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DIALOGE ÜBER
GRENZEN HINWEG

**SPEAK
UP** Dialogues
across
Borders

Demonstration against „judicial reform“ in June 2023 in Tel Aviv
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SUMMER BULLETIN 2023

Dear supporters,

summer is here and with it this year's major dialogue seminars and peace camps of the project. Participants have been selected in both project regions and first preparatory meetings have taken place - preparations are in full swing.

In the Balkans, the one-week camp for activists of the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) network is first this year, with Tuzla as this year's host city – the camp rotates between partner cities every year. In these one-week camps, YU-Peace activists deepen their knowledge and discussions about the past wars, the current political situation in their countries and plan joint activities and political action.

Together with the weekend visits, these camps are an opportunity for activists to expand their engagement and go deeper into specific issues. This year one focus will be on the topic of “guilt” and discourses around guilt; furthermore, there will be an “open-house-day”, where new interested people who do not know YU-Peace yet, but are older than the youthful participants of the annual peace camp on the Croatian Adriatic Sea, can inform themselves about the network and exchange ideas with activists.

On page 2, Vlasta Markovic, who temporarily has taken over the regional coordination from Alma Dzinic-Trutovic this year, tells us about the planning for this year's meeting in Seget Donji.

In Palestine and Israel, the political developments surrounding the right-wing conservative government under Prime Minister Netanyahu and the “reforms” that have been introduced (see also our spring appeal for donations) place both the work on the ground and this year's Dialogue Seminar for women under more difficult auspices than in other years.

After the Israeli government in March announced postponement of the implementation of the so-called “judicial reform”, negotiations between government and opposition were unsuccessful. In mid-June, Netanyahu announced that he would “take practical steps”. The protest movement against the erosion of democracy, as which many Israelis see Netanyahu's reforms, has recently lost momentum. Nevertheless, the weekly demonstrations continue. Meanwhile, parts of the international community criticize not only the so-called reforms but also Israel's changed settlement policy, which is intended to

accelerate settlement construction through simplified procedures. Recently, there have also been renewed violent escalations between the Israeli military and Palestinians in the West Bank, most recently in military operations in Huwara as well as in Jenin and Nablus.

In the midst of this political situation, the local partners continue their work: Our partner organization Seekers (name changed) gives account of their ongoing activities on page 3. They are currently preparing a new team of facilitators for the work with new dialogue groups this fall. The dialogue seminar for women, which will take place near Cologne at the end of July, has found many interested participants, contrary to our previous concerns. Even though it will certainly be

INFORMATION

As already announced several times, our old donation account with ‘Volksbank Odenwald’ has now been closed after a one-and-a-half-year transition period. Data of the new donation account at ‘Bank für Sozialwirtschaft’ can be found on the final page of this Bulletin.

a particularly tense seminar, we are very happy to see so many courageous women motivated for serious political dialogue despite the political developments.

The probably biggest news this summer, however, is that the project is now changing its name to "Speak up - Dialogues

across Borders". We have been sharing with you on the process of finding a new name for the project in our last two annual reports – now it's official. You can see the new logo on the front page of this Summer Bulletin, we hope you like it as much as we do!

We are currently working on adapting our homepage and social media pre-

sences to the new name as well and hope to complete the process over the summer. For more background on reasons for the name change and how this name was chosen, you can find an article on the last page of this year's Spring Bulletin, which is also available online.

CHALLENGES OF DIALOGUE WORK ON THE GROUND: „YOU CAN'T HIDE A GROUP OF YOUTHS“

Our partner organization Seekers (name changed) is working mainly within Israel and Palestine in 2023. Their work this year focuses on two areas: on the one hand, they continue to work with a group of activists who want to organize long-term and implement political actions. On the other hand, they are preparing a new team that will accompany dialogue groups in multi-year dialogue programs starting this fall. In mid-June, they are in the middle of their process, from which Sarah T. (name changed) shares her impressions with us.

"The team building moves forward as planned. Most of the participants were part of Seekers before - as participants or team members - three were not with us before but know some people from Seekers from other places. We call it team building because it's not just about training participants in facilitation skills,

but also about consolidating a group that can (...) work together on a specific project; also, we want to connect them all to us as an organization", says Sarah.

The concept of team building is designed in such a way that future facilitators can, among other things, go through parts of the program with each other and thus learn how to facilitate the dialogue processes as closely as possible to the experience of participants or deepen their knowledge in this regard: "(...) the principle [is] to lead the team itself through parts of a dialogue process. (...) Although they have all been through a number of dialogue programs before, this is an opportunity for them to get a taste of the full process and also to fill in some gaps in their own personal (introspective) process," Sarah T. describes the approach. So far, four weekend seminars have taken place: The first two-day seminar

was held separately for Jewish Israelis, Palestinians from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. The seminars in April and May were binational. In these first three seminars, the focus was on the dialogue process itself and initial reflections on it.

The fourth weekend workshop "was an opportunity to get to know more about the organization itself and to meet other people - board members, graduates and others that are not in any program this year. (...) At the end of the seminar we all felt that we have an amazing group of people who trust and like each other, who gain strength and hope from each other and hold deep discussions about more effective ways to impact people (...). In the coming weeks I will finalize the work on a booklet of the program they had in the past seminars, with the conceptualization and some theories. (...) We

plan teambuilding seminars in October and December 2023 and two more between February and April 2024. Those seminars will be less about process and more about theories, methods and tools, in addition to coping with the endless challenges reality holds for us", Sarah continues.

