



Dear supporters,

It's summer and, as always, the time has come for the big dialogues and encounters. Although our partners organize activities throughout the whole year, the biggest dialogue seminars and Youth encounters continue to take place between June and September.

Just like last year, the “Continental Camp” in the Balkans, which alternates between the different partner cities, marks the start of the summer. In 2024, it will be held in Srebrenica. The camps in Srebrenica have always had a special significance for Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace), but this year the political and social disputes surrounding the genocide have been revived: When the United Nations (UN) General Assembly finally passed a resolution at the end of May declaring July 11th as International Remembrance Day of the Srebrenica Genocide, reactions in the successor states of Yugoslavia were very mixed and the political mood intensified.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Bosniak and Croat members of the State Presidency, Denis Becirovic and Zeljko Komsic, were very positive and appreciative. Becirovic described the adoption of the resolution as “an opportunity for catharsis and reconciliation in the region”.

The President of Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik, who has repeatedly threatened to secede from the Federation and generally uses very nationalist rhetoric, has – not surprisingly – a very different view. This time he went so far as to openly deny the genocide in Srebrenica to media representatives. For survivors and civil society organizations, on the other hand, working on dealing with the past, be it in Bosnia and Herzegovina or other parts of the region, international recognition is an important step that backs their work and gives them encouragement.

Our partners will not be deterred from their work by the nationalist outbursts but looking at political developments, they will refrain from public appearances with the groups this summer. This is also the case in Seget Donji, where in mid-August some 70 new interested people will meet for the annual peace camp; a day trip to Vukovar in Croatia has already taken place (p. 4).

Given the unspeakably dramatic situation in Palestine and Israel, the partners are working in a different way this year (see also our appeal for donations in spring). The women's seminar team has

organised an alumni and concept seminar and will be coming to Germany with a group of about 25 people (p.3).

Seekers (name changed), the second partner organization in the region, is continuing its work on the ground as best they can. Its activities are currently focused on long-term active members and on strengthening and supporting smaller activist projects. At the same time, Arabic language courses are being offered to activists, and small groups are organising (semi-)public events to engage their communities in dialogue about the current situation and to break down the increasingly entrenched narratives. Seekers are also developing its dialogue programmes under the new political conditions.

A dialogue meeting organised by the School for Peace (SfP) for Israelis and Palestinians living in Europe took place in Berlin in early March. After six months of digital dialogue, the group met in person for the first time. “Speak up” provided financial and logistical support for the initiative (p. 2).

„WE CRIED, WE RECOGNIZED, WE LEARNED“:

DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS IN EUROPE

From the very beginning, “Speak up” has had a connection to ‘Wahat al-Salam - Neve Shalom’ in Israel and Palestine. The ‘Oasis of Peace’ is a village that was built by Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Jewish Israelis. Especially in the early years of work in the region, many “Speak up” staff members were graduates of the trainings for binational dialogue facilitation at the “School for Peace” (SfP), the educational institution of Neve Shalom. At the end of 2022, “Speak up” supported a simultaneous translation course at the SfP. In winter 2023, Roi Silberberg, director of the SfP, asked us to support an ongoing online dialogue programme for Palestinians and Jewish Israelis living in the European diaspora. We provided logistical and financial support for the organisation of a joint face-to-face meeting of the group at the end of the programme which took place in Berlin at the beginning of March.

The SfP began planning the programme in the summer of 2023. The start date for the online meetings on October 8th was set long before it was clear that this would be the day after the Hamas attack: “I remember waiting anxiously for the first meeting to start. Slieman (*editor's note: one of the facilitators*) wrote to us that morning that the meeting would take place, despite what had happened the day before. Today I think that was a good decision (...) and gave the group process a special direction,” said Hadas K., a Jewish-Israeli participant, a few weeks after the meeting in Berlin.

From October onwards, the group met online a total of nine times before the dialogue process culminated in a joint extended weekend face-to-face meeting. The SfP selected a total of 13 participants from its networks – seven Jewish Israelis and six Palestinians. Five participants currently live in Germany and the rest in other parts of Europe (for example, the United Kingdom, Istanbul and



Daring to talk openly to one another: Intense dialogue during the first face-to-face meeting in Berlin

Oslo). In addition to people who grew up in Israel and the West Bank, some participants originally came from Syrian refugee camps or in Gaza. Facilitated by a Palestinian-Israeli facilitation team and with simultaneous translation, the group spoke about their experiences as Jews and Palestinians living outside Palestine and Israel, the political situation on the ground, but also about Middle East politics and the social climate in the countries in which they currently live. They also exchanged views on political activism in the diaspora and their perspectives on the conflict and the occupation.

The dialogue was particularly intense due to the unfolding political developments and was shaped by current events: The ongoing escalation of the Israeli military operation in Gaza, the increasing repression in the West Bank, the situation of the Israeli hostages and political developments in Israel were important topics of discussion. However, the entire process was also accompanied by numerous discourses and discussions that arose both on-site and in the societies in which the participants live today, such as the question of whether the events should be categorised as genocide.

