

MIR



AUTHORS



ADELISA Mašić



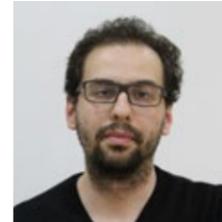
ALEM Bajramović



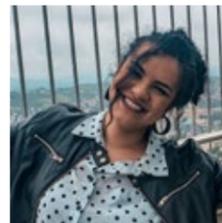
ALMEDINA Alihodžić



ALMEDINA Mehić



AMIR Barleci



AMRA Ćatić



ANJA Zulić



ARMIN Halilović



BENISA Bibuljica



DANICA Novaković



DUNJA Rujević



DŽENISA Joldić



ELMA Hasanspahić



ENA Rizvić



FRANCISKA Fischer



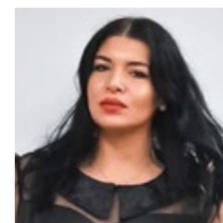
IRMA Ahmetspahić



KRISTINA Gadže



MATIJA Krivošić



MELANI Isović



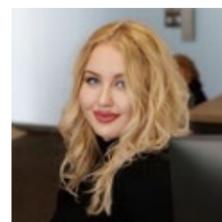
MIRNES Bakija



MOLLY Munro



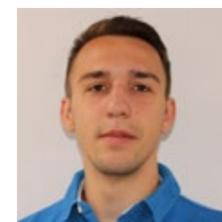
MUAMER Zukanović



NEDA Vukadin



SELMA Mašić



SELMIR Smajić



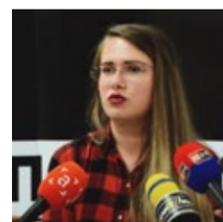
SERGI Cuadra Dominguez



SUMEJA Mehmedović



RAMO Tučić



VANJA Šunjić



AMINA Sejfić

AIDIN Kamber, ALEM Bajramović, ALMIR Kljuno, AMEL Uzunović, AMINA Imamović, ARMIN Durgut, DAMIR Balić, DARKO Kojić, DENIS RUVIĆ, DIJANA Markuš, EDIN Suljić, ELVIS Šabić, HANNAN Delić, HARIS Badžić, HARIS Ljutić, JESSICA Podraza, JOSE Salcedo Jimenez, MATIJA Krivošić, MIRNES Bakija, MITAR Simikić, MUNA Nazak, RAMO Tučić, RAISA Šehu, RENE Baker, SAFET Isović, SELMA Mašić, SLAĐANA Palikuća, VEDRAN Ševčuk Alf.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the second edition of MIR Magazine, an annual publication developed by the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC) and Balkan Diskurs. MIR is the first peacebuilding magazine in the Western Balkans dedicated to the **promotion of young, innovative people who push social and creative boundaries throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the region.**

We have developed this edition in light of the current challenges of preserving peace in Europe and the world: from war and narratives of division to the importance of environmental action for building sustainable peace. With regard to our country becoming an official candidate for membership of the European Union (EU), the magazine also reviews the role of the international community in BiH and the steps we must take in ensuring our EU future.

Last year, **PCRC successfully influenced the formal education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, by integrating our peacebuilding work in the official school curriculum in the Canton of Sarajevo. Through the "Holocaust & Peace" teaching manual that was created by teachers from all over BiH, students across the public school system will, for the first time ever, learn about peace as part of their classes from the 2023/24 school year.

The articles, essays, and interviews in this edition were written by 33 authors, Balkan Diskurs youth correspondents from 20 cities across BiH, and the world. Their work, dedication and innovation are the main reasons for our team to continue working on the production of this and similar projects. The youth correspondents worked under the supervision of our team, and my deepest gratitude goes out to Tatjana, Safet, Erna, Amina, Colton, Kristina and Marko for their trust and effort.

The development of MIR Magazine is financially supported by the PCRC's core funders, including the National Endowment for Democracy, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Sigrid Rausing Trust. Printing of the magazine is supported by the Embassy of Canada through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) and the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (Slovak Aid).

I hope that, upon reading this magazine, you will **better understand the importance of investing in education and the invaluable role of young people in building a better future for all.**

Velma Šarić
President, Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC)



Concept development, production and curation
Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC)

Editor-in-Chief
Velma Šarić

Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Tatjana Milovanović

Editorial Team
Erna Mačkić
Georgio Konstandi
Safet Šarić
Monica Green
Colton Harrington

Translator
Amina Sejfić

Authors
Balkan Diskurs
Youth Correspondents

Cover page
Damir Balić

Design&DTP
Bezbeli



Concept development, magazine creation and publishing is supported by:



Printing of the magazine is supported by:



The content of this publication represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility, and it cannot be considered to reflect the views of the magazine developers or the donors.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Editor's Note

ORDINARY HEROES

- 4 Heroes from our Neighbourhood
- 6 In conversation with the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to BH, Ambassador Johann Sattler
- 8 Youth in Peacebuilding: Respecting the History of All
- 10 Returning Religious Objects Marks Bosnia's Sacred Path to Reconciliation
- 13 The Man from Zenica: Gluing Back Together Broken Families

TRAVELING THROUGH BH

- 14 Where Bosnian, Hungarian and Ottoman Influences Collide: A Peer into Bosnia's "Silver Town"
- 16 Robert Dacešin: The Traveler from Banja Luka Putting Bosnia on the Map
- 18 Crossing the Rivers of Time: A Wander Over Four Bosnian Bridges
- 20 Bistrik Railway Station: Sarajevo's Historical Diamond
- 22 Walls that Unite: The Power of Murals in BH
- 24 Bosnia's Ongoing Battle Against Landmines: Pažnja! Zabranjen Prolaz!
- 26 Cycling Path Fuels Inter-Entity Cooperation in BH

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TRADITION

- 28 Tavla by the Neretva: Bosnia's Lasting Tradition
- 29 Art Lapis: Setting Herzegovina's Scenery in Stone
- 30 Forged by Ancient Mastery: the Bosnian Jeweler's Preserving an Age-Old Art
- 33 Šipovo's Cheese Pie: A Dish Worth Revering
- 34 Picturesque Livno: A City of Cheese and Wild Horses
- 36 Folk Dance: The Essence of BH Cultural Identity
- 39 Coffee and Ćejf: A Delve into Bosnia's Daily Ritual
- 40 Sicanje: Restitching a Lost Catholic Tradition

BALKAN DISKURS

- 42 Inspiration and Positive Mind



ART, FASHION AND MUSIC

- 44 Charna: A Hard-Rock Bosnian Success Story
- 46 The Sarajevo Artist Who Turned his Hobby into a Business
- 48 KAUR: The New Sustainable Fashion Brand By Two Bosnian Women
- 50 Tuzla's Master Pencil Craftsman
- 52 Elani: the Banja Luka Fashion Line Taking the World by Storm
- 54 No Nation Fashion: Sustainable Fashion & New Doors for People on the Move
- 58 "Žvrlja": Turning Children's Drawings into Jewelry
- 60 Bend S-alt: Tuzla's New Alternative Band Making Waves in BH
- 62 SFF: A Symbol of Sarajevan Defiance
- 64 Sarajevo Philharmonic: 101 Years of a Visionary Force of Classical Music

PEACE AND LOVE

- 66 Love Tales
- 68 Recognising the Unrecognisable: Mixed Marriages in Post-War Bosnia
- 71 Brčko Monument: a Sign of Peaceful Coexistence and Reconciliation
- 72 The Peace Festival: In Celebration of Harmony
- 74 Canada and BH: In conversation with Ms. Neelu Shanker, Chargée d'affaires a.i., Embassy of Canada to Hungary, Slovenia and BH
- 76 Friendship and Goodwill: The Enduring Italian Presence in B&H
- 78 With a Little Goodwill, BH Can Be Better

YOUTH & SUSTAINABLE PEACE BUILDING

- 80 Queer People's Plight in BH
- 84 Violence is Not Love: The Need for Prevention and Awareness
- 86 Bosnia's EU Accession: A Pipe Dream?
- 88 Holocaust and Peace: Lessons from the Past for the Future
- 90 La Benevolencija: Preserving Jewish Culture in BH
- 92 Romeo and Juliet in Bosnia: A Tale, or Reality?
- 94 The Ex-Yu Rock Centar: Celebrating Yugoslav Rock
- 96 Humanity in Action: More than a Game
- 98 Ramo Tučić: The Bosnian Artist of Endless Mediums
- 100 Women in Small Business: Inspiring Future Entrepreneurs

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION FOR LASTING PEACE

- 104 Discover the Mountainous Beauty of BH
- 106 'Apathy is not an Option': Bosnian Climate Activists Raise the Alarm
- 109 Kruščica's Bridge of Brave Women
- 110 The People Fighting "Fast" Fashion in the Balkans
- 114 Zdravo Zaza: The Banja Luka Sweet Store Revolutionising Desserts
- 116 Sarajevo's Green Art: From Waste to Ace
- 120 Artist's Words



HEROES FROM OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Tekst: Velma Šarić
 Photography: private archives, Spid Swimming Club, Jessica Podraza (Unsplash)



Your local doctor, lady at the grocery store, post worker, or a random passenger on a bus. You see these heroes every day. Through humanitarianism, activism, education, sports, art, and science, these ordinary heroes work to break down the barriers of Bosnia's deeply divided society, fragmented by a complex and problematic political system.

Although being a geography teacher requires Vedran Zubić to teach about borders, he strives to erase the invisible borders he sees in all his classes. He notes his daily mission is to make classroom divisions invisible, erase boundaries, and prepare his students to navigate the world. In May 2017, he was awarded Teacher of the Year by the Sarajevo Canton Student Council, and five years later, he was recognized as one of the five best educators in the world with the Global Teacher Award. When he is not in the classroom, Vedran is active on social media, offering advice on education and encouraging teachers to speak up, be proactive, and contribute to the betterment of society. Vedran is a reminder of the enormous importance of teachers and educators, and that education is the cornerstone of every healthy society.

Indeed, a single person can have a major impact on society, setting great things and good deeds in motion with small steps. Mirza Mustafagić, an influencer from Tuzla, utilized social media to launch a campaign for oncology patients at the University Clinical Centre in Tuzla, who have been facing a shortage of functioning radiation equipment for almost a year. On his Instagram profile, with 90 thousand followers, he organized the campaign "You can be that person too", sharing hundreds of testimonies from oncology patients. In just two weeks, the campaign collected over 150 thousand euros in donations from over four thousand legal entities, individuals, and public budgets. In addition to helping patients in Tuzla, part of the donations will go to medical centers in Zenica, Banja Luka, and Mostar.

The journey of ordinary heroes is never easy, particularly in societies still dealing with poverty, discrimination, and prejudice. From such circumstances emerged an inspiring story of thirteen-year-old Ismail Zulfić and his coach, Ahmed Kapo. Ismail was born without upper extremities and with a deformity in his right leg, but this has not stopped him from becoming a competitive swimmer, winning medals, and the nickname "the wingless butterfly". Beyond the hundreds of competitions and dozens of medals, their proudest achievement is changing the

mindset of their community, breaking stereotypes, and demonstrating that, with the right opportunities, people with disabilities can achieve great things. Coach Kapo recognized this potential and its importance for society when he founded the Spid Swimming Club, which brings swimming as a practice to over a hundred children with various disabilities, the only sports club of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A similar story of perseverance follows Lana Pudar, Bosnia's most successful swimmer bringing our country its first-ever senior international swimming medal, at the age of 15. Lana was born and raised in Mostar, a city without an adequate swimming pool for training, which forced her to constantly travel to Sarajevo and other cities to train for years. With diligence and perseverance, Lana has broken multiple national records. She finds joy in representing her country and seeing that she has inspired other young people to pursue sports and prompted public authorities to commit to investing in better athletic facilities.

Inspiration and friendship are what brought together Alma Numić and Mara Milanković-Daradan. The two peace activists came together after the Bosnian War to share their wartime experiences with young people, in order to educate them on the importance of preserving peace and living together. Both Alma and Mara were wounded during the war – Alma was

made a refugee and Mara was a member of the Republika Srpska Army.

"Through peace activism, I have opened my soul, met many good people—now friends from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, from Mostar, to Sarajevo, to Prijedor—and thus avoided trapping myself in the ideals of the war-torn nineties," Alma reflected.

They both note it has been incredibly difficult to come to a point of honesty and trust to share these stories with strangers and open their hearts repeatedly. "We live our dreams by building peace and unity in our homeland, Bosnia and Herzegovina," added Mara.

Thanks to peace activism, the wartime bravery of women like Jelena Križanac from Krčevina in Vitez Municipality, will not be forgotten. Described as a hero by her fellow citizens, she displayed remarkable courage and wisdom, saving lives with no regard for ethnic or religious affiliation. Jelena, a Catholic, knelt before soldiers and pleaded for the lives of 40 Bosniak neighbors who were imprisoned in a house that had been doused in gasoline. Although her heart stopped beating on April 25th, 2020, her neighbors say she will live forever in the hearts of the people she saved, giving them a new chance at life. Jelena's act of moral courage, which she never spoke of while she was alive, serves as a source of hope for all of us that even in the darkest of times, some will stand up to evil for the sake of common humanity.

One well-known story of moral courage is the one from the Bosnian village of Baljive. This village in the northwest has a long history of peaceful living. Even during the Bosnian War their residents, Serbs and Bosniaks, actively chose not to fight against each other. For centuries, Bosniaks have inhabited the lower part of the village, and Serbs the upper part, with properties situated between the two areas, yet no property disputes have been recorded among neighbors. During the last war, they organized joint patrols to prevent unwelcome incursions that could disrupt the peace in their village. Baljvine residents themselves often struggle to explain exactly how they have been able to maintain peace, but "respect" is a word that is used often—respect for neighbors and friends, and the readiness to help anyone in need.

28 years on from war and one thing remains strikingly clear: Bosnia is filled with heroes from our neighborhood.





IN CONVERSATION WITH THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO BH, AMBASSADOR JOHANN SATTLER

Interview led by: Velma Šarić
Photography: European Union to BiH

During your mandate as Head of the Delegation of the European Union to BiH and Special Representative of the European Union, BiH received candidate status for membership in the European Union. How challenging was this journey for your Delegation and what were the biggest problems, but also the successes on this journey? What are the first next steps for BiH regarding EU membership and your expectations for future reforms in the country?

Candidate status was a historic moment for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It should never be forgotten that the European Union is first of all a peace project, founded with the objective to integrate the societies and economies of Europe so closely that war is not only unthinkable, but materially impossible. The EU path of Bosnia and Herzegovina has a special significance, and every milestone that this country reaches is cause for celebration.

In December, Bosnia and Herzegovina also received a promise from the European Council – i.e. the heads of state and government of EU

member states – that accession negotiations will be opened once the necessary level of compliance with the membership criteria is reached. On 21-22 March the European Council will meet again and it will be absolutely crucial for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make the necessary progress on key reforms that will persuade the EU member states unanimously to open accession negotiations.

The BiH authorities know which reforms are needed. Legislation to strengthen the rule of law is crucial, including laws that will strengthen the fight against corruption and organised crime. It would also help Bosnia and Herzegovina's case for the EU to open accession negotiations if steps are taken to strengthen the integrity of elections. The protection of fundamental values is a key element of the EU accession process and to this end, we are concerned with the decision of the Republika Srpska leadership to criminalise defamation and draft legislation that places limitations on the freedom of civil society. Threats to the constitutional order from the Republika Srpska leadership are also unacceptable and run counter to BiH's EU path.

In terms of challenges on the path to the EU, one of the biggest obstacles is the inability of

politicians to seek win-win solutions that benefit all. There is a culture where unfortunately compromise is too often seen as something humiliating. Instead of seeking a solution where everyone wins, but also everyone has to make small sacrifices, political leaders too often seek complete victory. In doing so, everyone loses. Compromise and dialogue are essential to the functioning of the European Union – it is the only way that 27 countries with different political cultures and traditions can emerge stronger together.

Nonetheless, at various times during my mandate, when there was political will, allegedly impossible agreements or reforms suddenly became possible. We need to see more of that spirit over the course of 2024.

A big problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina is still the departure of young people to other countries where they stay and continue their lives. What are the Delegation's thoughts on this matter and does the candidate status have the possibility to change the perception of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

For me, it is natural that young people should want to spend some time abroad. Exposure to



other cultures and ways of seeing and doing things broadens the mind and encourages tolerance and wider perspectives. The problem – as you yourselves note – is that all too often the young people that leave Bosnia and Herzegovina do not return.

Every step that Bosnia and Herzegovina makes forward on the EU path brings with it benefits that should encourage more people to build their future here. Reforms to meet EU standards, for example in the rule of law, the fight against corruption, human rights, democratisation, energy transition, the environment, digitalisation and public administration reform improve the quality of life for everyone that lives here.

I am glad the EU is also investing in young people in BiH. I have had the good fortune to meet talented young people such as entrepreneurs, civil society activists, artists and researchers, some of whom have also received EU support. These are young people that have a real commitment to this country and make me optimistic about the future.

As a last point, I would also say that not only are too many young people from BiH leaving, but not enough young people from abroad are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would really encourage young people from around the world to spend time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly so-called 'digital nomads' who can work from anywhere. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not only a country of stunning natural beauty, it has diverse cultures and traditions that young people from around the world can learn from.

The EU delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina works closely with Bosnia and Herzegovina civil society. How do you see the development of civil society in BiH and how significant is it on the European path of our country?

Democracy is much more than voting. If all it takes to be a democracy is regular voting, then Russia, which goes to the polls in March this year, is a democracy, when it is clearly not.

Democracy comprises a large number of fundamental values and principles, one of which is the right to freely associate with other like minded people. Indeed, I frequently encourage people – young people in particular – to find a cause they are passionate about and pursue it.

This could be the environment, this could be disability rights, it could be inter-faith dialogue, or animal welfare. It could be anything.

I would say that Bosnia and Herzegovina has an impressive and determined civil society sector, which I am also glad that the EU has been able to provide support to. Civil society is crucial for the EU path and strengthening democracy also involves strengthening avenues for organised activism to change Bosnia and Herzegovina for the better.

Threats to limit the freedom of civil society, for example the draft legislation on 'foreign agents' in Republika Srpska is unacceptable. It should also be said that while the challenges to civil society are most acute in Republika Srpska, there are also threats to the functioning of civil society in the Federation as well. We will continue to stand by both the principle that civil society is essential, as well as provide concrete assistance to organisations, including to meet threats and challenges.

Considering the significant contributions of the international community to the post-conflict recovery and strengthening of social cohesion in BiH, do you think that enough has been achieved in this field and what are the next plans of the Delegation in this field?

A lack of social cohesion is clearly one of the things that is holding Bosnia and Herzegovina back from achieving its considerable potential. Nonetheless, without at all downplaying the challenges as regards social cohesion in this country, it is also important to remember that there are numerous individuals and organisations who are committed to building trust between communities. These are the actors that need to be strengthened.

Indeed, strengthening positive actors has been a central element of the 'Mozemo bolje' project, which the EU is funding and which is being implemented together with the UN, Council of Europe and OSCE. This project is investing in communities which are demonstrating leadership in building social cohesion and encouraging important dialogue.

'Mozemo bolje' is one of many EU funded projects that encourage social cohesion. Our new Europe House in the heart of Sarajevo, as well as the network of EU Info Points across BiH as well as countless projects targeted at young people in particular have encouraged

dialogue between communities as a key objective. Promoting an environment conducive to reconciliation is one of the 14 key priorities, and it will continue to be central to our work.

It should also be noted that the EU is unequivocally committed to supporting a safe and secure environment in BiH. As well as the presence of EUFOR Althea, the EU has also provided over €20 million in the past two years to the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What is it like to live in Bosnia and Herzegovina and among BiH's citizens? What impressed you the most when you arrived in our country, and what do you value most in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society today?

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been a very important part of my life for many years, since I started learning the language at university, through my work in Sarajevo in the 90s for the European Community Monitoring Mission and of course as Head of the EU Delegation and EU Special Representative for over four years. I consider this country now to be a second home.

I love the fact that no matter how long I live here, there are always new things I am learning every day. The language is expressive, rich and full of humour, with subtleties that continually throw up new surprises. The country has diverse landscapes that provide a source of inspiration and contemplation, as well as valuable places to recharge batteries and return to work re-energised. And of course this heart shaped country is one of big hearted people.

The one thing I really value here is people's dogged persistence. 'Inat' is a national characteristic that also has its negative sides, but it is also clear that when people in Bosnia and Herzegovina put their minds to something, they can achieve anything.

Is sustainable peace possible in BH?

Without a shadow of a doubt. I wouldn't be doing the job I am doing otherwise. The history of the European Union is one of bitter enemies becoming firm friends. France and Germany fought three incredibly bloody and destructive wars in the eight decades between the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and the end of World War II in 1945. Now, France and Germany are firm allies. There is no reason why this cannot also be true for the nations of the Western Balkans either. To this end, I congratulate the work being done by inspirational peace builders in BiH, such as those working in the PCRC. You can count on us to continue supporting peacebuilding efforts.

What is your message for young people in BiH, especially regarding the candidate status of our country?

My message to young people in BiH is to never give up. Yes, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a complex country with many challenges, and it is completely understandable that many decide to give in to indifference or despair. But that is making the work of the enemies of democracy easier. There is a reason that autocratic regimes around the world are pumping resources into disinformation campaigns that encourage apathy. A democracy requires active, engaged citizens. A dictatorship demands passivity. At the moment, there is a battle of values taking place in the world. Young people owe it to themselves and their happiness and wellbeing to fight for stability, prosperity, and a better future for all.



YOUTH IN PEACEBUILDING: RESPECTING THE HISTORY OF ALL

Author: Erna Mačkić
Photography: Mitar Simikić, PINCH Media

Young people coming together to honor the civilian victims of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, irrespective of ethnicity, contributes to efforts to face the past and build sustainable peace.

In August 2023, young participants of the State of Peace Youth Academy placed flowers and paid their respects to civilian victims of war in Tuzla, Brčko, Sarajevo, and Vitez. The participants, coming from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, learnt about the atrocities committed in the country based on the rulings of national courts and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The State of Peace Youth Academy, organized by the European Union in collaboration with the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), took place from August 18 to 31, 2023, with the aim of engaging young people from the Western Balkan countries in peace and democracy-building.

A special component of the Youth Academy was the commemoration of civilian war victims. According to Velma Šarić, the president and founder of the PCRC, this is because the process of facing the past cannot be sustained continuously if young people are not involved.

Šarić explains that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the commemoration of civilian victims remains unregulated at a national level, with permits for the construction of monuments and memorial sites granted by local authorities. She emphasizes that this situation leads to the creation of monuments that bear messages of hatred and division, lack educational components, and are divorced from the legally established facts about the atrocities committed.

Nikola Pavlović, a Youth Academy participant from Belgrade, said that this was his first time in Tuzla and his first time hearing about the grenade fired by Serb forces that struck the city gate. He expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to visit Tuzla and extended his condolences to the families of the deceased.

On May 25, 1995, the Army of Republika Srpska fired a grenade from Mount Ozren into the heart of the eastern Bosnian city, killing 71 people and wounding more than 120 at the Tuzla Gate.

During the Youth Academy's act of commemoration, participants laid flowers in tribute to the 116 Bosniak victims killed by the Croatian Defense Council in the western village of Ahmići.

The Youth Academy participants spoke with Hazrudin Bilić, a survivor of the massacre, who shared his personal story and educated participants about the details of the Ahmići attack.

Participants also visited the Osmica monument, commemorating eight Bosnian Croat

children killed in Vitez in 1993. Ivan Garić, whose sister was among the victims of this atrocity, spoke about the construction of the memorial and the efforts of families to preserve the memory of their loved ones.

An attempt was made to lay flowers at the Memorial monument "Kazani, 1992-1993," which was built in memory of killed Serb and Croatian civilians during the war in Sarajevo, but due to disorganization and inaccessible terrain, this was not possible. "This shows us that more needs to be done in the field of remembrance and memorialization, so that young people have access and the opportunity to learn about the history of our society," said Šarić.

Flowers were laid in honor of the civilian victims of the war in Brčko (northern Bosnia). Tea Ružić, the Advisor to the Mayor of Brčko District for youth and the non-governmental sector, says that the joint monument for all war victims signifies that every tear is equal and a part of our history. "I think that, with this



monument, we've sent a positive message from Brčko, because I can freely say that Brčko is an example of post-war reconciliation and coexistence," Ružić stated.

Ahmo Mehmedović, a participant from Srebrenica, considers memorialization crucial in creating lasting monuments and memories for the victims. "They're a special dimension in facing the past, and it's essential for young people to visit them and learn the facts about the war. Memorials should motivate young people to commemorate war victims through a variety of acts. With the knowledge, empathy, and inspiration acquired from visiting these memorials,



I believe that young people will contribute to this," remarked Mehmedović.

Lora Jurić, a participant from Đakovo, also spoke about the importance of young people from different nations and ethnic backgrounds visiting the sites of suffering for all groups. "I personally didn't grasp the depth of these stories. I knew our military operations as a Croatian movement to liberate Croats, but now I see the bigger picture. These were innocent people who didn't know why they were dying or why they were fighting. They were all victims of a toxic mindset, believing that war would bring peace," concluded Jurić.





RETURNING RELIGIOUS OBJECTS MARKS BOSNIA'S SACRED PATH TO RECONCILIATION

Text: Alem Bajramović, Kristina Gadže
Photography: Alem Bajramović, Denis Ruvic

During the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), numerous religious buildings and structures were destroyed, and sacred items, including the Qur'an, Bible, Torah, and Haggadah, were damaged or disappeared. However, many families of different ethnicities safeguarded such items, returning them to their rightful place when they had the opportunity.

The preservation and return of religious objects, according to Imam Fadil Effendi Arifović, is a beacon and message in opposition to regressive thinking and politics because, in the end, goodness triumphs over evil.

Eli Tauber, Cultural and Religious Advisor to the Jewish Community in BiH, asserts that the returning of religious items is invaluable in terms of preserving the identity of individual believers and religious communities.

"What distinguishes the people of Bosnia is the special bond among different groups that is embedded within them. Belonging to a different ethnicity or professing a different faith is not something that divides us but rather

something that unites and connects us. There has always been that trust and understanding here, in both good times and bad. But above all, honesty and respect characterize the Bosnian people," said Tauber.

According to Professor Dino Abazović from the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Political Sciences, the return of religious objects is pivotal in restoring trust and rebuilding interpersonal relations.

HOMECOMING OF THE HAGGADAH TO SARAJEVO

The Sarajevo Haggadah, a Jewish religious manuscript containing biblical stories, prayers, and psalms related to the Passover holiday dedicated to the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery, was returned to the National Museum of BiH in 2021.

Eli Tauber said the Haggadah is undeniable proof that the Jewish community survived and of solidarity in the neighborhood.

"A number of Jewish religious texts perished in the fire that engulfed the City Hall. Some were saved, but never returned to the synagogue. During World War II, numerous copies of the

Torah and religious books were burned or disappeared. Sarajevo was left without a copy of the Torah. Fortunately, they preserved one scroll of the Torah in the monastery in Travnik, and after the war, they brought it to Sarajevo and handed it over to the synagogue," stated Tauber.

BIBLE RETURNED TO THE PARISH OFFICE IN GORAŽDE

Jasmin Mujagić, a native of Goražde, found a Christian Bible in the attic of a house his family had purchased in 2007. When he discovered the Bible, he recalled that his first instinct was to leave it there and preserve it. After 13 or 14 years, Mujagić returned the Bible to the Parish Office of the Church of the Drina Martyrs in Goražde.

"When someone makes you happy, everyone is happy, so you should make someone happy. That's how I look at it. We need to appreciate each other. It's important for me to know that it got back to where it belongs," Mujagić said.

Father Josip Tadić, pastor of the Church of the Drina Martyrs in Goražde, said that the man, a follower of Islam, respects the Holy Bible, just as he, a Catholic, respects the Qur'an.

"That Bible has no financial value, but it will look nice in the museum of antiques we plan to open one day. The Bible is in our office now. It's very valuable because it's old and well-preserved," said Father Tadić.

QUR'AN RETURNED TO ALADŽA MOSQUE IN FOČA

A similar example of a Holy Book being returned occurred in Foča, where an anonymous resident returned a Qur'an to the Aladža (Hasan Nazir) Mosque in the spring of 2019. After the bombing of the Aladža Mosque in Foča in 1992, this brave resident safeguarded the Qur'an for 27 years. Out of safety concerns, she returned the Qur'an through Mensur Kadrić from Goražde, asking him to pray for her.

Fadil Effendi Arifović, the imam of the Aladža Mosque, described the returning of the Qur'an as a clear sign that, despite all of the unfortunate events that befell Foča and its Bosniak population, there is hope for a brighter future.

"It is up to us to try to help ourselves and all returnees and all people, if we're able. We need to rebuild the relationship between Muslims, who are the main minority in Foča, and our Orthodox neighbors, who are the majority, to create a safe and comfortable environment for our people here," said Effendi Arifović.

ICONS RETURNED TO THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY TRINITY IN MOSTAR

Religious icons were returned to the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Mostar by Nedžad Jašarević, in fulfillment of his father's wishes. Nedžad's father had preserved the icons for years after they were found in a destroyed Orthodox Church and Cathedral during the Bosnian War.

Someone told Nedžad's father, who was a police officer, "Here, I found this." He kept them until his unfortunate passing last year, with the intention of giving them back to the local Orthodox community. Nedžad learned about the icons before his father's death and he and his mother agreed to donate them. Around Eastern Orthodox Christmas, on January 7th of 2022, they decided to return the icons to the Orthodox church.

"The only difference here is between good and evil, good people and bad people. Let's say that politics are clouds high in the sky, and that ordinary people have their feet on the ground. Ordinary



people work and socialize and drink coffee. They have barbecues and are the godparents of other people's kids. Watching the news in the evening, you see that political ideologies are poisoning relations among ordinary people. I just hope these ideologies won't win out, even though it was politics that started the wars, not people," said Jašarević.

Father Duško Kojić, the parish priest of Mostar, said that he has been on religious assignment in Mostar for two years and he has never had any unpleasant experiences or felt like a minority.

"The people of Mostar perceive this church as their own, regardless of their religion or nationality. And that's nice. Of course, no one is happy that the church was demolished, but it's nice to be part of the restoration in this way because

we're all trying to reconstruct it and we're all happy about it," said Father Duško, commenting on the humanitarian act of the Jašarević family.

"THE WORD COEXISTENCE IS IMPOSED UPON US"

Effendi Arifović expressed his dislike for the term "coexistence," which is increasingly prevalent: "The word 'coexistence' is imposed on us. As soon as you have coexistence or tolerance, you have to put up with someone. But that's actually not the case. People in the Balkans have lived together, not next to each other, but together. They shared in both the good and the bad, and we try to promote these beautiful gestures, among ourselves as well as the wider public and the world."

The parish priest of Mostar, Father Kojić, doesn't think that people who live, work, and socialize with other identity groups are a minority. There are many such people, but they don't receive enough attention in the media. Mujagić says that he was overjoyed to have had the opportunity to make Catholics in Goražde happy, and Tauber believes that being different from others is not something that divides people, but on the contrary, connects them.

In terms of dealing with the past, Professor Abazović said that we are witnessing the positive side of religious memory, which is based on forgiveness and not resentment. "Forgiveness certainly doesn't mean forgetting, but opposing resentment," said Abazović.

Due to the prevailing climate of mistrust in Bosnia's post-conflict society, Abazović explains that the humanitarian gestures of returning religious objects may seem belated to some, but it is never and can never be too late.





THE MAN FROM ZENICA GLUING BACK TOGETHER BROKEN FAMILIES

Text: Selma Mašić
 Photography: Haris Badžić (Foto baza),
 Selma Mašić

Hanas Kovačević is a retired police officer from the central Bosnian city of Zenica. He has been using his law enforcement experience as well as his vast social connections to reconnect friends, acquaintances, and families who have fallen out of contact due to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) or other personal reasons.

Hanas has connected thousands of people, or as he says, 'solved cases'. This has earned him a reputation that extends beyond the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He explains how he has been contacted by people from countries all over the world, including Germany, Canada, and America, among others. When, once, he received a call from a girl in India, he was surprised, wondering, "How does anyone from India know some Hanas from Zenica?" He recalled that he and his colleague from Novi Sad managed to solve one case in seven days in which a girl from Turkey had been searching for her mother through German and Turkish television but had been unable to find her for more than 45 years.

It all started when he tried to find his own friend from the army, a man from Belgrade who he had been friends with during his military service in the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) in North Macedonia. This was the reason he had made a Facebook profile in 2008.

"I found him in Germany and then started looking for other friends and I'm in contact with them all the time," said Kovačević. He explained that, after renewing his own friendships, he decided to look for other people's lost contacts.

He joined different groups on Facebook devoted to helping people rebuild lost connections. To take his mind off his health condition, which forces him to remain at home, he joined the group called Broken Connections [Pokidane veze] and, as he says, "searches have already started there for children, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and relatives who were separated during the war."

The war in BiH resulted in many personal connections being broken, though this is not the only cause.

"It was the war that separated families, for example, brothers and sisters [...] They each went to their own side. I don't know why they didn't manage to keep in touch, but some of them lost contact even before the war. There are also many cases of mothers who gave their children up for adoption. These are more difficult cases where the investigation is more demanding because the data of these children is protected," Kovačević said.

A NETWORK OF CONTACTS

Explaining how he finds others' lost contacts, he said that his JNA service in North Macedonia allowed him to meet many people from across the Balkans, many of whom became friends that he has stayed in touch with over the years.

"Well, I contact them to help me, but also members of my Facebook group are helpful. Those who want to help come forward," said Kovačević, adding that he has a lot of friends in Croatia and Slovenia as well.

He doesn't charge for his work, while incidental expenses incurred during his searches are covered by the person he is helping.

MIXED EMOTIONS

He is satisfied with what he does, and his greatest satisfaction is when he sees people happy. With a smile on his face, he recalls how he reunited students from the same class in Vogošća after more than 30 years. As a sign of gratitude, they invited him to the class reunion, which he describes as "a special experience".

"When you see these emotions...they don't recognize each other. Some have changed a lot over the years, some are disabled now because of the war. Women are married...and when they meet, it's nice to see that. I just stand there and watch from the sidelines. They have stories to tell. They don't know what to ask each other first. There are a lot of them at once and everyone wants to talk to everyone, and everyone wants to ask someone something. All that is nice to see," said Kovačević.

However, not all stories have a happy ending. "The worst thing is when a child is looking for a parent who left them. And you find the parent. The child was already abandoned once, and when you find the parent, the parent doesn't want them, so the child is abandoned a second time. These are very ugly situations. It's very unpleasant to tell someone that their parents don't want them," Kovačević said.

Early on, he accepted many more requests. Now, he has to be more selective, as the work has taken its emotional toll on him. Hanas states that he only takes on cases where he truly sees a potential for his work to have an impact, or, as they say in law enforcement cases that are "open-and-shut."



WHERE BOSNIAN, HUNGARIAN AND OTTOMAN INFLUENCES COLLIDE: A PEER INTO BOSNIA'S "SILVER TOWN"

Text: Sumeja Mehmedović
Photography: Darko Kojić, Safet Isović
(Foto baza)

Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to an array of medieval fortresses. One such fortress is located on the northeastern slopes of Mount Majeвица in the town of Srebrenik. Srebrenik Tower, or Srebrenik Fortress, is known for having been the residence of Bosnia's medieval Ban, Stjepan II Kotromanić.

The Old Town of Srebrenik is a fortress located above the town, north of Tuzla, in the area that was once the Usora region. During the Middle Ages, this region witnessed constant conflicts between Bosnia and Hungary. Then, from the 15th century onwards, came the successive battles against the Ottoman Empire. It is situated on a solitary cliff with a height of nearly 400 meters, only accessible by a wooden bridge that connects the cliff to the rest of the elevation.

The main entrance to the Old Town is guarded by a large stone tower, which is part of the fortification. Within the walls, there are various structures, including a tower, a castle, residential buildings, a well, and a mosque. It was from here, on February 15th, 1333, that Ban Stjepan II Kotromanić, the uncle of Tvrtko I Kotromanić, the first king of medieval Bosnia, wrote a charter in Bosančica (Bosnian Cyrillic) to the Dubrovnik Republic, in which, for certain concessions, he renounced the settlements of Ston and Pelješac (now in Croatia).

Although the first written records of ancient Srebrenik date back to before 683 AD, the Old Town was built even earlier, with no reliable construction date known. There are many speculations regarding who the actual builder of this fortress was, mostly based on legends and folk stories.

Some historians and researchers share the opinion that the Srebrenik fortress was built by the Hungarians during their rule over the Banate of Bosnia in the 13th century. In some historical documents, there are notes that the Hungarian king established two banates in 1464, one in Jajce and the other in Srebrenik, in order to halt the Ottoman-Turkish conquest.

Nevertheless, after 55 years, the Srebrenik Fortress was conquered by the Ottomans, and its present-day architecture dates back to their 300-year rule from 1519 to 1835.

The Srebrenik Fortress was ranked fourth in TimeOut Magazine's 'Must See 2023' list of destinations. As a result of such accolades, Edin Šehović, an employee of the Srebrenik Municipality Tourist Board, believes that the Old Town of Srebrenik is slowly gaining recognition on the tourist map of Bosnia and the world.

Today, Srebrenik is a city that attracts tourists from all over the world with its architectural beauty, particularly in light of its medieval Old Town and Tower.

Srebrenik is considered an open city of art and is known for trade fairs and Šehović points out that in addition to the Old Town, Srebrenik is home to four national monuments of Bosnia:

the Old Town of Srebrenik Gradina, the Old House of Suljagić Konak, the Old Church in Čojluk and the Old Church in Špionica.