The final weekend seminars are deliberately planned for the period after the new dialogue groups have begun their meetings, as they are intended to provide close support for the new team, especially at the beginning of the program, and to specifically deepen facilitation skills where challenges with the new groups become apparent.

When asked about the impact of current

political developments on starting work with new groups, Sarah T. responds: "We intend to start a new triangle group in October. The impacts are huge - it is very difficult to find communities willing to have such programs for youth. Individual adults can make such a choice and keep it quiet if needed, but you can't hide a group of youths.

We discussed the program with people from the South Hebron Hills, but it didn't work out. We were also discussing the option to open a group in East Jerusalem - we are still working on this and hope to find a good solution before the end of this month."

Typically, each Seekers youth program has three fixed "partner communities" that serve as central meeting points for

the respective three groups - Jewish Israelis, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and Palestinians from East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The latter group has its central meeting point mostly in the West Bank, but this is proving to be a major challenge in the current political atmosphere. "As for the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship the Jewish groups, there are some options for places (...) and we have to make a decision in our upcoming board meeting", Sarah T. further explains, "in addition to what they learn in team building, the three facilitators of the new triangle will now meet with the supervisors to prepare in more detail for the first unit of the program (...)."

“FOR US, THE CAMP IS SUCCESSFUL WHEN PARTICIPANTS FEEL THAT THEY CAN ACTUALLY CHANGE SOMETHING TOGETHER“

On the last weekend in May, staff from our partner organizations and activists from the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) network met in Tuzla to plan this year's Peace Camp in Seget Donji on the Croatian coast. From August 14th till August 23rd, 2023, 70 young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia will meet there.

For Vlasta Markovic, who is temporarily substituting Alma Dzinic-Trutovic as coordinator this year for health reasons, this is one of the most important moments of the year: "It is not easy to take over the work from someone who has been coordinating the project for over 20 years now. But it is very important for me: I started as a participant when I was in 8th grade, I now feel that I can give something back to the project, something I got as a participant. And it's inspiring to work with people I've known since they were kids who are now leading groups themselves and who are standing up for real change in society. (...) It is great", she shares.

This year's camp will again focus on political workshops on the wars and their im-



This year's team in Tuzla at the preparation workshop for the Peace Camp in Seget Donji

act on the present. What will change are the methods – they will be more versatile and interactive. Vlasta explains: "In our main part about the war, we will work with Ron Haviv's war photographs. This time, we will print them out put them on cards. The youngsters will then choose a picture to which they can relate to and talk about what they see and how it makes them feel.

This makes it more interesting and interactive. After talking about the fee-

lings, we will talk about the facts: What actually happened in the picture? Where was it taken? Then we will also talk about the role of Ron Haviv and other war photographers, we will have an online conversation with him and look at other photos from the wars, starting from the beginning of the war in 1991 in Croatia to the bombing of Serbia in the 2000s (...)."

For many of the young people, it is the first time they talk about the wars, be-



Building trust and becoming a team: During the weekend seminars, new team members get to know each other better



cause in their families are often silent about it: “All the youngsters who take part in the encounters today were born after the end of the war. Therefore, they themselves are often surprised how little they know about the war. They come from diverse backgrounds and cities that were affected differently during the various phases of the wars, and some have war victims in their families. Our idea is to first connect with the victims, whether they are from Tuzla, Srebrenica or Vukovar, and then we look at what actually happened in those places”, Vlasta details.

This approach focusing on the victims of the wars on all sides, contrasts with narratives dominant in societies often describing wars as a string of actions by politicians and generals: “Our goal is to learn how to live the peace and how to be active in the present, learning from the bad events of wars”, says Vlasta. This also applies to current wars and conflicts, which is why the war in Ukraine and the conflict and occupation in Israel and Palestine will also be topics of the camp.

Dealing with war events and violence can pose challenges also concerning young people's mental health. Especially after the school massacre in Belgrade this May, which is being discussed far beyond Serbia, many of the staff members have once again become aware of how strongly young people are emotionally affected by such events.

For these reasons, the idea arose to include spaces that can cushion such effects in the program of this year's

camp: “Every other evening, we will offer a round of talks in which young people can participate voluntarily if they want to share feelings and emotions they do not want to talk about with the whole group. We will also tell them right from the beginning of the camp that they can always come to us if they want to talk about things, if something was too hard for them or if they have had some bad experience”, explains Vlasta.

Another focus of the camp will be activism – with the explicit question of what young people can do today and now to change their society. There will be workshops on discrimination, media manipulation and investigative journalism, as well as a day where participants can offer their own workshops for their friends.

“And then we have Ajna [Jusic]”, Vlasta tells us enthusiastically, “who will talk about her organization ‘Forgotten Children of War’. Her story and what she's doing now has a lot to do with activism. So, our aim is to wake up and motivate young people, to show them that they can actually make a difference. That they are not small if they all work together and pursue the same goal. For us, the camp is successful when the participants after the camp feel that they can actually change something together.”

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Editorial

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