

**10**

**YEARS**

**OF SARAJEVO**

**OPEN**

**CENTRE**



**SARAJEVO  
OPEN  
CENTRE**

## IMPRESSUM

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**Editor:** Masha Durkalić

**Editorial Board:** Emina Bošnjak, Vladana Vasić

**Authors:** Emina Bošnjak, Vladana Vasić, Dina Vilić, Lejla Huremović, Selma Kešetović, Saša Gavrić, Amar Bašić, Tamara Zablocki, Jozo Blažević, Inela Hadžić, Jasmina Čaušević, Kristina Ljevak, Edita Miftari, Nikola Kuridža, Maida Zagorac, Nera Mešinović, Azem Kurtić

**Language Editor:** Sandra Zlotrg

**Translation into English:** Context od

**Layout and Cover:** Aleksandra Nina Knežević

**Illustrations:** Vanja Lazić

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**September 2017.**

## LOOKING INTO THE PAST AND HOPING FOR THE FUTURE

## SOC SHOULD STICK AROUND

## for at Least Another Ten Years

Author: Masha Durkalić



I am one of those people easily affected by the passage of time. I feel ambushed by each birthday, each anniversary makes me pensive. I was stunned when Emina Bošnjak told me during one of SOC's community events that SOC will be celebrating its tenth anniversary at the end of 2017. I didn't really think about the longevity of SOC, nor did I take note of how quickly time has passed. SOC could have been founded yesterday for all I knew. In my mind it has been here forever, and the years simply flew by me, unnoticed. Ten years is an entire era.

I will briefly go back to the fall of 2010 when I first started working with SOC. One day I got an email from Saša Gavrić. He introduced himself and proposed we meet up for drinks so we could discuss our potential collaboration. Back then, as a young journalist I mostly covered stories related to culture, but I had started writing about human rights, especially the rights of women and the LGBTI population. We met up, had a few drinks and talked. And that was it. Never before or after did I have such an easy time striking up a collaboration. It's the longest and the most fruitful collaboration on my CV. And it's still going strong. Now, after ten years of work, I have been given the honour to serve as editor for a publication commemorating the tenth anniversary of SOC.

It's hard for me to look at SOC and its team from a strictly professional point of view. Many of them are my friends, people I can trust. We get to share many things – from frustrations related to our activism and advocacy work, problems with cats we pick up on the street and foster until they are adopted, to protesting on the streets of Sarajevo for our human rights. SOC has never been just an NGO that pays for my services, but

rather a group of people with whom I go out for coffee and drinks, dance, discuss new ideas and projects and talk about the situation in our society. SOC is one of those tiny cracks in our dark social reality that lets in light. Their dedication and effort to achieve their goals is an example to us all.

I also have to mention their meticulously fostered, impeccable professional standard. It is rare to find such professionalism and dedication in a society plagued by mediocrity and lacklustre (at best) efforts in all spheres of life – from cleaning one's own backyard to adopting policies. Rarely do we take to the streets and march in protest, yet SOC is one of the rare NGOs that gives us the opportunity to do so. Rarely do we have laws amended to benefit those who need changes in legislation, yet SOC is an organisation that pursues these changes until they actually happen. Rarely do we publically call out people who fail to do their job, or contaminate public space with their discriminatory views or phobias, yet SOC is an organisation that continues to publically condemn behaviour of this sort. Over the past ten years, SOC has managed to find its *modus operandi*, adopting practices and strategies geared towards fulfilling the set objectives. The SOC team will definitely invite you to their press conference three times, they'll proofread a text five times before publishing it, and they will certainly hold politicians accountable and try to establish dialogue with those politicians and decision makers who were oblivious to issues such as LGBTI rights in the past. Fur-

thermore, SOC has always tried to be as supportive as possible by providing help to other non-governmental organisations or providing psychological counselling for LGBTI people who rarely have access to psychological assistance or don't even know it's available to them.

As an activist I believe SOC has made several key contributions to activism in BiH. The series of talks and lectures titled *Neko je rekao feminizam?* has provided valuable insight into feminist topics and patriarchy, while exhibitions dedicated to women such as Laura Papo Bohoreta and Razija Handžić have given the public a rare opportunity to learn more about the influential women who shaped our society. The book *Zabilježene* published by SOC is the only publication on phenomenal women from BiH who marked their respective eras. SOC activists and their colleagues spontaneously organised the so-called Level 0 Pride in May 2016 when they marched down Obala Kulina bana, the same street where hooligans attacked participants of the Queer Sarajevo Festival in 2008. When the Ministry of Traffic of Canton Sarajevo failed to respond to SOC's request to hold a protest march against violence over LGBTI people in May 2017, thereby effectively banning it, activists organised an alternative protest in front of the building of the Government of Canton Sarajevo, raising their voice against the silencing of LGBTI human rights. SOC has carried out and contributed to many more wonderful things, but there's no need to describe them in detail here since the following 50 pages or so are full of information about SOC. You might find out something new about the organisation or simply be reminded of the great things it has done. We've even prepared a zodiac and advice column for you. I wish you a pleasant read and I encourage you to keep following the work of SOC because they are far from done. We need organisations like SOC to stick around, for another ten years at least.

## EMINA BOŠNJAK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE



Emina Bošnjak, photo: Dženat Dreković

# HARD WORK PAYS OFF

**For the tenth anniversary of SOC Emina Bošnjak, the executive director of the organisation, talked about the organisation's achievements, the importance of fundraising, team dynamics in SOC and their plans for the future.**

Interviewer: Masha Durkalić

**Ten years is a long period to get things done. Are you happy with your achievements so far? Do you think you could have done more and is there something you haven't tackled yet? How do you look upon the ten years of SOC?**

**EMINA BOŠNJAK:** Yes, we've done a lot. In the past ten years we've released over 100 publications, and I think it's a good indicator of the amount of work we've done. The number of trainings, seminars, exhibitions, book events, meetings and other activities that are the bread and butter of a civil society organisation can also be a useful indicator for anyone who is interested in the work of Sarajevo Open Centre. Looking back, I don't think we could have done more, as we've always worked very hard, pushing the limits of our human and other resources. If we look at individual activities, we've done more than necessary. I say this as someone who has occupied all positions within the organisation, from a coordinator to a program manager. However, since quantity doesn't necessarily ensure quality, in hindsight we realise there are things we could have done better, faster or in a different way. We also could have skipped some

of them, but it's all part of the learning curve and I highly doubt there has ever been an organisation with the perfect track record.

**AS FOR ADVOCACY WORK, OUR PRIORITY LIES IN PUSHING FOR LEGAL REGULATION OF SAME-SEX PARTNERSHIPS, GENDER RECOGNITION, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL GENDER MECHANISMS.**

I've also learned it's important to speak about the results, and I can say I'm very happy with what have achieved. Over the past three years we've been using a set of 20 clearly defined, measurable indicators to measure our results on an annual level. The indicators show that we have not only met but also exceeded most of our set goals. These

include the rise in the number and percentage of people from the LGBTI community who are satisfied with our legal and peer counselling services, the number of successful advocacy initiatives related to the rights of women and LGBTI people, changes in media coverage of LGBTI issues, and more visitors at the Merlinka Film Festival in Sarajevo. There, now I sound like a proper director. (laughs)

**Ten years is also a long period in terms of securing funding. SOC has managed to survive, despite constant fluctuations in the funds available to civil society organisations in BiH and the fact that SOC does advocacy work, which is uncommon here. How have you managed to secure the necessary funds? What difficulties have you encountered?**

**EMINA BOŠNJAK:** Fundraising is a very demanding process, one that is necessary to survive as an organisation, implement your activities and achieve your goals. I haven't been at SOC from the very beginning, so I hope I'm correct in saying that SOC has always strived to be more than an organisation simply publishing promo material; there's nothing wrong with it per se, but it's often far from enough. Nowadays, no one can afford the luxury of trying to bring about social change in BiH on a purely volun-



teer basis, so the biggest challenge is to find the funds that pay for the salaries of all employees and ensure adequate working conditions. We've always had good project ideas in all the areas we cover, and we've managed to procure funds for their implementation - for which we are eternally grateful - but some expenses cannot be covered by project money, even though they are crucial for the life of an organisation. Thankfully, there are donors such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Open Society Foundations. In my opinion, these donors played a crucial role in the development of SOC because they provided us with *core funding*, therefore enabling us to develop our organisational capacities, be flexible in our advocacy work, react when policies and laws we've been advocating for finally come into focus, or prevent important policies from being reversed, and provide co-funding for projects that need it.

I have to point out that SOC has had just one project financed by a local institution and this took place before we started to systematically address human rights of women and the LGBTI population. We didn't chase after projects that weren't in line with our overall strategy, even though some of them were quite tempting and we personally wished we could pursue them. I hope the first issue is resolved soon, not just for our sake, but also for the sake of the vast number of organisations dealing with human rights. As for the latter issue, I honestly hope we never have to compromise our principles in order to stay afloat.

**You have plenty to brag about as well. What are SOC's greatest achievements and why? Has your effort in making these things happen paid off?**

**EMINA BOŠNJAK:** Our effort has definitely paid off. It's difficult to distinguish between the *bigger* and the *lesser* victories, as they are all equally important. I feel more comfortable talking about the achievements I've witnessed since I've been at SOC, but I'm sure there were many before my arrival as well. The first thing that comes to mind is the SOC team celebrating the first thematic session on LGBT rights held in one of the parliaments in May 2015. We'd managed to achieve something that many saw as a pipe dream: *no way is that ever happening, LGBTI people are nowhere near their list of priorities, like hell are they talking about us*. Yet, despite the pessimism, we gave it a go - and it happened! The second thing is this year's Merlinka Film Festival: an incredible number of visitors, a fantastic atmosphere that made us giddy with excitement and the fact that Merlinka was the most important cultural event of the month. The House of Representatives of the Parliament of FBiH adopted the initiative to use gender-sensitive language. This initiative was a follow-up activity of our Equality Academy, and its adoption was a big deal. We were also the only civil society organisation that contributed to the amendments of the Law on Sports. The amendments address equal participation of women in the Sports Council, gender responsible budgeting and prohibition of discrimination on all grounds including disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics. This is also a huge success. We've played a part in drafting numerous amendments and policies: the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH, amendments to the Criminal Code of FBiH, the decision to design an Action Plan for Equality of LGBT people in BiH, etc. You can read more about it in this publication.

There are also *smaller* victories that propel us forward. It's a great success to have parents of young trans people come to us for advice and help, because they know we have the right information. Or when a person with an already impressive CV includes the School of Feminism "Žarana Papić", right after listing their formal education.

**We should also note the stability of the team, because teamwork is very important in civil society organisations. How did you build your team and your capacities over the years?**

**EMINA BOŠNJAK:** A lot of it has already been described in the *advice column*! (laughs) SOC has undergone changes in personnel and it's nothing unusual. What sets SOC apart is that former members who have moved on professionally are still involved in the work of SOC and are there to help and support us when necessary. We have established a culture of teamwork within the organisation, a strong belief that things will change if we

**I'VE HEARD PEOPLE SAY SOC FUNCTIONS AS SOME SORT OF A CULT. IT MAY SOUND INSULTING AT FIRST, BUT I CHOOSE TO LOOK AT IT FROM A DIFFERENT POINT OF YOU. I THINK IT REFLECTS AN IMPORTANT TRUTH ABOUT SOC: THAT THERE IS A SET OF CORE VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND RULES IN PLACE, AND A STRONG SENSE THAT WE ARE BUILDING SOMETHING TOGETHER. IT CONTRIBUTES TO THE COHESION OF THE TEAM, REGARDLESS WHO IS IN IT.**



Emina Bošnjak at the protest, photo: SOC

invested a lot in capacity building among our team members: from English courses, trainings on advocacy and administration/finance management, design. We've been working on it for years.

**Can you give us a glimpse into the future, what is the main focus of SOC going forward? What should we expect from SOC in the next ten years, what kind of surprises do you have in store for us? :)**

**EMINA BOŠNJAK:** Oh, I wouldn't dare look that far into the future! Currently, we are in the midst of strategic planning for the three-year period of 2018-2020. Based on what we've done so far and the consultations both with team members and outsiders, I can say that we won't deviate too much from our previous strategic plan in terms of the issues we deal with. We will focus our efforts on finishing some of the initiatives we started. Hopefully, we'll be wiser and more cunning in our approach. There is also talk of including new things on our agenda, but we will approach them carefully and only if we have enough time to tackle them. These issues are primarily related to education, labour, employment and problems affecting intersex people. We will also keep working on issues that require our attention – we won't see any progress in the implementation of newly adopted policies and legislation unless we exert pressure and cooperate with the institutions, thereby contributing to the European integration process of BiH.

As for advocacy work, our priorities include legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, legal recognition of gender, political participation of women and contributing to the improvement of institutional gender mechanisms. We will try to make a significant step forward in working with the LGBTI community. We hope to build a community strong enough to publically promote and proudly fight for its rights, a community that has its supporters who could tell you at any given moment why they support the LGBTI community and don't do so simply out of good will or tolerance. LGBTI people need to have support from their families, co-workers and friends, as well as influential public figures, so-called *opinion makers*. We have to wage this battle within the broader context of culture. Homophobia and transphobia must become a thing of the past, replaced by clear policies and clear ideas on how to ensure meaningful inclusion of LGBTI people in our society.

As for women's rights, we'll try to double our efforts, offer new solutions, new ideas and a new energy: I'm not aware of anyone seriously addressing gender equality on executive positions in the administration. We're talking about 10 000 jobs and a much higher number of executive positions than in the executive branch of government. Of course, the executive branch is key because this is where power is concentrated, but it won't be our sole focus. Also, we will try to combine feminist education with LGBTI activism and I believe this will help us bring about the cultural changes I mentioned earlier. I think this combination is an absolute goldmine since it helps us not only gain support for the work of SOC, but also change the general outlook – LGBTI issues don't just boil down to discrimination, nor does feminism concern only educated and informed young women. Both movements have an important emancipatory potential and I hope we will use it going forward.

## 10 BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENTS OF SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE

## THE BEST OF SOC

**A lot happens and a lot is done in ten years. Although it wasn't an easy task, we picked out ten moments that shaped the work of Sarajevo Open Centre, as well as the human rights protection movement in BiH.**

1

2009

## DESIGNING THE “CULTURE OF RELIGIONS” TEXTBOOK

In 2009, together with Goethe Institute and the OSCE Mission to BiH (Education Department), and with financial support from HEKS (Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz), Sarajevo Open Centre designed the textbook for “Culture of Religions”, a subject that had been included in school curricula in just three cantons of the Federation of BiH (Zenica-Doboj, Bosnian Podrinje and Sarajevo Canton). The textbook was designed in order to facilitate and improve “Culture of Religions” classes and was the first of its kind. All of the content in all chapters was presented from multiple perspectives, including the Jewish, Catholic, Islamic and Orthodox point of view. The main purpose was to get to know and understand the other. The textbook was authored by dr. Zilka Spahić-Šiljak and M.Sc. Dino Abazović, while Ivo Marković, Marko Antonio Brkić, Zorica Kuburić and Alen Kristić also played a role as contributors.



Priručnik za nastavnike/ce predmeta  
Kultura religija i druge interreligijske predmete u srednjim školama  
**KULTURA RELIGIJA**  
petak, 9. decembar 2011, 18h  
Sarajevo, Franjevački provincijalat  
Zagrebčaka 18

SOC



2

2011/12

## EUROPEAN WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM FOR WRITERS AND TRANSLATORS

Sarajevo Open Centre and the Traduki Network for Literature ran the European Writers-in-Residence Program for Writers and Translators. Like other programs around Europe, it provided writers and literary translators, both young and renowned, with an opportunity to stay in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina for four weeks and participate in various literary activities. The goal of this two-year project was to enrich the cultural scene of BiH by promoting new, innovative programs and bringing in foreign writers and translators who wrote about their stay in Sarajevo, thereby becoming the cultural ambassadors of the city. On the other hand, the local audience became acquainted with the literary and translation work of the guest authors. During the project, Sarajevo Open Centre established cooperation with various embassies and the Goethe Institute in BiH. Authors and literary translators from Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia participated in the program.



3

2010

SCREENING OF FILM *TO JE NAŠE DIJETE*

The screening of the film *To je naše dijete* by Elma Islamović was the first cultural event organised for LGBTI people in BiH after the attack on Sarajevo Queer Festival in 2008 and the disbanding of the Q Association. The screening was followed by a discussion on “What happens next with the queer movement in BiH?” This was the first event organised by SOC as part of its new program “Questioning - LGBTIQ Culture, Art and Law” supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Marije Cornelissen, who was a member of the European Parliament at the time, also took part in the discussion. Different projects and events related to LGBT issues were organised throughout 2010 and 2011 as part of the “Questioning” program.



Photo: SOC



4

2012

## CHANGING THE BLOOD DONOR QUESTIONNAIRE IN FBiH

The initiative to change the blood donor questionnaire used in FBiH in order to remove discrimination against potential blood donors on the grounds of sexual orientation was the first successful advocacy campaign led by SOC. In 2012, SOC filed a complaint with the Institution of the Ombudsman of BiH warning about the discriminatory practice that came to fore in April 2012 when the media reported on a conflict between employees of the Institute for Transfusion Medicine of FBiH and students of the School of Philosophy who revolted against the discrimination. One of the employees even used physical force against students who tried to point out that the questionnaire was discriminatory. Unfortunately, an employee of the School joined the attack by verbally insulting the students. The incident occurred during a voluntary blood donation event organised at the School of Philosophy. It sparked positive reactions among the public who stood by the students, and the discrimination against LGBTI people in the questionnaire was soon removed.



Photo: diskriminacija.ba

The advocacy campaign was successful due to combined efforts of SOC, students of the School of Philosophy and other activists. SOC filed a complaint with the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH regarding the exclusion of “all persons who have had occasional or frequent sexual contact with homosexuals” from donating blood and, once it received a positive recommendation from the Ombudsman, began corresponding with the Institute for Transfusion Medicine of FBiH, while the reactions and protests of the students and activists fighting for the human rights of LGBTI people contributed to removing discrimination against homosexual and bisexual blood donors. The Institute for Transfusion Medicine of FBiH consulted members of Sarajevo Open Centre before releasing the amended questionnaire. The current questionnaire strictly prohibits blood donation from people who engage in high-risk sexual behaviour, regardless of sexual orientation.

5

2012–2016

## REGULATING CRIMES AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE MOTIVATED BY HATE AND DISCRIMINATION

Our longstanding efforts and cooperation with civil society organisations that make up the Coalition for Combatting Hate Speech and Hate Crime resulted in the adoption of amendments to the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska in 2013, as well as the Criminal Code of the Federation of BiH. SOC and other members of the Coalition began working on amendments to the criminal codes of both entities in 2012, after news of a brutal attack against a young gay man in Mostar appeared in the media. It became clear that harsher punishments are necessary for crimes motivated by homophobia and transphobia, as well as nationalism or any other kind of xenophobia. In addition to focusing on improvements in the area of criminal legislation, SOC also began working on the legal protection of LGBTI persons against discrimination in 2012, trying to initiate the process of improving the existing Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH. SOC's advocacy work, carried out through the Initiative for Monitoring EU Integration since 2015, resulted in the adoption of amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH in 2016.



Photo: SOC

Amendments to the criminal codes, as well as the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH have enhanced the human rights of all citizens of BiH and the protection of LGBTI persons against hate-motivated crimes. The amendments to the criminal codes of both entities foresee harsher sanctions for hate-motivated crimes committed against LGBTI persons on the grounds of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This sends a clear message that prejudice and violence against minority groups will not be tolerated. Amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH include a clearer definition of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” (when the original Law was adopted in 2009 the terms “sexual orientation and expression” were used). They also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual characteristics against intersex persons.



Photo: SOC

6

## DISCUSSION OF LGBTI ISSUES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF BIH

The thematic session in 2015 was the first time a government institution discussed the human rights of LGBTI citizens in BiH. It resulted in the *Special Report on the State of Human Rights of LGBTI Persons* published by the Institution of the Ombudsman of BiH in 2016. The session was co-prepared with the Joint Commission for Human Rights of both chambers in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. Sarajevo Open Centre, together with other civil society organisations, initiated the drafting of this report back in 2013 and held talks with the Institution of the Ombudsman. However, the Institution drafted the report only when it received a clear signal from the Joint Commission. It was the first time an institution in BiH released a report that systematically analysed the legislation of BiH, elaborated on the human rights violations against LGBTI people in BiH and issued recommendations to institutions on all levels of government on how to prevent such violations.

The thematic session held in May 2017 was the first one dedicated to human rights of transgender persons in BiH and featured a trans activist who spoke about the legal recognition of gender reassignment. The session was organised in cooperation with the Joint Commission for Human Rights of both chambers in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the Gender Equality Commission of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Gender Equality Agency of BiH and the UNDP Office in BiH. The thematic session focused on discussing the report on the state of human rights of LGBTI people drafted by UNDP, as well as the human rights of transgender persons and the issue of legally recognising the effects of changing one's gender identity or sex. The participants were introduced to SOC's model of the Gender Identity Law and they also heard from Liam Isić, a transgender rights activist, who spoke about his personal experience.



Photo: SOC

2015-2017



7

2015-2016

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

After the general election of 2014, the Council of Ministers of BiH, as well as cantonal and entity-level governments were formed with complete disregard to the provision in the Gender Equality Law of BiH that is supposed to ensure gender equality in the executive branch by prescribing 40% representation of the underrepresented sex. Two women and seven men made up the Council of Ministers, while the governments of the Zenica-Doboj and Herzegovina-Neretva cantons included no women ministers in the 2014-2018 term of office. The 2014 general election did not result in a higher number of women in the legislative branch either – women took up 19.90% of government positions on all levels.

In 2015, Sarajevo Open Centre brought forth two initiatives before the Gender Equality Commission of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH with the aim of improving the political participation of women and ensuring equal participation of women in the legislative and executive branches of government. In order to ensure 40% of women ministers in the executive branch on state level, Sarajevo Open Centre and the Gender Equality Agency of BiH convinced the Gender Equality Commission of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly to propose amendments to the Law on the Council of Ministers in 2015. The amendments were supposed to ensure that the Council of Ministers of BiH could not be formed without meeting the quota of 40%. The proposal was approved at first reading but was not adopted.

That same year, Sarajevo Open Centre proposed amending the Law on Amendments to the Election Law of BiH in order to increase the number of women in the legislative branch. The proposed amendment would have made it mandatory for political parties to have an equal number of men and women candidates (50% per cent each) and alternate between the names of male and female candidates on the list. The parties that failed to abide by this provision would not be able to take part in the election. The Gender Equality Commission of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH accepted the proposal and drafted the bill. However, it was not approved at first reading.



Photo: SOC

8

2016

## PERFORMING SEVEN AT THE PARLIAMENT OF FBiH, 2016

On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 the documentary play *Seven*, based on interviews with seven women's rights activists from all over the world who spoke about violence against women, was performed during a thematic session on the "Current State of Women's Human Rights in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" organised by the Gender Equality Commission of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of FBiH in cooperation with Sarajevo Open Centre and Medica Zenica. The text was read by seven MPs of the Parliament of FBiH: Alma Kratina, Darijana Katić, Damir Mašić, Dennis Gratz, Jasna Duraković Hadžiomerović, Kenela Zuko and Vesna Švancer.



Photo: SOC

2016 9

## IDAHOT

Sarajevo Open Centre commemorated the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) on 17<sup>th</sup> May by handing out brochures on the symbolism and significance of the date to members of the Parliament of FBiH, as well as issuing a call to MPs and the government of FBiH to make an honest, unequivocal commitment to enhancing the human rights and equality of LGBTI persons. The following five demands were presented:

1. Members of parliament should provide clear, unequivocal support to LGBTI persons, thereby clearly showing that prejudice, discrimination and violence shall not be tolerated.
2. The Federation of BiH needs to change the provisions of the Criminal Code of FBiH that sanction incitement to hate and violence by adding gender, sexual characteristics, gender identity and sexual orientation to the list of prohibited grounds.
3. The Federation of BiH should draft and adopt a law on same-sex partnerships in order to provide legal recognition and regulation of same-sex partnerships and the rights and obligations arising therefrom.
4. The Federation of BiH should draft and adopt a law on gender identity so as to ensure quick, transparent and widely available legal recognition of gender reassignment and enable transgender and transsexual persons to live a dignified life.
5. The Federation of BiH should draft, adopt and implement a multiannual Action Plan for Equality of LGBTI Persons in order to tackle prejudice, discrimination and violence on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics. The measures are to be implemented on the level of Federation and the cantons.

In addition to members of Sarajevo Open Centre, other representatives of the civil society, LGBTI rights activists and their supporters also took part in the event. After handing out the material and giving media statements the activists, who were buoyed by the atmosphere and the positive reactions of several MPs, spontaneously organised a walk down Obala Kulina bana from the building of the Federation of BiH to Čobanija Bridge, with rainbow flags held up high. No incidents occurred, other than a few comments from passers-by and the crowd dispersed at the bridge with no problems. The walk was covered by all media outlets and became known as “level 0 pride” or “Sarajevo’s miniature pride”.



Photo: diskriminacija.ba

2016 10

## COOPERATION WITH INSTITUTIONAL GENDER MECHANISMS

SOC's cooperation with the Gender Equality Agency of BiH, the Gender Centre of the Federation of BiH and the Gender Centre of Republika Srpska reached its pinnacle with the introduction of measures concerning the human rights of LGBTI persons into the implementation of the Gender Action Plan. Measures to improve the human rights of LGBTI persons were also included in the operational plan of the Council of Ministers of BiH and the governments of both entities, which means they were included on all levels of government. The coordinating councils of entity governments and the Council of Ministers, whose staff has been trained to monitor the implementation of the Gender Action Plan of BiH, are in charge of implementing the said measures. Through our cooperation with the state Agency and gender centres, we managed to initiate the process of drafting a separate Action Plan for Equality of LGBTI citizens of BiH. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH was entrusted with this task in 2016. The Agency, gender centres and Sarajevo Open Centre designed a document proposing Measures to Ensure Equality of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The document was intended to serve as basis for measures included in the operational plans and help draft the Action Plan. It was presented at a joint conference in the Administrative Centre of the Government of Republika Srpska. At the start of 2017, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH issued a call to form a work group that would draft the Action Plan for Equality of LGBTI Citizens of BiH. Representatives of the Agency, the two gender centres, the government of Brčko District and Sarajevo Open Centre confirmed their participation. The document will be prepared soon and sent to the Council of Ministers of BiH for further deliberation.



Photo: 6yka.com



## THE BEGINNINGS OF SOC

# CHANGE THE WORLD AROUND YOU

**Saša Gavrić, one of the founders and the executive director of SOC from 2011 to 2016, recounts the beginnings of Sarajevo Open Centre**

Author: Saša Gavrić

The other day I stumbled upon a status on one of the social networks. It went something like this: when you're young, you want to change the world, but you have no idea how it's done, so you wing it and see what happens. With time, your wish to change the world is accompanied by a desire to learn and change yourself. Finally, you become focused primarily on yourself and your personal contentment as a necessary precondition for changing the world around you.

The status sort of describes the beginnings of SOC. Having completed my undergrad studies in Germany, I came back and found a job at the Goethe Institute, a German cultural centre. I had everything I could possibly wish for at that age. A super fancy job, great pay check and the freedom to live life according to my own needs and desires. However, I wanted more. I wanted to change the world around me. During my time at the Goethe Institute I worked on an interdisciplinary educational program for secondary schools called "culture of religions",

the goal of which was to present the various religious communities and traditions in BiH. I was surrounded by incredible women, in particular Ranka Katalinski and the late Zuhra Kalauzović, who showed me that Bosnia and Herzegovina has experts capable of doing small miracles.

