# Meeting Report:

## Youth, Peace & Security in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region: A Consultation and Dialogue

### 23-25 May 2017, Istanbul, Turkey




Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

In December of 2015, the Security Council adopted ground-breaking Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) – dedicating, for the first time, a full resolution to the positive role young people can and do play in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism.

UN SCR 2250 mandates the Secretary-General "to carry out a progress study on the youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels", and to present the results of the Study to Member States of the United Nations. The Study will provide evidence of young people's contribution to sustaining peace, through a participatory research process. An independent Lead Author, as well as an Advisory Group of 21 experts, were appointed by the Secretary-General to undertake the Study. Consultations with young people and youth-led civil society organisations offer an essential contribution to the Study, in order to gather the views, aspirations and demands from young people for peace and security issues. For more information about the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security (hereafter: the Study YPS), please click here.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia Consultation, held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 23-25 May 2017, was the third of a series of regional consultations for the Study. It was organized by UNFPA, UNDP with the support of the Peacebuilding Support Office. For the concept note of the event, please click here. 39 young participants between the age of 19 to 35 from the region were selected out of an open call for application (see annex A). Participants came from 19 different countries and territories: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo[1], Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Participants were selected through a selection process emphasizing innovative and creativity, as each applicant was asked to submit creative content on youth, peace and security to be part of this event. Their creative submissions were evaluated by a selection committee including youth specialists from UN Regional Office. Applications were evaluated on the basis of participants' active engagement in peace and security issues, their involvement with youth-led or youth-focused peacebuilding organizations, or affiliation with peacebuilding networks and non-violence movements, ensuring gender and age balance.

This report provides an analytical summary of the consultation in five parts. The report aims to give an overview of the participants' peace and security priorities, innovative peacebuilding projects, challenges, opportunities, as well as their recommendations for peace and security in Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.

[1] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

# 1. What are young people's peace and security priorities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia region?

## Cultivating Culture of Tolerance

Supporting peacebuilding projects that aim to foster culture of tolerance was highlighted as a priority issues by participants. In their views, current peace and security projects that are targeting youth mostly make national, cultural and religious differences more noticeable than they are. Highlighting these identity related differences further divides social group, and thereby makes building relationships with people from different cultures, ethnicities and religions harder for young peacebuilders in the region. Participants think that there is a need for peace and security projects that are not driven political interests. Participants believe that bringing young people from diverse social groups can only be possible, if culture of tolerance is promoted in the region. Peace education in this regard was repeatedly mentioned by participants as a useful tool to cultivate a culture of tolerance and to break the intergenerational transmission violence. In this context, participants suggested that youth, peace and security in the region should be presented as a window of opportunity for young people to raise their voice, and a participatory policy platform that can bring young people across cultures, ethnicities and religions together to spread the culture of tolerance in global peace and security platforms.

## Talking about Security

Participants emphasized that they would like to be able to raise their voice on security related issues. In this respect, consultation participants highlighted that ensuring young peoples' freedom from fear is one of the most important ways to contribute positively to peace and security policies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Although young people in the region are directly and disproportionally influenced by national security politics, they have been frightened by their elders or authorities not to talk about security related matters. Participants think that while young generations are constantly frightened to talk about security issues, they are being recruited to secure their own countries. Participants strongly defended the idea that talking about security related issues should be perceived as their personal freedoms that young people have. In other words, participants do not want to be the object of security related discussion; they rather would like to think and speak about security related issues in their daily life.

## Promoting Family Level Peacebuilding Programs

Participants emphasized that priority should be given to family-level peacebuilding programs to support youth, peace and security in the region. In their views, current peace and security projects fall short to understand the role of

> *"Peacebuilding starts in the families. We need to work with families, because they have a great impact, especially in smaller communities." (Bosnia and Herzegovina*

families in peacebuilding processes, and lacks family level conflict analysis skills. According to participants, families have an important role to increase youth participation in peacebuilding, because education at the family level shape young people's minds, behaviour and attitude most. In this context, young peacebuilders perceive that families' ability to prevent violence should be explored and used a resource in peacebuilding. In order to create generations for peace in the region, it is necessary to create space for families and their positive contribution at the community level should be systematically integrated to broader peacebuilding policies.

