and cultural scenes and raising questions about relations, the past, and a shared future in the context of rising nationalist rhetoric.

Initiative Proves That a Mural to a War Criminal is Discrimination

In March, we submitted a complaint to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality regarding the launch and implementation of a competition by the Ćuprija Cultural Institution for the creation of a mural dedicated to the convicted war criminal Nebojša Pavković. Following the Commissioner's acceptance of the complaint, the Ćuprija Cultural Institution canceled the competition and its accompanying decisions, thereby preventing the glorification of a war criminal and proving that such practices constitute an act of discrimination, as well as hate speech against Albanians.

Participation in the UN Human Rights Council Session

At the invitation of Jürg Lauber, President of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, Sofija Todorović, Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, spoke in early March at the 17th meeting of the Council's 58th session in Geneva, as part of an interactive dialogue on transitional justice and human rights.

Berlin Process 2025: Youth Initiative Presents Regional Recommendations on Reconciliation and Dealing with the Past

From June to September, the Initiative, together with other associations, worked on drafting recommendations regarding the transitional justice process, intended for the governments of the Western Balkan countries. At the Civil Society Forum in Podgorica, an event within the Berlin Process Summit held in September 2025, the Director of the Initiative, Sofija Todorović, presented recommendations aimed at improving the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past.

„Dosije Hrvatska: Koordinacija mržnje“

Prompted by a months-long chauvinistic campaign by Serbian government representatives against Croatian citizens in the midst of mass student protests, we issued a report titled "Dossier: Croatia. Coordinated Hate." This report documented mass violations of the rights of Croatian citizens in Serbia from December 2024 to February 2025. Part of the report's findings was included in the recommendations of the European Parliament and the European Commission for Serbia.



RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

"Dossier: Croatia. Coordinated Hate."

Prompted by a months-long chauvinistic campaign by Serbian government representatives against Croatian citizens in the midst of mass student protests, we compiled a report titled "Dossier: Croatia: Coordinated Hate". With this report, we aimed to highlight the mass violations of the rights of Croatian citizens, as well as violations of the laws and the Constitution of Serbia, and to call upon the competent institutions to act within their authority and prosecute those responsible. The report documents inflammatory and discriminatory statements made by Serbia's highest officials and media outlets close to them, and offers recommendations intended for the institutions of the Republic of Serbia.

Report: "The State of Denial – Serbia 2024: Lying About Crimes Under the Flag"

Throughout 2024, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights worked on its third "State of Denial" report, which documents both institutional and non-institutional practices of war crimes denial over the course of the entire year. The 2024 report is titled "Lying Under the Flag" and bears witness to a record number of cases involving the denial of crimes and the glorification of war criminals.



Report on Human Rights Violations Against the Falun Gong Group in Serbia

In reaction to the unlawful and arbitrary actions of the institutions of the Republic of Serbia toward members of the "Falun Gong" spiritual group, we published a report titled "Serbia vs. Falun Gong: (Un)Friendly Ties of Steel." In the report, we meticulously reconstructed the events of May 7 and 8, 2024, when eight members of this group were groundlessly deprived of their liberty immediately prior to the arrival of the President of the People's Republic of China.

Publikacija „Killing the truth“

In collaboration with Cardiff University, in 2025 we published an English-language publication titled "Killing the truth – genocide denial and historical revisionism in Serbia as state-sponsored violence: trajectories, challenges and opportunities." In this publication, we explore historical revisionism in Serbia linked to other forms of state-sponsored violence, identifying how and why state-sponsored revisionism has intensified in recent years.



YIHR publications



YIHR IN NUMBERS



ADVOCACY

Combatting Hate Speech, Persecution, and the Targeting of University Students, High School Students, and Citizens

As part of the "Three Freedoms" platform, in January we demanded that government representatives cease their continuous dissemination of hate, persecution, and targeting of university and high school students, professors, and all citizens who, since November 2024, have been demanding accountability and justice for the victims of the canopy roof collapse at the Novi Sad railway station.

Participation in the UN Human Rights Council Session

At the invitation of Jürg Lauber, President of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, Sofija Todorović, Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, spoke in early March at the 17th meeting of the Council's 58th session in Geneva, as part of an interactive dialogue on transitional justice and human rights. During her presentation, the Director of the Initiative clarified that human rights organizations in Serbia, particularly those actively advocating for the prosecution of war crimes, are subjected to threats, attacks, and media smear campaigns that are frequently led by institutional representatives themselves. Following the meeting, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the attacks on human rights defenders, protesters, and journalists in the context of mass protests in Serbia, demanding respect for freedom of expression and assembly.

The Case of the Nebojša Pavković Mural

In March, we submitted a complaint to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality regarding the launch and implementation of a competition by the Ćuprija Cultural Institution for the creation of a mural dedicated to the convicted war criminal Nebojša Pavković. Acting upon our complaint, the Commissioner issued a recommendation to this institution to suspend the competition and the painting of the mural, stating that the execution of the competition could incite hatred and discrimination against members of the Albanian population in Serbia, and lead to the secondary victimization of victims and their families. The Ćuprija Cultural Institution subsequently annulled the competition and its accompanying decisions, thereby preventing the glorification of a war criminal and proving that such practices constitute an act of discrimination.

Recommendations of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances

During the same month, we submitted recommendations to the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances, which the Committee subsequently included in its report on Serbia. Among the recommendations directed at the Serbian authorities are the implementation of the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide, and legislative amendments to penalize the denial of war crimes and the glorification of war criminals.

The Persecution of Novi Sad Activists

Ahead of one of the largest public gatherings in Serbia in the last 20 years, which was scheduled by blockading students for March 15 in Belgrade, media outlets close to the government published an audio recording obtained through wiretapping a meeting attended by members of the Free Citizens Movement and activists from the STAV group. This was swiftly followed by political persecution, with 12 activists from these two organizations facing charges of conspiracy to overthrow the constitutional order; six of them were outside the country at the time the recording was leaked and remained in political exile until the end of 2025. In mid-March 2025, the Initiative launched a campaign against the political persecution of this group of activists from Novi Sad, which resulted in a series of joint statements, briefing the international community on the case, and a street action demanding the release of Marija Vasić from detention.

Anti-Croatian Campaign

We demand that the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office and regulatory bodies prosecute those committing human rights violations against citizens of Serbia, as well as violations of the rights of foreign nationals, particularly Croatian citizens who were targeted by government representatives and pro-government media. These violations included the targeting of blockading students holding dual citizenship, the publication of passport photos of several Croatian citizens, and the expulsion of 13 foreign nationals from Serbia.

Demand to Withdraw the Nomination of Dejan Vuk Stanković for Minister

Alongside dozens of other civil society organizations, in April we demanded the immediate withdrawal of the proposal to appoint Dejana Vuka Stankovića as Minister of Education. This demand was made because he clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding and respect for student demands, promotes undemocratic and authoritarian methods of conduct and governance, and faces serious allegations of sexual harassment made by female students during his tenure at the Teacher Education Faculty.