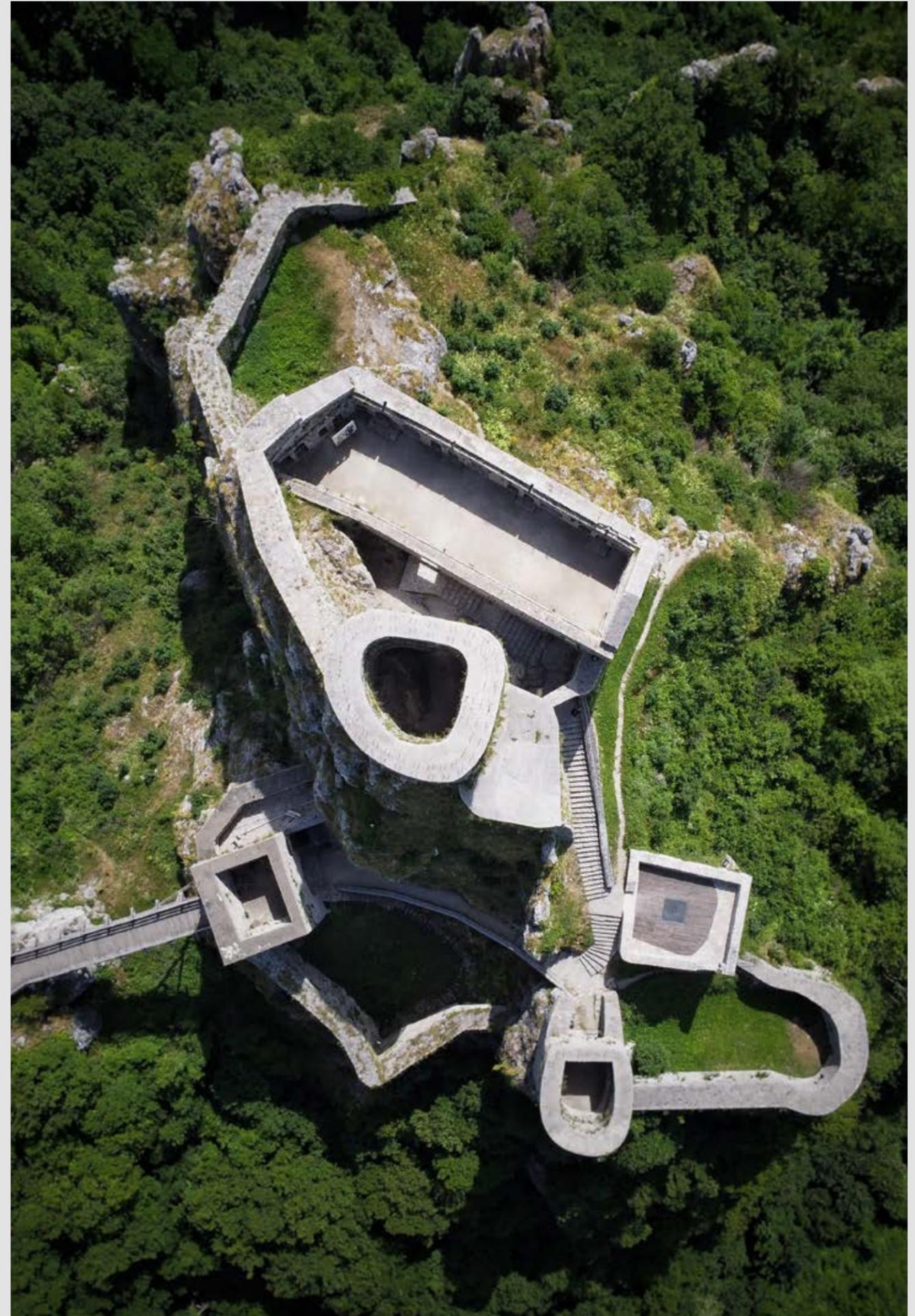
Bosnia and Herzegovina is filled with unsung historical diamonds. Srebrenik, with its fusion of medieval and Ottoman influences, can certainly be counted among them.

"SILVER TOWN"

According to legend, the name Srebrenik does not refer to the rumored presence of nearby silver mines, of which there were none. Rather, it is supposed to have originated from an event in which three queens competed to build the most beautiful town for themselves. As the legend goes, one built a city in Sokol, another in Gradačac, and the third said that her city shines as if it were made of silver, which is why the name Srebrenik remained.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Old Town of Srebrenik can be reached via the M-18 highway. The fortress is only a few kilometers away from the municipality of Srebrenik itself. Those who enjoy leisurely strolls can park their car in Srebrenik and walk to the fortress, while those looking to save time can drive directly to the tower. The fortress is open for visitors from 9am to 8pm in the summer and from 9am to 5pm in the winter. The entrance fee is two Bosnian marks.





ROBERT DACEŠIN:

THE TRAVELER FROM BANJA LUKA PUTTING BOSNIA ON THE MAP

Text: Danica Novaković
Photography: private archive

Banja Luka native, Robert Dacešin, has already visited a total of 90 countries across the globe and learned five languages. Along the way, the young polyglot has created numerous videos and published four books about his travels.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Robert has become familiar with the many diverse cultures and customs of the countries he has visited.

"I don't think Asia leaves anyone indifferent, especially the less explored areas like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, countries that have so much to offer. I also liked Sri Lanka, which is rarely mentioned but really has everything, from nature to wonderful people and good food. But my favorite destination in Asia so far is Japan, where I've been three times," said Dacešin.

While traveling the world, he has never forgotten his homeland. In fact, he has done a great deal for Bosnia and Herzegovina already. In his work, he has made an effort to introduce the world to the natural and cultural beauty of his homeland, both through his books and videos on his

YouTube channel. One of these videos, titled "Why Bosnia and Herzegovina Can Be the Number One Tourist Destination in the World," has become very popular and has won numerous awards.

"So far, I've filmed over 50 videos from different destinations all over the country, written about 200 articles, and made a substantial number of posts on Instagram, with the goal of promoting Bosnia and Herzegovina. I sincerely hope that, in this way, I can help everyone realize how beautiful our country is and how much we should appreciate it. Somehow, we always want to travel to distant destinations, sometimes without thinking about how much we have to offer in our own backyard," explained Dacešin.

Dacešin adds, "My ultimate goal is to promote my country in the destinations I travel to, to explore the world, and to broaden horizons. So far, I think I'm on the right path to achieving this. Another wish of mine is to visit every country in the world," said Dacešin.

He is particularly delighted to have so many young people and children in his audience. The Banja Luka-born vlogger added that, through his articles and posts, he aims to share positive

and educational stories from the places he visits with people in the Balkan region and help them plan their own trips in the simplest possible way.

YOUTUBE AND REVENUE

In his early days of vlogging, Dacešin did not always have the financial means to promote his content. For this reason, he decided to pursue an additional source of income by teaching a digital marketing course. This course was often his primary source of income, enabling him to finance his travels.

"The channel has grown over time. Today, along with the digital marketing course, YouTube is probably one of my main sources of income, allowing me to continue to film and travel. I have a team of three or four people who shoot and edit with me, all with the aim of creating the most educational content possible from destinations around the world. In the last three years, we've filmed about 150 videos from around 40 countries. The channel is nearing 100,000 subscribers, making it possibly the first channel of its kind in our region to reach such figures," said Dacešin.

In pursuing his passions, he has struggled with the issue of time constraints. While his travel vlogging may seem like a dream job for many, few are aware of what goes on behind the scenes and how much effort and time he invests in his accomplishments.

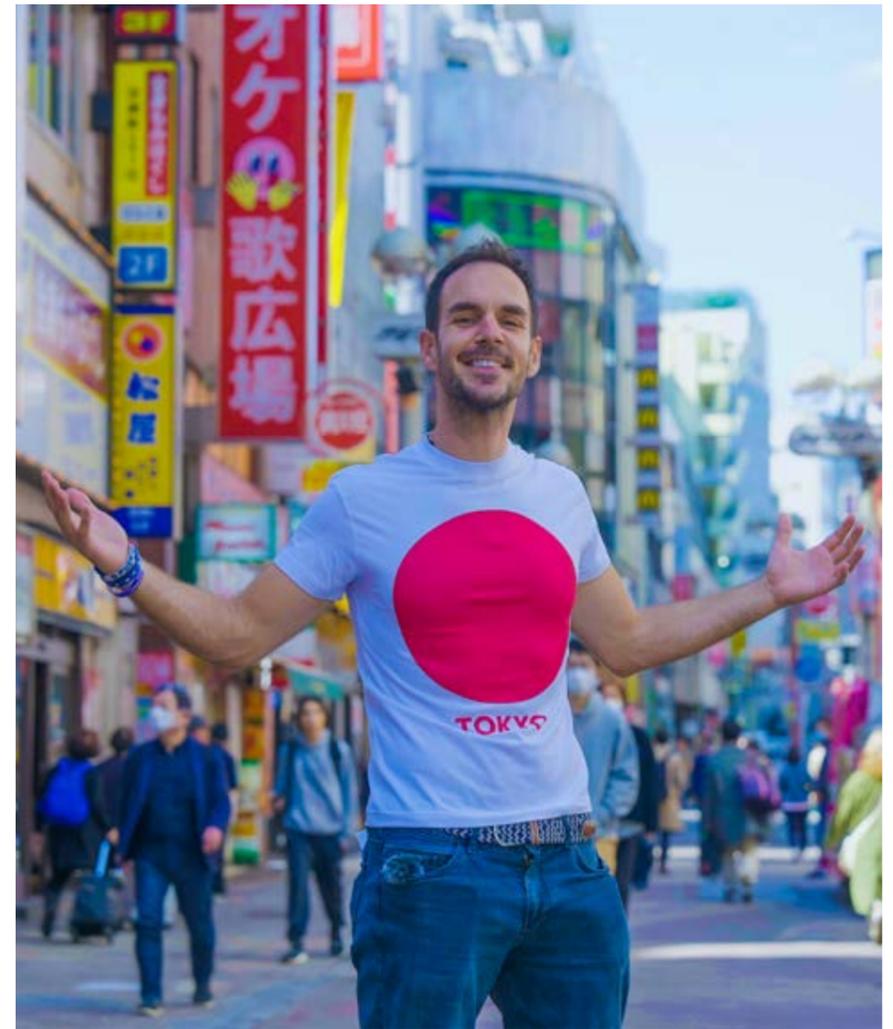
"Simply put, I have so many ideas, and I do most things by myself, which means I often find myself working late into the night. Writing a script, coming up with a video concept, arranging onsite guests, researching the locations, filming, editing, and posting everything on Instagram and Facebook, and finally publishing it as a text on the website – this all takes a lot of time," the young Banja Luka man explained.

LOVE OF COUNTRY

He has won numerous awards, but for him, the greatest reward of all is knowing that people from all over the world are watching his videos about Bosnia and Herzegovina. This increases the country's international exposure and will likely attract a number of tourists to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I simply love my country, and I believe it has a lot of potential. When I was younger, I wanted to move away, especially when I was studying abroad, but the more I travel, the more I want to stay here. The country is beautiful, the nature is wonderful, the food is great, and the people are warm and friendly. I want to show this to the rest of the world, which is why I strive to present it in the best possible light whenever I travel," stated Dacešin.

He advises young people to work hard, believe in their dreams, and follow their gut instinct, which is all that they need to guide them. He believes in never giving up on one's goals because, as he says, with effort and persistence, nothing can stop you from achieving them.



CROSSING THE RIVERS OF TIME: A WANDER OVER FOUR BOSNIAN BRIDGES

Text: Kristina Gadže and Alem Bajramović
Photography: Alem Bajramović

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, bridges represent an important part of cultural and historical heritage. Telling stories of by-gone eras, they are often tourist attractions. The Old Bridge in Mostar, Ars Aevi in Sarajevo, Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad, and the so-called 'Bridge under the Bridge' in Goražde are just some of the bridges that defy time and captivate with their endurance and unique character.

Among the most remarkable bridges in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Old Bridge in Mostar, built in the 16th century during Ottoman rule. The bridge was restored after sustaining damage during the Bosnian War and is now a major tourist attraction as well as a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005.

"It's recognized worldwide as a special tourist destination, and so it exudes a positive atmosphere of socializing and good times," says Senad Suljić. He adds that the bridge's charm attracts a great deal of positive energy, highlighting the Red Bull Cliff Diving event, various concerts, and the shores crowded with young people during the summer.

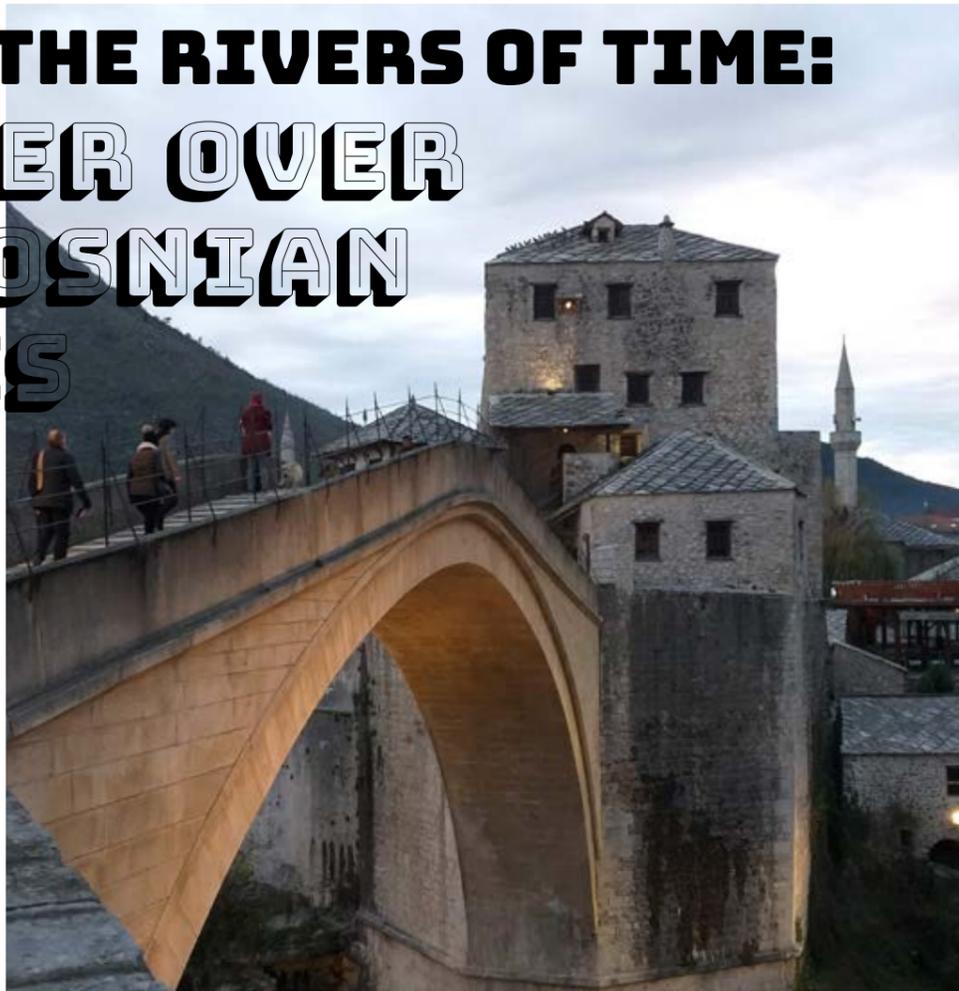
Suljić observes that Bosnia's younger generations learn about the country's recent tragedies from family members or in school, but not having gone through 'the Golgotha' themselves, they perceive the bridge as a place for socializing, romance, and pleasant memories.

MOSTAR'S ENDURING OLD BRIDGE

The Old Bridge was destroyed during the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was rebuilt in 2004.

"Those of us who are a little older often pause and remember everything, but, like everywhere, time moves on. There's also a culture of war memorialization, and the Cultural Center is one of the important institutions engaged in commemorating both sad and happy dates in the city's history, including [sic] the Old Bridge. That arch over the Neretva River emanates an interesting energy," said Suljić, stressing that this energy is stronger than any hatred.

"There isn't a country or a home without a picture of the Old Bridge on the wall. Of course, it should be a link with people worldwide, and the



Old Bridge has been that for a long time. Like everything in life, feelings towards bridges vary, but I think that for the majority, every bridge is a symbol of connection, socializing, and positive anticipation of what will be found on the other side," Suljić reflected, adding that he likes the verse "A bridge extends wherever I stand," from Đorđe Balašević's song "Sevdalinka."

VIŠEGRAD'S WORLD- CLASS LANDMARK

Just as in Mostar, Ottoman culture is discernible in Višegrad, where the Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007, has stood for centuries. According to Marko Božić, the director of the Tourism Organization of Višegrad Municipality, the bridge is the most visited attraction in Višegrad, drawing an estimated 200,000 tourists to the city in 2022.

The Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge across the Drina River in the east of Bosnia and Herzegovina was built at the end of the 16th century by the court architect Mimar Koca Sinan on the orders of Grand Vizier Mehmed Paša Sokolović. Characteristic of the apogee of Ottoman monumental architecture and civil engineering, the bridge has 11 masonry arches with spans of 11 m to 15 m, and an access ramp at right angles with four arches on the left bank of the river.

The reconstruction of the bridge took place from 2013 to 2015. Its maintenance was overseen by Višegrad Municipality and the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural-Historical and Natural Heritage of the Republika Srpska.

Asked whether the bridge is a symbol of connection and if it carries such symbolism today, Božić quotes the writer and Nobel laureate, Ivo Andrić: "Of all that a man is impelled to build in this life, nothing is in my eyes finer and more precious than a bridge. Bridges are more important than houses, holier, because they are more all-embracing than places of worship. Belonging to everyone and the same for everyone, useful, built always rationally, in a place in which the greatest number of human needs coincide, they are more enduring than other buildings and serve nothing which is secret or evil."

The Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge is a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Božić believes that young people should learn from, preserve, and cherish such monuments. "We sincerely want to see the Višegrad bridge as a place where people from all over the world come together, visiting Višegrad as tourists in increasing numbers to see this famous world-class landmark with their own eyes. It's important for younger generations to understand the significance of national monuments and cherish them in their local communities, recognizing these monuments as part of our national identity and treasures to be preserved for future generations," said Božić.

A WONDER OF WARTIME ARCHITECTURE IN GORAŽDE

The unusual 'Bridge under the Bridge', located in Goražde, tells a story of human suffering and survival. Admir Džemidžić, a curator at the Goražde Local Museum, explained how the bridge was created during the war in Bosnia

and Herzegovina when Goražde was under siege and its inhabitants needed an easier way of crossing from one side of the Drina River to the other.

"The war hospital was on one side and the command headquarters was on the other, and they needed to have some kind of communication. The wounded had to be transported to the hospital, as did the medicines. So, in 1994, the so-called 'Bridge under the Bridge' was built. The chief engineer was Selver Sijerčić, who died in the war. They say the bridge was built at night and was completed in a few days because all the necessary structures had been made earlier," Džemidžić explained, noting that metal rods were inserted above the bridge where the structure was connected, and thus the bridge was made with wooden paneling.

Due to the small space between the two bridges, those crossing the 'Bridge under the Bridge' had to crouch down. As a result, some people injured themselves and bore the mark of crossing the 'Bridge under the Bridge' on their heads for some time.

"For a while, that bridge was a lifeline for our city and people. Our goal is to preserve it the best we can, to protect it and open it to the public in the future. We plan to install a new floor and secure the entire bridge so that we can get a permit to use it for touristic purposes. It would be a commodity that we could use here and offer to tourists and all history enthusiasts, and also a way to share with our children what our countrymen faced during the war," Džemidžić stated.

As he pointed out, this rare type of bridge represents a "wonder of wartime architecture".

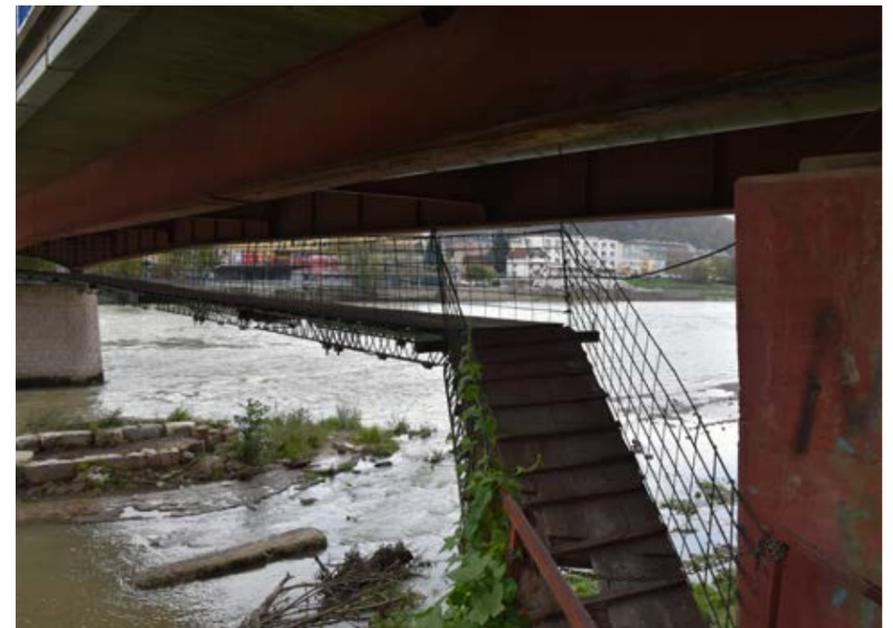
He adds, "People on boats and above the bridge built this architectural marvel at night and during ceasefires, and it still stands today and can still be used for similar purposes. When we give tours, we take visitors to the start of the bridge and explain how and why it was created and its significance. When it's restored, let it be a bridge of peace, not a bridge of war, a bridge under a bridge, or a wonder of wartime architecture. Let it be a bridge of peace and let everyone come to see it and realize what trouble and human folly actually led to its construction," said Džemidžić.

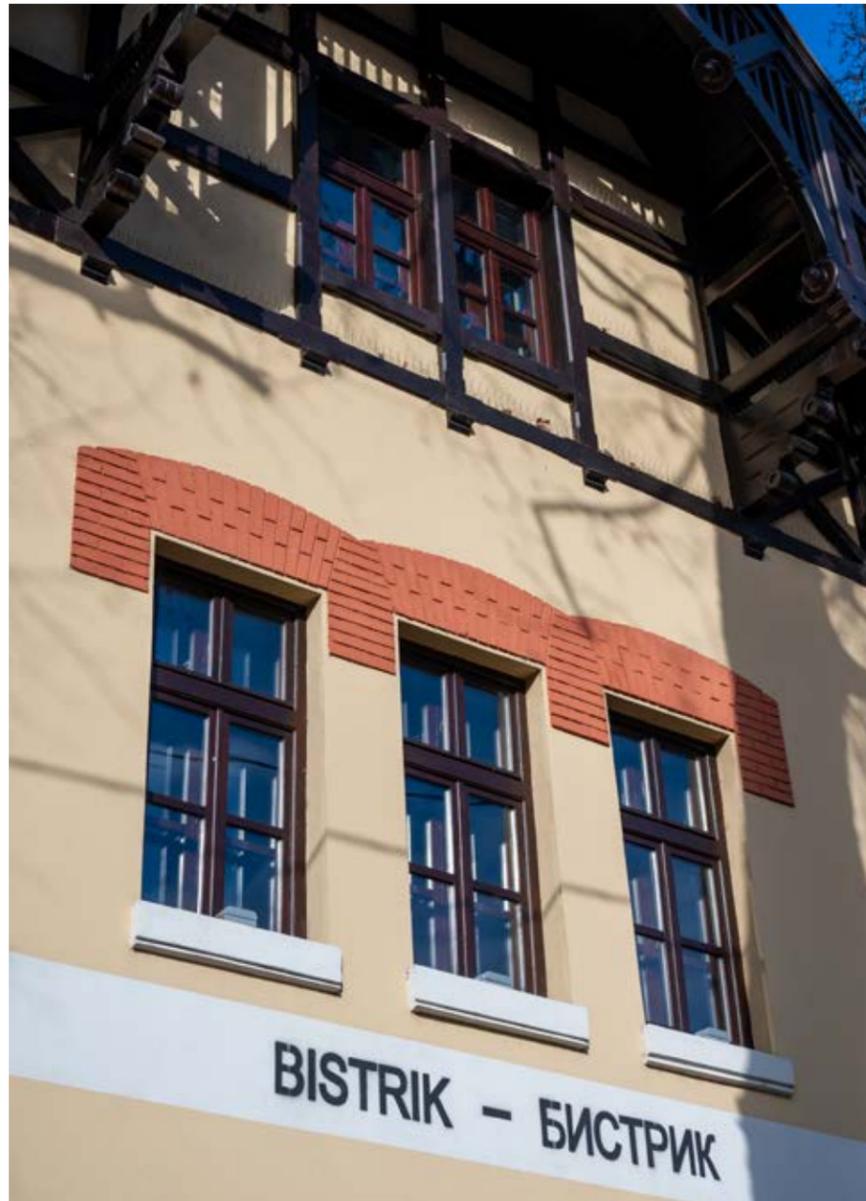
SARAJEVO'S CULTURAL BRIDGE

The Ars Aevi Bridge in Sarajevo is a bridge with a more peaceful story. This pedestrian bridge is clearly visible from the banks of the Miljacka River in the city center. As stated by the director of the Ars Aevi Museum of Contemporary Art, Senka Ibrišimbegović, this bridge represents one of "the city's most important communication lines," connecting the cultural and residential zones of Sarajevo. The bridge was built in 2002, thanks to the contributions of Favero & Milan, an engineering company from Venice, and other Italian and foreign companies.

The construction of the bridge was made possible through the support of Novo Sarajevo Municipality and various Sarajevo Canton institutions, including the City Institute for the Development of the Sarajevo Canton.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has many bridges, each with an untold story that intrigues visitors and keeps them coming back for years. Their charm and preservation remain a legacy for younger generations to spread the history and beauty of Bosnia and Herzegovina in their communities and far beyond.





BISTRİK RAILWAY STATION: SARAJEVO'S HISTORICAL DIAMOND

Text: Dženisa Joldić
Photography: Denis Ruvic

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is rich in cultural heritage. The city reflects the diversity and history of the wider region. One of the most important cultural monuments in Sarajevo is the Bistrik Railway Station, a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, it serves as the City Museum, but also as a gathering place. Located in the very heart of the city, it holds a special significance for the local population and is an important center of culture and history.

The Bistrik Railway Station dates back to the 19th century, when Sarajevo was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The building, which primarily functioned as a railway station, was built in the Art Nouveau style, a popular architectural style of that period

characterized by elegant lines, rich ornamentation, and detail.

Beyond its architecture, the station stands out as the site where scenes from Hajrudin Šiba Kravac's cult film, "Walter Defends Sarajevo", were filmed in 1972. This film became one of the most popular films in the Former Yugoslavia.

Twenty-three-year-old Sarajevo native Ilhan Kapo researches the history of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian capital in his free time. A Bistrik Railway Station enthusiast, he says that the classic partisan film, "Walter Defends Sarajevo", is the easiest and best way to familiarize younger generations with the Bistrik station.

"The film showcases the purpose and concept of connecting Sarajevo with Slavonki Brod and Budapest. There was also a need to connect Sarajevo with the eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina," said Kapo. He also highlighted the station's first-ever train, the iconic Čiro, which many from older generations remember fondly.

AN ARCHITECTURAL GEM IN THE HEART OF SARAJEVO

With the closure of the Eastern Railway in 1973, the Bistrik station lost its primary function. However, an initiative emerged to transform the station into a museum, which was realized 42 years later. In 2006, the Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina declared Bistrik Station a national monument.

With support from the city government, the renovation, reconstruction, and restoration of the Bistrik railway station began in 2021. The country's only railway station from the Austro-Hungarian period, a dilapidated building where once there stood the embodiment of a grand historical legacy, was slated to be transformed into a gathering place for events of cultural and social significance. According to the Sarajevo City Museum's webpage, "this project has three

very important dimensions - cultural, social, and developmental."

On April 6th, 2022, which marked Sarajevo City Day and the 30th anniversary of the Sarajevo Siege, the longest in modern history, the Bistrik Railway Station was restored.

Sarajevo Mayor, Benjamina Karić, cut the ribbon at the entrance of this symbolic building, expressing her joy and pride at seeing the Bistrik Railway Station opened on such a momentous day: "Our architectural gem shines with its old splendor once more."

The renovated Bistrik station holds significance for the citizens of Sarajevo and beyond. For rail workers, it is particularly special, evidenced by their attendance at the event, in uniform and displaying their emotions.

"We rail workers wanted to come to this ceremony today in our railway uniforms. Today's ceremony also brings back feelings connected to the days when we worked here as rail workers. Behind me is the train dispatcher's office, which evokes special emotions from the times when we were on shift," Sead Kustura, an employee of the Railways of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, told the media.

As the child of a rail worker and someone who once manned this narrow railway, Kustura stated that this was, for him, a dream come true.

THE STORIES OF SARAJEVO LIVE ON

The transformation of the Bistrik station into a museum and a gathering place for both tourists and local residents is an important step in preserving Sarajevo's cultural heritage and promoting the art and history of the region.

A phoenix rising from the ashes, the station now comprises two sections: one housing a museum and the other a venue for events. The station, a repository of countless memories and stories, is a treasured symbol of the city of Sarajevo.

"Listening to the beautiful stories of older neighbors and acquaintances about Bistrik Railway Station, I simply grew attached to it. The stories are so positive and full of emotion that it's impossible not to feel, even for a moment, the station's charm," said Kapo.

The city of Sarajevo invested around 2.9 million Bosnian marks in renovating and restoring the splendor of the old building.

Today, Bistrik Railway Station, the Sarajevo City Museum, is an important hub for art, history, and culture. The museum offers a variety of exhibitions and programs that provide visitors with an insight into the rich history of Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The museum's exhibitions cover a variety of topics, including not only Sarajevo history but also archaeology, ethnology, and art.

Among its exhibits is "Walter Defends Sarajevo," on loan from the Sarajevo Film Center. There is also a permanent exhibition in the museum dedicated to the 1914 assassination in Sarajevo that triggered the First World War. Visitors can see original artifacts, documents, and photographs that bear witness to this pivotal moment in history. The museum also organizes themed exhibitions and events to promote contemporary art and culture, in support of local artists and innovators.

"Unfortunately, today we only have the building as a memento, but I hope that younger generations will cherish and study the history of this city and metropolis, and not allow this history to die. As long as we live, the unique heart and soul of this city will also live," Kapo concluded emotionally.

WALLS THAT UNITE: THE POWER OF MURALS IN BH

Text: Benisa Bibuljica
Photography: Alem Bajramović

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a country with a rich history, culture, and spirit of resilience. Despite the scars of war and division, the nation has emerged as a symbol of hope and unity thanks to its towns and cities that promote multicultural and multi-religious life.

Street art and murals have played a significant role in reviving the country's rich cultural heritage. Numerous murals across BiH depict scenes from local history, serving as a reminder of a diverse and harmonious past. They convey messages of peace, friendship, and a better future.

Although often associated with graffiti and vandalism, street murals in Bosnia defy this perception through their power to transcend a gray reality.

The organization Obojena Klapa has made a great contribution to this art form in Bosnia and Herzegovina, transforming Sarajevo's gloomy facades into works of art.

"We want to make Sarajevo a city of color and a synonym for street art in the region. This implies the affirmation of this form of art in society and the recognition of its importance by our fellow citizens, authorities, and other spheres of society," said Benjamin Čengić, President of Obojena Klapa and a renowned Bosnian-Herzegovinian muralist.

Street art often transcends language barriers, conveying messages of peace. Murals expressing experiences and aspirations common to all citizens help bridge divides and promote understanding among different ethnic and religious groups.

"Art resists nationalism and draws attention to real societal issues such as corruption, the non-transparent use of public funds, elite political manipulation of the media and judiciary, and the like," noted Mirjana Čuskić from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights.

OPEN-AIR CLASSROOMS

In addition to their undeniably striking appearance, murals also serve as open-air classrooms. They pay tribute to individuals who have made a significant contribution to society. This is evident in the streets of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian capital, where there are murals dedicated to important national figures such as Davorin Popović, Michael Schumacher, Milena Mrazović, and Goran Čengić.

In early 2022, several Sarajevo artists created a mural of the seven-time Formula 1 champion, Michael Schumacher, as a token of gratitude for the assistance he provided to Sarajevo during and after the war. Benjamin Čengić says that this mural is the least Sarajevo can do to express their gratitude to Schumacher.

"We decided to paint this mural because Schumacher is definitely someone who deserves to be honored in Sarajevo and thanked for the donations and assistance that he provided to us during and after the war. Moreover, he's someone who always gave his best. He's

a true symbol of that mindset and attitude," Čengić asserted.

The late frontman of the rock band Indexi, Davorin Popović, is among those featured in the murals of the city center. The credit for this mural also goes to Obojena Klapa, with a conceptual design by Armin Numanović, a former student at the University of Sarajevo Academy of Fine Arts.

Before the start of the war in his native city, Popović confronted paramilitary leader, Željko "Arkan" Ražnatović, later indicted for war crimes in Bosnia and Croatia, who had told him to flee

Mostar, Zenica, and Modriča. Some of his notable murals include a tribute to Nikola Tesla in Doboj and murals depicting literary figures such as Petar Kočić, Meša Selimović, Branko Ćopić, and Ivo Andrić. Deni is one of the few street artists who does not name his works.

One example of a mural serving as an open-air classroom and addressing important social issues is the First Inclusion Mural in Cazin. This mural was painted by internationally recognized artist Rikardo Druškić and Bosnian-Herzegovinian street art and graffiti artist Muhamed Baručija as part of the campaign "We



Sarajevo: "I stayed. Where was I going to run? What would happen to Sarajevo if I left?" The singer was one of those who defined the soul of Sarajevo, and that is why his mural in the heart of the city, where he passed away in 2001, captures the viewer.

The impact of women on society in BiH is evident in the mural dedicated to the country's first female journalist and editor, Milena Mrazović. Renowned in Europe as a famous Bosnian writer, she pushed the societal boundaries imposed on women in the late 19th and beginning of 20th century. The mural, which adorns the Electrical Engineering School, was created by artist Nataša Konjević. "Milena is just one woman who deserves to be more present in public space," Konjević told the media.

Deni Božić, from Doboj in northern BiH, is the artist behind 150 murals. In addition to Doboj, his murals can be found in Sarajevo, Banja Luka,

Are All Children."

This unique artistic creation aims to raise awareness about the importance of including children with developmental difficulties in education and society. Children with developmental difficulties from the Inclusive Practices Development Center in Cazin, as well as students from the Cazin II Elementary School, joined the artists in creating this mural.

"All children deserve a happy childhood. Social inclusion shouldn't be just a phrase but something implicit everywhere and for every child, every person. I'm convinced that every individual is unique and can contribute to the community, which is why I supported this initiative," Druškić told the media during the opening of the Inclusion Mural.

The Second Inclusion Mural was created by Nermin Rizvić, an educator and rehabilitator at the Center for Inclusive Practices. The mural



formed part of the celebration of Children's Rights Week 2022, which took place on the wall of the courtyard of the Cazin II Elementary School.

Looking at southern Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are approximately 200 murals scattered across Mostar, primarily created within the framework of the Mostar Street Arts Festival (SAFMO). One of these is titled "Break Free from the Frame," painted by Maid "Mida" Redžić, an artist from Mostar.

PAINTING A PATH TO PEACE

In the town of Goražde in eastern BiH, the Peace Mural was created in 2020. Situated on the dilapidated building of the former Student Center, this mural is one of six peace initiatives implemented by the SEKA Center for Education, Therapy, and Democratic Development. The artwork was created by a group of young people led by painter, Irma Gušo Smajilhodžić.

"The message of the mural Our future is to bring people together, not to divide them. The mural presents an illustration of a tram with stories of high school and elementary school students from Sarajevo and East Sarajevo on its windows," explained the mural's chief designer, Aleksandra Nina Knežević. She added that the

mural's message is mutual support, dialogue, reconciliation, understanding, friendship, and hope for the future.

The mural "Allegory of Peace and War" on the wall of the Sarajevo Economics High School was painted by Zagreb-based muralist, "Lonac." It depicts the eternal struggle between good and evil, with a girl allegorically balancing two jars: one open and filled with olives and the other closed, featuring a Siamese fighting fish. The jar with olives is open, while the one with the fish is closed, suggesting that it is time for peace.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, Trebinje, along with five other local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, participated in the creation of the mural "25 Years of Peace in BiH," designed by Jelena Pištinjat, an artist and graphic designer from Trebinje.

"The two figures dominating the mural, who can only hold a dove, the symbol of peace, in unity, represent an artistic work that symbolizes precisely this assertion. Thus, peace can be achieved only through harmony, understanding, and love," Pištinjat told the media.

A mural in the mining town of Vareš shows that young people perceive their differences as

assets, eschewing the discriminatory educational policies in BiH aptly known as "Two Schools under One Roof," which separates children in the happiest days of childhood.

Students attending classes based on the Bosnian curriculum and their peers studying under the Croatian curriculum joined forces in extracurricular activities to create a mural of peace.

"The mural depicts unity, emphasizing the values that everyone should cherish and respect," said Nurdin Begović, the coordinator of the project "Feel the Art - Preserve the Tradition," organized by the informal group, Youth of Vareš.

Street art and murals often spark conversations. They can depict themes of peace and unity. They serve as a catalyst for dialogue, enabling people from different backgrounds to find common ground.

"In that lies the main strength of both memory and art. The sense of unity is one of the most important factors in the functioning of any society, and therein lies the power and significant role of young people, in particular, young artists," concluded Sarina Bakić, a Sociology professor at the University of Sarajevo Faculty of Political Science.



BOSNIA'S ONGOING BATTLE AGAINST LANDMINES:



PAŽNJA! ZABRANJEN PROLAZ!

Tekst: Sergi Cuadra Dominguez
Fotografija: Jose Salcedo Jimenez

Landmines and shells continue to claim lives in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. These unexploded materials are remnants of the devastating war in Bosnia, which formally ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995.

One Monday morning, on March 20th, 2023, Smajo, a 48-year-old man from Doboj, was walking in the local forest in search of firewood to heat his home. At around 3:10 PM that same day, the Doboj police received a tip about an explosion in one of the minefields on Becanj Hill. Smajo never returned home. An anti-personnel mine had killed him.

"It happens," says the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) demining mission leader in the Sapna area (Tuzla Canton), speaking from the field. "You can walk the same path a hundred times, get used to it, trust your instincts. You can walk for years within two centimeters of an explosive – a mine is no more than ten centimeters – creating a false sense of security. Until the fateful day comes when you set off the mine."

Since 1995, 1,781 people have fallen victim to landmines in BiH, with 624 fatalities. Today, an estimated 2% of the country is still mined, posing a direct threat to more than half a million citizens. Approximately 80,000 mines are still scattered across the country, making BiH one of the most mine-ridden countries in the world.

Demining efforts in BiH commenced in 1996, initiated by the United Nations (UN), which established a dedicated demining agency. This agency was handed over to the new BiH government as the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMAC). Working in cooperation with the three armies that had signed the Dayton Peace Agreement, this institution was responsible for identifying mined areas, drawing up action plans, determining protocols, and facilitating and coordinating the intervention of both national and international troops. BHMAC continues to carry out these tasks to this day.