## Highlighting the Role of Gender in YPS Agenda

There are multiple types of sexual and gender-based violence that has to be seen as priority concerns for the youth, peace and security agenda in the region. Forced and early marriages, bride kidnapping, domestic violence, crime against transgender, trafficking of women and girls are some of the major security concerns that were mentioned by participants in relation to protection of young people. Participants highlighted that YPS agenda should advocate for the rights and safety of LGBTI youth. Participants also referred to sexual and reproductive health problems, such as access to contraceptives, as security related matters that needs to ne prioritized in YPS agenda.

According to participants, youth, peace and security agenda in the region needs to recognize that there is not a direct correlation between representation of women in formal political spectrum and protection of women from gender-based violence. Although in recent years women representation formal politics have increased in number of countries in the region, gender-based violence against women have increased in these countries according to participants' knowledge. Moreover, participants highlighted that specific attention has to be given to understand the role of masculine identities, since this gender related notion is important to prevent youth violence in the region. Promoting the construction of non-violent masculine identities should be seen as a priority for youth, peace and security agenda in the region.

## Supporting Peace Journalism

Supporting peace journalism was outlined as another peace and security priority by consultation participants. In their views and experience, mainstream newspapers mostly publish news on youth in relation to violent incidents. Moreover, online hate speech reproduce the negative stereotypes on young people. These facts about mainstream and social media contribute to the exclusion of young people from peace and security related issues. It is a priority for young peacebuilder in the region to have space in mainstream media and safe spaces in online platforms to demonstrate their positive agency in building peace and preventing violence.

# 2. Innovative Youth, Peace and Security Projects from Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region

## Using Art to Transform Conflicts

It is often the case that participants build peace and security through various forms of participatory art projects. In participants' view, using art is a functional and transformative way to overcome ethnic and religious differences that divide social groups in the region. Using art projects is a functional way to build peace, because participation in these projects does not require special knowledge or status. For example, organizing drawing lessons allow young peacebuilders to create opportunity for children with disabilities to express their opinion on peace and security related issues. According to participants, using art as peacebuilding projects is also transformative because involvement in art projects empowers its participants to be the leaders and entrepreneurs of constructive social change. This means that involving in art projects not only enables young peacebuilders to build necessary relationships to resolve disputes, but also enables them to explore and develop alternative methods to push for positive social and political change. For example, young peacebuilders in the region use interactive theatres as dialogue forums to bring national reconciliation processes further.

## Building Peace on the Move

Young peacebuilders in the region perceive mobility as an effective way to build peace and security. Their peacebuilding projects use busses as mobile spaces to organize problem-solving workshops in conflict affected regions. They invite young people from ethnically and religiously diverse background to travels with them to conflict-affected zones. Through these mobility projects, they initiate the first direct contact between young people from divided societies on the negative impact of violent conflicts. In the places where they arrive with busses, participants also facilitate discussion forums on common the problems they face as young people from adverse social groups. Seeing mobility as an opportunity increase young peacebuilders' ability to reach small villages in rural areas, where victims of violent conflicts mostly reside.

## Creating Safe Space

Creating a safe space for young people to build peace should be considered as a priority for youth, peace and security agenda. However, this priority should not overlook the fact that young people themselves are able to create safe spaces to build peace and prevent future violent conflict. In their view, understanding local culture plays an important role in creating safe space for peacebuilding. For example, teahouses in the region serve more than a recreational space in their view; teahouses are places to observe where young people build peace. The story in the next page also exemplifies how do young people creates safe space to exercise their agency to build peace.

## A Youth Peacebuilding Story:
## Creating Space for Inter-Ethnic Relationships

"I'm from Macedonia and working as the Secretary General of the Centre for Intercultural Dialogue (CID). We work for the promotion of human rights and strive for intercultural learning. We offer space for inter-community dialogue. We explore different narratives, points of view and cultures. We do this through the MultiKulti Youth Centre, situated in a multicultural and multi-ethnic area of our town.