Spyware

Late in May, alongside partner organizations, we submitted an amendment to the criminal complaint regarding the forced unlocking and spyware infiltration of the mobile phones of a student activist and a journalist, which occurred in late 2024. We appealed to the competent institutions to react without delay, in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia as well as international standards, in order to halt unlawful digital surveillance and all other forms of pressure.

Condemnation of the Meeting Between Šutanovac and Netanyahu

We jointly condemned the meeting between Serbia's Ambassador to the US, Dragan Šutanovac, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reminding the Serbian authorities that the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in November 2024. We further reminded them of Serbia's obligation to suspend arms deliveries to Israel, warning that continuing such practices could constitute a serious violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as complicity in genocide. We cautioned that as a state declared responsible by the International Court of Justice in its 2007 judgment for violating the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Serbia must approach this matter with utmost care and act in full accordance with international law and domestic legislation.

Reaction to the Incitement to Lynch Veran Matić

In July, alongside other civil society organizations, we reacted to the President of the Republic's incitement to lynch journalist Veran Matić. This sends an unequivocal and dangerous political message: that targeting and retaliating against those who fight for truth and justice is, once again, permitted in Serbia. We called upon the competent institutions to act professionally and conscientiously, to protect the personal safety of Veran Matić, and to reject the practice of impunity for violence.

30 Years Since the War Crimes of Operation Storm

Together with the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Croatia, in August we warned against the exploitation of the 30th anniversary commemoration of Operation Storm by the authorities in both Serbia and Croatia, who used the occasion to demonstrate chauvinism and a complete abdication of responsibility toward the victims. We drew attention to the fact that Croatian officials omitted any mention of the exodus, the killing of Serb civilians, and the prevention of their return, while statements from Serbian officials completely failed to acknowledge responsibility for the joint criminal enterprise that resulted in the creation of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, as well as the torture and forced mobilization of Serb refugees from Croatia.

The Return of Nebojša Pavković to Serbia

In September we condemned the statements and actions of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Justice following the return of the convicted war criminal Nebojša Pavković to Serbia. He was granted early release from a prison in Finland due to poor health. The highest state representatives utilized this situation to glorify Pavković as a hero and to deny the mass human rights violations for which he was legally and definitively convicted.





Participation in the Civil Society Forum Within the Berlin Process

At the Civil Society Forum in Podgorica, an event organized within the framework of the Berlin Process Summit held in September 2025, the Director of the Initiative, Sofija Todorović, presented recommendations aimed at advancing the process of reconciliation and dealing with the past in the Western Balkans. From June to September, the Initiative worked alongside other civil society organizations to draft these recommendations, which are directed at Western Balkan governments, international organizations, local civil society groups, member states participating in the Berlin Process, the European Commission, European Union member states, as well as regional and intergovernmental bodies.

Belgrade Pride

This year, once again we participated in organizing Belgrade Pride which is traditionally held in September, demanding that the grievances and requirements of the LGBTQI+ community in Serbia be met. Alongside other organizations, we specifically demanded the adoption of the Law on Gender Identity, improved healthcare services for transgender individuals, swift and adequate responses from state authorities, and public condemnation by government representatives of hate speech and hate crimes targeting the LGBT+ community. We also called for the explicit recognition of LGBT+ individuals in local action plans as a particularly vulnerable social population. The gathering, held under the slogan "For Family," was attended by several thousand protesters, and the entire event was marked by solidarity with the students and citizens demanding government accountability for the tragedy in Novi Sad. During the march, a 16-minute silence was observed to pay tribute to the victims, and instead of the traditional concert, drummers beat their drums to make noise.

Reaction to the Announced Legislative Amendments

In October, alongside partner organizations, we issued a position paper to the public and relevant institutions regarding the announced amendments to the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Law on Juvenile Offenders. We warned that under conditions of a deep political and social crisis, the Government lacks the legitimacy to implement comprehensive changes to key criminal legislation within a minimal timeframe and through a non-transparent consultation format. We demanded the immediate withdrawal of the proposals from the legislative procedure, the organization of a genuine public debate, due consideration of the positions of the National Convent on the EU, and the rejection of solutions that expand the scope for repression, undermine victim protection, and compromise legal certainty.

The BC Partners Case

During the same month, we submitted complaints to regulatory bodies and competent institutions in the United Kingdom, calling on them to respond urgently to allegations regarding the involvement of the British investment firm BC Partners in the suppression of media freedoms in Serbia. Our complaints followed the publication of an audio recording of a conversation between the CEO of United Group, Sean Moore (which is majority-owned by BC Partners), and the CEO of Telekom Srbija, Vladimir Lučić. The recording discusses plans to weaken United Group's media operations in Serbia and notes the Serbian President's desire to remove the director of United Media from her position. This audio recording points to collaboration between BC Partners and the Government of the Republic of Serbia aimed at weakening the country's two most prominent independent media outlets N1 and Nova S, both of which operate under United Group.

A background image showing a group of people, mostly young adults, at what appears to be a protest or demonstration. They are holding signs, and the scene is outdoors with trees in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

Election of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality

Alongside numerous civil society organizations, we urged the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia to annul the selection process for the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and to conduct a new, transparent, and participatory process. We demanded that this new process include all relevant stakeholders and provide an adequate timeframe to ensure genuine competition and the selection of the best candidate. The manner in which the initial selection procedure was carried out severely undermined the integrity of the process, damaging the institution's credibility and diminishing its capacity to independently and effectively protect the human rights of all citizens of Serbia.

Demand for the Memorialization of Unmarked Sites of Suffering

In November, as part of a joint activity with the Centre for Nonviolent Action (Belgrade/Sarajevo) and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Zagreb), we marked undocumented sites of atrocities in Serbia, specifically, the locations of former detention camps for Bosniaks and Croats in Šljivovica, Begejci (Torak), and Stajićevo. While this was a symbolic commemoration, the action served as a call to the authorities to facilitate proper remembrance through adequate memorialization, public awareness, and youth education.

International Human Rights Day

In December, on the occasion of International Human Rights Day, we joined feminist organizations within the regional initiative Amplifying Voices II to call upon governments, institutions, and international actors to adopt a series of recommendations. These recommendations seek to recognize survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, ensure their full participation in public life, and guarantee their access to justice, truth, and reparations in accordance with international standards, including CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, and the principles of transitional justice.