**IN 2013, SOC ADOPTED ITS FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN, THEREBY BECOMING A HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION FOCUSED ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND LGBTI PERSONS. IT WAS THE YEAR IN WHICH SOC STEPPED INTO ADULTHOOD, PROVING IT WAS READY TO LEARN, SACRIFICE AND CHANGE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO CHANGE ITS ENVIRONMENT. WE STOPPED DOING WHAT WE WANTED, OPTING INSTEAD TO FOCUS ON THOSE ISSUES THAT NEEDED ADDRESSING.**

When Goethe Institute decided it would no longer work on "culture of religions" we talked about what to do next. Due to my inquisitive nature I looked up other organisations in the region and discovered the Belgrade Open School – or BOS. Although

a huge NGO, BOS soon became an example of the kind of organisation we wanted to have and the kind of programs we wanted to run. We didn't want to call the organisation Sarajevo Open School – SOS, so we decided on calling it "centre" instead. In the beginning we groped around in the dark, without a clear focus. We knew culture of religions couldn't be the only thing we did. We had to add other themes as well. Culture and arts, taken over from our work in Goethe Institute, as well as social research and publishing became our main priorities. In addition to Ranka and Zuhra, there were also Anđelka, Azra and, briefly, Aleksandar. As SOC grew, the only founders who stayed with the organisation included me and Damir Banović, who was sometimes heavily involved, while at other times he was simply there, like an older brother, ready to step in when we needed him. Damir is still part of the organisation as president of the assembly.

From 2007 to 2011 we carried out many activities and projects. We basically did whatever the heck we wanted, paying no attention to the priorities of donors or anyone else for that matter. We did no assessments of actual needs. We didn't have an office, didn't care much for strategies, annual plans, work regulations or other formalities. But we did have enthusiasm, strength and motivation to make all our crazy ideas happen and see them through. We lobbied for the introduction of "Culture of Religions" as a subject in secondary schools, we trained a vast number of teachers, designed a textbook and a teacher's handbook for "Culture of Religions", organised



Saša Gavrić, photo: Dženat Drekević

countless film screenings, exhibitions and published the first comprehensive introduction into the post-Dayton political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. New people, such as Dražen, Hana, Arijana and Dina joined SOC. They took part in the activities but also contributed to the development of SOC by changing its profile, structure and priorities. On a personal level, I was completely caught up in the work of SOC, trying to develop the organisation but also at times preventing it from developing of its own accord. I behaved like a very strict parent, aware of my mistakes but reluctant to loosen my grip.

As I and the people around me changed, so did SOC. Inspired by the queer festival in Sofia, I contacted the Q Association, the first LGBTIQ organisation in BiH, and proposed we do a similar festival in Sarajevo. This was in 2007, right after I had founded SOC. It was the organisation's first foray into LGBTIQ issues. LGBTIQ work would remain a priority for SOC throughout its existence. Together with Q Association we developed the program and worked towards implementing the project. At the same time we were busy preparing a regional LGBTIQ collection of texts. By late 2007/early 2008 the cooperation crumbled due to silly disagreements. Q Association continued working on the festival. We all know the outcome. SOC's regional LGBTIQ collection of texts also never saw the light of day, simply because we didn't get enough interesting pieces through the open call for papers. All beginnings are a matter of trial and error, as they say. No one could have foreseen that from 2010 onwards SOC would make its name primarily by promoting and protecting the human rights of LGBTIQ persons.

In 2011, four years after it was established, SOC underwent its biggest change. Arijana Aganović and I quit our jobs and together with Dina Vilić we became SOC's first full-time employees. We invested our own money and got our first office. In late 2011 and early 2012 Lejla, Mariña, Emina, Feđa, Jozo, Vladana and Jasmina joined us. The organisation improved and grew every day. The desire to do cool, but completely disparate things became an ever growing problem. At the suggestion of Hana Stojić, we sent a delegation from BiH to the Leipzig book fair. On another occasion, we held activist workshops for young LGBT people. Then we revisited the writers-in-residence program, organised film screenings showcasing the cinematography of various countries, and continued working on culture of religions. From this medley of activities and our cooperation with wonderful individuals and organisations, SOC developed into the organisation we know today.

Culture of religions, social research and publishing, culture and the arts were all left behind as SOC adopted its first strategic plan in 2013, becoming a human rights organisation focused on women's and LGBTIQ rights. It was the year in which SOC stepped into adulthood, proving it was ready to learn, sacrifice and change in order to be able to change its environment. We stopped doing what we wanted, opting instead to focus on those issues that needed addressing.

When I left the organisation in the summer of 2016, I closed an important chapter of my life. I had spent nine years developing myself, and shaping the nine out of ten years of SOC's existence. It is now up to SOC's current team, led by Emina Bošnjak, to shape if not ten, then at least the next 3 or 4 years of SOC.

## SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE TEAM

# BATTLES WORTH WAGING ARE BEST WAGED TOGETHER

**Sarajevo Open Centre could always boast of a dedicated team ready to take all challenges head on, overcome problems together and also have a good time. The line between the professional and private life of SOC team members has always been very blurred, and this makes us stronger because we know each other's strengths and weaknesses and are ready to help out at all times. The following pages are dedicated to our team, our Steering Committee and Assembly, as well as people who no longer work with us on a regular basis but are still an important part of the story.**



**JOZO BLAŽEVIĆ, 31** PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Hate crimes

**What would you like to achieve as your main activist/advocacy goal?**

I'd like to see Bosnia and Herzegovina become a country that recognises LGBTI persons as equal members of the society. LGBTI people who were born here, who live in BiH, work and pay taxes like all other citizens deserve to be free. I hope to see LGBTI people live a life without fear and violence, I hope to see them happy and smiling, because we are after all talking about basic, fundamental human rights.



**EMINA BOŠNJAK, 33** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Everything Sarajevo Open Centre does :)

**What would you like to achieve as your main activist/advocacy goal?**

I hope to see two things (relatively soon): a law on same-sex partnerships and legislation that regulates women's participation in the executive branch, in accordance with the Gender Equality Law of BiH. We'll be working very hard on both of these issues and I hope our efforts come to fruition.



**JASMINA ČAUŠEVIĆ, 41** PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Feminism, women's rights

**Who do you look up to in your activist/advocacy work?** Zehra Muidović, after whom the childbearing centre in Sarajevo was named following World War II. It was a symbolic gesture, a hope that every newborn will be an anti-fascist. She was a partisan, a heroine of the National Liberation War and the revolution, a member of the Anti-fascist Women's Front, a determined anti-fascist, agitator and conspirator. She hid Radojka Lakić and many other comrades in her apartment on Alifakovac. She organised a forty-day-long military intelligence course on using radio transmitters. She carried out "the most intense conspiratorial work, with great commitment".





**INELA HADŽIĆ, 29** PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Human rights in general, especially women's rights and gender equality

**What would you like to achieve as your main activist/advocacy goal?**

A real change in the mind-set of citizens when it comes to respecting human rights, and actual implementation of legislation.



**DELILA HASANBEGOVIĆ, 26** PROGRAM ASSISTANT

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Gender equality, feminism, women's rights

**Activist/advocacy role model:**

There are so many, I wouldn't know where to begin. My co-workers are my role models: the intelligent, hard-working, dedicated SOC team that creates a vibrant, dynamic work atmosphere. Also the people I get to meet regularly, the activists who inspire me to show solidarity and fight for a society of equality and justice.



**LEJLA HUREMOVIĆ, 30** PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Working with the media and the LGBTI community

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far?**

Every intervention in public space. Every time we occupied public space and increased our visibility. Two things in particular come to mind: the spontaneous mini pride in May 2016 and the performance in front of the BBI Centre on Coming Out Day in October 2016.



**MARINA JOVOVIĆ, 33** FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far?**

I had butterflies in my stomach, and felt happy and proud when we organised a protest in front of the building of the Government of Canton Sarajevo instead of the banned march on 13th May 2017. You could hear the sound of drums, people came with their children, friends and partners, rainbow flags were everywhere and for an hour or two it felt like we'd briefly defeated homophobia. We were free, and I hope we continue to fight for freedom.



**NIKOLA KURIDŽA, 28** PROGRAM COORDINATOR

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Gender equality, anti-fascism, LGBTI rights and freedoms, human rights, confronting the past and reconciliation

**Activist/advocacy role model:** Due to my views on class and authority I don't care much for role models, but there are two people in particular who have shaped my worldview. These are Judith Butler and Madonna. As a student of philosophy, I found in the writings of Judith Butler all those things that are deliberately omitted from the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her work paved the way for a completely new, more humane outlook on the world. Through her activism, Judith proved that she wasn't just a philosopher preaching from an ivory tower. I've been following her work for years. As for Madonna, she proved that a pop icon can be both political and achieve commercial success. She is a pioneer in using popularity and media influence to question gender roles, religion and sexuality, which she has managed to do more or less successfully. She has continued to question women's role in the society, as well as defy the image of an aging woman by refusing to bow down to patriarchal notions of "aging gracefully" that apply to women only. Her involvement in raising awareness on HIV and AIDS is also of immense importance.





### **MAJA LUKIĆ-SCHADE, I'VE BEEN TOLD I LOOK LIKE I'M 33**

PROGRAM MANAGER

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Rights of LGBTI people, women and other marginalised groups

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far?** The thing that galvanizes and motivates me the most is doing pioneer work that's never been done before. I can't really pick a favourite activity, as there have been many. I've been following the work of SOC since 2010, and the screening of the film *To je naše dijete* has a special place in my heart. It was the first event following QSF (not exactly a public event, as only a handful of people knew it was happening. I think the police ended up outnumbering the audience). We were all quite scared. I would also single out the first trainings for police officers, teachers, psychologists and pedagogues, as well as the human rights march when rainbow flags were proudly on display on the streets of Sarajevo. I am also very proud of the brave SOC team members and other activists who were part of the performance "Naši životi postoje i izvan četiri zida" and other street actions.



### **VLADANA VASIĆ, 27 ADVOCACY MANAGER**

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Gender equality, human rights of women and LGBTI people

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far?** I can't really pick a favourite, but I have a soft spot for the first time we commemorated IDAHOT in 2013. We organised community events for activists and the LGBTI community in SOC, and together we made a banner to commemorate the date. We put it up on the bridge on Skenderija in the wee hours of dawn, before the clock struck 6, because we were so scared of being seen. Of course, by 9 a.m. the banner was already taken down, but the media covered the story and we managed to convey our message. This is why the "level 0 pride", i.e. the protest walk for IDAHOT 2016 was so significant. It showed the immense progress we'd made as activists and as an organisation. It also showed how far the LGBTI community had come, since we were no longer hiding and giving in to fear. We are continuously making forward strides.



### **DINA VILIĆ ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCE COORDINATOR**

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Leaving comments on LGBTI and feminist issues on various message boards and participating in heated online discussions :)

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far:**

The protest in front of the Government of Canton Sarajevo after the cantonal Ministry of Traffic banned the march against violence directed at LGBT people. We were all on the same page and stood there as one. I think the protest has made us stronger and more capable of carrying out bigger actions in the future.



### **MAIDA ZAGORAC, 25 PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Political participation of women

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of activist/advocacy work?**

The chance to do something I love and believe in, something I live for, a chance to become the change I want to see, to help create a society without discrimination or prejudice where everyone is equal – these things are invaluable and are much more than perks that come with the job. I should also add getting to know interesting people, learning new things, working in a vibrant environment, travelling, improving professionally, doing street actions and seeing happy, smiling faces around me. Disadvantages include always fearing what comes next, the agonisingly slow pace of change, a lack of understanding from other people, worrying how things will turn out, being disappointed by failures and lack of response from the authorities. Luckily, the will and the desire to build a better society is stronger than the occasional setback. :)

**NAIDA KUČUKALIĆ, 33**

**Former role in SOC:** LGBTI Community Outreach Coordinator

**Current job?** I'm currently a freelancer. I've taken on work as moderator, facilitator, workshop leader, translator and author.

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Empowering individuals, LGBT persons, working on equality, combatting violence and torture, primarily against women. Whenever we stand up for those who are suffering, we stand up for ourselves as well.

**What do you remember most about working in SOC?** The great energy that was created within the team and the community. It only grew stronger with each new person coming in. There was a sense of trust and people felt they were in a safe space, and could enjoy in that safety at least twice a week. The sense of togetherness, despite all our differences. We didn't have the same needs or the same priorities, but we were in it together. We talked, argued, learned from each other, laughed, cried, and shared our most intimate stories. We left a part of ourselves there, knowing it was safe. We brought all our secret identities out into the open. We danced. Those are actually my most precious memories – the hours spent preparing events for the community and socialising with the community in the room on the ground level every other Friday. Later we would all clean up and go to a friendly cafe to continue hanging out.

**AIDA SPAČIĆ, 35** PRESIDENT OF THE STEERING BOARD OF SOC

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Freedom of choice and expression, anti-discrimination

**Favourite thing SOC has done so far?**

The Merlinka Festival because it's a great way for members of the community to get together and get to know each other, and because it features important, empowering films. I love Merlinka.

**ARIJANA AGANOVIĆ, 33** SOC ASSEMBLY AND STEERING BOARD MEMBER

**Former role in SOC:** I did all kinds of work in my three years at SOC. From being a steward when we organised the first gay & straight parties at a club formerly known as Podroom to serving as manager of the Political Participation program. The roles of 'project coordinator' and 'project assistant' meant overseeing numerous activities in the 2010-2013 period when I was actively involved in the work of the organisation. The activities were related to culture of religions, film screenings, LGBT programs, etc. Today I am a member of the Steering Board.

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Gender equality, with a special focus on the political participation of women

**What were the most important life lessons you learned while at SOC?** SOC was a watershed moment in my life because I realised that fighting for equality and a just society isn't merely a job description, it's a lifelong call and I try to uphold these principles whenever I can.

**ELMAJA BAVČIĆ, 34** SOC STEERING BOARD MEMBER

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Freedom of speech and assembly, feminism and equal rights and opportunities, gender-sensitive policies

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of activist/advocacy work?**

Although often perceived as a marginal activity, activism is a key component of fulfilling the goals of an organisation, addressing the needs of the community and the needs of people whose rights are under attack. Our advocacy work often suffers if we aren't visible on the streets and if we don't create pressure through this channel. Activism is the very core of the organisation and it has helped us come this far. We've opted for a combination of activism and advocacy work and we will stick to it going forward.


**DAMIR BANOVIĆ, 34** PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF SOC

**Former role in SOC:**

A co-founder of SOC

**Current job:**

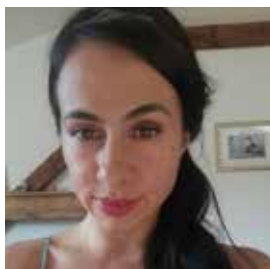
Senior Assistant at the School of Law in Sarajevo

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Law and social research

**What were the most important life lessons you learned while at SOC?**

That achieving one's ideas and ideals is possible.


**MARIÑA BARREIRO MARIÑO, 32** SOC ASSEMBLY MEMBER

**Former role in SOC:** Program Manager

**Current job?** Right now I'm working as Head of Human Rights at OSCE Mission to BiH

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:** Fighting for justice and equality

**What were the most important life lessons you learned while at SOC?**

SOC was everything to me. I learned everything there is to know about my job: how to set daily priorities, write project proposals, raise money in order to fulfil the goals together with my co-workers. Most of all, I learned that you can't get anywhere by yourself. You need teamwork in order to be successful. We can achieve good results only if we're all pulling in the same direction. Oh, and most importantly – in SOC I found friends for life, people I consider my family.


**SAŠA GAVRIĆ, 32** SOC ASSEMBLY MEMBER

**Former role in SOC:**

Activist, a co-founder of SOC in 2007, executive director from 2011 to 2016

**Current job?**

After five interesting years of managing SOC it was time both I and the organisation made a change. Currently, I'm working as a Gender Equality Adviser at OEBS Mission to Kosovo.

**Main area of activist/advocacy engagement:**

Institutions in charge of promoting and protecting human rights, human rights legislation, institutional mechanisms for gender equality in federal/complex political systems

**What were the most important life lessons you learned while at SOC?**

You can change the world, if you want. That's what I did. But it's also important to change yourself and to shift your focus from work to love, the people who surround you and your personal happiness.

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ, JURIST AND CO-FOUNDER OF SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE**

# HOW LGBTI RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS WERE USHERED INTO INSTITUTIONS

**Damir Banović is a recognisable face of Sarajevo Open Centre. As co-founder, jurist and author of numerous publications, he has been involved with the organisation from the very beginning. An excellent jurist, he has dealt extensively with the legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, analysing the discrimination against LGBTI people on various levels and trying to identify the best advocacy methods for upholding the rights of LGBTI persons within an institutional framework. In 2012 he published the book *Rights and Freedoms of LGBT Persons – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Statutory Regulations of Bosnia and Herzegovina* in which he analysed the legal basis for LGBT rights in our country. We sat down for a chat with Damir, who looked back with nostalgia at SOC's major achievements, the obstacles the organisation had to overcome, and also revealed if and to what extent SOC has contributed to his impressive academic career.**

Interviewer: Selma Kešetović

**You have been with Sarajevo Open Centre from the very beginning. What drove you to become part of this landmark organisation that publically promotes the rights of LGBTI people in BiH?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** Sarajevo Open Centre was founded as an association in 2007 and its main driving force was introducing Culture of Religions into schools, primarily in Canton Sarajevo. Different projects and programs have been added since then. I would single out film weeks showcasing the cinematography from various countries, as well as social research projects and the publication of the first book on the post-Dayton political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009 called *Introduction into the Political System of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Key Aspects*. The goal was to describe the current legal and political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also connect young researchers from around the country. I'm especially pleased to see that the relationships built through this project are still alive today. What followed next was an even more ambitious project with the same goal. In 2011 we published a new collection of texts called *State, Politics and Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Analysis of the Post-Dayton Political System*. Saša Gavrić and I were the editors of the volume. From 2007, Sarajevo Open Centre has also dealt with issues affecting the LGBT population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The marginalised social, political and legal position of LGBT people in BiH later became the organisation's primary focus. It felt natural to me as a jurist, researcher and LGBT activist to see Sarajevo Open Centre gravitate towards feminism and queer activism and be part of it.

**“I THINK INCREMENTAL CHANGES SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED. IF YOU MANAGE TO EMPOWER AND HELP EVEN A SINGLE PERSON, YOU'VE ALREADY DONE SOMETHING VALUABLE FOR ACTIVISM.”**

**Why did you and Saša Gavrić explore the political and legal system of BiH? What were the results of your research and how did it contribute to SOC's efforts to advocate the rights of LGBTI people and women?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** By exploring the legal and political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina we hoped to address the gaps in existing literature. Normative descriptions of how the system functions were completely





Photo: Irfan Redžović

**“PERSONALLY I BELIEVE CULTURE IS A VERY IMPORTANT PLATFORM FOR RECOGNISING AND EXPRESSING DIFFERENCE AS A KIND OF COMPASSIONATE DISPLAY OF THE VARIOUS IDENTITIES THAT HUMAN BEINGS CARRY.”**

lacking and we tried to set it right. Some of our research focused on particular aspects of the system, such as *The Parliamentary System in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, but we also tried to give a comprehensive overview of the post-Dayton political context. Later on, SOC shifted its focus to LGBTI rights and feminism, but it goes without saying that an

in-depth knowledge of the political and legal system of the country is a sine qua non if you want to advocate for someone's rights or do any kind of activist or research work.

**What were the biggest obstacles in the beginning?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** We faced obstacles on three levels: the state that does not recognise the problem of marginalisation, the society steeped in heteronormative and patriarchal practices that discriminates against those who don't fit into the traditional roles, and the level of community. The latter is perhaps the most interesting. When I say LGBT “community” I don't necessarily mean people who share the same values. I mean it as a concept. The community is a pretty heterogeneous group of people. Having a different gender identity and/or sexual orientation might be the only thing they have in common. Within the community there are different opinions as to what are the actual needs, the best ways to achieve the set goals and what should be the main focus. Some people in the community often shy away from public visibility and feel threatened by efforts to achieve political, social and legal recognition.

**Through your research you've tried to understand the position of LGBTI people, identify their needs, as well as political and legal mechanisms that could provide protection. Which research would you single out as particularly important and pertinent today?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** Legal research that shed light on the state of legal protection for the first time was particularly important to me. It was carried out after the Gender Equality Law and Anti-Discrimination Law were passed. Through these acts, “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” became part of the legal sphere for the first time (although the terminology somewhat varied). They were an important incentive to start analysing and systematising anti-discrimination legislation, as well as educating the community, society and government officials. At one point, the practice of reporting discrimination also picked up. Most of the complaints were filed with the Institution of the Ombudsman of BiH. The last research I did was in 2013. Together with Vladana Vasić, I released a publication titled *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Law and Practice*. In addition to offering a systematisation and interpretation of statutory regulations, we analysed legal practice, including the Queer Festival case that's currently at the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Sarajevo Open Centre has worked hard on analysing and changing the legislation in favour of the LGBTI population in BiH. Looking back, how much has changed in the last ten years?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** I think incremental changes should not be overlooked. If you manage to empower and help even a single person, you've already done something valuable for activism. But there have also been major changes, especially in the last five years. In 2016, the Joint Commission for Human Rights held a thematic session at the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH presented its Special Report on the Rights of LGBT People in BiH. The improved Anti-Discrimination Law now includes sexual characteristics as prohibited grounds for discrimination, in addition to sexual orientation and gender identity. I think this is a very important step because it means the institutions have started including LGBT issues in their agendas. Sarajevo Open Centre has also played a helping hand in establishing other organisations and informal groups in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I think it's very important to decentralise activism and help people outside of Sarajevo. That's why I'm particularly overjoyed by this outcome.



Photo: Ivana Teronić

**What needs to be done going forward?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** We operate on three levels – the state, the society and the community – so it's necessary to continue with our activities in all three areas. On the state level we need to ensure the implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Law, work on education and try to address current deficiencies. Lobbying for laws on registered partnerships and gender identity is also on the agenda. As for the society, we should insist on creating a culture of acceptance by emphasising our mutual differences, as well as our similarities. Empowering, educating and supporting the community remains a key aspect of our work.

**“SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE HAS ALSO PLAYED A HELPING HAND IN ESTABLISHING OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND INFORMAL GROUPS IN OTHER PARTS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. I THINK IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO DECENTRALISE ACTIVISM AND HELP PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF SARAJEVO. THAT'S WHY I'M PARTICULARLY OVERJOYED BY THIS OUTCOME.”**

**Has there been a moment in the work of SOC when you felt you were part of something great?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** I remember the year and the day when we organised the first Merlinka Festival in Sarajevo. It was the first significant, public LGBT event after the aborted Queer Festival in 2008. Personally I believe culture is a very important platform for recognising and expressing difference as a kind of compassionate display of the various identities that human beings carry. I'm all for using arts and culture as means of bringing about change.

**Has your work with SOC contributed to your academic success? What has SOC changed in the world of academia and research?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** I do think it has contributed to my academic success. However, I'm not sure it has changed something in the world of academia and research. There is a difference in the area of research now for sure. Universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina use our publications; students use them as a valuable source of information, jurists use them as additional literature to prepare for their bar examination, foreign researchers use them as guides to understanding the complex political system of BiH. So there are benefits.

**Do you have a message for new generations of LGBTI activists?**

**DAMIR BANOVIĆ:** I hope we've created a certain resilience that will enable future work and development. I think new generations are intelligent enough to identify needs and figure out how to respond to them within this social context. I also hope we've managed to create a situation where different identities can co-exist in a much more peaceful atmosphere than the one we endured. .

# FROM POETICS TO PAYMENT SLIPS FROM CULTURE TO BUREAUCRACY

**In the early days, Sarajevo Open Centre mostly organised cultural activities, especially film screenings and literary events. Dina Vilić, a SOC member from the very start, goes back to the very beginnings of the organisation. Although now in charge of finance, she began her career at SOC by running the film and literature program. It was an interesting job that saw her do everything from hand-delivering invitations like a proper postwoman to clubbing.**

Author: Dina Vilić

A chilly October, year 2010. Arijana, Hana, Saša and I decided liquor was the best way to keep warm. “Dina, how would you feel working for SOC?”, Saša asked, as we were strolling by the river. “You could help us out with film screenings and similar stuff.” “What’s SOC?”, I asked. “Serbian Orthodox Church”, Saša quipped. “Sarajevo Open Centre. Arijana would give you tasks to do. We still don’t have an office. You’d work part-time.”

So began my SOC career: at a pub, with toasts all around. I’d head to town to work on my master’s thesis. Arijana would usually check in before 12. We organised film weeks – European Documentary Film Week, Slovenian Film Week, Spanish Film Week, Hungarian Film Week, Francophone Film Week – and tried to tour different parts of the country. We travelled to Tuzla, Bugojno, Zvornik, Banja Luka, Zenica, Goražde, Istočno Sarajevo, Gračanica, Bihać, Trebinje... We made posters and flyers, program announcements, sent copies of films to all of these towns. Since we wanted to enable foreigners to also attend screenings, we

translated everything into both BCS and English. The subtitled films would arrive by bus from Banja Luka in the evening. I’d usually wait at the bus station with my dad who, unbeknownst to him, had become SOC’s first volunteer, or the first driver.

## I HAVE SO MANY MEMORIES FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF SOC, WHEN WE ROAMED FROM PROJECT TO PROJECT, DIPPING OUR TOES INTO EVERYTHING FROM CULTURE AND RELIGION, TO POLITICS AND LGBTI ISSUES

In 2011, after the unfortunate and completely unnecessary commotion surrounding the 2008 Queer Sarajevo Festival, Saša and I decided to screen a short documentary film about LGBT people called *To je naše dijete* by director Elma Islamović. We were a little bit scared of the outcome. We decided not to publicise anything in the media, but we still had to send out invitations. At least 600 of them. We had enough money to mail only half of them by post. The rest had to be hand-delivered on foot, from one institution to the next. It fell upon me to be the postwoman. That’s how I got to know every single street in Sarajevo. Of course, someone had to write out 600 addresses on the envelopes. I took care of the 300 envelopes that I hand-delivered, while my mother filled out the other 300, thereby becoming, unbeknownst to her, SOC’s second volunteer.

### FOCUS ON FILM

The screening was a hit. The Meeting Point cinema was packed full. We even had to bring in additional chairs. There were no incidents. We came up with a new idea: *Sex, Pop and Politics* – a series of LGBTI-themed films. Screenings would take place once a month. We’d start in Sarajevo, and then we’d see. However, the catchy title caught attention in other places and we were asked to organise screenings in smaller towns. So we sent the films. Thinking that the people knew what the films were about, since the flyers also featured a brief synopsis, we were pleasantly surprised and beyond thrilled. After one of the screenings, we got a call





SOC's press clipping

from the director of the cinema in Zenica. Laughing over the phone, he said: "What on Earth was that film?! I had an audience of mostly older ladies, they almost had a stroke!" This didn't dampen our enthusiasm, so we continued with the screenings until, after adopting a strategic plan, we gave up on the cultural program altogether (which coincided with the closure of museums in Sarajevo). However, we did start cooperating with Merlinka Festival, bringing it to Sarajevo in 2013.

In 2011, after a year at the organisation, I got news from Saša: "We finally have an office!" By office he meant the apartment he and Arijana shared. The office was in the dining area, next to the kitchen. "If you get hungry, help yourself. Here are the keys to the apartment. You could come at 10 and work until 2 p.m." Art Cinema Kriterion opened right around that time, so we relocated our film screenings from Kinoteka to Kriterion. The films attracted a large audience both in Sarajevo and other places. We were constantly asked to organise screenings in smaller towns as well. We were more than willing to oblige, so we'd send them copies of the films. I had already learned how to fill out a payment slip, pay invoices, contract fees and taxes. I was constantly on the phone with managers of the cinemas, reminding them to send us the invoices. We soon moved into the realm of the absurd: there I was begging them to send an invoice so we could pay the rental fee. I'd tell them we'd be in trouble if we didn't pay. At one point, I got the following response: "You see, we don't care about material things, only spiritual nourishment!"

## WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE

In 2011, together with Traduki Network for Literature we organised a Writers-in-Residence program, hosting writers from East Europe in Sarajevo for a month, giving them the opportunity to write and present their work to local audiences. The program became very popular and we were soon joined by Goethe Institute in Sarajevo, the Austrian Embassy in BiH and the Goga publishing house from Slovenia.



Over the course of two years we hosted brilliant writers, such as: Barbi Marković, Arian Leka, Vladimir Jankovski, Vasile Ernu, Tomislav Marković, Dieter M. Gräf, Daniela Chmelik, Ana Đokić, Emma Braslavsky, Esad Babačić, Daniel Banulescu, Bojan Babić, Zachary Karabashliev, Katrin Schmidt, Daša Drndić, Franzobel, Ognjen Spahić.

My first task was to take our first guest Barbi Marković to Banja Luka for a book event. My biggest fear was misplacing one of the receipts, because all of the cash was in my bag: for food, transportation, housing and monthly stipend. At the end of the month I handed the receipts and the leftover money to Saša. But all my efforts were in vain as one day I handed over 300 BAM extra. At home I counted the money again. My mom, dad and brother all did the counting. The next day at work, I counted the money with Saša. Still, there was a surplus of 300 BAM. To this day I have no idea how we ended up with that much surplus money!

## AN END OF AN ERA

Month by month, the writers came and went. Most of them liked Sarajevo. I got to hang out with them, more or less – it depended on how busy they were. We organised a lunch with every writer so we could get to know them and talk about the readings. I have so many memories from the early days of SOC, when we roamed from project to project, dipping our toes into everything from culture and religion, to politics and LGBTI issues. A memorable moment was the arrival of Vasile Ernu from Romania. He barely spoke English but was fluent in Russian and Romanian. None of us could speak the two languages. The three of us were sitting in a restaurant, trying to communicate in whatever way we could, flapping our arms about. We must have looked possessed. Nevertheless, we managed to sort everything out.

Arian Leka from Albania loved the Sarajevo mornings. I helped Daša Drndić buy wine, olives and cheese for her guests. We cut the cheese up and prepared a small buffet. I explored the nightlife of Sarajevo with young writer Daniela Chmelik. We continued our cooperation with Ana Đokić who came back a year later to work with school and pre-school children. We were especially thrilled to see Sarajevo Open Centre mentioned in the thank you note in her book, the one she'd been working on in Sarajevo. Tomislav Marković, the voice of dissidents, described his experiences in Sarajevo in the magazine *e-novine*. Emma Braslavsky was thrilled with the ritual of mid-afternoon coffee drinking. As I tried to explain the difficult financial situation of most people in BiH, she asked: "How come you have money for coffee?" I thought about it long and hard, but I never came up with a good answer.

The program ended in December 2012. We ended the film screenings that same year. We moved away from culture and focused on LGBTI and feminist issues, and I turned to other "literary" genres, those that had to do with crunching the numbers, instead of explaining the world.

## CULTURE OF RELIGIONS - A NEW COURSE IN THE BIH EDUCATION SYSTEM

# RELIGION AS A PART OF SOC'S IDENTITY

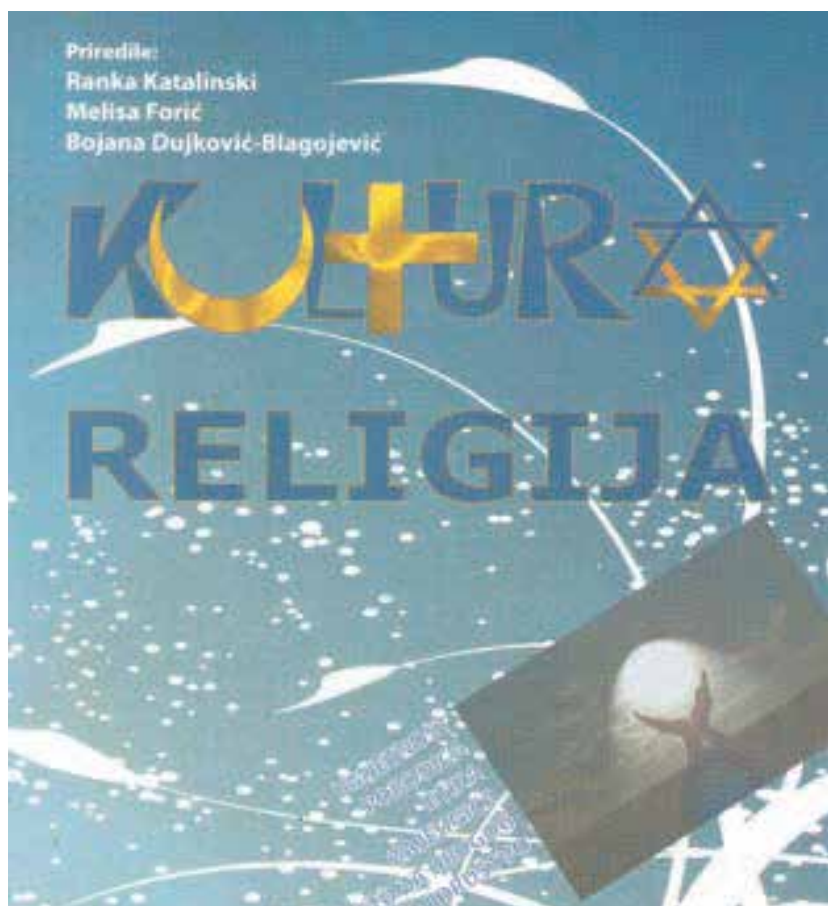
**The beginning of activities of the Sarajevo Open Centre was marked by an interesting initiative, a bit unusual at first sight, seeking the introduction of interdisciplinary non-confessional religious course "Culture of Religions" in the BiH's education system. From today's perspective, religion seems distant and incompatible with the organisation's profile nowadays, but *in the beginning, there was a Culture of Religions...***

Culture of religions was one of the reasons behind the establishment of the Sarajevo Open Centre, based on the belief that the promotion of interreligious dialogue through the education system in a state with complex ethnic-religious relations is a precondition for tolerance and co-existence. Studying of BiH religious traditions in a new way represented a challenge which turned into tilting at windmills, and Sarajevo Open Centre left it to new generations, turning to some other battles itself.

Activities relating to the Culture of Religions course in schools were implemented under the joint project of Goethe Institute in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo Open Centre and OSCE. Goethe Institute and Sarajevo Open Centre, in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute Zenica and ministries of education, science, culture and sports of Zenica-Doboj Canton and Bosnia-Podrinje Canton and with the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska organised seminars for teachers and professors who run the Culture of Religions courses. During 2007 and 2008, three cycles of seminars for teachers of humanistic courses such as sociology, philosophy and history were organised. As a part of the project, the book entitled Culture of Religions by Ranka Katalinski and Zuhra Kalauzović was published in 2009, and a teacher handbook was published in 2011 and promoted in December 2011, on the eve of the Human Rights Day.

**THIS ACTIVITY OF THE SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE AIMED AT IMPROVING THE TEACHING METHODS AND PRACTICES THROUGHOUT BIH THROUGH TRAININGS, IN ORDER TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF A SUBSTANTIVE REFORM OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM, WHICH WOULD CONTRIBUTE, THROUGH NON-CONFESSSIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, TO THE CREATION OF A SOCIETY OPEN FOR DIALOGUE AND WILLING TO LEARN ABOUT OTHERS.**

The *Culture of Religions* book was written by a group of authors lead by Dr Dino Abazović and Dr Zilka Spahić-Šiljak, and associates Ivo Marković, Dr Zorica Kuburić and Alen Kristić. The original manuscript was modified and methodologically adapted to the Culture of Religions course, and it was prepared by Ranka Katalinski, Melisa Forić and Bojana Dujković-Blagojević. Structure of the textbook is based on the preliminary framework and guidelines of a group of local and international experts which developed the Curriculum for interreligious education in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the initiative of Goethe Institute.



Priručnika za nastavnike/ce predmeta  
Kultura religija i druge interreligijske predmete u srednjim školama

# KULTURA RELIGIJA

petak, 9. decembar 2011, 18h  
Sarajevo, Franjevački provincijalat  
Zagrebačka 18

**SOC** SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE  
SARAJEVSKI OTVORENI CENTAR  
САРАЈЕВСКИ ОТВОРЕНИ ЦЕНТАР



Invitation-KdR-WEB

## IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION

Given the complicated education system in BiH, divided competences and sensitivity of the topic, and a different, more open i.e. interdisciplinary approach to religious education, the Culture of Religions course has never been systematically incorporated in the education system, but it was implemented sporadically, in accordance with the curricula of cantons in FBiH and in the RS. The textbook and handbook have been used as teaching materials depending on the needs of teachers running the courses that are entirely or partially dedicated to the culture of religions.

Thematically, the textbook was oriented towards the acquisition of basic knowledge about monotheistic religions, about activities through mutual dialogue, and about education and getting familiar with ethical values. The main objective was to meet and understand others and the different. Culture of Religions includes six chapters: *Cultural contribution of religions to architecture, literature and music, Family and religion, Ethics and religion, Togetherness as the principle of religions, Peace – place for the other, Religion – state – society.*

This activity of the Sarajevo Open Centre aimed at improving the teaching methods and practices throughout BiH through trainings, in order to contribute to the gradual development of a substantive reform of the school system, which would contribute, through non-confessional religious education, to the creation of a society open for dialogue and willing to learn about others.

During 2012, the Sarajevo Open Centre conducted the first strategic planning which resulted in a hard decision, made by consensus, that the religion would no longer be a part of the activities, and that the struggle for a more tolerant society would be conducted in other arenas.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LGBTIQ STORY

# BACK TO SILENCE

## - NEVER AGAIN

**The tenth anniversary of Sarajevo Open Centre, and especially of programs relating to LGBTIQ culture and activism, created an opportunity for Amar Bašić, former member of Q Association and co-founder of Logos Association to recall the path, ups and downs of LGBTIQ activism in BiH. Today, Amar works as a public relations officer, professional translator and occasional LGBTIQ activist, and here he writes about the importance and contribution of Sarajevo Open Centre to LGBTIQ activism in BiH.**

Written by: Amar Bašić

Since I believe that the story about results and achievements of Sarajevo Open Centre gains its genuine depth and meaning only when viewed in the context of the LGBTIQ activism in general, with reference to the “ancient beginnings” and past experiences, I went through the rich archive materials stored somewhere on Google servers, in the electronic wastelands of my inbox. I call it “rich” because, with great pride, I see myself as a member of the first generation of LGBTIQ activists in BiH, and also because I have not developed the habit of deleting emails.

This first generation, i.e. a few of us who decided to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina, remember the times when we worked deeply underground in early 2000’s, when Internet forums, house parties, informal “gathering places” and a few dark zones for *cruising* were the only forms of self-organisation and the only scenes. Going out into the public in any serious form seemed unthinkable. The media mostly bypassed LGBTIQ topics as irrelevant, and even when they were given space, the idea was to “confirm” the bias and to reduce the story about LGBTIQ persons to a spectacle, soapbox, kitsch, freak show or an otiose manifestation of western propaganda which threatens the tradition and morality of local society. A few photos from the largest gay pride at the time in Rio was published here and there, showing an exhibitionist dancer probably wearing the least amount of clothes ever seen by that time. Clearly, the intention was to remind the pious crowd why it is good that we do not have such parades.

### SHY STEPS

The first indications of change and of concrete activist organising were seen in February 2004, when the Association Q for the promotion and protection of culture, identity and human rights of queer persons was formally founded. The initial shy campaigns and actions started, mostly strictly anonymous and practically invisible. The first “official” parties were organised in public places – those were closed parties with strict guest lists at the entrance and stickers to be placed on lenses of the revolutionary-at-the-time cell phones with cameras. Nevertheless, even these shy steps were leading us to some kind of continuity, and from 2007 we started organising regular parties twice a month. In 2005, Logos Association was established, with the intention to question deviations from hetero-patriarchal normative system through the prism of religion, spirituality and interreligious dialogue.

This early activism was a kind of a patchwork – with a little theory, community, some research, little bit of art, and some religion. Often incoherent, more often self-confident, and most often inexperienced, we believed that things could only get better. Associations increasingly went public, attendance of events covering LGBTIQ topics recorded a steady growth, and journalist writings slowly transitioned towards rudimentary understanding of the broader context of rights and needs of LGBTIQ persons. Among all these developments, I barely noticed the invitation for submission of papers for the book about queer theory, activism and culture in April 2008, which was prepared by the Sarajevo Open Centre, which was practically unknown at the time, and the far better known Queer Zagreb Festival. That is when I started perceiving SOC on a small, but seemingly established activist scene. However, all eyes were on the first announced and serious public LGBTIQ event in Sarajevo at the time – the Queer Sarajevo Festival.





Amar Bašić, photo: Tarik Limo

I think that there is no need to explain in how many ways the QSF represented a turning point for the activism and position of the LGBTIQ community in BiH. The zest and optimism were replaced by shock and fear. We felt the crushing rage of the homophobic society to the full. For the first time, messages like “die faggots” and pseudoscientific homophobic “arguments” could be seen on public transportation stops. Organisers of the festival were cluttered with threats. The mailing list of Q Association was hacked several times. *Reality check* came as the strongest slap. The stopped QSF revealed all shortfalls and weaknesses of activist organisation and work at the time, and the community itself slid back to underground work.

## RIISING FROM THE DARKNESS

The unfortunate termination of QSF showed that despite the horrifying violence, there were still citizens in BiH society who were willing to go out into the street and stand for and on behalf of their LGBTIQ fellow citizens. However, without clear guidance and direction within the community, the support initiatives gradually subsided, and the Sarajevo scene fell into the darkness where it would stay for almost two years. In 2009, Q Association tried to revive the messages and ideas of QSF through the *QSF in-a-box* project. From today’s distance, it is hard not to notice the irony of packing QSF in a box, in between the “four walls” of a kind, just like the entire community practically went back into the closet. From my very subjective perspective, the community existed less during this period than in 2004, which made us fear that the defeat could be even worse than we had thought initially.

In my memory, the initiative from July 2010, when the Sarajevo Open Centre invited us to the “First summer gay party” in Podroom club with the intention to make such parties a regular event on every first Thursday of a month is recorded as the essential kick which eventually woke up the traumatized community. I remember superficially the bitter flavour in my mouth because of the determinant “first” in the title of the event. But this was our reality after the QSF. We had to star all over again, and build new foundations and new optimism with new people and new ideas. For the second time, as a community, we had to make insecure steps and get out of the absolute darkness.

The new “first” invitation to the party included the unavoidable note that registration with a name or nickname was mandatory. In the spirit of the cautious, the first ones for the second time, but still very symbolical steps, the party theme was “disco night”. However, it was already obvious that things would not be the same this time. In October 2010, invitations were sent to the premiere of a short documentary entitled *To je naše dijete* (“It is our child”), directed by Elma Islamović, about four LGBT persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the projection, organisers announced a discussion on “How to proceed with the queer movement in BiH”, which was evidently essential. This was the first event within the new program of Sarajevo Open Centre called “Questioning – LGBTIQ culture, art and rights.” Apart from the note saying that the event would be closed for the media for security reasons, the invitation also included an encouraging sentence: “We sincerely look forward to your attendance, and hope that in this way we will start a new period in the development of the queer community in BiH.”

## THE COMMUNITY GETS CLOSER TOGETHER

The parties continued in December 2010, with guest performance of lesbian-feminist choir Le Zbor from Zagreb. This time, “Le Zbor Gay Lollipop Party” took place in Fis Kultura club, which would become one of the central places of Sarajevo LGBTIQ scene in the following years. In the end of 2010, Q Association announced the beginning of its inactive status. By that time, Logos Association also disappeared from the activist map, allowing the Sarajevo Open Centre to take the full lead of the LGBTIQ movement in BiH.



Protest against limiting freedom of assembly of LGBTI people in front of the Canton Sarajevo Government, May 2017

In May 2011, Sarajevo Open Centre launched a movie cycle “Sex, Pop and Politics” with regular public projections of non-hetero-normative films in the Art Cinema Kriterion. Publishing activity, promotions, discussions and a systematic approach to advocacy were intensified. After 2011, we witnessed some serious work with representatives of institutions and political parties, media and journalists for the first time, aiming at changing of the approaches and creating a more positive environment through education. This resulted in a radical turn in media reporting on LGBTIQ topics. Sensationalism became a rare phenomenon, whereas the scientifically based and legally specified terms and interpretations assumed primacy in media contents.

Politicians and parliamentarians came forward for the first time, providing unambiguous support to LGBTIQ citizens and significantly contributing to the improvement of the social position of LGBTIQ community. LGBTIQ topics were discussed in parliaments and governmental institutions. There were allies in the public space, which made public activities significantly better than before.

Apart from these activities, the parties were still organised on a regular basis, which is why they became accepted by the community and were organised independently from the Sarajevo Open Centre. It was interesting to observe the transition over a mere ten-year period, from parties that implied fear, lists, stickers and secret locations to those that were organised within regular club programs, openly and without lists, crowded with people and accepted as a legitimate part of Sarajevo’s nightlife. All of this resulted in drawing the community closer together, which is an important precondition for any kind of activism.

## BACK TO THE STREET

With Sarajevo Open Centre, the LGBTIQ activism finally came out of the closet in a serious way. This time, the homophobic violence against participants of the International Queer Film Festival Merlinka in 2014 did not mean capitulation and return to the silence. The Festival continued, and this year marked its fifth edition. Response to violence included mobilisation of capacities, of the community, social and media support. This time we stood tall and unwavering. The experience, lessons learned, new leadership and new energy enabled us to publicly confront cantonal institutions in 2017 and tell them that we would not let anyone sabotage our walks and street actions. A protest we organised as a response to the prevention of the march was the first public, announced, unambiguously LGBTIQ event on the street after 2008. And it felt wonderful to wave rainbow flags in the park behind the BiH Presidency building.

When I think about activities of the Sarajevo Open Centre, I put it in the very context of the new, more systematic, better organised and more democratic approach, and of awareness of prior experiences, mistakes and lessons learned. In the past ten years, ‘maladies’ that, unfortunately, often affect the non-governmental sector, such as the personality cult or neglecting of own base were overcome.

For all these reasons, I think that tribute should be paid to the generation which infused LGBTIQ activism with the necessary seriousness and professionalism after the QSF. I will forgivingly say that – with all the positive things that we did in the previous years – maybe organisations that preceded the Sarajevo Open Centre were supposed to be the milk teeth and an introduction to a more thorough and more comprehensive approach that we have today. Naturally, these milk teeth had to fall out, but they are worth mentioning from time to time, because the story of activism would not be complete without them. Also, we should clearly emphasize that the current approach and capacity of activism and the achieved results constitute a brand new, significant and successful treasure which guarantees continuity – so that we never go back to the silence again.



## THE RETURN OF LGBTI ACTIVISM

# HOW THE LGBTI PROGRAM HARDENED THROUGH ART

After the withdrawal of Q Association, the Article One exhibition, projection of the film *To je naše dijete (It is our child)*, performance of *Le Zbor, Citanka lezbejskih i gej prava (Textbook of lesbian and gay rights)*, and translation of the book *Born to Be Gay* constituted the new breakthrough of LGBTI activism to the public space. These artistic-activist endeavours brought a new hope that after the threats, violence and the *de facto* clear message that LGBTI persons, identities and culture are not welcome in BiH society, it is still possible to continue fighting on the right side of history in BiH, for human rights of lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual persons.



Article One exhibition in Art Cinema Kriterion, july 2011





Title pages of Born to be Gay: Historija homoseksualnosti (2012) and Pojmovnik LGBT kulture (2012)

Title pages of Born to be Gay: Historija homoseksualnosti (2012) and Pojmovnik LGBT kulture (2012)



Discussion following the screening of *To je naše dijete* with Elma Islamović, Lejla Turčilo and Marije Cornelissen





Otvoreni forum (Open Forum) in May and November of 2012, organized by SOC and Heinrich Boell Stiftung



First SOC training for the LGBT activists (October 2011) and first training for the police (2013)



DOBRILA GOVEDARICA, DIRECTOR OF THE OPEN SOCIETY FUND

# SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE IS INTERESTED IN THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

**On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of SOC, Dobrila Govedarica, executive director of the Open Society Fund in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a donor and long-time friend of Sarajevo Open Centre talked about the progress achieved by this organisation over a short period of time, from the beginnings that were marked by small steps and with a small team, to extraordinary results that already benefit the whole BiH society.**

Interview by: Tamara Zablocki

**Open Society Fund has supported the work of Sarajevo Open Centre for many years. What kind of potential did you see in SOC, led by its founder Saša Gavrić at the time?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** From the very beginning, the Sarajevo Open Centre knew that we were an organisation willing to support the activities of associations working on the protection of human rights of LGBTI persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, considering that we also supported the first local association of the kind, Association Q, as well as the organisation of the first Queer Festival in Sarajevo, which unfortunately did not unfold as we had hoped it would. We met Sarajevo Open Centre and its founder Saša Gavrić at the beginning of their activities, as a part of the education process. At the time, they were still making small steps and they asked us for help with printing of handbooks about culture of religions. It was already clear to me that these people had far broader interests than LGBTI rights alone. They were actually interested in this society as a whole, regardless of the fact that they belonged to a stigmatized minority and that later, during their strategic development, they had to eliminate some topics, and focus on the others.

**You supported the Sarajevo Open Centre through the key period of strengthening and professionalisation. Today we see the results of this progress: SOC is an influential factor in BiH society in the domain of respecting the rights of LGBTI persons. How would you evaluate SOC's progress over the years?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** At the time of our first encounter, Sarajevo Open Centre was a small organisation of a few people. We at the

Open Society Fund were concerned as we thought that after the 2008 and the fiasco with the organisation of Queer Festival in Sarajevo, there wouldn't be another organisation that would work on LGBTI issues and join the public discourse in a long time. However, miracle called Sarajevo Open Centre happened, and they managed to do it in a relatively short timeframe. It is fascinating that in a few years only, they managed to form a team, collect information important for their activities, conduct excellent analyses of laws and public policies, and publish outstanding publications not only about LGBTI rights, but also about women's rights and feminism, because it is not so common here. You know, producing one single publication requires a lot of work, even for organisations that focus on some kind of publishing as their only activity, because you have to possess the knowledge about content, editing, and know how to make a publication that will perform its original function later. A large majority, almost all civil society organisations are not able to analyse legislation, develop founded proposals supported by arguments, and articulate them properly, whereas the Sarajevo Open Centre learned

**“BY MAKING SMALL STEPS AT FIRST, A VERY YOUNG TEAM OF SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE MANAGED TO BUILD A RESPECTABLE ORGANISATION, AND I THINK THAT BY ITS WORK, RESULTS, TRANSPARENCY, AND LEVEL OF ORGANISATION, IT BELONGS TO THE GROUP OF FIVE OR MAXIMUM TEN BEST CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA”**





and proved they can do it over a short period of time, and then they focused on advocacy as the next step in the same process. Practically none of the other organisations work on advocacy, because it is the hardest part. One needs to plead with parliamentarians, politicians who are not even friends of the idea, get rejected five times, and maybe get a chance for a conversation the sixth time. For any topic, not only rights of LGBTI persons, this is the most difficult part of the job, because you need to ask people to talk to you about something that should bring general benefit, while they reject your requests. Persuasion is the key. By making small steps at first, a very young team of Sarajevo Open Centre managed to build a respectable organisation, and I think that by its work, results, transparency, and level of organisation, it belongs to the group of five or maximum ten best civil society organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have been in this job for 25 years and I met numerous non-governmental organisations, but I rarely witnessed such progressive development and such dedication that I saw in Sarajevo Open Centre, considering that all of them were very young when they started, in their twenties, with scarce working and life experiences. In only five years, they managed to achieve real results, surpassing some organisations that have been active in Bosnia and Herzegovina for twenty years.

**“I AM NOT CARRIED AWAY BY THINKING THAT THE SITUATION OF LGBTI PERSONS IS AUTOMATICALLY BETTER IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, BECAUSE IT TAKES TIME, BUT SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE DESERVES THE MOST CREDIT FOR THE FACT THAT CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN PROVIDED FOR SOMEONE WHOSE RIGHTS HAVE BEEN JEOPARDISED BECAUSE THEY ARE AN LGBTI PERSON TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM BY LEGAL MEANS”**

**What do you think was the key for such continuous rise of Sarajevo Open Centre?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** I am confident that the founder of the organisation himself, Saša Gavrić greatly influenced such path of the Sarajevo Open Centre, who obviously knew how to pick the right person to succeed him in the position, Emina Bošnjak. Such stories begin with one person, because one person has a vision, desire to do something, to bring together a team that suits

them, and to start working. Saša Gavrić had a vision and the support of his team, but he also had special emotional intelligence which determined his skill to communication with people. Only the rare ones could resist his charm, arguments and general approach, regardless of how rigid attitudes about sexual and gender minorities they had. It was fascinating to watch him talk to parliamentarians, police officers and other groups which we believe are behind the line when it comes to LGBTI rights. Just remember the politicians' statements about the Queer Festival, when they needed to be reminded of the Constitution and of the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights. And then suddenly the Sarajevo Open Centre appeared, led by Saša Gavrić, and dismantled all that. Of course, I don't think that the situation is ideal today or that it will become ideal in the near future, or that conservative thinking about sexual minorities will disappear, but I think that decision makers and a large number of citizens heard about sexual minorities thanks to SOC, which was certainly contributed to by the improvement of overall climate in the region when it comes to visibility of LGBTI persons. I still cannot imagine the day when the gay pride will take place in Sarajevo, but things are changing for the better.

**Why is it that you can't imagine the day when the gay pride will take place in Sarajevo?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** It is because I fear that there wouldn't be enough brave members of sexual minorities out there who would lead the parade, because it is not sufficient that I and hundreds of people like me come to the parade to support them. And members of sexual minorities would not go out for various reasons: family relations, situation at work, and I can definitely understand those people. I do not judge them because I know that one must evaluate one's gains and losses in life. The state of spirit in Bosnia and Herzegovina is such that sometimes it seems to me that we returned a hundred years to the past compared to the time when I was young, and seeing that the evolution theory is being eliminated from the school syllabuses, I am wondering how far we will go. In such environment, the Sarajevo Open Centre managed to achieve great things, from amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law and onwards, where they played the key role. Their amendments went through the legislative process and were adopted, and if there weren't for them, nobody would

have advocate for their adoption. That is why I think it is fantastic for Bosnia and Herzegovina. And that is why I say that small groups of brave people are important, individually brave at first, and then joined together.

**What are some of the most important achievements of Sarajevo Open Centre with respect to everyday life of LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** Trainings of the police and medical workers were very important in the work of Sarajevo Open Centre, but the very fact that managers agreed to such trainings speaks a lot about abilities of the SOC team. The fact that the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior accepted to be a part of this story is revolutionary, I would say, because it sensitises police officers for LGBTI issues. It is very important to sensitise the people who may be asked for help by members of sexual minorities one day, and these are police officers and medical workers. If we put the laws aside, because laws in this country are often only a dead letter, the direct contact of members of a completely stigmatized group with the police and medical workers requires great courage and psychological stability, and the response of the police and medical workers is therefore very important. In a society like this, it is not at all simple to have the police officers and medical workers complete trainings that will help them provide adequate response to problems of LGBTI people. I am not carried away by thinking that the situation of LGBTI persons is automatically better in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because it takes time, but Sarajevo Open Centre deserves the most credit for the fact that conditions have been provided for someone whose rights have been jeopardised because they are an LGBTI person to solve their problem by legal means. Until yesterday, such person had no legal means to solve the issue.