The organisation itself started off in someone's living room after the end violent armed conflict. Our organization emerged because we were looking answers to the 'simple' questions that we had about each other [those from different groups]. It was created provide safe space for us, where we can ask each other those simple questions about each other; or to share our ideas, where we won't be judged based on our ethnicity. This was the place where we could feel safe. Throughout the years of our work, we developed into a community centre that is working with different almost all groups. We work with children who are five years old to youngsters up until 30 years old, and also with adults that are now feeling that the youth centre as if their own.

The youth centre is an open place. It offers bilingual non-formal education for everyone. It is there to support and address the needs of young people and the community in general. From these needs, we have identified that the centre and the workshops that we have must be bilingual. For example, we always have two facilitators. One facilitates in Albanian and the other in Macedonian. They are working together and co-facilitating the learning of the youngsters. In this way, they do not translate each other's words, but they reach the youngsters in both languages, in a way filling the gaps and misunderstandings that may arise because of language and cultural barriers. From this experience, we have noticed that language and cultural barriers exist not only among the youngsters, but also among people of different ages. Therefore, we started free culture and language classes that are available and open for everyone to attend. In this way, we are bringing people and cultures together. We are offering an open floor for questions, discussion and dialogue. Creating space for mutual understanding and simple things like drinking coffee together, we contribute to peace and security within the area, but also towards the prevention of future misunderstandings and conflicts that may arise.

We always ask ourselves, 'Why do we have conflict?' It's because of misunderstandings and fear of the unknown. Why do we have misunderstandings? We think because of the lack of interaction between different groups. As an answer to this need for interaction, we have our youth centre that offers this safe space."

*(Female, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)*

# 3. Challenges to Youth, Peace and Security in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

## Inclusion as a Double-Edged Sword

Participants highlighted that there are programmatic challenges to conduct youth inclusive peacebuilding projects. Firstly, current peacebuilding projects conducted by UN, non-governmental organizations, governments and even youth-led peacebuilding organizations have limited capacity to exercise meaningful youth inclusion in the region. Projects mostly fall short to reach out young people living in rural areas, although they present themselves inclusive peacebuilding projects. This challenge mostly mentioned by participants in relation to the fact that implementers of peacebuilding projects have limited financial and operational capacity to reach rural areas. Implementers are mostly based in capital cities, and they aren't financially supported to travel to small villages in rural areas. The impact of this particular limit of peacebuilding programs increases the rural and urban divide among youth populations, which in a way further increase youth exclusion in their view.

> *"I am a privileged person; I know that I am here in Istanbul Hilton to talk about peace and security. We need to bring the voices of people who do not have a computer or cell phone."*
> *(Montenegro, Male)*

Secondly, offering more opportunities and creating wider spaces for youth participation in peacebuilding processes is not sufficient to solve the problem of youth exclusion and marginalization. In their views, the concept of inclusion has been employed mechanically, since inclusive peacebuilding programs only approaches young people approve our values attached to our concept of inclusion. In other words, expanding the circle of inclusion horizontally increase the number of young people who can be part of peacebuilding program; however, ideological divide between included and excluded increases. In this respect, participants suggested that youth inclusion in peacebuilding should be understood beyond the exchange between like-minded people. Participants emphasized that inclusion should also be about being critical to our own values to expand the circle in terms of accepting and tolerating alternative norms and values.

## Financial Problems

According to participants' experience, there is a lack of transparency in the distribution of funds allocated for peacebuilding programs. Non-governmental organizations' pre-established personal relationships with donors and business networks shapes donors preferences on which organization receive funds. In this respect, youth-run peacebuilding organizations are in disadvantageous position to compete for funds. In participants' view, processes on the distribution of funds should be institutionalized and funds should be awarded to organizations, not individuals or groups of friends. Moreover, participants also think that there is also an impression among donor community in the region that youth participation in peacebuilding should be based on

unpaid voluntary work. Although young people find sufficient number of peers to conduct their project on voluntary basis, they face difficulties to sustain and develop their projects.