DEMOCRATIZATION

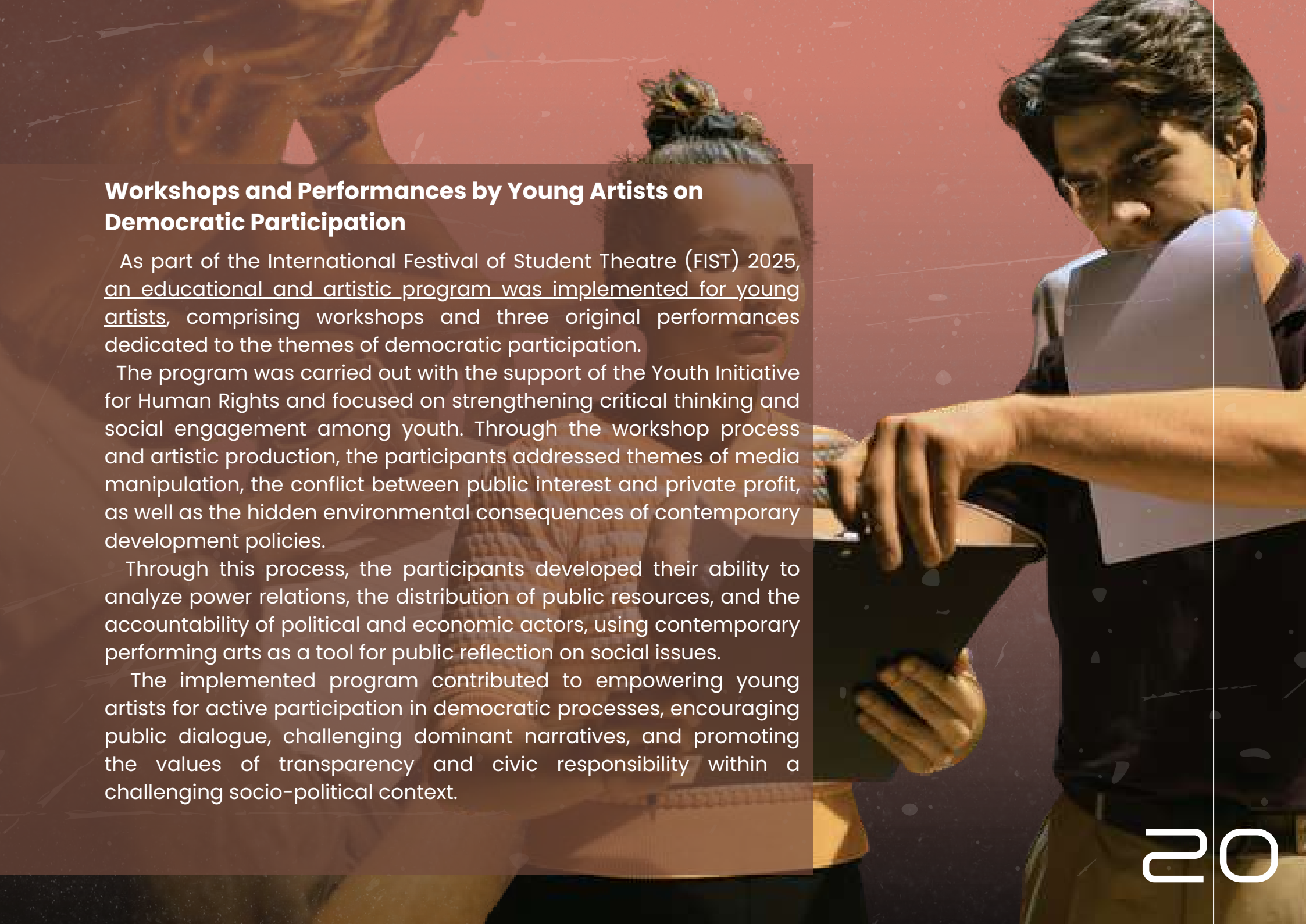
Activist Assembly Held in Niš

The Activist Assembly in Niš, held from February 7 to February 11, was dedicated to strengthening the political and civic literacy of young people. Over the course of five days, 30 participants from different parts of Serbia took part in educational sessions and discussions regarding the functioning of the political system, political ideologies, the role of institutions, and decision-making processes.

Against the backdrop of social and educational blockades across the country, the assembly provided a space for open conversations on current social issues, a critical examination of 20th-century history, and an understanding of how historical narratives are utilized in contemporary politics. Special focus was placed on media, civic, and historical literacy through the analysis of disinformation, manipulative narratives, and the importance of fact-checking sources.

Youth Exchange "Say No to Hate Speech" Held

Young people from Germany, Serbia, Ukraine, Italy, Spain, and Bosnia and Herzegovina gathered in Jajce and Sarajevo for the international youth exchange "Say No to Hate Speech" held from October 15th to 23rd. Throughout the nine-day program, participants learned how to recognize, understand, and combat hate speech in their own communities through training sessions, workshops, and study visits. Through discussions on discrimination, social tensions, protests, and facing the past, the participants exchanged personal experiences and developed a deeper understanding of the political and social challenges faced by youth. Visits to Sarajevo and the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potočari left a particularly powerful impression, where they discussed facts, responsibility, and the importance of acknowledging the suffering of victims. During the program, they created visuals, short video clips, and photographs which they shared on social media to convey messages of solidarity and encourage their peers to actively oppose hate speech.

The background image shows three young people, two women and one man, engaged in a creative activity. They are holding a large, dark, rectangular object, possibly a piece of art or a prop, and appear to be working on it. The lighting is warm and focused on the subjects, creating a sense of concentration and collaboration. The overall tone is artistic and educational.

Workshops and Performances by Young Artists on Democratic Participation

As part of the International Festival of Student Theatre (FIST) 2025, an educational and artistic program was implemented for young artists, comprising workshops and three original performances dedicated to the themes of democratic participation.

The program was carried out with the support of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and focused on strengthening critical thinking and social engagement among youth. Through the workshop process and artistic production, the participants addressed themes of media manipulation, the conflict between public interest and private profit, as well as the hidden environmental consequences of contemporary development policies.

Through this process, the participants developed their ability to analyze power relations, the distribution of public resources, and the accountability of political and economic actors, using contemporary performing arts as a tool for public reflection on social issues.

The implemented program contributed to empowering young artists for active participation in democratic processes, encouraging public dialogue, challenging dominant narratives, and promoting the values of transparency and civic responsibility within a challenging socio-political context.

Support for the Youth Public Debate on the EXPO 2027 Project within FIST 2025

As part of the 20th International Festival of Student Theatre (FIST 2025), the Youth Initiative for Human Rights supported the organization of a public debate. The debate was initiated and entirely designed by the young festival participants, focusing on the EXPO 2027 project as one of the highly relevant contemporary socio-political issues.

The debate took place against the backdrop of increased youth social engagement and limited space for institutional dialogue. Its goal was to enable an open and inclusive exchange of views on a project that was adopted without a comprehensive public discussion. In this way, FIST 2025 served as a platform for constructive dialogue between youth, citizens, and the expert public.