In Berlin, participants met in person for the first time. Here they continued their dialogue and made plans for joint acti-

vism for an end to the war, a just political solution to the conflict and an end to the occupation. They also took a political tour of Neukölln, a particularly culturally and politically diverse neighborhood.

Ahmad Al Saadi, a Palestinian participant, summarised his experience in Berlin sometime after the weekend as follows: “You have to go to the cause, to the root of the evil and see why it is there; and how you can change something. And that was possible in Berlin (...). We cried, we recognized, we learned. I understood the perspectives. I have had many conversations with Israelis before, but not as honest as in Berlin. (...) Here I could feel, understand and also acknowledge [their] fears. That was really a game-changer for me. Now after Berlin, we meet, we talk, we organise. I now have two projects that I am organising with two other people from the group. (...)”

The creation of dialogue spaces specifically for Palestinians and Jewish Israelis living in Europe was a first for both the SfP and “Speak up”.

While the main focus of “Speak up” remains on the political dialogue between people living in Israel and Palestine, this SfP initiative demonstrates the importance and potential of diverse dialogue spaces: “Despite the physical distance from the conflict region, the pro-

gramme (...) has proven to be an important platform for promoting mutual understanding, cooperation and activism”,

writes the SfP in its evaluation of the six-month pilot programme.

DIALOGUE SEMINAR FOR WOMEN: “SOME HAVE BECOME CYNICAL AFTER NINE MONTHS OF THIS MADNESS”

Instead of a traditional dialogue seminar, the Women seminar team is planning an “alumni and concept seminar” for this summer. Amid the most devastating military and political escalation, the Israeli-Palestinian team is preparing participants from previous years for an in-depth dialogue. Parallely, the partners are deciding which conceptual elements of the programme should be revised for the future and how these can be discussed in Germany in August.

The Palestinian participants are currently meeting almost exclusively online to prepare for the seminar. In view of the overall precarious security situation and the particularly dangerous situation in the West Bank, everyone agrees that traveling should be avoided wherever possible. During preparation, participants engage with the fundamentally changed political conditions for dialogue, the brutal violence that is also order of the day in the West Bank, the suffering in Gaza, and discuss how they can and want to confront the 'other side' emotionally and politically this year. A workshop on digital security has already taken place. Also logistical preparations were even more difficult this time: The German Representative Office in Ramallah was closed for months and the group had to apply for their visas at the embassy in Jordan. In addition to the increased security risk, additional military checkpoints added massively to travel times.

On the Jewish-Israeli side, participants can meet face to face, but at the same time the political mood in Israel is very agitated. Uncertainty about the threat of military attacks from neighboring countries, a heated social atmosphere, repression of demonstrations and restricti-

ons on freedom of the press and expression, together with the militarisation of society, are all part of everyday life.

Despite the dangers, the team recently organised a bi-national meeting in the Hebron area, which some did not attend for fear of escalating violence in the West Bank. The group met, among others, the filmmakers of ‘No other land’. The film by an Israeli-Palestinian duo, won the award for best documentary at the Berlinale in February. The acceptance speech by one of the filmmakers caused a scandal in the German media and politics at the time. The seminar's group watched the film together and talked to the filmmakers about the film's making and intentions. In all groups, Meanwhile, in all groups, political developments and the progress of the massive military operation in Gaza continue to shape and partly disrupt the groups' conversations and show how tense the atmosphere is. At the beginning of June, when four Israeli hostages were freed from their Hamas abductors and returned home safely and more than 200 Palestinian civilians were killed during the