### Instrumentalized Youth Participation in Formal Politics

For participants, young people involved in formal politics do not necessarily defend the interests of youth population; they rather serve for the interest of political elite. Although there are mechanisms, such as national youth councils, established to realize youth participation in formal politics, youth involvement in these platforms is often limited to the youth organizations working with political elite. Participants also highlighted that there is a tendency to understand youth inclusion as it is merely about representation of young people in formal politics. In participants view, this is a misleading way to assess the political inclusion of young people and youth specific issues, because the voices of youth representatives are often taken into account in policy-making processes. Lack of mechanisms to ensure youth participation in politic in sub-national level politics is another aspect of the challenges participants raised in this respect. According to participants, there is a need to develop mechanism to ensure youth participation in decision and policy-making processes at municipality level.

## 3. Opportunities to Youth, Peace and Security in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

### Youth-led Diplomacy

Participants emphasized that youth-led diplomacy is an opportunity to find to solutions to protracted conflicts in the region. According to participants' experience, youth-led diplomacy often tries to resolve the conflict from a different angle than traditional diplomatic relations. Participants build diplomatic relations through sport projects and cultural exchanges. They use these recreational projects as instruments to build trust among young people from different national background. In their view, participation in international sport events and cultural exchanges creates an environment that can overcome technical challenges that are related linguistic misunderstandings in finding solutions to conflicts. Participants also emphasized that organizing international youth gatherings on common social problems, such as corruption, is a better way to initiate diplomatic relationship to solve international conflicts and disputes.

### Trust between Youth-based Peacebuilding Organizations and Governments

Participants articulated that building trust between governments and youth-based peacebuilding organizations is an opportunity for the YPS agenda. In participants view, youth involvement in peace and security related issues has been mostly seen as a threat by governmental authorities, which in a way creates an obstacle for youth peacebuilders to scale up their work with the support of their local or national governments. At the same time, from the perspective of participants, not all but in many countries in the region youth-based peacebuilding organizations also have low

trust in their governments. In participants' view, governments are often systematically exclude young people from social, political and economic life, and in some cases youth peace work are subjected to governments' security investigation. In many countries in the region youth peacebuilders take responsibility and leadership to build a reciprocal trust between youth-based peacebuilding organizations and governments.

Building trust between governments and youth-based peacebuilding organizations requires certain level of flexibility according to participants. It is necessary to be flexible in terms of how young people should describe their peacebuilding work. Finding a convincing language to gain the trust of their governments is challenging task for young peacebuilders. Nevertheless, gaining governments' trust is one of the most rewarding opportunities according to their experience, because governments are the ideal partners to sustain and scale-up their peace work.

Inviting governmental officers to young peacebuilders' meetings and holding experience sharing sessions with government officers mostly works for the benefits of both governments and youth peacebuilders. As a result of these meetings, governmental officers do feel more inspired and encouraged to support youth peace initiatives and the reciprocal trust between government and youth peacebuilding organizations increase. For example, as a result of these events, in some countries youth workers and governments together develop alternative fundraising methods to support social investments that have impact in peacebuilding and violence prevention. Local governments' ability to provide safe space for young people to build peace was mentioned as another major opportunity by participants. Collaborating with local level governments allows participants to use public spaces that are necessary for them to organize recreational events. For example, participants in collaboration with local governments conduct sport-based peacebuilding activities in stadiums. Organizing sport-based peacebuilding program enables participants to mobilize young people who are interested in sports, but did not have the chance to take part in peacebuilding initiatives.

## Training Youth in Mediation

Participants emphasized that training young people to work as mediators is an important opportunity to advance youth, peace and security agenda in the region. Participants use often peer-to-peer mediation techniques in schools and universities to bring solutions to youth involvement in violence, and transfer their skills in dispute resolution to their peers. According to participants, providing trainings for young people to work as mediators has an impact beyond the transformation of the conflict among youth. In their experience, youth who are trained as mediators use their mediation skills to transform the conflict between families and communities.

