



COALITION FOR WORK WITH PSYCHOTRAUMA AND PEACE KOALICIJA ZA RAD SA PSIHOTRAUMOM I MIR

MONTHLY REPORT SEPTEMBER 2019

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are working very hard now and continue, despite being one of the very few organizations devoted to long-term psychological work and capacity building onsite here and online in a number of places in the world.

In Vukovar, ironically, a Peace Gong was unveiled by Mayor Ivan Penava who said that a satisfactory level of interethnic coexistence was achieved in the town after the war, and what the people of Vukovar still were expecting was Serbia's "acknowledgement of the act of aggression and repentance." We are skeptical about the real state of affairs. There were similar expressions against reconciliation in the rest of Croatia. Further, Dubravka Šuica was elected as an EU commissioner for democracy and the rule of law. Considering her record as a Member of the European Parliament, we wonder where this will go. Further, we expect that, within a short period, Croatia will become a member of the Schengen area.

Generally speaking, there has been no change in the psychological state of the region, and we remain the only organization giving psychological assistance without drugs and without charge.

We wrote a semi-annual report and published it on our website at <https://www.cwwpp.org/annual-and-semi-annual-reports.html>.

Externally, we continued with clients, supervision, and groups, more or less as usual. Virtually all of our clients were abused as children. They also suffer from additional effects of the war. We are now working with a new group, Snehalya, in India. This group is an institution working with the children of sex workers. Many of the children have HIV. We are assisting them to initiate a peer counseling program and training for workers with the children, most of whom have low levels of education.

The migrant situation is extremely challenging. It is getting worse. More and more migrants are coming to Europe, and they are being criminalized. They are being injured and are dying underway.

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They are forced to live under highly unsanitary and inhumane conditions. No one is giving them the long-term psychological assistance that they need, either while they are on the move or when they attempt to integrate into receiving societies. We are working with Advocates Abroad and are attempting to work with other groups. No one seems to see the need for this. We are very frustrated.

We continue to work on the second PET course, namely that on communication.

We were honored that Charles Tauber was invited to be on the scientific review committee for the InPACT conference for 2020.

As usual, we commemorated various international days, notably the climate strike day on 20 September and the International Day of Peace on 21 September.

We are attempting to do the maximum that we can. We feel that, in our fairly unique role, we must stand up and try.

STATE OF THE REGION

Summer is coming to an end and the first day of the fall has come and gone. A World Peace Gong, a symbol of lasting peace in the world, the 50th such monument in the world, was unveiled in Vukovar on the occasion of World Peace Day. Mayor Ivan Penava said, "In this way we are sending a message to the world, that, after we won independence, our great aspiration and ideal is to build lasting peace and for Croatia to become a better country and better society."

He said that a satisfactory level of interethnic coexistence was achieved in the town after the war, and what the people of Vukovar were still expecting was Serbia's "acknowledgement of the act of aggression and repentance." We are skeptical about the real state of affairs.

The Zagreb branch of the Croatian Disabled Homeland War Veterans' Association, HVIDRA, complained about the "Serbian folk singers" at Zagreb's annual music festival, calling for a boycott of "singers who are not from our area". The organizer told the media that the selection of performers was guided by the "demands of the audience".

Croatian veterans' organizations have political influence in the country and often have sought to use it. They were at the forefront of protests in 2013 against the introduction of "bilingual" Croatian and Serbian signs in Latin and Cyrillic script on official buildings in the Vukovar, and staged a high-profile 18-month long sit-in, which ended in April 2016, demanding the resignation of the Minister of Veterans' Affairs.

At the end of August, the war veterans' associations also became involved in discussions about whether the Croatian Serb leader, Milorad Pupovac, whose party is a junior member of the ruling coalition, should apologize for statements he gave to the Bosnian media in which he said that Croatia was turning into a factor of instability in the former Yugoslavia, and that there are attempts in Croatia to rehabilitate the ideas of the World War II Ustasha fascist movement. These organizations are calling on the Croatian government to break up the coalition if Pupovac doesn't apologize.

At the same time, the Croatian interdepartmental commission for the procurement of multi-purpose combat aircraft received letters of expression of interest to provide the country with new fighter jets.

The recent nomination of Dubravka Šuica, to defend "democracy" in the EU, has made Croatia proud. But questions about Šuica's millions, as well as about her political values, should be answered, according to Gong, a Croatian pro-democracy NGO.