Flooding in the country over the past decade has eroded large tracts of land, washing away



ordnance into places not previously identified as hazardous. This has further complicated BHMAC's mapping and marking efforts.

NEITHER RECKLESS NOR FEARFUL

Mine clearance is a complex process involving multiple institutions, a robust workforce, medical professionals, specialized machinery, and substantial sums of money.

NPA deminers, with 25 or more years of demining experience, explain that clearing a minefield requires ten times more effort, resources, and time compared to laying them. While human instinct is to flee from danger, deminers must move towards it in order to neutralize the threat and ensure the safety of others. For this reason, they are widely viewed as heroes.

In freezing temperatures and pouring rain, one NPA demining team based in Kikovi-Zavid tells us how they have suffered the loss of three colleagues in BiH over the years. Most recently, an 18-year-old boy was killed during his first demining mission. He had joined NPA at the encouragement of his father, who was also a deminer in the organization. Since humanitarian demining began in BiH, 53 deminers have died while on duty.

The team leader, in a characteristic display of Bosnian dark humor, describes their mission as "finding the mines before anyone can hear them."

"MADE IN BOSNIA"

"Many of these bombs were made in Bosnia. They used to be made in factories all over the country. We have a colleague who worked in one of these factories, then participated in mine action missions during the conflict, and now works with us on demining. PROM-1s are lethal, and we unearth them in perfect condition as if they were planted yesterday. That's why this device is the cause of most of the casualties," explains Selma Antić, an NPA project manager for risk assessment and education.

NPA's Global Training Center for Mine and Explosive Detection Dogs, located in Blagovac, near Sarajevo.

During our visit, we were welcomed by Hakon Ovland, one of the center's founders and its last remaining Norwegian member of staff. He shared the story of the center's founding in 2004 when the first litter of detection dogs was raised in a house he was renting nearby.

DOGS FROM BOSNIA READY FOR UKRAINE

Describing the efficiency of this particular breed of canine, Ovland compared them to Formula 1 cars, saying "It's like they have an extra gear." He added that even in countries like Iraq, these dogs can cover more than 1,000 square meters in a single day.

"The cost for each dog is \$25,000, and on average, it costs one dollar to clear one square meter of land. So, essentially, the cost of the dog is paid off within a month of work, and they have the capacity to work for up to 8 years," he continued.

One of their teams comprising 15 dogs is ready to be deployed to Ukraine, according to Amer Skenderagić, a trainer at the center with demining experience in Yemen, Cambodia, and Angola. The training process is time-consuming and constant, requiring two years of daily work until a dog is fully operational. The process begins with a 10-week observational period to gauge the puppies' reflexes before training begins. At the age of 15 to 18 months, they are ready to begin working in minefields. This is followed by three to six months of acclimatization to the specific territory of the country where the demining mission will take place.

Instructors highlight the strong bond that develops between the dog and the handler. They consider the dogs as more than just work partners, crediting them with saving countless lives, including theirs, on numerous occasions.

As the struggle against unexploded mines continues in Bosnia, this painful reminder of war is salt to the wounds of the survivors.





CYCLING PATH FUELS INTER-ENTITY COOPERATION IN BH

Text: Armin Halilović
Photography: Mitar Simikić, private archive

One cycling path is shaping politics in a way few expected in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The ongoing cooperation between the five Podmajevica municipalities located in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS) is a unique example of people over politics in post-conflict BiH. These municipalities, which span BiH's two entities, are working to develop tourism and employment in the region, which includes the Via Majevica cycling path.

Since Via Majevica connects Sapna, Teočak, Čelić, Lopare, and Ugljevik, the mayors of these municipalities signed a cooperation agreement and established an inter-municipal working group to plan the next steps.

The inter-municipal working group that started working in 2019 with the support of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina developed dozens of project proposals aimed at the development of tourism, while last year the group expanded its focus to waste management and environmental protection.

"Such a high level of inter-entity cooperation is quite unique in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we hope that soon, others will take similar steps for the benefit of their residents," said Damir Gnjidić, Head of the Office of the OSCE Mission in Tuzla.

Considering the extraordinary natural, cultural, and historical resources at their disposal, Gnjidić said that the primary focus of the initiative has been the development of tourism, an integral part of which is the bicycle path.

In addition to the OSCE, the Via Majevica project is supported by the German Embassy in BiH while the European Union is considering financial involvement.

Fermin Cordoba, Political Advisor and Team Coordinator for the EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina, says that the group decided to focus on Via Majevica as it is a positive story and has the potential to further promote social cohesion. The project was financed within the framework of the EU program for all (EU4All), which aims to assist local communities/municipalities during the implementation of construction interventions, improving accessibility to places and facilities in which citizens live through reconstruction, adaptation, and equipment acquisition.

"We see the Majevica region as a positive example of working across inter-entity borders. We are working on the principles that tourism and development of the economy are areas with huge potential to constructively engage local authorities to work on trust-building. Promotion of tourism and environmental protection are also associated with economic growth, so it seems to be an area where some

progress could be made. But again, the most important thing is that it isn't us internationals that are saying: 'Hey you need to engage,'" Cordoba said.

According to him, the most rewarding part of his job is building closer relations with the local population.

RECONCILIATION POINTS THE WAY TO THE FUTURE

"This project is an outstanding example of how, almost 30 years after the end of the war, reconciliation points the way to the future. Five municipalities – two from the RS, three from the Federation – extended a hand to each other in order to improve the development of their municipalities together," said Lea Thurm, Head of the Culture, Press, and Protocol Department of the German Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thurm explained that tourism is a way to create jobs in the region in order to stop further emigration, especially of the young population. Initially, the entity governments of the RS and FBiH were not ready to provide sufficient funds for clearing mined areas in order to prepare the area for tourism. As Thurm points out, this is why the Federal Republic of Germany "stepped in to provide a precondition for further investments."



"The approval of the project by the German Government makes it possible to start clearing the area of Majevica of mines by the end of 2024 in cooperation with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Center," says Thurm.

The first bicycle ride of the Via Majevica project was held in 2019, which started from Rastošnica, in Sapna Municipality. It attracted around 60 participants from all partner municipalities, as well as from Loznica in Serbia.

Fatima Gušić, a member of the Via Majevica Working Group from the municipality of Sapna, explains that the length of the route is about 80 kilometers, and goes through the territory of all five municipalities. That year, the trail was well-tended and bicycle signaling and signs were installed.

"The trail you ride through boasts an abundance of natural beauty, sacred and religious buildings, lakes, stećak tombstones, open plains, and forests. It offers cyclists an amazing view of the beauty of these areas. The goal of this ride is to promote a healthy lifestyle, inter-entity cooperation, the elimination of hatred, and the development of recreational sports and rural tourism," states Gušić.

Over a hundred cyclists from five partner municipalities, as well as the municipalities of Kalesija, Tuzla, and others, participated in the last bicycle ride. After each ride, there has been a gathering of cyclists, members of the Via Majevica Working Group, municipal mayors, international officials, and others.

Gušić noted that a documentary film was made about the activities of these municipalities, which showcased the work of the Via Majevica Working Group and the natural beauty of BiH. "In order to strengthen our cooperation, a joint package of tourist projects called 'Meet Majevica' has been prepared, and will be presented to international donors and organizations whose work we have drawn attention to," announced Gušić.

Enes Avdičević, President of the Preporod Bosnian cultural community from Teočak, said that the anti-hate coalition, Society without Prejudice, in Teočak has been actively working in the field of reconciliation and mutual understanding, building connections between five local communities from both entities for 15 years.

A COMMON GOAL

"The municipality of Teočak recognized the importance of the work of the members of the Coalition and of inter-municipal cooperation, and signed the Letter of Intent on Future Cooperation, which rejects the rhetoric of division. Its future action is based on joint work that builds bonds between communities and creates an environment for an inclusive future," said Avdičević.

He added that the project includes numerous activities, including the installation of

canopies, park benches, trash receptacles, and tourist signs on the Snježnica and Mezgraja lakes. In addition, the project includes inter-religious educational seminars, souvenir workshops, and the Via Majevica recreational bicycle ride, organized in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Avdičević predicts that Via Majevica will ultimately contribute to bolstering local employment and accommodation capacities in rural areas, as well as the expansion of the scope of tourist services.

"The heads of the five municipalities along the Via Majevica trail recognized the common goal of all nations, which is prosperity. To partners, donors, future users, and nature lovers, we presented the potential outcomes, a common vision of progress, and the idea that Majevica, with all its content and potential, is a perfect place for rest, recreation, and enjoyment of the rich local cuisine," Avdičević said.





TAVLA BY THE NERETVA: BOSNIA'S LASTING TRADITION

Text: Muamer Zukanović
Photography: Elvis Šabić

Rolling dice, moving 15 checkers across twenty-four points to their 'home board,' and 'bearing them off' – it is one of the oldest board games. Backgammon. It was played in the Roman and Persian empires, Ancient Egypt, and during Ottoman rule, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Bosnia, the tradition of playing backgammon has continued to this day, transitioning from local cafes and neighborhoods to clubs and associations for team and individual competitions.

Backgammon has long been played across Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in Mostar, the southwestern city on the Neretva River. It has been especially popular since 1999, when the Backgammon Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a member of the Olympic Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized the country's first team championship.

There are six clubs in Mostar registered with the Backgammon Association of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tavla Klub Stari Grad, Tavla Klub Bjelopoljac, Tavla Klub Policajac, Tavla Klub Zrinjski, and Tavla Klub Livi-Balinovac.

Damir Baltak, the president of Tavla Klub Stari Grad Mostar, describes the rules of the game as simple: "Two players participate in the game.

Each of them has 15 checkers that need to be moved across twenty-four points to reach their 'home board,' and then be taken out of the game. Players use a pair of dice, moving the pieces based on the numbers they roll." Baltak adds that the winner is the first one to remove, or 'bear off,' all their pieces and thus earn a point. The duration of the game varies depending on the agreement, typically ranging from the first to reach three to five points.

The difference between backgammon and chess, dominoes, or similar games lies in its dynamic nature and unpredictability. Baltik explains, "It's been proven that backgammon is a game of single moves, unlike chess, which offers a much larger number of possible combinations to play. Additionally, there is an element of luck involved since dice are used to determine the next moves. This factor makes the game much more interesting than other games."

Tavla Klub Stari Grad Mostar was established in 1996, initiated by Professor Muhamed Voljevic. Baltak notes that the club went by the professor's name for a long time, and the traditional jumping tournament from the Old Bridge was also named after him. The club currently has around 30 members, predominantly younger players. In recent years, they have won the team championships of Bosnia and Herzegovina three times,

securing second and third place, as well as the Bosnia and Herzegovina Cup. In addition to team achievements, individual club members such as Ekrem Spahić and Šemsudin Kusturica have also been individual champions. Edin Spahić and Almir Hadžimerović have both been two-time national champions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In addition to playing in clubs, some players also participate in competitions individually. One such player is Benjamin Čamo, the current Balkan Champion, who first discovered the game in one of the well-known cafes in Mostar when he was still in high school. Čamo says that he's drawn to the game's intriguing aspects.

Čamo earned the title of Balkan Champion in the tournament held in Neum at the end of last year, which featured ten clubs and six players. When it comes to preparing for tournaments, Čamo explains that there are online programs available that analyze matches statistically, mathematically, and logically.

"After every match, I conduct an analysis to examine any mistakes I made. I learn new things after each match. Each match is highly intricate, but the more I learn, the fewer mistakes I make, increasing my chances of winning," added Čamo. He added that he plans to defend his Balkan Champion title.



ART LAPIS SETTING HERZEGOVINA'S SCENERY IN STONE

Text: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Art Lupis

In the town of Ljubuški, nestled in the western part of Herzegovina, the picturesque backdrop of the bubbling karst springs and streams, and idyllic fields, govern the landscape. This beauty of the Herzegovinian karst landscape has been preserved for some time through the creation of a set of curious stone souvenirs. Bestowed with titles such as 'At Grandma's,' 'My

Grandfather,' or 'My Village,' these handcrafted mementos hope to capture the iconic scenery of Herzegovina. Behind this creative endeavor, which showcases an authentic expression of the Herzegovinian region, is Nikolina Miličević, a resident of Ljubuški who decided to start a small business called Art Lapis.

"I've had the idea for a while because my family has been working with stone, so the material has always been readily available and I'm familiar with how to use it. It just needed to be shaped into

something close to my heart, that is, stone souvenirs, especially little houses because I love my Herzegovina," said Nikolina, who receives significant support from her family and the community.

Among her creations, you can find stone houses, religious artifacts, as well as figurines with patriotic motifs. Nikolina explained that when she first began, her creations took more than three days to make, but now it requires less time.

"I do everything by hand. The stonemason prepares the stone strips that I cut into small pieces with pliers. I glue these pieces row by row and work around the doors and windows. Then, I glue cardboard to the doors and windows. Next is the roof made of wooden pieces, which I cover with special corrugated cardboard. Later, I add landscaping elements like fences, debris, flowers, and trees. All the decorations come from nature," Nikolina explained.

Aside from her love for her hometown, another reason d'être of Nikolina's business is her disability. Bosnian society does not offer many professional opportunities for people with disabilities. Nikolina says she is content with the progress she has made in her career, but she believes that the demand for souvenirs could be higher.

"I plan to expand the business. I would like to hire someone because I still need help, given my disability. But everything depends on the demand and how the business will develop," said Nikolina.

She advises young people, who may be discouraged and lack the motivation to translate their ideas into action, not to give up, and to be bold regardless of any obstacles.

"You have to believe in success because that's the only way you can succeed," concluded Nikolina.





FORGED BY ANCIENT MASTERY: THE BOSNIAN JEWELER PRESERVING AN AGE-OLD ART

Text: Almedina Mehić
Photography: Mitar Simikić

Established in 1938, Sofić S. goldsmith's shop stands as a testament to three generations of skilled artisans in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each piece of jewelry forged at this shop is the product of meticulous and creative craftsmanship. For the past 13 years, their mission has been to present ancient Bosnian jewelry to the modern world.

Driven by a desire to showcase the golden treasures of their homeland, these goldsmiths work under the careful supervision of experts, top archaeologists, and ethnologists, to create a collection of faithful replicas and unique pieces of jewelry inspired by traditional motifs. Sofić S. utilizes the ancient techniques of past craftsmen and has managed to create a distinctive brand of jewelry that scrupulously preserves thousands of years of tradition and culture. This practice has resulted in a collection of gold jewelry spanning from the 3rd century BCE to the 20th century.

At Sofić S. an entire team works together to create each piece of jewelry, a process which takes several days. They use original materials

such as gold, silver, and precious and semi-precious stones, paying great attention to their techniques in order to ensure that the jewelry faithfully depicts the skill and artistic talent of the ancient masters.

Sofić S. jewelry embodies the beauty of tradition seamlessly intertwined with contemporary aesthetics. Their jewelry stands out for its unique style, which combines tradition, elegance, and modernity.

Maintaining a long-term business based on craftsmanship in Bosnia and Herzegovina is known to be a challenging process, yet their success extends beyond the borders of their homeland. For 15 years, jewelry forged by ancient techniques proudly bears the Sofić S. brand on the streets of Sarajevo, London, Stockholm, New York, and beyond.

Looking to the future, Sofić S. plans to expand their team, create and refine new collections, and organize exhibitions to introduce the rest of the world to their exceptional jewelry. An inspiration to youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they advise young people to pursue their dreams within their homeland and diligently work towards their goals.





ŠIPOVO'S CHEESE PIE: A DISH WORTH REVERING

Text: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Ajdin Kamber, Darko Kojić
(Foto baza)

In the western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina lies the municipality of Šipovo, with a population of around ten thousand. The municipality is situated near the valleys of the Janja and Pliva rivers and the streams of Sokočica, Lubovica, and Volarica. This topography is favorable for the production of traditional Janja cheese and kajmak (clotted cream), which are used in the preparation of Janja's sirnica [cheese pie] or kajmakuša [kajmak pie], a local dish that has enriched the region's culinary offerings for centuries.

Since 2017, this traditional dish has even had a monument in Šipovo. It signifies its historical role and significance of the cheese/kajmak pie in the town during difficult times.

Milan Kovač, the mayor of Šipovo municipality, stated that for centuries, the pie has been served at celebrations as the 'final offering' on the table at religious feasts, weddings, and baptisms.

"One poet from Šipovo dedicated a poem to this dish, where the verses 'pita nas je održala i njojzi hvala' [we survived thanks to the pie, and we thank it] refer to the fact that it was a

significant dish during the 'hungry years' in this region," said Mayor Kovač, describing the verses of the Šipovo poet Vojo Rakita.

As he mentioned, there is a saying among the people, "If you know how to make a pie, you can get married", which visitors to the region find especially charming.

Every year in July, Šipovo becomes one of the most visited cultural hubs during the "Days of Šipovo" festival. Alongside sports competitions, this cultural event concludes with a pie-making competition known as the Pitijada, where the women of Šipovo, as Mayor Kovač describes it, have the opportunity to showcase their skill and speed in making pies in the town square. This allows them to vie for awards and recognition as the fastest pie makers.

The Tourist Organization of the Šipovo municipality notes that the monument was erected to honor the pie precisely because it is a national and traditional dish of all ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is also a custom (among Orthodox Christians) to raise a toast with rakija in honor of the pie when the hostess brings it to the table.

"Traditional food as a product of the environment and way of life in a particular area undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the tradition of all peoples. It's a part of us and our identity;

it defines who we are, where we come from, and we must not forget that," stated Vesna Muždeka, the director of the Tourist Organization of Šipovo municipality.

Janja's sirnica or kajmakuša, is just one of the reasons why tourists visit the town. Rural tourism, which during the summer season often requires "an extra bed," is also becoming increasingly popular. It encompasses Janja Islands, the Pliva River springs, Vagan Cave, and other attractions.

"According to our data, Šipovo is a destination where tourists enjoy day trips, and many of them stay for two to three days to visit everything Šipovo has to offer. In recent years, there have been quite a few family visits lasting four or five days. Untouched nature, clean rivers and their sources, mountain landscapes, sports hunting and fishing, the medieval Sokograd fortress, the Glogovac Monastery, and numerous other attractions await you," notes Mayor Kovač, inviting all those interested in exploring this fertile region.

Muždeka from Šipovo's Tourist Organization emphasized that they must strive to ensure that the generations to come do not forget the food of their ancestors. Ultimately, it is a part of the history and culture of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



PICTURESQUE LIVNO: A CITY OF CHEESE AND WILD HORSES

Text: Erna Mačkić
Photography: Haris Ljutić, Mljekara Orman

Nearly ten years have passed since Livno, a gem of western Bosnia and Herzegovina, appeared on the Distractify portal's list of "38 magical small towns that are too perfect to be real". Alongside Livno, the list included Bled in Slovenia, Cappadocia in Turkey, numerous Italian towns, Dazhai in China, and Hallstatt in Austria, among others. According to Distractify, these towns, with their surreal beauty, resemble picture book illustrations.

Livno is located in western Bosnia and Herzegovina. The city sits on the southeastern edge of the Livanjsko Polje at the foot of the Kruzi plateau, below Mount Cincar and the rocky hill of Crvenice. The Kruzi plateau is known for its wild horses, as well as its distinctive historical dwellings called košare, where families such as the Šehići, Sitnić, and Burkić have long resided, producing the renowned Livno cheese and other dairy products.

The wild horses of Livno are a unique phenomenon in this part of Europe. For almost 50 years, these horses were domesticated and used for farming, but with the arrival of mechanization in the 1950s, their owners released them into the wild. Since then, the wild horses have mostly roamed Kruzi, Cincar, and the surrounding areas, including the Borava Glava pass, a road connecting Livno with Šujica, in Tomislavgrad Municipality. Searching for water in winter and for salt, they have managed to adapt to the harsh weather and evade



threats from horse thieves and predators. Livno's Borova Glava Mountaineering and Environmental Society has also built watering holes.

PROTECTION FOR LIVNO HORSES

In late 2009, Livno Municipality adopted a resolution on the protection of the wild horses, providing for their professional supervision, hygiene, disease control, nutrition, herd structure and identification, marking, and population monitoring. However, this resolution was repealed in 2017 due to budget constraints within the local government.

Protective measures are anticipated for the estimated 800 wild horses inhabiting Kruzi and its surroundings. It is often possible to approach these beautiful creatures or even watch their playful interactions. Thanks to these beauties, as well as the area's other natural wonders, Livno is becoming a well-recognized tourist attraction, with available accommodation nearly impossible to find during the summer months. Tourists come to Livno not only from Bosnia and Herzegovina but also from neighboring Croatia and other countries worldwide, including Australia and the United States.

AWARD-WINNING CHEESES

A visit to Livno is incomplete without tasting Livno cheese, which is produced according to traditional recipes at the Livno, Orman, Puđa, and Burkić dairy farms, among numerous others. Smaller farms produce cheese for personal use, while the remaining milk is delivered to dairy farms, including Livno Dairy, which has upheld the tradition of high-quality cheese production since the late 19th century.

The unique production method, which follows the original recipe has been passed down through generations, has resulted in premium cheese with a special texture, aroma, and flavor. At Livno Dairy,

they make original Livno cheese as well as numerous other varieties, such as Cincar, Smoked, Limited Edition, Goat, Pepper Blend, and Trappist.

Over the years, Livno Dairy has achieved prestigious recognition for its cheese. The International Institute for Quality and Taste in Brussels has awarded Livno cheese the Superior Taste Award (STA), with the maximum three stars for exceptional taste and superior quality, for three consecutive years. As a result, the cheese also received the Crystal Taste Award, an additional recognition for products that have earned three consecutive STAs from three different tasting panels. In 2024, a total of 25 products in various categories received this award.

The panels consist of over 200 renowned food experts carefully selected from the most prestigious culinary institutions, such as Le Guide Michelin and Gault & Millau. During a blind test, products are evaluated based on appearance, aroma, texture, and taste.

"This success is another confirmation of the quality of authentic Bosnian-Herzegovinian domestic products, recognized on a global level, which we can be extremely proud of," stated Livno Dairy.

Meanwhile, Orman Dairy stands out for being family-owned and operated. Upon returning from Germany, the Orman family began producing Livno cheese under the brand Farmersko Blago [Farmers' Treasure]. They make cheese with various additions, including olive oil, figs, pepper, paprika, and lemon. For two consecutive years, Orman Dairy has won first place at the III and IV Balkan Cheese Festivals in Belgrade.

In addition to cheese, wild horses, fresh air, and rivers flowing into the Adriatic, Livno also boasts the largest artificial lake in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lake Buško, and enjoys around 2,250 hours of sunlight annually. All things considered, it is no wonder that Livno locals are always said to be in a good mood.





FOLK DANCE

THE ESSENCE OF BH CULTURAL IDENTITY

Text: Almedina Alihodžić
Photography: Ensamble Proleter

Culture, art, and the beauty of historical expression – this is how folk dance in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be described. These traditional dances are still being learned by new generations and passed on to others.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, folk dance is often an indispensable part of celebrations and local events. This would not be possible without the many folk dance groups that nurture tradition and fill numerous halls with their performances. One such group is the Proleter Workers' Cultural and Artistic Society from Sarajevo, founded back in 1905 by the Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Operating continuously since its establishment, Proleter relocated its activities to new, more modern premises after the Bosnian War. Today, they state their mission is to preserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the peoples living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

DANCING INTO UNITY

"It is our obligation as a socially responsible entity to provide young people with the opportunity for creative development and steer them away from today's vices. Our vision is to

direct our activities towards the youth in order to interest them in our rich cultural heritage and customs practiced by their ancestors throughout their lives. This can be achieved through the organization of various projects," stated Sulejmen Skenderagić, the Secretary of Proleter Sarajevo.

Proleter has participated in numerous festivals across Europe and around the world. They received a plaque from the Sarajevo City Council in 1965, as well as the April 6th Award in 1976. Among their collection of awards is also the plaque of the Sarajevo Canton in recognition of their contribution to the study, preservation, and promotion of the cultural heritage of all peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the year 2020.

Another group preserving local traditions and culture, including folk dance, is the Croatian Cultural and Artistic Society, St. Anthony-Cim. This society was established in 1872 within the Franciscan Monastery in Mostar, as the Mostar Brotherhood of St. Anthony of Padua. It expanded its activities, primarily focusing on literacy in Herzegovina until the end of the Second World War when it ceased to operate for some time. The society was re-established in 1993 in the House of St. Anthony in Mostar, thanks to the Franciscans, and has been actively working ever since to preserve tradition and heritage.

The folk ensemble of this cultural and artistic society consists of concert, preparatory, and children's ensembles, as well as original and recreational groups. Marinko Jurić, the leader of the St. Anthony-Cim, describes folk dance as a noble hobby that revives a rich tradition and brings new life to the stage.

"You have to love folk dance. It's simply a way of life. As a sport, folk dance strengthens both the body and the spirit. Despite all our daily obligations - school, university, work - we spend our free time exploring old customs and traditional attire, or reconstructing old dances and songs," said Jurić.

Meanwhile, in the northwestern Bosnian city of Banja Luka, folk dance is taught by the team of the Pelagić Workers' Cultural and Artistic Society, which was established in 1927, named after the theologian Veso Pelagić. It originally began with a speech-choir section, expanding to include a folk dance ensemble in 1945. Bojan Kukić, the Artistic Director of the Pelagić ensemble, noted that they begin each season with a new slogan. This season's is "All in a Circle".

"The color of the season is dark blue, reminiscent of [local] Zmijanje embroidery. Throughout the year, we have rehearsals where we practice the routine to be performed at international festivals during the first half of the

year. In the second half of the year, we prepare a program with a specific theme for local audiences," Kukić elaborated.

NEW GENERATIONS NURTURE THE "OLD"

When enrolling their children in extracurricular activities, many parents think first of sports or modern dance, with folk dance often being the last on the list, according to Proleter. Interest in joining the society peaks at the beginning of the school year when all cultural and artistic societies open registration for new members. After a month or two, however, Proleter says that membership begins to wane, leaving only diehard folk dancers.

"For retaining members, the societies' management also bears great responsibility because we all have certain interests, as do the members. They want to socialize, travel, and participate in various festivals and events, and it's the management's duty to make these activities happen. Where there's good management, there's also a good society," Skenderagić, from Proleter, acknowledged.

The Pelagić Society emphasizes that the interest in folk dance is not diminishing. This observation is echoed by Mostar's St. Anthony-Cim, which has also noted a continued interest in enrolling children and young people.

"Folk dance is beginning to be recognized in cultural events. We're receiving a growing number of requests for our ensemble to appear at openings and programs for various cultural events that are not exclusively concerned with folk culture. We're happy about this. We would

love for it to become even more popular," said Jurić, from the St. Anthony-Cim society.

He added that their folk ensemble collaborates with various other ensembles, societies, singing groups, and associations throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Balkan region, and Europe.

According to the Pelagić Society, no day for folk dancers is ever the same. "It could be a day for rehearsing our repertoire, a day for costume preparation, before or after performances, a day for stage preparations. The most effort is invested in preparing the program for performance, where dancers, singers, and musicians tirelessly rehearse for many hours per week. During rehearsals, dancers go through a warm-up where we strive to protect our dancers' locomotor systems as much as possible and prepare the body for all kinds of exertion. After that, we enter the phase of rehearsing dance patterns and then memorizing choreography," Kukić explains.

He adds that the Pelagić Society collaborates with other associations throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, with ensembles from the region, and has established contacts with groups from around the world at international festivals.

Kukić notes that each of their dancers has a special relationship with the traditional attire, and they are taught to treat it with respect, particularly as these are original costumes more than a century old, and therefore embody significant cultural heritage.

Both Proleter and Pelagić societies agree that folk dance is not frequently showcased in the media, which is one of the obstacles to attracting a larger audience. "There aren't

any television shows dedicated to folk dance in our country, and even the time allocated for someone to announce a concert is very short," Skenderagić pointed out.

A FUTURE OF FOLK DANCE

Both Proleter and St. Anthony-Cim are looking firmly to the future.

Proleter is determined to continue working to strengthen their membership and improve the quality of their performances. In the near future, they plan to introduce new stage setups, restore traditional costumes, and repair instruments.

St. Anthony-Cim highlights the enormous effort that their ensemble invests in preserving cultural heritage: both the tangible, in the form of costumes and musical instruments, and the intangible, such as dances, songs, and customs. "We strive to present all of this very well to our audience through rich production and scenographic measures, to make folk dance on the stage more accessible to younger audiences and therefore interest them in joining us," said Jurić.

The members of Pelagić believe that it is crucial to pass on the beauty of Bosnian heritage to future generations, protecting this unique cultural inheritance from oblivion. "The uniqueness of our folk dance was recognized by the expert committee at the 60th Week of Culture in Wista festival in Poland this year, where our ensemble was awarded a special prize for archaic forms in dance and song. Indeed, song, dance, and music are the most valuable and beautiful aspects that can be passed down as heritage," Kukić concluded.



COFFEE AND ČEJF: A DELVE INTO BOSNIA'S DAILY RITUAL

Text: Adelisa Mašić
Photography: Mitar Simikić

Coffee, a famous, aromatic, and energizing beverage, has a long history and cultural significance worldwide. From its beginnings to the present day, coffee has evolved into a symbol of social gatherings, moments of serenity, and a reviving flavor.

In the heart of Sarajevo, in the very center of the Old Town, you will find one of the region's most widely known cafés: Miris Dunja [The Smell of Quinces]. This café carries a unique story created by its owner, Edib Čengić, a story which was shared with us by his long-time employee, Adnan Mazgić, a man with a great passion for coffee and the art of crafting it.

"For Edib, Miris Dunja isn't just a business venture, it's also his dearest project. Through hard work and perseverance, Edib has managed to bring to life his creativity and love for the past, creating a space that's a true treasure of memories and stories," Mazgić shared.

He describes the arrival of coffee in Sarajevo 450 years ago from distant Arabia through Constantinople, the beginning of a journey that would permanently shape the cultural identity of the city.

"There's a coffee for everyone," Mazgić asserts, explaining that in Sarajevo there are more common varieties such as Arabica and Robusta, but also rare types like Excelsa and Kopi Luwak.

Regardless of the type of coffee you prefer, whether it's strong, aromatic, mild, or even fruity, you can find them in Sarajevo's coffeehouses, which are centers of social life.

"People gather there to converse, read books, play chess, or simply enjoy some peace and quiet. Coffee Houses have become essential places for socializing and gatherings, gradually evolving into cultural institutions that continue to uphold the spirit of Sarajevo," Mazgić explained.

The traditional importance of coffee in Bosnia and Herzegovina is reflected in the craftsmanship of making cezves [coffee pots], cups, and serving trays, which are produced by copper-smiths. Among them is the oldest copper-smith, Muhamed Huseinović, who says that he pours his whole heart and soul into his work. His love for this ancient craft was passed down from his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, who were also copper-smiths.

"I started learning the craft when I was a six-year-old boy, under the guidance of my father," Hasanović recounts. He adds that he has passed on his skills to his sons, Ismet and Ismar, and he hopes that one of his grandchildren will also inherit this profession.

This craftsmanship is deeply rooted in the heart of Sarajevo and is a symbol of local identity and tradition. To make cezves, cups, and serving trays, Hasanović explains that masters of this craft use various materials and techniques to make them distinctive, with copper being the most commonly used material due to its durability and heat conductivity. "It's shaped by hand, using special tools

and techniques like boiling, molding, and engraving to create unique details and patterns on their products," he elaborates. Hasanović points out that in Sarajevo, the most esteemed decorative method is savat, an engraving technique.

The art of making these products in Sarajevo plays a significant role in preserving cultural heritage. These items not only symbolize traditional Bosnian culture but also serve as connections between the past and the present.

"Coffeehouses have been the center of social gatherings since forever. They became favorite places for conversation, giving rise to various styles of coffee preparation. This gave rise to kafa razgovoruša, focusing on conversations over coffee. Similarly, we have sikteruša—bitter coffee, proljevuša—mild coffee with more water and less coffee, razgaluša—coffee served with

sherbet, and dočekuša—the first coffee, which is sweetened," Hasanović explained.

The tradition of sipping coffee slowly from a fildžan [traditional coffee cup] is a precious part of the cultural heritage of this city. Masters of this craft, with their love for their work and tradition, create masterpieces that symbolize the identity of Sarajevo.

SARAJEVO'S FIRST COFFEEHOUSE

According to legends, the first coffeehouse in Sarajevo was Hadži Šabanova's, located in Bentbaša, dating back to 1592. At that time, it was a favorite meeting place for Sarajevans, especially the Sarajevo elite, known as ešraf. Unfortunately, it was demolished during World War II.





SICANJE

RESTITCHING A LOST CATHOLIC TRADITION

Text & photography: Matija Krivošić

Places that you visit spontaneously for the first time truly have a special aura and soul. Just like that, my first trip to the Prozor-Rama municipality was to study the traditional custom of tattooing among Catholics in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). It goes by different names in different parts of BiH, such as *bocanje* or *križicanje*. For a long time, I was looking for the best possible example of traditional tattooing and tattoos, which are above all, the living history of a time and a dying tradition.

“Maybe there are two or three women left who have crosses in Rumboci village,” said Mare Vuročić, a grandmother from the village of Rumboci in Rama municipality. Mare was one of the people I interviewed during a visit to this village in northern Herzegovina, or southern BiH, for research on traditional Catholic tattooing, known as *sicanje* (poking or cross-poking).

The idyllic landscape of the village of Šarci near Rumbok was illuminated by the colorful palette of the sun’s rays that day when I spoke with Mare, Marta Šarčević, and Biljana Glibo. Mare was born in 1944 and Marta was born in 1938. They are relatives who are also tattooed in the traditional way. Biljana is an ethnomusicologist and leader of the ethnic heritage

group ‘Čuvarice’ and she tattoos traditional designs, but with the help of modern tattoo studio equipment.

Sicanje tattoos were used by Catholic women to identify themselves as Catholics and thus save themselves from forced marriages, abduction into the harem, and rape during the Ottoman period. This method of tattooing in our country arose during the Ottoman occupation of medieval Bosnia and continued to be practiced extensively until the end of the Second World War. After the end of the Second World War, *sicanje* slowly disappeared into oblivion, but in certain areas, it can still be found.

During Ottoman times, anyone who was marked in this way would be prevented from converting to another religion, that is, to Islam. However, this was not always the case. According to the documents collected by Croatian ethnologist Ćiro Truhelka, there is evidence that some Catholic women who were tattooed were still converted to Islam so that they could marry the (Muslim) man they loved. A few months ago, I spoke with Toni Petković, a mythology researcher from Vareš. He also confirmed that in the Vareš area, there were also cases when tattooed women were abducted by the Ottomans or changed their religion.

According to an article in *Glasnik* magazine, published by the BiH National Museum,

Truhelka and Dr. Leopold Glück were the first to talk about “common” tattooing, as it was called then. Marking religious, ethnic, or any other affiliation with tattoos was common at that time, but much more so among Catholics than any other peoples.

“When we were little girls, Mare’s aunt used to do it. That’s how it was in the old days, that’s what our people did to show that they were Croats during the Turkish occupation,” explained Marta, also a resident of Rumbok.

The girls who decided to get *sicanje* tattoos mostly did so between the ages of 10 and 15. Those I spoke to told me that they had done it at the age of 15.

“When I was little, this [tattoo] was done by your late relative,” Marta tells Mare, laughing.

A question that really intrigued me was whether men also tattooed each other. The answer I received was “rarely,” to which Mare added, “It was so nice for us, and us women wanted to do it.”

They confirmed that while “almost every girl had tattoos,” it was rare for men. Later in the conversation, Marta mentioned that her late brother had tattoos similar to hers.

Truhelka’s sources confirm that tattooing was more frequent among women. Both hands were tattooed, but according to Truhelka, the left hand was slightly more tattooed. Sometimes

women had so many tattoos on their hands that the color of the hand wasn’t visible. Women tattooed their arms, above and below the elbow, as well as their hands. Chests were also tattooed along the sternum. Sometimes you could also see some simple design on the forehead. Truhelka says that in that period, it was mostly women from Central Bosnia who were tattooed, especially in the cities of Sarajevo, Visoko, Travnik, Fojnica, Prozor/Rama, Bugojno, and the Banja Luka area. The custom was slightly less common in Olovo, Vareš, Vijaci, and in the Neretva river valley.

When men decided to get tattooed, they would get a simple design above their right elbow or a cross on their index finger. Towards the end of my trip in northern Herzegovina – or southern BiH – I had an informal conversation with Zdena, a priest from Guča Gora and a lover of traditional tattoos. He told me that men also used to get tattoos under their armpits or behind their ears. They even got designs from *stećaks* or traditional tombstones.

Sicanje began with a family gathering at the home of a female relative who was skilled in tattooing. However, the grandmothers from Rumbok said that there was no specific date when it was done. The only thing that was certain was that it was done more often in the summer. As regards the number of women who would be tattooed in a day, Marta said, “however many you would like to receive, two or three. They would mostly come on Sundays when everyone was at home.”

From her sources, Truhelka states that women tattooed themselves, but the grandmothers from Rumbok refuted this, because when tattooing, the skin of the hand had to be held taut with the other hand.

“We were glad to do it. But it was hard, you know. Take honey, black ink, and mix. First, you draw what you want and then with a needle proceed to tattoo it,” said Mare. Marta elaborated, “From coal or crushed coal, and honey, you would make the mixture. Take a needle, the one we used to sew with, and draw.”

Before the actual injection of this mixture, the design would first be painted with some black ink. Then, with a sewing needle, as Marta specified, one would tattoo into the skin until the design was finished.

“This is how [the skin] was tightened, you had to endure the pain. We would be covered in blood. It surprises me, but thanks to dear God, we never pierced any veins,” Marta said with a laugh.

After the tattoo was done, the hand would be wrapped in a bandage which would be worn for a whole day. The next day it would be washed with very cold water.

Crosses were the most commonly tattooed design, but not the only one. Certain sets of designs also developed that were characteristic of a particular place and had their own names. Crosses were usually placed on the finger, forehead, hands, or in the middle of some larger designs. In the area of Kraljeva Sutjeska, there were somewhat more ornate designs.

Then followed a series of secular symbols formed by dots or a circle, which were generally placed on the upper side of the arm, under the elbow, and on the chest. The circle usually had a cross inside, but more often it was empty, or with a single star. The circles were usually concentric, with a smaller one inside a larger one. On men, the circle was placed above the elbow, while on a woman, it was on the upper arm.