**What awaits the Sarajevo Open Centre in their future work? What could be their next goals that would be important for BiH society?**

**DOBRILA GOVEDARICA:** Accepting the LGBTI community as equal in the society means huge civilisation shift, and it certainly is a long-term endeavour. Talking to members of the Sarajevo Open Centre about their future plans, I learned that their future plans have to do with the law on same-sex partnerships. I think that their third attempt in that direction will be successful. The first attempt will face a very bad reaction: I don't think that anybody in the parliament will be willing to talk about it seriously, and some ugly articles will be published in the rightist media. On the second attempt, it will already be an old story, and it will be possible to convince one group in the parliament that this law is important. They will definitely succeed the third time because, at least I hope, the generation of politicians will change at last; the same people will no longer be sitting in the parliament, and the rest of the world will be so far ahead in the domain of LGBTI rights that the same-sex partnership issue will be a minor shift at that point. The world is already very advanced: my colleague in Spain is gay, he has a partner and the two of them adopted two children. This is not a revolutionary thing over there, and their parents treat them and their children just like parents of any married couple we know would behave. This is how things should be, because if I do not threaten anyone with my lifestyle, who has the right to interfere and tell me how am I supposed to live? I believe that the level of awareness will rise here in the next ten years, and that the law on same-sex partnerships might be adopted then. I think that the advantage of today's generations lies in the fact that all kinds of information are available to them thanks to the internet, which prevents ignorance about global trends.



**PIA HALLONSTEN, THE FIRST SECRETARY OF SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (SIDA), EMBASSY OF SWEDEN IN BIH**

**SOC SHOWS HOW A WELL SET SYSTEM YIELDS GOOD RESULTS**

As a SIDA employee, I had the honour and privilege to follow SOC's path over the past three years. It clearly shows how a well set system yields good results.

Theory of change, a clear matrix of results with good indicators, monitoring the implementation, a strong and engaged management, stable internal procedures, transparency, providing sustainable results, a new strategic plan based on results and lessons learned – all of these constitute typical example of how planning and a well designed strategic plan with an extraordinary framework of results establish perfect conditions for institutional support. I wish that all support to civil society would look like this. This example perfectly illustrates how it pays off to provide strategic donor support for a pre-defined results framework, with preliminary assessment.



## OBSTACLES AND PROBLEMS

# VIOLENCE GENDER EQUALITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SILENCE

**Ten years of SOC's existence included many friendships, partnerships, work and success, but also a lot of negative experiences that enabled us to learn and grow. All of this created the organisation and team that we are today, and encouraged us to fight for human rights of LGBTI people and women and for a more equal BiH**

Written by: Vladana Vasić



## VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTI PEOPLE IS(NOT) PUNISHABLE

On February 1st 2014, a group of 14 men wearing masks barged in the Art Cinema Kriterion in Sarajevo and attacked participants of the discussion which was taking place within the Merlinka festival, inflicting light injuries on three people and severe psychological consequences on everyone who was there. Although the gathering had been reported 20 days beforehand,

the police were not there to prevent the attack in a timely manner. The Sarajevo Open Centre filed two criminal reports to the Prosecutor's Office of Sarajevo Canton, as well as a report to the internal control of the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior. However, three years after the attack, indictments have not been issued against the responsible persons. In November 2016, SOC submitted an appeal to the Constitutional Court of BiH for violation of the right to freedom of assembly.

Two years later, another attack took place in the Art Cinema Kriterion, on 4 March 2016, when four young men barged into the bar, insulted people and threw bottles, ashtrays and glasses at them, and threatened to burn the bar down because LGBTI persons used to go out there. Two people were injured. A year after the attack, this case has not been prosecuted either, and the police still investigate without any concrete results.

Homophobia and transphobia are no strangers in the educational institutions either. Namely, in March 2016, Haris Zahiragić, president of the Student Parliament of the University of Sarajevo at the time expressed discriminating positions about LGBTI people, first on social networks and then in the media,

using hate speech and calling on 'medical treatment' and 'marking' of LGBTI persons. SOC reported this case to the Assembly of the Student Parliament, Ethical Committee, the Senate and rector of the University of Sarajevo, requesting that these institutions issue disclaimers distancing themselves from such positions. Apart from tentative condemnations, the Senate did not react in any other way to the homophobic statements and behaviour of the president of the Student Parliament of the University of Sarajevo.

The homophobic and transphobic bullying also represents a continuous problem, especially in the past three years, and although such cases were reported to competent ministries of interior and social work centres, the absence of a concrete institutional plan against bullying and for the development of an inclusive and tolerant educational environment is still evident.



Photo: SOC

## GENDER EQUALITY IS(NOT) 50%

Following the general elections in 2014, when the Council of Ministers of BiH and entity-level and cantonal governments were appointed, both the international standards defined by the UN's CEDAW Committee and the Council of Europe and the provisions of the BiH Gender Equality Law stipulating equal representation of men and women in the executive government with minimum 40% of less represented sex were violated. For example, the Council of Ministers of BiH appointed two women ministers as opposed to seven male ministers, whereas in Zenica-Doboj Canton and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton governments, not a single woman was appointed as a minister for the 2014 - 2018 term. In order to prevent such violations and to ensure 40% representation of women ministers at the state level, Sarajevo Open Centre and Gender Equality Agency of BiH prompted the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of BiH Parliament to propose amendments to the Law on BiH Council of Ministers in 2015, which stipulated that the Council of Ministers may not be appointed if the quota has not been fulfilled. This proposal passed the first reading, but it was not adopted eventually.

The number of women did not increase in the legislative government branch either after the general elections in 2014 – there was the total of 19.90% of women on all government levels. In 2015, SOC proposed that the Law on Amendments to the Election Law of BiH should include the obligation of parties to ensure equal numbers of men and women (50% of both sexes) on candidate lists, with consecutive ordering of male and female candidates, in order to increase the number of women in parliaments and assemblies. The Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of BiH Parliament adopted this proposal and sent it to the legislative procedure. However, it did not even pass the first reading.



Photo: SOC

## LGBTI PERSONS WILL(NOT) MARCH

On 30 March 2017, the Sarajevo Open Centre announced the scheduled organisation of a protest march on May 13th to the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior, on the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, in order to raise public awareness of the inadmissibility of violence against LGBTI people. As the march was planned to take place on the road section from the Eternal Flame to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in Sarajevo, the approval of the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Transport was requested on April 11th. According to the Law on Basic Safety of Roads in BiH, such approval is to be requested minimum 15 days before the planned event. According to the Law on Public Assembly in Sarajevo Canton, the event is to be reported minimum seven days before the scheduled date, and if the event is to take place on a road, the approval of the SC Ministry of Transport must be attached.

From May 4th to 11th, members of the Sarajevo Open Centre were communicating with a representative of the SC Ministry of Transport by telephone and receiving contradictory information, whereas the Ministry did not issue any official opinions. When it was reasonable to conclude that it would not be possible to adequately organise and prepare the event in accordance with the law without the decision of the SC Ministry of Transport, although they had already invested efforts and resources in the event, on May 11th, 2017, 48 hours before the scheduled event, at the planned last meeting with the police concerning the organisation of the protest march, SOC members scheduled a protest in front of the Sarajevo Canton Government building. The SC Ministry of Transport issued the decision on May 11th, 2017 at 4:08 p.m., which was too late and did not leave enough time to SOC to take further steps in order to organise the march, and it was too late for SOC to fulfil its legal obligation as the organiser to inform the public about the traffic regime change via the media at least 48 hours beforehand. The decision arrived five hours after a press conference organised by SOC members in order to inform citizens about cancellation of the march because of the administrative silence of the SC Ministry of Transport, explain that this was the violation of the right of freedom of assembly, and to announce a new protest.

SOC submitted a complaint about the violation of the freedom of assembly to the Human Rights Ombudsman Institution of BiH, and the Ombudsman Institution issued a recommendation confirming that the SC Ministry of Transport violated the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by preventing the organisation of the protest march against violence against LGBTI persons with its passiveness and administrative silence. The Ombudsperson's arguments among other things read that public assemblies require many practical solutions, which is why at least minimum level of agreement between the organiser's representatives and the authorities about the time, location, traffic regime and other factors are necessary.

# TODAY, THERE IS A SMALL BUT IMPORTANT GROUP OF LGBTI PERSONS THAT WILL ENGAGE IN ACTIVISM

**How to build the LGBTI community and movement? With lots of patience, with creativity and desire to persist until the attainment of pursued objectives. By spreading the idea outside of the capital, insistence on persisting with the idea, and by fostering interpersonal relations and experience exchange. Below you will find a story about SOC's work on building of the LGBTI community and movement in BiH**

Written by: Lejla Huremović and Jozo Blažević



Participation in direct work with the LGBTI community is of immense importance for overall work on the improvement of LGBTI rights. When we started organising regular monthly Gay-Str8 parties back in 2011, we knew that they would not be enough to empower individuals. However, these parties were a very important part of the story about the beginnings of LGBTI gathering. It seems to us that enough time has not passed by yet to enable us to speak about a built community and strong LGBTI movement in BiH. However, there is no doubt that all we did from 2011 to 2015 contributed to the establishment of a small but important group of LGBTI people that will engage in activism. But even those who have not appeared in public participated in our workshops, trainings, movie projections, discussions and different events that meant a lot to them for individual improvement, incessant fight and coping with the process of coming out.

It was interesting how we chose words carefully at the beginning of our work, trying to feel the public pulse. In 2011, we launched a movie cycle questioning the hetero-normativity entitled *Sex, Pop and Politics*, and the acronym LGBTI or words 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' or 'trans' person were not mentioned anywhere. While we were testing the public reaction at the time, it was important to us to publicly announce the events. Thus the movie announcements could be found in *Oslobođenje* daily newspaper, *Dani* magazine, and in the other media. We were hoping that through this not-so-direct title, the message would reach the target audience – LGBTI people. And it did. The *Sex, Pop and Politics* cycle was very important for our contribution to the community building, getting out of the 'four walls' cult and establishing contacts, meeting people and socializing, because this is how all other things start. The movie projections were organised in five cities in BiH: Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica and Mostar. At the beginning, some LGBTI persons used to come when the movie had already started and lights were out, and they left just before the end of the movie. However, they did come and they gradually became more relaxed and stayed even after the movies. Why are we mentioning this, and what does it have to do with building of the community and movement? It has, and a lot too. These projections, which were taking place in parallel with regular parties, contributed to the establishment of connections within the community, and helped people start getting to know one another and exchanging experiences outside of internet chats and forums, and helped LGBTI persons start coming out before one another, for a start.

## WORKSHOPS AND NEW COOKIES

In early 2012, we decided to launch a series of workshops for LGBTI people to discuss LGBTI rights, queer culture and art, history of LGBTI activism, and eventually about coming out. It wasn't at all simple to gather LGBTI people in such workshops. There were still reservations about coming to an organisation or premises to talk about these topics in daylight, although the workshops were never public, and information about





them were shared via verified communication channels, through mailing lists collected at parties or movie projections. But regardless of the reservations, a large number of LGBTI persons attended the initial workshops in the following three years, where they probably gained the first insight in their rights in BiH. We remember the first workshop in Mostar, when four people applied, and only two showed up. The other two were too afraid to come after all. But two people did come, and they definitely broke the ice and spread the news, and six months later, we had 15 people attending the second workshop in Mostar. That is when we knew that persistence pays off and that we have to work more and more with every day.

**WE WANTED TO SEE LGBTI PERSONS GATHERED IN ONE PLACE, WITH SMILING FACES, EMPOWERED AND WITH A DESIRE TO DO SOMETHING FOR LGBTI PEOPLE IN THEIR CITIES**

The situation with organisation of the workshops changed for the better with time. The number of participants went up from year to year. People were becoming freer and more visible. In 2014, we organised another series of workshops for LGBTI people. We were in doubt whether we would be able to hold the workshops at all, given the previous experience. However, when we announced the call for applications, many people responded. It surprised us and we were delighted because finally people were not afraid to apply, not to mention showing up at the workshops. This was one of the decisive moments for SOC's activist work, and especially for activism outside of Sarajevo. This year, through our workshops we contributed to the establishment of three more groups: LibertaMo in Mostar, B.U.K.A. in Banja Luka and TANKA in Tuzla. These were informal groups at start, but their existence was very important. Soon after that, we helped groups LibertaMo and B.U.K.A. to officially register as associations dealing with LGBTI human rights, whereas TANKA is still an informal group of citizens. Be it formal or informal, these were the first associations that started working on LGBTI topics in these cities.

We gained extensive and rich experience through all these activities. This year, we organised the first school for activists from all cities in BiH about human rights of LGBTI persons. We experienced different, sweet and funny situations. For example, some of the activists even fell asleep in sauna, and some of them contacted us later with funny email subjects such as 'Hi mum'. These are the people who later started seriously working on human rights of LGBTI people through various approaches: work with the community, different street actions, art... Basically, we wanted to see LGBTI persons gathered in one place, with smiling faces, empowered and with a desire to do something for LGBTI people in their cities.

## **MASKS AS A TURNING POINT**

Sometime in 2013, we launched social gatherings in SOC. They were taking place on Wednesdays and were nothing like we had envisaged. On many occasions, nobody turned up. Only we from SOC were there, or somebody would bring a fried at times. On the other hand, some gatherings had pretty good attendance. We often talked about the cause, why people did not want to come. In these contemplations and development of creative ideas, we decided to include the community in something concrete. We came up with the idea to make plaster masks. Students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo helped us in this endeavour. Over a period of two months, we used to get together in SOC's garden every Wednesday and mould masks on faces. A small part of the community was included in the production of masks. During such gatherings, we got an excellent idea to use



the masks for an exhibition, so we decided to organise a multimedia exhibition that would include masks of LGBTI persons who participated in this project, photos of those persons wearing masks, and a closet in the exhibition room where visitors could hear audio recordings of the persons who made the masks talking about feelings they experience when the society stubbornly pushes them in such closets. It was a great honour for us to participate in creation of this exhibition. The exhibition entitled 'Masks are for the closet' is still 'alive' and travels to different cities in BiH and the region. We believe that this was a very important turning point for coming out of LGBTI persons into the public space because, although they were wearing masks, they were physically present in that room. Two years later, at the exhibition called *The invisible everyday life*, LGBTI persons appeared without masks. The previous exhibition, social gatherings and talks every Wednesday and workshops about LGBTI rights, movie projections and parties definitely contributed to this process.



During this period, we rarely, practically never, went out to the street. We believe that the main reason behind it was non-existence of LGBTI persons who would be willing to go out into the street. We admit that back in 2011, many of us were not prepared to go out either. We got stronger every day, thanks to all these developments. When we wanted to make a banner for IDAHOT, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia and place it on Ajfelov bridge in Sarajevo, many people who worked on the banner showed up. However, only a few persons dared to go out and place the banner, although it was done in the middle of the night. The banner was placed on the planned spot after all. Community reactions were still rare at the time. We received comments occasionally, like enthusiasm of one person who saw the banner while going to work in the morning. Through the years of our work, continuous socializing and various events, the community provided more and more feedback and increasingly participated in our events.

We believe that constant fight and work are required in order to strengthen the LGBTI community and build the movement. We believe that each one of us can contribute to it, every single individual. We believe that coming out is required for empowerment of the community, and in order to get to the coming out stage, we must empower one another on a daily basis by getting together and exchanging experiences, in safe spaces, through learning and solidarity. We believe that LGBTI organisations can be of key importance for bringing the community together and building of the movement. We also believe that all of us must resist hetero-normativity, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and eventually fascism that surround us.

**WE BELIEVE THAT COMING OUT IS REQUIRED FOR EMPOWERMENT OF THE COMMUNITY, AND IN ORDER TO GET TO THE COMING OUT STAGE, WE MUST EMPOWER ONE ANOTHER ON A DAILY BASIS BY GETTING TOGETHER AND EXCHANGING EXPERIENCES, IN SAFE SPACES, THROUGH LEARNING AND SOLIDARITY. WE BELIEVE THAT LGBTI ORGANISATIONS CAN BE OF KEY IMPORTANCE FOR BRINGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER AND BUILDING OF THE MOVEMENT**

## THROUGH ASSOCIATION TOWARDS THE RESULT: THE INITIATIVE FOR MONITORING OF BIH'S EU INTEGRATION AS THE STRENGTH OF JOINT ACTION

**Over the past few years, the coalition of non-governmental organisations gathered under the Initiative for monitoring of BiH's EU integration actively advocates for important issues in the domain of human rights protection, monitors the situation with the EU integration process and records significant success in advocacy**

Written by: Inela Hadžić

The Initiative for monitoring of BiH's EU integration process is a coalition of civil society organisations which was founded in 2013 at the Centre for Political Studies, and it is still run by Damir Banović. One year later, the Sarajevo Open Centre took over coordination of the coalition. The establishment of this coalition was initiated by people in the aforementioned organisations, as well as people who recognized the importance of such association at the time, such as the director of Heinrich Böll Foundation at the time, Mirela Grünther Dečević. At the very beginning and in the years to come, the coalition continued monitoring the EU integration process and contributing to the development of democratic standards and the rule of law with very limited resources, but with joint enthusiasm of member organisations and individuals. From year to year, the support for the coalition grew and from the initial ten organisations that formed the coalition, the number has increased to 40 civil society organisations that are well known for their expertise and work.

Civil society is certainly one of the rare local actors advocating for the so called 'European perspective'. Protection of rights of minority and vulnerable groups, prohibition of discrimination, rule of law, war crimes prosecution, fight against corruption, independence of the judiciary... are just some of the topics that the coalition continuously works on. Looking back to the past few years, we can see that topics relating to democratization and human rights protection primarily lived in civil society organisations and among a small number of citizens, and that these topics have moved from the margins towards the centre. The civil society organisations gathered under the Initiative for monitoring of BiH's EU integration process coalition contributed to the increase of transparency of this process, striving to inform as many citizens possible about decision making developments behind closed doors.

### ADVOCACY SUCCESSES

The Alternative Progress Report for BiH which has been developed by the coalition for the last five years consecutively influenced not only findings of the official report

on BiH's progress towards the European Union, but also served as a relevant source of information about functioning of the state, rule of law and democracy, and human rights focusing on minority rights and transitional justice. In that respect, progress/regress in these fields is monitored annually, and this document also serves as the advocacy document of human rights defenders in BiH gathered in the coalition, who managed to record several important achievements.

First of all, we will immodestly boast that through advocacy actions and findings and recommendations presented in the alternative progress reports for 2015 and 2016, the coalition managed to take part in the process of amending the BiH Anti-Discrimination Law. Many of the proposed amendments were

**CONSTANT COOPERATION WITH RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS IN BRUSSELS, THE EU DELEGATION IN BIH, EMBASSIES OF EU MEMBER STATES THAT ARE SEATED IN BIH AND WITH THE INCREASING NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS IN BIH HAS LEFT A SPECIAL MARK ON THE QUALITY OF WORK AND ACTIVITIES OF THE INITIATIVE FOR MONITORING OF BIH'S EU INTEGRATION PROCESS DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS**





Konferencija o procesu EU integracija BiH, Parlamentarna skupština BiH, mart 2016

included in the existing text of the law in mid 2016. The Sarajevo Open Centre as the coordinator of the coalition also lead the process of inclusion of the development of BiH Anti-Discrimination Strategy in the work plan of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH. At the time of writing this text, the Strategy is under development, and the coalition is included in the working group which supports this process. We also participated in working groups for the development of amendments to the Law on the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH.

## CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

Owing to the fact that SOC has been recognized as the coordinating organisation, and the whole coalition as the associated advocacy endeavour, we managed to contribute to the improvement of the BiH Law on Free Legal Aid which was adopted at the state level in 2016. With the other coalition members, we developed a proposal for amendments to the FBiH Labour Law aiming at its harmonization with EU acquis, which will be the subject of active work in the period ahead. Cooperation with Maja Gasal Vražalica, delegate at the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH who recognises the importance of NGO's work and expertise arising from that work resulted in amendments to the BiH Law on Sports, which greatly contributed to gender equality and gender responsive budgeting issues.

Constant cooperation with relevant institutions in Brussels, the EU Delegation in BiH, embassies of EU member states that are seated in BiH and with the increasing number of institutions in BiH has left a special mark on the quality of our work and activities during the past few years in terms of regular consultations which we plan to continue and strengthen in the future.

The work of organisations joined under the Initiative for Monitoring of BiH's EU Integration Process coalition greatly contributed to changing of the perspective about the role of civil society organisations in the whole process of BiH's EU accession and about usefulness of their work. During previous years, unlike many state institutions, we monitored the human rights situation in a structured and continuous way, focusing on the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups, and informed the institutions in BiH and relevant institutions in the EU about it, and we advocated for improvement of legislation and of the position of BiH citizens.



## FROM PUBLISHING TO EXHIBITION

# SOC'S FACTORY

## OF KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE AND ART

**During the entire period of existence of Sarajevo Open Centre, we researched and wrote about the political system, work of the institutions, discrimination, historical, cultural and social issues concerning women and rights of LGBTI persons. With such knowledge production, we improved feminist and human rights debates in the public discourse of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These are some of our activities that contribute to culture, publicist writing and art in BiH in the context of (women's and LGBTI) human rights**

Written by: Jasmina Čaušević

### DOCUMENT, RESEARCH, ANALYSE AND PUBLISH

Since its foundation, the Sarajevo Open Centre is known for intense research and publishing activities. However, this is not all. Everything we document, research, analyse and publish becomes the basis for our further advocacy work. We honestly believe that our knowledge production contributes to social changes in the right way.

We publish all our publications in five editions – *Questioning*, *Gender*, *Human Rights*, *BH Politics*, *Human Rights Paper* – depending on the topic and purpose of every publication. More than 100 publications have been published so far.

Since 2011, we have published *Questioning* edition, which includes books and other publications thematising issues of gender, sex, and sexuality, through policies that deconstruct patriarchy and hetero-normativity. Since 2012, we have published various titles in the *Gender* edition dealing with: gender as a sociologically and culturally conditioned difference between men and women, which is primarily produced by norms, practices, customs and traditions, and changes with time; the phenomena and persons that deny, overcome, question and criticise this narrow binary division; and the breakdown of gender and different social categories such as feminism, security, politics, art, history, everyday life, leadership etc. Since 2012, *BH politics* edition has questioned and analysed the political system and performance of our state institutions. In *Human Rights* edition, we have published different reports, texts and publications concerning human rights of women, lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual persons. *Human Rights Papers* edition offers short, focused and thematic reports, policy papers and analyses of human rights situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and of the development of human rights in the international context to both international and domestic audience. Through these two editions – *Human Rights* and *Human Rights Papers* – with collected concrete data and analysis, we managed to provide visibility to problems that women and LGBTI people are facing in the BiH society and to offer concrete solutions for them, from guidelines to concrete proposals for legal solutions and public policies.

### LIBRARY

When the Sarajevo Open Centre started working in 2007, it also started collecting materials for a library. Since then, the library has grown progressively and over 1000 titles have been collected so far, mostly thanks to individual donations and through purchase, but the library is also enriched by own editions.





Today, our library offers undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students and all other citizens the latest domestic, regional and international expert literature in the field of human rights of LGBTI persons, queer theory and LGBT studies, as well as a great selection of books about theatre, film, literature, media culture, sociology, sexology, history of art, anthropology, political philosophy, political science, history, medicine from the perspective of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, intersexual, asexual, queer issues, and human rights and social theories.

Also, the Library and documentation department of the Human Rights Centre in Sarajevo received rich and contemporary material that was obtained by the Sarajevo Open Centre in 2013. The joint initiative of SOC and the Centre was focused on the establishment of a study division called 'LGBT corner' at the Centre's library. Such study division enables users to find material dealing with the broad area of LGBT culture and rights in one place, in the *LGBT studies/Queer studies* section.

What makes our library unique is the literature concerning lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersexual and queer persons, and the community in general, i.e. people who are almost invisible in the public space, and these publications aim to explain to the citizens the problems, needs, rights and culture of people whose lives disrupt the assumed social values and normativity.

## EXHIBITIONS AND LITERATURE

Multiannual companionship and cooperation with the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina reached its peak through the organisation of three exhibitions about three great women from BiH's cultural history.

In November 2016, an exhibition was organised about the founder of this Museum entitled *Razija Handžić's Poetry and Museum: confiscation of memory and systematic neglecting of women's contribution to culture, science and institutions*. In March 2017, an exhibition about writer Nafija Sarajlić – *RISE UP, WOMAN! Europeanisation & Emancipation: case of Nafija Sarajlić – sketches and themes* was organised, and an exhibition about Laura Papo Bohoreta *Sephardi woman in Bosnia* was set up in June 2017. The work on exhibitions is an attempt to correct the gender injustice of systematic neglect of women's contribution to BiH culture, science, art and society.

The cooperation in the domain of art was even broader. With the Association for Culture and Art CRVENA, we organised the exhibition *My house is your house* in October 2014. This exhibition questioned the 'ossified' discourses of domination and power and represented the space for contemplation about everyday life and society through emancipation foundations of the common and the political. The exhibition focused on the issues some of which were solved *de jure* through feminist and women's fight, but not *de facto*: unpaid work, housework, care for family, and violence against women, and they remain in the centre of women's fight.

Direct work with the community also implied translating of everyday lives of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender persons into art, thus providing general public with access to authentic stories and experiences of these people. In 2013, on the occasion of the International Coming Out Day, we opened the *Masks are for the closet* exhibition. The exhibition comprised of masks placed in the room and in the closet, photographs of persons, intimate notes about feelings of people who hide their identities, and closets where visitors could enter at the exhibition opening and feel the hiding claustrophobia through audio recordings. After that, the same year in December, the *Invisible everyday life* exhibition by Irfan Redžović and Vedad Divović depicted persons who wanted to share moments from their everyday lives with the public: from their workplaces,

places where they socialize to their homes. By publicly presenting segments from lives of people who defy the implied binary social systems of our culture with their everyday lives, we wanted to contribute to the principle which says that human rights should not be selective and that everyone should be equal when it comes to the enjoyment of human rights and the responsibility attached to such enjoyment.

Publications *Women who love women* and *18+* gave voice to the community which rarely or never gets the chance to speak about growing up, first loves, sex, living together and partner relationships. This is probably why they had several editions.





## TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR THE POLICE AND JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES

# WE HAD TO TEACH THE POLICE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL PROTECTION OF LGBT PERSONS

**Educate police officers, prosecutors, judges, judiciary in general, about human rights of LGBT persons is of immense importance. Although there is significant amount of legislation in BiH, persons in charge of law enforcement do not use all the options offered by the legislation. For this very reason, the Sarajevo Open Centre started working, and still work with the judiciary. In the text below, Jozo Blažević remembers the very beginnings of SOC's training activities with these stakeholders**

Written by: Jozo Blažević

It was the year 2013. For us in SOC, this was an ordinary business day, when the police came to visit us self initiatively. I remember that we were scared because we thought that they came to arrest us or something, although we knew that we did nothing wrong. The fear was justified, because we were, and still are, aware of the fact that we live in a closed, traditional, conservative society intertwined with various types of intolerance, where being an LGBTI person is still socially unacceptable. Luckily, it was not the case this time. Police officers came to see what we were doing and what we were working on in the domain of the protection of human rights of LGBT persons, one of the most marginalized groups in BiH.

This is how the cooperation between the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior and Sarajevo Open Centre started. Until that moment, we had not worked with any state institution on the topic of human rights of LGBT persons. Soon after that, we started organising trainings for police officers from the Ministry of Interior of Sarajevo Canton. Decision of the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior to include the module about hate crime against LGBT persons in their program of permanent trainings meant great success. It was a matter of historical importance, because this was the first time that all the police, from the police officers that work with the community to junior inspectors, attended the training about hate crime against LGBT persons. Our cooperation continued in the following years through trainings, but also through securing of public events.

## SENSIBILISING THE POLICE

It seems to me that the attack on Merlinka 2014 Festival was the key factor that contributed to additional strengthening of the cooperation between the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior and SOC. Unfortunately, I think that only then the importance of physical protection of LGBTI persons was fully understood. We had to teach the police about it. We also had to teach them many other basic things about sexual orientation and gender identity. We had to teach them that LGBTI persons are not abstract, that they live in Sarajevo, in our country, that it could be their neighbours, colleagues etc. This was not easy. I remember fierce discussions at the beginning. Individuals provided great resistance at the trainings. Sometimes things escalated to a point where some police officers left the lecture. However, although we may not have realised why we faced resistance on that level, it was clear to us that we had to go through this process. We knew that we needed to be patient and that the police were very important to us - LGBTI persons, just like to all other citizens of BiH society. We did not give up.