## Peacebuilding on the online platforms

When participants have difficulties to find safe space to meet and organize activities, they often use online platforms to build peace and security. In various circumstances, young peacebuilders in the region use social media to reach their peers and build initial

virtual relationships. Online world is also perceived as an opportunity to create intergenerational dialogue, informing older generations on the positive traits of young people in social change. It has been also mentioned by participants that hate speech is a big problem in online platforms. Especially when participants spread messages on peacefulness, they are often bullied on social media. Additionally, some of the social media platforms are banned in particular countries, which makes it difficult for participants to connect young peacebuilders to conduct cross-border online peacebuilding initiative. Participants perceived youth4peace.info as an opportunity to overcome challenges regarding cyberbullying and social media bans. In their views, youth4peace.info as a regulated online platform by UN is able to provide legitimate and safe space they are looking for. Conducting online projects and discussions on youth4peace online platform that can connect young peacebuilders is seen as an opportunity to overcome social media bans.




*Photos and collage by consultation participant (Russia, Female)*

## Thinking from Other Way around:
## Including Governments in Youth Peacebuilding

"I'm an individual peace activist from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I also work as a volunteer for the Nansen Dialogue Center (NDC), in Prijedor. Every program at NDC includes people from Prijedor, as well as the neighouring city, Sanski Most. Sanski Most has mostly Bosniaks; Prijedor mostly Serbs. Before the war, we had really good communication between these two cities. People would live in one city, and work in the other, for example. But after the war, interaction between cities and populations stopped. We have been working for seven years to improve inter-ethnic communication.

At NDC, we have a Coordination Board consist of three members. One of the members is a former president of the city assembly. She is politically very active. We have also members who are politically and socially very engaged. With the support of our members, we are trying to inform members of the Government about what we are doing, and how this contributes to peace and security. We use our resources to get Governments officials to be involved in our reconciliation projects. We know that we will be supported, if we can demonstrate what we do to our Government.

At NDC, we conduct trainings on peace education for primary schools teachers and students from both cities. We inspire them and work with them to explore how we can bring peace education to schools and bring students from both cities together. There are three types of peace support programs in the NDC: peer mediation, peace education, and peace and conflict resolution.

In May 2017, we had 400 primary school students participated on a trip to a national park. We had students from 15 schools in both cities. They walked through the forest, did sport activities, and sang together. This trip has been happening every year for six years. The students built relationships with each other, and their fears of the others disappeared. They can now be more open to others. They know that there are people who are different, and they will respect that. They are aware of their differences, but this is not a problem in their mind anymore. They now know how to embrace their differences.

The mayor of Sanski Most came to the park to see the students, as did members of the Ministry of Education from the Republic of Srpska and members of the Ministry of Education from Unsko-Sanski Kanton. These Government officers approved these programs in the schools. Now NDC regularly informs them about all of its activities, expects Governments to participate and support our projects.

We will be celebrating International Peace Day on the 21st of September, first in Sanski Most and then in Prijedor. The kids from Prijedor will first go to Sanski Most. Then from kids from Sanski Most will go to Prijedor. Last year we had 550 kids. We hope that these programs continue. We are trying to find financial support from other donors."

*(Female, Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

# 4. Recommendations

## Participation

- ✓ Conduct formal and non-formal youth, peace and security consultations at national and local levels on regular basis.
- ✓ Develop mechanisms for participation and inclusion of youth in decision-making processes at all levels.
- ✓ Create formal youth parliaments that are working parallel to national parliaments.
- ✓ Enable national youth councils to take active role in shaping national peace and security policies.
- ✓ Bring youth related issues beyond youth ministries and parliaments. Create youth departments in all ministries in addition to youth ministries in order create opportunities for young people to raise their voice in all youth-related issues, including peace and security issues.