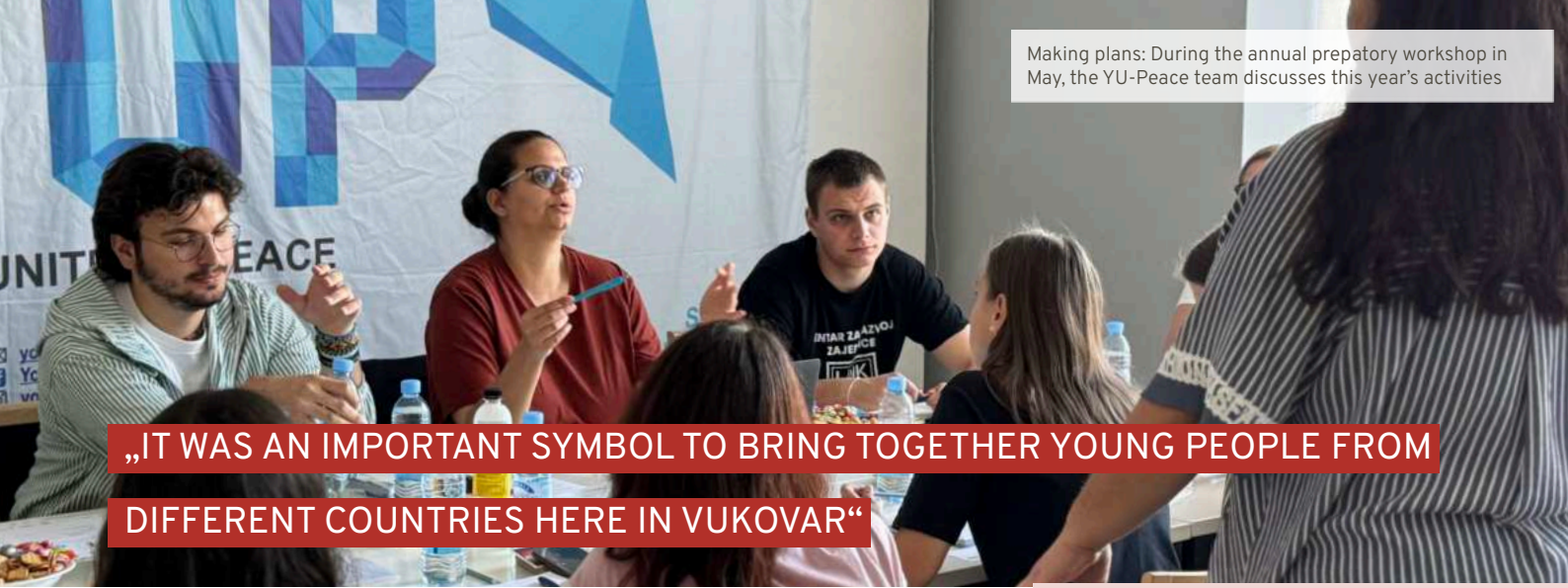
military operation, the group had heated discussions, some of which became verbally aggressive: “It was difficult for participants on both sides to hold all the different feelings at the same time – the joy at the return of the hostages, the grief for the civilian victims, the anger at the one-sided media coverage on both sides; some have become cynical after nine months of this madness. It was very difficult”, shares Liron L., Israeli coordinator.

Because of the participants' deep emotional involvement, this summer, there is even more space than in previous years to work through their feelings together and take a deep breath.

At the same time, there will be intensive dialogue units for this year's small group of participants and they will be able to contribute their experiences and ideas to the process of enhancing the seminar's concept in terms of methodology and content for the coming years.



Defying the cycles of violence: Israelis and Palestinians in conversation near Hebron



„IT WAS AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL TO BRING TOGETHER YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES HERE IN VUKOVAR“

In Croatia, the project has been working for a long time with the organisation “Our House Europe” (Europski Dom Vukovar, EDVU). In previous years, rather smaller groups from Vukovar have taken part in the YU-Peace camps. It was therefore all the more gratifying that around 50 YU-Peace activists were able to meet in the city at the end of April (see cover picture).

Originally, a whole weekend visit was planned, but in the end, it only a day trip was possible. Despite the short time, the visit was a success: firstly, the guests from the other partner cities got to know “Our House of Europe”. The Vukovar team presented the work of the organisation and talked about the city's strong division between Serbs and Croats. They also discussed with the group the current political situation in the different partner cities and countries and the importance of European Union membership for Croatia.

Afterwards, local activists showed the other participants around their town. “It was an important symbol to bring together young people from different countries here in Vukovar, also for the local citizens”, said Dijana Antunović Lazić, coordinator of “Our House Europe”.

A participant from Vukovar had prepared a workshop for the afternoon on the topic of “Peace and Enlightenment in Immanuel Kant”. Rather than an being abstract philosophical lecture, David took the others on a journey through his ideas about Kant's philosophical approaches – and the group was enthralled. “I can't really explain how David did what he did (...) in the end, David's message was that it's

actually quite easy to be on the right side - the side of peace”, said Vlasta Markovic, regional coordinator, describing the workshop.

Around the visit to Vukovar, there were several smaller meetings of YU-Peace members in various partner cities, as well as the annual planning workshop for the YU-Peace team in Tuzla and a special meeting to plan the anniversary weekend visit to Tuzla in autumn, when the 30th anniversary of the project will be celebrated.

“The programmes for the Peace camp in Seget Donji and the activists' camp in Srebrenica have been finalised. In Seget Donji we will be hosting, among others, a Serbian journalist who is openly critical of President Vučić. He will tell us about his work and the repression he faces”, explains Vlasta Markovic.

The activists' camp in Srebrenica will focus around the theme “Creating Change” and will include Valentina Gagic, coordinator of the local partner organisation “Sara”, who will tell her personal story and share about her activism. The group will also visit the Potočari Memorial and discuss the genocide and its social consequences.

Recent reactions to the adoption of the UN resolution on the Srebrenica Memorial Day showed how contested the narratives of what happened on the ground continue to be.

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Editorial

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