Cooperation with the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Interior in a way opened the door for our cooperation with other cantonal ministries of interior. From 2014 - 2016, in cooperation with the OSCE mission in BiH, we conducted trainings about hate crime for police officers from all cantonal ministries of interior, and then we implemented the Train the Trainer program for all cantonal ministries of interior to enable them to further educate their colleagues about hate crime. Sarajevo Open Centre advocated with every MoI separately and constantly put pressure on them to include the hate crime module in their program of compulsory trainings, and they eventually agreed, to our great joy. Some ministries of interior already conducted hate crime trainings, some are currently implementing them, and some will do it by the end of 2017. Every cantonal ministry of interior included the hate crime module in their regular and mandatory training topics for police officers in FBiH.



Education for the police officers, 2016

**DECISION OF THE SARAJEVO CANTON MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO INCLUDE THE MODULE ABOUT HATE CRIME AGAINST LGBT PERSONS IN THEIR PROGRAM OF PERMANENT TRAININGS MEANT GREAT SUCCESS. IT WAS A MATTER OF HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE, BECAUSE THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT ALL THE POLICE, FROM THE POLICE OFFICERS THAT WORK WITH THE COMMUNITY TO JUNIOR INSPECTORS, ATTENDED THE TRAINING ABOUT HATE CRIME AGAINST LGBT PERSONS. OUR COOPERATION CONTINUED IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS THROUGH TRAININGS, BUT ALSO THROUGH SECURING OF PUBLIC EVENTS**

In this way, we reached a large number of police officers who attend the trainings and learn about the hate crime against LGBT persons. Our cooperation has lasted for four years already, and it continues. In the past two years, we managed to establish successful cooperation with the FBiH Police Academy and the Federal Ministry of Interior.

## TRAININGS OF JUDGES AND PROSECUTORS

There is a lot more to say, but I want to emphasize that things were not easy for us at the beginning. It is easier now, which basically tells us that our work with the police paid off. All of us know that the police are there to protect all citizens, regardless of their differences.

We certainly could not leave out prosecutors and judges in the judicial chain. Our cooperation with them and with the police has lasted for four years already. Trainings that we conduct with them are implemented in cooperation with the Judicial and Prosecutorial Training Centre of FBiH. We informed these professionals about the improved anti-discrimination and criminal legislation and practice in the domain of human rights protection with the emphasis on LGBT persons as a marginalized social group, and we showed them how important it is for their work in judicial institutions. Also, we constantly want to sensibilise and inform judges and prosecutors about efficient methods of protection and prosecution of human rights violations based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics in BiH, in accordance with domestic legislation, while also respecting international and regional legal standards. Of course, this cooperation included, and still includes moments that are not easy for us, or to put it simply, that are not pleasant for ears. However, every time, it tells us that we have to work even harder.

## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

We must not forget that in July 2012 we organised the first Political Leadership Academy in order to contribute to strengthening of political participation of young people and to the improvement of gender equality through political education and human rights promotion. Members of different political parties and representatives of civil society organisations participated in the Academy. The Political Leadership Academy program was the first training program of Sarajevo Open Centre which combined political education and human rights, and through the covered topics, it tried to provide broader perspective of political participation, different from the one present at the BiH political scene.

In the following years, SOC developed other programs that were focusing on gender equality and participation in political life. Apart from the education about political system and topics that deal with leadership skills required for young politicians, the program included specific topics dealing with gender equality and human rights of marginalized groups, such as the LGBTI community.

# SMALL FREEDOMS AND GREAT TRIUMPHS OF ART: HOW WE BUILT MERLINKA

**The International Queer Film Festival Merlinka, which was organised for the fifth time this year, holds a special place and importance in the work of Sarajevo Open Centre. On this occasion, Kristina Ljevak, winner of the Sarajevo Open Centre's award for the support to LGBTI persons for 2016 writes about Merlinka**

Written by: Kristina Ljevak

When we grow old and start wondering how we spent our youth, the answer will be: on protests, peaceful walks, small unofficial prides... In places where we tried to point to the fact that LGBTI rights are a part of universal human rights and that privileges and freedoms are not meant solely for the majority to enjoy. The opportunity to draw the attention to disempowerment of LGBTI persons in the society in somewhat more conventional and 'non-street' sense through popular culture was an excellent choice. The International LGBT Film Festival Merlinka came into existence in that spirit in Sarajevo, in March 2013, i.e. it became brother-sister festival to Belgrade Merlinka which was established in 2009. We believed that messages of engaged films and theatre plays, discussions and tribunes would reach the wider, non-activist audience group, and that once their attention has been drawn to the LGBTI battle, they would feel invited to participate in it. It was important to present films dealing with LGBTI topics that were almost never included in festival programs. The festival was named after a murdered trans person, Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka, who acted in Želimir Žilnik's film *Marble Ass*. This film opened the first festival, both in Belgrade and in Sarajevo, four years later.

At the time when Merlinka was launched in Sarajevo and organised by the Sarajevo Open Centre, my professional engagement was linked with an overly ambitious idea about approximation of culture and human rights in the early morning program of the Public Broadcasting Service of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was editing the morning program at 7 a.m. on Fridays, and at the same time I was hosting members of the Sarajevo Open Centre on Federal TV and BHT1 and announcing the festival. I eventually hosted Želimir Žilnik, feeling privileged as an activist because I had the chance to speak to him early in the morning.

With the projection of *Marble Ass* film, talking to the directors Jasmila Žbanić and Žilnik, with joy and confetti, the first Merlinka was opened in the Art cinema Kriterion in Sarajevo. That night and in the days to come, the small space of freedom helped us feel as we lived in a different Sarajevo or BiH in general, in a city where the audience had the chance to socialise after non-mainstream films, and same-sex partners could hug or kiss without fear. We believed or at least wanted to believe that the first Merlinka was also the beginning of a new, more open and more relaxed path in the fight for LGBTI rights.

**THE SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE ORGANISED THE FIRST MERLINKA FROM 13 TO 15 MARCH 2013. JASMILA ŽBANIĆ AND ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK OPENED THE FESTIVAL. THIS WAS THE FIRST MERLINKA TO BE ORGANISED OUTSIDE OF BELGRADE, ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MURDER OF VJERAN MILADINOVIĆ MERLINKA.**



Želimir Žilnik and Jasmila Žbanić, photo: SOC

## WE ARE AGAINST THE OPPRESSORS

Apart from qualitative aspect owing to the experience from previous Merlinka, the second Merlinka in 2014 was not supposed to bring anything new or different. It was supposed to be just another festival in a row, except





Drag show performed by queer art group House of Flamingo at 2017 Merlinka



Panel discussion on transgender rights during 2014 Merlinka, which was abruptly and violently stopped when hooligans entered the Art Cinema

**THE SECOND MERLINKA (2014) WAS STOPPED AND THEN RESUMED BECAUSE OF MASKED ATTACKERS WHO PHYSICALLY ATTACKED THE FESTIVAL PARTICIPANTS DURING THE PANEL ON TRANSGENDER PERSONS. ALTHOUGH THE FESTIVAL HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED TO THE POLICE, THEY WERE NOT SECURING THE EVENT. THE FESTIVAL CONTINUED WITH STRONG ANTI-FASCIST MESSAGES AND SUPPORT FROM THE PART OF BIH CITIZENS WHO ARE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM.**

tival after the attack, and not during the regular program, because they reasonably assumed that there would be no cameras to record it. But all these things are expected in a country where a lot is implied, but very little is actually done. It is important to note that, although they were notified, the police did not secure the second Merlinka, and the attackers have not been prosecuted to date.

## IF LIFE WERE MERLINKA

The third Merlinka which took place in late January and early February 2015 was marked by the memory of the traumatic incident from the previous year, and the decision that such experience must not repeat itself. There were no attacks this time, and the festival was secured by the police and the security agency. Knowing that one cannot watch films without police forces any more is certainly not encouraging or cheerful.

The fourth Merlinka was a genuine triumph of activism and I remember when I wrote a text entitled <http://www.lgbti.ba/> *If life were Merlinka* for the LGBTI.ba portal. I still think and believe that things would be better for all of us in such case, and that overall improvement of the attitude towards human rights would contribute to personal growth and development, regardless of the sexual orientation, gender identity and other attributes. I remember that Predrag Azdejković, founder of Merlinka and long-time friend of the Sarajevo Open Centre told me at the time: "The curse of all our countries is that things move very slowly and barely, but they still do, and I see some progress. I primarily see many young and brave people who see Merlinka as a free space where they feel safe and watch good and high-quality films. Although this film festival primarily promotes culture and

that it did not include parading in toilets but a feeling of personal and political accountability which, along with the art, attracted people to its programs.

The second Merlinka was attacked by people wearing masks and it brought the fear back. The attackers interrupted the panel discussion on transgender persons in the Art Cinema Kriterion on 1 February 2014, injured the participants and conveyed the message that nothing important and good would happen yet, until more people gather around the idea of freedom and equality, among other things. Even years later, I am still unable to forget the feeling of defeat and helplessness, and fear which excluded all rational things, including solidarity, and the need

for survival and shelter when a few of us sought refuge in Kriterion's storage room dominated.

As I was leaving Kriterion, I remember that I passed by a restaurant where they had a wedding ceremony, and people were dancing the traditional dance, in accordance with the old custom. With good reason, I perceived the wedding and folk iconography as symbols of heteropatriarchy, which will likely never leave space not to support, but at least to understand things that go beyond its framework.

The news that the program was not cancelled, but that it would continue on the day following the attack was encouraging. The next festival evening witnessed one of the most touching moments in our activist history in Sarajevo, when we all started singing the *Aj, Carmela* song performed by Darko Rundek – *We are against the oppressors / and their helpers / legionaries and fascists*.

There is no return, we can only move forward - this was the unspoken vow with which we welcomed the next Merlinka festivals and small triumphs of freedom. And some parliament sessions where somebody for the first time spoke about things that delegates had not wanted to listen before. We also welcomed those who only came to support the fes-

art of the LGBT community, Merlinka is also an important political act, and this is what it should always be. I wish that the minister of culture and sports of BiH opened Merlinka festival next year, because this is a cultural event and it should be supported by the cultural institutions in BiH. For a minister of culture to open the festival, there should be a state-level ministry of culture first, and hopefully we will see both happen one day.

We welcomed the fifth Merlinka in the end of January 2017 with the slogan 'Merlinka is for everyone.' It took place without fear from attacks, and hopefully the majority perceives it now as a part of the regular cultural offer in Sarajevo. Launching of the festival on all levels, primarily on the symbolical one is also a part of the debt towards people from the past, who risked their own lives in order to live own freedom and promote the highest human values. As it was the case at the opening of the already famous first Merlinka in Sarajevo, when an 'honest homage was paid to Merlinka's courage, charm, freedom', as Jasmina Čaušević, program coordinator of Sarajevo Open Centre put it at the time.

The last, fifth Merlinka which was held in January 2017 in Sarajevo was visited by over 500 people. Maybe this number is not of special importance in some other environments, but in our domestic circumstances, it is commendable even for mainstream events. And as colleague Azem Kurtić said – everyone who wants to be free and who thinks that love is love came to the festival. Merlinka 2017 was also recognized as 'the freest one', and as such, it gave additional impetus to activist efforts that are equally numerous as the obstacles. For the community and freedom admirers, the arrival of the queer art group House of Flamingo from Zagreb to the last LGBTI film festival in Sarajevo was priceless. Through drag as the creative and emancipating valve of a kind, House of Flamingo offered more than the Sarajevo audience expected.

Merlinka is not only an important activist act and a platform for activities targeting those who understand less or do not want to understand the Other and Different. It is an important link to everything that we do not experience ourselves, regardless how open we are. I remember how precious it was for me to see the film *The mask you live* at the fourth Merlinka, along with several other excellent films. It is a film which researches masculinities as concepts and norms connected with our stereotypical ideal of a man, and explains to us the consequences of deviations from the dominant patterns of male behaviour. Men or boys who are unable to fulfil the tasks that are expected from them become wounded men who again wound others. 'We must expel the man from our heads and place him in our hearts,' says one of the heroes of a film which shows us confessions of abusers and victims, pedagogues, psychologists and therapists, but also of young men who under different circumstances became aware of the need not to be a part of the dominant mould and not to represent masculinity in the way in which it is usually expected. Such films should not only be a part of Merlinka's program, but also of regular elementary school classes, in order to try and prevent that the feelings of rejection and personal frustration turn into intolerance one day.

Many things were presented and promoted as culture in this land of tears. It was 'short-winded' at times, without leaving any social trace. The experience of Merlinka and the fact that we built it undoubtedly will be remembered, at least in the collective activist awareness, as one of the best things that the art enabled us to do.



Drag show performed by queer art group House of Flamingo at 2017 Merlinka

**THE FOURTH (2016) AND FIFTH MERLINKAS (2017) ATTRACTED THE LARGEST NUMBER OF VISITORS. THE FOURTH ONE FINISHED WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF EXCELLENT LE ZBOR GROUP MEMBERS WHO COLLECTIVELY PLAYED THE ANTIFASCIST MUSICAL REPERTOIRE. APART FROM THE TOP FILM PROGRAM, THE FIFTH MERLINKA HOSTED THE HOUSE OF FLAMINGO AND THEIR SPECTACULAR DRAG SHOW.**

## WORKING TOGETHER ON IMPROVING THE REPORTS ON LGBTI PERSONS

# THE MEDIA AS IMPORTANT ALLIES IN THE BATTLE FOR VISIBILITY AND EQUALITY

**For six years, the Sarajevo Open Centre has been dedicated to working with the media and media representatives in the battle against prejudice and stereotypes towards LGBTI persons who are often the recipients of irresponsible media reporting, and in order to improve the reporting on LGBTI persons. The key of this work are analyses in the media representation of LGBTI persons, School for students of Journalism and Communicology and young journalists, and info sessions and cooperation with media partners.**

By: Lejla Huremović

In the contemporary society, the media are the most important way of communication, and can contribute to the improvement of LGBTI human rights. The continuity and sensibility in the journalists' approach and knowledge is of paramount importance for stereotypes and prejudices not to cross over from the sphere of the media to the general sphere of the society. Having that in mind, SOC started monitoring and analyzing the representation of LGBTI persons in the media six years ago, and according to the analyses, we started working on concrete steps in contributing to professional and ethical media reporting.

For five years in a row, SOC has been organising the School for students of Journalism and Communicology and young journalists called *Responsible Journalism: LGBTI persons and the media*. We believed that it was necessary to work with young people, university students who are entering media outlets and starting with their reports on various topics, including LGBTI persons. Since it is a familiar fact that the faculties in BiH do not pay enough attention to the reporting on LGBTI persons, we understood the importance of creating such a school and offer to at least a small number of students the chance to learn more about LGBTI persons and reporting on LGBTI topics. More than 70 students and young journalists completed the training and they are our associates today, reporting on LGBTI topics in a professional manner while working in the media. Some of the participants of this School have become permanent or guest associates of our LGBTI.ba portal.

## INFO SESSIONS AND LGBTI.BA PORTAL



**IN 2013, WE STARTED THE FIRST LGBTI INFO PORTAL IN BIH, INITIALLY CALLED LGBT-PRAVA.BA, AND IN 2014, IT WAS RENAMED TO LGBT.BA, AND FINALLY IN 2016 TO LGBTI.BA. THIS IS A PLATFORM TO START AND RAISE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE FOR LESBIANS, GAYS, BISEXUALS, TRANS AND INTERSEXUAL PERSONS. FROM MARCH 2014 TO MID-AUGUST 2017, IT WAS VISITED 346,364 TIMES.**

In 2012, we published the *Manual for Journalists on Professional and Ethical Reporting on LGBT Topics – Outside the Four Walls*, and in 2013, *Short Guide through Professional Reporting on LGBT Topics*, with the aim of contributing to better understanding and reporting on LGBTI persons.

Since 2013, we started our monthly info sessions, with the aim of placing certain topics in the media which had not been reported about or had been reported in a wrong, stereotypical, sensationalistic way. The info sessions proved to be a good way to directly address certain topics, and meet journalists on the spot and talk to them about LGBTI topics.

All the activities were conducted with the intention to influence media reporting in a qualitative and quantitative way, and thus contribute to the visibility of LGBTI persons in the public.

In 2013, we started the first LGBTI info portal in BiH,





First info-session for journalists, May 2013

initially called [Lgbt-prava.ba](#), and in 2014, it was renamed into [LGBT.ba](#), and finally in 2016, into [LGBTI.ba](#). This is a platform to start and raise different questions of importance for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans and intersexual persons. From March 2014 to mid-August 2017, it was visited 346,364 times.

## DIRECT COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA

Another important segment during these years was direct cooperation with the media which we recognized as important allies in our battle. We have worked directly with portals: [bljesak.info](#), [tacno.net](#), [6yka.com](#), [e-trafika.net](#), [radiosarajevo.ba](#), [klix.ba](#), TV and radio outlets: Federal Television, Radio Free Europe, BH Radio 1 and many others. Through monitoring and analysis of media reporting, we concluded that there was space for reporting on LGBTI topics, and that a growing number of journalists was engaged in reporting about the problems and lives of LGBTI persons. Since 2015, the tendency of increased reporting on LGBTI topics has continued, both in a qualitative and quantitative manner. For comparison purposes, in 2016, there was a total of 1299 media postings, while approximately the same number of postings was noted in the first half of 2017. We are happy about this and we hope that this tendency will continue, especially when talking about professional, non-sensationalistic approach to reporting about LGBTI persons. In our work with the media over the last six years, we have contributed to the visibility of LGBTI topics and persons in BiH media. We managed to offer the LGBTI community credible and relevant information on LGBTI rights and everyday life through the first and only LGBT info portal [LGBTI.ba](#). We created a space for the voice of the LGBTI community in BiH to be heard through different media campaigns on web portals, television, radio and print media.

**FOR FIVE YEARS, SOC HAS BEEN ORGANISING THE SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICOLOGY AND YOUNG JOURNALISTS CALLED RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM: LGBTI PERSONS AND THE MEDIA. MORE THAN 70 STUDENTS AND YOUNG JOURNALISTS COMPLETED THE TRAINING AND THEY ARE OUR ASSOCIATES TODAY, REPORTING ON LGBTI TOPICS IN A PROFESSIONAL MANNER WHILE WORKING IN THE MEDIA.**





First School for Students of Journalism, April 2013

## 4 KA POZITIVNIM PRAKSAMA

Lejla Huremović i Masha Durković

IZVJEŠTAVANJE MEDIJA U 2016. GODINI  
O LGBTI TEMAMA U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI



### MARIJA ARNAUTOVIĆ, A JOURNALIST AT RADIO FREE EUROPE AND LONG-TERM ASSOCIATE AT SOC

## SOC PLAYED THE MOST IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF LGBTI PERSONS THROUGH COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA

We started the cooperation with the Sarajevo Open Centre several years ago. Since Radio Free Europe is committed to reporting and promoting human rights we followed the activities of SOC before as well, but the actual cooperation began with our special program. It seems to me that we all learnt a lot through our work together. We received immeasurable assistance from the people from SOC, in the form of advice, contacts etc., whether we covered topics about endangering the rights of LGBTI persons or created shows which dealt with hate crimes. It seems to me that the Sarajevo Open Centre team has shown a more responsible approach than other non-governmental organisations regarding the cooperation with the media and they have shown this in the best possible way throughout the years. Thus, it seems that BiH society is more open today to listen to stories which were an absolute taboo several years ago.

In my mind, the Sarajevo Open Centre played the most important role in promoting the rights of LGBTI persons, and all topics regarding their rights. They did this in a unique manner – through cooperation with the media and training the media, which I think is the most important link in the process of raising awareness of the society on specific topics. This work is visible if we take a look several years in the past, when there were absolutely no topics in the media regarding LGBTI persons, and the situation is very different today. I think that it is all owing to SOC and the cooperation they managed to establish with the media, as few other non-governmental organisations managed to do in BiH, as well as their continuous engagement in training journalists how to report on these topic in an appropriate way.

# ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF BIH HERSTORY

**History from a feminist point of view is an important topic in the work of the Sarajevo Open Centre, which used its publishing and cultural undertakings to start telling a new, alternative narrative of the female history in BiH. Read about the way SOC fights for the herstory of women in BiH in the following text.**

By : Edita Miftari

Herstory as a concept is part of feminist criticism of traditional historiography and represents history written from a feminist perspective, the point of view of women, emphasizing the role of women in the history of the society and civilization. The role of women has been neglected around the world, through time and space, despite their major contributions in the past and the present to the development of society, politics, language, technology, art, economy, science and other aspects of life and society. These contributions are not visible enough and rarely recognized by society, thus the role of women is usually brought down to care about the family and home, and biological procreation. The reproduction of women throughout history has been broader and more important, a lot more social and political, a lot louder, albeit suppressed and unrecognized.

It has been the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina for a long time, and only individuals who live by the principles of feminism decided to put an end to such interpretations of history. After several important publications in the *Gender* edition which opened the door of herstory and development of feminism through time in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Somebody Said Feminism? How Feminism Influenced Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Adriana Zaharijević, 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2012, and *What is the Gender of Security?* edited by Damir Arsenijević and Tobias Flessenkamper in 2013), Sarajevo Open Centre published an edited the doctoral thesis by Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, dr.Sc. which she defended at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade in 2013. The book *Women's Movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Articulation of One Counterculture* in 2013, translated into English, was a benchmark in research and analysis of history, the position and point of view of the women's movement and activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, overcoming the usual oversimplified and one-sided analyses of women's associative movement and activism which over-emphasize or completely neglect certain steps in its development. Presenting the feminist interpretation of the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina from its beginnings all the way to the post-Dayton period, this book is an inspirational read for feminist theoreticians, activists, and broader reading audience, and the same inspiration was re-articulated only a year later when *Women Documented* saw the light of day.

## THE WOMEN OF BIH FOREVER DOCUMENTED

*Women Documented* was documented by a group of scientists and activists who decided to give their activist-academic answer to the systematic neglect of the contribution of women to BiH culture, excommunication of women from the main social currents,



Book promotion of *Zabilježene*, 2014

**WOMEN DOCUMENTED TELLS THE UNTOLD STORY OF BIH WOMEN WHO PUSHED THE LIMITS OF THE ESTABLISHED SYSTEM THROUGH NON-CONFORMIST AND BOLD ACTIONS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND WIDER**







Exhibition My House is Your House Too (Moja kuća je i tvoja kuća) in cooperation with Crvena, October 2014

the loss of continuity and removal from the cultural, scientific and other form of memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The book *Women Documented – Women and Public Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* from 2014, edited by Jasmina Čaušević, represents an outline for studying the history of women in BiH. The book material was collected through interviews, conversations, research in archives and records, manuscripts and notes on the brave, interesting and successful women who did not accept blind obedience or who defied social rules and fought for a better future. *Women Documented* tells untold stories of BiH women who pushed the limits of the established system through non-conformist

and bold actions in their environment and broader, in such a loud voice that a year later they received a second, amended and revised edition in which mistakes were corrected with additional findings. *Women Documented* was translated into English, and nowadays, the book can be found in personal and university libraries on at least three continents, which was made possible owing to the authors of the book and friends of the Sarajevo Open Centre through their travelling.

Since herstorigraphic testimonials in the editions of the Sarajevo Open Centre have a broader socio-political reason than purely activist ones, the book *Women Documented* had the purpose of marking the 100 years' anniversary from the beginning of World War I in an alternative way, thus the following important anniversary inspired further documentation of women's history in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The final months in 2015 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords – an international agreement which brought peace and laid the foundations for arduous construction of trust and reconciliation in the BiH post-war society. Since everything connected with this agreement, the document and the process itself, is based on predominantly male points of view, it was expected that the process of celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dayton Accords would be dominated by men, the political leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world. Thus, this was the perfect occasion to *stir up* the narratives on political history of the past 20 years with an insight and short overview of the political life and activities of particular women actors, politicians, institutional leaders and activists. In 2015, the book called *1995–2015: Women and Political Life in Post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina*, by authors Arijana Aganović, Edita Miftari and Marina Veličković, was published by the Sarajevo Open Centre and the Agency for Gender Equality BiH. This publication, just like the sequel to the story on *Women Documented*, puts women into the centre, now specifically in the political life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through interviews with 15 women who contributed to the political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period 1995–2015 through their work and activism, and whose experience, knowledge and perseverance made the advancement in the area of women's politics possible.



Exhibition Poetry and Museum of Razija Handžić: Memory Confiscation and Systematic Neglect of Women's Contribution to Culture, Science and Institutions, Museum of Literature and Performing Arts BiH, 2016

## WHO SAID FEMINISM?

Although they were finally told, these stories remain mere ink on paper. Our teaching curricula, especially the ones for studying and interpreting history will not be open for alternative narratives for a long time, staying at the door of patriarchal, ethnic-nationalistic interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the Sarajevo Open Centre starts

activities in the area of training on the protection of human rights of women, gender equality and feminism through the programs of the Equality Academy and Žarana Papić School of Feminism, five cycles of lectures and discussions under the general title *Somebody Said Feminism?* exhibitions, campaigns and advocating. The following are selected from these activities: *Laura Papo Bohoreta – The Sephardic Woman in Bosnia*, presented in June 2017 at the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts; exhibitions *STAND UP, WOMAN! Europeanization & Emancipation: the Case of Nafija Sarajlić – Themes and Reminiscences*, held in March 2017 and the exhibition *Poetry and Museum of Razija Handžić: memory confiscation and systematic neglect of women's contribution to culture, science and institutions* in November 2016, also organised at

the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina; exhibition *My house is your house, too* in October 2014 at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina; and scene reading of the revolutionary drama *Seven* in 2013 and 2015 in Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka. Five cycles of the lecture *Somebody said Feminism?* in over 30 discussions touched upon the topics related to ideology and language, digital feminism, the relation between right-wing and feminism, women's reproductive rights, women in the countryside, pornography, poverty, women politicians in positions of power, biopolitics written into women's bodies, sexuality in education, feminism and women with disabilities, the relationship between the market and women's work, the treatment of women in monotheistic religions, and many other topics we face in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Great contribution was made to all the listed activities which shed light on BiH herstory, owing to the women and men who enthusiastically worked with the Sarajevo Open Centre on these programs, publications and exhibitions, especially Zlatan Delić, the curator at the Museum of Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose relentless scientific work in *Women Documented* saved BiH female writers such as Nafija Sarajlić i Razija Handžić from oblivion, and directly inspired exhibitions about them, thus making their creations and achievement public and available.

Not even ten years of work by the Sarajevo Open Centre and its partners would suffice to tell all the forgotten stories of all forgotten Bosnian and Herzegovinian women; but the alternative narrative has already been articulated, documented and presented to a wider audience. The die is cast and there is no going back. BiH herstory published by the Sarajevo Open Centre is a clear documentary contribution offering the perspective on where women are today and where they always have been - and they have been here, always and everywhere, in every aspect. It is on us to recognize their experiences, to tell their stories, to celebrate their undertakings, big and small, and to create new ones for the times that are coming. Sarajevo Open Centre is therefore always going to be on the right side of BiH herstory, and as such offer the platform for raising our voice against forgetting the women who could give birth to us, if they haven't done so already.



Exhibition *Europeanization and Emancipation: Case of Nafija Sarajlić - Themes and Reminiscences*, Museum of Literature and Performing Arts, March 2017

**BIH HERSTORY PUBLISHED BY THE SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE IS A DOCUMENTARY CONTRIBUTION OFFERING A POINT OF VIEW ON WHERE WOMEN ARE TODAY AND WHERE THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN – AND THEY HAVE BEEN HERE, ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE, IN EVERY ASPECT**



Exhibition *Laura Papo Bohoreta - the Sephardic Woman in Bosnia*, Museum of Literature and Performing Arts, June 2017



## ADVOCATING OR LOBBYING FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND LGBTI PERSONS

# HOW TO BRING ABOUT CHANGES

## CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND LGBTI PERSONS IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF BIH?

