



# NEWSLETTER



## Training Course: Mechanisms for Human Rights Advocacy and Protection

Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR), supported by the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (SHC), organized on April 26th and 27th a training course in Belgrade entitled “Mechanisms for Human Rights Advocacy and Protection”. Participants were activists from 15 non-governmental organizations from Serbia: Center for Democratic Initiative from Jagodina, National Parliament from Leskovac, Bulgarian Minority Cultural-Informational Center from Dimitrovgrad, Human Rights Council from Negotin, Distrikt 023 from Kikinda, Toplice Initiative from Prokuplje, Human Rights Council from Niš, Center for Dialogue, Justice, Solidarity and Regionalism from Vršac, Libergraf from Užice, Srem Youth Initiative from Sremska Mitrovica, Human Rights Council from Vranje, Urban In from Novi Pazar, Association “95” from Bačka Topola, Civic Action from Pančevo, and Vlah Cultural-Informational Center from Bor.

The aim of this training course was to educate participants about the use of mechanisms designed to realize and protect human rights, and envisaged by existing laws in Serbia.

Dragan Popović and Miroslav Janković from YIHR opened the course with short introductory notes, which were followed by a lecture by Rodoljub Šabić, Serbian Information Commissioner. Šabić lectured about the importance of the right to free access to the information of public interest and the importance of how to protect this right when the law is breached. During the lecture, Šabić spoke of corruption index in Serbia which, according to a non-governmental organization Transparency International, used to be 1.3, while today it is approximately 3 (on a 1 to 10 scale), where 1 marks the worst. Šabić also mentioned the Guide through the Law on Free Access to the Information in Romani language (which is not yet officially used), which is the first official legal act in this language in Serbia.



Participants experience:  
“The discussions were a good opportunity for trainees to learn, in concrete terms, from the most competent experts about the topics this training course focused on.”





Dr Petar Teofilović, Vojvodina Ombudsman, and Milan Antonijević, YUCOM Executive Director, also lectured during the first training day. Apart from information about the institution of Ombudsperson and mechanisms designed to protect citizens' rights, Teofilovic stressed that budget needed to maintain this institution was “damaged” this year, which renders problematic its existence in the future. Using examples of court proceedings conducted by YUCOM, Antonijevic explained to trainees how to recognize and process hate-speech in media reporting.

Participants experience:  
 “Great lecturers made the presentations  
 extraordinary.”

The next day Tanja Drobnjak spoke about court practice in cases of racial, religious and national hatred and intolerance, but also about the way this criminal act is processed before domestic courts, as well as about obstacles which legal representatives and lawyers encounter within domestic judiciary. Goran Miletic, from the SHC, lectured about advocacy and motivated the trainees to take active part in the protection of human rights. The second day was concluded by Miroslav Jankovic’s lecture about the right to rehabilitation and about the need for the citizens whose rights had been violated in the period between April 6th 1941 and April 25th 2006 to be rehabilitated. Janković laid special emphasis on the right to rehabilitation of those citizens who in the 1990s refused to take part in wars and crimes committed by Serbian armed forces,

Participants experience:  
 “What I liked most were the presentations – the way various mechanisms were presented, cogency, examples, clear presentations – as well as the quality of additional material and overall organization of the training course. I have heard many interesting suggestions. The atmosphere was inspiring for discussion. I felt trainees were willing to ask and to learn.”

and who were subsequently, by court or administrative decision, or without it, deprived of life, freedom or any other right.

At the last training session, the trainees were tasked to use in practice one of the human rights mechanisms about which they learned during the course. Among trainees there were activists of non-governmental organizations whose main programs are not focused on researching, processing and protection of human rights. They are expected to pay more attention to this segment in their future work, or at least to put to good use the knowledge and information they obtained at this training course.

In the second half of this year, the YIHR will organize another training course in Niš, with the same focus and the same subject, and with participants from other 15 NGOs. The YIHR wishes to use its knowledge and ample experience acquired during the monitoring of transitional laws in Serbia in the past three years, and to share it with other NGOs, contributing thus to further strengthening of the NGO sector in Serbia and monitoring the development and implementation of the rule of law in Serbia.

