

HUMAN RIGHTS RETRAINING OF LAWYERS IN THE COUNTRIES OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA – PROJECT SUMMARY

Twelve years after the wars ended on the territory of former Yugoslavia states in the region have incorporated the most important international human rights instruments. Reports of the international organisations and monitoring bodies confirm that important improvements in the existing legislations were made after the democratic changes in the countries in the region. However, the practice remained mostly like in former Yugoslavia: recognised international standards are seldom or never directly applied, i.e. judges almost never base their decisions on recognised international standards but make decisions in accordance only with local legislation. Thus, the greatest challenge remains how to change the interpretation of laws and how to introduce the culture of human rights among the professionals responsible for human rights implementation and protection of citizens. Unfortunately, the attitudes of the judiciary result in clash of “national legislations *versus* international standards”.

Since 2002, partner organisations in the project *Human Rights Retraining of Lawyers in the Countries of Former Yugoslavia* have been implementing planned activities with the assistance of the **Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, Norwegian human rights advisor, Ms. Gro Hillestad Thune and the **Norwegian People’s Aid** SEE office in Belgrade. This is a unique continuous project in the area of European Court for Human Rights jurisprudence and retraining of lawyers with regional dimension in the South-East Europe.

Designed as three three-year-cycle project (the first cycle: 2002-2005, the second: 2005-2007 and the third and final 2008-2011), the project has substantially contributed to re-establishing the contacts among legal professionals in the region and thus to the reconciliation process in the countries of former Yugoslavia, which is being considered as an important valued added to the basically professionally-oriented project.

Partners in this project are NGOs from the Balkan region: **Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Zagreb)**, **Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (Serbia)**, **University of Sarajevo Centre for Human Rights (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**, **Human Rights Action (Podgorica, Montenegro)** and **Forum Centre for Documentation and Research (Skopje, Macedonia)**. Their cooperation has roots in founding of the Balkan Human Rights Network, in 1998. The aim of the cooperation, based on the principles of democracy and transparency, is to contribute to the democratisation of the region, fostering protection of human rights, peace and reconciliation in each country and the whole region.

Target group:

- Legal professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia: judges, prosecutors, public defenders and attorneys
- Government officials involved in the reform of judiciary in the countries of the former Yugoslavia (officials from the Ministries of Justice, Ministries of Local Government, National Judiciary Training Institutions, Ombudsman’s institutions, etc.)
- Human rights NGOs lawyers/activists