

Vehid Sehic

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Website: www.forumtz.com

Description of specific project, practice, or technique:

Forum of Tuzla Citizens (FTC) was created out of need and determination to preserve Bosnia and Herzegovina as a unified, independent and decentralized sovereign state governed on the principles of parliamentary democracy, in its historical and geopolitical borders, recognized by the international community, and that no part of its territory can not be considered a separate national territory of any of its people, as a response to the increase of nationalism in their own communities. Forum of Tuzla Citizens Association is a non-party, in which citizens gather at the free will and individual choice. Affiliation to any political, religious, social, gender or age group is not an obstacle to participation in the Forum. Compositions of the FTC, however, are citizens-individuals, not representatives of political, ethnic, religious, social or age groups. FTC in this regard is open to all citizens who care about preserving and developing traditional democratic, urban, cultural and ethical values of Tuzla and Bosnia as multinational and multi-religious urban communities.

FTC is committed to:

- Punishment of war criminals
- Return of refugees and displaced persons to their eternal homes and restore their property
- Start the process of restoring mutual confidence motivated by humanism and strength of spirit
- Support and active participation in all peace support constructive initiatives that are in accordance with the principles and objectives of the FTC
- Democratic participation in all spheres of life in the city of Tuzla and BiH - Strong influence and react to all events in BiH and that are contrary to democratic principles and program policies FTC
- Full equality of citizens regardless of their political, ethnic, religious, social, age and sex

- Respect for all human rights and freedoms, in accordance with the Declaration of Human Rights
- Develop feelings of Bosnian patriotism on the basis of a positive cultural and ethnic experiences in our region
- Preservation and cultivation of multinational and multi-religious material and spiritual heritage in accordance with the criteria of civilization
- Develop feelings of love, loyalty and devotion to the city of Tuzla and the protection of its traditional, spiritual and cultural beings
- Creating conditions for the European quality of life and work in all fields
- Preservation, protection and improvement of the environment with the undertaking of environmental measures to this end
- Preservation and development of human resources and their affirmation of the implementation of projects that will bring Tuzla and introduced in all European trends and processes
- Networking and cooperation with similar associations from Europe and world.

Description of organisation that individual is associated with, the history and scope of its work or how the individual partners with others:

During the ten-month blockade of the city of Tuzla FTC organized a series of public forums on the topic *How to Survive*. FTC is the organizer and producer of cultural events Tuzla fall within which is prepared evening of poetry, exhibition of cultural heritage museum in eastern Bosnia, an exhibition of art works from private collections, Fair literature for children. FTC is engaged in providing and distributing humanitarian aid. FTC in May and July 1994 organized a public forum entitled BiH in the light of Geneva and the "Washington Agreement". FTC in cooperation with the Brussels VERONA Forum and the Association of Independent Intellectuals CIRCLE 99, Sarajevo is the organizer of the International Conference on the theme *Can we be without multicultural Europe?* which was held in Tuzla in November 1994 under the auspices of the European Parliament FTC in cooperation with the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly and Municipal Council of Tuzla is the organizer of the International Conference on Local Democracy in Europe and BiH, which was held in Tuzla in November 1994.

FTC, in cooperation with the city of Bologna and the organization of German-Bosnian Friendship Wupertala realized from the project Remote godfather covering more than 200 families of Tuzla. FTC organized in

February 1995 public debate Protection of Human Rights; in April organized a forum in which to promote the institution of Ombudsman of the Federation of BiH. When e-mail system connection died out, FTC during the information blockade and broken links organized a written communication with all republics of former Yugoslavia and the world through the project Letters, which provided a written communication with foreign citizens. Daily through this system received and sent about 100 letters. FTC was co-founder of the General Assembly Helsinki Citizens Assembly, which was held in Tuzla in October 1995 and which is involved around 600 participants from home and abroad. FTC initiates and leads the project Citizens Alternative Parliament of BiH, which initiates, encourages, and helps materially connects local civic initiatives at the state level. Constituent Assembly "Citizens Alternative Parliament of BiH" was held in August 1996.

Since 1997, National Endowment for Democracy, through the project Citizens Alternative Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina - the strengthening of civil society, supports the work of GAP. Of the initial 14 members of the network GAP today has grown into a network of 30 highly respected NGO. In October 1995, in cooperation with the Association Circle 99 from Sarajevo, the FTC issued a charter that contains the basic organizing principles of the common state of BiH. With the financial support of Norwegian Church Aid, FTC published a brochure An Introduction to Human Rights, which represents the first serious written work in the field of human rights in the history of BiH. With the IKV and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in RS, FTC led project "The Way Back", which helps displaced people from Tuzla and Bijeljina to return to their homes. The project was successfully completed in 2001 when 20 houses were repaired and allowed for the return of refugee families, where they also received tractors.