The crescent-shaped fence opened at the bend of the elbow. The other side facing the fingers was decorated with lines, berries, and fir trees. The inside contained a cross or a star with several lines, and the middle of the fence had a cross or another design.

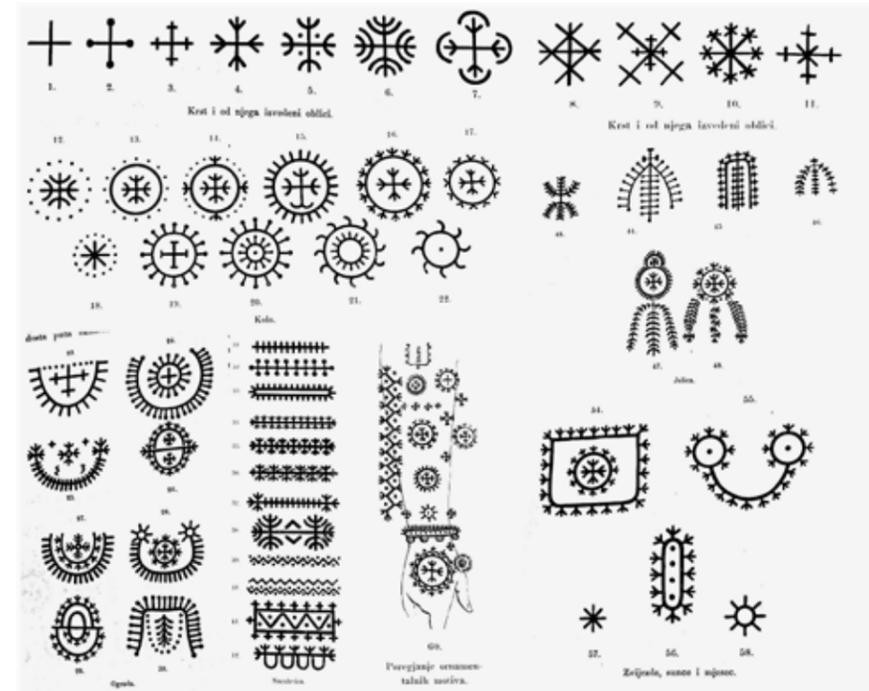
There was often a design below the fence, circling the wrist, such as a branch. The more ornate designs were called *fir trees*.

The most common design in the Bila area, the municipality of Vitez, was an ear of corn, consisting of a vertical line, crosses, and twigs. It was often placed on the lower arm, below the elbow. The stars had shapes with eight lines or a circle bounded by lines. The stars mostly served to fill the space between the main designs. The design known as the “ornament” consisted of a star, which was composed of an oblong ellipse with lines on it. The “sun”

design was surrounded by a similar pattern and closed by a line on the upper side. A sickle-shaped design with a wheel at both ends was called a “moon”.

My travels through Rama ended with a conversation with Biljana, the ethnomusicologist and leader of the Čuvarice ethnic heritage group. She tattoos these designs because it is her profession, but also because it is a tradition that she loves and wholeheartedly wishes to preserve. As she stated, today, people react very well to these kinds of tattoos and she received questions from her former students who were looking for advice on what to do when they set out to get a traditional tattoo.

Young people are still interested in traditions and this custom from times gone by lives on, Biljana concludes. In other words, *Sicanje* is quietly but surely returning to new generations.





“Writing is PEACE for me. P - Passion. E - Enlightenment. A - Ambition. C - Compassion. E - Empathy,”
Danica Novaković (22), Banja Luka.



“Spreading peace is crucial for creating a better world where all people can live in harmony and progress. That is why I am very proud to be a part of this peace-spreading story through the magazine MIR,”
Dženisa Joldić (25), Hadžići.



“As a young journalist who gained experience working for the Balkan Diskurs platform, continuing cooperation with the MIR magazine is of special significance to me. It is extremely important to me that young people who have contributed to the creation of this magazine have positively highlighted how many good things are happening around us, which we often take for granted,”
Mirnes Bakija (36), Sarajevo.



“Writing for the MIR magazine allows me to explore and get acquainted with various socially-engaged projects, individuals, artistic initiatives, and active citizens who make the Balkan region a better place to live in. It is especially encouraging when, besides the digital version, I could read and hold my texts and those of my colleagues in printed form,”
Anja Zulić (32), Banja Luka.



“If correspondence is just the first rough note of history, being a correspondent for the MIR magazine means recording the positive side of the present that rarely finds its place in history books. Creating a magazine that celebrates humanity provides the basis for creating history books that will speak of humane deeds. For me, it is an exceptional honor to be part of such a story,”
Selma Mašić (26), Zenica.



“I believe motivation is the key that unlocks the door to creativity. Journalism is precisely one of the things where I express my creativity and strive to convey positive stories of people from the local community,”
Elma Hasanspahić (23), Zenica.



“Writing for the MIR magazine is an exceptional opportunity because we contribute to an annual publication that supports young innovative individuals. In every text, we build bridges between the past, present, and future through stories about society, history, culture, (in)equality, human rights, justice, and politics in BiH and the Western Balkans, shaping our region as understandable and familiar to domestic and international audiences,”
Adelisa Mašić (27), Sarajevo.



“The fact that my voice (and the voices of others through my texts) is heard and that someone values what I do and the way I do it motivates me not to give up on writing. Because writing is my creative expression and my window to the world, and my goal is to put on paper what I see and feel in the best and simplest way,”
Sumeja Mehmedović (29), Kalesija.



“Writing for the MIR magazine means spreading positive words about and within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each of our topics represents the society in which we live, one of cooperation, peace, and benevolence. That is precisely the reason for my continuous support of the PCRC and Balkan Diskurs, which provide opportunities for new as well as permanent correspondents of Balkan Diskurs, and other collaborators, and involve them in continuing their peace-building efforts,”
Kristina Gadže (29), Ljubuški.



“Writing for the MIR magazine is an opportunity to promote positive stories that pave the way for a better life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is my way of contributing to the community and spreading inspiration among readers, creating bridges toward a more peaceful and prosperous future,”
Selmir Smajić (23), Lukavac.



“The MIR magazine is precisely that part of my sweet obligations that I would accept even in the greatest organizational chaos of my life. Here, I have left a small part of myself, with which I learned to act in my own peace (or turmoil) and advocate for the interests of collective peace, with a team that always inspires me anew,”
Irma Ahmetspahić (25), Sarajevo.



“Writing for the MIR magazine offers me creativity at its highest level. Each written text carries its own story, love, and together they make the MIR magazine,”
Ramo Tučić (32), Zvornik.



“For me, peace represents an oasis of tranquility, harmony with our surroundings, inspiration, and strength that drives and prevents the emergence of insecurity within us. PEACE is one of the most important segments of life that lifts us all above the storms of life and turns us towards each other,”
Benisa Bibuljica (28), Bijelo Polje (Montenegro).



“Peace for me means exploring intriguing topics and sharing information with readers. This represents my path to creatively convey my ideas and enhance the diversity of available media content. Writing for MIR magazine enables me to connect with the audience and act on a broader social level,”
Dunja Rujević (21), Banja Luka.



“A smile is very important. If we cannot smile, then the world is not at peace,”
Amir Barleci (30), Sarajevo.



“Journalism is the art of uncovering what someone else wants to hide. That's why in this edition of our magazine, you will encounter love, unity, humanity, and peace because they still exist, even though they are sometimes hidden from us,”
Neda Vukadin (25), Banja Luka.



“Every day is an adventure and an opportunity to show the world from a different perspective. In the MIR magazine, words are bridges, and truth is the most valuable currency,”
Muamer Zukanović (28), Mostar.



“To write for the MIR Magazine means to be on the right side of both history and the present and to continuously contribute to the construction of a more normal, open, and happier Bosnian-Herzegovinian society. This is the pledge that my generation needs to make so that in the future, we, as well as the young people who are just coming of age, can live in a society of solidarity tailored to human measure, and so that we do not repeat the mistakes of our ancestors,”
Vanja Sunjić (31), Dobož.



CHARNA

A HARD-ROCK BOSNIAN SUCCESS STORY

Text: Neda Vukadin
Photography: Vedran Ševčuk Alf

Fifteen years ago, David Jojić and Zlatko Mušić conceived a band that would stand apart from the rest and bring a new musical spirit to the Bosnian city of Banja Luka. They named the band Charna, and today, their vision has expanded beyond the borders of their hometown, rocking the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

David and Zlatko wanted their original music to be heard far and wide. Tragically, fate intervened, and Zlatko did not live to see the flourishing of his band. In his memory and in defiance of death, David and the rest of the band decided that their music and Zlatko's spirit would live on.

"The idea was to form a band that would produce exclusively original music and to try to leave some mark on the music scene. In those years, one of our most significant successes was participating in the 46th Zaječar Guitar Festival, but we were defeated in the final. Unfortunately, Zlaja also died later. My wish at that time was to publish his last work, the track Bring Me Back [Vrati me], in his honor, in order to save it from the clutches of oblivion," recalled David, the group's frontman.

Along with David, the band currently consists of guitarist Igor Stanković, bassist Darko Karać, rhythm guitarist Srećko Popović and drummer Vladan Gvozdić.

"We collaborate constantly. We create new songs and the last two awards from Zaječar and Mostar are, in a way, the crowning

consummation of the effort and enthusiasm we invest in this band," said David.

The frontman explained that the band name "Charna" is an old Slavic word that had several meanings. Most often, it referred to a black-haired girl or a child of the night, because the old Slavs gave the name Charna to children born during the night.

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE AN EAR FOR QUALITY MUSIC

"If you were to ask me how I would describe the band," David expounded, "I would say it's a collection of five different personalities and characters. However, when these five personalities step into the studio, practice room, or onto the stage, we become one, and each of

us knows what to do so that we perform at the highest level. Through every song we release, we want to reflect on all aspects of society, both the bad and the good. I can rightfully say that our songs often have a utopian quest for truth with a constant reevaluation of society and ourselves. Unlike some more modern genres, they don't come together quickly; they 'simmer' for several months."

"Our audience today spans multiple generations. From older rockers to young people just entering this realm, and that's something we're particularly happy about. Trust me, it's an unparalleled feeling to stand on stage and watch a kid sing your song with you, from verse to verse. We hope to inspire these young people to dedicate themselves to this art form as well. As long as there are those kids in schools with long hair and an acoustic guitar, there's hope for rock and roll," David stated.

STANDING OUT IN AN OCEAN OF STREAMING

"Each award has its own charm and each one is won under different conditions. We won the award for the best band at the Banja Luka Guitar Festival, in our own city, which meant a lot to us. It was important for us to prove our worth there. The award of the Zaječar Guitar Festival has a special weight because we were added to the list of bands that have

triumphed at Europe's oldest music festival. We won our most recent award from Mostar because we had a completely different competition system compared to the previous titles," explained David.

They are especially fond of their newest songs, which have yet to make their public debut. Experimenting with a different style, they have decided to try their hand at rap music, collaborating with Banja Luka rapper Bojan Madžar, who performs under the name Zdoje. Their song "Mute" is a perfect symbiosis of hip hop's fierce sound with melodic elements.

The band is determined to ride the momentum of their recent victories, which will not be difficult given their upcoming plans. Before going to Zaječar, David said that they recorded two songs at Cirith Ungol Studio, which are being screened and will be uploaded onto streaming platforms along with video clips. They will also be returning to Mostar, as their recent award included an opportunity to record at the Pavarotti Studio, which is considered one of the best in the Balkans. They will record two tracks, with accompanying video clips to be made by spring.



THE SARAJEVO ARTIST WHO TURNED HIS HOBBY INTO A BUSINESS

Text: Alem Bajramović
Illustration: Damir Balić

Asked to introduce himself, Damir Balić responds, grinning, "Who are you? What do you want?" The inquiry, he says, sounds "cop-like," adding, "Who's paying you? Who do you work for?"

Balić, an illustrator and animator from Sarajevo, has been living in the Netherlands for two years. He draws cartoons and humorous illustrations and recently founded a small company in The Hague. He says that the entire process of setting up his business took about an

hour, including online registration and a visit to confirm and sign the documents.

As a child, he loved copying comics and cartoons including The Simpsons, South Park, Family Guy. He recalls that comics "were everywhere, folks passed them around a lot. Mostly Alan Ford and those French ones, Gaston and Unpapa, and Asterix and Obelix. You start reading, copying. You see it and realize you're good at it. You start with copying and then you get into it more seriously," Damir explains. He added that even during the Bosnian War (1992-1995), while hiding from shelling in basements, he flipped through Alan Ford comics that had been left by a neighbor.

After not being admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts, he says this allowed him the freedom to draw whatever he wanted, though he believes that an education from the Academy would have had its benefits.

"I would have had discipline, there would have been other things, a million other benefits. But here, at least, you have the luxury of choosing who to listen to and who to learn from. I started doing this a long time ago, and if there's anything in terms of education that's worth the money and especially the time you invest in it, it's these online schools and tutorials. Because you really learn from many masters, from top experts who created the comics and cartoons you used to watch," states Damir.

He notes that these experts are "cool and down-to-earth people" and in learning from them, he has seen how they work, what their routine is, what inspires them, and how they practice. "You might offend them if you call it 'talent' because they know how much effort they put into reaching that level. You don't wake up talented and just do it, just like someone doesn't get up and spontaneously do an

Olympic backflip. You have to practice and build yourself up," he reflects.

TECHNOLOGY AND DOODLING

He finds new technologies attractive, and he wants to see what gems they may hide and have to offer. He says that technology has now "exploded," and digital visual art is all around us. "The combination of technology and doodling, in the end, is a whole industry. If you know how to draw and if you know how to work in programs, you can create a lot of things, from marketing to movies, cartoons, everything," Damir remarks.



In his creative work, there are many influences from comics and animated films, but he adapts to clients' requirements. He considers his style to include doodling caricatures, humorous drawings, new-age graffiti, and other things that he does "just for the joy of doodling, drawing when there's no need to draw." However, he emphasizes that he cannot make a living on this alone.

"The other day, I read that building a style is essentially admitting what you don't know, and then it passes as your style. You aspired to something greater, something stronger, but if you got stuck on that, you'll just say, 'That's my style, and that's it,'" says Damir.

He explains that his work reflects a range of influences: "Sometimes I realize I actually drew noses like in Alan Ford, or ears. But that's that creative plagiarism we all do. You copy and observe every master before you, thinking about how each of them would do it, from the great masters to guys who make comics. And then within that, you incorporate yourself, your style, what drives you, and ultimately, what's easiest for you to do."

Upon coming to the Netherlands, he says he realized that he is "not special."

"You know, when you're in your own element, it's the comfort zone, it's clear that you're good at it. Anyone who doesn't know you knows you through your illustrations, that's what you do. But when you go abroad, especially at this age, it's not exactly easy. You really have to start from scratch. What came naturally for you in 35 years of living in Sarajevo, here, you have to start all over again," he explained.

Damir is currently learning Dutch, and while taking notes on vocabulary and grammar during classes, he suddenly finds himself drawing. "It's like being back in school, and that's the sweetest thing for me. I draw the craziest things in the moments when I shouldn't, when I should be paying attention and learning the language. And in those drawings, I see things I haven't seen in years, things I used to doodle back in the day," says Damir.

According to Damir, illustrators in the Netherlands do "crazier things", and there is a larger market. He loves drawing faces in various variations, so he spends time "buzzing around Pinterest, with billions of pictures of different faces".

"You try, you look around, you draw. I mostly work on faces and some other humorous things,

a bit punkish, metal-like. They wanted to send me to a psychiatrist, my mom was concerned about how many skulls I draw," he says with a chuckle.

PRESSURE ON ARTISTS

He also doodles simpler designs to publish on social media, though he believes that the constant posting of artwork is one of the main pressures on artists.

"Having an online presence is a job in itself. Whether you're doing it for yourself, Oriflame [cosmetics company], or the singer Dino Merlin, it's the same. You really have to dedicate yourself to it," says Damir.

New technologies and equipment for illustration are a great help to him. He adds that now there is inexpensive painting equipment everywhere, and ideas can be jotted down and sketched quickly.

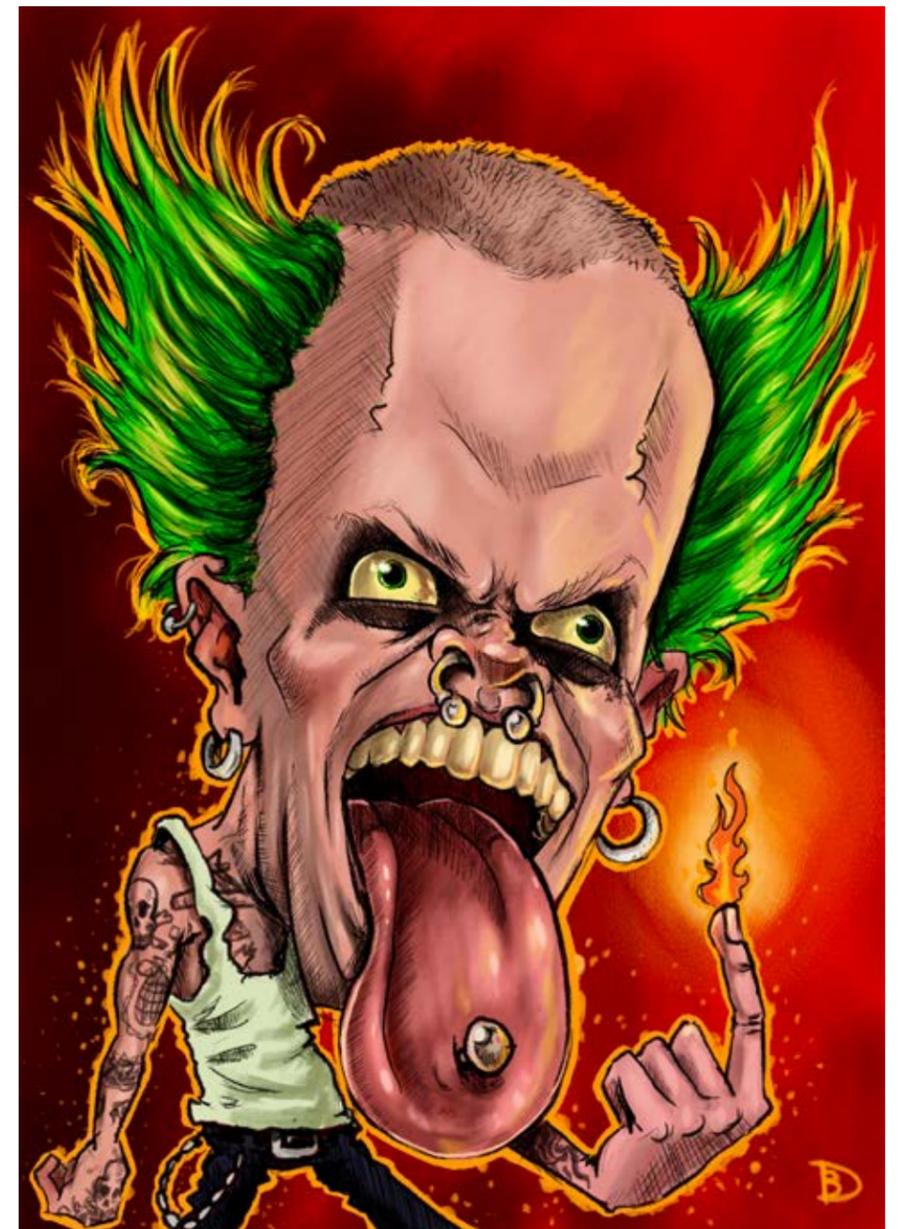
"I remember back in the '90s, I saw in a movie about how they used a drawing tablet. That was a wow for me, and we were drawing with a mouse in Paint. And then I got some small tablet back in the day. You know how it changes... Until then, I drew everything with ink, pen, but when you start drawing on a

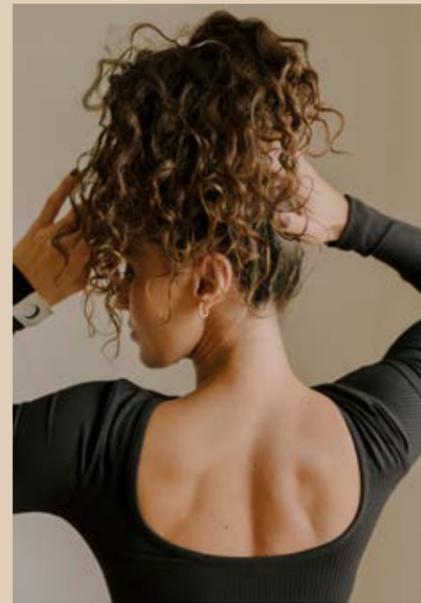
tablet and see the possibilities that give you speed, the 'undo' option, you're an instant art studio," he reflects.

The biggest challenge in his profession is the generation of images through artificial intelligence, which Damir describes as something that happened overnight: "You wake up and see [...] you don't have any work anymore."

"You just type what you want in the application, and it produces work three times better than mine. I always thought machines would take over some other jobs, starting with Robocop, not these creative things," says Damir.

He believes that young people who want to work in visual arts need to promote themselves through social media, plan what to do and publish. "You have to have the will for it, to exploit yourself to that extent, privately and whatever. Post online how you draw the most current things. It's great that you can learn for free now, at least in the beginning, and if you want to learn something specific, you can pay less than 100 dollars and learn those things online. And then, when you learn, you see where you have a way in," Damir explains, adding that some works of art should be done for the public while others should be for a price.





KAUR

THE NEW SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRAND BY TWO BOSNIAN WOMEN

Text: Mirnes Bakija
Photography: Muna Nazak

While data from The Economist magazine shows that more than half of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina wish to leave the country, this is not the case for the talented designers Ada Vuk and Amra Ćorić. Ćorić and Vuk are the creators of the new KAUR clothing brand. These best friends decided to give up their jobs as a pharmacist and an information technology engineer in order to create clothing inspired by the yoga lifestyle.

"While we were in lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, we came up with the idea of getting involved in fashion design. We realized that there isn't enough clothing on the market here that's natural, comfortable, suitable for working out, and at the same time elegant enough to wear for a night on the town. Both of us have been yoga instructors for several years, so based on our needs and understanding of the yoga community, we started creating clothing," Ada shares.

Ada and Amra design everything themselves, but they also have a whole team of people they

work with, from modeling to production, all of which takes place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "It's very important to us that it's created in and stays in our country," Ada noted proudly.

All KAUR creations are made exclusively from 100% natural materials. In addition to being 100% natural, the fabrics must be sustainable, as well as comfortable, soft, and gentle. Ada explains that their summer collection is made with Tencel, a fabric derived from the leaves of the fast-growing eucalyptus plant, which is biodegradable, hypoallergenic, and antibacterial.

"Unfortunately, environmental awareness is not at a very high level in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We would love to create some zero-waste items from leftover materials, whether it's pillows, yoga props, or the like. Regrettably, there are no fabric recycling factories in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but we sincerely hope to change that in the future," said Ada.

Each of their collections is given a name that tells a unique story. The name of their eighth and newest fall/winter collection, which was released in October 2023, is 'Gracious but Fierce,' reflecting their view of women as

simultaneously strong and gentle. The fabrics used in this collection are natural, cotton, and viscose, making for a sporty yet elegant style.

"Our creations are not just pieces of clothing. Women need to be empowered more, so we came up with the idea to place the collection's slogan on the left side, which is related to the feminine principle. We often receive comments from our customers about how they feel different, and we believe that our clothing carries energy," remarked Ada.

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Last year, Ada quit her job as a pharmacist and is now working on the KAUR brand and yoga. Amra also recently resigned from a major telecommunications company to focus on managing the KAUR business, which they believe has developed exceptionally well in the last two and a half years.

Through various programs for female entrepreneurs, they have realized that while many

women have fantastic ideas, these ideas are rarely translated into business ventures. Ada emphasizes that at some point, it is important to stop and tell yourself, 'What I'm doing isn't a hobby—it's a business that I need to dedicate myself to fully.'

The KAUR label has also faced many challenges. In the beginning, as Ada pointed out, they were producing less clothing, so it was difficult to find a factory. Those willing to engage in smaller-scale production generally had problems related to their workforce. Additionally, there is a limited availability of fabrics, especially natural ones. Most wholesale fabrics are not adequately stocked and have a limited selection of colors, making it challenging to reproduce an item. Because of this, Ada says they often created "limited" collections and eventually found a supplier outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to have the opportunity to work with a wider variety of fabrics.

According to Ada, many women doubt themselves and lack the confidence and courage to bring their ideas to life. When you want to work in the fashion industry in Bosnia and

Herzegovina, she adds, it is crucial to consider who your target market will be.

With her experience as an IT engineer, Amra quickly developed a website (www.kaur.ba), making the products available for online purchase. Ada notes that to some extent, they are still having to remind people to make orders through the website, as many mistakenly believe their products can be bought via their social media.

The KAUR website is in English, with the aspiration of having customers outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina. "We have had a lot of orders from all over Europe. The limiting factor here in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the price of shipping, as people pay higher shipping costs than in the European Union," Amra explained.

Their aim is to keep the creation and production processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina while also finding a model for entering the EU market.

"YOU'LL MAKE MISTAKES AND THAT'S OKAY"

From the very beginning, it has been crucial for them to be a socially responsible brand, and

that is the fundamental value the two women wish to nurture through their KAUR label.

"With the KAUR brand, we promote community gathering and giving back to the community. We often organize events where we make various donations. This year, we organized a drive where we decided to be a permanent donor to the Safe House in Sarajevo," recounts Ada proudly.

KAUR's mission is to involve people from the community in the creative process and give everyone the opportunity to get involved in their work.

"This way, it's better for everyone and each person contributes to the whole story. I think it's very important to learn to ask for help. I remember a message we received at the very beginning when a woman told us we would make mistakes, but that this is okay. Indeed, this is true - defeats shouldn't discourage us but teach us. From that, things develop that can be built upon on a personal level as well," Ada reflected.

Her message to female entrepreneurs is to be brave in their ideas, persevere, and direct their energy towards success. By boldly pursuing their desires and goals, success, she says, is guaranteed.

KAUR creations can be purchased on their website, at the Orea Bazaar, both Bazerđan locations in Sarajevo, and the Tekne concept store in Banja Luka.



TUZLA'S MASTER PENCIL CRAFTSMAN

Text: Ramo Tučić

Jasenko Đorđević explains it requires patience, a steady hand and precision, to create his artistic works: miniature sculptures carved on graphite pencils. He has crafted over 300 of these pieces to date, most of which have been featured in temporary or permanent exhibitions. Some have even become part of private collections both within and outside the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Đorđević discovered his love for art at a young age. He crafted small sculptures from various materials, as well as miniature books measuring just a few millimeters and micro-origami.

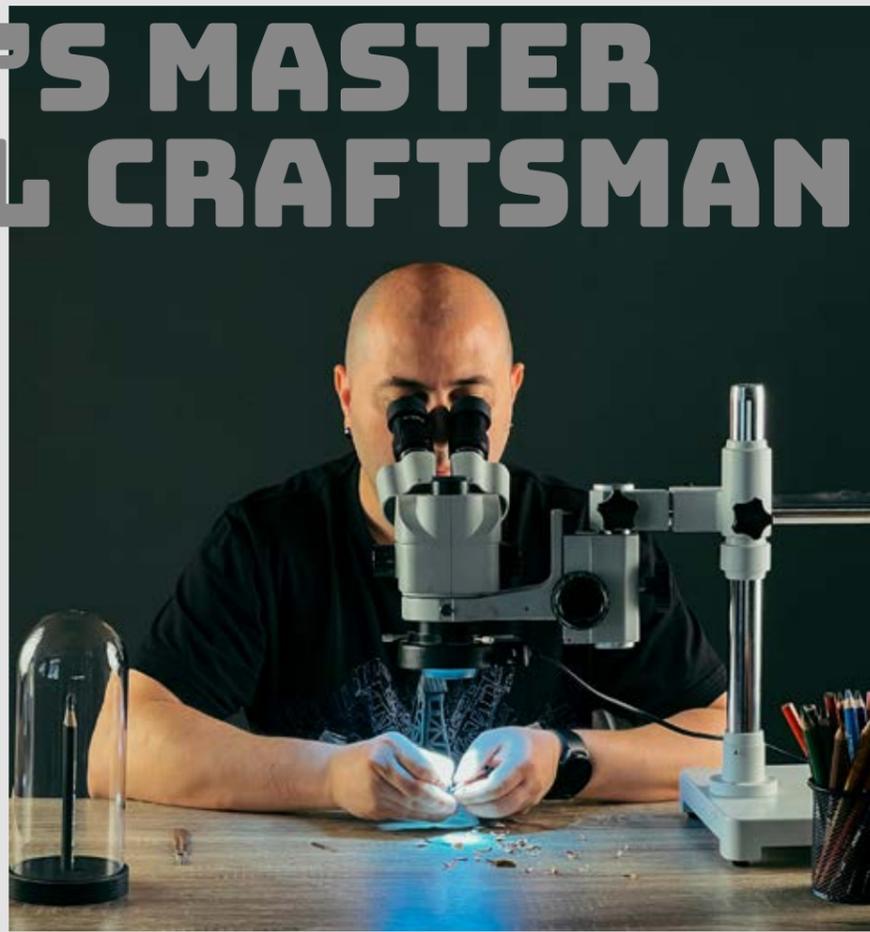
"With one origami figure, I applied for the Guinness Book of Records. I folded a paper boat measuring about 1 millimeter (paper dimensions around 1.5 mm - 2.5 mm). Unfortunately, due to technical issues, the record was not accepted, but they confirmed to me that they didn't have anything similar at the time," recalled the artist from Tuzla.

He has since chosen the graphite pencil as his medium. Graphite is naturally very fragile, requiring special attention during the carving process. With dimensions averaging 2-5 mm, the finished work of art is classified as a form of miniature sculpture, and the fact that it is housed inside the pencil gives it a unique touch.

THE TOOL BECOMES THE ART

Jasenko notes that "the pencil has always been a tool for creating art, but in this form, it becomes art itself."

When asked how it all began, he emphasized that it was in fact his brother who peaked his interest, by showing him the sculptures of an American artist in 2010 and challenging him to try something similar. Accepting the challenge, Jasenko sent his brother a finished sculpture



on a pencil a few days later. A year later, he had his first exhibition at the Youth Center in Tuzla. The following year, he became a member of the Tuzla Canton Visual Artists Association and had the opportunity to showcase his work at the association's annual group exhibitions.

His first collaboration came in 2013 with the Derwent pencil factory in England. He created approximately ten sculptures on their pencils which were exhibited at the Frankfurt Fair in Germany. After the fair, the sculptures were returned to England, where they were displayed as a permanent exhibition at the Cumberland Pencil Museum. That same year, he participated in the 7th Biennial of Miniature Art in Tuzla,

competing against 180+ artists and around 500 works. Jasenko won two awards: the Sculpture Award and the Grand Prix of the Biennial.

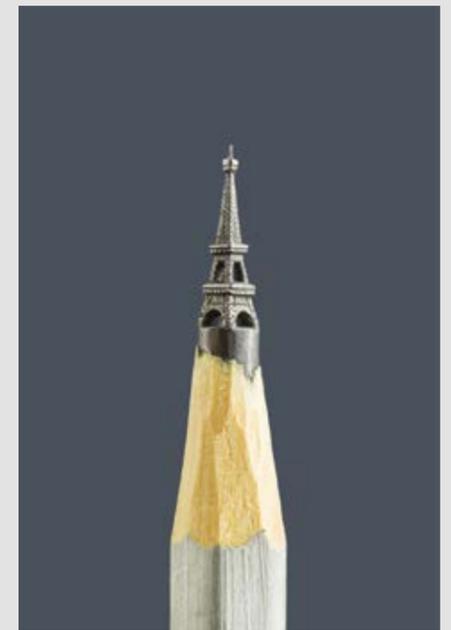
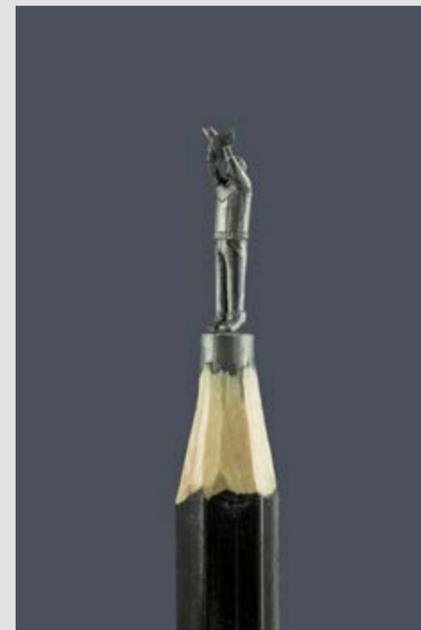
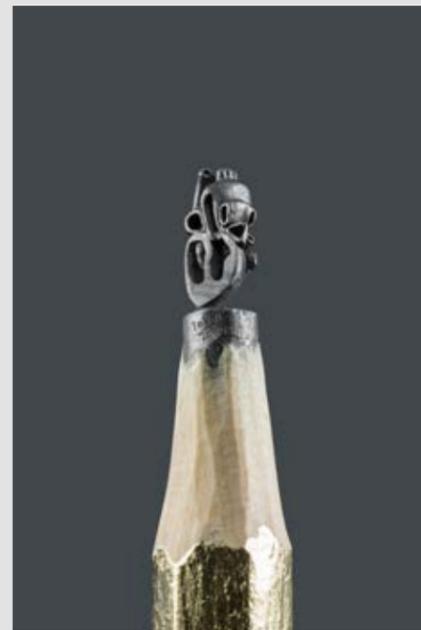
His works have received global media coverage, including from outlets like National Geographic, BBC, China Today, Russia Today, The Sun, and The Guardian, as well as most of the cooperative news agencies like Anadolu, Reuters, Associated Press, EFE, AFP, and many others. Following this media attention, Jasenko received an invitation for his first solo exhibition outside his country, in Norway.

Jasenko points out that when he began, there was only one artist in the world working on such pencil sculptures, and there was little information available about the craft. Thus, he had to learn the process on his own.

"I had a few surgical scalpels at home, I took several standard HB pencils with a diameter of 2 mm and started experimenting. I first tried to make some simple shapes to get acquainted with the material. Soon, I found pencils with a slightly larger diameter (4 mm) and greater durability (H2) and started working on more demanding shapes," he explained.

He reiterated that graphite sculpture technique is extremely demanding because of the material's delicacy, requiring the utmost care while carving. Operating within dimensions of between two and five millimeters further complicates the process.

"The crafting process can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, I choose the design that I'm going to carve. Since graphite is spatially limited, it's necessary to select a design that can fit into that surface. Once I choose the design, I sketch the sculpture as it should appear on the pencil. This way, I can assess the

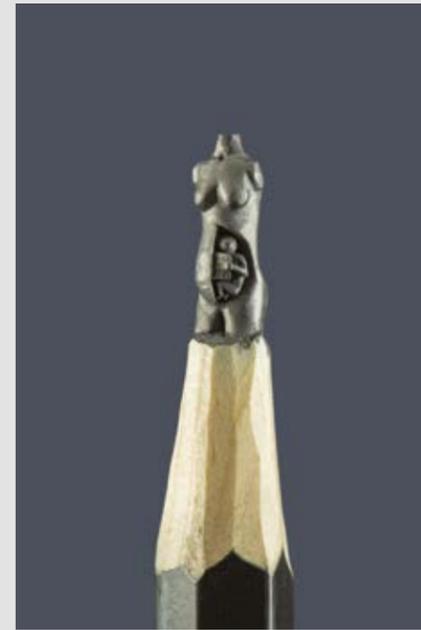


areas where the sculpture could potentially break during carving," Jasenko explains.

In the second phase, he begins carving, using surgical scalpels and a cosmetic magnifying glass with strong light. This phase can last from several hours to several days, depending on the complexity of the sculpture. Once he achieves the rough shape of the sculpture, he begins the third phase, which can take several days, focusing on fine details. "In this phase, I use a microscope to achieve as much detail as possible. When the sculpture is finished, I take a macro photograph of it and then store it in a secure box," he added.

Given graphite's fragility, storing his miniatures poses an additional challenge. The Tuzla-based artist notes that many sculptures have been damaged during transportation or by careless handling.

Over the years, Jasenko has partnered with numerous organizations such as Amnesty International, Save the Children, and Project Literacy. He has also partnered with companies including Union Bank, Carlsberg, Chow Sang Sang, Alpen Maykestag and Coca-Cola.





THE BANJA LUKA FASHION LINE TAKING THE WORLD BY STORM

Text: Neda Vukadin
Photography: Elani

In the northwestern Bosnian city of Banja Luka, two women are well-known for their contribution to fashion: Dijana Popović and Tanja Vreto. Their skilled needlework has captivated local, regional, and global hearts, with numerous celebrities wearing their carefully crafted pieces. Today, they have created their own fashion line, Elani. The women's ethos is clear: no one should leave their shop without a smile. "We've always tried to make sure that our clients leave our shop with a smile and later shine with our piece," Vreto happily states. These two best friends have been collaborating in business for over a decade, and the play

of needle and thread in their hands takes on a completely different meaning with a special design and Bosnian-Herzegovinian touch.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS AND THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

It all began in 1997 while they were in high school, which they attended together, marking the first generation of fashion designers enrolled in Banja Luka. Their friendship and collaboration continued through college and at the fashion house CarmenLine, where they honed their craft. The secret to their success in this line of work is love, which, as Vreto emphasizes, they have never lacked. "We love overcoming

obstacles and meeting clients' expectations together. Sometimes, we even surprise ourselves. Over time, challenges become routine, and you start to enjoy crafting increasingly complex pieces," said Vreto. Elegant dresses, which might seem difficult and complicated to many, don't pose a significant challenge for these skillful tailors. According to Vreto, the most challenging moments are when they are working on a piece for a collection, such as their Trench Coat collection, and even seemingly simple models in fact require a lot of effort. As for their clients, Vreto says they always come with a clear vision, which makes the job easier, and there are not many issues or deviations.

Throughout their years of work, Vreto and Popović have created dazzling pieces for many well-known personalities in the region, and costumes with their signature have graced numerous stages, thanks to, for example, athletes. "It's a great honor," Vreto adds.

They had long fostered the idea of creating their own fashion line, and during COVID-19, they officially started their venture. Vreto describes the process as the natural culmination of ten years of work, during which they had always happily fulfilled the wishes and ideas of their clients, giving their own design and personal touch to their creations.

The Elani fashion line began three years ago. They chose the name "Elani" because they wanted something universal and international, but most importantly, easily memorable, as the term elani symbolizes light, zest and thrill.

