



Dear supporters,

For another summer, Project Speak Up brought together young people for political dialogue in two project regions.

In Israel and Palestine, the partners once again succeeded this year in accompanying 36 participants through an intensive and varied dialogue seminar in Germany, in the midst of an increasingly hopeless political context.

This is all the more remarkable given that throughout the whole preparatory phase the fragile, escalating situation kept calling into question whether the seminar would take place at all:

on the one hand logistically, as the arrival of both groups in Germany was in jeopardy; and on the other hand emotionally – it was by no means certain whether those interested participants who had started the preparatory phase in April would actually want to come in the end, given the devastating repression in the West Bank, the dystopian developments in Gaza, and the war with Iran. The local teams accompanied the women through all the ups and downs, and in the end, the dialogue seminar was a success (p. 3).

Seekers (name changed), the second partner initiative in this region, tirelessly continued its work on the ground. Following a digital meeting of its members,

they have not only planned a face-to-face binational meeting of long-standing active members for late autumn, but are also continuing their uni-national work in their respective societies, through public lectures and discussions, among other actions. In addition, a team is forming to make a new attempt of establishing local groups for a new cycle of Seekers' two-year dialogue program.

The participants in the dialogue seminar for women will continue working with the seminar group from mid-September onwards: uni-national meetings, various workshops, and a binational meeting are planned until December.

In the project part in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia, the first major activity took place from July 24th to 28th, with the camp for active participants once again held near Tuzla in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Almost 50 members of the Youth United in Peace (YU-Peace) network took part. The young people focused primarily on the genocide in Srebrenica, which marks its 30th anniversary in 2025: What is the situation in the region 30 years later? How is the genocide discussed in the societies, what is the status of social and political

recognition of what happened? And to what extent does this historical experience shape views on current developments in the world, such as the situation in Gaza?

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation surrounding Milorad Dodik, the president of Republika Srpska, made headlines again during the course of the year. In early August, the Appeals Chamber of the Supreme Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina upheld the ruling of the Central Election Commission, which, among other things, bans Dodik from political activity for six years. Dodik already announced that he will not respect this ruling, meaning that Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face the threat of a constitutional crisis.

Serbia is also in the midst of a deep political crisis, with protests against Vučić's government continuing unabated since last November. The situation there was a particularly prominent topic at the sea camp in Croatia, which took place from August 10th to 19th with around 70 participants. There were also workshops on topics such as media manipulation, dealing with the wars of the 1990s, mass rape during the wars, and the special legal and social situation of children born

after such rapes. Another weekend visit to Vukovar is planned for October, during which participants will stay with local families. Here, the Vukovar YU-Peace members will not

only show their guests the city, but the group will also focus on the history and (political) present in Vukovar and Croatia.

PEACE CAMP IN TIMES OF PROTEST: “THE DESIRE FOR SOLUTIONS FOR THE REGION HAS NEVER BEEN THIS STRONG”

This year, the big annual peace camp organized by the YU-Peace Network took place once again in the Croatian coastal town of Seget Donji. Young people from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina traveled there to get to know each other, exchange ideas, and reflect upon issues of coexistence and a peaceful future together. This year's camp was shaped particular-

The developments in Serbia are giving youngsters new courage and hope that they, too, can exert political influence. In response to the collapse of the newly renovated station canopy in Novi Sad, which claimed the lives of 16 people last November, a protest movement formed in Serbia. Initially, this was fueled primarily by anger over ongoing corruption in the country, which was also seen as the cause of the poor renovation of the train station. The protests, led by students but supported by the majority of the Serbian population, are now directed primarily against the authoritarian regime of Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić. His denial of responsibility and cover-up of the facts surrounding the tragedy in Novi Sad, as well as the rigorous state violence against the protesting civil society, reflect a long-standing policy that the people of Serbia have finally had enough of. During the camp, two partners in the project talked about the threats they personally and their organization as a whole have received in recent months. Government-supported hooligans play a special role in this, using intimidating and violent means against activists with complete impunity. On the other hand, there are the protests, through which people have been fighting for change peacefully and with new creative methods for months. Nevertheless, Speak Up partners wonder how long this peaceful atmosphere can be maintained. In view of the increasing violence by pro-government goons and the police, they emphasize concern about a violent escalation of the current situation during the camp in Seget Donji. Hours later, this point of escalation no longer seems closer than ever: During an evening work-

shop, one of the partners approaches us, visibly concerned, and shares that the situation in Serbia has escalated since last night. In several cities, there have been organized marches by pro-government hooligans who attacked protesters with fireworks. Serbian police responded with disproportionate force. The sentiment at the camp was visibly tense at this point, as many members of YU-Peace are also involved in the protests. During this year's planning workshop of the partners from the project region at the end of June, a former participant of the camp had already been arrested. There was great concern among both the youngsters and the local team members that more YU-Peace members could be affected this time. This made the mutual support participants tried to give each other during these tense days all the more important. A workshop on Friday morning was especially powerful in this situation. A former participant, who now works as a journalist for one of the few independent Serbian television stations, had traveled to the camp to talk about the dangers of media manipulation. Journalists are currently under particular pressure in Serbia, where the government's influence on the media is growing. This made the critical examination of the media in the workshop all the more important. However, it was about more than just raising awareness among the young people. After introducing the topic, the journalist surprised the participants by connecting two colleagues via video call: a journalist known throughout the region for her critical reporting on the protests in Serbia and her fearless interviews with politicians, and a reporter who accompanied