Her commission portfolio is meant to see her defend EU values and the rule of law.

In her last role, as a Member of the European Parliament, she twice voted against European Parliamentary resolutions on gender equality. She also flip-flopped on sanctions against Hungary and Poland over their judicial abuses at home.

Croatian media reports that, next month, the European Commission will confirm that Croatia has met the technical conditions for accession to the Schengen area, which outgoing EC President Jean-Claude Juncker allegedly had promised.

The situation with refugees and migrants on the doorstep to Europe is horrible. At this writing, Vučjak camp is without medical care, a situation that will result in a humanitarian catastrophe for those 800 people affected.

Generally speaking, there has been very little change in the psychological state of people in the period that we have been in the region. We continue to be the only organization in the region offering assistance with psychological traumatization without cost and without drugs. The importance of mental health and wellbeing is still undervalued and stigmatized.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Clients

In September, we had four regular clients. The issues were the usual ones, that is, abuse in childhood and issues relating to the war. We had one client not from this region who was a victim of severe psychological abuse in childhood.

Groups

Several groups will be dealt with under the Migrant Situation below.

There was no meeting of the South Africa group this month.

The group with Snehalaya, in India, continued. They are dealing with highly traumatized children and are in need of education. We are encouraging them to have education groups, self-help groups, and peer counseling, with the older children serving as counselors. There is a capacity issue with the ratio of caregivers to children. We think that peer counseling could partially solve this. Florence Koenderink also is working with this group, and has been for a substantial period. Further, there is an issue with the protection of children with HIV from infection with other diseases, such as chicken pox and measles.

Supervision

Supervision with Alphonse Kanda in South Africa and Ivan Maslow in Split continued this month.

Alphonse is working hard on his master's thesis in medical anthropology, is teaching, and has many family obligations. He is under immense pressure.

Ivan is working with childhood trauma and with trans-generational transmission of trauma.

The Migrant Situation

The situation in southeast Europe continues to worsen. The number of migrants coming is increasing. Fall and winter will make conditions on the ground worse. While the change in government in Italy has made things slightly better there, the situation in Greece is the opposite. We are hearing that more and more migrants are being sent north to the Nea Kavala camp, which is about an hour north of Thessaloniki, and others. The situations in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Montenegro continue to be extremely poor. Many migrants are being returned to their regions of origin, in many cases to further imprisonment, torture, or death. Again, we find that organizations are providing marginal emergency assistance with short-term volunteers. We discussed our difficulties with this approach in the monthly report for August. Again, no organization is providing long-term psychological support for asylum seekers and refugees, be these people on the move or those attempting to integrate into receiving societies. Also, we find that the volunteers and staff members of the organizations providing assistance are not getting the psychological support that they need.

We continue to hold our weekly supervision sessions with Advocates Abroad. We also are attempting to find funding sources for joint projects with them.

We continue to be in contact with No Name Kitchen.

We have agreed with the students at the University of Belgrade to resume the group during the second week in October.

The one brighter note in all of this has been contact with the Open Cultural Center in Polykastro, Greece, near the Nea Kavala camp. They see a strong need for our work there. They are attempting to work things out with the management of the center.

All in all, we are discouraged and frustrated. We see very large and urgent needs for psychological assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in the regions of first landing and in the reception regions as well as to volunteers and staff members who are attempting to provide them with basic needs. Yet, there seems to be no sensitivity for this type of work anywhere.

PET

We have resumed working on the manual for Course 2, communication. This also is going slowly because of our other obligations.

Miscellaneous

Charles Tauber was invited to be on the scientific review committee for the InPACT conference for 2020, which is an acknowledgement of and an honor for our work.

We commemorated and supported the Climate Strike Day on 20 September and the International Day of Peace on 21 September. The Climate Strike Day brought back memories to Charles of his work with environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, in the 1960s and 1970s.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Semi-Annual Report

We finished and sent the semi-annual report, which is available on <https://www.cwwpp.org/annual-and-semi-annual-reports.html>.

PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

Our concentration will be on the migrant situation, and our attempts to gain entry somewhere. This is partly dependent on funding. We would like to establish offices near the borders in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Greece. We do not have the funds to do so.

Further, we will continue to write the PET courses, which we see as providing a major contribution to beneficiaries and to those assisting them.

CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

We continue to work. We find ourselves one of the very few organizations doing what we do in the way that we do it. We are proud of that, despite the amount of work that it entails.