In response to the lack of transparency in institutional processes, this organized public debate allowed for the consideration of the social, economic, and democratic aspects of the EXPO 2027 project, standing as an example of an alternative model for participatory decision-making.

The conclusions and recommendations resulting from the debate were compiled into a document sent to the competent institutions, aiming to contribute to improving transparency and accountability in decision-making processes of public importance.

This program further confirmed the role of young people as active participants in democratic processes and their ability to initiate informed public debate on issues of broader social interest.



Initiative Alumni Gathering: "Connections That Last"

As part of continuous activities for networking and supporting former program participants, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights organized the event "Connections That Last" on July 18th in Belgrade. The gathering allowed alumni to reflect on the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained during their participation in the programs, as well as to reconnect with the community to which they belong.

During the event, participants discussed the impact of the programs on their personal and professional development, as well as the role of youth in the current socio-political context. Special attention was dedicated to the position of the civil sector in the current political situation, while the discussions enabled an exchange of views on the organization's future direction of action.

The event confirmed the importance of mutual connection and continuous dialogue among young people, contributing to the empowerment of the alumni community and their engagement in social change.

A new cycle of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Program started

Third consecutive Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Program commenced with a two-day training session and workshop in Tirana on December 12-13, 2025, bringing together more than 20 young individuals from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The program, funded by the Open Society Foundations and implemented by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Serbia), Youth Educational Forum, and SCiDEV, will run until September of next year.

During the introductory training, participants got to know one another, exchanged experiences, engaged in debates on current social and political issues in the Western Balkans, and improved the skills necessary for designing research and policy proposals. RYLMP will involve them in policy work across fields such as education, employment, migration, regional cooperation, and the digital and green transition, through teamwork and mentorship.

The program aims to strengthen regional youth cooperation, leadership, and their capacity to advocate for changes based on facts and research.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

Youth Meeting in Preševo

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Serbia and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Kosovo jointly organized a youth meeting in Preševo, which took place on January 31 at the premises of the Youth Office within the Preševo Cultural Center. The event was designed to connect young people from border areas, namely the Preševo Valley and the northern parts of Kosovo, as well as youth from across Serbia and Kosovo in a broader sense. The meeting provided an opportunity for young people to get to know one another, exchange experiences, and discuss the challenges they face within their respective communities.

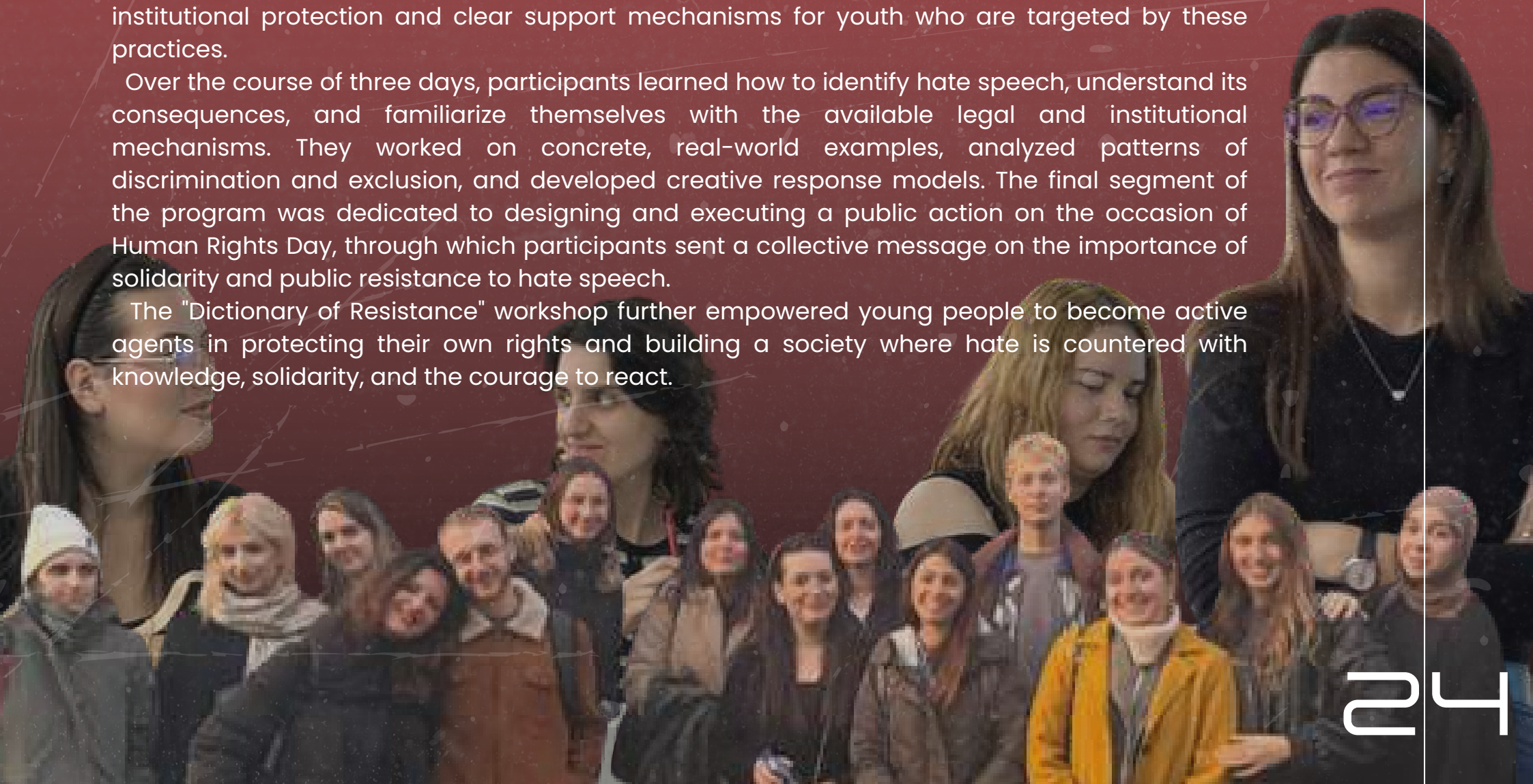
During the event, participants had the opportunity to learn more about the Peace Generation Activist Network, an initiative aimed at fostering positive change and advancing long-term cooperation between youth from Kosovo and Serbia. A dedicated segment of the program focused on local organizations from the Preševo Valley, which presented their work, current initiatives, and avenues for youth involvement in projects of community significance. This meeting created a vital space for intercultural dialogue, mutual acquaintance, and networking among young people who rarely have the chance to interact. The event contributed to reducing mutual distance, encouraged open communication, and represented an important step toward building better relations between the two communities.

