

The Righteous of former Yugoslavia

In May 2012 European Parliament adopted March 6th as *European Day of Remembrance of the Righteous*.

So far the concept of the righteous has been limited on those who saved Jews from the „Final Solution“ during the Second World War. Concept of the righteous had its foundation exclusively in Jewish culture. Since 2013 Europe will on March 6th commemorate all those righteous individuals who risked their lives and the safety of themselves and their families to stand up for the dignity and freedom of victims of totalitarian regimes or any violation of human rights.

The declaration of the *European Day of Remembrance for the Righteous* is an important step towards promoting basic human rights and defending human freedoms and dignity especially nowadays when financial crisis has an impact on the rise of radical and rigid ideologies.

Extension of the concept of the righteous on those who have risked their lives fighting for the dignity of individuals regardless of their ethno-national or other identities has special significance in former Yugoslavia region which passed through wars in which individuals lost their lives just on the basis of fascist criteria. However, NGO Gariwo Sarajevo for more than a decade tries to involve the concept of the righteous in the public space of West Balkan countries. During the Yugoslav wars there were a lot of righteous who saved many individuals who belonged to those ethno-national groups that were doomed to disappearance.

NGO Gariwo Sarajevo has found *Duško Kondor Civil Courage Award* which was assigned for the first time in 2008. It has awarded thirty laureates since then. NGO Gariwo Sarajevo has gone a step further beginning notion of the righteous connect with the notion of civil courage which can be expressed in peace as well as in war. This may be clearer if we read the definition of civil courage which is given on NGO Gariwo's website: „Civil courage is the will and ability to disobey, resist, oppose and to end by non-violent means the abuse of power by any public authority, private enterprise or individuals who deliberately neglect their duties to society or illegally use for their own advantage the levers of their political, economic or social power violating human rights – whether in the media, academic, ecclesiastical or family spheres.“ (www.gariwo.org)

March 6th as European Day of Remembrance for the Righteous will be for the first time introduce into the public space of B&H and region by NGO GARIWO Sarajevo through the recognition and presentation of people who could be considered as the righteous in the culture of countries which has emerged after Yugoslavia dissolution.

On the 6th March, on Wednesday, in organization of NGO GARIWO Sarajevo, at the Bosnian Cultural Center in Sarajevo, Branilaca Sarajeva 24, from 12 to 14 hours, there will be held *Duško Kondor Civil Courage Award Ceremony*.

In front of many distinguished guests from the diplomatic, political, and cultural life of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, in front of over 1.000 high school and university students from BH,

Croatia and Serbia, will be assigned to four *Duško Kondor Civil Courage Award* and one *Duško Kondor Award for Affirmation of Civil Courage*.

The speakers will be: **Valentin Inzko**, High Representative of International Community in BH, **Stjepan Mesić**, President of Croatia 2000 – 2010, **Mayor of Sarajevo**, **Svetlana Broz**, Director of NGO Gariwo Sarajevo.

There will be presented short films about laureates produced by NGO Gariwo Sarajevo. Beside movies, the audience will also see educational, cultural and artistic program which will include the premiere of an Ode to Civil Courage song: (<http://www.gariwo.org/en/selected/do-it-an-ode-to-civil-courage>) in Gariwo Sarajevo production.

Members of the 2013 Commission:

1. Uwe Kitzinger CBE, Chairman of the Board, UK
2. HE Henrik Ofstad, Deputy Chairman of the Board, Ambassador of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Croatia, Kingdom of Norway
3. Dževdana Jašarević, Secretary to the Board, journalist, Bosnia and Herzegovina
4. Esad Kočan, journalist, recipient of the Duško Kondor Award for Affirmation of Civil Courage, 2011, Montenegro
5. Besim Spahić, Professor at the Political Science Faculty of Sarajevo University, Bosnia and Herzegovina
6. Ellen Elias Bursać, literary translator and scholar of South Slavic studies, USA
7. Dinka Čorkalo Biruški, Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of Zagreb University, Croatia
8. Ognjen Tomić, political scientist, Italy

In 2008, the GARIWO Sarajevo non-governmental organization established the *Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage* and the *Duško Kondor Award for Affirmation of Civil Courage*, for the purpose of acknowledging those who have demonstrated civil courage in their personal acts or have contributed to the affirmation of civil courage.

The Board has relied, in selecting the laureates, on the two fundamental criteria for identifying the righteous: that the individual or group took significant risks when demonstrating civil courage and that there was no expectation of nor receipt of material benefit or any other form of recompense for what was done.

On the basis of the proposals received for 2013, the Board selected the following laureates:

Goran Čengić was born in 1946 in Sarajevo. He was well known as a hand-ball player for the clubs: *Bosna*, *Mlada Bosna*, *Crvena zvezda* and the Yugoslav national team. In 1963, when he was 17, his team, *Bosna*, won the Yugoslav Cup.