**From its beginning, SOC has cultivated the feminist approach to human rights, and understood the connection in the battle for human rights of women and human rights of LGBTI persons, since the cause or inequality of these groups in BiH is the same – patriarchy and a conservative society enslaved by tradition, religion and nationalisms. This made it clear that we would raise questions and advocate for the improvement of the human rights of these two groups**

By: Vladana Vasić



### WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT US:

*I have enriched my life greatly by working with the Sarajevo Open Centre and I have gained invaluable knowledge and experience on human rights. SOC is a team of young people who are pushing boundaries, fighting for the rights of all marginalized groups in our society and selflessly sharing knowledge, with a special hint of professionalism permeating their work and engagement.*

**Maja Gasal Vražalica,**  
representative in the House of Representatives  
of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH



*In a very short period of working directly with representatives and delegates from all political options, the SOC staff managed to create conditions for passing legal and amendment solutions following the best European practice regarding the promotion of gender equality, the protection of rights of the LGBT population and other vulnerable groups, which resulted in raising the general awareness of BiH citizens on the importance of such an approach. Without SOC, the promotion of these values would be brought down to a couple of lonely representatives, while the support for these values grew immensely through the activities of SOC.*

**Damir Arnaut,**  
representative in the House of Representatives  
of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH

## HUMAN RIGHT OF LGBTI PERSONS – FROM ANTI-DISCRIMINATION TO PROACTIVE APPROACH TO INSTITUTIONS

The first advocating steps by the Sarajevo Open Centre in the area of human rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender and intersexual persons were directed at achieving a regulation that would ban and adequately penalize violence and discrimination; as well as having consistent application of the regulation in all cases. As was pointed out in the text about the 10 most important events in the history of SOC, the



first fruitful advocating activity by our organisation was amending the questionnaire for volunteer blood donors in FBiH, removing possible discrimination grounds for potential blood donors based on their sexual orientation. In our battle for removing this discrimination, SOC turned to the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina which issued a Recommendation suggesting such a change. Our success was also helped by the protest of students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo and the reactions of human rights activists for LGBTI persons in BiH.

Legislative amendments in the field of anti-discrimination and hate crimes are a result of longtime work and coalition creation with other civil society organi-

sations. The work of the Coalition for Combat against Hate Speech and Hate Crime, with Sarajevo Open Centre being a member, led to amendments of the Republika Srpska Criminal Code in 2013, and the FBiH Criminal Code in accordance with the amendments SOC drafted for this Coalition. SOC and other Coalition members started working on the amendments of the Criminal Code of the entities in 2012, following the media report about a brutal attack against a young gay man in Mostar; when it became clear that it was necessary to introduce harsher punishments for homophobic and transphobic hate crimes, crimes driven by nationalism or xenophobia. The amendments of the Criminal Codes of BiH entities stipulate harsher punishments for crimes driven by hatred or prejudices against LGBTI persons based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, in order to send a clear message that violence against minority groups in a society is not allowed. Alongside advocating for amendments of the legal frame, SOC also advocated for the training of policemen and policewomen on LGBTI human rights and proper investigation of hate crimes, independently and as part of the Coalition. This resulted in permanent training on this topic for policemen and policewomen of Sarajevo Canton in 2015 and in the implementation of the *Train the Trainer* program in 2016 for police educators from other cantons in FBiH who would hold permanent training for police officers in their ministries by the end of 2017.

In 2012, SOC worked on the protection of LGBTI persons against discrimination, trying to initiate the improvement of the existing Anti-Discrimination Law in BiH. SOC had already started a conversation with the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency for Gender Equality in BiH and Gender Centres of the entities as competent institutions for gender equality issues on the necessary amendments to this law and a more proactive approach to the protection of human rights of LGBTI persons. The Initiative for the Monitoring of EU Integrations was formed as a platform to work on the improvement of human rights of BiH citizens within the EU accession process. In 2015, within the Initiative, SOC started stronger advocating which led to a better cooperation with the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees BiH and passing amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH in 2016. Amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Law of BiH give clearer definitions of the terms “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” (in 2009, when the Law was passed, these terms were cited as “sexual orientation and expression”), ban the discrimination against intersexual persons on the grounds of their sexual characteristics. Since 2013, SOC has organised annual training on hate crimes and discrimination for judges and prosecutors, independently or in cooperation with the Heinrich Boell Foundation, OSCE Mission and Centres for the education of judges and prosecutors in both entities.

Wishing to encourage institutions to take a proactive approach to protecting human rights of LGBTI persons, the Sarajevo Open Centre has been advocating the creation of the Special Report on Human Rights of LGBTI persons by the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH since 2013. Although this initiative was supported by a large number of other civil society organisations, the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman dragged their feet on starting to work on this report. In 2015, the cooperation between the Sarajevo Open Centre and the Joint Committee on Human Rights of both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH resulted in a theme session on human rights regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> May. This



First theme session of the PA BiH Joint Committee on Human Rights on human rights of LGBTI people

session was the first event of its kind, during which an Institution in BiH discussed the rights of LGBTI persons and the future steps for their improvement. There were two conclusions at the theme session. The first one was that the Anti-Discrimination Law had to be changed in order to adequately describe sexual orientation and gender identity, and the other was that the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman had to make the Special Report. This Report was made and published late 2016, and it is the first report by an Institution in BiH issuing clear recommendations for all government institutions to eliminate present instances of human rights violations of LGBTI persons.

In May 2017, in cooperation with the Joint Committee on Human Rights of both Houses of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH and the UNDP Office in BiH, another theme session was organised with the focus on human rights of transgender people, the issue of legal recognition of consequences of living in another gender identity and gender reassignment. SOC presented its Law on Gender Identity to the people present, and an activist for the human rights of transgender people talked about his own experience.

The cooperation of SOC with the Agency for Gender Equality in BiH, the Gender Centre of FBiH and the Gender Centre of Republika Srpska was crowned when the measures for the improvement of human rights of LGBTI persons were introduced into Operational Plans for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan, but also when the creation of a special Action Plan for the Equality of LGBTI Citizens of BiH was initiated. In 2017, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH sent invitations for assembling a work group to create the Action Plan for the Equality of LGBTI Citizens of BiH. Representatives of the Agency, both Gender Centres, the Government of Brčko District and the Sarajevo Open Centre confirmed their attendance. The drafting of this document should begin soon, and upon completion it will be sent to the Council of Ministers of BiH for adoption. In 2016, in cooperation with SOC, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH included measures regarding the human rights of LGBTI persons in the Action Plan for Combating Discrimination.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN – SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS, A BATTLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE**

In the field of human rights, the Sarajevo Open Centre mainly focused on the issues of ensuring gender equality in the private and public life, especially regarding political participation and representation of women in the executive and legislative power. In 2015, with the aim of improving political participation of women and ensuring equal participation of women in the legislative and executive level, SOC filed two initiatives with the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. In cooperation with the Agency for Gender Equality BiH, it encouraged the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH to propose amendments to the Law on the Council of Ministers stipulating that the Council of Ministers BiH cannot even be appointed if the quota 40% representation of the lesser represented sex set by the Law on Gender Equality of BiH is not met. This recommendation passed the first reading but was not adopted.

The second recommendation by SOC was about passing amendments to the Law on Amendments to the Election Law of BiH which would regulate the obligation for political parties to ensure equal numbers of men and women on candidate lists (50% each sex), with alternating order of male and female candidates, to increase the number of women in parliaments and assemblies. The political parties which would not respect this provision would not be eligible to partake in the elections, and the respect of this provision would lead to greater representation of women in legislation bodies. The Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH accepted this recommendation and directed the bill into procedure. However, the bill did not pass its first reading.

The work of SOC regarding the human rights of women includes also offering support for other organisations of the civil society in their intention to improve the position of women in the BiH society. Thus, in 2015, SOC supported a group of other organisations, consisting of Medica Zenica, Foundation of Local Democracy Sarajevo, Vive Žene Tuzla, BiH Woman Mostar, Women from Una Bihać and Women to Women Sarajevo, when they filed a complaint to the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH to investigate the systematic violation of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in the Federation of BiH, with special focus on not recognizing and completely excluding safe houses with the legal status of association and foundation from the Draft Law on the Amendments to the Law on Protection



against Domestic Violence in FBiH, which was in Parliamentary procedure at that time.

In order to draw attention to the insecure financial position of safe house in the entire BiH, especially in the Federation of BiH, the participants of the SOC Žarana Papić School of Feminism, SOC representatives, association Vive Žene from Tuzla, Medica from Zenica, Cure Foundation, and citizens taking part in the campaign *16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence* in 2015 they organised an activity in front of the Parliament of FBiH during the discussion on the Draft Law on the Amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in FBiH. The message was that safe houses deserve the legal right to state

support, that one safe house ensuring accommodation for 25 survivors of domestic violence needs on average 240,000 KM to function properly, and that FBiH secures only a tenth of the necessary funding. It was also emphasized that the state should cooperate with non-governmental organisations which offer such help and protection and to ensure better treatment for victims of violence. With the recommended amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in FBiH, the Ministry is threatening to leave the survivors without the help they enjoyed so far. It was requested for the amendments to be withdrawn from the procedure, and they were not adopted in the end.

In 2016, SOC together with Maja Gasal Vražalica, a representative at the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH recommended amendments to the Law on Sport of BiH, which were adopted and thus the provisions ensuring gender equality were improved and the obligation of gender-sensitive budgeting was introduced in the area of sports in BiH.

In 2017, the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly in BiH supported by the Sarajevo Open Centre held a theme session on the improvement of rights stemming from the legal employment status, connected with motherhood and fatherhood. They presented a set of recommended amendments to the Labour Law of FBiH, developed by SOC, containing measures of protective nature (inappropriate questions on family status, marriage and pregnancy plans during job interviews), and stimulating measures for fathers to use parental leave more in order to gradually shift the role perception of men and women in realizing their family lives and participating in social life. In the following period, SOC will be working with other civil society organisations and representatives at the Parliament FBiH on advocating the adoption of these recommendations.



## BUILDING THE LGBTI COMMUNITY THROUGH ACTIVITIES BY SOC

# THROUGH COMPANIONSHIP

## WE TEAR DOWN THE FEELING OF LONELINESS, AND GAIN A SENSE OF BELONGING AND EVERYDAY GROWTH

**Sarajevo Open Centre, among many other things, also deals with strengthening the community through different work with LGBTI persons. Owing to our events for the community, many people had a chance to be themselves for the first time without fear or judgement. This way of getting together and exchanging experience, knowledge, hopes and ideas only grew in strength and now gathers a team that has been here for a long time, but is accepting new members all the time. Nikola Kuridža is writing about SOC work with the LGBTI community.**

By: Nikola Kuridža



Barbecue with the LGBTI community, July 2017

The building of a community is a fundamental activity. Without a constructed community not a single movement, especially the one for accessing equal rights for LGBTI persons, can be successful. Strengthening the LGBTI community leads to overall improvement of the rights of LGBTI persons. To me, working with the community means being able to create a new way of association and trust.

Strengthening the community is a constant and often strenuous business, but all the effort comes back through successfully beaten fears, blocks and seemingly unsolvable problems of gays, lesbians, transgender, bisexual or intersexual persons. And it is all worth it in the end since empowered persons are the ones changing the society.

The concept itself of getting together with the community is ever changing and adapting to the needs of the community. SOC opens its door to everyone who is well-meaning, and our premises are always filled with the air of support, trust and safety, as well as freedom and openness. We are happy that we can work with the LGBTI community from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, since the life of LGBTI persons is more difficult outside big cities.

The empowerment process is continued through the process of peer to peer counselling which opens up the possibility for individual support regardless of the problem someone faces. Sometimes all that is important is to share one's worries and they instantly become smaller. We also offer psychological counselling, giving our community the possibility for significant empowerment and building through our services and joint activities.

### WE'RE NOT ALONE

From this point of view, it seems that the LGBTI community in Sarajevo, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina is only going to get stronger and become an important social category to count on when making decisions. I am immeasurably happy about that. The question is only when we will reach the crucial moment in this process, but getting there is not questionable at all. The strength lies within solidarity and alliance. Through our work with the community, we also work on ourselves, knowing that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

One of the most important things we get from getting together with people from our community is breaking down the feeling of loneliness and understanding that we are not alone, that we belong somewhere and that there is someone who understands what we have been through. Solidarity among the down-trodden has always been a threat to an oppressive social apparatus. We offer the possibility for solidarity to develop as a



universal value and we will not stop on that path!

Working with the community also includes the flexibility of working hours and multitasking. On the other hand, the rewards can be found in happy faces, conscious attitudes, the final acceptance of one's distinctiveness and the opportunity to see all the beauty of difference.

Finally, it seems best if we shared with you some experiences directly from our community!

*"I first attended a SOC event when they hosted the drag artist Panti Bliss, at the Chamber Theatre 55, over a year ago. From the beginning of the year I have followed SOC's work more and I attended almost every event. I like where this is going. I am commending the variety of content and approachability of the team members." – V.O.*

*"I attended SOC trainings, which were very helpful to me in my life. Also, I like the gatherings like having a barbecue. What I like the most is that when there are surveys and questions being asked, the team members listen to our responses. Once in a survey I wrote that I couldn't come to the gatherings because I didn't have transportation means to get to Sarajevo, or a place to stay in Sarajevo. For the following activities, I was told that I would have secured transportation and accommodation. That is how I recognized that they actually listened to the needs of the community." – Mol*

*"I have known about SOC for the past seven years. It is impressive that SOC gathers young people. The topic that I follow a lot is the topic of life partnership – that's most important for me now. The second most important thing is that we can come together like this." – Marijana*

*"I find everything really great. SOC is very important to me, and it has helped me a lot, starting with professional help, that is, visiting a psychologist, as well as accepting myself. You feel a lot better when you are part of a community. These are trustworthy people. I find all the workshops great, but my favourite one was on coming out. The story was spontaneous, some other people outed themselves. I had already known some stories on outing, but this way I saw people going through the same. It was interesting to see all the different ways people outed themselves." – Alen S.*

*"In the field of advocating, owing to the initiatives of the Sarajevo Open Centre, we got some laws, like the Anti-Discrimination one, which we can use in the future, with the aim of improving the quality of life of LGBTI persons. One of my favourite events is the Merlinka Festival, since it is a major gathering for activists. The atmosphere is great, and it is a good opportunity to meet new people. I also like educational workshops since I believe that you cannot get enough training and that it is the holy grail of activism. I was personally inspired by some members of the Sarajevo Open Centre. They motivated me and showed me what it means to be an activist, which means a lot to me. I like the School of LGBTI Activism, the Žarana Papić School of Feminism, events like the barbecue get together, as well as the fact that SOC works with institutions. SOC gives an opportunity to people to have a better quality of life." – Haris Begić*

*"I first came to SOC two years ago, and I have been on numerous workshops since. My eyes opened for the trans issue – today I know a lot more about trans rights and the LGBTI community. What I find important in SOC's work is that they helped me in my work and initiatives, like the drag group initiative. They helped me so much to become empowered that I can say that life without SOC would look sad. Everything SOC does is great for the community, for me and those coming after me. SOC helps us help ourselves and others, but it also teaches us about ourselves and others." – Iwa Farah Durawi*





Presentation of Lamija Begagić's novel *In the Zone*

*"SOC matters to me because I hang out with people who are going through the same things as I am. It's a relief. I was recently at a party, and it was great, but it is important to say that for me it is the most important that I know that a safe place like SOC exists, that there is a place where I don't have to pretend about being a lesbian. Although for personal reasons I cannot always be there, SOC has my support." – Pot*

In five months (from February to July 2017) around 200 people visited our community events. We would like to thank everyone for their participation in SOC activities, those who selflessly shared their knowledge and talents and made this movement possible! For the next 10 years of building the LGBTI community!

**NAIDA KUČUKALIĆ, COORDINATOR FOR WORKING WITH THE LGBTI COMMUNITY AT SOC FROM SEPTEMBER 2014 TO JANUARY 2017**

## FROM GATHERINGS AND ACTIVIST ACTIVITIES TO PLAYING BINGO AND Pictionary

My job included getting to know the community, their needs, and accordingly organising theme or fun gatherings twice a month. Our community is diverse, so are the needs, wishes and desires, and everything was carried out in line with possibilities. We organised evening gatherings on different topics; the LGBT movement, homosexuality in our region, lesbianism and the women's movement, bisexuality, transgender, transsexuality, religion and queer identity, coming out, and we also talked about sex, sexually transmitted diseases, sex toys, activism, feminism...

We hosted numerous important personages from the Balkans, activists, and people promoting equality in the society in a manner. Those were: Lepa Mladenović, Boban Stojanović, Marko Šelić Marčelo, Helena Vuković, Biljana Ginova, Zoe Gudović, Neprocjenjiv.A (Mihael and Neda) from Rijeka, Franko Dota, Mima Simić, Alma Selimović, Ana Brakuš, Milan Đurić, Ljiljana Živković, Elma Islamović and many others.

We organised trans group meetings, and a small seminar with trans people from the region, at the request of the trans group from BiH, which they led. We watched films, went to the theatre, of course following queer topics. On two occasions, we took groups to the Belgrade and Podgorica Pride Parades.

We started activities, street and online ones, with limited resources, with an activist group, for IDAHOT, Lesbian Day, Me-

morial Day for transgender persons who are no longer with us, International Transgender Day of Visibility. These were all activist activities – and I am not talking about posters around the city, which were paid for. We went and took letters by transgender persons to the Federal Parliament and relevant Ministries etc. In addition to it all, creating and organising all the mentioned events, we also did *peer to peer* counselling, personally in the premises of SOC or by e-mail. A lot of people contacted us. Some even by phone or text messages. I think it is important to say that even people over 40 called us or came to see us. Some needed a longer time to communicate until trust was established, and they would come later. For a lot of people, it was helpful to come twice a week, talk, pour their hearts out, recharge and get back to the real world. Some started psychotherapy to work on themselves some more.

We also had parents come and see us. Some were only there for support.

We organised barbecues and New Year's Eve gatherings, for three years in a row. We also organised games such as a Pictionary tournament, Bingo with prizes, with around 50 people, group screenings of *Game of Thrones* with quizzes and more. It was a very intense and good period. People came from other towns, not only Sarajevo, some of them to meet people like them for the first time, e.g. from Krajina. There was good energy.



## OUR LIVES EXIST BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS

# THE STREET IS WHERE THE LOUDEST FIGHTS TAKES PLACE

**During ten years of existence, Sarajevo Open Centre has organised numerous street activities wanting to draw the attention to the threat of rights of LGBTI persons, women and marginalized groups. Although equality battles are waged on different fronts, the street is one of the most important. There were plenty of activities, and Azem Kurtić wrote about the most important ones.**

By: Azem Kurtić

The battle for equality is waged on different fronts and it includes the change of law, advocating campaigns, work with politicians, judges and police officers. It also includes the work with the media, journalists, citizens and those who do not see the importance in equal access to rights. One of the more important fronts in this battle is the street.

Ever since the first 8 March protest to the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the world has recognized the importance of public assembly. SOC drew inspiration from these events when organising protests and demonstrations or joining them. Pride parades, protests and street activities send a clear message: We are here, we exist, and we want equal rights!

During the ten years of its existence, the Sarajevo Open Centre has organised, often with the help of other activists or organisations, a range of activities to occupy the public space. There isn't a single activity more important than the other, but we will nonetheless select only some of them.



Human Rights Day March, December 2016

**GATHERED AROUND ONE IDEA – RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE, THE ATTENDEES AT THE MARCH SENT THEIR MESSAGES ON BANNERS: “TEST YOURSELF FOR HOMOPHOBIA”, “SILENCE ISN’T GOLD”, “EQUALITY, JUSTICE, FREEDOM = HUMAN RIGHTS”, “THE RIGHT TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR”**

## HUMAN RIGHTS MARCH

Every march against discrimination and marginalization of a specific group is a march for human rights in general, since there is no compromise or priority list regarding human rights. Led by this idea, on 10 December 2013, on Human Rights Day, SOC activists went into the street with other citizens with the slogan “Human rights abroad”. The assembly began in front of the Academy of Arts, and then they marched to the Faculty of Philosophy for the rights of women, young people, Roma people, LGBTI persons, persons with disabilities, war survivors, refugees, returnees and everyone else who may not even be aware of being discriminated.

This march was organised as part of a seven-day-celebration of the International Day of Human Rights that year. The march sent a message that the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and cannot be and must not be selectively applied.

Three years later, the same day and place, on 10 December 2016, the Sarajevo Open Centre, CURE Foundation and Civil Rights Defenders, with the support of other organisations and individuals, organised another human rights march. “Human rights on the agenda” was the slogan of this march, with two hundred people gathering. This was the most populous march to date, and all those who marched that day, came back home filled with positive en-

ergy which was felt among the crowd. The number of people attending the march grew as the march was coming to a close, and it went by without a single incident.

Gathered around one idea – rights for everyone, the attendees at the march sent their messages on banners: “Test yourself for homophobia”, “Silence isn’t gold”, “Equality, justice, freedom = human rights”, “The right to breathe clean air”.

The procession briefly stopped in front of legislative bodies (Federal Parliament, The Government of the Sarajevo Canton and finally the Parliamentary Assembly) where they read particular requests. The special focus of the requests pertained to the protection of the rights to life and safety, protection against violence, the creation of a tolerant society, ensured access to healthcare and the protection of public goods.

## EQUALITY NOW!

On 21 December 2015, as part of the campaign “16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women” SOC and Medica Zenica held a press conference on the square in front of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the aim of drawing attention to the insecure financial position of safe houses in the entire BiH, especially in the Federation.

The message from the gathering was that safe houses deserve and have the legal right to state support, and that the safety of violence survivors must not be less important than the comfort of politicians. One safe house, ensuring the accommodation for 25 survivors of domestic violence, annually requires 240,000 KM to operate properly. The Law on Protection against Domestic Violence stipulates that the Federation of BiH has to finance safe houses in the amount of 70% of total funds. The Draft Budget of FBiH for 2016, for all six safe houses in FBiH planned a total of 162,000 KM, as in the previous budget. At the same time, 226,000 KM annually is allocated for the accommodation and expenses of ministers in the Federal Government.

Together with the participants of the Žarana Papić School of Feminism, the activity was attended by the representatives of the Association of Vive Žene from Tuzla, CURE Foundation, and citizens who wanted to be part of the activity.

“Equality now” was the slogan for SOC’s street activity that was held on 27 April 2016 in front of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, when the recommendation for amendments to the Election Law and the Law on the Council of Ministers of BiH was on the agenda of the session of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. Other organisations and activists dealing with gender equality and political participation of women joined the protest.

This symbolic activity called upon Parliamentary representatives not to distort the existing gender quota, but to support the recom-

mendation by the Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH for achieving gender equality at the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in order to introduce the gender quota of 50%, which would make male and female candidates equal on the election lists on the next elections.

The activity was supported by representatives of non-governmental organisations, political parties and delegates of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH.

**THE WALK WHICH COMMEMORATED IDAHOT 2016 IN SARAJEVO WAS QUICKLY DUBBED THE SARAJEVO ZERO PRIDE. ON THAT DAY, ACTIVISTS STROLLED SEVERAL HUNDRED METERS DOWN THE STREET OBALA KULINA BANA, CARRYING THE FLAGS, SMILING AND HAPPY**



Sarajevo Zero Pride, May 2016

## ZERO PRIDE AND THE GRAND COMING OUT

During the celebration of 17 May, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDA-HOT), in 2016 in front of the Federal Parliament, SOC wanted to point at the disadvantaged position of LGBTI persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The plan was to call upon the delegates in the Federal Parliament to honestly and resolutely pledge themselves to the equality of LGBTI persons.

A decree with five concrete requests was handed out to the delegates of the Parliament, with the final aim of protecting the human rights of LGBTI persons. After peaceful protest stand-out, the distribution of information material, distribution of decrees, a spontaneous walk down Obala Kulina Bana occurred.

The walk was quickly dubbed as the Sarajevo Zero Pride. On that day, activists strolled several hundred meters down





Our Lives Exist Outside our Four Walls Street Action, October 2016

## THE ACTIVITY CALLED “OUR LIVES EXIST OUTSIDE OUR FOUR WALLS” EMPHASIZED THE FACT THAT VISIBILITY LEADS TO GREATER ACCEPTANCE OF LGBTI PERSONS, AND LEADS TO A DECREASE IN DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE, WHICH HAPPENS ALMOST ON A DAILY BASIS AND ALWAYS GOES UNNOTICED

The failure to provide the right to assembly was not answered with silence. “Violence Is Not Normal” was the motto of the protest march against violence against LGBTI persons planned for 13 May 2017 at 12:00. It was not held because the Ministry of Traffic of the Sarajevo Canton did not approve the march along Titova Street, from the Eternal Flame to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, although the request had been filed two weeks ahead of the legally prescribed deadline. This was a sign that the battle for LGBTI rights, and the rights of all other minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has to continue even stronger and more adamantly. In response to the Ministry’s action, SOC held an emergency press-conference where they presented the details for cancelling the march, pointed fingers at the ones to blame, and announced a protest gathering in front of the Sarajevo Canton building. The protest was held on 13 May 2017, at 12:00 with the support of numerous other activists.

## FAST MOBILIZATION

When it was needed, we responded to support gatherings, like the one held on 16 June 2016, where we expressed solidarity with all the victims of terrorist attacks happening in the world, especially for the victims of the terrorist and homophobic attack at the gay club in Orlando, USA, which took the lives of 50 people and injured more than 50 people.

SOC activists also participated in the gathering in front of the Consulate of the Republic of Croatia in Sarajevo, supporting our fellow fighters in Croatia, after tear gas was thrown into the SuperSuper club on the night of 11 February. “Zagreb Today, Sarajevo Tomorrow” was the message on one of the banners at this gathering, since what happened in Zagreb can easily happen in Sarajevo as well. That is why it was important to send messages of support and to state that we will not turn our backs to homophobic attacks which are definitely hate crimes.

On 3 October 2016, SOC activists met in front of the Polish Embassy protesting with a group of citizens, thus joining numerous European cities which organised protests supporting women in Poland. Dressed in black, the group sent a clear message that it was against depriving Polish women of the right to make decisions about their own bodies, which is a direct attack on their body anatomy and freedom. The reason for the “Black Protest” was the initiative for criminalizing abortion in Poland, which would make abortion legally impossible unless the mother’s life was in danger. Owing mostly to women in Poland, but also to the protests in many European countries, even in Sarajevo, this law was not adopted.

Through street activities, and gatherings like these ones, when it is necessary to stand side by side with women in Poland or express solidarity with the LGBTI community in Croatia, for the last ten years, SOC demonstrated that it was against the violation of human rights, regardless of where it happened. Ten years of fighting for equal rights and equal access to rights for everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina would not have been possible without activists, partner organisations and friends of the community, to whom the Sarajevo Open Centre is very grateful. Together with them, we remain in the streets, where we wage our loudest battles!

the street Obala Kulina Bana, carrying the flags, smiling and happy.

The ninth year of SOC’s existence will be remembered by the performance in front of BBI Centre Sarajevo as part of the celebration of the International Coming Out Day. That day, 25 October 2016, will be remembered because the activists went out into the streets, which are theirs as much as everyone else’s, despite all the comments, disapproval, threats and violence which lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender and intersexual persons face every day.

The activity called “Our lives exist outside our four walls” emphasized the fact that visibility leads to greater acceptance of LGBTI persons, and leads to a decrease in discrimination and violence, which happens almost on a daily basis and always goes unnoticed. LGBTI persons are a part of this society, where they live, work, create, learn and contribute the best way they can, for a better tomorrow for all of us.

“These are my streets too!” – was written on one of the banners held by the activists of the Sarajevo Open Centre and the CURE Foundation as well as other activists during a 45-minute performance.