"Dictionary of Resistance" Workshop

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights organized a three-day workshop "Dictionary of Resistance" in Novi Pazar. The workshop was designed for young people from Serbia aged 18 to 30, with the aim of developing the knowledge and skills needed to recognize and counter hate speech in public spaces. The workshop was created in response to the increasing normalization of hate speech within student, activist, and broader social communities, as well as the lack of institutional protection and clear support mechanisms for youth who are targeted by these practices.

Over the course of three days, participants learned how to identify hate speech, understand its consequences, and familiarize themselves with the available legal and institutional mechanisms. They worked on concrete, real-world examples, analyzed patterns of discrimination and exclusion, and developed creative response models. The final segment of the program was dedicated to designing and executing a public action on the occasion of Human Rights Day, through which participants sent a collective message on the importance of solidarity and public resistance to hate speech.

The "Dictionary of Resistance" workshop further empowered young people to become active agents in protecting their own rights and building a society where hate is countered with knowledge, solidarity, and the courage to react.



Echoes of Dialogue

The "Echoes of Dialogue" program, held in Pristina from June 9 to 15, 2025, brought together young people from Serbia and Kosovo. Over the course of an intensive seven-day program, participants explored how storytelling can become a tool for reconciliation, dealing with the past, and fostering understanding among communities divided by conflict. Through lectures, workshops, and guided discussions, the participants familiarized themselves with key concepts of transitional justice and peacebuilding, while examining how personal stories and narratives shape social relations and perceptions of the "other side."

Throughout the program, the young participants exchanged their own experiences, challenged inherited narratives, and learned how stories are constructed, shared, and transformed within the space of intercultural dialogue. Special emphasis was placed on creative storytelling, participants developed narrative, visual, and multimedia works addressing personal memories, identity, mutual encounters, and the ways in which youth can contribute to reconciliation processes.

Regional Activist School "New Wave" (Novi Val)

At the beginning of May, the Regional Activist School "New Wave", jointly organized by the Youth Initiatives for Human Rights in Serbia and Croatia from April 29 to May 5. The program brought together 19 young people from both countries who, over the course of six days, learned about the wars of the 1990s, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, war crimes, and conflicting historical and political narratives, while also exploring what dealing with the past means for today's generations. The introductory sessions covered the historical, economic, and cultural aspects of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the role of media and propaganda, as well as topics such as Operations Storm and Flash, political decisions regarding the partition of Bosnia, and the work of the Hague Tribunal. A dedicated segment of the school was focused on working in thematic groups that addressed Vukovar, Operation Storm, and children killed in the war. This was complemented by a "Memory Walk" through Osijek, during which participants visited sites central to wartime events and crimes committed against civilians. A meeting with journalist Drago Hedl and a visit to the Museum of Personal Stories further deepened their understanding of the local context and personal wartime experiences.

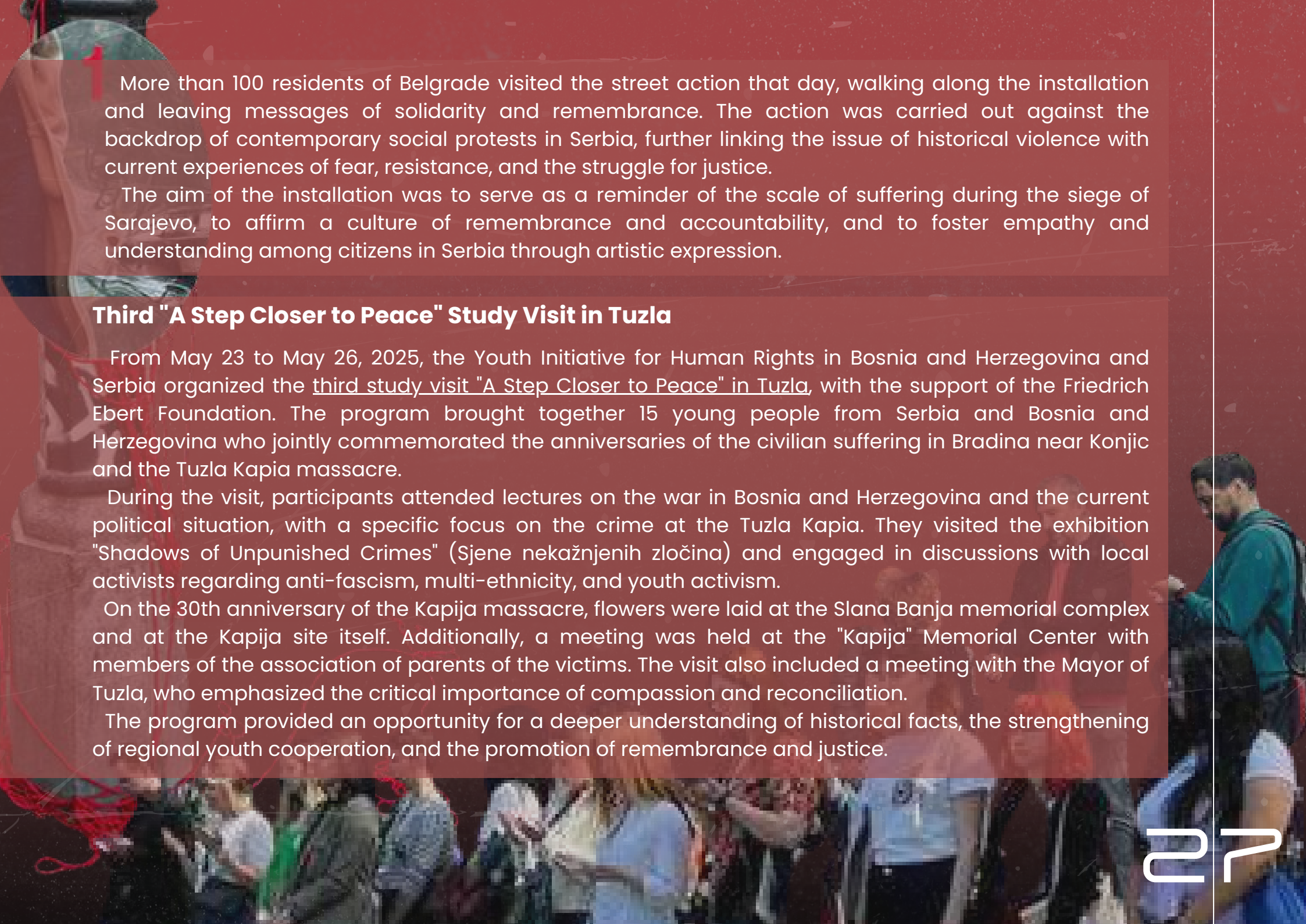


Through workshops on nationalism and stereotypes, "Sharing is Caring" sessions, and "The Nineties and Me" discussions, the young participants shared their own perspectives, family stories, and the dilemmas faced by a generation born after the war. The "New Wave" school demonstrated that young people want to understand the past without myths and propaganda, that they seek truth, empathy, and dialogue, and that they are ready to take an active role in building a more just future in the region.

