

**FINAL REPORT FROM THE CONFERENCE:
"FACING THE PAST / CREATING THE FUTURE"**

Sarajevo, 30 September - 1 October 2001

INTRODUCTION

The Conference "Facing the Past / Creating the Future" was held in Sarajevo on 30 September and 1 October 2011, and organised by the Open Society Fund in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Conference was one of a series of events held during 2011 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Soros Foundation in the Western Balkans. The aim was to emphasise the importance of culture and the arts for the development of an open, inclusive and democratic society in the region.

The conference brought together about one hundred participants. Given the diversity of participants, the plenary sessions on the various aspects of the role of culture and the arts in the reintegration of the Western Balkans and the challenges of developing regional cultural cooperation led to intensive discussions and exchange of ideas. The participants had the opportunity to attend five plenary sessions and participate in four workshops.

This Report presents a summary of the discussions from the plenary sessions and workshops. It brings together the main issues raised during the presentations and the discussions that followed. We would like to point out that this Report aims to provide an insight into the work of the Conference and therefore conveys only the main conclusions. It does not include all the details and nuances of the discussions. The report is also being prepared for a more extensive publication we plan to develop. All the relevant presentations can be viewed through the website of [OSF BiH](#).

OSF BiH would like to thank the moderators and panellists, the participants and all those who contributed to the success of the Conference.

1. INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATIONS

At the start of the Conference, Aleksandra Jovičević and Milica Tomić posed many questions: what is the relationship between individual and collective responsibility, and what is the place and role of individual artists in this relationship between participants and the state, that is, between individual and collective responsibility; when did the war in the territory of Yugoslavia actually start; what is the name of the war from the early 1990s and what is its character; who has the right to a narrative of a crime (the state, international tribunals, the victim, the artist). Apart from that, it was concluded that the war still goes on, that it has been continued by other means, that instead of peace, we have reconciliation - an ideology that conceals war only to normalise it.

The introductory session did not provide definitive answers to the posed questions. On the contrary, additional hypothetical questions was raised - is not culture one of the means to continue the war? It is, therefore, important for artists to speak in a critical and socially involved way about phenomena from the present, but also those from the past.

The discussion of prospects for developing cultural cooperation in the region concluded that even though the societies in the region developed in different ways in the past 20 years, there are similar trends in all former Yugoslav countries that can generally be summed up as an

accelerated loss of the public domain. It was concluded that a consensus could be reached on this matter, making it a basis for joint action.

2. PANELS

Panel 1: "Traces of a Disappeared Country in Art"

Moderator: Pavle Levi

Panellists: Želimir Žilnik, Haris Pašović, Mrdan Bajić, Erzen Shkololli

Traces of a disappeared country are still profoundly present in artwork and activism. Communication in the region is intensive and there is a natural interest for regional cultural exchange and cooperation. Cooperation had never ceased on a personal level, and contact are established in line with interests and convictions in art. Over the past 20 years, various platforms enabled establishing contacts and developing joint initiatives.

The disappeared country is perceived in various ways and this is in part dependent on age and location. Young people do not have a feeling of nostalgia towards the former country and establish contacts unburdened by the past. Generations whose formative years transpired before the 1990s must accept the newly developed situation and develop relationship on new foundations.

During the discussion, two attitudes on understanding experiences of the past and their present relevance were defined. One attitude was that it was unnecessary to analyse experiences from socialism to respond to today's problems and that new frameworks of action should be sought, while the other was that the positive emancipatory heritage from the past can be useful.

Everyone agreed, however, that it was necessary to fight for public space. It is necessary to politicise public space, because otherwise the result will be an immobile cultural scene and ultimately an immobile citizenry.

A statement made by Vladimir Milčin can serve as a conclusion: "We did live in a common country, but we did not live a common past... Our past was not entirely common, and our future cannot be entirely common either. Abandoning these two extremes will make it easier for us."

Panel 2: The Culture of Remembering: Crimes and Symbolic Memory

Moderator: Lev Kreft

Introduction: Andrea Zlatar Violić

Panellists: Borka Pavićević, Milica Tomić, Jasmina Husanović, Jeton Neziraj, Skelzen Maliqi, Katarina Pejović

What are the processes that give rise to collective memory? What is the role of the individual and individual narratives in that process, and what is the role of art? Is memory possible if there is no political subject to remember? These were the questions posed during this session.

Andrea Zlatar Violić started her opening presentation by introducing three terminological pairs: individual and collective memory; remembering and forgetting; amnesty and amnesia. The trauma of war results in individuals losing their personal stories because they come to belong to collective memory. Art projects, on the other hand, provide space to the public for

something that belongs to personal narratives. A selective approach to the past, suppression of the past and the ultimate creation of imaginary national histories mainly pertains to the period following 1941 and results in a lack of critical historiography throughout the 20th century. This imposes two tasks - establishing a critical historiography and a complete overhaul of the education system.