## A PLATFORM FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

# EQUALITY, COOPERATION AND JOINT ACTION OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

**In 2015, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Sarajevo Open Centre started the Equality Academy with the intention to create a new platform for political leadership and space for joint actions of representatives, leaders of political parties and civil society organisations. Find out more about the work and success of the Equality Academy which recently saw its third generation of students**

By: Maida Zagorac

The idea of starting the Equality Academy, a platform for political leadership and space for joint actions of delegates, councilors, representatives of political parties, counsellors to ministers and mayors as well as civil society organisations, was born towards the end of 2014 during a meeting with Saša Gavrić, then executive manager of the Sarajevo Open Centre and Merima Ejubović, science associate at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation – BiH Office. The Equality Academy started its program already in May 2015, and recently its third generation of students completed their studies.

**THE GOALS OF THE ACADEMY WERE CLEAR FROM THE BEGINNING: STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE AREA OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUALITY POLICIES OF UNDERPRIVILEGED GROUPS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, IN ORDER TO ENHANCE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND STRENGTHENING THE COOPERATION BETWEEN DECISION MAKERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN BIH**

With a great wish to put women rights on the political agenda, and seeing that for such a change one needs partnership and action with the representatives of the government, at the beginning of 2015, we started devising the program for the first Equality Academy. The goals of the Academy were clear from the beginning: strengthening the capacities of political leaders in the area of gender equality and equality policies of underprivileged groups in Bosnia

and Herzegovina, in order to enhance rights of citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina and strengthening the cooperation between decision makers and representatives of civil society organisations in BiH.

We were hoping that the announcement of the beginning of our Academy would rouse the interest of the public and that we would accept a lot of interesting applications. But we came to understand the reality of the situation only when the first applications started coming in. For every open call for the Equality Academy we received over one hundred applications, and, unfortunately, we had to turn down many of them due to the restricted number of participants. The Equality Academy soon became a recognizable event standing out from other events due to its quality, the innovations it brings to the BiH human rights scene and the composition of participants. This also made the Sarajevo Open Centre and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation recognizable. Everyone wanted to take part, to teach, to contribute. Our phone lines, faxes and emails were red hot, and diplomats wanted to take part in welcoming the participants at the opening of the Equality Academy.



Third Generation of Equality Academy, 2017

## THREE GENERATIONS

The first and second generations of participants at the Equality Academy consisted of parliamentary representatives at the cantonal, entity and state level; members of political bodies within parliamentary political parties; counsellors to leaders of political parties and ministers at the cantonal, entity and state level, who were interested in strengthening their own capacities and working on identifying and implementing concrete solutions to improve gender equality and the position of underprivileged groups in our society. The first two generations included participants from all parliamentary political parties, which saw the Academy as a space for breaking down barriers between parties, joint learning, discussion and exchange of opinion and experience, finding joint solutions and the space to form new partnerships and friendships. The program included three modules in which different topics were discussed. As a reward for excellent grades and behavior in class, the first two generations went on a study visit to Zagreb within which they had the opportunity to visit the Parliament of Croatia, the Office of the Gender Equality Ombudsperson, the Human Rights House Zagreb and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. The focus of the study visit was to understand the processes which lead to the accession of this country to the European Union, and to become acquainted with the work of the institutions of the Republic of Croatia in the area of gender equality.

In the previous two years (generations 2015 and 2016), the participants listened to topics about the political system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the reforms ahead of us in the process of EU integrations, what gender equality looks like within the Dayton Peace Accords, the election process, gender equality policies, feminism, the representation of women in patriarchal models (“woman, mother, queen”), public policies treating gender equality, the Istanbul Convention and violence against women, finance and public budgets, gender sensitive budgeting, an increased participation of women in the legislative and executive branch of power, Gender Action Plan of BiH and its implementation at the level of the BiH entities and FBiH cantons, and there was also some talk about the human rights of LGBTI persons. During the program, they met the representatives of non-governmental organisations in BiH dealing with the issues of gender equality, but they also practiced their presentation skills with the help of Duška Jurišić who has been moderating each module for the past three years, and who has made each of the modules special with her dedicated engagement, starting discussions and arousing interest among the participants. There was never lack of discussion, and they often continued during coffee breaks, after dinner, even staying up until late at night, and some of them would even spice up their morning coffee with a discussion from the previous day. Since the first-generation group from the Equality Academy showed huge interest and willingness for change, it is not surprising that a follow up activity was organised, with the intention to achieve real gender equality within the bodies of executive power.



Second Generation of Equality Academy, 2016

**SINCE THE FIRST-GENERATION GROUP FROM THE EQUALITY ACADEMY SHOWED HUGE INTEREST AND WILLINGNESS FOR CHANGE, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT A FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY WAS ORGANISED, WITH THE INTENTION TO ACHIEVE REAL GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN THE BODIES OF EXECUTIVE POWER**

equality and the underprivileged groups in their local communities and broader society. This generation of participants is fresh out of the Academy. As part of their program, the participants listened to topics about what we have achieved so far and what's in store for us with current policies regarding gender equality in BiH, on the Gender Equality Law in BiH, the Gender Action Plan, the election process, feminism, human rights of LGBTI persons, observing women through the looking glass of patriarchy, the role of man in accomplishing real gender equality, gender sensitive budgeting and gender sensitive policies adapted to local levels of government. This generation also learnt about gender analysis and practiced its application to concrete issues, but also tested their prejudices and stereotypes within the live library and conversation with a lesbian, gay man and a bisexual person. The greatest success, as was the case with the previous two generations, was the presentation skills workshop, where participants practiced their media presentation, and simulated a talk show.

## KNOWLEDGE, PARTNERSHIP, FRIENDSHIP

The good reputation following the Equality Academy would not be heard this far if there were not for experienced and interesting lecturers who selflessly shared their knowledge and experience with our participants. We tried hard to bring the most prominent experts from BiH and the region for every area we considered, and they were: Adis Arapović, manager, Centre for Civil Initiatives; Emina Abrahamsdotter, feminist and activist; Irena Hadžiabdić, Central Election Commission BiH; Gordana Sobol, SDP Croatia; Adnan Kadribašić, expert in gender equality; Danijela Majstorović, professor at the Banja Luka University; Sonja Lokar, expert in gender equality from Slovenia; Karolina Leaković, SDP Croatia; Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić, manager of the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH; Jasminka Džumhur, the Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman BiH; Natalija Petrić, Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports in Republika Srpska; Svetlana Cenić, economist; Jelena Milinović, PhD in social studies in the interdisciplinary field of gender studies and head of the department for coordination, education and cooperation in the





Gender Centre in Republika Srpska; Mirjana Lukač, manager of the Gender Centre in Republika Srpska; Duška Jurišić, journalist; Saša Gavrić, executive manager of the Sarajevo Open Centre; Kika Babić-Svetlin, expert advisor for planning, developing and monitoring the GAP BiH within the Agency for Gender Equality in BiH; Ismeta Dervoz, delegate in the House of Representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH with the mandate 2010–

2014; Sandra Zlotrg, executive manager of the Association *Lingvisti*; Jasmina Čaušević, program coordinator for the Sarajevo Open Centre; Ilija Trninić, executive manager of the organisation *Perpetuum mobile*; Dženita Hrelja Hasečić, expert for gender sensitive budgeting; Gordan Bosanac from the Centre for Peace Studies in Zagreb; Sabina Čudić, delegate of the Canton Sarajevo Assembly and coordinator of the F5 Initiative; Mersida Mešetović, Colonel at the Armed Forces of BiH; Meliha Lekić, professor at the Faculty of Medicine at the Sarajevo University; Aida Spahić, feminist, activist and MA in gender studies; Vladana Vasić, manager for advocating at the Sarajevo Open Centre; Lejla Somun, expert in gender equality; Azir Mrđanović, expert in gender equality; Elmaja Bavčić, feminist, activist and MA in gender studies; Faruk Hujjić, expert in finance and gender sensitive budgeting.

The Equality Academy and the contacts that came from it created numerous positive effects: cooperation with parliamentary commissions for gender equality, Initiative for introducing gender sensitive language in the Parliament of FBiH, suggestion for solving the issue of non-existing institutional mechanisms for gender equality in FBiH cantons, preventing the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in FBiH (which would set back the status of safe houses), suggesting and jointly advocating for the amendments to the Law on the Council of Ministers BiH (introducing the 40% quota), suggesting and jointly advocating for the amendments to the Election Law (introducing the 50% quota for election lists). In addition, the Academy participants publicly read the drama *Seven*, thus raising their voice against gender based violence. The greatest contribution of the Academy is honest friendship and partnership that were created, the knowledge the participants acquired, who became honest advocates for change in our society, fighters for human rights, our dear allies who stand by us in protests and react individually on violations of human rights of women and LGBTI persons. We are particularly proud of them for often contacting us on their own to agree what to work on next with joined forces.

## SOC IS COUNTERING PATRIARCHY

## 100% FEMINISM

**The Sarajevo Open Centre is one of the few organisations simultaneously dealing with the rights of LGBTI persons and women's human rights. What connects these two programs is Feminism as a clear political action in our organisational profile. In addition to feminism as an organisational value, in the last ten years, we have also realized numerous feminist programs and activities, believing that the same phenomenon is at the core of problem women and LGBTI persons face: relentless patriarchy and its satellite – hetero/cisnormativity. This proved to be a hit in the dead centre since the participants of our feminist educational activities became advocates for the rights of LGBTI persons, and vice versa**

By : Emina Bošnjak i Jasmina Čaušević



Until recently, no one in the BiH society attempted to make the topics of pornography, hip-hop, Yugoslavian film, *sevdah*, digital world and the left-wing part of public discussions and conversation from a feminist perspective. Following the completion of Žarana Papić Women's Studies in BiH, the termination of Gender Studies at the University of Sarajevo, there was no more space for new generations, and the older ones, desiring Feminism, to socialize, gather, express solidarity and learn how to empower themselves, but also get the possibility to hit patriarchy where it hurts the most: in the public sphere. In the past couple of years, we tried to change that.

## SOMEBODY SAID FEMINISM?

In March 2013, Sarajevo Open Centre began organising lectures and discussions related to Feminist topics, women's rights and different questions of gender. The title of this cycle of lectures and public discussions refers to the well-known collection of Feminist texts called *Somebody Said Feminism? How Feminism Affected the Women of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* which was edited by Adriana Zaharijević in 2012, and whose fourth edition also included texts from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fifth cycle is currently being held, with 35 sessions of lectures and discussions held so far in Sarajevo, and also in Banja Luka. The idea which started it all was connected with opening a space to articulate critical review of various topics, primarily from a Feminist position. The lectures are intended for all people interested in different review policies, and the lectures are conceived in a way that after 60-minute introduction of the topic, there is space for questions and the unfolding of a debate. Some of the topics so far were

connected to workers' and social rights, critique of militarism, war rape, the ideological specter and gender issues in the political life in BiH, eroticism in Yugoslavian film, Women's Antifascist Front of BiH, ideology and language, challenges of Feminism today, Feminist criticism of political economics, the relationship between Feminism and right-wing, women's reproductive rights, Feminist readings of the life of women in the countryside, pornography, poverty... Lecturers were individuals from the academic community, younger and more experienced activists, artists from BiH and the region. We fondly remember one of the most visited discussion with women using social networks and the digital space for their Feminist activities. Marina, Hana and Dinja seduced, enchanted and make the audience laugh during the Pitchwise Festival in 2016.

*"The cycles of lectures called 'Somebody Said Feminism?' create a great story and they are my favourite activity by SOC. This cycle created a space for discussing not only current Feminist topics, but also the important questions and issues which influence our daily lives, and which previously had not been in the focus of discussions in the public sphere. The diversity of topics, and the great number of lecturers, thus also a diversity of perspectives, is what gives special attributes to these cycles. I really felt privileged to be part of this story. However, in addition to the great lectures and discussions which I like to look at again in recordings, listen to or recommend to others, there is another important detail of what happens before and after the events. Namely, every lecture is an opportunity to meet, hang out, create some new ideas and talk; about those 'important', but also those less 'important' topics."*

**Amila Ždralović, a lecturer at the cycle *Somebody Said Feminism?***

## ŽARANA PAPIĆ SCHOOL OF FEMINISM

### Context

In the mid 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina, academic workers and theoreticians, with the help of organisations dealing with women's rights started informal education and courses with Feminist agenda. The non-governmental organisation Women to Women started the project "Žarana Papić Women's Studies in BiH" which was envisaged as a two-semester course which would introduce the participants with the main ideas of Women's Studies. The International Forum Bosna, in cooperation with feminists opens the Centre for Gender Research (2002), offering numerous programs and workshops, and organising academic debates. The result of these debates was the special edition of the International Forum Bosna magazine dedicated to Feminism *The Challenges of Feminism* in 2004, edited by Jasminka Babić-Avdispahić, Jasna Bakšić-Muftić, Marina Katnić-Bakaršić and Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać. The quality of these programs is also witnessed by the fact that the associates for both were women professors from the University of Sarajevo, who would, in the academic year 2006/2007 also start the Master Studies program of Gender Studies within the Centre for Interdisciplinary Post-Graduate Studies at the University of Sarajevo.



### About the Žarana Papić School of Feminism

In 2015, the Sarajevo Open Centre used its Žarana Papić School of Feminism to continue the program of the Žarana Papić Women's Studies, which was started and organised by the Association Women to Women in 1998, as the first course on women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Žarana Papić School of Feminism is a free-of-charge two-semester academic-activist educational program, whose aim it is to use theoretical and practical modules and an advocating and activist seminar in order to offer Feminist education on theories, concepts and practices necessary for, among others, competent and critical public action in domestic, regional, international, governmental and non-governmental organisations. So far, more than 70 people completed the training in three generations. The lecturing staff is comprised of experts in different scientific fields: Aida Spahić, Lejla Mušić, Elmaja Bavčić, Dženita Hrelja, Đermana Šeta, Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović, Lejla Hadžiahmić Asja Bakić, Sandra Zlotrg, Bojana Đokanović, Adnan Kadribašić, Jelena Milinović, Kika Babić-Svetlin, Maida Čehajić, Miroslav Živanović, Danijela Majstorović, Tijana Okić, Amila Ždralović, Nebojša Jovanović, Ajla Demiragić, Damir Banović, Adriana Zaharijević, Selma Kešetović, Adrijana Hanušić-Bećirović, Gorana Mlinarević, Nela Porobić, Nejra Nuna Čengi, Tijana Cvjetičanin.

### Mission

The mission of the Žarana Papić School of Feminism is to offer Feminist education which will, through critical and analytical Feminist thought, empower people in political, cultural and civil initiatives to take over responsibility and be socially active. The Žarana Papić School of Feminism offers a revision and evaluation of dominant knowledge through cross-disciplinary Feminist formal, informal and neglected knowledge, in order to analyze political, cultural, social and legal questions, issues and contexts. The Žarana Papić School of Feminism equally affects the production of knowledge, enabling the interaction between sciences and different segments of society, as well as the encouragement of concrete advocating and activist initiatives in our environment.

*"For me, the Žarana Papić School of Feminism is one of the best ways of informal education I've ever had. There is a wide range of useful and interesting topics and modules, excellent lecturers, connections with other people of the same point of view, and all with the purpose of achieving noble goals – these are the most important things this school offers to me."*

**Matej Vrebac,**  
third generation participant at the Žarana Papić School of Feminism

*"I attended the Žarana Papić School of Feminism at the very end of my university studies, which enlightened me about the lack and non-existence of, not only, the Feminist awareness and speech, but also general non-existence of women's history in the entire formal education. This school has been one of the biggest turning points in my personal and social and academic action. I would say that the development of Feminist awareness is one of the key contributions of the Žarana Papić School of Feminism in a society whose unawareness, ignorance and lack of will hinder the development and improvement of a healthy individual and society."*

**Tanja Grabovac,**  
first generation participant at the Žarana Papić School of Feminism

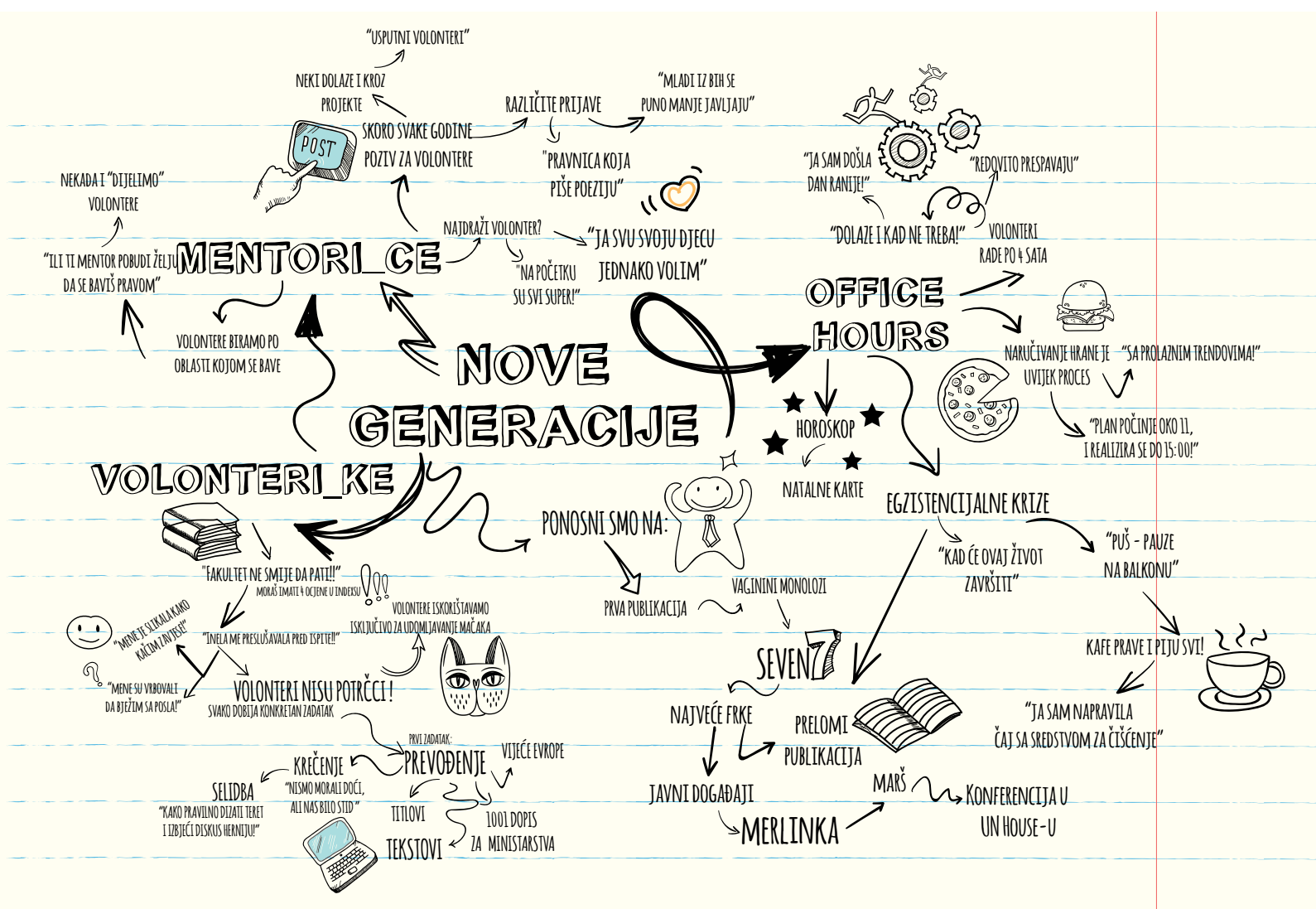


THEY'VE BEEN THROUGH THICK AND THIN, FROM ZODIAC READINGS TO EXISTENTIAL CRISES!

# SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE VOLUNTEERS

They have a mentor (sometimes more than one), fixed working hours, and a desk. They quickly learn what SOC is all about, how to organise a workshop, a conference or lay out a publication. They participate in advocacy work, campaigns and selflessly help out when times get rough. They are incredible ambassadors of Sarajevo Open Centre!

We're often pretty hard on them, but we believe we give them an excellent opportunity to work, learn and improve their skills. Our current and former volunteers reveal what it's like to work with SOC's team. Our brainstorming workshop brought out a fair share of laughs, as we dug out forgotten anecdotes as well moments that caused our hearts to swell with pride.



# AWESOME PEOPLE!

**Over the past ten years, SOC has established cooperation and partnerships with numerous individuals from the world of academia, art and science, as well as its natural allies – other non-governmental organisations. Our partnerships have transcended the boundaries of BiH and many of our collaborators have also become trusted friends whose expertise, knowledge and support have always been at our disposal. Remembering every single name is a difficult task, especially since we're working around the clock to get this publication out (same old, same old) so please don't be mad at us if you're not on the diagram. Just add your name/the name of your organisation!**

## GOOD THING SOC EXISTS, OTHERWISE WE'D HAVE TO INVENT IT!

*The first instinct of most people would be to describe a non-governmental organisation by what it does. However, I think an organisation is primarily defined by the people who work there. And when you have energetic individuals who are intent on changing the society for the better, then work becomes child's play. This is true of Sarajevo Open Centre. With their openness, honest approach and the values they uphold, SOC's team has opened many doors in BiH and built relationships and collaborations with numerous individuals and non-governmental organisations.*

*In a very short time, Sarajevo Open Centre established itself as a recognisable organisation that knows what it wants, works tirelessly and fastidiously to change the society and nurtures partnerships and cooperation with others.*

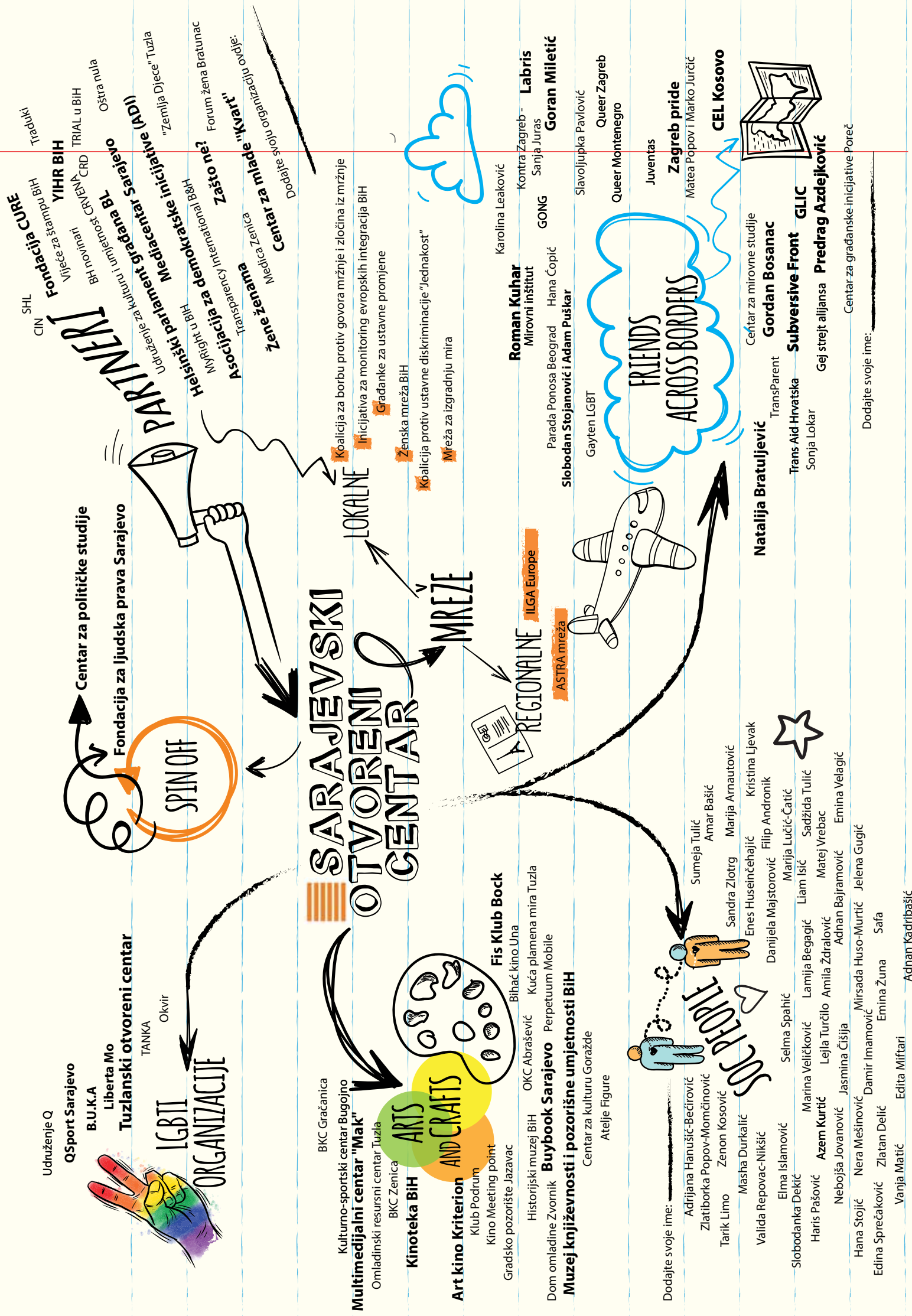


*The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka has been working with SOC for a few years. The relationship between the two organisations has long surpassed mere project partnership, and we hope it will continue for years to come. We consult each other, exchange opinions, react, support each other and celebrate every tiny improvement in human rights protection in BiH.*

*What makes Sarajevo Open Centre unique are the men and women who work there – their patience, perseverance, knowledge, fearlessness in trying to break down prejudice and stereotypes, promote the principle of equal opportunities in a society that unfortunately remains deeply patriarchal and traditional. They've been an example to us all how to go about our work, how to build relationships and bridges. In a very short period of time they've created the conditions for adopting or at least discussing various regulations and policies related to gender equality and especially the protection of LGBTI persons, which was a taboo topic in BiH until recently.*

*Finally, what else is there to say other than – good thing SOC exists, otherwise we'd have to invent it!*

**Dragana Dardić,**  
*executive director of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka*





## SOC'S GAY&amp;STRAIGHT PARTIES

## MAKING OUT

## WITHOUT FEARING A BLOW TO THE HEAD

From 2010 to 2015, SOC organised Gay & Straight parties on several locations in Sarajevo. The idea to start organising the parties came from Vanja Matić in 2010. At first they were held in a club called Podroom, relocating later to FIS Club in Sarajevo. SOC organised 75 parties in succession during the abovementioned period. Since then, the parties have become an occasional occurrence. Lejla, Naida, Dina and Jozo sat down for a chat to recall the highlights of the parties and how they contributed to building the LGBTI community.

Chat moderator: Masha Durkalić



Invitation to the first Gay and Straight Party, organized by SOC

**Masha:** How did the parties come about? What happened first?

**Dina:** By the time I started working in 2010, two parties had already taken place. Podroom was the location. We didn't have a say in setting the date, the owner of Podroom did it. He kept scheduling us for Thursday. Lots of people attended, but they were pissed because they had to work on Friday. The DJ was also hired by Podroom, so we had no say in the music either. At first I worked as a steward at the entrance, together with Arijana and Ivan.

**Lejla:** You know what, I never noticed you standing at the door :P

**Dina:** I once invited a friend from university. She was a steward twice. We even got tipped :D

**Naida:** Hahahaha, from the crowd coming in?

**Dina:** Yeah, from the crowd. They'd pay the 5 BAM to get in and leave 1 BAM for us.

**Naida:** Not a bad gig after all :)

**Dina:** We really didn't want to take the money, we kept telling them "We're actually paid to do this!"

**Masha:** What was the turnout for the parties at Podroom and what was the atmosphere?

**Dina:** There were lots of people. They weren't afraid. The bouncers in the club used to roll their eyes, but the people coming in were psyched! I remember this one time two guys got into an argument and one of them started to leave, but his partner caught up with him on the stairs, pinned him against the wall and started kissing him. Ivana and I blushed and we really wanted to watch but it felt awkward.