Popović emphasizes that their biggest fear was that they would appear amateurish when they entered the market. It was crucial to them that all the effort, work, and carefully selected materials be duly noted and appreciated.

"We wanted to have the most positive impact possible and for any observer or buyer to believe and understand how much effort was put into each piece when they see it," said Popović.

GLOBAL INFLUENCES MEET A SIGNATURE TOUCH

Accessibility was a main goal of the Elani brand. "It was important to us that we liked our work and that the prices were affordable with respect to our incomes, and it has indeed proven to be a good ratio and comparison," noted Popović.

While they have never regretted their choice of career path, they cannot hide their disappointment that many others do not appreciate the importance of this particular occupation.



"We're sad that many young people aren't as enthusiastic about this profession as we are. Every day for us is filled with creativity, challenges, and maximum fulfillment. I can say that we don't look forward to going home - we look forward to our workdays and responsibilities. This profession should be given a chance," Popović emphasized.

For inspiration for their collections, the two Banja Luka women say they follow the global fashion scene and trends, stressing the importance of incorporating anything that can contribute to their work and is appealing to their local community. According to Popović, many factors come into play, from the colors currently fashionable to cuts, but they strive to ensure that everything they create is usable and wearable. "Each of our pieces carries a designer's touch, and in such a short time, I

can confidently say that our design has become recognizable and is gaining more and more recognition, which makes us especially happy," stated Popović.

Elani places a strong emphasis on quality, with the aim of creating clothing that endures for years and is highly functional. Popović says that their greatest ambition was to enable women to buy modern, high-quality, and functional clothes, which is often difficult today.

ALL IS FAIR IN FASHION

Disagreements between Vreto and Popović occur because both have many quality ideas, calling for careful selection. They refer to these disagreements as creative, and after a successful working day, they forget that they even happened.

"Our relationship is based on friendship, god-motherhood, and collaboration. We've learned and overcome everything together, so we always have that in mind. We're each other's greatest supporters, and our strongest support is family. Sometimes we have deadlines, for example, for shooting a collection, and we want some last-minute changes, so we create pressure on ourselves and work late into the night," explained Popović.

She believes that all of this is apparent - the sacrifices they make - and that is why she thinks they are recognizable in the fashion world. She added that they invest a lot in this business and that it is not just about needle and thread. It is necessary to devise good marketing and have a whole team behind them.

Vreto and Popović have big plans, and time will show how they unfold. With their participation in Fashion Week in Sarajevo, they will strive to elevate their work and marketing to an even higher level than it is presently.



NO NATION FASHION

SUSTAINABLE FASHION & NEW DOORS FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Text: Irma Ahmetpahić
Photography: No Nation Fashion

A project initiated two years ago is an example of inclusivity, love, and empathy towards people on the move. In addition to therapeutic interventions, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched this new fashion project to harness the skills and creativity of migrants. This initiative has been undertaken with the aim of integrating migrants into society, blending different cultures, promoting sustainability through recycling and environmental protection, and enacting positive changes in the local community.

The project was conceived and coordinated by Margherita Vismara, a department chief at

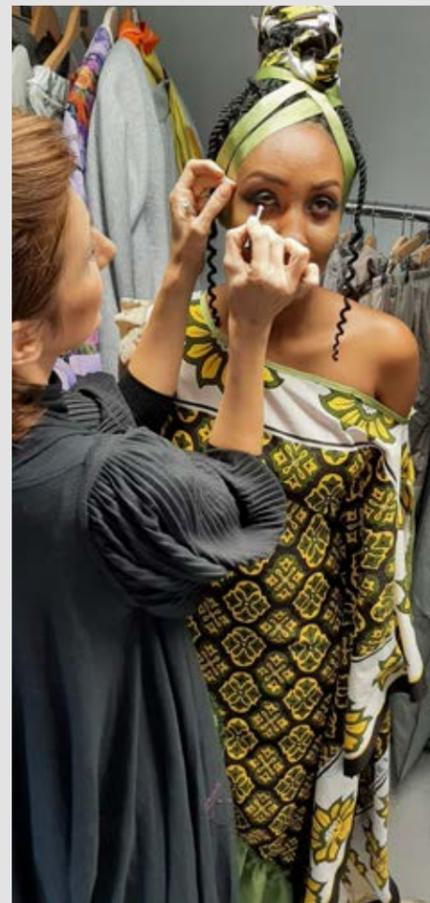
the IOM. She came from Milan to be part of the project, teaming up with acquaintances and friends from BiH. The project has given rise to a brand called No Nation Fashion, and I got a chance to talk to one of its designers, Aleksandra Lovrić.

SEWING AS AN ESCAPE

The migrant reception centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) were designed to accommodate 800 people, yet, at any given moment, one can find over a thousand migrants, all from different cultural and educational backgrounds. Finding oneself in these camps is undoubtedly overwhelming, and migrants, as strangers in a new society, are in dire need of psychological support.

In situations where access to the outside world beyond the reception center is restricted, migrants find themselves under common scrutiny, and therapeutic workshops have proven to be the most helpful. These are provided in the Ušivak and Blažuj centers in Sarajevo, where they have led to significant improvements in residents' mental health.

The first IOM sewing center was opened in the Ušivak reception center. When asked about the choice of sewing, Vismara explained that many migrants come from Pakistan and Bangladesh, countries where men are commonly involved in the textile industry, making it a universal option for all genders. As they began working, it became apparent that the migrants possessed many skills, a desire to learn, and a talent for sewing.



Initially, they started with making simpler items such as reusable masks, which contributed to the conservation of economic resources. Vismara emphasized that the local community, private sector, media, and various other professions played a role in the project's development, donating materials worth 25,000 Bosnian marks (approximately €12,780).

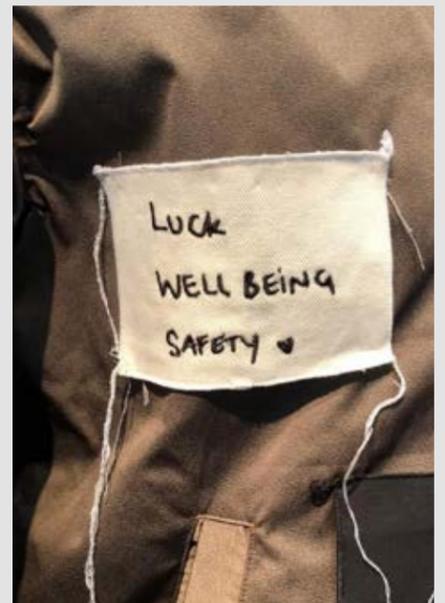
"We started sewing in the center, and just six months later, we organized our first fashion show, which was a tremendous step, demanding even for individuals deeply involved in the fashion industry," stated Vismara, adding that everything was done in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Designer Aleksandra Lovrić explained that it was an interesting concept for her since this was a way to connect with people on the move and contribute to the development of multiculturalism.

"I've always found the selling of tissues on the street to be sad," said Lovrić, who, by 2021, when IOM advertised for the Project Coordinator position, already had years of experience with international fashion brands. Selling tissues refers to the often-seen practice across the country in which migrants are selling packets of tissues on the street in exchange for money from passersby.

Lovrić's journey with migrant collaboration began when she partnered with a girl from Iran to recycle old fabrics to create bags and turbans, eventually publishing their work on social media. As she explained, they put a lot of love and empathy into the project, which their various followers recognized, offering maximum support for the continued development of the project.

"We spent up to eight hours [sewing] in that 20-square-meter corner, where the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Morocco, and Algeria come together. It was more than just a sewing corner. It was a place where all emotions,





laughter, tears, different stories, and experiences met," the designer shared.

EMPOWERING OPPRESSED WOMEN

Lovrić displayed ten meters of canvas on a terrace, allowing the imagination of random passersby, mostly minors, complete freedom. Using the paint she had, she envisioned everyone writing their dreams on the canvas. The results were striking. One woman painted a skirt, with one side covered by flames and the other by a hand, symbolizing restricted freedom of speech in support of empowering oppressed women who often faced these situations in their home environments.

According to Lovrić, makeup and modeling workshops are also organized in the migrant centers, focusing on restoring women's confidence. She adds that women staying in camps want to feel dignified and have time for hair-styling, makeup, and a new outfit. In this way, when they stand in front of the mirror, they can experience a sense of security and a renewed awareness of their existence.

Lovrić also created a photograph inspired by the fashion photographer, Peter Lindbergh. The models were striking girls from Afghanistan. Some sported short hair or piercings, reminiscent of iconic photographs featuring the likes of Cindy Crawford and Naomi Campbell. They wore white shirts, in the same composition. The photograph's caption read: "Not supermodels from the '90s, but much more than that," and it had a very positive impact.

Initiatives like this one help boost the confidence of young girls from migrant backgrounds, opening up new opportunities for them, such as collaborations with various associations.

No Nation Fashion models are living their story and have even been to New York, thanks to collaborations with the renowned Parisian International Fashion Academy, Kent State University, and a prestigious fashion school in New York. Additionally, a "No Nation Fashion Pop-up Shop" was organized, and the proceeds from the first collection were evenly distributed to the Renaissance Association, which provides assistance to those affected by and undergoing treatment for breast cancer in BiH,

and to support migrants engaged in No Nation Fashion's workshops.

In January 2024 they presented a fashion show in collaboration with Franco Pagetti and Academy VII, after which they hope to present the fashion show in Serbia. The models are migrants, both men and women, who are actively working on realizing the envisioned project.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY UNDER A HOSTILE SYSTEM

According to information from IOM, the majority of migrants wanted to stay in BiH and build their future here, but challenges in obtaining asylum have led them to seek refuge in other countries. This, among other factors, presents the biggest obstacle to the complete realization of the project.

"Out of 200 people who apply for asylum, only 20-30 of them actually obtain that right," stated IOM department chief, Vismara.

The same research suggests that 50 percent of center users are individuals who could qualify for international protection. The remaining 50

percent are those who migrate due to the economic situation in their home country, meaning they would not receive any documents and, consequently, would not be able to earn a living legally.

"From an artistic perspective, it's genuinely sad because we constantly witness the migration of our people, a brain-drain from these territories, including designers, fashion designers, painters, and the like, who don't find their place here. We could certainly compensate for this with the talent we have at our disposal, but we're limited," said Lovrić.

STORIES OF SUCCESS

One young mother from Afghanistan who worked in the IOM sewing corner for a long time found great success. She and three other migrants were enrolled in a free course provided by IOM in collaboration with the Fashion Academy in Paris, where they learned drawing techniques and how to prepare models for fashion shows and photo shoots. Following this workshop, she purchased a sewing machine to create her own clothing and launched her own initiative in finding models.





“ŽVRLJA” TURNING CHILDREN’S DRAWINGS INTO JEWELRY



Text: Dunja Rujević
Photography: Žvrlja

Mina Vesković, a literature professor, created the brand Žvrlja. Under this label, they craft jewelry based on children’s drawings, preserving the memories of childhood.

It all began with Professor Vesković’s desire to create a necklace from her daughter’s first drawing, one that she wanted to keep forever. This is how the first Žvrlja piece, featuring a little girl with pigtails, came into being. “I wanted to capture this moment of my child’s development, so I came up with the idea that instead of framing her first drawing



as a picture, I would turn it into a necklace. Then my daughter’s godmother wanted one, and so did my friends and their friends. With the help of friends, my idea started to become a reality,” recalls Vesković.

The jewelry is exclusively custom-made, based on the desires and drawings sent in by mothers, fathers, aunts, and other relatives of the child drawers. Once a drawing is received, it is traced onto silver or gold. The crafting process then begins, incorporating various decorative techniques. Each stage of the creation process is done by hand, demanding several hours to craft each unique piece.

“The most common motifs of the jewelry are portraits of mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, closely followed by first letters, first drawings of the sun, pets, family portraits,” explained the owner of Žvrlja.

The creation of these masterpieces is entrusted to a craftsman and an artist with whom she has been collaborating since the inception of Žvrlja. “Each piece of jewelry is crafted in a unique and personalized way, making it a one-of-a-kind item because there is only one ‘Žvrlja’ like it in the whole world,” Vesković noted.

When introducing Žvrlja, she often says, “Capture the moments as your little ones grow up.” This is precisely the essence of these creations: keepsakes of childhood and important family moments.

Her favorite part of the collection is the original drawings created by children because they radiate sincerity, spontaneity, and the irresistible imagination of children.

“Our most darling creations are the first drawings of little ones when we’re not sure if a dot is a nose, an eye, or a tuft of hair. We first interpret the masterpiece together, often with input from the mothers who explain certain details, and then we begin crafting,” she said, explaining the initial steps of making a Žvrlja piece.

To aspiring jewelry makers, her advice is to dive into realizing one’s visions without overthinking and to continue learning along the way.

“Today, there are numerous opportunities for education, excellent experts, programs, and associations that bring entrepreneurs together and encourage them. Indeed, it has never been easier to showcase your product or service through social media,” concluded Vesković.





BEND S-ALT

TUZLA'S NEW ALTERNATIVE BAND MAKING WAVES IN BH



Text: Selmir Smajić
Photography: Edin Suljić

Filip, Jasmin, Denil, Bakir, Mladen, and Amina are talented musicians from different corners of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Together, they form S-alt. The blend of original sound, creativity, and energy among them provides a special experience for all lovers of alternative music.

"S-alt is an escape from the ordinary. It's a journey into the depths of our emotions and experiences," explains singer-songwriter, Filip Marić. He describes their music as "a mixture of different influences, from alternative rock to electronic elements, creating a unique soundscape."

In addition to Filip, the band comprises Jasmin Avdić, also known as Jaci, who serves as the producer and bassist, along with Denil Babović on guitar, Bakir Memišević on keyboards, Mladen Ristić as another producer, and Amina Halilčević as the drummer.

"The creative synergy within the band is incredible. We all bring our ideas and perspectives, and when we put them together, something magical happens," says Jaci. He wants their music to be a reflection of their generation, dealing with both personal and social events.



The selection of the band's name was a democratic process in which the members all gave their suggestions. After a vote, the name "S-alt" was chosen, signifying a fusion of "solo" and "alternative."

The Tuzla heavy metal scene has its own unique character, but S-alt has managed to find its niche and stand out. With their vitality, the band has breathed new life into the local music scene.

"Alternative music has its audience, and we want to be a part of that narrative. We want to offer people something new, something different," said Denil Babović. He continued, "Our music is a combination of various genres, and that's what makes it special. We believe we have something to say, and people will recognize it."

"WE'RE FIRST AND FOREMOST ARTISTS"

S-alt is shaped by the diverse backgrounds and musical experiences of each member, contributing to the unique sound and expression of the band. "Essentially, the six of us have different

musical backgrounds, and we've all developed differently as artists and musicians with our personal expression and signature. None of us is just a professional musician who will play a song merely because someone else did it that way. We're not just professional musicians—we're first and foremost artists," Bakir asserts.

Jaci, the band's producer, has his own history with metal bands and the alternative metal scene. As for Filip, he says that he expresses himself poetically through lyrics, a poetic component that has earned him awards at music festivals. Denil, as described by Jaci, is the bassist and is also involved in independent projects, while Mladen started playing music on his own, learning through YouTube.

POSITIVE REACTIONS TO THE SONG "GORKO SLATKO"

Although the music scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces challenges compared to neighboring countries, the members of S-alt are optimistic and focused on expanding their

influence beyond Tuzla. The band has performed in Novi Sad (Serbia) while also recording a song in Mostar. Their goal is to introduce their music to other cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the broader region. They've already achieved notable success in their young careers, with their single "Gorko Slatko" receiving an especially positive response from the audience.

"JUST START, AND EVERYTHING WILL FALL INTO PLACE."

"Anyone who sees and reads this, anyone who wants to pursue music, regardless of where they come from: just start. I'm the best example of someone who grew up in circumstances that were not conducive to the kind of music I'm involved in, but I did it because I love it. Everything will fall into place, whether you live in a rural area or a city where you have everything. Just do what interests and excites you, sing and play what you love, regardless of the genre, and have a lot of patience for it," Filip advises.





SFF A SYMBOL OF SARAJEVAN DEFIANCE

Text: Amina Sejfić
Photography: Obala Art Centar / Sarajevo Film Festival

When we talk about Sarajevo, we usually begin with the city's rich history, its tapestry of cultures, influences, and ideas. An indispensable part of this story is, of course, the Sarajevo Film Festival (SFF). The SFF, one of the most prestigious film festivals in the Balkans, not only captures the attention of global film enthusiasts but also makes a significant contribution to the cultural landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The SFF was founded by the Obala Art Center in 1995, during the devastating Bosnian War (1992-1995). It became a symbol of renewal and unity while promoting the rich cinematic heritage of the region. Like the Siege of Sarajevo itself, the SFF has left an indelible mark on this city, occupying a pivotal place in the past, present, and future of Sarajevo.

Maša Marković, the head of the SFF Industry Department, attests to the festival's triumph

over adversity during the siege: "The Sarajevo Film Festival, which celebrated its 29th edition this year [2023], was born from the siege of Sarajevo as a symbol of cultural resistance. This year, it was a great pleasure to present our audience with a program commemorating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the wartime cinema, Apollo. As part of this event, we screened some of the iconic films that provided our fellow citizens with a sense of normalcy in times of hardship, right on the Obala Open Stage," said Marković.

She adds that the goal of the festival has always been to showcase the most significant achievements in world cinema to local audiences, fostering a safe environment for filmmakers and spectators.

SUPPORT AND CHALLENGES

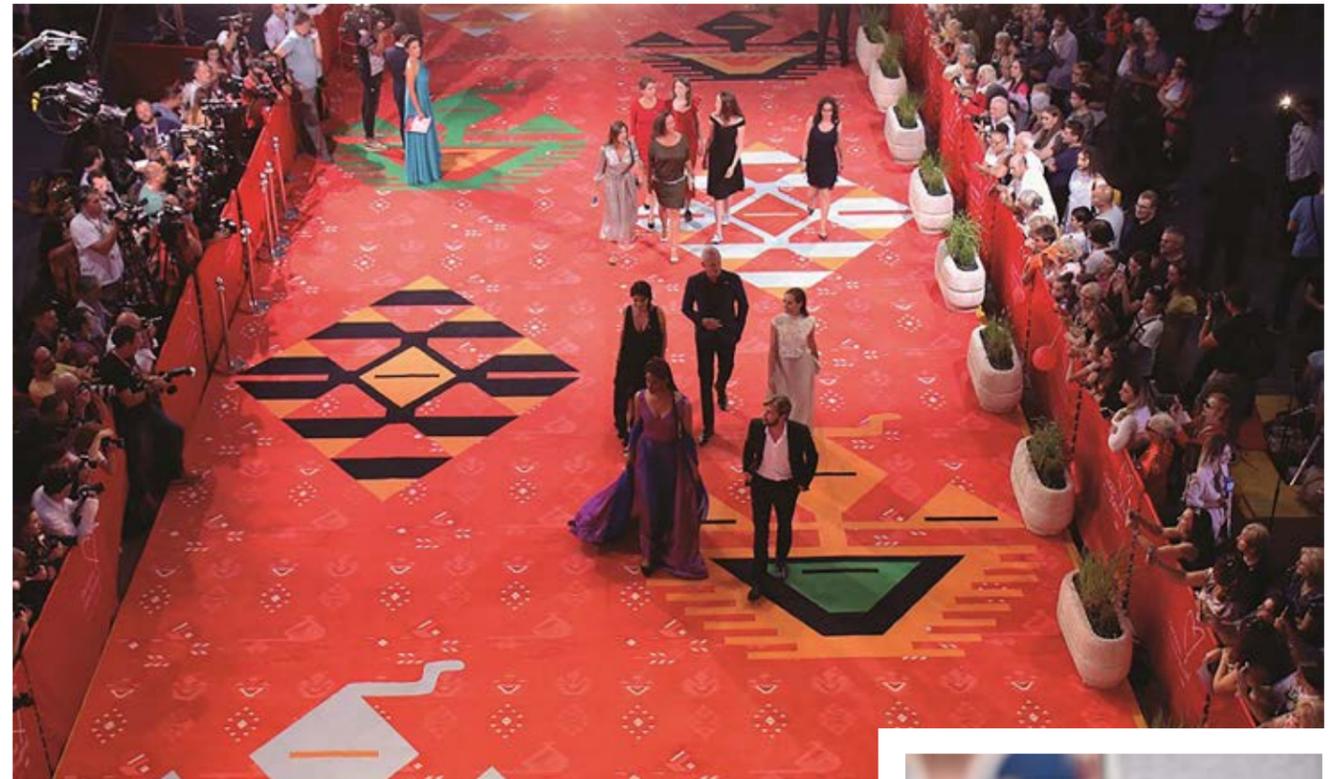
The festival has survived difficult times but has flourished over the years. Every year, Sarajevo is transformed into the epicenter of the global film scene, attracting talented filmmakers,

artists, and cinema enthusiasts from all around the world. However, as Marković points out, the festival's development is dictated to some extent by funding, which has long been unstable.

"The festival has continued to grow, but in recent years, we have increasingly encountered challenges related to Sarajevo's existing infrastructural capacity, and we hope that more investments will be made in public infrastructure in the years ahead," she said. Marković expressed her hopes for the construction of a new modern festival center in Sarajevo, which would be an enduring part of the SFF legacy.

The Sarajevo Film Festival plays a crucial role in supporting domestic filmmakers and the development of Bosnian cinema. It provides a platform for young screenwriters and filmmakers to present their works. A special segment of the program called BH Film allows Bosnian artists to express their unique perspectives while fostering connections with producers from around the world.

"On the international film festival scene, the Sarajevo Film Festival positions itself as a



festival of discovery, meaning our competitive selections are open to debutant screenwriters or those with their second film achievement. Most of these young professionals later return to Sarajevo for world or international premieres and to develop their future projects. What sets this festival apart is our teams' simultaneous tracking of these artists' professional growth and development," explained Marković.

The biggest challenge facing Bosnian cinema, according to Marković, is securing continuous support. This enables not only film production but also the development and improvement of other technical sectors essential for keeping pace with the increasing production of audiovisual content in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

THE FESTIVAL AS AN ENGINE OF TOURISM

The Sarajevo Film Festival also has a significant impact on tourism and the reputation of Bosnia and Herzegovina worldwide. Synonymous with summer in Sarajevo, the SFF attracts thousands of visitors from various corners of the world. During the days of the festival, the dramatic increase in tourism transforms the city into a hub of cultural festivities.

"A large portion of our diaspora specifically chooses these dates to visit their homeland, so as a result, these figures are significantly higher. Our collaborators from the region often say that during these seven days, Sarajevo has twice its usual population," Marković said.

She mentioned that an independent study conducted by the British consulting firm Olsberg SPI on the SFF's economic, cultural, and social impact revealed that the economic activity indirectly related to the festival generates an estimated 10.3 million Bosnian marks in revenue and creates 99 jobs annually.

As stated on the official website, the Sarajevo Film Festival, serving as a central hub for a region with over 140 million inhabitants, operates as a communal platform for the film sector. It

sets high standards for film events, promoting cinematic achievements in Southeastern Europe and making a crucial contribution to the development of the region's film industry. Moreover, it positively shapes the international perception of Bosnia and Herzegovina and fosters a strong sense of community among its citizens.

The Sarajevo Film Festival doesn't just follow film industry trends, it also sets social ones. By collaborating with environmental experts and producing greenhouse gas emission reports, the festival showcases an earnest commitment to sustainability. Moving forward, there are plans for the construction of modern festival centers to reduce negative environmental impacts.

Approaching the 30th anniversary of the Sarajevo Film Festival, Marković emphasized the importance of taking responsibility for the environmental impact generated by such an event. Given its substantial workforce, engagement with numerous producers, and the influx of visitors to Sarajevo, it is essential to be mindful of the environmental footprint created by this operation.





SARAJEVO PHILHARMONIC: 101 YEARS OF A VISIONARY FORCE OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

Text: Amina Sejfić
Photography: Raisa Šehu, Sarajevo
Philharmonic

The Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra has become a traveling ensemble, performing on prestigious stages and recognized for its extraordinary talent and professionalism worldwide. At the same time, it represents the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as a cultural icon and an important bridge between different cultures.

Marking their 100th anniversary in 2023, the orchestra has witnessed a rich history, interwoven with that of the city of Sarajevo itself. The centennial birthday concert was led by one of today's most renowned conductors, Maestro Riccardo Muti.

"The Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra celebrated its 100th year of existence, having survived all that has happened in this area in the past 100 years. Even after the war, it has withstood every instance of devastation, essentially starting anew," remarked Professor Vedran Tuće, Director of the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra.

He adds that the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra is the only professional orchestra of

its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina, "and as such, it's certainly one of the main pillars of cultural life in BiH." The fact that the orchestra serves the Opera and Ballet of the National Theater amplifies its significance.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Sarajevo Philharmonic is its dedication to creating music that transcends time. The orchestra regularly performs concerts at various locations in Sarajevo, including free outdoor events, to enable people to enjoy classical music without economic barriers. In addition, it develops collaborative projects, fusing music with other artistic disciplines to create unique experiences for audiences.

"The orchestra is constantly looking for ways to attract new and younger audiences by performing novel 'OFF programs' and thematic concerts such as film music concerts. We also follow trends in music for the very young and have been performing special concerts tailored to school-age children for the past few years," explains Tuće.

The OFF programs of the Sarajevo Philharmonic are special or unconventional concerts that take place outside the usual repertoire or format of classical concerts. These programs aim to attract

a new audience, refresh the traditional approach to classical music, and offer innovative and experimental performances.

"Within the last year, we established the positions of Chief Conductor and Concertmaster as a basis for constant quality improvement. This duo is tasked with designing the program in such a way that we see visible improvements with each consecutive concert. The program is designed so that, by conducting sectional rehearsals as well as collective rehearsals, the orchestra always has the opportunity to solve problems and learn new artistic interpretations," said Tuće.

Regarding orchestra staffing, he noted ongoing efforts to fill positions while also providing regular opportunities for young artists to perform together with experienced professionals. This allows young talents to gain valuable experience and realize their potential within this esteemed orchestra.

Through its educational programs, workshops, and special concerts tailored to children and youth, the orchestra creates an inspiring environment where young people can learn about different instruments, performance techniques, and classical compositions. The Sarajevo



Philharmonic Orchestra also cooperates with educational institutions in encouraging young talents, offering them opportunities to develop and participate in top-tier musical experiences. "Recently, we received approval to employ six new artists and we will do everything to ensure that the number of new members is continually increasing," said Tuće.

In Addition to welcoming new artists and celebrating its centennial, the Sarajevo Philharmonic is preparing for new projects. The director calls for patience, however, so as not to spoil the surprises in store.





LOVE TALES

Text: Tatjana Milovanović
Photography: Mitar Simikić

Which holidays do you celebrate? "Why don't you attend religious classes in school?" "If your mom and dad are this and that, then what are you?"

These are just some of the questions posed to children in Bosnia and Herzegovina born to parents who are from different ethnic groups or who do not identify themselves with an ethnicity. These children are confronted with questions of identity from an early age, presenting a dilemma: can someone be an equal member of the community in this country if they do not identify along ethnic lines?

The years during and since the war have strengthened the salience of ethnicity on all fronts and bred suspicion towards "others" who are different. Ethnically mixed families are included in this category. There are no rational arguments against these relationships, which are only opposed based on unsubstantiated claims concerning "failed marriages" and children "frustrated by their origins". Children from mixed marriages often face labels like "mutt".

Inter-ethnic couples often have to contend with opposition and prejudices from both sides of their family, as well as society at large. Their testimonies speak to enduring love that prevails over all pressures, problems, and adversities.

One example is Sejfo and Mira Mahmutović, who, despite the tribulations of war, years of separation, different ethnic backgrounds, and other challenges, have remained steadfast in their love since their school days. Sejfo describes his family as a "mini former Yugoslavia," consisting of himself, his wife Mira, and their children, Robert and Fatima. When his neighbours in Jelah ask why his son is named Robert, Sejfo answers with a smile that the name is from a novel.

Mira says that the term "mixed marriage" doesn't make sense to her, to which Sejfo responds, "How are we not mixed? I'm male, she's female." Raised in neighboring villages, they were the first young inter-ethnic couple in

their area. They have weathered all life's challenges together, unchanged by the political events in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Humanity has always come first for them and will continue to do so.

In Nataša and Elvir's family in Zenica, the most important holidays are their children's birthdays. They have preserved their love for twenty years, despite facing numerous obstacles, including opposition to their relationship from both of their families. They say they have explained their differences to their children "naturally", without enrolling them in religious classes because they believe that faith should be taught in religious institutions rather than schools. Their children have no strict religious affiliations, and all holidays are celebrated in their home. They believe that everyone should fight for what they believe in, just as they fought for their marriage, and are certain that their children will do great things for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Similarly, Samra and Dražen's love story has withstood societal pressure due to their religious differences, fears of not being accepted by their families, physical distance, and other hardships. Today, they are the parents of a daughter, and they say that the secret to successful love is understanding and compromise. Together with volunteers at the Nela Citizens' Association in Orašje, co-founded by Samra, they work to foster interreligious cooperation and dialogue, with a special focus on children.

Their relationship was also subject to criticism. Samra and her family are from Velika Kladuša, where the majority of residents are Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims). She says that she was in love with someone of the Catholic faith. "We faced condemnation from others, but we didn't pay attention to it. I didn't care about his religion, it didn't matter to me, but it did to our communities," said Samra, adding that although she believes her parents initially thought that their love would soon pass, "it never did."



According to Dražen, the older generations who experienced the war pose a major obstacle for young multiethnic couples.

The term "mixed couple" is familiar to Momir, a computer programmer from Brčko. The love story between Momir and his wife Vahdijana, a special education teacher from Serbia, began through mutual friends. They say that apart from receiving some disapproving looks, they haven't faced any obstacles to their relationship, which has culminated in marriage. They live in the Brčko District and have two children.

In Brčko, Momir says that there are fewer and fewer marriages, especially multiethnic ones. "In

Brčko, everything relies on your ethnicity. We live together in one city divided by nationalities," he emphasizes. Vahdijana explains that in Brčko, declaring one's ethnic identity is important for seeking employment, a practice they reject. This is one of the reasons why Momir decided to become self-employed.

They mention that although they themselves are not religious, they celebrate the religious holidays of their parents out of respect for tradition. "The biggest problem is when the holidays overlap and we want to visit both sides. We have plenty of holidays to celebrate, and we enjoy it," explains Momir.





RECOGNISING THE UNRECOGNISABLE:

MIXED MARRIAGES IN POST-WAR BOSNIA

Author: Amina Sejfić
Photography: PCRC, PINCH Media

Prior to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mixed marriages were an accepted reflection of ethnic diversity. Today, however, children from such marriages are often referred to as 'mixed-race'. As a result, they often inhabit parallel worlds within the ethno-nationalist

framework that permeates Bosnian society. Aida Gavrić's film, "The Colorless," and the Post-Conflict Research Center's photo exhibition, Love Tales, address the topic of mixed marriages from the perspective of not belonging and the possibility of liberation from fixed notions of identity.

"The Colorless" follows those born from a time of love between different peoples who

suddenly find themselves "in-between" with the collapse of brotherhood and unity. When the antinationalist culture of Yugoslavia collapsed upon the communist country's violent dissolution, intercultural harmony gave way to ethnonationalist norms. "The film is about those who defy classification in a country where ethno-nationalist categories color the social landscape.

These people are often labeled a kind of excess or 'remnant,'" explained Gavrić.

The idea for the film emerged as an extension of her scholarly preoccupation with hybrid identity and identity in general, rooted in her personal childhood experiences. Specifically, from the realization that she did not fit neatly into confessional and ethnic categories in a society where this type of categorization and classifiability is presented as crucial for almost all practical aspects of life.

Gavrić earned her master's degree at the Department of Comparative Literature and Librarianship in Sarajevo and recently defended her doctoral dissertation on cosmopolitanism and world literature in Nada magazine between 1895 and 1903.

Her personal story as a child of a mixed marriage is embedded throughout "Colorless," which she says makes it difficult for her to single out any one scene from the film as the most poignant. Nonetheless, she highlights the narrative of two girls, Nora Gutić and Arven Gavrić-Memić, whose spirit, reflection, and even on-screen appearance embody the essence of the film.

"Every aspect is extremely important to me and forms an indispensable piece of the complete picture I aimed to convey to the audience. But if I really had to choose, I would say that the perspective of the two six-year-old girls is most insightful," said Gavrić.

"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO CHANGE THE WORLD"

It seems extremely important to discuss these topics, especially in a society as divided and distrustful as Bosnia and Herzegovina. The easiest way to approach the subject is certainly

through art, which often affords the artist more freedom to delve deeper. "I don't want to be silent. Artists mustn't remain silent. Otherwise, who else will point out the reality and what's wrong and bizarre in it? Who will uncover it?" asked Gavrić. She noted that she has always wanted to change the world and believes that this is the primary drive of most of those who work with art – or at least it should be.

The Post-Conflict Research Center employs innovative multimedia content like documentaries, photography, and art to promote peace. Velma Šarić, the president and founder of the organization, also believes in the potential of art to change established narratives.

"Art has proven to be an excellent medium for promoting proper values and topics that are still somewhat taboo in our society. Art is the easiest way to change current entrenched narratives," says Šarić.

NON-EXISTENT AND UNSUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS

A screening of "The Colorless" was held at the National History Museum, accompanied by the exhibition "Love Tales," featuring ten multi-ethnic couples from Bosnia and Herzegovina. These works challenge the prevailing narrative that relationships between people from different ethnic backgrounds are non-existent and unsustainable.

Maja Gasal-Vražalica, whose story is included in the "Love Tales" project, says that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the stories of various national, ethnic, and gender minorities are told, but no one has ever talked about the minority defined by inter-ethnic, inter-religious, and even same-sex marriages.

"In the photograph, there are four of us—our son, our cat, and the two of us. I guarantee you can see Bosnia and Herzegovina in a nutshell, and we, as such, are condemned and even stigmatized as people in Bosnia and Herzegovina

without an identity because we haven't managed to adapt or decide," said Gasal-Vražalica.

Gavrić witnessed the power of art, or in this case of documentary film, when "The Colorless" premiered at the AJB DOC Film Festival in the category of Films shot with a smartphone.

"It's especially interesting that an audience not directly affected by the central theme reacted strongly to the film. People often cried and laughed at the same time while watching it. As someone who has spent her whole life writing, a medium that has a very limited reach, this experience was totally extraordinary," Gavrić remarked. She added that the film actually represents a significant turning point in her work – the transition from text to motion picture.

The inspiration for the title "The Colorless" came from the work of Džemaludin Latić, a professor and writer who published a text in 1994 in the wartime magazine Ljiljan (Lily) and in the collected volume Mješoviti brakovi (Mixed Marriages). In the text, he refers to mixed marriages as "mostly failed marriages in which severe conflicts arise" and where "a kind of misunderstanding of common life is present." He also described children from these marriages as "frustrated by default," recommending at the time that "such marriages end once and for all".

"In the film, he was given the space to explain his current view of the text he wrote almost 30 years ago, and to express his views on the subject today," Gavrić said. At one point in the film, Professor Latić apologizes for, in his words, "the clumsy and careless expression" he used in his 1994 text.

The creator of "The Colorless" asserts that we should embrace diversity in identity among people.

"Don't allow yourself to be divided, diminished, or categorized. The only acceptable collective identity determinant for a human being is that of belonging to earth. This is the only way to the Kantian utopia of eternal peace," Gavrić concluded.





BRČKO MONUMENT A SIGN OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND RECONCILIATION

Text: Almedina Alihodžić
Photography: Mitar Simikić

One year ago, a tear-shaped monument in memory of all civilian victims of the war was officially unveiled in Brčko in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to district officials and the Brčko District supervisor, Jonathan Mennuti, the monument represents another step forward in the pursuit of tolerance and true coexistence.

Brčko is a city and the administrative seat of Brčko District, and de jure, the Brčko District belongs to both entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina but in practice it is not governed by either, as it has its own education system, free-standing courts, annual budget, and separate health and police services. Brčko is a self-governing city with inhabitants from all ethnic groups, and it was this multi-ethnic character that made Brčko one of the main points discussed in the Dayton Peace Accords, subsequently being awarded the

'district' form with international supervision by the Office of the High Representative.

During the unveiling of the monument, Brčko Deputy Mayor Anto Domić said that it serves as a reminder of dark times and a warning of the evil that mankind is capable of, but also sends the message that such atrocities should never happen again.

"The monument also serves families who have lost loved ones, functioning as a place of remembrance and reverence for victims who should never have suffered," Domić said during the inauguration ceremony.

Mennuti, who, in addition to his role as Brčko District supervisor is also the first deputy to the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasized that the monument to civilian war victims confirms Brčko's commitment to peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. "This monument, which is part of an urban park, will serve as a space not only for reflecting on the past but also for gathering

and discussing a more prosperous common future for everyone in this specific administrative unit of BiH," Mennuti said.

Participants in the State of Peace Youth Academy, which brought together 50 young people from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, laid flowers at the monument in Brčko in August last year, demonstrating that respect for all is the only path to a peaceful future.

Tea Ružić, the Brčko District mayor's adviser for youth and the non-governmental sector, attended the flower-laying ceremony with the participants of the Youth Academy. Regarding the shared monument to all war victims in Brčko, Ružić said that every tear is equal and a part of our history.

"I believe that with a monument like this, we have sent a good message from Brčko because I can freely say that Brčko is an example of post-war reconciliation and coexistence," emphasized Ružić.



THE PEACE FESTIVAL: IN CELEBRATION OF HARMONY

Text: Armin Halilović
Photography: Post-Conflict Research Center

In the heart of Bosnia and Herzegovina lies the small town of Vitez, which has been, for the last three years, welcoming young people to learn about preserving peace, coexistence, and tolerance. The Peace Festival is organized by the Post-Conflict Research Center (PCRC), and in the last two editions it has gathered almost 100 young people from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to work together to build a better and peaceful future for our country.

Velma Šarić, Founder and President of the PCRC, explains that the Center has created much multimedia content in its 13 years of operation and that each project promotes peace and conflict prevention.

According to Šarić, the annual Peace Festival in Vitez is a part of the upcoming "Peace Museum". The Museum, developed by the PCRC, seeks to help cultivate a culture of tolerance and truth in the region—fertile conditions upon which peaceful, pluralist democratic societies can thrive and blossom.

Along with the Festival, the Center created MIR Magazine - the first peace magazine in the Balkans dedicated to the promotion of young, innovative people who push social and creative boundaries throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region.