Street Action: "Every Step Was a Risk"

On April 4, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights staged the artistic-activist installation "Every Step Was a Risk" in Čika Ljubina Street in Belgrade, marking 33 years since the beginning of the siege of Sarajevo. The action was dedicated to all victims of the war in Sarajevo from 1992 to 1996, regardless of their ethnic, national, or religious background.

The installation was designed as a symbolic passage through a space of risk: two mirrors were placed at the beginning and end of the street, connected by a red thread measuring 1,425 paces, corresponding to the number of days the siege of Sarajevo lasted. By observing their own reflection in a mirror marked with a target, visitors were symbolically placed in the shoes of the citizens of Sarajevo, who lived for years under the constant threat of sniper and artillery fire.



More than 100 residents of Belgrade visited the street action that day, walking along the installation and leaving messages of solidarity and remembrance. The action was carried out against the backdrop of contemporary social protests in Serbia, further linking the issue of historical violence with current experiences of fear, resistance, and the struggle for justice.

The aim of the installation was to serve as a reminder of the scale of suffering during the siege of Sarajevo, to affirm a culture of remembrance and accountability, and to foster empathy and understanding among citizens in Serbia through artistic expression.

Third "A Step Closer to Peace" Study Visit in Tuzla

From May 23 to May 26, 2025, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia organized the third study visit "A Step Closer to Peace" in Tuzla, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The program brought together 15 young people from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina who jointly commemorated the anniversaries of the civilian suffering in Bradina near Konjic and the Tuzla Kapia massacre.

During the visit, participants attended lectures on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the current political situation, with a specific focus on the crime at the Tuzla Kapia. They visited the exhibition "Shadows of Unpunished Crimes" (Sjene nekažnjenih zločina) and engaged in discussions with local activists regarding anti-fascism, multi-ethnicity, and youth activism.

On the 30th anniversary of the Kapija massacre, flowers were laid at the Slana Banja memorial complex and at the Kapija site itself. Additionally, a meeting was held at the "Kapija" Memorial Center with members of the association of parents of the victims. The visit also included a meeting with the Mayor of Tuzla, who emphasized the critical importance of compassion and reconciliation.

The program provided an opportunity for a deeper understanding of historical facts, the strengthening of regional youth cooperation, and the promotion of remembrance and justice.

Film Screening on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, a film screening organized by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights was held on July 10, 2025, at the Endžio Hab space. On this occasion, the docudrama "Samir Mehić Bowie - Letters from Srebrenica," produced by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIRN BiH), was screened.

The film follows the personal story of Samir Mehić, a musician who remained in Srebrenica during the siege, and through an exchange of letters with a friend, sheds light on the experiences of a youth interrupted by war, fear, friendship, and hope. The screening served as a starting point for a discussion on the importance of a culture of remembrance and dealing with the past as prerequisites for reconciliation.

Following the screening, an informal discussion was held with the attendees, and the evening concluded with a joint attendance of the commemorative artistic performance staged by the Women in Black in Republic Square in Belgrade.

Artist Performance "The Mother's Scarf"

Civil society organizations and citizens marked the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide on July 11th by lighting candles and tying scarves together at Republic Square in Belgrade. The performance was inspired by the international campaign "Mother's Scarf", initiated by the Association of Movement of Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa Enclaves and the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC). Scarves, as a universal symbol of remembrance, empathy, solidarity, and hope were connected into a joint installation. The scarves used were sent by the Mothers of Srebrenica group with the support of the Post-Conflict Research Center.



The activity in Belgrade was part of a simultaneous global commemoration held across multiple countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Jordan, Iraq, and Cambodia. This sent a clear message that the Srebrenica genocide must never be forgotten and that its denial must stop.

During the commemoration, attendees lit candles next to the message "People Remember People", which was the motto of this year's remembrance in Serbia. The gathering was attended by representatives of the Green-Left Front (ZLF) and the Free Citizens Movement (PSG), the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Serbia and Montenegro Martijn Elgersma, as well as numerous citizens. In a statement for Radio Free Europe, Sofija Todorović, Director of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, emphasized that "genocide denial affects all those who are alive, because Srebrenica is, even today, a town where people live."

The goal of this action was to preserve the culture of remembrance, publicly oppose genocide denial, and express solidarity with the victims and their families, thirty years after the crime in Srebrenica.

Third Drina Summer School Held in Banja Koviljača

The third Drina Summer School, held from August 15 to August 20 in Banja Koviljača, brought together twenty young people from Serbia who, through a six-day program, learned about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, war crimes, the Srebrenica genocide, and Serbia's role in the wartime events. Through lectures by historians Vladimir Petrović and Dragan Popović, alongside experts from organizations such as the AIRE Centre, Medica Zenica, and the Humanitarian Law Center, participants addressed key topics including the outbreak of the war, international criminal law, wartime sexual violence, forced mobilizations, and genocide denial strategies.

A special part of the program was dedicated to the Srebrenica genocide, after which the participants visited the Srebrenica Memorial Center in Potočari, paid their respects to the victims, and toured the new Genocide Museum. On the final day, they discussed the Dayton Peace Agreement with legal expert Nedim Jahić, and the program concluded with a discussion and a quiz led by the school's coordinators.

The youth highlighted that the Drina Summer School provided them with a space to learn, question, and connect with peers who share the same values of facing the past and peace activism.

Three Workshops Held on Sexual Violence in War and Peace

Throughout 2025, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights implemented three multi-day educational workshops dedicated to understanding sexual and gender-based violence in war and peace: I don't want a rose, I want justice!, Combating silence with education and UNMUTE. The workshops brought together a total of 60 young people from various parts of Serbia.

The workshop program covered themes of sexual violence as a systemic crime, legal and social mechanisms for facing the past, the experiences of survivors, and the continuity of gender-based violence in both wartime and peacetime contexts. A special focus was placed on case studies from the wars of the 1990s, as well as transgenerational trauma and the role of feminist and civil society in justice processes.

The educational approach combined theoretical lectures, guided discussions, and creative working methods, including writing, storytelling, and activist actions. This approach allowed participants to process complex and emotionally demanding knowledge on both a personal and collective level, resulting in greater engagement and concrete creative and activist outcomes.

The workshops were led and supported by experts and activists in the field of transitional justice and the fight against sexual violence. A particularly significant contribution came from collaborations with organizations and individuals working directly with survivors and children born of wartime rape.

Through these workshops, the Initiative further developed an educational model that provides young people with knowledge, space for dialogue, and tools for a responsible and empathetic approach to facing the past and contemporary forms of violence.



Book Promotion: "I Am Alen"

In Belgrade, on November 26, promotion of the autobiographical book "I Am Alen" by author Alen Muhić was held. The event was organized by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Autonomous Women's Center and Women in Black.