The remainder of the session dealt with various aspects of the culture of remembering, mainly through the prism of projects. Thus, when talking about the project "The Four Faces of Omarska", Milica Tomić analysed the question of whether it is possible to conceive a memorial from the position of those whose knowledge and experience has been excluded and disqualified from the corpus of public memory.

Jasmina Husanović talked about the confluence of cultural production and emancipatory policy, especially in the context of the policy of testifying to trauma.

Talking about his work on the play "Patriotic Hypermarket", Jeton Neziraj concluded that "in this region art deals with what others did to us, but rarely has the courage to deal with what we did to others," and that "artists engaged in regional cooperation are often stigmatised because they pick at the wounds that hurt us, but we know that this is the only way to heal."

Through the prism of a number of initiatives, Katarina Pejović talked about the role of art when it comes to the culture of memory, and particularly emphasised that dealing with the past must necessarily be a question of methodology and contextualisation. She pointed out the need to work more with young people and stressed that at this moment, art must contain a pedagogical component.

Skelzen Maliqi pointed out that culture had a significant role in preparing for the war, but was also the first to be sacrificed for the sake of higher national interests.

Borka Pavićević pointed out the need to find another language in culture and two instances that lead to a change in the perception of the role of art and culture in the region.

The first was a change that occurred within the EU. Namely, up to a few years ago, art and culture were not present in official documents and cultural production projects were recognised only as a means for the development of civil society and democracy. Evidently, that model was not effective and now in all documents, culture is presented as a means for reconciliation.

The other important instance was when artists in the region rejected their role in the political life of society and thereby reduced the scope of public space. However, de-politicisation in the cultural arena leads to de-politicisation in the civic arena and to passive citizens. The problem of public space is, therefore, the object of daily struggles, because public space is where continuity is established to inspire personal integrity in citizens.

Panel 3: Difficulties in Speaking and Reading "Our" Languages; The Future of Cultural Cooperation

Moderator: Dejan Ilić

Panellists: Varja Đukić, Bojan Munjin, Boris Bakal

Do we (still) understand each other? What is the origin of our misunderstandings? Books, the publishing industry, the market - where are we? These were the questions discussed by the panellists and members of the audience.

All

the speakers agreed that people in the region understand each other

(even though they speak Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian), while any lack of understanding or misunderstandings originate from political and national animosity and the use of language for political purposes. Namely, language has two functions - to establish communication and to strengthen identity, and in this region the latter is always by far the more significant.

It was concluded once again that the cultural connections between cultural centres in the newly created states are strong and that more should be done to facilitate the circulation of cultural contents and improve communication.

In that context, the importance of understanding and translation, and not just as a matter of language, but also on all other levels, was emphasised. Concerning the issue of cultural cooperation, it was concluded that cooperation should be established not only within the cultural sector, but linkages should be set up with other related sectors.

It was pointed out that publishers in the region must work on co-publishing projects. The issue of the market was also brought up during discussion, and it was concluded that the independent cultural scene in the region has been successfully dealing with 1990s nationalism, but that it is questionable how successful it will be in dealing with the implacable market increasingly being pushed onto it. The market, however, will become inevitable. It is increasingly unlikely that someone will fully finance independent projects and it is, therefore, imperative for independent culture to prepare for the newly established situation.

Panel 4: Activism and New Media

Moderator: Aldo Milohnić

Panellists: Vuk Ćosić, Teodor Celakoski, Alban Muja

Whether used as a new technological solution to ease communication or being at the centre of an activist project, new media have become an indispensable activism resource. Horizontal communication is characteristic of new media, and they have come to the forefront in the past few months during the Arab Spring.

Already in the mid-1990s non-governmental organisations were established in the region to promote media culture and new technologies (Ljudmila, Ljubljana; mama, Zagreb).

The panellists provided examples of various projects and personal experiences to illustrate the importance of new media and the diversity of their application in the region.

The key issue all the participants in the discussion kept coming back to was the issue of public space and public dialogue. These were recognised as the key field of activism, and in that process, new media play an important role in sensitising the citizenry. However, under the current influence of neo-liberal tendencies, are societies are undergoing a transformation of understanding what public space is. Namely, it is necessary to respond to pressures imposing hybrid public spaces (such a shopping centres) as new types of public space. This sort of transformation of the terminological framework must not be allowed because it would lead to a loss of contact with what is constitutive for public space. It is necessary to determine what new media may offer in the struggle for strengthening the public domain discourse in general. It is also necessary to go beyond linkages merely within the sector and seek partnerships outside the culture sector.