"At both Festivals, we witnessed the greatest values of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are multiculturalism and multiethnicity. Through art and various educational content, we strive to motivate young people and provide them with the necessary tools to work on creating a climate of sustainable peace and tolerance in their communities," adds Šarić.

Patrik Turošik, Deputy Ambassador and Consul at the Embassy of Slovakia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who is the main sponsor of the Peace Festival through a Slovak Aid grant, spoke to young people about the current challenges of preserving peace in Europe, referring to the war in Ukraine and the importance of resisting hatred and division.

"I come from Slovakia, from a town on the border with Ukraine, and my family lives there, and I live in fear of how they are doing. Refugees often pass through the city and what we see is

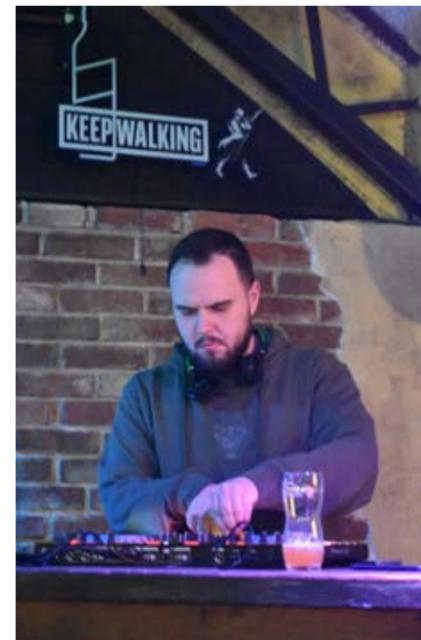
that these people may be broken and exhausted, but also ready to continue their future and fight for it," said Consul Turošik, hoping to inspire the festival participants to be brave, even when in fear.

BUILDING PEACE TOGETHER

Alem Bajramović, a participant from Goražde, describes the annual event as a unique opportunity for young people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet, exchange ideas, and work together to build much-needed peace through artistic content.

"I'm very proud to participate in the Festival and contribute alongside my peers to positioning Bosnia and Herzegovina as a regional leader in peace processes, thus joining the world," says Bajramović.

Ivana Ševarika from Banja Luka says that she enjoyed the panel discussion with young peace-builders in particular, as it addressed specific problems that young people face. She emphasizes that only through respecting others and appreciating differences can we contribute to lasting and sustainable peace.



Representing the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina, political advisor, Fermin Cordoba, attended the festivals, and emphasized the importance of inter-ethnic dialogue not only in and of itself but also from the perspective of EU integration. He explained to festival participants that reconciliation is among the priorities that BiH must fulfill on the path to EU integration.

The content of the Peace Festival includes a series of activities, including music concerts, theater performances, photo exhibitions, art workshops, screenings of documentaries, and promotions of various peace content by domestic and international organizations. The festival is organized within the Ethno-Village Čardaci in Vitez, on the banks of the Lašva river.

The 2024 Peace Festival is being held from February 22 to February 26, with the support of Slovak Aid, the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Rockefeller Brother Foundation, and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.





CANADA AND BH

IN CONVERSATION WITH MS. NEELU SHANKER,
CHARGÉE D'AFFAIRES A.I., EMBASSY OF
CANADA TO HUNGARY, SLOVENIA AND BH

Interview led by: Tatjana Milovanović
Photography: Neelu Shanker (private archive), Rene Baker (Unsplash)

Could you tell us a bit more about why the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) granting scheme started in BiH and how your granting goals have developed over time?

The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is a program designed to support small-scale, high-impact projects conceived and designed predominantly by local partners. For over 50 years, the CFLI has been supporting local projects around the world that ensure everyone can

live with dignity, peace, the full enjoyment of rights, and well-being, now and for generations to come. As a friend of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada has a keen interest in seeing the development of the country as a stable, secure, and multi-ethnic democracy, which is fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. The CFLI is an excellent way to support these objectives, with a particular focus on three priority areas: inclusive governance, with a focus on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law; gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and peace and security, with a focus on conflict prevention and building peace.

Why is it important for the Canadian government to support local initiatives and civil society?

The Embassy of Canada supports a range of projects in BiH that are designed and implemented by local civil-society organizations, who have an in-depth understanding of local needs and priorities and are best placed to respond to them. Through such partnerships, we support local ownership and capacity-building to empower civil society organizations and collectively advance inclusive governance, gender equality, and peace and security.

Within the CFLI grants there is a big emphasis on gender equality. Why is this and what are some of the most notable CFLI-supported grantees in this area?

Since 2017, Canada has significantly enhanced our focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We did this with the Feminist Foreign Policy, through which Canada seeks to apply a feminist perspective to all our international policies and programs, including diplomacy, trade, security, development, and consular services. It also includes Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, which seeks to eradicate poverty, and build a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world. Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy is rooted in the conviction that all people should enjoy the same human rights and opportunities to succeed, as well as the ability to fully benefit from equal participation in economic, political, social, and cultural life.

In BiH, as in other countries, women continue to face significant barriers that limit their economic and social opportunities. A key focus of our CFLI programming is promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women

and girls. Whether as peacebuilders, civil advocates, or through working on more inclusive governance, women and girls' full participation in decision-making processes produces better decisions and lasting outcomes.

While all our CFLI projects have strong gender components, I would like to highlight two current projects in particular:

- As part of Canada's strong investment in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, we are supporting a project by the Association Žena BiH, which aims to promote continuous and meaningful participation of women in sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton.
- As part of Canada's broader efforts to counter sexual and gender-based violence, we are supporting Vaša Prava's HERJustice initiative, which helps provide free legal aid access for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, while also leading capacity-building workshops and advocacy campaigns aimed at its prevention.

The Canadian Embassy works closely with Bosnian civil society. How do you see the development of civil society in BiH and how significant is it for the future of our country?

Strong civil society organizations are vital for a robust democracy and play an essential role in building a more just and inclusive world. BiH has a number of excellent organizations working tirelessly to advance outcomes across a range of important issues, including gender equality, inclusive governance, or peacebuilding, to name a few. It is of central importance that governments facilitate the ability of civil society organizations to play this crucial role, and help to build a strong, inclusive future for BiH.

Could you tell us a bit more about your cooperation with municipal, regional, or national government institutions within the CFLI, as they are also eligible to apply? Any good practices you could share?

The focus of the Embassy of Canada's CFLI program is to support small-scale projects with a measurable local impact. In this regard, recipients

can include a range of institutions, including non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, as well as international organizations and municipal, regional, and national governments or agencies. The key is that project activities focus on advancing core priorities in BiH. The CFLI is always looking to fund innovative projects that deliver measurable results.

What is the future of CFLI and Canada's contributions to BiH? Any plans for further development or increasing of support given?

We look forward to launching a call for proposals for the 2024-25 cycle later this spring and encourage interested organizations to apply. More details will be shared on the Embassy's social media (X: @CanadaBiH; Facebook: Embassy of Canada to Hungary, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

What is your message for youth in BiH?

Youth play a crucial role in any democracy, both as leaders of tomorrow, as well as today's agents of change. It will be vital for BiH's future, and its continued development into a fully-fledged multi-ethnic democracy that youth see a future for themselves, where they can take advantage of economic and cultural opportunities to succeed. To help make this happen, I strongly encourage all youth in BiH to use their voice to help build the future they want to see in this country. Their powerful and fundamental perspective of future success will be vital to building dialogue and trust. These will help build new connections and more inclusive solutions that can have a transformative role in BiH's future.

Throughout my time with the Embassy, I've been struck by the outstanding commitment BiH citizens and organizations have for improving conditions for all people. The Embassy's work on CFLI has contributed to this, including by providing civil society organizations with support so they can develop new partnerships, grow their own capacity, and deliver lasting results. It's made me proud that my team and I have been able to help build these partnerships and support so many amazing organizations in this way.

FRIENDSHIP AND GOODWILL: THE ENDURING ITALIAN PRESENCE IN B&H

Text: Vanja Šunjić
Photography: Italian Embassy Sarajevo

After the war in the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) faced the tasks of economic recovery and the restoration of trust and social relations among its population. Although this process has not been fully completed, there has been evident progress, achieved with the commitment of BiH citizens as well as significant contributions from many European countries. This assistance has taken various forms, including financial assistance as well as the dispatching of thousands of foreign volunteers, who have worked continuously with citizens from both entities to promote reconciliation, open dialogue, memorialization, and coming to terms with the past. Almost three decades after the war, the Italian Republic stands out for its immeasurable contribution to this process.

ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE AMONG FORMER ENEMIES

The Italian NGO, the International Committee for the Development of Peoples (Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli; CISP) arrived in Tuzla during the Bosnian War, where their first activity was delivering essential equipment and medicines to the local hospital. The CISP has since upheld a hands-on engagement with local citizens to create an environment for former enemies to collaborate in unity. As a result of this continuous work, the CISP has become an initiator, participant, and facilitator in the development of Bosnian society.

"I'm most proud of the projects we've carried out in partnership with stakeholders from Bosnia and Herzegovina, aimed at improving the lives of the youth and marginalized people, protecting the environment, and creating new jobs. The projects we're currently implementing

in the protected areas of Konjuh, Sutjeska, and Blidinje combine these elements," said Jasmina Ovčina, a project director at the CISP.

Italian volunteers have been coming to rural and urban areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina for decades, organizing youth camps for children and young people from both entities. In the immediate aftermath of the war, when socializing was not like it is today and there was no social media, this was the only way for young people from different ethnic communities, living just a few kilometers apart, to get to know one another.

"Growing up, young people had the desire to go those few kilometers, and then the volunteers from Italy made this happen in their own way. Many others did this too, but in my opinion, the Italians did it in a special way. They came to Bosnia and Herzegovina bringing aid they'd collected in their community, didn't ask for anything in return, and kept coming back," says Ovčina.

Similar initiatives still exist today, from spontaneous grass-roots organizations to formal ones like the Italian Red Cross, which is still active in BiH. Volunteers from the International Blue Rose Garden Foundation (Fondazione Internazionale il Giardino Delle Rose Blu) have been visiting families and children in different parts of BiH for years. They welcomed the 2023 new year with children from Cerska, Mostar, and Sarajevo.

"What's my view on this? The very fact that I once joined them shows that I think it's very useful. Stepping out of our comfort-zone, which often holds us back, getting to know different people, and exchanging opinions helps us to get to know ourselves," Ovčina emphasizes.

COLLECTIVE MEMORIALIZATION

The Alexander Langer Foundation from Bolzano, Italy, initiated the post-conflict psycho-social project "Adopt Srebrenica", in collaboration with the

Tuzla-based organization Amica, spearheaded by Dr. Irfanka Pašagić. The project aimed to assist an ethnically mixed group of Srebrenica youth on their individual journeys towards reconstructing relationships and remembrance. In 2015, these informal groups evolved into the association "Accept Srebrenica". In addition to contributing to several iterations of the International Week of Srebrenica Remembrance, the Accept Srebrenica association has established the Adopt Srebrenica Documentation Center. What does the Center document? Just one line here summarising what it documents would suffice.

As peace activist Andrea Rizza Goldstein explains, the center emerged from the specific needs of former Adopt Srebrenica group members. These boys and girls, of both Bosniak and Serb ethnic origin, were very young when the war began and have no direct memory of what happened in Srebrenica. Some lost family members during the war and genocide, of which they also have no memories. Thus, the center was created in response to the need to recover individual and collective memory.

Since 2017, Goldstein has been working for Arci Bolzano, the Territorial Committee of the Arci network in Italy. Arci is a large national network of volunteers with around a million members, over 4,000 clubs, and over a hundred Territorial Committees.

Arci Bolzano promoted international solidarity both during and after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina through numerous projects. Three years ago, with the support of the Adopt Srebrenica association, they formalized an institutional partnership with the Srebrenica Memorial Center, and in 2022, the Srebrenica 2.0 application was created. In a political context where erecting physical memorial markers is virtually impossible, this digital memory app tells the story of the events in Srebrenica between 1992 and 1995 through nine significant points.

"In recent years, we have organized several dozen educational trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily to Mostar, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, and Tuzla, with hundreds of young people, students, activists, youth workers, high school students, teachers, municipal and provincial officials, etc.," Goldstein added.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Italian civil society organizations represent one of the strongest pillars of Italy's presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thanks to their efforts, preschools, nursing homes, centers for people with disabilities, unemployment centers, homes for widows and war refugees, and more have been opened in the country.

Italian families have hosted numerous children from BiH, who went on to return home as peacebuilders, reconciliation advocates, and, in a way, young ambassadors of Italy. The strength of Italian civil society in BiH, operating with a bottom-up approach, is a key factor in

the friendship and goodwill that characterize the relations between Italian and BiH citizens.

"At the same time, we're increasingly focused on supporting civil society in BiH and its organizations, always with the aim of building bridges between people, overcoming barriers, and supporting BiH's alignment with EU standards," stated Matteo Evangelista, Deputy Head of Mission at the Italian Embassy in BiH.

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Cultural and economic cooperation between Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina is strong and fruitful. Italy is one of the main cultural partners of BiH, and the Italian embassy sponsors and supports almost all major festivals in the country. Additionally, events are organized at the embassy throughout the year, with a special focus on promoting Italian art, literature, music, customs, and traditions. These include Italian Language Week, Italian Cuisine Week, Italian Design Day, Italian Language Days, cinema events, singing competitions inspired by the Sanremo Festival, and a host of other cultural events.

There is also cooperation between Italian and Bosnian media, which is why the BiH public is familiar with a number of Italian series, as well as with the format of Radio Italia.

"The positive response and genuine interest of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian public in Italian culture inspire us to invest more energy and resources in this sector. This makes culture not only an instrument for fostering stronger and long-lasting relationships between the two countries but also an opportunity to unite the diverse souls of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the name of beauty, which transcends any kind of ethnic or cultural divide. As such, Italian cultural diplomacy aims to provide concrete support to the reconciliation process in BiH," said Evangelista.

Another example of the showcasing of Italian culture in BiH is the construction of the Ars Aevi Museum. With funding from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), a local



architectural studio is working on the final design for the building that will house a collection of around 150 prestigious works of art. The museum's initial design is the work of Renzo Piano, and one of the main artists represented in the collection is Michelangelo Pistoletto.

Economic cooperation between Italy and BiH is also high. In 2021, Italy became Bosnia and Herzegovina's second-largest trading partner. By the end of 2022, the total volume of trade between the countries exceeded 2.8 billion euros, with a trade surplus in favor of Italy of nearly 700 million euros. These figures demonstrate the growing demand of Bosnian-Herzegovinian consumers and entrepreneurs for Italian products.

Among the initiatives credited for this, Evangelista mentions the project "Roots of the Future," implemented by the CISP, which connected young people and students from all parts of BiH on a journey to rediscover our country's rich cultural heritage and study stećci, ancient tombstones, as a unique national artifact. The "Ready for Europe" project, implemented by the Italian

non-governmental organization Re.Te. and the Youth Council of the Federation of BiH, brought together young people and youth organizations from across the country to discuss issues pertaining to EU integration and enlargement, with a particular focus on the green agenda.

The Embassy of Italy also works to empower young people, women, the media, environmental associations, individuals, and informal groups in Bosnia. Together with the United Nations Population Fund, they have implemented a project called "Bringing Us Closer: Youth Exchanges in Divided Communities", which is conducted in partnership with six different municipalities in BiH.

A large number of Italian entrepreneurs invest in Bosnia and Herzegovina and engage in the local economy through direct and joint ventures with local partners. This approach to economic investment is referred to as "nearshoring". The sectors where Italian companies in BiH are most active include finance, metallurgy, chemistry, energy, clothing and footwear, and wood processing.

AN ALLY ON THE PATH TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Italy is an unwavering supporter of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European integration process. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation supports civil society and international organizations in their efforts to promote an environment conducive to reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the 14 priorities outlined in the EU Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership application, alongside social cohesion, and human rights. Additionally, Italy supports knowledge exchange, technical assistance, and capacity building in the broader process of the country's EU integration, as well as assistance in managing migration flows.

"In this regard, as part of our mission, we're supporting a new project to aggregate our companies on the ground based on the chamber of commerce model. This is the intention of the newly established Association of Italian Companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This association has the potential to create extraordinary synergy between the two countries and to encourage even more trade and investment flow," Evangelista emphasized.





WITH A LITTLE GOODWILL,

BH CAN BE BETTER

Text: Alem Bajramović
Photography: project archive

The “Strengthening Trust and Cohesion in Communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina” project is a joint effort by the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) aimed at promoting a positive environment and preserving peace. Implemented under the slogan “With a Little Goodwill, We Can Do Better,” the project has been rolled out in over 20 local communities through collaboration with local authorities, civil society organizations, individuals/communities as peacebuilders, media outlets, and other social actors.

“The project aims to strengthen and promote an environment that is more conducive to genuine reconciliation, which directly contributes to improved trust and cohesion within and between communities,” the project team said, explaining that the project was launched in October 2022 after the elections.

The project budget is three and a half million euros, with a focus on strengthening communities and building trust.

Joeri Maas, Senior Advisor in the Executive Office of the European Union Special Representative to BiH, in an interview for our magazine, highlighted that the idea for the project came from the desire to help create an environment conducive to reconciliation, one of the Key Priorities of the European Commission. “In the past, we tried to work with members of the BiH Presidency to hold a joint commemoration for all civilian victims. It did not work, for all the reasons you can understand. Then, following another round of political escalations, we really saw the need to do more and launch activities that would allow us to promote trust, community, cohesion, and an environment conducive to reconciliation,” Maas explained.

Maas further clarifies that the project has three key pillars: “First, we want to encourage more active civil society in BiH on the topic of reconciliation. The second pillar focuses on communities where the foundations of positive peace are already present, to strengthen

positive peace, strengthen cohesion, and identify and further support these communities. The third involves working with local media to highlight positive stories instead of divisions.”

POSITIVE REACTIONS ON MULTIPLE “FRONTS”

He says one of the key things they tried not to do was replicate what had been done before.

“We set the foundation for the process in all of these things, but we don’t dictate the outcomes. So, when I talk about the communities we work in, we organize community dialogues that bring together activists, citizens, local civil society organizations, and authorities to discuss what can be done to improve relations in their community. And we said we are willing to support the outcome of their conclusions. So, just tell us the essence, tell us where you think you can take steps to improve community cohesion, community trust, and we will support it,” Maas explains.

The project does not set specific expected outcomes, but Maas emphasizes that they want

to encourage a positive trend. However, they don’t have specific goals. “But if the community says we want to build a road from this point to that point because it would allow different parts of our community to better connect, then we look at it and say, okay, that’s doable, we can build that road and the municipal government supports it, let’s build this road. In other places, it’s the reconstruction of a park, buying musical instruments, renovating a community center, or rebuilding a fire station. We didn’t come up with any of that beforehand,” says Maas, adding that it’s a very simple concept, but they feel it’s relatively unique to work this way.

Discussing the project’s success so far, Maas says the reactions have been extremely positive, and they see this “on multiple fronts.” “We don’t come with preconceived ideas of what the international community thinks they need. We ask them and listen. And they are, unfortunately, surprised. I mean, they shouldn’t be surprised. This should be our standard way of working. But it is, I think, very encouraging. The other thing we see is that with a little help, incredible things are possible. And that help is not just financial,” Maas emphasizes, adding that people are positively surprised because four multilateral organizations are working together with the same goal and approach.

“WE CAN DO BETTER” - A PLATFORM FOR ALL CITIZENS

The project team says that the list of activities is long and that project-related activities take place daily. The project encompasses a range of activities and engagement of various social groups: collaboration with local authorities and organization of dialogues within and between communities as a platform for greater civic participation and interaction; investment in local infrastructure and support for civil society organizations in implementing initiatives that build and strengthen trust and cohesion between different groups; support for local media in its mission to spread positive stories and counter narratives that cause divisions.

“Citizens in local communities see ‘We Can Do Better’ as a platform within the community that is open to all citizens, which provides space for discussion on issues that are important to all of them, and through which they can co-create activities and initiatives that contribute to solving those issues and strengthening cohesion and trust within the community itself. The project sends a message that citizens can and should be drivers of change in their communities, and that together with decision-makers within the community they can create a better environment for themselves and their neighbors,” the project team explains.

They add that the project is just one of the instruments the EU uses to support BiH citizens on their path to EU integration, and as such is specifically aimed at contributing to the achievement of Key Priority Five,

and that the project runs until the end of March 2024.

“We are currently looking at what can be done with the second phase of the project. But even more importantly, it is crucial to ensure that the progress we have made and the lessons we have learned are incorporated into the ongoing work and other support provided by the international community. We are working on that and are currently seeking to restart discussions with the Council of Ministers on Key Priority Five,” Maas adds.

POSITIVE STORIES IN MANY COMMUNITIES

The column, co-signed by Ambassador Sattler, Dr. Ingrid Macdonald, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Dr. Susan Penksa, Acting Head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, mentions that there are many powerful examples in Bosnia and Herzegovina where people and communities are working together towards an inclusive future, such as Žepče, home to the monument to all civilian war victims, or Bosanski Petrovac, where the Monument to Peace was unveiled.

“All project activities will be shaped by local changemakers from across BiH. We will act as support, but for the sustainability of the project itself, local actors must be at the forefront. We want to hear and learn from the incredible experiences of local ‘peace champions’ and empower them to truly be an example for all in BiH. As an old saying goes, ‘with a little goodwill, we can do better’. That’s why we named the project ‘We Can Do Better,’ because despite the pervasive pessimism and rhetoric of division, BiH can and will do better. We are determined to help make it happen,” the column concludes.

Positive stories of building trust and cohesion can be found in many communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where various individuals stand out as examples and take concrete steps to connect people and strengthen sustainable peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These positive examples should be an inspiration to other communities, as well as to political action at higher levels of government, but in the public discourse of Bosnia and Herzegovina they remain unnoticed, even stifled by negative narratives.





QUEER PEOPLE'S PLIGHT IN BH



Author: Melani Isović
 Photography: Amina Imamović, Almir Kljuno,
 private archive of Emina Bošnjak, Armin
 Durgut, Hannan Delić

On March 18, 2023, another anti-LGBTIQ hate crime was perpetrated in Banja Luka. In the lead-up to Pride, a group of hooligans attacked the organizing committee of the Bosnian Pride March. That night, members of the Pride committee were forced to leave Banja Luka for their own safety.

This attack underscores the urgent need to defend the rights and safety of the LGBTIQ community and to strengthen preventive measures and legal action in cases of hate crimes.

Lejla Huremović, a member of the organizing committee who was among those attacked, emphasizes that any act of violence against LGBTIQ persons impacts the freedom of all members of their community. As a Queer person, it is difficult to hear that someone has been



attacked solely on the basis of their sexual or gender identity.

"Violence leads to feelings of fear, isolation, and insecurity, overwhelming us with unpleasant emotions. Throughout history, we've seen the community retreat entirely behind closed doors after certain attacks, but I'm encouraged to see that this is no longer the case. Although we're all shaken, we haven't bowed to thugs and fascists. We've stood up and continued walking with courage and living our authentic lives," says Huremović.

The socio-political dynamics across Bosnia and Herzegovina also impact the Queer community. Marginalized groups are often the most affected by the consequences of any crisis.

"The current political and economic situation is not favorable and affects the quality of life for LGBTIQ people, from unemployment and inflation to the deepening divisions imposed on us by political authorities," Huremović remarks.

HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK

According to Huremović, the announcement of more restrictive laws on freedom of assembly, the criminalization of defamation, and even a ban on discussing LGBTIQ topics in schools indicate a dark period. The human rights of those who do not yet have full equality and legal protection continue to be targeted.

She notes that today, Queer people live much more openly than they did ten years ago, which is why right-wing structures seeking to curtail this freedom are on the rise.

It is necessary to cultivate a society that is open to diversity, where the true spirit of humanity and mutual respect for all members of society will prevail, regardless of sexual orientation.

"We have to see people as human beings, not as identities. We've lost our humanity, and it costs us all and dehumanizes us. Solidarity,





support, friendship, and love should be the basis of social interaction," Huremović asserts.

Activist and President of the Kwart Youth Center from Prijedor, Branko Ćulibrk, notes that there have been certain shifts in society and in the visibility of the LGBTIQ community. Intolerance towards the community has decreased to a certain extent, but not to the extent that would guarantee people complete safety and stability.

"Bosnia and Herzegovina is a democratic society and, as such, it has signed and should respect all conventions guaranteeing the rights, safety, and freedoms of all citizens of this country. However, in practice, this definitely isn't the case, so there is still significant intolerance towards the LGBTIQ community. This is most evident in violence, discrimination, and hate speech against the LGBTIQ community," explains Ćulibrk.

A SYSTEMATIC FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE

"Something that we could do as a society to improve the situation overall and protect LGBTIQ rights is to fight violence systematically. Social



violence has become ubiquitous and is increasingly gaining social acceptance, even from political actors," Ćulibrk observes.

Ending the culture of impunity for violence requires a collective effort from society, including strengthening the judicial system and raising awareness about the seriousness of violence. It is important to work towards building a society where violence is unacceptable, and perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

"Violence itself isn't adequately punished. Cases of hate crimes and hate speech, not only towards LGBTIQ persons but also towards the general population, are not adequately classified. This allows hate speech and hate crimes to go unpunished and fosters a culture of violence in society," says Ćulibrk.

Every individual in society faces the opportunity to contribute to violence prevention and promote a culture of accountability, something which Ćulibrk is keen to see.

"As a society, as individuals, we shouldn't allow the culture of violence to thrive. The violence that surrounds us needs to be condemned,

reported, and sanctioned. Younger generations need to be made aware that violence is unacceptable. As individuals, we can contribute to preventing and stopping the cycle of violence in our society," emphasizes Ćulibrk.

The director of the Sarajevo Open Center, Emina Bošnjak, says that the Banja Luka attack was definitely a shock for the entire LGBTIQ community, but when we look at the history of Queer activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we also see courage, resilience and reasons for optimism.

"Despite the continued challenges of homophobia and transphobia, our community stands strong, gradually creating a safer space. Homophobic and transphobic resistance exists in different forms, but our alliance is stronger today, as is society's awareness of the need to protect LGBTIQ people and provide them with equal opportunities and equality," contends Bošnjak.

INSTITUTIONAL HOMOPHOBIA

A particular challenge, according to Bošnjak, will be responding to institutional homophobia

and transphobia, especially in the entity of the Republika Srpska. "It's necessary to prosecute all participants in attacks on LGBTIQ persons, and also to put a stop to negative trends like incitement to violence and discrimination. We must also put a stop to the proposed ban on the admission of LGBTIQ activists into educational institutions, and the discriminatory regulation of health insurance for trans people in the Republika Srpska, which precludes any systemic healthcare support for transgender people, and general trends restricting the space for civil society to operate," Bošnjak states.

A recent public opinion survey by the Sarajevo Open Center suggests that there has been notable progress and social change in Bosnian society. However, when it comes to issues related to LGBTIQ rights, perspectives vary.

Bošnjak points to the encouraging fact that only 11 percent of respondents reported having extremely negative attitudes towards LGBTIQ people. However, 13 percent of respondents said they believe that Queer people require treatment, confirming the need for greater education and

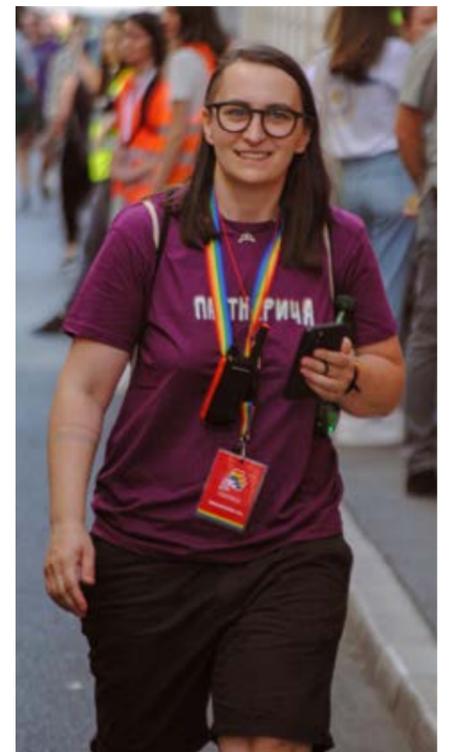
sensitization of the public. In contrast, a significantly higher portion of respondents, 32 percent, reported extremely positive attitudes towards LGBTIQ people, with 16 percent emphasizing respect for every individual's right to live freely, make their own decisions, and express their identity. Additionally, 11 percent support equality and the right of LGBTIQ people to live and love as they choose. Finally, just 5 percent of respondents said they view LGBTIQ people as ordinary people.

Bošnjak notes that the Council of Ministers has adopted the first comprehensive Action Plan that specifically deals with the challenges faced by Queer people. The plan sets clear guidelines and responsibilities for institutions at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and many measures are already being implemented, often with the support of the Sarajevo Open Center and international organizations.

"Through the joint efforts of activists, the Sarajevo Open Center and parents who support their LGBTIQ children, key issues such as access to healthcare and administrative changes related to the legal recognition of gender identity - key issues of importance for transgender people - have finally come to the attention of the authorities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We hope that the next few years will be pivotal for the establishment of new regulations reinforcing the human rights of trans people," says Bošnjak.

She goes on to emphasize that the responsibility for building a safer society for LGBTIQ people and creating an environment supportive of the authenticity of all citizens lies primarily with institutions:

"Institutions have the greatest responsibility, namely the introduction and strengthening of legal provisions for same-sex partnerships, facilitating accessible and clear gender transition processes - both legally and medically - and vigorously combatting, preventing, and sanctioning violence and discrimination. In this domain, the judiciary, the media, religious communities, political parties, and especially educational institutions will play a key role."





VIOLENCE IS NOT LOVE: THE NEED FOR PREVENTION AND AWARENESS

Text: Muamer Zukanović
Photography: Ajdin Kamber, Amel Uzunović
(Foto baza)

Gender-based violence is sending shockwaves through Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its frequent outcome is fatal: femicide. Femicide remains legally undefined in the country. Despite the outspokenness of NGOs and human rights activists, fear of the next femicide is ever-present in Bosnian-Herzegovinian society.

The appalling murder of Nizama Hećimović in the northern city of Gradačac, which was live-streamed on social media, horrified the public. Shortly thereafter, this incident was followed by femicides in Živinice (Tuzla Canton) and Zavidovići (Zenica-Doboj Canton), then a severe assault in Bijeljina (NE Bosnia), beatings in Ljubuški (SW Bosnia), and another femicide in Sarajevo. Femicide and domestic violence against women and gender minorities were certainly occurring before, but since Nizama's murder, these crimes have received greater visibility in the media.

According to the data of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJSC), 518 suspended sentences were imposed for domestic violence charges in 2021, 494 in 2022, and 410 in 2023. In 2021, 118 people were sentenced to prison

for such crimes, a number which rose to 139 in 2022 and 151 in 2023.

IDENTIFYING PERPETRATORS

Dr. Safet Mušić, a researcher specializing in violence-related phenomena, cited numerous studies indicating that people can become violent as a result of their upbringing, environmental influences, education, and other factors integral to personality formation.

Dr. Mušić enumerated some of the common characteristics of individuals prone to violence, including unjustified outbursts of aggression, an inability to engage in rational discussions and non-violent problem-solving, incidents of aggression in school and during childhood, attempts at dominance in romantic relationships with the threat of physical force, substance abuse, alcoholism, possession of illegal weapons, social conflict, and affiliation with extremist and violent groups, among others.

Aside from femicide, the category of gender-based violence includes other acts of physical violence which can leave various visible traces (welts, bruises, contusions, bloody lips, black eyes, strangulation marks on the neck, etc.), as well as coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation, and emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse.

Identifying perpetrators in society is often difficult, as they frequently use various methods to undermine the victim's self-confidence and pride. In conversations with victims, fear can be perceived in facial expressions, avoidance of eye contact, secretive or withdrawn behavior, and a general lack of self-confidence.

To protect victims of violence, Mušić points to well-established options for seeking help – filing police reports, maintaining these reports, and testifying against the perpetrator. Additionally, it is possible for the Social Welfare Center to intervene in collaboration with the authorities to provide support to victims.

One issue that commonly arises is that victims are often unemployed, and after relocating to safe houses, they find themselves without secure shelter again after six months, as well as without financial means. Mušić considers this an area where more work is needed to overcome the problem.

As a support for victims of violence, Mušić suggested that one option might be providing continuous financial assistance through the Social Welfare Center until the victim secures employment.

"Violence can be prevented from having fatal consequences primarily through a swift response from the executive authorities: the police, prosecution, and court," Mušić stated,



emphasizing that strict adherence to the legal framework in cases of violence is crucial. Prevention is also extremely important, including measures to introduce the subject into formal education or existing courses.

SUPPORT AND PREVENTION

According to Dr. Mušić, non-governmental organizations play a significant role in implementing awareness programs within the community, targeting both young people and offenders. Additionally, projects should be carried out through various social activities such

as seminars, summer camps, and quizzes, supported by all levels of government.

Amina Kolašinac is the coordinator of the project "Violence is not Love", conducted by the Global Analytics Association for Social Research. She says that through projects, public campaigns, youth education, street initiatives, and the media, the project aims to raise awareness that violence against women and gender minorities should not be normalized. Victims should be provided with support and preventive measures for recognizing violence in relationships and reacting to it in a timely manner.

"Educating people, primarily young people, has enabled their direct contribution to the topic and our public campaign has sent a message to women that they are not alone or abandoned," explained Kolašinac, adding that the project also raises awareness among men about the importance of their role in women's lives.

In addition to family settings, gender-based violence also occurs in the workplace. One well-known example is the physical assault on Enisa Klepo by the manager of the hotel in Jablanica where she worked. The attack had resulted from her efforts to exercise her labor rights.



BOSNIA'S EU ACCESSION: A PIPE DREAM?

Text: Melani Isović
Photography: Ajdin Kamber, private archive

Bilateral relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the European Union (EU) have been in progress for more than twenty years. In December 2022, BiH was formally granted the status of candidate for full EU membership, after

submitting an application for membership in February 2016.

BiH would benefit from accession in many ways. The country's standard of living would increase, its citizens would be able to travel without major restrictions, and its young people would gain access to educational and job opportunities in other member states. EU membership would also likely attract greater investment, stimulating economic growth and

creating jobs. Additionally, harmonization with EU standards could improve the country's legal and political stability. However, this accession is contingent on the fulfillment of 14 key priorities, posing a challenge for BiH.

Political analyst Tanja Topić tells MIR magazine that BiH's EU integration saga will not be concluded in the near future.

"We need a completely new, progressive - and it's questionable whether we have one

- political generation that firstly understands the European Union, European values, and that we're not implementing all these reforms for anyone there, but for ourselves," says Topić.

A legal and orderly state should be a common goal within every responsible society, given that it is the foundation for stability, justice, and prosperity. Thus, contributing to stability and coexistence should be in the collective interest of politicians and citizens alike.

"It's clear to the political elite here that strengthening the rule of law would mean their own imprisonment, so it's logical that they would do whatever they can to obstruct this and render the values upon which an orderly society depends meaningless. Citizens are told that the European Union will disintegrate before Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes a member. This illustrates their attitude towards integration," emphasizes Topić.

In the Opinion of the European Commission (Avis), delivered in May 2019, fourteen priority areas were specified, divided into four key sectors: democracy and the functioning of institutions, the rule of law, basic rights, and public administration reform. These priorities represent the conditions that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to meet in order to begin formal negotiations for full EU membership.

"Very little has been done. It's almost shameful to talk about any fulfillment. And what has been fulfilled was done under the rug and under pressure from European Union officials. Let's not fool ourselves, the candidate status was a gift to us, and it wasn't enough to motivate the political elite to awaken from the hibernation they've been in for almost a decade. They're driven only by personal interest," Topić observes.

AROUND 100 NEW LAWS STILL NEEDED

"The laws that have been adopted are flawed. They won't be enacted immediately, and they don't correspond to international standards. Roughly a hundred laws need to be adopted. The reform of electoral legislation is demanding, and we see that this process has been stalled for years. The fight against corruption doesn't show any progress, as key laws haven't been adopted. I think that domestic actors

expect New Year's presents from the European Commission," remarks Topić.

Divergent political currents within the country are slowing down the EU accession process, making it difficult to reach a consensus on key issues and implement reforms.

"The policy of mutual blackmail and blockade is something that has stalled the process, and geopolitical circumstances in Europe have derailed it. The division is dragging the country backward. We're getting poorer, steeped in corruption with a high percentage of our citizens emigrating. Under these conditions, it's hard to imagine any forward progress towards the EU," says Topić.

She contends that EU membership would improve the standard of living in BiH, explaining that "member countries or countries that have started negotiations gain prominence in the sense that foreign investors are confident in their investments. This enables a greater inflow of foreign investments, increased employment, and the creation of a hospitable economic environment free from most of the afflictions that we're suffering from. Citizens would be able to travel, which is a major asset - the free move-



She expresses concern about the possible exacerbation of youth emigration from the country, a phenomenon that has been unfolding for years.

"I'm not optimistic about how this will affect young people, who, even under these difficult circumstances, are finding ways to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina en masse, as happened with Croatia. I'm afraid that the relationship between BiH and the European Union will be reduced to the stick-and-carrot dynamic - rewarding obedience and punishing the opposite - because we've shown that this is the only approach we know. A different approach would be internal democratization, that is, the establishment of the sort of democracy that would disgust the current political elite," Zelenika notes.

Sara Feraget, a product design student at the Academy of Fine Arts from Sarajevo, believes that there are many potential benefits of accession for both BiH and the EU, but that the nation needs to go through a process of adapting its mentality, from law to general culture.

"Regarding the benefits for young people, I sincerely hope with all my being that the education system will not only improve but will completely change from the ground up at all levels, especially the higher levels, including through international collaboration, study trips, and the many opportunities that are offered to young people in the EU but not to young people in BiH," says Feraget.

Mubina Šašić, an Electrical Engineering master's student from Konjic, believes that BiH has a place in the EU and that all obstacles along the country's path to Europe must be removed as soon as possible. In addition to EU membership, she considers NATO membership equally important for securing peace, stability, and prosperity in BiH as well as the wider region.

"EU membership would primarily improve the quality of life for all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For me and young people generally, it would mean visits and occasional trips to other EU countries for professional training, collaboration, and networking with other young people, which would also be another opportunity to represent our homeland in the best possible light," Šašić states.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will submit a report on its progress toward fulfilling the 14th priority to the Council of the European Union by March 2024 at the latest.

ment of people, without visas, without borders, opportunities for young people to study, to travel, to have cross-cultural exchanges."