The promotion was moderated by Iva Parađanin Lilić, and the conversation was dedicated to the author's personal testimony, the experiences of children born of wartime rape, and the broader social context of facing the consequences of the wars of the 1990s. The event opened up a space to discuss society's responsibility toward civil victims of war and those whose voices have long remained invisible.

The audience had the opportunity to participate in a discussion on the importance of listening to, understanding, and publicly acknowledging these experiences as part of the process of facing the past. The promotion was recorded in its entirety and published as a podcast episode within the "Tampon Zona" series, making the conversation accessible to the wider public.



YIHR Serbia, YIHR Croatia, and CNA Marked Unmarked Sites of Suffering in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights from Serbia and Croatia participated in a joint action with the Center for Nonviolent Action, dedicated to marking unmarked sites of suffering from the wars of the 1990s, with the goal of preserving the memory of the victims and pointing out the importance of institutional and social responsibility in the process of facing the past.

YIHR Serbia and YIHR Croatia marked the locations of former detention facilities and execution sites in Šljivovica, Stajićevo, and Begejci in Serbia, as well as locations in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that still lack official memorial markers.

The action aimed to contribute to a culture of remembrance based on facts, strengthen regional cooperation among organizations working on transitional justice, and encourage public institutions to take responsibility for permanently and with dignity marking sites of suffering.

Art Action "Monument to a Deserter"

The art action "Monument to a Deserter", realized in cooperation between the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and authors Đurđica Čilić and Srđan Ćešić, was presented at the Cultural Center of Belgrade (KCB). The event was held on December 1, following previous presentations in Zagreb and Sarajevo, and was dedicated to anti-war resistance and the question of the place of deserters in public space.

The program included an artistic segment and a public discussion. As part of the action, actor Rade Maričić read the poem "Deserters" by Tadeusz Różewicz, while works by Dalia Koler from the Youth Initiative for Human Rights were presented in the lobby of the KCB. These works were brought together into a collection titled "Archive of Encounters", which was created during visits to sites of remembrance across the region.

Following the artistic portion, a panel discussion titled "Desertion as an Ethical Act" was held, featuring speakers Olga Manojlović Pintar, Vukašin Milićević, Rade Maričić, and Dalia Koler. The conversation focused on understanding desertion as a form of anti-war resistance, the relationship toward anti-fascist heritage, and the importance of humanizing the "other side," particularly when

working with youth and in the context of contemporary social tensions. The goal of this art action was to open up a space for critical reflection on war, responsibility, and remembrance, as well as to affirm anti-war stances in public discourse.



HUMAN RIGHTS

The Documentary Advocacy Film "Connecting..." on Cultural and Artistic Cooperation Between Serbia and Kosovo

Within the framework of activities under the auspices of the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!" festival, the documentary film "Connecting...", directed by Idro Seferi, premiered on January 31, 2025, in Belgrade and on February 7, 2025, in Pristina. The film was co-produced by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Belgrade), the Integra organization (Pristina), Civic Initiatives (Belgrade), and the international organization HREYN (Brussels).

The documentary/advocacy film follows artists from Serbia and Kosovo who, through their professional and activist practices, promote cultural cooperation and dialogue between the two nations, while shedding light on the obstacles they encounter in these efforts. The film highlights the importance of artistic engagement in normalizing relations, dealing with the past, and strengthening the reconciliation process.

The premieres brought together embassy representatives, public figures, the film's cast and crew, and civil society representatives. A discussion with the director and participants was organized during the events, providing the audience with a firsthand perspective on the challenges and experiences of cultural and artistic cooperation.

This project further strengthened inter-ethnic dialogue through art and culture, providing a platform for young people and professional artists to engage in constructive exchange and collaboration.

Regional Pride Academy

Regional Pride Academy, held from September 3 to 7 in Belgrade, was one of the key programs in the field of LGBTQI+ rights. Over the course of four days, 30 young activists from across the region learned about the history of the queer movement, legal frameworks, political challenges, and the role of the media in shaping narratives about the community. Special emphasis was placed on art as a tool in the fight for visibility and equal rights. Alongside volunteers, the participants took part in the preparations for the Belgrade Pride march and joined the demonstration, sending a clear message that Pride remains a protest and a demand for equal protection, institutional accountability, and freedom for all. The program demonstrated the critical importance of regional networking and the inclusion of young leaders in decision-making processes regarding their rights.

The Twelfth Edition of the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!" Festival

The twelfth edition of the "Mirëdita, dobar dan!" was held from November 20 to 22, 2025, in Pristina. Once again, the festival served as a space for dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, connecting artistic and cultural scenes while opening up questions regarding relationships, the past, and a shared future against a backdrop of rising nationalist rhetoric.

The program brought together both established and young artists from the Belgrade scene. The festival opened with remarks by Kushtrim Koliqi (Integra), Tijana Đuknić (YIHR Serbia), Jörn Rohde, the German Ambassador to Kosovo, and Majlinda Mazelliu, Director of the British Council for Kosovo and Albania, followed by a concert by the band "Pliš."

Throughout the festival, debate, literary, visual, and performing arts programs were organized. These included literary discussions with authors Marija Ratković and Arbër Selmani, moderated by Vladimir Arsenić; exhibitions by Ivan Šuletić, Mihaela Vučinić, and Nemanja Joković; the theatrical performance "All the Good Barbies" (Sve dobre barbike); and a screening of the film "78 Days" (78 dana) directed by Emilija Gašić. The final day was dedicated to a debate on Kosovo-Serbia relations featuring Branimir Đurović, Dimitrije Prokopović, Vjosa Çerkini, and Vullnet Krasniqi, moderated by Tatjana Lazarević, alongside literary and film programs.

The festival concluded with the presentation of an award to Lindita Sejdiju, founder of the Department of Balkan Studies at the Faculty of Philology in Pristina.

The festival was organized by Integra (Kosovo), the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Serbia), and Civic Initiatives (Serbia), with the support of international partners and donors.



Regional "Re:Connected" Workshop and Exhibition Held in Sarajevo

From December 2 to 5, BIRN and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights organized the regional workshop "Re:Connected", which brought together more than 20 young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in Sarajevo. The program focused on the role of media and art in the processes of dealing with the past and building dialogue in post-conflict societies.

Through a combination of theoretical and practical work, the participants developed their own video installations on the themes of memorialization and collective memory. The workshop concluded with a public presentation of their works at the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, alongside a panel discussion featuring visual artist Anita Karabašić and Dalia Koler, Transitional Justice Program Coordinator at YIHR.

The aim of the activity was to strengthen critical and creative approaches among youth when reflecting on the past, as well as to foster regional cooperation.



A WORK ENVIRONMENT TAILORED TO YOUTH!