Apart from that, in view of the process of transformation of the public sphere aided by the development of new media and increased use of social networks, as well as the need for quality public dialogue, it was pointed out that education and awareness raising are among the big tasks awaiting the non-governmental sector in the future in its efforts to humanise social space.

Panel 5: How Europe Views Cultural Cooperation in/with the Balkans

Moderator: Gottfried Wagner

Panellists: Pascal Brunet, Petra Bischof, Robert Palmer, Isabelle Schwarz, Sana Ouchtati

The aim of this panel was to determine the prospects for cultural cooperation of the region with the rest of Europe in the next five years - what forms of bilateral and multilateral cultural cooperation are possible and what forms of cooperation and support can be expected from various agencies and foundations.

In her presentation, Sana Ouchtati focused on EU support instruments that are available and underused. These include various IPA funds.

Pascal Brunet talked about the need for international cultural cooperation and the challenges it currently faces.

Isabelle Schwarz briefly presented the European Culture Foundation pointing out that programmes for the region within the foundation were developed following a needs analysis. She also emphasised the importance of international cooperation.

Petra Bischof presented the Swiss Cultural Program for the Western Balkans. The Program has been present in the region for 12 years and has evolved from supporting the development of culture to supporting development through culture. An exit strategy has been prepared since the Program will be closing in 2012. The exit strategy will use the twelve-year experience of working in the region for further development of the independent culture scene.

Robert Palmer had an inspirational presentation touching on various topics - how an outsider sees this region, Council of Europe support for developing human rights and democracy in the region, cultural cooperation between the Balkans and Europe, the necessity of cultural and all other forms of cooperation in the Balkans.

Further discussion clarified a number of points: donors are changing the way they operate since their focus is shifting from culture to other sectors and/or from the Balkans to other regions; there is a need for donors to design their programmes in the region based on real needs; the role of culture in the development of civil society was emphasised.

"Cooperation" was the keyword of this session. The need for cultural cooperation - regional, European, international, but also cooperation within the country and with public institutions - was emphasised a number of times. Cooperation between donors present in the region is also needed to create new financing mechanisms.

3. REPORTS FROM WORKSHOPS

Moderator: Vladimir Milčin

Four workshops were held the day before. At the end of the Conference, the rapporteurs presented the conclusions from the working groups.

Workshop A: The Dynamics of Civil Society and Cultural Activism (NGO Perspectives)

Moderator: Emina Višnić

Introduction: Predrag Cvetičanin

Rapporteur: Oliver Musovik

There are already three large national networks (in Croatia, Slovenia, and Serbia), while in BiH, Macedonia and Kosovo, there are initiatives for their establishment. These networks can act in support of international cultural cooperation, but also as agents within existing cultural systems. There is a clear need to establish a framework for joint action, an influential regional cultural platform that would be long-lasting, not as a network of all networks or a new institution, but would enable peer-to-peer cooperation among all organisations and groups within it. It would be heterogeneous and inclusive, based on programme exchange and functioning as a mechanism to influence national cultural policies, as well as EU programmes focusing on this region. This need is all the more evident given the asymmetry in the development of cultural systems in the region.

The workshop also proposed three parallel activities:

- constituting national networks where there aren't any with the help of existing networks and through the transfer of knowledge and skills, good practice and capacity building.
- establishing a platform for regional cooperation. The aim is to create a framework for long-term cooperation. It would be based on programme exchange. Apart from that, the platform would include exchanging knowledge, skills and experiences, capacity building activities and advocacy activities at the national, regional and EU level.
- it was agreed that the existing national networks and those in the making should launch an initiative to establish a regional fund in partnership with individual donors and countries from the region - the Southeast Europe Fund - to finance regional cultural cooperation. It was concluded that the establishment of a regional culture fund, mainly financed by countries from the region with the initial impulse provided by international donor organisations, would set an example of a good exit strategy enabling further development of civil society in Southeast Europe.

Workshop B: Advocacy in Culture

Moderator: Branislav Dimitrijević

Introduction: Isabelle Schwarz

Rapporteur: Svetlana Rakanović

Isabelle Schwarz proposed a definition of the term and provided some examples.

Advocacy in culture is a set of techniques, resources, strategies, methods, and knowledge for positioning and repositioning culture and cultural activists for the purpose of positive changes and working in the interest of the public good. In order for advocacy in culture/for culture to be successful, it is necessary not just to identify problems, but to propose concrete measures and be constructive. In order for advocacy in culture to be effective, it must have a clearly defined, understandable aim and be very precise and realistic in addressing its topics or problems. Good planning is necessary in the sense of mutual coordination between all the actors involved in the process. Advocacy is not just limited to the sphere of culture, it can be activated in the field of civil rights, freedom of expression, etc.

In terms of the region, advocacy practices and policies have been found to be dependent on the progress the country has made in the process of EU accession. Building capacities and networking (especially with European platforms) were recognised as priority activities for advocacy.