In 2002, in cooperation with the IKV with the newly established Forum of Srebrenica, the project was resumed in the area of Srebrenica. With ABF Gothenburg Sweden, FTC initiated and conducted an educational program called ABF-FGT Data Studio, where citizens are trained in information technologies. In addition to acquiring useful knowledge and internationally recognized certificates, students and schools are to further education in the field of democratization, human rights, role of NGOs, trade unions, and media in building civil society. In July 1999, FTC organized an international conference entitled "How to [achieve] stability in Southeast Europe," where actors of political alternatives from the region presented their views

on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Since 1996, FTC has a very successful cooperation with the Olof Palme Center in Stockholm, with whose help many activities were organized and aimed at democratization and building civil society in BiH. Within zajeni'kog project called NGO Incubator during 2000 and 2001, the FTC has helped bolster the work of number of NGOs. In 2002, cooperation continues through the project Citizens Voice, which aims to exercise their rights, obligations and responsibilities of citizens in relation to government and vice versa, and the establishment and recognition of dialogue between citizens and local authorities.

From 1999 to 2001, FTC organized a number of roundtables and public forums on various topics (human rights, return, privatization, economic situation) throughout the country. FCT helped found the Assembly of Citizens Pact for South Eastern Europe in July 2000, which aims to promote, develop and organize (implement) model of regional co-operation by local NGOs and municipalities committed to stability, peace and democracy. 2002 and 2003 FTC, in cooperation with the IKV and with hCa Banja Luka, CGS and hCa Tuzla, implemented a project How to integrate BiH, BiH in order to integrate into Europe. Project is on integration of BiH at all levels and to initiation of a broad discussion about bh. internal integrations, informing citizens about the process of European integration, institutions and the conditions for accession to the CoE monitoring and compliance requirements upon admission, and to initiate debate on the role of citizens in the integration process and establish campaigns. Through a project called Strengthening the civil action at the local level, FTC at 2003 launched the dialogue between citizens and local administration and the administration at higher levels in BiH with the objective of strengthening democratic processes and institutions of society, democratization, human rights and freedoms of citizens, transparency, efficiency, professionalism and quality of public administration and services local government and administration in BiH as a whole. FTC has a Youth Group, which operates under the name of Urban Culture that brings together young people who want to be actively involved in the work of NGOs and community life. During 2002-2003, a group aimed to develop discussion groups among young people, engaging young people in combating drug abuse and youth education in the field of civil society and human rights.

Describe the context in which the individual works, analyse the conflict, and indicate how this analysis has influenced the peacemaking work of the individual:

The successor states of Yugoslavia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in particular, are still struggling with the legacies of war. Political, economic and social progress is hindered by a structural status quo, which is based on ethnic divisions. Most of the current political leadership is not willing and able to address the legacy of the past (particularly war crimes), to support reconciliation and to develop cooperative strategies with the other sides. In turn, large parts of BiH society are either following antagonistic rhetoric and action, or are withdrawing into the private sphere, as they do not see alternatives. At all levels those actors who promote dialogue, cooperation and issues of general public interest are overshadowed by dividing discourse and the inability to constructively deal with diversity and to transform conflicts in a peaceful manner.

Twenty years since violent conflict engulfed BiH, the country continues to endure an environment of ethnic separation, antagonism and fear. Those citizens who survived the brutality of the war continue to be affected by their experiences. Former prisoners, war veterans, families of people who were killed, and families of those whose whereabouts are still unknown must regularly confront the lasting emotional and physical effects from this traumatic period of their lives. The effects of the conflict on these individuals and groups in BiH has not been fully acknowledged or addressed. Because ethnicity was a central motivating factor behind the violent acts committed during the conflict, many of these people maintain deeply entrenched grievances towards other ethnic groups-- grievances that foment the divisions that continue to paralyze Bosnian society. Without intervention, these divisions will persist and expand in the future, as the generation that lived through the war passes on its grievances and prejudices to its children. Unless they learn the benefits of reconciliation now, this younger generation will not understand the need to promote it in the future.