CARROT AND STICK

MIR Magazine asked young people about their attitudes towards the European Union and the potential impact that EU membership might have on their lives.

Nevena Zelenika, a Political Science student from Banja Luka, views BiH as part of centuries-old European civilization, a link between Eastern and Western societies, and a buffer zone that has always gravitated primarily toward the European economic community.

"As a future political scientist, I've noticed that all the opportunities and processes in BiH are directly connected with the European Union, and this connection is unbreakable. The will and motivation of the political classes in BiH indicate that European integration is the subject of diversification and the diffusion of responsibility. Bosnia and Herzegovina is obliged not to exclude European heritage from its achievements," explains Zelenika.





HOLOCAUST AND PEACE: LESSONS FROM THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Text: Tatjana Milovanović
Photography: Denis Ruvčić, PINCH Media

Holocaust and Peace: Lessons from the Past for the Future is a brand new manual for educators that aims to foster critical thinking and an objective approach to the past through peace education. This resource has already found practical application in the Sarajevo Canton curriculum as well as in several peace education workshops.

The manual was drafted by 15 educators, teachers, and peacebuilding experts in collaboration with the Post-Conflict Research Center and the Educator's Institute for Human Rights and ForumZFD BiH. It consists of 11 lessons and four modules covering the topics of history, human rights, memorialization, and language and literature. It is estimated that from 2023, approximately 400,000 students every year will learn about the Holocaust, moral and civic courage, memorialization and human rights, breaking prejudice against minority groups,

and about the role of the individual in building peace, social cohesion and positive change.

Through its methodology, content, and approaches, the authors advocate for these modules to serve as tools for peace education. The aim is to encourage contemporary research on the lessons learned from mass atrocities, instill human rights values, foster a constructive and inclusive culture of remembrance, and reinforce the role of language and literature in cross-curricular education. In so doing, the manual contributes to promoting true values and nonviolent, inclusive attitudes.

Velma Šarić, the President and Founder of the PCRC, emphasizes the significance of the manual's introduction into the official curricula in Sarajevo Canton. She stressed its role in passing on important values to new generations, including respect, empathy, solidarity, and dialogue, all of which are essential to understanding diversity and coexistence.

Teachers, as authority figures and disseminators of knowledge, play a vital role, especially in the

still ethnically divided societies and communities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). As explained by Michele Parente, a project manager at ForumZFD, teachers can create a safe environment for dialogue and the exchange of opinions within classrooms. He adds that this also provides students with the necessary tools for understanding nonviolence, gender equality, and human rights.

TRANSFORMING GENOCIDE EDUCATION

According to Jakob Finci, the president of the Jewish community in BiH, our textbooks mainly focus on wars that have directly or indirectly affected our country or on the former state of which we were an integral part. "Although the world said 'never again' after the Holocaust, similar genocides were perpetrated afterward. I don't think that we're innocent with regard to Srebrenica either, because we didn't teach children what can arise from hatred among different nations and religions," said Finci.

Elijas Tauber, one of the authors of the manual, explained that in elementary school history textbooks, the presentation of the Holocaust itself is vague and emotionally detached. He argues that textbooks do not allow for the development of empathy or the essential understanding of the scale of this shameful civilizational tragedy.

"The numbers of victims and the names of the camps will quickly get mixed up in the sea of information that students will have to learn in history class so that knowledge about the Holocaust will eventually be reduced to a number, a geographical term," he said. Tauber called for considering different approaches to building an educational strategy for the prevention of genocide.

Parente believes that, with the manual, educators can objectively teach about the topics of commemoration, constructive cultures of memory, and fact-based historical narratives. In this way, students will be encouraged to think critically about history and explore their active role in confronting the past.

He adds that the manual promotes an unbiased approach to memorialization that allows for multiple perspectives, the sharing of emotions, and questioning, but without the distortion, revision, minimization, relativization, or denial of the facts.

THE YOUNG AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Selma Rustempašić, a teacher and co-author of the manual, emphasizes the role of peace education as a catalyst of social change in BiH. Rustempašić stressed that special attention should be given to young people, who are the driving force of progress and play a vital role in the process of reconciliation and the prevention of future conflicts.

Time and distance have posed the greatest challenges in the drafting of the manual because the educators involved live on different continents and in different time zones. Kate W. English, the Executive Director of the Educator's Institute for Human Rights, states that teachers had obligations within their classrooms and significant responsibilities towards the school community, while partner organizations balanced this initiative with all other tasks within the organization. These obstacles, she believes, have opened up many opportunities for the project itself because it engaged so many educators with diverse experiences.

"Together, we can learn from history to build a more peaceful future. Atrocities in the past can shed light on both human failures and paths toward reconciliation. Students and teachers are our best hope to be able to take the most effective examples of compassionate resolve and apply them to the challenges we face today," said English.

The PCRC believes that the manual equips educators with the modern teaching techniques, resources, and lesson plans necessary to transform the study of history and the causes of conflicts and violence while preventing and combating revisionism and denialism.

"By promoting lessons from the field of Peace Studies, as well as the values of tolerance and constructive memory, educators who use this manual will contribute to advancing historical memory, dialogue, and conflict prevention in post-conflict environments shaped by social, ethnic, religious, and political identity," Šarić concluded.





LA BENEVOLENCIJA

PRESERVING JEWISH CULTURE IN BH

Text: Kristina Gadže
Photography: Denis Ruvic

La Benevolencija is a Jewish cultural, educational, and humanitarian society that has been operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina for one hundred years. Although it still functions as a non-governmental organization, this hub of Jewish culture hopes, through its activities and historical role in BiH, to underscore the necessity of addressing its status and space.

When La Benevolencija was initially established in 1892, its aim was to provide scholarships to pupils and students for education abroad, with the aim of students then returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it quickly expanded to include the organization of various cultural activities, a tradition that has been preserved to this day. By a decision of the Sarajevo Canton Assembly, La Benevolencija, together with other national associations, was declared one of the fundamental organizations

of special significance for the Sarajevo Canton Government.

Vladimir Andrle, the President of La Benevolencija, emphasized that the government of Sarajevo Canton's recognition is significant for its acknowledgment of the importance of the Jewish community and their contribution to the city. This was especially true during the 1990s war when 40 percent of the total humanitarian aid in the country was provided by Jews. He also stressed that this recognition was

community building. The manager of one of the pharmacies in Dobrinja was a Palestinian, and I emphasize this in the context of the current Israel-Palestine politics. We collaborated without any issues, and to this day, we cooperate with everyone," Andrle explained.

They were reestablished in 1945 under the name Sloboda, meaning "freedom." After the war, La Benevolencija sought to assist citizens by providing support for starting small businesses, offering interest-free loans through a former microcredit organization. Additionally, they offered courses in Arabic and English languages for technological literacy. Some projects from that time are still active today, such as "Program 19 u 19" [Program 19 at 19], where on the 19th of every month, they organize a cultural activity. They also commemorate the annual European Day of Jewish Culture.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

As Andrle pointed out, they work on promoting peace and reconciliation, primarily through collaboration with the other three national organizations, where they aim to serve as a "counterpart diametrically opposed to the daily politics." They also engage in these efforts through the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of their projects, "Sazvučje" [Harmony], has resulted in concerts held in various cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Now we have changed the educational concept. We used to have Open House Day, where students from schools would visit us, but now we are working on projects where we go into schools and discuss topics that are important for this society. These include hate speech, antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, Holocaust denial, and general stories about the Holocaust because we have learned that people don't know the story of the Holocaust and how it affected the Jewish community," Andrle said, describing the project "Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Xenophobia in the Public School System", realized in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

As part of this program, they have visited five schools and six classes in the Stari Grad Municipality of Sarajevo. "We wanted these to not be traditional lectures but to motivate students to explore what they've heard through conversation. This year, we are creating a more substantial program that we are supposed to carry out with the European Union mission, which would last for a year and a half. We would like to visit as many local communities as possible in both of the entities and Brčko, where we want to engage with teachers, active parents, directors, and pedagogical institutes, as well as create resources for people to share what they've learned. I think these topics need to be discussed," Andrle added.

essential for advocating for the adoption of the Law on Foundations in BiH in 2017, where the four national communities would be exempted from the concept of non-governmental organizations, and the issue of restitution of national property would be resolved.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

La Benevolencija, as Andrle noted, can be seen as the successor to all cultural institutions and organizations that existed before the Second World War. "We are talking about sports clubs, choirs, and political organizations," said Andrle. He emphasized that, before the Second World War every fifth resident of the city of Sarajevo was Jewish, making them a constitutive member of the nation.

The association operated smoothly until 1941 when the Ustasha government of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) seized power and banned their activities.

"At that time, all their property was confiscated. La Benevolencija primarily collected humanitarian aid to assist Dubrovnik. We had three pharmacies in the city of Sarajevo: near the National Theater, in Dobrinja, and in the Jewish

are in difficult financial situations. Through two homecare programs, they provide assistance not only to citizens of Sarajevo but also to others in need and to Holocaust survivors, of whom there are 58 in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The month of September is reserved for Jewish Culture Days when all Jewish communities in Europe, including La Benevolencija, organize activities aimed at preserving Jewish culture. This year, they also participated in the Sarajevo Winter Days and organized five exhibitions, a play, and a concert, which they expect to continue until the end of the year.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF JEWISH CULTURE AND BROADER CHALLENGES

Andrle mentioned that the general perception people have about Jewish culture is that it's just concerts of Sephardic music, but he believes it's much more than that. "We have Laura Papo Bohoreto, Kalmi Baruh, David Kamhi, a wide range of cultural traits that are somewhat forgotten in the broader society. We have the Hebrew Español language, which is a dying language in Bosnia and Herzegovina; there is only one person who speaks this language. We will focus more on this, especially on the revitalization of Hebrew Español at an academic level," Andrle stated. He added that this language had been offered as an elective course at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, but the problem was that there were no tutors available to teach it.

He also emphasized the fact that Jewish culture would not be preserved if members of the community did not actively work to safeguard and promote it.

The association is currently funded solely through donations and small grants from the Federal Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Sarajevo Canton Government. Besides funding, a significant issue is the lack of an official workspace for their activities. They currently use the premises of the Jewish Community of Sarajevo.

"Without a Restitution Law, all that property [confiscated during the Second World War] has been nationalized, and there's not much we can do about it unless the authorities are willing. We have a space on La Benevolencija Street, but that space has been nationalized, and now it's used by the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of the Interior. We have an example in Zenica where the synagogue was returned to the Jewish community for use as a building because we can't reclaim ownership. We now use that space and have made it available to the wider community. It's primarily a cultural center," Andrle explained.

He envisions the organization as vibrant, healthy, and long-lasting, and his message emphasizes unity as the strength of Bosnian society.

"I believe we can't exist without one another, that we don't make sense without one another because it's a centuries-old concept of life we're accustomed to, and it's natural for us. We've noticed a lack of visiting during holidays. People have become alienated from each other, and I think that's a shame. With our projects, we want to show that we need to return to that path because Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot continue without any of its ethnic groups. If one group of people leaves Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosnia disappears because that's the essence and core of our country," Andrle concluded.



ROMEO AND JULIET IN BOSNIA: A TALE, OR REALITY?

Text: Amina Sejfić
Photography: Helen O'Grady Sarajevo

In the 2021-2022 school year, a group of young performers came together in a production of a play entitled "Romeo and Juliet from Two Schools Under One Roof". The play follows a Shakespearean love story set in a post-conflict Bosnian-Herzegovinian reality. The young actors form part of the Helen O'Grady Sarajevo Drama Academy's 'Upper Primary' group, consisting of students in the upper grades of elementary schools. The Academy allows young performers to use art as an expression of tough everyday realities. On stage, performers immerse themselves in unexplored worlds while strengthening their confidence

in bringing about social change through their art. Arna Tanović-Branković, the leader of the Helen O'Grady Academy's theater studio, as well as an actress and a lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts, described the play as "the classic Shakespearean love story set in the context of two classes from two schools under one roof." According to Tanović-Branković, the play offers a striking example of collaborative work that is socially relevant and addresses the nationalism and transgenerational trauma burdening Bosnia's children. During an initial improvisation of the play, Tanović-Branković asked the children who among them wanted to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina. All 30 of them raised their hands. "It was a terrible defeat. Personal. That's how I

experienced it. Is it possible that we adults have made their homeland a place of hopelessness, fear, and dysfunctionality?" she wondered. Perhaps fittingly, the play concludes with the young protagonists' departure from BiH, with Romeo and Juliet continuing their love story far away from one another, through screens and digital devices.

ACTING: A TEACHER OF LIFE LESSONS

"Theater provides children with a world preceding their real-life experience, empowering them with knowledge of how to react in situations similar to those they go through on stage. Acting is a powerful teacher of empathy and life lessons. Through acting, you learn to observe the world from different perspectives and characters. You learn to understand rather than judge others," reflected Tanović-Branković. The play "Romeo and Juliet from Two Schools Under One Roof" is one in a series of

performances by the Helen O'Grady Academy. The Academy was conceived of and realized in 2015 and originated in the Department of Communication at the prestigious Trinity College in the United Kingdom. Years earlier, in 2001, Tanović-Branković worked as a theater teacher in the drama department of the Herman Gmeiner Social Center of SOS Kinderdorf and later at the Academy of Performing Arts. She explains that what she sought was a drama program tailored to children and young people based on their needs and abilities and adaptable for all age groups. Tanović-Branković highlights the difference between teaching acting to aspiring actors and actresses, and teaching acting as an extracurricular or school activity. The Helen O'Grady Academy program utilizes acting tools that, according to Tanović-Branković, are aimed at cultivating confidence, positive attitudes towards individuality and the future, communication skills, and creative and divergent thinking competencies in children

and young people. Participants are divided into three groups: Lower Primary, Upper Primary, and Youth Theatre. The Academy has also started a new/old Adult Theatre, open to all participants 19 and over. "We have enriched this program; the performances we stage as we finish off the academic year are socially and culturally relevant, addressing issues that concern young people and thereby empowering their belief in themselves as well as in the possibility of corrective action within the social community," said Tanović Branković. Šejla Rizvanbegović-Dvizac, co-owner of the Helen O'Grady Academy in Sarajevo, is described by her colleague Tanović-Branković as the manager, driving force, and foundation of the school. Together with professional teachers Edis Bilić, Saša Krmpotić, and Ester Walburg, they uphold the mission and vision of the school's founder, Mrs. Helen O'Grady, who began developing this program in 1979 and has made it the most prestigious program in the field of drama education worldwide.





THE EX-YU ROCK CENTAR: CELEBRATING YUGOSLAV ROCK

Text: Ena Rizvic
Photography: PINCH Media

The Ex-Yu Rock Centar in Sarajevo was inspired by Ohio's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The aim of the Centar, founded by American Will Richard, is to honor and celebrate Yugoslav Rock and Roll, as well as the contemporary music scene in the ex-Yugoslav region.

Richard's love of music began in his father's vinyl record store and evolved into a passion for Yugoslav Rock after living and working in Bosnia for several years. His plans for the Centar started to come to life in early 2021 with the creation of the Ex-Yu Rock Society (EYRS), and on November 29, 2022, the Centar officially began displaying its first exhibit, "Šokiraš me, majke mi!", ("My god, that's shocking!") to the public in Dom Mladi Skenderija, Sarajevo. It opened a second exhibit in December that year, and plans for several more in the near future. Eventually, the Centar aims to upscale this work into its very own museum and exhibition space, gift shop, concert venue, and, of course, it would not be a proper Sarajevo establishment without a bar cafe.

While rock music is most often associated with the United States and Great Britain, many argue that Yugoslavia created acts that were on par with their Western counterparts. One of the most influential and successful bands in the region, Bijelo Dugme ("White Button"), for example, originated in Sarajevo itself and has remastered their work with Abbey Road Studios. In many ways, their mix of classic rock and roll instruments and vocals with traditional

melodies from the western Balkan region created an authentic style of music.

THE INCLUSIVITY OF ROCK AND ROLL

Many of the most well-known rock acts of Yugoslavia originated in Sarajevo, making it an ideal location for the Centar to call home. However, the Centar's planned museum space would not only celebrate bands that came from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, Majke ("Mothers"), one of Richard's favorite bands from former Yugoslavia, comes from Croatia and is already featured in the Centar. While all of the bands featured have their own unique histories and styles, the

Centar prioritizes music over nationality. It aims to showcase different Yugoslav rock and roll hubs from all over the region in its upcoming exhibits, including "Rijeka – City of Rock" and "Rock Bands from North Macedonia". The Centar's inclusivity doesn't end there, with another exhibit focusing on "Women in Rock."

Not only does the project provide a good opportunity for the public to explore this music, but it is also an opportunity for the city of Sarajevo to expand its selection of museums. At the moment, most museums in this capital city focus on different wars and conflicts. While these museums are indispensable, they create the sense that war is the defining feature of Sarajevoan culture, which is far from the truth. Projects that aim to honor the cultural aspects of



the city and its history are thus needed to paint a more accurate image for tourists who may not be aware of the nuances of the city's history.

"Yugoslavia had one of the greatest rock scenes in the world and I really want visitors of Sarajevo – which was one of the key Yugoslav music hubs – to learn about these bands and to be exposed to their innovative music. Ex-Yu rock is in many ways a hidden treasure," added Richard.

One example of a similar project in Sarajevo is the Sevdah Art House, which focuses on a specific kind of Bosnian folk music called Sevdalinka. This cafe and museum honors the centuries-old musical tradition that was first popularized around the early 1900s.

The Centar aims to become an attraction in a similar vein. "Not only will it offer foreigners visiting Sarajevo a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in Yugoslav music, but it will also enable people from the entire region to embrace their rich music culture and to celebrate the hundreds of legendary bands from this part of the world," said Richard.

By bringing all these people together in celebration, the Centar also breeds a sense of community. It has already begun to build up its own musical scene through social events like music quiz nights, discussion panels, shows, and tours. Several primary and secondary schools from the region have also visited the Centar.

The Centar also aims to attract new artists and encourage them to share their music with locals and international listeners. "This is where the concert space will play a pivotal role in the center because it will allow artists throughout the region who may have been inspired by the legendary acts displayed in the exhibitions to share their own work. By honoring the past, people are able to develop new authentic styles, just like other courageous artists have done throughout history," added Richard. Since its opening in Dom Mladi, the Centar has hosted a wide variety of performers to showcase their own work.

"THE HISTORY OF YUGOSLAV ROCK AND ROLL IS LONG"

People who adore the rock and roll music of the former Yugoslavia have been overwhelmingly enthusiastic about Will Richard's idea.

Journalist and author of the Ex-Yu Rock Encyclopedia, Petar Janjatović, notes "The history of Yugoslav rock and roll is long and very interesting, and for that reason, it's a great idea to have a museum dedicated to it."

Dino Šaran, lead singer of the rock group, Letu Štuke ("Flying Pike"), stated in a recent interview with Richard that he is also in full support of the project and willing to reach out to any other artists that would be of interest to this work. However, in this interview, Šaran also pointed out one difficulty the center will have to face: separating the art from the artist. While he might adore the Yugoslav rock albums released by artists prior to the war, he recognizes that music is always rooted in political contexts.

Walking this fine line between appreciating the art and acknowledging the controversies of individual artists is a tough but necessary part of the road ahead which the Centar understands must be approached carefully. One approach would be to appreciate those artists who fought adamantly against nationalist rhetoric; another would be to simply put the love for music first. "At the end of the day, if we consider music as a sort of common ground, we had



the best rock scene, alongside the American and English scenes, in the world," Šaran adds.

These politically contentious issues pose obvious setbacks, as less attention is often provided to projects that do not directly promote reconciliation in a post-war setting the way a war museum might. However, this has not stopped the Centar from gaining domestic and international support. Centar za promociju civilnog društva (CPCD, "Center for the Promotion of Civil Societies"), the EU Delegation to BiH, the Swiss Embassy to BiH, the French Embassy to BiH, Canton Sarajevo, AMUS, UNESCO, Hayat Productions, and other organizations have already sponsored and endorsed this project.

The early successes of the Centar have justified these investments and demonstrated the value of its mission. Since November 2022, the

Centar has welcomed thousands of visitors. "This is just the beginning, but I am proud of what we have established so far and I'm looking forward to expanding the Centar. I'm thrilled to be able to honor Ex-Yu rock legends and to have the opportunity to meet many of them over the past couple of years. These are world-class artists and the Ex-Yu Rock Centar is providing a space where they can be honored together," said Richard.

For any artists, producers, executives, promoters, photographers, journalists, and fans who would like to donate or loan any original/authentic photos, posters, recordings, instruments, clothing, documents, rare records, or other items that could be of value, please reach out to the Centar directly. You can contact their email at info@ex-yurock.com or call +387 60 307 6375.





HUMANITY IN ACTION: MORE THAN A GAME

Text: Molly Munro
Photography: private archive (Kerim Hodžić), Humanity in Action

Using innovative educational initiatives for young adults, HiA is a transatlantic non-profit that promotes democracy and human rights. They create environments where people from diverse backgrounds and identities can interact and discuss challenging topics openly and respectfully. HiA supports a vision of inclusive societies that value diversity and navigate boundaries through healthy political, social, and interpersonal relationships.

Humanity in Action (HiA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) launched the project "Gamifying EU Realities in BiH: Board Games Paving Ways to Youth Engagement in EU-related Matters in BiH" in 2022. This initiative

provided young people with an opportunity to participate in the design and playing of board games to learn more about the European Union (EU), its operations, and the possible integration of BiH into the EU framework. The project, supported by the EU and the Council of Europe in BiH, promoted civic and democratic engagement among young people in local communities and other spheres of public policy-making.

"It was a fantastic chance to meet a lot of great people and learn a great deal about the EU, its operations, and how we can apply those here at home. Of course, it was also a unique opportunity for personal development and learning," said Nedim Numanović, one of the participants.

Kerim Hodžić, the Project Officer of "Gamifying EU Realities in BiH," stated that they aim to inspire action and engage young people, who often lack interest in these topics because they

are disillusioned with politics and are tired of hearing about the subject.

"We have to take action, starting at a local level," emphasized Hodžić.

The board games were designed, produced, and tested in the participants' hometowns. The main goals of the project included fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and interaction among young citizens from across the country, as well as helping them to better understand the various interconnected aspects of civic and democratic engagement.

Hodžić believes that "in the long run, the major benefit is motivating people, giving them certain tools and skill sets that they can't acquire on their own. We want [the youth] to learn about teamwork, to gain certain skills, and to develop the critical thinking capacities to achieve a common goal. So, it's not

necessarily about the topic of the EU; it's more about training them for much greater undertakings that they can do themselves. Offering them something and opening their minds to something that has the potential to lead to something bigger."

Reflecting on the skills she took away from this experience, participant Nizama Patković said, "Since I was a team leader, I learned a lot about leading and coordinating a team and organizing meetings. Apart from that, of course, I learned a lot about the EU and its processes. The importance of the visual component of the game as well as its simplicity and competitiveness are also things that we had to pay attention to and learn a lot about."

Numanović said he learned what it takes to coordinate a team to work efficiently towards a goal and how to maximize individual talents. In addition, he explained that he gained knowledge in board game design, both in terms of visual design and game logic.

Asked whether activities like this could contribute to peacebuilding in BiH, Numanović said, "I believe that they can because they bring people from all walks of life together, teach what we should be working towards, and cater to our individual talents to some extent as well. All kinds of skills were learned here, not just about game design, and that can help educate and train people how to work towards a better tomorrow for our country."

The final board games "36," "Eurochase," and "Euforija" educate players about the policies, democratic values, financial support, and laws of the EU in an engaging way. The games are publicly accessible on the Action in Humanity website along with instructional videos.

"The project taught me much more about the EU, its operations and different branches, and how all those gears turn together to make everything work on a grand scale," noted Numanović.

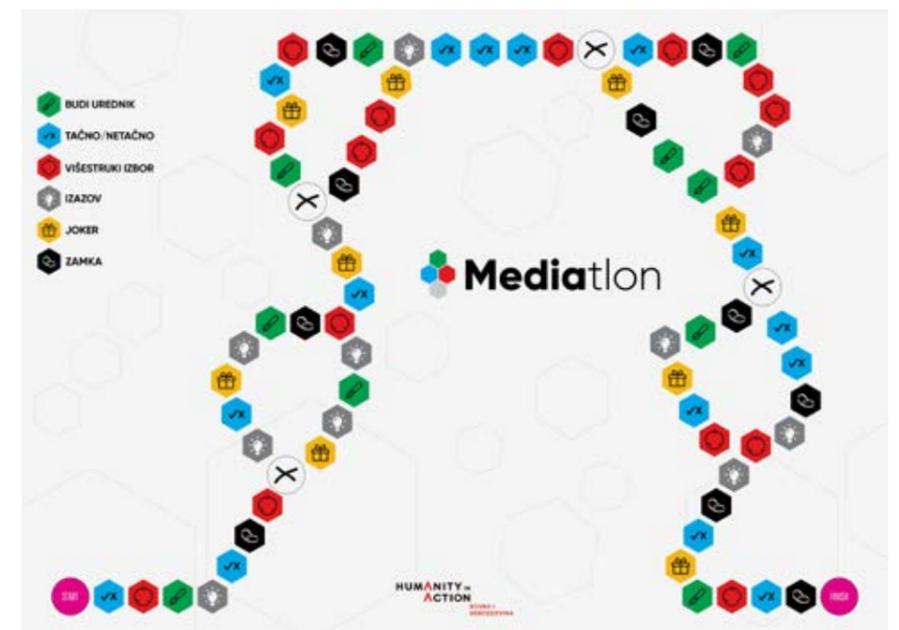
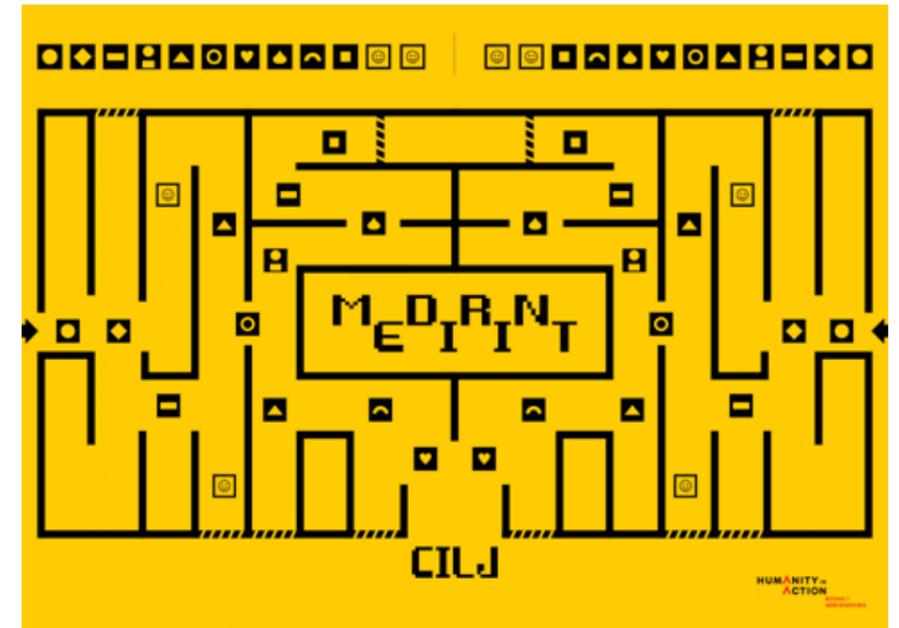
Fellow participant, Patković, said that despite history lessons and other non-governmental projects she has been exposed to in the past, her knowledge of the EU was limited to some basic concepts. She added that while developing one of the board games, she had to study and learn a lot in order to make the game as accurate and authentic as possible. "There are certainly still many things that I don't understand due to the complexity of the operations, but my level of knowledge has improved a lot."

She summed up the experience as "a beautiful time from which a friendship and a product were born."

HiA involves student leaders in the fostering of growth and development among young workers in BiH who are committed to upholding human integrity and minority rights.

They maintain that the measure of a true democracy is its treatment of its most vulnerable populations and that Europe's dedication to democratic ideals and diversity should not be taken for granted. Their work promotes intercultural, racial, and religious understanding within a global setting. Their goal is to bolster the commitment of young Bosnian community leaders to democratic principles by encouraging social engagement and early career development, in which they are taught how to combat prejudice.

One of their recent initiatives was to create interactive and informative material about important issues facing the country's youth, such as media and information literacy and the potential for Bosnian EU integration.



RAMO TUČIĆ:

THE BOSNIAN ARTIST OF ENDLESS MEDIUMS



Text: Adelisa Mašić
Photography: Ramo Tučić, Omladinski resursni centar Tuzla, BKC Tuzla, Pozorište mladih Tuzla

"Through the drama studio, I first learned to love myself, and later, others. I acquired discipline in the truest sense of the word, and most importantly, I learned how to overcome stage fright, which, as a student of journalism, was more than necessary for me," recalled Tučić.

From an early age, some feel a deep inner drive to express their creativity and enrich the world around them. Among such individuals is Ramo Tučić, who discovered his path into the world of art in early childhood.

Born in Zvornik in 1992, as a toddler he survived the journey now known as the Death March, fleeing his hometown alongside his mother during the Srebrenica Genocide. As refugees, they stayed first in Zavidovići, then in Zagreb, and later in Germany, before returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1998. Tučić completed his primary and secondary education in his hometown.

From an early age, he showed an affinity for art, contributing to an artistic exhibition displayed in the lobby of his school. His artistic interests broadened in Tuzla, where he enrolled in the Drama Studio of the Tuzla Youth Theater at the age of 20. As a member of the Studio for more than ten years, he starred in numerous performances. This theatrical experience not only allowed him to hone his skills as an actor but also, as he says, shaped his character.



In addition to being an actor and journalist, Tučić is also a painter. Although he did not immediately realize that he possessed a talent for painting, he discovered it through his involvement in the theater, where he worked on set design for several plays. After years of work and experience, he had the courage to embark on his first solo exhibition, entitled "Lines of Life."

After his first solo exhibition, he vowed to dedicate his talent as a painter to those in need of a voice. This commitment gave rise to his second solo exhibition, "I Exist," addressing the challenges faced by members of the Forgotten Children of War Association and questions of identity. These "forgotten children" were born as a result of wartime rape. As a result of the ongoing stigmatization attached to this lived experience, their existence remains marginalized even today.

Subsequent exhibitions followed, such as "You Are Not Alone," which explored themes related to youth mental health, and a charitable exhibition titled "For Them," which helped to raise money for the Children's Diseases Clinic at the University Clinical Center in Tuzla.

Using his experience as a journalist acquired across multiple media platforms, Tučić has promoted his artistic work and, as a result, has attracted a larger audience to his exhibitions.

"I somehow learned to balance it all and do what I truly love. My days are genuinely different. Sometimes, I'm full of creativity, and that's when I'm a painter, transferring my visions onto canvas. Other times, I'm a journalist, conveying my stories through texts. I like to joke that balancing my day requires a group effort and a manager, but actually, everything you see when an exhibition happens, down to the smallest detail, is my own handiwork. Still, I can't forget the significant support and assistance from the people involved in the process of my work," explained Tučić.

When it comes to future plans, he is constantly working on new projects and exhibitions. His audience is accustomed to annual exhibitions, and Tučić hopes that his future exhibitions will be displayed in as many cities as possible, touching the hearts of all who attend.

Tučić is a striking example of dedication, creativity, and passion with the potential to inspire all. Through his exhibitions, he not only expresses his creativity but also raises awareness about important social issues.

WOMEN IN SMALL BUSINESSES: INSPIRING FUTURE ENTREPRENEURS



Text: Mirnes Bakija
 Photography: Dijana Markuš, Mirnes Bakija, Slađana Palikuća

One of the successful stories of entrepreneurship featured Slađana Palikuća, a barista from Banja Luka. She started working in this field during her high school days and today, she is the proud owner of Piccola coffee shop in Banja Luka. The uniqueness of this charming establishment lies in the decoration of their coffee with various designs, creating an inviting atmosphere for guests to enjoy their favorite beverage.

"I started from scratch and began building a foundation by working all day on my own, giving myself another chance in this city," Palikuća recalls.

Jasmina Čušić, originally from Mostar, is the owner of Eko Jasmina, a small store selling organic fruits and vegetables. Despite having a degree in English Language and Literature, she was unable to find a job because she did not affiliate herself with a political party (a common symptom of corruption in post-conflict Bosnia). Not knowing where to turn, she started her own business that, today, continues to attract a growing amount of customers.

"I was conditioned to join a specific political party in order to secure a job in education. I didn't want to be a part of that. I wanted to embark on an adventure of my own, so I started this business," explains the entrepreneur from Mostar.

Merjem Hamzić is an entrepreneur from Sarajevo who left her long-time job in the banking sector to venture into chocolate-making. Together with her husband, she founded Bashka, a brand of handmade chocolates.

"We believe in local products, which is why we want to support the growth of our brands," Hamzić proudly states.

While natural cosmetics are becoming an increasingly popular alternative to well-known brands for many consumers, launching a small business in this market is not easy, as Amila Muratović can attest. However, this young entrepreneur from Živinice (eastern Bosnia) has risen to this challenge. Muratović launched Bellen Cosmetics, a brand of handmade cosmetics made from natural waxes, plant-based ingredients, and essential oils. Muratović also offers teas, serums, and everything someone may need for beautiful skin.

Another success story in the field of cosmetics, this time natural soaps, comes from Banja Luka. Entrepreneur Dijana Markuš is the proud owner of the brand SaponiFly.

"I started step by step. The soaps were improving every time, and my happiness grew," she says, smiling as she recounts the story of her business.

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Palikuća (Piccola caffetteria) acknowledges that the difficulty lies not in starting the business itself, but in the hurdles faced afterward, which can be daunting.

"I didn't expect any help from the government or the authorities because I quickly realized that assistance is reserved for the privileged, people with political party affiliations who don't even need the help," explains the barista.

During her work, she encountered various problems such as discrimination in career advancement and even more serious difficulties. She states that the biggest issue that women in small businesses face is that they are not taken seriously, and they often encounter different forms of violence.

"When I opened the café, I also suffered psychological harassment from an older man. He called me a young girl running a café and said he would drink wherever he wanted. He threatened to send inspectors until they closed my café," she said, recalling the distressing experience.

Markuš, the owner of SaponiFly, attests that starting your own business is a significant challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially without initial capital. While making soap may seem like a relaxing hobby, she emphasizes that it is a fairly costly process. As she explains, her earnings are only enough to purchase new raw materials or pay for soap-making courses, which she is very eager to attend.

Čušić from Mostar believes that Bosnia and Herzegovina has excellent agricultural and natural conditions to become an organically conscious country, but these potentials remain largely untapped. In comparison to Slovenia, which has 3,000 organic producers per capita, Bosnia and Herzegovina has less than 100.

"I definitely think that the state should provide more support for young people to



engage in organic farming, especially in larger cities like Sarajevo or Banja Luka because people there are more conscious about what they eat and have greater purchasing power," asserts Čušić.

THE EXPERIENCES THAT SHAPE MOTIVATION

Muratović, the proud owner of Bellen Cosmetics, revealed that cosmetics has been her passion since childhood.

"As a teenager, I began to experience skin problems. After conducting in-depth research, I discovered that the main culprit was my cosmetics. The products I was using contained silicones, parabens, formaldehyde, and heavy metals. Who would want that in the skincare

products they use in their daily routine?" asked Muratović, who came up with the idea to create several natural cosmetic concoctions for herself.

She stresses that she wanted to make natural cosmetics, free from animal cruelty and any ingredients that are harmful to people or the environment.

Similarly, Markuš made her first soaps for her children, to give them a safe natural product that would not harm their skin. Over time, she started experimenting more with shapes, and when she began the soap-making process, she added different ingredients to make the soaps unique. She emphasizes that making high-quality soap takes hours of painstaking work and that the key lies in careful preparation, precise planning, and measuring the ingredients.





"My soaps are made from plant oils and butters, fragrant and essential oils, mineral colors, and other [natural] additives such as various types of clay, activated charcoal, coffee, and many other ingredients. Each recipe is carefully designed to bring out the best from the ingredients. It's really a joy to combine colors and scents and then receive praise for it," Markuš stated.



'TO BE BRILLIANT, YOU HAVE TO START'

Bellen Cosmetics is proof that the production and trade industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not reserved solely for men, serving as an example for all aspiring female entrepreneurs planning to start a small business.

"Start as soon as possible! Learn, research, create. The younger you are the better because you have more time for ups and downs. This is how you gain experience. Don't listen to others, listen to yourself. Be your own support system. Long-term experience will open many doors for you," Muratović advises.

Palikuća says she has learned from experience that no matter how well you plan, life always takes unexpected turns. She adds that, in both business and life, it is important to be adaptable to new situations. She encourages all women entering the business world to do what truly fulfills them and bravely pursue the goals they set for themselves.

"You don't have to be brilliant to start - you have to start to be brilliant," Palikuća emphasizes.





DISCOVER THE MOUNTAINOUS BEAUTY OF BH

Text: Elma Hasanspahić
Photography: Mitar Simikić

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a country cradled in the rugged elevations of the Dinarides. The country's landscape is interspersed with green meadows and adorned with breathtaking peaks. This land of the Balkan Peninsula, brimming with natural marvels, offers an incredible harmony between wild, untouched nature and rich cultural heritage. The mountains of BiH represent the heart of this natural wonder, providing countless opportunities for exploration and adventure.

In 2013, a group of young enthusiasts came together with the idea of promoting hiking as a healthy lifestyle and an escape from everyday routine. They founded the Vedro Association for the Development and Support of Mountaineering and Sports Tourism, which is celebrating its eleventh anniversary this year. Their first expedition

in October 2013 was to the Medieval Royal City of Bobovac in central Bosnia.

"The mountains in BiH are something special, and it's not just those of us from BiH who appreciate it but also mountaineers from neighboring countries, who regularly come to explore our mountains," states the Association.

They explain that for the average recreational mountaineer, the mountains of BiH offer a complete package: from low mountains and accessible slopes to beautiful forests, abundant freshwater springs, lakes, meadows, and even more challenging mountains with fixed pegs and cables (via ferrata).

The Dinarides, a mountain range that runs through BiH, provide outstanding opportunities for hiking, skiing, and outdoor adventures. Mountains like Prenj, Bjelašnica, and Vlašić attract winter sports enthusiasts, while sites like Una National Park and Sutjeska National Park are a paradise for nature and bird lovers.

