

# Vacation From War

Dialogues across Borders



## CALL FOR DONATIONS 2020

Dear sponsors and supporters, already at the end of February, German media reported on the events in Bosnia-Herzegovina which fuel fears of a new war among the population: Milorad Dodik, Serbian member of the Bosnia-Herzegovina State Presidency and President of the Republic of Srpska, called into question the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina; he did not accept a court decision that defines public land as property of the state as a whole (and not of the respective republic). This – among many other incidents – shows that nationalist slogans in the Former Yugoslavia today are still much more than rhetoric. Nationalist resentments flare up regularly, right now people have the feeling that the political situation can shift at any moment.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump recently announced his "Peace Plan" for Israel and Palestine. The result were mass protests in the region. Reactions among the international community were mixed, but often critical of Trump's announcements. The Palestinian Authority then

considered cancelling the security agreement with Israel, but this quickly turned out to be a threat rather than an actual decision.

Government formation in Israel remains very difficult even after the third consecutive parliamentary election. With a right-wing coalition likely to form a government, there is still no positive change in the political situation in sight.

Work on the ground is by no means getting easier for our partners in both project regions - but they are all the more determined to counter worrying political developments with their work.

As different as the contexts in the two project regions of *Vacation From War* may be, dialogue work stays incredibly important for giving young people the chance to develop perspectives for political change and peaceful coexistence together!

**For this, they need your financial support.**

**Please support our Peace Work with your Donation!**

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## Dialogue Seminars and Youth Encounters in Summer of 2020

In the former Yugoslavia, 120 young people will meet for an Initial Peace Camp in Basko Polje, Croatia, in June 2020. In addition, there will again be peace camps for participants in the past Peace Camps and active members of the YU-Peace network, as well as weekend visits to Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje and Srebrenica.

In mid-July 2020, young men and women from Israel and Palestine will meet in Germany to use the nonviolent communication method to enter into a dialogue about the conflict and the occupation.

At the beginning of August 2020, only women\* from Palestine and Israel will meet near Cologne. They work with the tried-and-tested political narrative approach, which opens up an intensive examination of the conflict through personal stories, their respective family stories and the collective narratives.

Despite the corona virus pandemic, our preparations for the meetings and seminars in summer 2020 continue. We hope that all activities can take place as planned.



## „There is no ‚humane‘ way of invading a families‘ home at 3 a.m.“

*David R.\* (name changed for security reasons) is 33 years old and grew up in a Kibbutz near Haifa in a humanist-liberal, politically left-wing family, in which, notwithstanding, military service also played a major role. In an interview (the full interview is printed in our annual report) David tells Schulamith Weil about his many years of service in the army. There, growing doubts led to his decision to refuse even the reserve service. In the Allgenders-Seminar, he faced Palestinians for the first time without wearing uniform. Here he tells what these encounters triggered in him.*

David R.: Why I came to the seminar has a lot to do with the military experience I just described. (...) In recent years I have been looking for ways to get involved in relations between Israelis and Palestinians. (...) When they told me where they came from, it was difficult for me to tell them that I have already been in every single city and in every village in which they live. (...) I always wore the military uniform,

the rifle, was in power. (...)

To meet in the seminar, face to face, a young Palestinian my age, whose home I had invaded ten years ago and whom I woke up in the middle of the night, to see him and his family and his eyes full of fear and to see my eyes, full of inner fear, is very painful. Sitting here now and even telling this story, hearing his story, it hurts so much.

(...) How have the countless nights that I went into houses or carried out operations (...) influenced the lives of children and what kind of trauma do they grow up with?

Here I suddenly had a very strong, sad and painful insight when I heard and understood firsthand how many of such children have been growing up in such a reality for years and are still growing up in it now. (...)

There is no humane way to break into a families‘ home at three in the morning, whether you are coming to find a family member for interrogation, if you are looking for guns there, or simply to get into

the house because it is a good point for scouting, or because you want to put pressure on another family member who lives in another village or town. There is no way that does no harm and does not cause anger or resentment on the other side. Because you enter into the most personal and intimate place of a family. You wake them up in the middle of the night.

One memory I cannot get out of my head: the rooms of small children. You also have to go in there to find things. But to see pictures of Mickey Mouse on the walls and Barbies (...), that just hurts me, this reality that was forced on me and that was even more forced on them.

Before I came to the seminar, I imagined this moment - eyes that meet - and all I wanted is for them to know that behind this uniform and these eyes is David. I didn't know what it would be like to meet Palestinians here. I didn't know if they wanted to talk to me or if they would be very angry with me. (...)