This summer, I graduated from high school in Germany and decided to take a gap year before university to volunteer in Belgrade with the Initiative. So far, I have had the chance to learn a great deal about Serbia; its history, culture, and current political situation through conversations with my colleagues as well as other people I have met here. Before arriving, I knew very little about the Western Balkans and had never been to the region before, which is exactly why this experience is so incredibly valuable to me.

I am also really enjoying life in Belgrade: the brutalist architecture, the vintage trams, the small kiosks and open-air markets scattered across the city, as well as the opportunity to meet people from all over the world.

Coming straight from Germany brought quite a few culture shocks and new things to adjust to, a new language, currency, culture, and mentality. Yet, these challenges have helped me broaden my horizons, build character, and develop a deeper understanding of Serbia.

I found it particularly fascinating to learn how differently topics like nationalism and the culture of remembrance are viewed here compared to Germany. The conversations I've had have really prompted me to reflect on my own relationship with national identity.

I am truly grateful for this opportunity, and I wish there were more exchange programs connecting young people from Western and Eastern Europe.

A portrait of a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue sweater and a gold necklace, smiling slightly. The background is a dark blue gradient with some light streaks.

Karolin Miler

As a third-year political science student at Sciences Po in Paris, specializing in the European Union and Central and Eastern European studies, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to spend a semester with the Initiative in Serbia, particularly given the current political climate and the student protest movement that has been active for a year now.

During my time in Serbia, I was fortunate enough to engage with young activists, both within and outside the organization, who provided me with a broader and more nuanced understanding of the country's current situation, its history, and its potential future trajectories. It was an invaluable experience to witness the protests and civic actions firsthand, and to speak with individuals directly involved in the protest movement and the broader struggle for justice and anti-corruption in Serbia.

Given my academic background in post-war conflicts and Balkan reconciliation processes, I held rather negative preconceptions about Serbia prior to my arrival, especially regarding the Kosovo issue. Consequently, it was fascinating to observe the activities and projects the Initiative implements to promote transitional justice and challenge local mindsets on this matter. I was particularly impressed by the Mirëdita, dobar dan! festival, as I was present during its planning phase and the post-festival period. Naturally, there remains a pressing need for further efforts in transitional justice across Serbia, but I firmly believe that the work of organizations like the Initiative is vital to shifting attitudes and advancing the reconciliation process.

I look forward to the remainder of my stay in Serbia and to following their future endeavors.

A portrait of a young woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark green turtleneck sweater. The background is a solid dark blue.

Zad Destremo

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT US...

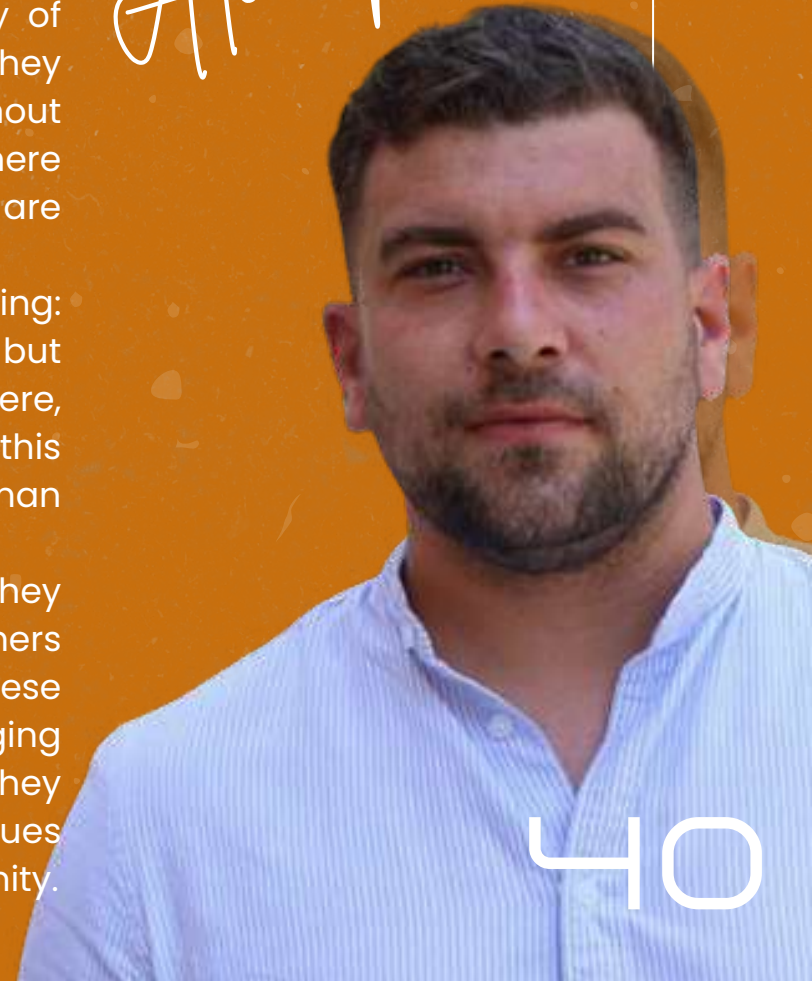
My opinion of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights is clear and comes from personal experience. These are young people who are not asking for privileges, but for basic human rights. They want a fair system in which we are all equal, without labels and without the divisions that have burdened us for years.

While sitting with them and sharing my story, as well as the story of children born because of the war, I felt genuine attention and respect. They listened, reflected, asked questions, and expressed their opinions without prejudice. It was not an ordinary conversation, but a space where understanding is built and walls that others have spent years erecting are torn down.

What others have said about this initiative only confirms the same thing: these are people who restore faith in society. It is a space of freedom, but also of responsibility. A space where one learns that hatred leads nowhere, and that love, truth, and courage are the only way forward. The work of this organization deserves the support of everyone who believes in human dignity. Because this is not their struggle—this is the struggle of all of us.

At a time when it is easiest to remain silent or look the other way, they choose to speak up, to connect people, and to build bridges where others have left divisions behind. That is why I believe that young people like these are not only a source of hope, but also a force that is already changing society today. They do not ask who you are or where you come from; they ask what kind of person you want to be. And it is precisely on such values that a future is built in which everyone will have their place and their dignity.

Alen Muhic



For this reason, both personally and on behalf of the band Pliš, I am grateful to the Youth Initiative for Human Rights for the invitation, the impeccable cooperation, and the support we received during our participation in the "Mirëdita, Dobar Dan" festival. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Initiative in terms of values and look forward to future opportunities for joint action. Although it might have been expected that my first collaboration with the Initiative would be in the capacity of my affiliation as a "Project Coordinator at the Belgrade Open School," it was the name of the band Pliš that appeared alongside my own. As a result, this first official collaboration immediately carried greater significance. Bearing in mind the Initiative's goals and mission, and knowing the kind of media environment in which it operates, being part of its work under these circumstances and insisting on understanding and reconciliation in the region represents a form of defiance against the currently dominant narratives in the former Yugoslav republics.

Pliš