students on a protest bike tour from Serbia to Strasbourg. Participants at the peace camp were thrilled. One after another, they came forward to personally thank the journalists for their reporting: “I'm going to call my parents right after this to tell them that I got to talk to you!”, said one participant. At the end of the conversation, the journalist addressed the youngsters with a message: “The current protests have awakened Serbia. We must continue to fight to avoid further tragedies. We must all work to make our context an

easier one.” This encounter was a special highlight of the camp, and not only for the Serbian participants. The personal conversations with the journalists achieved one thing above all else: they created courage and inspiration to take action and not give up hope for political change. In the context of the peace camp in Seget Donji, the new generation of participants had the opportunity to understand that they are not alone in this goal.

ENTRENCHED FRONTS AND HUMAN ENCOUNTERS: ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE 2025

“I am here because I believe in peace,” says Dalia (name changed) from the West Bank at the dialogue seminar for women at the end of July. The fact that also this year, so many young adults from Palestine and Israel have made the journey to engage in dialogue with the “Others”, to listen to their stories, feelings, demands, and questions, is deeply impressive in and for itself. Considering the circumstances, however, this year's seminar is almost a miracle: the flights for the group traveling from Israel had to be rebooked because the airline suspended its flights indefinitely after the war with Iran. The participants first had to travel to Berlin with an Israeli airline and then take a very long bus ride from there. Fortunately, the Palestinian participants from the West Bank and East Jerusalem all received their visas. However, on their way to Jordan, the border crossing was arbitrarily opened and closed for days, with authorities sending hundreds of people back to Jordan or Palestine after they had already waited countless hours at the border. The group left a total of five days before their flight, spent one night in Jericho, a whole day queuing at the border, and then several more days in Amman – all to make sure they would catch their flight. When everyone finally arrived, Salma F. (name changed), Palestinian coordinator, joked, “I brought them

here, so the seminar is a success!” There is quite some truth in that: the mere fact that all the participants made it to Germany is a great achievement. After a small group of former participants had combined in-depth dialogue with the conceptual revision of the seminar program in 2024, this summer was not only the first seminar with a new group of participants since October 7, 2023, but also the first time the new seminar structure was implemented. The latter meant, above all, that the preparatory phase in Israel and Palestine was

much more intensive than before and some content was included there to make even more room for binational discussions during the precious time in Germany. Starting in April, the groups not only got to know each other in international meetings and talked about their expectations and fears, as they had done in former years. They also already prepared the basic structure of their presentations on their history, culture, and society and their respective national narratives at home. These have always been a central element of the dialogue



ly by the current political situation in the region. Above all, the ongoing protests against the government in Serbia dominated discussions and were clearly reflected in the atmosphere of the group. According to one team member, the participants' desire to find solutions to the current challenges the region is facing has never been as strong as this year.





Heavy conversations: A Jewish-Israeli and a Palestinian participant discuss animatedly during the presentation of the Palestinian national narrative.

seminars, but until now, the preparation for the presentations took place during the dialogue in Germany. During the seminar, the discussions were much more intense than in previous years: the war has now affected all participants personally in one way or another. Among the participants were two Palestinians from the West Bank who have family in Gaza. In addition, all people in the West Bank are increasingly affected by concrete acts of violence by settlers and the Israeli army on a daily basis. The Jewish-Israeli participants came not only with the traumatizing experience of October 7, but also with the very recent experience of the Iran-Israel war. The first days of the seminar were marked by anger and incomprehension. The discussions were very much focused on a struggle for mutual recognition: the demand for recognition of the suffering of October 7, recognition of the threat situation in which Israelis find themselves, recognition of the need to defend themselves. And vice versa, demands for recognition of the events in Gaza as genocide, of Palestinians' people right to self-determination and to their own state, of the daily suffering of the occupation and of the Palestinians' right to armed resistance. Outside the dialogue sessions, the groups kept very separate; they did not sit together at meals and hardly spoke to each other in their free time. Step by step, however, the facilitation team managed to guide them out of one impasse after another and enable more mutual listening and empathy. This created a space in which there was room not only for one's own feelings, hopes, and

fears, but also for those of others – and for seeing the proclaimed “enemy” as human beings. Overall, the dialogue space remained noticeably fragile: the constant flood of news from Palestine and Israel was present in the room every day, with new attacks on civilians in Gaza, forced evictions and violence in the West Bank, statements by politicians, demonstrations in Israel, videos of starving hostages. In the end, it was a deeply transformative encounter. An Israeli participant, who lost her partner on October 7th, described her journey from that horrifying day to the dialogue seminar as follows:

“After he was murdered, I was filled with grief and hatred. Months passed. Then I spoke to a friend and heard myself say, ‘I want all people in Gaza dead.’ I was shocked at myself and decided to learn more about the Palestinians and Palestinian history. I understood that war and hatred would never change anything. So, I decided that I had to talk to them. We have to find a solution (...). Here, I met Palestinian women who, like me, want peace. That gives me hope.”

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Editorial

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