**Masha:** But you kept watching!

**Jozo:** Hahahaha :D

**Dina:** The bouncers frowned, but didn't say anything.

**Jozo:** They were stunned :D

**Masha:** Lejla, what do you remember about the parties in Podroom?

**Lejla:** That it was really fun and people danced a lot. I didn't know anyone and that made it more interesting :) I remember hooking up with a girl :) Those were the times :)

**Dina:** We soon discovered FIS. Saša contacted the owner and pitched the idea.

**Naida:** Q had organised parties in FIS before.

**Dina:** The FIS management gave us free rein to set our own date and play our own music.

**Masha:** Do you think the parties allowed members of the community to get to know each other. For two years after QSF nothing happened. Was this an opportunity to start new relationships?

**Dina:** Definitely. Lots of new relationships blossomed. Although there were also some old ones that fell apart, hahahaha.



**Lejla:** Oh yeah, I can speak from personal experience. This has always been a really important aspect. You could just tell that people were drunk on this sense of freedom.

**Naida:** People still crave these parties today, you can imagine how much they wanted them back then.

**Dina:** A lot of people used to leave their emails so we could invite them for the next one. The mailing list kept growing.

**Masha:** So, most of the work on trying to connect the community happened at the bar?

**Jozo:** That's right. Many people won't attend any other events, but they'll gladly hit the bar any time :D Some just need a little liquid courage to loosen their tongue, and that's totally ok :)

**Naida:** This is how I connected with other people when I worked at SOC. The alcohol, the music and the feeling that you were in safe space really made you let go. It just felt like home turf, which is how others get to feel every day of the week.

**Naida:** FIS was the perfect location. It had an outdoor patio, so in the summer you could dance, make out, talk and mingle there.

**Dina:** And you didn't have to worry about an idiot attacking you.

**Lejla:** Yeah, you could just make out without worrying about a blow to the head with a glass bottle.

**Masha:** So, FIS was *the place* for parties. Were there any notable love scenes? :)

**Jozo:** The lesbians would sometimes cause drama. And the gay guys would just point over to their boyfriends and that meant you were going home empty-handed hahahah :D

**Lejla:** I mainly stood on the stairs, watching. If I happened to hear a song I liked, I'd come down and dance. On the nights when I worked as one of the stewards, there would always be someone kind enough to cover for me while I busted a few moves or hooked up with a girl :)

**Dina:** A girl was trying to hit on me once and I said "I'm straight" and she was like: "Every girlfriend I ever had claimed to be straight". So I said: "But I'm in love, does that count?" and she replied: "Now, that one actually does count". And off she went...

**Masha:** How nice of her! How did the parties influence your work?

**Dina:** It was a great way for the community to gather, get new contacts and, eventually, build a group of people who are still regulars at SOC's event. We also recruited future co-workers :)

**Naida:** When I started working in SOC, I was a regular at all parties, regardless of who organised them. Okvir had already started doing their thing, after that came Qsport, so I visited other friendly places and I'd chat people up as we were dancing or waiting in line for the toilet. I'd tell them SOC was organising an event, slip a business card into their hands, dance a little, and they'd show up at the event. I did this because I wasn't really familiar with the newer generations, so I was trying to get around as much as I could :)

**Jozo:** Oh boy, I remember we used to call FIS "Lady Dampness" since it was always so smoky in there!

**Lejla:** Dina, didn't you once fall asleep at the entrance, or was it someone else?

**Dina:** Hahahaha, it was me! They played electronic music, and for some reason electronic music puts me to sleep. I worked as a steward that night and I simply dozed off, hahahaha :D I think Saša sent me home, and you stayed to watch the door.

**Jozo:** I think people who came to FIS were empowered by the experience and got to know each other. So they started attending other events as well.

**Lejla:** Yeah, sometimes we'd meet people at other places, at a non-LGBT event, inform them about the parties and they'd show up. It was wonderful.

**Masha:** I think the parties attracted a lot of people, not just LGBT, but also straight people.

**Dina:** That's right, a lot of straight people attended the parties, even straight couples.

**Jozo:** I remember lots of foreigners used to attend during SFF... For them it was the best party in town.

**Dina:** Some just wanted to check it out and ended up liking it, especially women.

**Masha:** Because everyone wants to dance! I think the parties were one of the go-to events in Sarajevo if you just wanted to dance.

**Lejla:** Yes, that was a really important part of it, that you could just dance without anyone staring at you. Back then, we had the energy to organise the parties. We didn't work as much so we had time to unwind and attend the party in the evening. Sometimes, though, we'd work all day long and then work at the entrance in the evening as stewards. But we didn't mind. We loved it. At least I did. It was hard work, but it was fun.



**Dina:** It became really hard when we started organising the parties twice a month. We were keeling over with exhaustion, but we had to stay there until the very end, stay sober because we were in charge and had to keep an eye on everything.  
**Jozo:** I remember I'd sometimes leave the last penny I had at FIS. But it was worth it, so I was never sorry :D However, the parties became a big burden after the attack on Merlinka in 2014. After that, we started notifying the police, asking for their presence every time.

**Lejla:** Since they were commercial events, we had to set aside money for them. And it wasn't cheap, plus we had to hire security guards. They never understood that we weren't hiring them because it was a commercial event, we did it for security reasons: not because of the people partying inside, but because of the jerks on the street.

**Masha:** How long did SOC organise the parties?

**Jozo:** From 2010 to 2014.

**Lejla:** It's quite a long period for a continuous streak of parties.

**Masha:** And then you stopped?

**Jozo:** Yes.

**Lejla:** We just didn't have the strength to continue and we also had problems with the management of FIS. The work at SOC had really picked up, and we simply couldn't do it all.

**Naida:** Others had also started organising them. Having parties of any kind is all that matters.

**Lejla:** We thought someone else would pick up the baton. It doesn't matter who organises the parties, they just need to exist. It's a great way to hang out, build a community and exchange experiences. It would be lovely to see some of the younger ones do it. We'd be happy to share all our knowledge and experience, so they could organise something, like Zbeleton in Zagreb.

**Masha:** SOC still organises parties occasionally?

**Lejla:** Yes, occasionally. The last one took place on 13<sup>th</sup> May at The Loft.

**Jozo:** We're just too busy, and there's a huge sense of responsibility towards those who attend.

**Lejla:** On the other hand, we know how important the parties are, so we compromised and decided to do them a few times a year, plus during Merlinka.

**Naida:** Also, there's the problem of finding the right location.

**Jozo:** I think there are people who could do a really good job of it. I live to see the day when all the different folks in Sarajevo who do LGBT-related stuff are able to give each other a helping hand.

**Masha:** People from other towns used to attend parties in Sarajevo, right?

**Dina:** Yes, a lot of them. I know a whole group of people from Tuzla, they used to come in just for the occasion.

**Lejla:** People from Zenica were regulars!

**Masha:** So, the need is still there, but the parties require robust logistics and organisation, and not everyone is up to the task.

**Lejla:** That's right.

**Dina:** We're expected to do it, because our parties were the best.

**Naida:** There are more organisations/initiatives now, but people are afraid to take up that kind of responsibility, although so much effort has gone into improving security.

**Masha:** Yes, responsibility and security are the key issues. Attending such an event is still pretty dangerous here.

**Jozo:** Yes, unfortunately.

**Lejla:** It was no less dangerous six years ago, but we didn't give up. We organised them and I honestly hope the parties continue. I hope the situation is sorted soon.

**Masha:** Time for final remarks, impressions, conclusions. Go ahead. ☺

**Dina:** We really need the parties, the right location as well as young people who could take it upon themselves to organise them. That's the conclusion.

**Naida:** I just feel there was more soul in everything back then. We were bolder, ready to just give it a go and see what happens. The young and the old attended the parties. It didn't matter what music was playing, because you were having a good time, it felt like you were home. You'd kiss and dance without a care in the world, because everyone knew it was just once a month, so you'd make sure to be there.

**Jozo:** The parties in Sarajevo were great. I'd like to see them again. It's important for people to get together and get to know each other. A message for the newer generations would be: feel free to take up the reins!

**Lejla:** The party offers all kinds of things: empowerment through talking to other people, wild fun, great kissing, bad or phenomenal sex, beautiful love stories, friendships and a massive hang-over that not everyone can cope with gracefully the next day :)

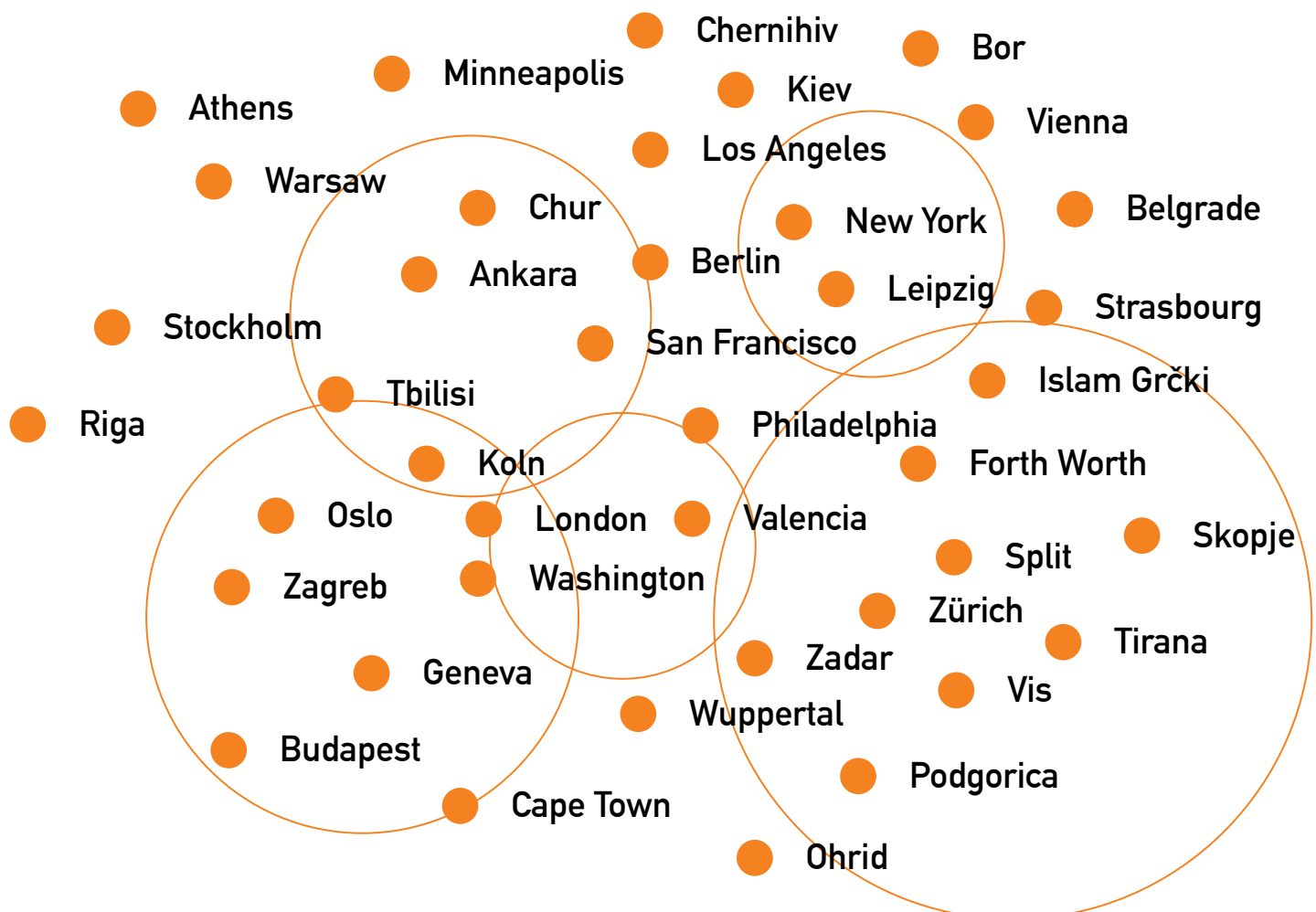


## TRAVELS OF SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE TEAM

# FROM CAPE TOWN TO LOS ANGELES

**Networking is indispensable to every civil society organisation. For us it has been a unique opportunity to meet new people, talk and learn from other activists, human rights advocates, the people who managed to change their communities, laws and policies for the better. This helped us improve our own work, gave us new ideas and the inspiration to continue pursuing our goals. We believe we have been good ambassadors and reciprocated the positivity of our hosts.**

## DESTINATIONS:



## SOC'S RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

# 10 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION

**Evaluation of two-year programme work of the Sarajevo Open Centre (2015–2016) has shown that six factors contributed to our success: approach to the work with individuals and institutions, recognition and production of 'advocacy champions', empowerment of other stakeholders in order to assume responsibility, knowledge production, internal organisation and method of work, and increased visibility. We have become an organisation with the capacity to advocate and to achieve institutional and legal changes of public policies that are significant and sustainable. The success does not mean so much to us if we are not able to share the learned lessons with others.**

### **1. Work, work, work, work, work!**

It is not uncommon to merge the work attitude, personal beliefs and activist approach in the NGO sector. Many SOC members sacrificed their private time in order to succeed in some of their intentions. Although we worked four hours a day at the beginning, once the organisation was professionalised in 2011, long of-fice work for more than eight hours a day paid off, but only because it followed strategic objectives, it was connected with other activities, and always considered other stakeholders and context analysis. We even stopped counting the lost weekends!

### **2. Life-long learning**

In an organisation where study nerds were preferred, an organisational culture was created where everyone was encouraged to learn: about finesses of BiH political system, advocacy, finance and administration, public communication, English... We attended numerous trainings, seminars and training programmes, but internal train-the-trainer sessions were particularly important. Constant learning is essential, because we don't possess sufficient knowledge ourselves, and we must never lose patience in transferring it to younger, new and less-experiences team members, including volunteers.

### **3. 'Impossible' objectives**

We would probably not achieve half of what we did if there weren't for the objectives that were set ambitiously, but not unrealistically. What helped us was the strategic plan which we delivered ourselves with some outside help, which encompassed the objectives we would like to see achieved. Finally, activities that contribute to each objective were implemented. In this way, we were able to constantly test if our work was leading us towards the attainment of our objectives and whether new activities we planned would potentially lead in the same direction.

### **4. Sandwich tactics**

Do you know enough delegates, decision makers? Do you communicate with them regularly? Do you keep them informed about your work, do you ask them about their plans? How often do you consult your end beneficiaries? Do you know their problems and can you mobilize them (and how quickly) to support your requests? Will there be a policy change, if it is not accompanied by a social change? If the change is introduced, will it be sustainable? How can media contribute to changes you advocate for? This is the series of

questions that we ask ourselves constantly, because we believe that it would be better and more effective to put pressure and request both top-to-bottom (decision makers) and bottom-up (from the base and community that we work for) changes.

## **5. Bring things to the end**

Sending a letter/mail/fax to an institution is not enough. You should call them and check if they received it. And seven days later, do it all over again because chances are big that the key person – maybe the one reading emails – is on a vacation. The same call should be made again a month later. Repeat if needed, until you get some reply. Nothing is easier than forget that you sent an inquiry to somebody, especially when you don't get any reply. Still, you bear the responsibility, because you want the reply, reaction or information. This rule especially applies to other, much more complex activities, such as advocacy actions.

## **6. External communication**

Website, Facebook, YouTube, newsletter, press conferences, presentations, info sessions... We used different means and methods to present our work and successes to others. Work in a non-governmental organisation is often a mystery for people outside: what do they do and – more importantly – how they do it? Our biggest challenge was how to communicate so that decision makers, but also young students and the neighbour hairdresser upstairs can understand us. Remember that it is very important to be transparent with all partners and beneficiaries about the method of work and results, and with the donors about money spending. If you do your job well, let others know about it!

## **7. Coalitions, initiatives, networks**

Many of our successes would not have happened without the support of other civil society organisations and activists. Simple math tells us that other organisations have similar or the same objectives, and that joint endeavours can only benefit us. Advocating for inclusion of hate crime in the Criminal Code of FBiH is an excellent example, because it did not only concern LGBTI people, but also returnees, Roma people and many others. In this way, civil society's requests have greater legitimacy before the government, and the civil society's voice becomes stronger.

## **8. Celebrate your victories**

After the first thematic session in any parliament in BiH about LGBTI rights, which took place at our initiative, we opened a bottle of Champaign. True, it was cheap, but it did not spoil our celebration. It is important to recognise victories, however small they may seem, in order to gain the feeling that we are contributing to changes and that the efforts we put in changing of the society, public policies and laws were not wasted. Also, our work should make as happy and fulfilled, and if you follow this advice, it will happen.

## **9. Look for new challenges**

You managed to do something? Excellent, let's move on! Celebrate, but don't get carried away by your success. The world is still spinning around, and probably still needs your activities. Read, follow new trends and research, depending on available time and obligations. Find the time if you don't have it!

## **10. Know when to stop**

Sometimes, things are simply beyond our control. No matter how hard we try, we are not able to influence some changes to the extent we would want. When that happens, the smartest thing you can do is stop, measure three times and evaluate the situation, and simply let it go, if necessary. On the other hand, sometimes certain battles need to be restarted, viewed from a different perspective, with the help of people outside, if possible. You certainly shouldn't put your head through a wall, if you don't want to get a headache afterwards.



# ACTIVIST STAR FORECAST

**Horoscope –everyone reads is, but nobody believes it. As we were marking the 10 great activist years, we couldn't resist to use the favourite entertainment format and look at the most important activist moments from the past as well as the future ones through the prism of 12 zodiac signs. Don't take this activist horoscope too seriously, but remember all these important events and join us in the activities we implement in order to mark them. Our activist horoscope offers new moments, ideas and activities. Because, let's be honest, who doesn't like to read a positive horoscope? Take a look at our activist star forecast!**

Written by: Nera Mešinović



## MERLINKA

The Sarajevo Open Centre has organised queer film festival Merlinka in late January for several years in a row. Sun is mostly in Aquarius in that period, which is followed by Capricorn, the hardest worker in Zodiac. Thus we see that a great artistic and social event follows after hard work, with Aquarius-like progressive principles of equality and human rights. Also, planet Uranus, natural ruler of Aquarius is currently positioned in Aries until 2024, which means that activist efforts will be rewarded and encouraged by the fiery strength of Mars.



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Women's Day was marked for the first time in New York on 28 February 1909 under the rule of the constellation of fluid Pisces. The biggest potential of sensitive Pisces lies in the fact that they know no limits between self and others. Ocean is the metaphor for Pisces and this is exactly what we have seen on the streets of many world cities for more than a hundred years – women and men photographed from bird's-eye perspective, who look like a big river, unrecognisable as individuals. Like many other people and organisations, the Sarajevo Open Centre participated in the protest march, joined in empathy and joint awareness raising of differences between experiences, which was followed by appropriate discussion within the programme entitled *Somebody said 'feminism.'*



### LGBTI HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK AND TRANS\* VISIBILITY DAY

In the first week of the new horoscope year, which coincides with the first day of Aries constellation rule, we talk about important topics. LGBTI Health Awareness Week lasts from 26 to 30 March. Aries rules the following parts of the body: head, brain, eyes, sinuses and ears. Allergies are frequent

during this period, and they activate processes on the head, and we advise LGBTI persons, primarily Scorpio, Aries, Virgo and Cancer to be prepared. (P.S. If you need condoms, come to one of SOC's get-togethers.)

Another important date is March 31st, the Trans\* Visibility Day. The tradition of marking this day was introduced in 2009 and, not surprisingly – under the rule of Aries. Persons born with Sun in Aries always express their dissatisfaction and refuse to be silenced. In terms of activism, this is a priceless quality. Cycle of new battles and conquering of free spaces begin in the spring. Maybe this is not the best time for soundless coming out, but it certainly is the time for building and confirming one's bodily and mental integrity. The Sarajevo Open Centre worked on the draft proposal for the law that would facilitate access to administration for trans\* people who want to change personal documents.



### IDAHOT

During the IDAHOT-a – the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia – when the Sun is in Taurus (its natural ruler is Venus), planetary environment is the best for nightlife and enjoyment in DJing and VJing. Members of the LGBTI community with Sun in Taurus and Libra are especially recommended to pay attention to potential wooers in

the signs of Aries, Gemini or Virgo.

Moreover, Earth is the second ruler of Taurus, and thus May is the best month to go out into the streets and protest. Nature flourishes, as well as the activist ideas in the minds of Capricorn and Sagittarius. Aquarius and Pisces imagine ideas and utter mantras asking for the events to go by without any incidents and with many creative conclusions. Cancer and Leo have taken care of the picnic, and Scorpio members write a liberating manifesto.



### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IT'S TIME FOR EQUALITY

Referendum for marital equality took place in Ireland in the Gemini sign on 22 May 2015. Gemini is a sign that created democracy, a researcher of all forms of communication, and therefore referenda are not unknown to it. Gemini energy is positive and progressive, and it is no surprise that the majority

voted for marital equality in Ireland. It was a big deal for Ireland. And we had the chance to hear about this campaign at the international conference entitled *It's time for equality*, which was organised by the Sarajevo Open Centre in February 2017. We learned from Craig Dwyer who participated in the YesEquality campaign for marital equality in Ireland that equality and progress can be achieved even in the more conservative societies, under the rule of the excellent communicator Mercury. Also, for SOC members, this was an excellent period for strategic planning.



### SOCIALISING WITH THE COMMUNITY

It's time for summer and vacations. The Sun, which is entering the Cancer constellation, brings the feeling of relaxation and self-pampering with its intense rays. At that very point, SOC's coordinator for work with the community, Nikola, as a representative of Cancer sign recognised that it was the time for barbecue, music and sun. As

the Moon is the ruler of Cancer, conversations full of impressions and emotions continued late into the night, in privacy of SOC's premises. Activist work was focused on the inside – getting over the *burn out*, and evaluation of the past period. It is great to know that there is *peer to peer* counselling or someone who will listen to your ideas. We therefore encourage everybody who has ideas or wants to talk to send an email to [nikola@soc.ba](mailto:nikola@soc.ba). (Even in the funny horoscope, Cancer has to offer some service.)



### THE PRIDE

Late July and August were reserved for annual leaves of the Sarajevo Open Centre's team. In the constellation of Leo, the vacation is certainly not a mere relaxation on the beach. Sun as the ruler of Leo brings us high temperatures and enormous quantity of energy for socialising. This is an excellent period for travel and meeting new people. Also, under this influence, it's

time to celebrate the hard work, and gay prides that take place throughout Europe at this time make an ideal opportunity.



### 10 YEARS OF EXISTENCE OF THE SARAJEVO OPEN CENTRE

On the tenth anniversary of the Sarajevo Open Centre – 30<sup>th</sup> of August – the Sun again falls in the constellation of Virgo. The Sun is the alert part of our personality, and when it falls under Virgo, we can be sure that all the work we commenced will be finished with great attention and studiousness. Virgo, ruled

by Mercury (in this respect, Mercury rules the higher intellectual concepts, like a structure composed of parts where none of them is neglected), knows and recognises social mechanisms of oppression very well, and it is one of the rare Zodiac signs which commences extensive work, such as the one done by the Sarajevo Open Centre, with the vision of a more just society. In its higher domain, in Virgo, Mercury offers great patience and dedication to detail, and this explains the advocacy initiatives and efforts put in finding a way to work with the institutions. Thus, in late 2016, the Sarajevo Open Centre greatly influenced the adjustment of the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination Law of BiH, which is the first anti-discrimination law in countries of Southeast Europe which includes sex characteristics as prohibited grounds for discrimination.



### COMING OUT

The constellation of Libra falls in the seventh house on the natal chart, which rules very personal relations, but unlike the rule of Sagittarius where the relations would be free to develop naturally, Libra rules relations that are regulated by social norms, such as marriages or employment contracts. Libra is ruled by Venus (in its higher form compared to the rule of the

earth sign Taurus, in Libra, Venus becomes the principle of harmony, but the one which relies on abstract agreements). It is the scale that weighs patriarchy on the one side, and offers empty space on the other side for public speeches. This tells us that patriarchy prevails, and Libra doesn't deny it. However, Libra also teaches us the lightness of movement, of speech, balance between physical and the spiritual, and sincere self-expression in the society. On 11<sup>th</sup> of October, the world marks the International Coming Out Day, and that is when the space opens for discussions, under the influence of extrovert and just Libra. More and more LGBTI persons seek balance between their feelings about who they are and the part of those feelings that they may present in the society. This was visible from results of the research of problems and needs of the LGBTI community in BiH, which was carried out by the Sarajevo Open Centre in 2017; publishing of the research is expected soon.



### ACTIVIST JUBILEES

From late October until mid-November, many dates were dedicated to marking of activist jubilees. This period is ruled by the seemingly ill-omened and ill-natured Scorpio. Scorpio, which is ruled by Pluto, a planet of deep spiritual and bodily transformation, is often of ill repute. When the Scorpio sign is mentioned in everyday discussions, everyone usual-

ly starts talking about how they are all lunatics and maniacs. Scorpio possesses powerful poison and people are often afraid of it. Pluto is an external planet, it moves very slowly and needs 20 years to cross a sign, but as it moves, it transforms things, mostly not in a good way. We live in the world which denies eternity and importance of emotional and intellectual processes. Scorpio, an arena which rules the cycles of birth and death, plays the key role in social transformation on this very day. Namely, apart from raising awareness of the need for transformation of civilisation settings, it loudly speaks about taboos. Thus, in the end of October, we mark the Asexuality Awareness Week, then the Breast Cancer Awareness Day (October



24<sup>th</sup>), and the Intersex Awareness Day (October 26<sup>th</sup>), and the International Transgender Day of Remembrance to memorialise those who have been murdered as a result of transphobia and hatred (November 26<sup>th</sup>.) This is when Scorpio reminds us about the existence of both sexuality and asexuality, promotes ideas of non-binarity, organises big rebellion requesting adequate and non-invasive treatment for inter-sex persons, as well as a breast cancer awareness campaign. There she is, walking shirtless down Ferhadija street, out of spite.



### 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

In late November, we enter the Sagittarius constellation rule. Vital energy that Centaurus's body radiates and the feeling for justice derived from enormous reading experience are the biggest qualities of this sign. Chiron, the great teacher of almost all Antic heroes is the mythical image which gave the name to this constellation. Jupiter, Roman God of heaven, the largest planet in the Solar System is the ruler of Sagittarius. Its influence is strong, but expansive. It seems that persons born in this sign always carry great zest and enthusiasm. Many astrologers, when writing about activism and horoscope, say that this sign is the most dedicated activist compared to all others. Sagittarius always takes the side of those with the least heard voice. From 25 November to 10 December, we mark 16 days of activism opposing violence against women. Since Jupiter is the planet of expansion and collectivity, campaigns take place in the large part of the world. On the International Human Rights Day, on 10 December 2016, the Sarajevo Open Centre organised a protest march, presenting requests dealing with neglected human rights. We are looking forward to the continuation of this tradition, and we hope that the influence of Sagittarius will encourage many others to join us in the joint walk this year, for the joint cause.



### NO WINTER SLEEP

It is the time of big changes, almost tectonic ones, in the world. Increase of neofascistic tendencies has caused a lot of concern in the activist community. But persons born with the sun in Capricorn will certainly not let anyone see that. We already mentioned that Capricorn is the hardest worker of all Zodiac signs, but we think that this deserves more clarification. In the winter, when it starts snowing in December, we need more energy in our part of the world to keep us warm. And in such a cold way, like the winter, Saturn - the strict father - emphasises responsible behaviour as an imperative for persons born in Capricorn. This means that Capricorn members must invest much more energy and work in order to get gifts from Saturn. It is natural for a Capricorn, if they feel responsible for an activist idea, to focus all available resources on it and to invest much more energy than any other Zodiac sign would invest. LGBTI persons born in this sign must be constantly reminded that life cannot be all work and no fun, but for activists born in this sign, fun and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. Director of the Sarajevo Open Centre was born under the rule of Capricorn constellation, and she is an example of tireless enthusiasm and persistent and dedicated work. The head of finance is also a Capricorn, and we can be sure that there will be no omissions in that domain.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR DONORS  
THAT HAVE SUPPORTED OUR WORK IN THE PAST 10 YEARS!