The European Union's accession process presents one of the few prospects to build a peaceful and more prosperous future for the citizens of BiH. However, at this point in time, at the level of civil society, there is not enough exchange and cooperation focused on peacebuilding in order to support processes of dialogue and reconciliation as a precondition for sustainable social change.

Without coherent national, regional and pan-European civil society support to these broader societal processes they will also remain low on the priority list of politicians and governments in BiH at local, regional and national levels. Instead, in the current weak civic environment, the risk for violent escalation of conflict remains high.

Numerous CSOs have valuable experiences with grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, are rooted within local communities, and some already participate in political dialogue from local to national levels, particularly those with offices and regular activities in urban centers. However, the widespread lack of organizational capacity and the non-existence of a coordinating body for peacebuilding NGOs leads to focusing on individual projects. As a result, there is a lack of mutual awareness, contact and cooperation between organizations pursuing similar goals. Potential synergies are not fully developed; mutual learning through exchanging knowledge, experiences and resources remains sub-optimal.

A targeted civil society contribution to peacebuilding in BiH, which by definition would need to follow an all-BiH strategy, is thus dissected into a myriad of unconnected small initiatives. The second specific problem is closely related: inter-ethnic cooperation and the promotion of an all-BiH peacebuilding agenda for reconciliation and cooperative development is currently not visible enough and finding little access in the media as well as in public and political debates. With a coordinated approach NGOs committed to peacebuilding would have the potential to give an important impetus in this regard. However, capacities for engaging in political advocacy and for entering into political dialogue are also currently low. Nation-wide outreach and visibility actions to mobilize larger support from within the broader BiH public will need to be developed if we want to advance peacebuilding and cooperative development and remind governmental authorities about citizens' public interests.

Impact of the individual's work, including credible policy and advocacy influence that contributes toward peace:

Vehid Sehic was born on May 3, 1952 in Tuzla, where he completed primary school and gymnasium. He finished Faculty of Law at Sarajevo University, and after that he has been working at the prosecutor's office and as a lawyer. Until 1988 he worked as a judge and vice president of the Superior Court in Tuzla, and since 1994, he worked as a lawyer again. Vehid Sehic is Founder of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens in 1993, and active in

developing several networks of civil initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and architect of the Civic Assembly of BiH. Currently he is the president of the Forum of Tuzla Citizens and Civic Alternative Parliament of BiH. In the field of human rights he is a permanent contributor to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in BiH, Serbia and Croatia. He is member independent commission for national symbols BH formed by the Office of the High Representative, and an Active participant Democratic Alternative BiH.

The Forum of Tuzla citizens is one of the oldest and best organized local NGOs and has received extensive support from citizens in its effort to create the conditions for peace in Bosnia. The aim of this NGO is to build inter-ethnic trust and to preserve a multinational and multi-religious society in Bosnia. They are our partners within the Network for Building Peace which is aiming towards comprehensive renewal of social and economic life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to long-term enhancement of whole society to deal with difference and conflicts in constructive and non-violent ways, in that way creating frameworks for joint, coordinated activities of a number of civil society organizations, local government, business sector, media and governmental institutions.

Jointly our activities are focused on the following areas we find key for our work and future: a) education, b) security, c) regional development, d) protection and promotion of human and minority rights, e) dealing with the past and transitional justice, f) gender equality, g) culture of public dialogue and democracy, h) strengthening capacities of civil society for bundling true peace, i) returning trust between bh. nations, j) more constructive influence towards leading bh. structures, and k) improving coexistence in BiH.

Through his organization Forum of Tuzla Citizens, Vehid Sehic was able to produce studies, analyses and reports in the field of human development, the NGO sector, human rights, peacebuilding, and social policy. He was supporting strengthening and capacity building of institutions within the governmental and non-governmental sector for policy development, but also supporting municipalities and public institutions in capacity building for planning and policy development, in particular in the field of human rights and peacebuilding. He was in charge for capacity building of local NGO's with aims to improve their sustainability, including advisory services and technical support to local authorities and NGO sector regarding to policy development issues, and improvement of the return process.

Tell us a story about this individual's peacemaking work:

Vehid Sehic is the crucial person in BiH for processes of building peace, reconciliation and human rights. During the war, times he was connector between parties in the war, first person to cross the entity lines and work with all nations and religions. After establishing Forum of Tuzla Citizens with Vehid's leadership, it quickly grew to be one of the leading NGOs in the country and region. He moved forward working as President in The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Vehid Sehic is one of authors of Iraq constitution (new). Today he is person who is running regional cooperation through the Igman Initiative.