The COVID-19 pandemic inadvertently bolstered the tourism potential of BiH, as people increasingly sought out destinations for their natural beauty. Nonetheless, at the Vedro Association, they believe that there is always room for progress, particularly because BiH has so many natural wonders with the ability to attract many tourists.

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAINEERS

"All of the mountains could be top tourist destinations—and some of them already are, such as the Olympic beauties Bjelašnica, Jahorina, and Vlašić, which are known for their ski resorts. If only this were approached with planning or with certain restrictions, for example, on the construction of hotels, apartments, cottages, and such," Vedro stated.

According to the Vedro Association, the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina are appealing to both local and international mountaineers because of their purely natural surroundings, devoid of residential complexes, restaurants, or any facilities that might disturb the serenity of being immersed in nature.

UNIQUE COMBINATION OF CULTURE AND NATURE

Another notable mountaineering destination is Prenj, a mountain massif in Herzegovina with many peaks, the highest of which, Zelena Glava, is 2,115 meters above sea level. This is followed by Lupoglav (2,102 meters above sea level), Otiš (2,097 meters above sea level), Herač (2,046 meters above sea level), and Velika Kapa (2,007 meters above sea level).

Another highlighted mountain is Treskavica Mountain, located in central BiH, which descends into Herzegovina on its southern slopes. "Treskavica, at 2,086 meters above sea level, is the highest mountain in Sarajevo and is only 300 meters smaller than the highest peak in the country," they explain, adding that when the weather is clear and sunny, visitors can see all the way to Montenegro and the Adriatic Sea.

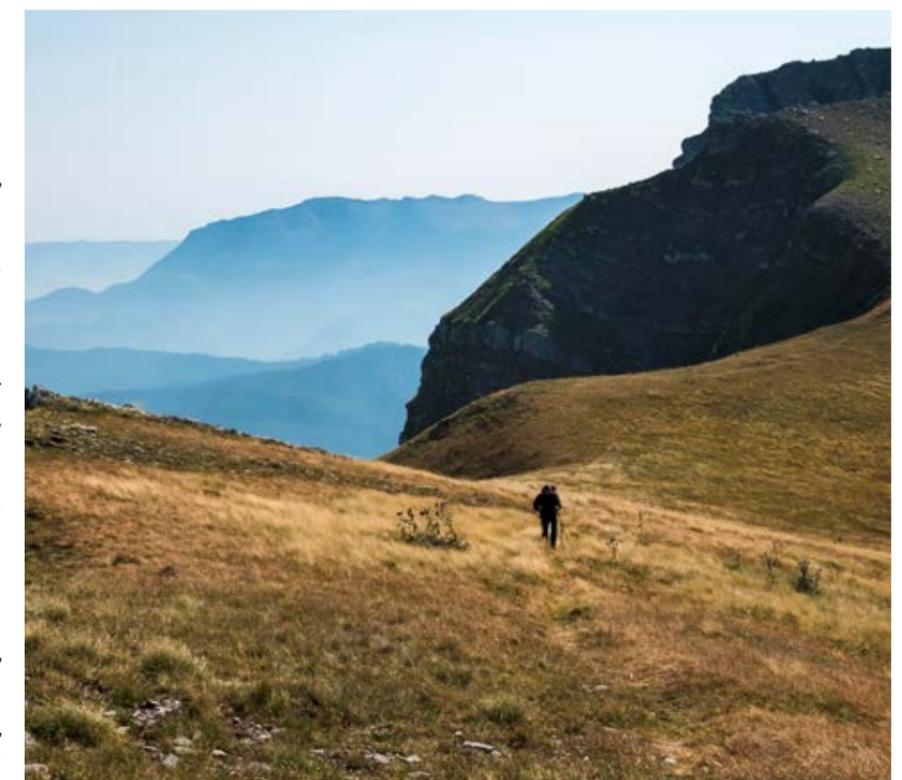
Treskavica Mountain is rich in water, with 365 springs, including the sources of five major rivers (Željeznica, Bistrica, Ljuta, Bijela, and Rakitnica). The mountain is also home to ten different lakes (Veliko, Platno, Crno, Bijelo, Zmijsko, Turov Stan, Kućare, Trokunsko, Gornja Bara, and Simovića Bara).

The highest peak of Zelengora is Bregoč, standing at an elevation of 2,014 meters above sea level and surrounded by around

ten other peaks at approximately 2,000 meters above sea level.

This is just a glimpse of what the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina have to offer. These mountains are more than natural beauties, they are also part of the country's rich cultural

heritage. Whether you are an adventurer seeking a challenge, a nature lover in search of tranquility, or a traveler looking to discover the unique combination of culture and nature, you will be amazed by the mountains of Bosnia and Herzegovina.





‘APATHY IS NOT AN OPTION’: BOSNIAN CLIMATE ACTIVISTS RAISE THE ALARM

Text: Franziska Fischer
Photography: Mitar Simikić

The effects of the climate crisis are becoming increasingly evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Four activists from Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Zenica are tirelessly working to raise awareness about the need to address environmental issues. These activists are Samir Lemeš from Eko Forum Zenica, Edna and Meliha from the Youth Movement Revolt Tuzla, and activist Layla Jusko.

Lemeš, the president of Eko Forum Zenica, stated that the ecological movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long history. He explained that advocacy for better air quality in Zenica dates back to 1950. Plans were made by the local government to reduce air pollution in the city but air pollution issues persisted. After the privatization of the steel industry that started way back in 1998, the promised improvements to the factories were not realized, prompting citizens to establish civil society organizations, such as Eko Forum Zenica in 2009.

When asked about the active participants in their organization, Lemeš said that they are mainly older individuals of professions, including engineers, journalists, and doctors. “It’s still challenging to engage younger people to join

us,” he acknowledged, adding that the fight for better air quality requires time, which young people often don’t have.

Young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the “Fridays for Future” movement, which began in 2019. While these protests continue in many countries, they have ceased in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Layla Jusko was part of the “Fridays for Future” movement and believes that the climate crisis demands greater attention from all.

“There is awareness of climate issues here, I can’t say it doesn’t exist, but it’s still not at a satisfactory level. We have only a few people who are actively working on it,” she noted, adding, “Young people are aware of this problem, but there is a lack of willingness for action.”

Meliha and Edina are activists in the Youth Movement Revolt Tuzla. Edina describes the reactions to the activities of this movement as mostly positive. “Some people take an apathetic attitude, which is really common in our society, where they tell us that we’re doing this for nothing – ‘You’re not going to change anything.’ But most are really proud that a group of young people are coming together and at least trying to make a change. And I think we are, at least in some areas,” said Edina.

Referring to the various strategies used to advocate for environmental protection, Lemeš

explained: “We used every form of activism we could think of.” When Eko Forum was founded, they focused on gathering information about Zenica Ironworks, the main steel plant in Zenica and center of steel metallurgy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, researching legal solutions and health-related issues, as well as making visuals of the data so that it would be more accessible to ordinary citizens. In addition, they organized protests to draw the attention of national and international media. They established contacts with other organizations in BiH and Europe fighting for similar goals and even filed criminal complaints against some corporations for endangering public health.

THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The significance of the non-governmental sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s response to the climate crisis was emphasized by both Lemeš and Layla. There is a need to hold leaders accountable, given their failure to fulfill their commitments regarding any green transition.

All four activists expressed pessimism regarding the country’s compliance with international climate agreements, such as the 2015 Paris



Agreement or the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The latter sets out the objective of Bosnia achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

“It’s essentially just ink on paper. They say they’ll enable a green transition, but in reality, they won’t. They just want to stay in power. It all depends on the NGO sector,” Layla reflected. Edna elaborated, “Governments are trying to push old narratives to cover up the work they’re not doing. Bosnia is among the countries that have signed the Paris Agreement, and part of the agreement is to shut down all coal power plants, but I don’t hold much hope for that. To mask this, they focus on national tensions instead.”

Climate activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina faces unique challenges stemming from the country’s political and social history. Being an activist in Bosnia is difficult, as Layla has observed, and even the term “activist” carries a different connotation here than in other parts of the world. Protest culture in Bosnia lacks vitality, and people feel uncomfortable when they disagree with the authorities, as it can lead to problems.

“Whenever you organize demonstrations or protests, it’s a double-edged sword,” explained Edna.

In her opinion, many people in Bosnia and across the Balkan region believe that even when something bad is happening, they should not speak out, as doing so can turn you into a target of criticism from one’s community or even put your job at risk. “This is because people are not engaged in the public side of activism,” Edna added.

All of the activists agreed that education plays a crucial role in increasing awareness of the far-reaching consequences of global warming.

Regarding the world of activism, Edna emphasizes that “for every issue, there are usually like-minded individuals. The key is to find them and connect with them.”

Layla recommends joining a local organization because it can be motivating to be surrounded by people who support you and share your values. She added, “Find something in climate activism

that aligns with your profession. If you’re an engineer, you can invent something that helps clean the air. If you’re a medical student, focus on public health, and educate people about the effects of air pollution. If you’re a political science student, get out there and advocate. Do something in a field you love. Climate can be connected to any sector, from language to engineering.”



KRUŠČICA'S BRIDGE OF BRAVE WOMEN

Text: Amir Barleci
 Photo: Mitar Simikić, private archive

Courageous, brave, and determined are just some of the words that can be used to describe the residents of the village of Kruščica, in the central Bosnian municipality of Vitez. These brave women halted the construction of a mini hydroelectric plant on the Kruščica River to conserve nature, protect clean drinking water, and preserve the environment.

The Kruščica women stood their ground for 505 days, as legal and other battles raged

against the planned construction of the mini-hydroelectric power plant. They remain immensely grateful to the media, non-governmental organizations, and individuals who supported them in their fight.

Despite the arrests of 22 of the women and one man who joined them in their opposition to the power plant, these activists remained undaunted. The local court ruled to commemorate their courage with a sign that read "The Bridge of Brave Women" in honor of their courage.

Maida Bilal is the President of the Krug Života (Circle of Life) Foundation and a key organizer

of the protests. She talks about the Kruščica protests: "One of the videos from that event still makes me cry today. Our children will be grateful to them. This kind of patriotism and love should be written in the pages of our history because this is how one defends one's country. It was so challenging to be an example of the high price of freedom of speech, activism, the right to life, sleepless nights, illness, inability to work, and other unfortunate things."

The Circle of Life Foundation was founded in 2021 with the mission of advocating for environmental protection, the implementation of ecological standards, and respect for human rights, including the right to clean water, air, soil, and forest conservation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"If we manage to inspire one human being to work on themselves and to treat the environment as a part of their being, we'll consider that a success. Small steps make big stories, big stories change people's habits and the history of our country," the Circle of Life Foundation states.

"GREEN NOBEL" DEDICATED TO THE KRUŠČICA WOMEN

For her remarkable commitment and activism, Maida Bilal was awarded the esteemed Goldman Prize, often referred to as the "Green Nobel," in the field of environmental protection. This prestigious recognition is not only a source of honor and satisfaction for her but also serves as a confirmation of the righteousness of her work and paths. She dedicated the award to all the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but first and foremost to the women from her village who were arrested, as well as to "the beautiful Kruščica River and Kruščica Mountain."

Speaking more broadly about people's attitudes towards the protection of rivers, air, forests, and soil, Maida emphasized that the responsibility doesn't rest solely on them but also on the system, which lacks regulations and a clear strategy for environmental protection.

"I can freely say that for the past few years, many citizens have been working harder and fighting against pollution. People appreciate our natural resources more and more because COVID-19 has shown us that only by connecting with nature can a person find peace and maintain their health," she said.

In the battle for the Kruščica River, Maida highlighted the vital role of the media: "The inexhaustible strength of the journalists and teams that reported on this case is equal to our on-call staff, trust me. Although I never had the opportunity to thank them personally, I will take the opportunity now. The media that transparently and courageously reported on the fight to save the river of the people of Kruščica really made a great contribution, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart."

Maida also expressed her gratitude to the Banja Luka Environmental Center, describing them as the thread that brought everything together and encouraged them to keep going. "The story of Kruščica became a motive for the struggle of many people in many aspects of life," she remarked.



Maida sent a message to the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding the protection of natural resources, ecosystems, and the environment: "Be aware that we, as citizens, must create policies and mechanisms to manage our resources and protect them with all our being. Sow the seeds of virtue in this noble and good country so that our smart young people stay here and continue our fights."

PRESERVING AND PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

In June 2022, the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the decision to ban the construction of mini hydropower plants with a capacity of ten megawatts. The President of Kruščica's Circle of Life Foundation, Maida Bilal, has stressed that the passing of this law is not enough and must be implemented seriously: "We no longer have time to use the declaration as a political tool to manipulate the public but must truly understand that there are more of us who share the same goal: to preserve and defend our natural resources."



THE PEOPLE FIGHTING “FAST” FASHION IN THE BALKANS

Text: Anja Zulić
 Photography: Staša, HAAD, HUMANA NOVA



Today, the epithet “fast” marks many aspects of our daily lives, and the fashion industry is no exception. Fast fashion, with its monthly-changing trends and the convenience of online shopping, has left many continuously striving to “stay in style”. In the era of consumerism, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the textile industry, following closely behind oil and gas, is one of the largest environmental polluters in the world.

The sustainable fashion movement represents a positive advancement as an alternative to the massive textile waste and extremely precarious working conditions of the fast fashion industry. This concept is often closely associated with “ethical fashion”, which emphasizes the rights of workers within the textile industry. In stark contrast to fast fashion, sustainable fashion items command a higher price because they are made from quality materials and intended for everyday long-term use.

In Croatia and Bosnia, two relatively new fashion brands are paving the way for more sustainable fashion in the Former Yugoslav region.

STAŠA

Designer Staša Doblanović Randall is the owner of the Croatian sustainable brand STAŠA, which she launched back in 2013 as a student attending the Textile Technology Faculty in Zagreb.

When STAŠA was founded, sustainability was not a widely discussed or prominent topic within the fashion industry. Staša Doblanović’s first collection was made from 100 percent cotton. As she says, her awareness of environmental issues dates back to her childhood.

“As a child, I was constantly surrounded by nature, often going hiking and taking walks with my parents, and I also used to sail. It seems to me that all of this has made my awareness of nature even more pronounced, and through fashion, I try to emphasize its importance,” she explained.

While running a sustainable fashion brand can be challenging, many who enter the fray do so to make a meaningful impact on the environment and society. By overcoming these challenges and crafting sustainable products,

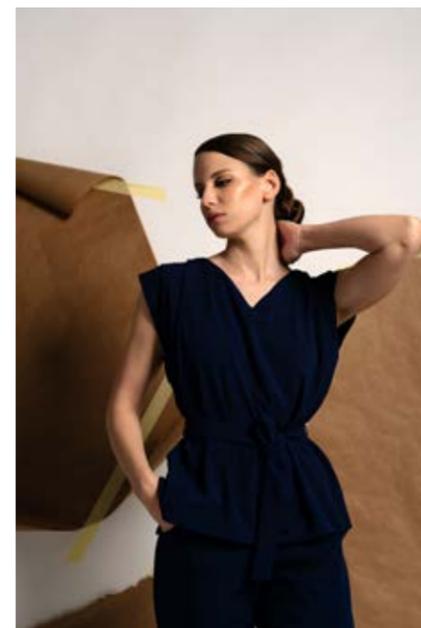
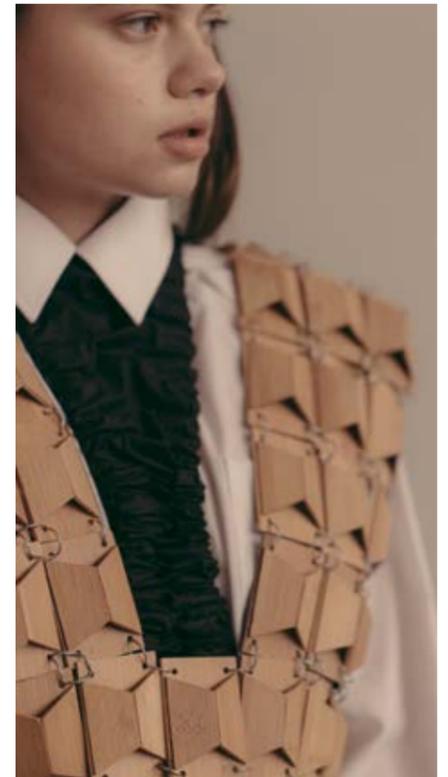
fashion designers can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future.

The fundamental philosophy of STAŠA is rooted in sustainability, thoughtfulness, and slow fashion. In the creation of clothing articles, Staša places great emphasis on the materials used. Her preferred materials include cotton, linen, Tencel, and, more recently, recycled polyester made from plastic bottles. All of Staša’s materials come with an OEKO-TEX certification.

“OEKO-TEX ensures that textiles and textile products do not contain substances that could be harmful to human health or the environment. In general, the OEKO-TEX certificate is a valuable tool for promoting the safety and sustainability of textile products, protecting human health, and increasing consumer trust,” Staša elaborated.

After selecting the materials, the design process begins. Staša always ensures that her clothing pieces can be worn in multiple ways throughout the day. For this reason, her designs are minimal and can be combined as casual wear or elevated with accessories and high heels to achieve a more elegant look.

One of the challenges she faces in managing a sustainable brand is finding suitable materials that are produced in an environmentally friendly manner. This can sometimes lead to higher product prices due to the increased costs of these materials.





HAAD

Meanwhile, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, designer Adnan Hajrulahović promotes educating younger generations about the harmful consequences of fast fashion and introducing them to the benefits of sustainable brands. His brand, HAAD, has been operating for two decades.

For Adnan, fashion represents an amalgamation of the professions of his ancestors: a tailor, a hairdresser, a jeweler, and a designer. HAAD emerged as a process of self-discovery but also as a response to limited opportunities. Adnan serves as a testament to how, from the darkness of post-war despair, young people can forge a brighter path.

“Fashion is one of the mediums through which I express myself, and through fashion, I convey my ideas, thoughts, and values. I promote and affirm stories and viewpoints. I have never worked in fashion just for the sake of fashion. I have never been interested in a beautiful dress if it’s only beautiful if it doesn’t have a story or if it doesn’t promote the values I believe in,” emphasized Adnan.

The brand HAAD aims to preserve the identity of Bosnia and the Bosnian people through its designer pieces, drawing its greatest inspiration

from medieval Bosnia. In this way, Adnan expresses his love for his homeland, a place where he wishes to remain, and which continually inspires him. HAAD is sustainable not only on account of the materials used to create the clothing but also because the products are not mass-produced for warehouses.

“I choose quality fabrics and knits that can be used for a long time, thus reducing the need for new purchases. I opt for natural fabrics and create clothing that is meant to be worn and can be worn multiple times. I promote clothing that is not dictated by time and trends because acceptable clothing with aesthetic value is always timeless,” said Adnan, who dedicates considerable time and effort to educating the public about the detrimental effects of the textile industry.

Adnan lives by the same principles as his brand HAAD. Through engaging with young people, providing lectures for responsible companies, engaging in public appearances, and through his overall work, he aims to empower people to make environmentally conscious decisions.



HUMANA NOVA

In addition to designers, there are organizations producing clothing based on sustainability and inclusivity. Among these is the cooperative HUMANA NOVA, established in 2011. The idea to start the cooperative arose from study visits to European Union countries, where the founders became more familiar with EU standards in employing persons with disabilities and their work integration. HUMANA NOVA was actually founded through a project by the ACT Autonomous Center (today’s ACT Group), a civil society organization from Čakovec.

At the beginning of 2011, the employment office of Croatia’s Međimurje County reported a substantial number of persons with disabilities, members of national minorities, middle-aged and elderly seamstresses, who lost their jobs due to the decline of the textile industry. Moreover, there was no local company systematically collecting old textiles and clothing.

HUMANA NOVA notes that people are surprised to learn that the cooperative collected more than 3500 tons of discarded textiles since 2011. Many are unaware of the extent to which textiles pollute the environment, especially in the absence of adequate disposal solutions.

In order to address this issue, as individuals and customers, HUMANA NOVA stresses that we must begin to view purchases as conscientious decisions that merit at least some research into the origins of the item being purchased.

“In educating about fast fashion, it’s necessary to raise awareness about its effects on the planet and society - about the increased emission of harmful gasses when discarding textiles as waste, the amount of which increases due to low-quality materials and mass production/purchase, as well as about the working conditions in fast fashion factories and the resources that are consumed during the production of new products,” HUMANA NOVA emphasizes.

OLDER GENERATIONS LIKE “SLOW” FASHION

“Something I notice is that older generations grasp sustainability and are inclined towards slow fashion. They buy less and the things they buy are things they really need, or it’s one item of clothing that costs a little more, rather than five items of clothing that cost very little. This hyper-consumerism is still prevalent among young people,” observes the owner of the Croatian brand STAŠA.

ACCESSORIES WITH BOSNIAN RUG MOTIF

Adnan, the owner of HAAD, explains that he designed and created a collection of products, mostly accessories, inspired by the traditional Bosnian carpet motif. This collection has been around for ten years, and it has reached every corner of the globe. “The scarf

emerged from the need to find a shared value among the Bosnian people. For all of us in our homeland, no matter our ethnic background, our home is our foundation. We all cultivate family values, and the warmth of the home is symbolized by the carpet, and the Bosnian carpet also symbolizes the continuity of time in our home,” said Adnan.

REINVESTMENT OF PROFITS

HUMANA NOVA employs people with disabilities and other marginalized groups, bolstering their self-confidence and independence and improving their quality of life and that of their families. The organization currently has 51 employees, 28 of whom have disabilities and 17 of whom belong to socially marginalized groups. All profits are reinvested in equipment and employee support, which, the company affirms, leads to greater motivation among the workforce.





ZDRAVO ZAZA

THE BANJA LUKA SWEET STORE
REVOLUTIONISING DESSERTS



Text: Danica Novaković
Photography: Zdravo Zaza

Zorana Glišić from Banja Luka started making gluten-free, refined sugar-free desserts after being diagnosed with gluten and lactose intolerance. Recognizing a need for healthy sweets for adults and children alike, she began producing them in larger quantities, giving rise to Zdravo Zaza. The secret to her success, Glišić claims, lies in good communication with customers, taking their advice into account when creating new products, and openly accepting the feedback she receives.

From small cookies, bars, mini cakes, and slice cakes, to large cakes ranging from one to three kilograms, and three flavors of ice cream, you can find it all at Zdravo Zaza. Each unique dessert draws its own fans.

“What’s certain is that the ice creams were in greater demand than ever this year, and the new flavors, Madagascar Vanilla & Tonka with Pistachio Pieces have delighted everyone, including me,” said Zorana.

When producing sweets at Zdravo Zaza, white sugar, gluten, and flour are all omitted from their recipes. Those opting for a vegan or vegetarian diet can also find treats that do not contain animal products.

The products are based on nuts, fresh or frozen and dried fruits, organic cocoa, healthier sweeteners such as dates, agave, coconut sugar, xylitol, erythritol, stevia, and natural colors.

“High-quality ingredients are important because there’s no comparison between imported and domestic hazelnuts or organic raw cocoa and the industrial ones found on the shelves in all supermarkets. They taste completely different, and so do the products made from them,” Zorana noted.

HEALTHY IS THE NEW TASTY

Even though there is an increasing amount of information about healthy eating and it is becoming more easily accessible, Zorana notices that change rarely happens unless there is an urgent need for it. Her approach is somewhat different as she does not wish to base anyone’s dietary habits on fear of food and illness.

“It’s important to me that food fulfills all the factors necessary for enjoyment, meaning that it is visually appealing, aromatic, and tasty, and that the textures and components are diverse, but also that I feel pleasant, full, and satisfied after eating. That’s why many admire our work, even those who have traveled the world and dined in exclusive global restaurants,” says Zorana.

As Zorana explains, when you realize that healthier food and delicious food are not mutually exclusive, it is much easier to approach changing habits in the long term.

Little ones are delighted with Zaza’s sweets, especially those who, due to health problems from early childhood, are not allowed to consume gluten or sugar. Thanks to Zdravo Zaza, many have tried sweets for the first time in their lives.

“We’ve had many cases where children tried ice cream for the first time or got a cake they could eat for their birthday. These are always very emotional moments for parents and for us who make the sweets for them, and the children are always happy, satisfied, and glad to come back to us,” Zorana shared.





SARAJEVO'S GREEN ART: FROM WASTE TO ART

Text: Irma Ahmetpahić
Photography: Denis Ruvic

Inspiration for great things often comes from 'ordinary' people. With support, understanding, and community collaboration, small projects can generate impactful stories, celebrated for their uniqueness, local specificity, and modes of creation. Among these is the story of the Green Art Association,

primarily owing to its projects focused on transforming packaging waste into art.

"We transform waste into art, as the project's name suggests. Our greatest support and my favorite partners are the KULT Institute for Youth Development. For me, human interaction is crucial in order to convey the sense of this activity's importance," says design graduate, Alma Hrasnica-Dervišević, the founder and president of Green Art.



As a graphic designer, Hrasnica-Dervišević directs her creativity and marketing experience towards engaged design for the benefit of society, achieving visible and striking results.

During our conversation, we spoke about a special story regarding the 'Čepočilim' [Cap-Rug] and 'Čepoklupa' [Cap-Bench] projects in Sarajevo. These have brought her recognition even in everyday encounters, as people approach her to donate caps, which her association transforms into works of art.

"Čepočilim' is the beginning and climax of the recycling story. We have managed to give some utility value to packaging waste, which is the essence of the 'Čepočilim' project," said Hrasnica-Dervišević, who conceived of the idea of utilizing plastic bottle caps.

The Čepočilim project came to life thanks to the Sarajevo Canton Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction, and Environmental Protection, after Green Art was officially accepted in a public call for non-governmental organizations.

The Čepočilim, made from plastic bottle caps, stands as a permanent exhibition in Sarajevo's Ciglane neighborhood, on Husrefa Redžića Street. Nearby, the Čepoklupa exhibit can be found on Gimnazijska Street, which is well-known among young Sarajevans. The mosaic is constructed from three-centimeter-wide plastic bottle caps, donated in large part by citizens. Given the number of donations, caps not used in the exhibits are stored and will be used in the creation of Green Art's upcoming wheelchair exhibit.



evidenced by the fact that it is also, for example, the emblem of the Sarajevo Film Festival.

750 KILOS OF CAPS

The public's dedication to collecting bottle caps is evidenced by the fact that the "cap centers" were completely full. Hrasnica-Dervišević says that they currently store extra material in a garage, where there are 750 kilograms of caps. She cites the example of an 80-year-old fellow citizen who left her contribution to Čepočilim, during the Maker Faire Sarajevo Festival, showing that participation in progressive initiatives has no age limit. During this festival, Green Art presented a watercolor reproduction, articles of clothing, and decorations built using the felting technique. The exhibition also featured decorative cans and vases with planted succulents, among other creations.

ELEVEN YEARS OF ČEPOČILIM

The Čepočilim, which was installed at Ciglane in 2019, was previously exhibited for seven days at the Sarajevo City Center complex, coinciding with World Recycling Day on March 18. This event introduced the Green Art Association's bottle cap artwork to the world.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Čepočilim project gave rise to the idea for Čepoklupa, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). At the time, Green Art was organizing online workshops for children from the Dom Bjelava orphanage and Vladislav Skarić Elementary School.

"After the workshops, we from the association got to work, and with ideas and support, we created Čepoklupa. It's designed to resemble a Bosnian rug, positioned in the very center of the city and accessible to young people. Even the municipal mayor himself requested that something like this be at the 'epicenter' of city events," recalled Hrasnica-Dervišević.

During the collection of bottle caps, "cap centers" were established at specific locations in the city, allowing the public to contribute to the idea at any time.

"The team engaged at Ciglane incorporated over 20,000 caps into the Čepočilim mosaic, featuring motifs inspired by Bosnian rugs," explained Hrasnica-Dervišević.

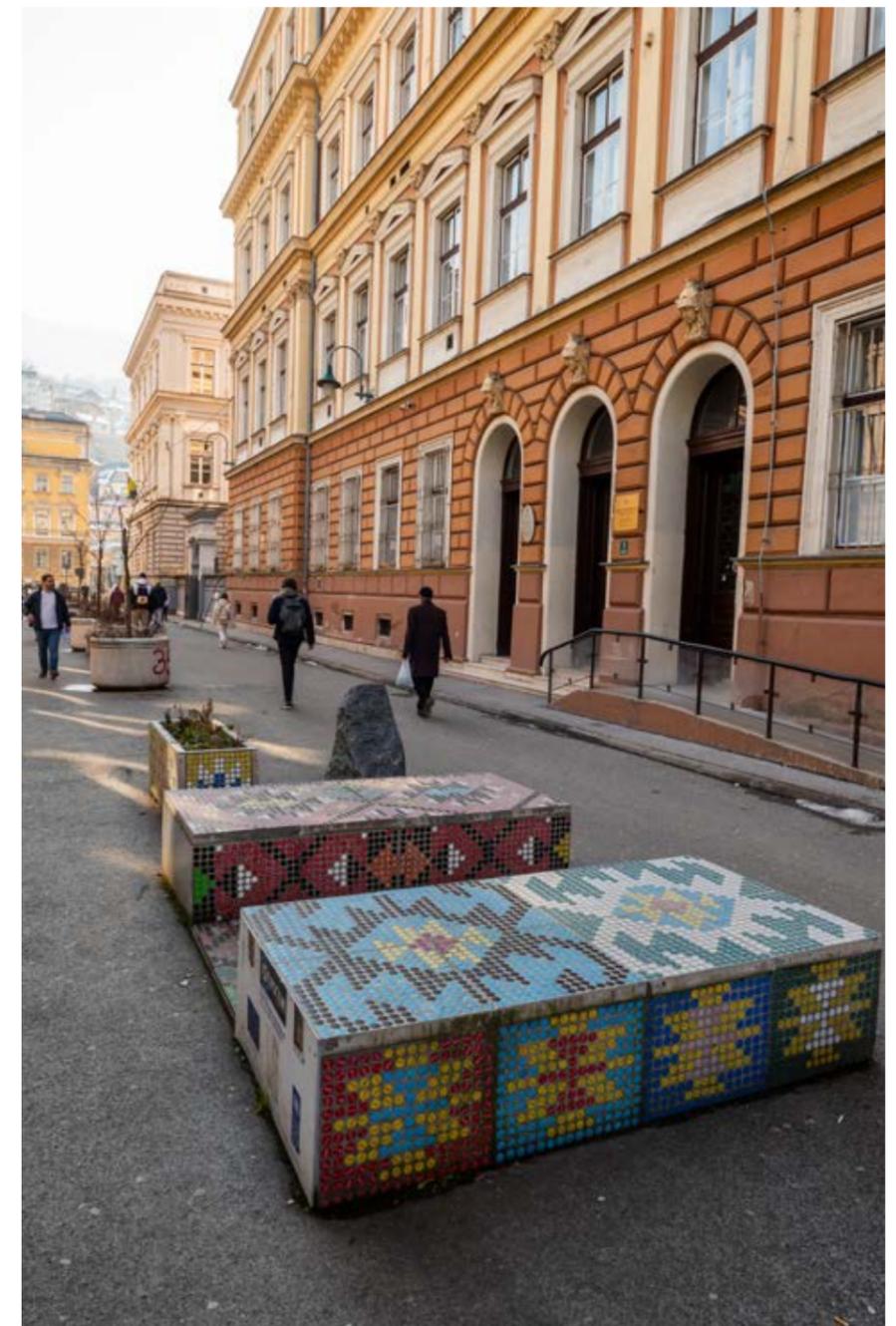
CAPS AND CANS

From the extra caps they collect, Green Art creates rectilinear mosaics. The reason for choosing this variant, Hrasnica-Dervišević explained, is the intricacy of Bosnian rugs and their patterns.

"It's all meticulously arranged, and I'm very pleased that all participants adhere to this design. The entire design is custom, without the use of Photoshop. When I saw the palette of colors I had at my disposal, I realized that it's a means of artistic expression, which is now widely used even in elementary schools, in art classes," stated the founder and president of Green Art.

The entire process of creation, decoration, and product finalization is done under the supervision of the organizer, who emphasizes the incredible level of commitment shown by the children.

Čepočilim has become a treasure steeped in tradition with its unique motif. The prominence of the Bosnian rug in the public sphere is







| Cover page: Damir Balić

ARTIST'S WORDS

The front page of the *MIR Magazine* is inspired by space. The fact that it is a play on the word "svemir" (Bosnian for "space") further emphasizes the magazine's deeper message of togetherness and peace. The cover illustration conveys this theme through carefully selected elements.

In the centre of the illustration is the Vučko mascot, a recognizable symbol whose presence forms a bridge between the real world and the expanses of heaven. The Vučko mascot symbolizes more than just a link to the past; it represents a bridge between history, present and future. Vučko is growing old with us, he is the bearer of collective memory and a witness to the transformations we have undergone. In the context of this illustrated utopian society, Vučko becomes the embodiment of values such as scientific reasoning, progress, and mutual respect. His presence emphasizes the concept of sustainability, where tradition and modernity blend in harmony. His age symbolizes wisdom, experience, and dedication to preserving the fundamental values that form the foundation of this utopian society.

The winding shapes that run through the illustration represent the unpredictability of time and the dynamics of life. Those winding elements symbolize the journey, challenges and changes that everyday life brings. Given the space theme, these sinuous patterns can also be interpreted as orbital paths or trajectories, emphasizing the journey towards unexplored territories.

Beside the presence of Vučko as a symbol of a utopian society and a link to the past, three astronauts appear on the front page of *MIR Magazine*. Their signified meanings further enrich the message of the illustration. The first astronaut can symbolize the courage of explorers and scientists who venture into the unknown, exploring the frontiers of space to gain new knowledge and perspectives. The second astronaut can represent cooperation and the international community, as space programs are often the result of joint efforts by different states. The third astronaut can symbolize the spirit of togetherness and caring for the Earth. His carefully directed attention to planet Earth underscores awareness of the importance of preserving our home, thus emphasizing that

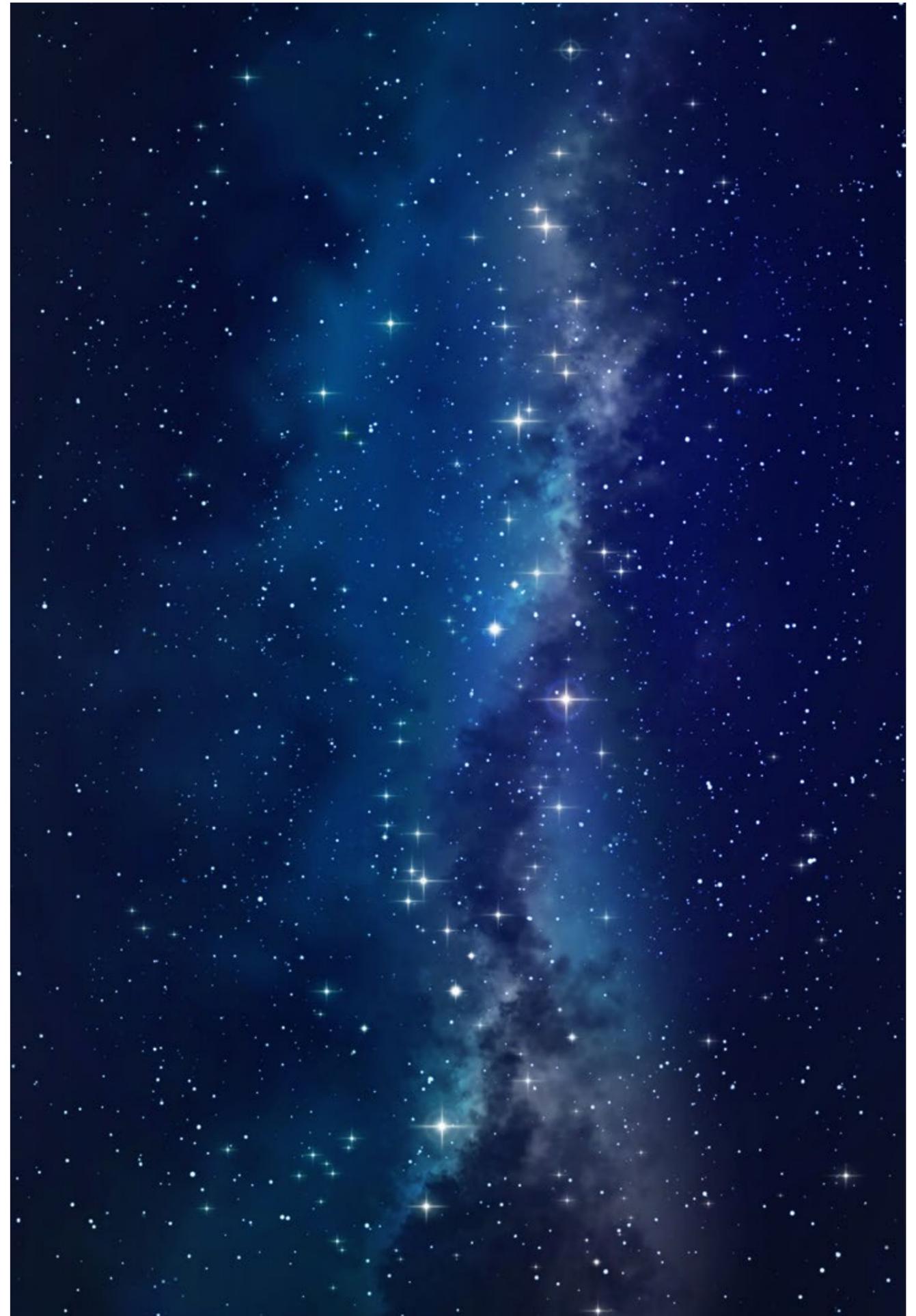
space exploration should not neglect our responsibility to the planet.

The background of the illustration encompasses the vastness of space with countless stars, galaxies, and planets. This boundless universe symbolizes the eternal striving towards the unknown, towards that which is beyond our current understanding. The stars are arranged to form a heart shape, emphasizing the love and togetherness that are key elements in achieving universal peace.

The colours of the illustration reflect a deep connection with the celestial bodies – the dark blue represents the mystery of the universe, while the bright stars contribute to the feeling of light and hope. **Through this illustration, readers are encouraged to think about the importance of togetherness and peace to achieve the endless possibilities that the universe offers.**

The front page of *MIR Magazine* not only attracts attention with its design, but also encourages further reflection about the universal values we share.

Damir Balić, damirbalic.com





POST-
CONFLICT
RESEARCH
CENTER