Participants of the Allgenders-Seminar exchange in a small group



I had several face-to-face discussions and one of the participants in my group approached me after me telling my story and asked me to forgive him. I didn't understand why. He said that he had always seen the devil in soldiers and did not believe that there were soldiers who had different views or acted differently. (...) I told him

that it was the other way around for me. For me it was a sign of great strength and it was extremely painful in some phases. Because with every story I heard from the Palestinians, I saw myself on the other side. It was a once in a lifetime experience. I believe that this experience that corrects something or heals it in a sense. (...) For

me, the interpersonal connection is extraordinarily powerful. (...) I would like to offer to invite soldiers here with experiences similar to mine. I believe that this helps to heal a society. (...) I have the need to thank you for the chance to (...) meet the others, talk, be angry and laugh. This is (...) a life experience for which I am very grateful.

## „You can make a difference!“ - Human Rights Work in Serbia

*(Text: K. Ochsendorf) The Peace Camp in the former Yugoslavia always triggers a lot of emotions among the participants. They often learn for the first time about the complexities of the history of war and reflect upon the current political situation. They ask themselves the difficult question of what they can actually do to initiate political change or contribute to it. In 2019, Sofija Todorović shared her experience of her work in the “Youth Initiative for Human Rights Serbia” (YIHR) and showed the youngsters how everyone can make a difference.*

Sofija has been a program coordinator at YIHR in Belgrade for a long time and worked especially on issues related to dealing with the past and democracy. In the lecture, she told the participants about activities and actions that she planned for YIHR and in which she herself took part in.

For example, she told of an action in which YIHR Serbia held a vigil in the park next to the Presidential Palace on July 11th to commemorate the victims of the Srebrenica massacre. They combined this with an appeal to citizens and politicians to participate and formulated clear demands to the government and parliament, such as the establishment of July 11th as an official holiday or the legal prosecution of war crimes.

Sofija shared many different exam-

ples of her civil society engagement and also didn't keep secret about the fact that activism is not always a risk-free endeavor: Herself and other YIHR activists were physically attacked in January 2017 during a public action: At an event in the community center in Beška, which was carried out by the Serbian Government party, they had protested with a banner during a public discussion in which a convicted war criminal was the major spokesman under the slogan "War criminals should be quiet so that victims can be heard". In doing so, they drew attention to the governmental support for war criminals. Not only were the activists violently removed from the community center, they were also fined afterwards.

“Sofija's workshop on human rights and activism showed me that there are people (...) who stand up for others and for themselves. I admire her wisdom and courage,” said

Anja A. from Sombor after the lecture. The youth felt inspired and empowered, and at the same time



dismayed that Sofija and her organization were exposed to hostilities. For example, the organization's office space was smeared with nationalist sayings after the YIHR swept over nationalist graffiti in public space in Belgrade. For her part, Sofija encouraged the youngsters: "You can make a difference!", she emphasized at the end of her lecture. (...)





## Getting creative - Support *Vacation From War*

97% funding through private donations? Really? - People who get to know *Vacation From War* are often surprised when they hear that the project, ever since its creation, is almost exclusively financed through private donations. We are very proud of this and – especially in comparison to other projects and organizations – we notice how important the independence that this type of funding gives us is for the project. Also, our partners appreciate this, as they have the possibility to plan and design the dialogues and encounters with their experience and expertise without having to adhere to restrictions with regards to content and design, which large institutional donors tend to impose and which often-times have little to do with realities on the ground.

In addition to countless individual donors, parishes, peace groups and foundations support *Vacation From War*. It is amazing to see the creative ways in which supporters collect donations and make the project better known: On the one hand, many call for donations on occasions such as birthdays, anni-

versaries, but also at funerals. On the other hand, people also regularly organize fundraisers for *Vacation From War*.

Are you a member of a choir, a sports club, a theater group, a book club...? Maybe you would like to combine your hobby with the support for the project and organize a concert, a run, a theater performance, or reading in support of the project? We look forward to every kind of support and would be happy to send you information material free of charge, also for re-distribution to your friends and family!

The costs of the project increase, especially in the area of accommodation, travel expenses and meals for the participants of the dialogue seminars and Youth Encounters. That is also why we ask you to make the project better known in your area and to interest even more people in peace work on a grassroots level.

If you use social media (we know there are good reasons not to do so), we invite you to follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

The work of *Vacation From War* is supported by the Foundation *Dialogues & Encounters*.  
[www.dialoge-und-begegnungen.de](http://www.dialoge-und-begegnungen.de)



## Donations account *Vacation From War*

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*We are funded 97% through private donations. Secure our independence with your donation!*

## Data protection

On data protection in accordance with the EU data protection regulation: We like to keep in touch with you: we have stored your data (postal address) for the sole purpose of sending you our project information (and, if applicable, a donation receipt). Of course we will not pass on your data. You can revoke consent to receive information from us at any time by email or post and request the deletion of your address data. Upon request, we provide you with information at any time about what personal data we have stored on your person.

## Editorial

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## Committee for Fundamental Rights and Democracy

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