## Protection

- ✓ Provide human rights education programs for young people in order to raise their awareness on protection rights. Integrate human rights education in primary schools curricula.
- ✓ Demonstrate the lack of specific mechanism to protect young people.
- ✓ Support peacebuilding projects that can show how young people are equally affected by violent conflict.
- ✓ Develop specific legal mechanism to protect the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex youth.

## Prevention

- ✓ Enable religious youth leaders to engage in peacebuilding and violence prevention.
- ✓ Create a regional youth-led religious peacebuilders network focuses on violence prevention. Start with the establishment of youth imam network that is specifically designed to work on current urgent, such as prevention of violent extremism. Then support this network to include religious youth leaders from all religions working on violence prevention at community level. Create platforms for exchange for religious youth leaders to share their lessons learned across religions and national borders.
- ✓ Provide education for children on gender issues; promote alternative masculine and feminine identities in primary schools curricula. Support diversity and gender trainings.
- ✓ Reform formal school curricula in collaboration with youth organizations. Update their content to meet the demands of job markets. Incorporate intercultural and peace education in formal education in all subjects.

- ✓ Make informal education opportunities accessible for marginalized young women and men.
- ✓ Sponsor youth-led business initiatives that aim to support peacebuilding and violence prevention.
- ✓ Provide peace education and conflict resolution trainings to young people living in small villages in remote areas. Make sure that young people from diverse socio-economic and cultural background both living in rural and urban have access to non-formal peace education trainings.

## Partnership

- ✓ Youth4Peace.info online platform should provide safe space for online youth participation in peacebuilding. In particular, the platform should provide an opportunity for young peacebuilder to connect youth from divided countries and communities.
- ✓ Build partnership between religious and social inclusion institutions. Enable youth religious experts to participate in social inclusion programs that are working with young people.
- ✓ Create a youth led multi-stakeholder advocacy group that would work for the creation of youth participatory mechanisms in development of the education programs.
- ✓ Provide sustainable financial support and safe space for regional and national youth peacebuilders networks.
- ✓ Reach out to youth groups that are not traditionally involved in peacebuilding projects. Ensure that youth initiative from rural areas and young women and men from conservative background have opportunities to build partnerships with peacebuilding organizations.
- ✓ Foster cooperation between governments and non-governmental organization for the implementation of peacebuilding programs.

## Disengagement & Reintegration

- ✓ Create and support youth centres that can provide psycho-social and legal support to youth who were recruited or involved in violent extremism.

## Implementation Strategies for UN SCR 2250

- ✓ Establish mechanisms for the implementation of the UN SCR 2250 at national level. Start with the development of country specific indicators that can assess straightforward outcomes.
- ✓ Create national level UN SCR 2250 implementation working groups in all countries. Half of the members of these groups should be representatives of youth organizations.
- ✓ Organise local level consultations and awareness raising events on peacebuilding and UN SCR 2250 for peacebuilding actors of all ages.
- ✓ Collect and share evidence of young people in peacebuilding, develop right based arguments for youth inclusion in peacebuilding.

# Annex A: Participant Information

## Country Profile

| Country of origin | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Albania | 2 |
| Armenia | 2 |
| Azerbaijan | 2 |
| Belarus | 2 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 2 |
| Georgia | 2 |
| Kazakhstan | 2 |
| Kosovo[2] | 2 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 2 |
| the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | 2 |
| Moldova | 2 |
| Montenegro | 2 |
| Russia | 2 |
| Serbia | 2 |
| Tajikistan | 2 |
| Turkey | 2 |
| Turkmenistan | 3 |
| Ukraine | 2 |
| Uzbekistan | 2 |

## Age Profile

| Age | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| 19 | 2 |
| 20 | 5 |
| 21 | 1 |
| 23 | 4 |
| 24 | 8 |
| 25 | 4 |
| 26 | 3 |
| 27 | 3 |
| 28 | 2 |
| 29 | 2 |
| 30 | 1 |
| 31 | 1 |
| 33 | 1 |
| 35 | 1 |

## Sex

| | |
|---|---|
| Female | 20 |
| Male | 19 |

[2] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).