In the context of our region, it was suggested that advocacy topics include the cultural rights of minority or underprivileged groups and greater support to collaborative cross-border projects.

Workshop C: Challenges of International Cultural Cooperation (Needs and Obstacles)

Moderator: Robert Alagjovski

Introduction: Nevenka Koprivšek

Rapporteur: Bojana Matić-Ostojić

The group focused on current issues and difficulties related to international cultural cooperation in the region. It should be noted that the group expanded the notion of the region to include Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. Apart from that, an important aspect of cooperation not often mentioned is cooperation with countries of the Mediterranean.

Following discussion, the group produced a number of recommendations:

- it is necessary to raise awareness about the importance and benefits of international cultural cooperation. This includes both cooperation within countries, and especially outside large cultural centres.
- it is necessary to once again present the region as one of great potential, because Europe still harbours certain negative perceptions. Intercultural cooperation is the way to do this. There are various modes of cooperation that could be employed: study visits of artists and managers, joint productions, creating joint programmes, etc.
- many recommendations pertain to the (non)existence of financing: to find synergy between various agencies and foundations supporting culture so that they may construct a coherent approach; greater coordination is necessary among donors; it is necessary to diversify mechanisms for funding culture; it is necessary to find sources of financing for intercultural cooperation.

And finally, a message to foundations - the job is not done, we still need your support to develop international and European cultural cooperation.

Workshop D: Innovation in Cultural Policy

Moderator: Florent Mehmeti

Introduction: Vesna Čopič

Rapporteur: Sanjin Dragojević

Integration processes are known to be slow. One of the primary conditions for facilitating transition processes in the region is a strong, just and responsible state, one that would facilitate a relationship of trust in the region and allow cultural policy to regain its important place of primacy.

When it comes to ensuring new forms of agreements, or negotiations about culture, we should avoid rigid divisions among sectors within culture; we need to achieve a sincere and open partnership.

When it comes to cultural policy, the element of transferring knowledge is very important. Namely, transition in culture is nowhere near finished. The situation in the region is extremely diverse. On the one hand, this makes cooperation more complex, but on the other, it enables the development of various types of knowledge. One of the basic conclusions was that knowledge transfer should be enabled both within the region and in the countries of the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. The capacity building and knowledge transfer element is very important and it will be a great experience for European relations as a whole.

When it comes to the operational mechanisms of cultural policy, it is necessary to say that a considerable portion of cultural policies is, in fact, petrified, and that, on the one hand, there is hyper-regulation, but on the other, few adhere to the regulations.

Certain trends are discernible within cultural cooperation. Cultural cooperation mainly takes place among cities, especially capitals. No country in the region has made cultural cooperation its priority. However, it is logical for integration processes to be accelerated and for regional cultural cooperation to become a primary political interest, for constructive energy to be freed and to once again establish what had been given in this area: communication and a joint communication domain.

4. CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS¹

Milena Dragičević-Šešić summed up the conclusions of the Conference.

The aim of this Conference was multi-fold - to bring to the foreground the results of twenty years of activity of the independent activist scene and try to evaluate them; create the conditions for facing the past; encourage recognition and support to new energy in the cultural dynamics of the region when it comes to artistic creativity, collaborative art, artistic production and practices.

The conclusion of the conference could be what Vladimir Milčin said during discussion, "We did not live a common past, and therefore, since we do not share a common past, we cannot share an entirely common future."

During the conference, important issues were raised: who are the protagonists of memory policies and who in this society has the right to narrative. The right to narrative is confirmed by power. This conference has shown that instead of the establishment - the scientific, political, media, cultural establishment - the artist seizes the right to publicly speak out about crimes. Artists give themselves the right to create public space.

What are we juxtaposing to the ideology of reconciliation, this ideology that conceals crimes, insists on ethnic division and balance, making us all into victims, creating an atmosphere for general unaccountability and indifference? The notion of accountability was stressed and it was concluded that the role of the independent sector was to create the conditions for accepting responsibility.

Numerous needs were identified: critical historiography, new contextualisation, an overhaul of the education system, we need a completely new language to name things, new monuments and heroes, political subjects able to remember, a culture of resistance, a refusal of compromise with matrices of ethno-capital and ethno-politics, trans-sector and trans-disciplinary contextual action.

Neglected topics to be addressed at a future conference are: the relationship between culture, art, and the media; policies of exclusion, language, translation policy, culture and education, trans-sector platforms.

There is much to do, a lot of work ahead of us, activism, networking, promoting and advocating all those things recognised as key topics during this conference, mutual capacity building through mutual transfer of knowledge, and, of course, action.

¹This Report cites only the most important parts of the presentation. An integral text, including this presentation, can be found at www.soros.org.ba