Goran was raised in the spirit of the ideals of anti-fascism, particularly freedom and equality for all people. These were the principles his parents, Nataša Zimonjić-Čengić and Ferid Fićo Čengić, the first post-war mayor of Sarajevo, brought him up to believe in.

During the recent war he lived in an occupied part of Sarajevo, on Grbavica, and from there he was taken and killed on June 14, 1992 after he tried to protect his neighbor, Dr. Husnija Čerimagić, when Veselin Vlahović Batko, otherwise known as the "Grbavica Monster" came to take Dr. Čerimagić to his death. Čengić's attempt to save Dr. Čerimagić was in vain. They took both men away. Goran's remains were discovered nine years later and he was finally laid to rest.

The Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage is being given to **Goran Čengić** of Sarajevo posthumously, because fully cognizant of the risk he was undertaking he sacrificed his life, thereby demonstrating civil courage by the following:

- Attempting to protect from certain death his elderly, ailing neighbor, Dr. Husnija Čerimagić.
- Hearing screams he came out of his apartment and confronted the infamous murderer, Veselin Vlahović Batko, shouting, "What are you doing! Can't you see this man is ill?"
- He did not step back even though the criminals were armed. Instead he stood up to them with the intent of protecting someone who was being unjustly maltreated.
- He chose not to be a helpless bystander or keep his silence when faced with cutthroats.

He gave his life to affirm his integrity as a human being and his determination to stand his ground at moments that were the worst in the history of his city.

Predrag Matejević, Zagreb, Croatia - for civil courage

Predrag Matvejević was born in 1932 in Mostar. He earned his degree in French Language and Literature in Zagreb. In 1967 he defended his doctoral degree at the Sorbonne in Paris. He taught French Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy at Zagreb University until 1991 when he left Croatia. From 1991 to 1994 he taught Slavic literatures at the Nouvelle Sorbonne (Paris III), while from 1994 to 2007 he taught the Serbian and Croatian language and Serbian and Croatian literature at Sapienza University in Rome. He is author of numerous essays and books, including several with a bearing on the question of civil courage, such as "Open Letter - Moral Exercises." The titles which have been most widely translated are *Mediterranski brevijar* (English translation: *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*), *Druga Venecija* (English translation: *The Other Venice: Secrets of the City*), and *Jugoslavenstvo danas*. [Yugoslav Identity Today].

He has held a number of significant positions abroad and has been honored with several titles such as honorary life-long Vice-President of the International Pen Club in London.

His decorations include, in France, the *Légion d'honneur*, in Croatia the *Red danice* [Order of Danica], and honors in Slovenia and Italy.

The Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage is being given to **Predrag Matvejević of Zagreb** because, although fully cognizant of the risk he was undertaking, he demonstrated civil courage by the following:

- During the Yugoslav period he spoke out for human rights, particularly the right to free speech, and championed those convicted of political crimes.
- In 1998 he was a co-founder of the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, the first independent political association at that time in Yugoslavia, the goal of which was to find a peaceful solution to the Yugoslav crisis.
- He risked his life fighting against and writing against all forms of totalitarian practice.
- In 1991 he was faced with persecution, slander and abuse of all kinds. Among other things, his mail box was riddled with bullets. To save his life he fled the country.
- While in exile he became a powerful voice of criticism in ex-Yugoslav societies and spoke frankly about evil and its perpetrators.
- In 2001 he published a article, "Our Talibans," in the Zagreb newspaper *Jutarnji List* in which he named certain writers and intellectuals as responsible for incendiary words that fueled the war.
- In 2005, he was tried in a rigged trial for the article "Our Talibans" and given a conditional sentence of five months for slander. He never appealed the conviction because he felt that by doing so he would have been acknowledging the validity of the suit.
- With his case he forced the political elite of Croatia to examine their actions. In the midst of this persecution by the court, the President of Croatia named him as Croatian representative to the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie*.

Nebojša Popov, Belgrade, Serbia - for civil courage

Nebojša Popov was born in 1939 in Zrenjanin. He earned his degree at the Faculty of Law of Belgrade University and received his doctorate from the Faculty of Philosophy of Zagreb University.

A member of the Praxis group in Zagreb and of the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, he has been one of the foremost fighters for human rights and labor rights, and one of the preeminent sociologists, a founder of *Republika* and for many years its editor. *Republika* is a "periodical for civil self-liberation - against fear, hatred and violence." For his journalism he has been given a number of prestigious awards - the *Dušan Bogović* award for ethical action and courage, the SEEMO Journalism award, conferred by the South East Europe Media Organization. He was declared a "knight of the profession." Popov is the recipient of the *Konstantin Obradović* award for advancing the culture of human rights that is awarded by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights. He is author of several books including *Contra fatum, Srpska strana rata* [The Serbian Side of the War], *Iskušavanje slobode* [Testing Freedom]...

The Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage is being given to **Nebojša Popov** from Belgrade because, although fully cognizant of the risk he was undertaking, he demonstrated civil courage by the following:

- He has worked tirelessly on democratizing the societies where he has lived—first socialist Yugoslav society, then nationalist Serbian society.

- During the time of Yugoslavia he was secretary to the editorial board of the *Praxis* group. Those who were affiliated with *Praxis* were thought to be dissidents. Their objective was to encourage critical discourse about Yugoslav socialism in order to advance it.
- For many years he was a member of the Administrative Board of the *Korčula* Summer School. This was a gathering place for free philosophical thought. It was banned in the mid-Seventies.
- He was one of the founders of the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, the first independent political association in Yugoslavia. Its goal was to find a peaceful solution for the Yugoslav crisis.
- During the siege of Sarajevo he founded a citizen's group called: *To Live in Sarajevo*, which organized protests against the attacks on Sarajevo and took part in organizing various forms of aid to the people of Sarajevo. As part of the activity of the group he organized and took the first Belgrade anti-war group to visit besieged Sarajevo.
- He organized a series of actions, discussions and round tables calling for an end to the war.
- In the middle of the Balkan wars he supported and was involved in women's movements for independent organizing and gender equality.
- He stood up in defense of the right to the freedom of opinion including the views of those whose politics he did not share.
- With his activities he has marked almost a half century of fighting for freedom, democracy, human rights, and labor rights.

Melisa Ismičić, Novi Šeher, Bosnia and Herzegovina - for civil courage

Melisa Ismičić was born in 1985 in Doboj, but she lives in Novi Šeher. She is a teacher of the Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian languages and literatures. After seeking a job for several years she finally found work in 2011 at the Novi Šeher Elementary School. She lost this job because of a brief public engagement, mainly through *Školegijum: A Journal for a More Just Education*, in which she offered examples of poor education practice, the problem of nepotism in employing teachers, the approach to reforming education which favors a superficial, rather than a substance-based, approach, especially in reference to the system known as "two schools under one roof," and so forth.

The Duško Kondor Award for Civil Courage is being given to **Melisa Ismičić** of **Novi Šeher** because, although fully cognizant of the risk she was undertaking, she demonstrated civil courage by the following:

- She published an article, unsigned, in *Školegijum: Journal for a More Just Education* with the title "Why is it easier for you to get an article from Split than from me." The article was a critique of the existing school system and provided examples of poor education practice.
- She published the article without a signature not out of fear but because she hoped other schools would identify with the examples she gave, without associating them exclusively with

the Novi Šeher Elementary School. Her goal was to provide constructive rather than negative criticism.

- When an investigation was undertaken at the school where she worked against the person who had written the article, she made it known that she was the author and she was fired. By doing so she showed that the greater good mattered more to her than personal interests and this provoked even greater fury among her superiors.
- She made public the pressures that the principal of the school and some of the teaching staff brought to bear on her over her article and she also spoke publicly on several occasions to call for a school system that would be fairer, of higher quality, and greater integrity.
- The harassment she suffered did not dissuade her from working at the school and she applied again for the same job she had lost. In the course of a hiring procedure that was highly suspect in the way the points were assigned her application was rejected.
- By her own example she has faced the public with the question of what young people can expect who are fighting for a more just society and whether today in Bosnia and Herzegovina it is possible to voice constructive criticism without suffering retaliation.
- She has continued living in her community and fighting to return to her job, not only for her own sake but for the sake of justice.

Jelena Lovrić, Zagreb, Croatia - for affirmation of civil courage

Jelena Lovrić was born in 1948 in Lukovac (Bosnia and Herzegovina). After graduating from Tuzla high school, she enrolled in the Faculty of Philosophy of Zagreb University (Yugoslav Studies and Comparative Literature). From the early 1970s she worked in newspapers and magazines such as *Vjesnik*, *VUS*, and *Start*. She wrote for the political weekly *Danas* from its first issue in 1982 to its last, in 1992. After *Danas* she wrote briefly for *Slobodna Dalmacija*. She was one of the founders of *Feral Tribune* and the shortlived magazine *Pečat*. As of 1994 she wrote for *Novi List*, thanks to the courage of the editors. She contributed to various foreign media. Her longest affiliation was with French international radio and Radio Free Europe.

All those years, marrying remarkable journalist talent to an exacting ethical standard in her articles she reached the heights of professional journalistic standards.

Now she writes a column in the weekly *Globus* and the *Jutarnji List* newspaper.

The Duško Kondor Award for Affirmation of Civil Courage is being given to **Jelena Lovrić of Zagreb** because, although fully cognizant of the risk she was undertaking, she affirmed civil courage, over many years, from the early 1980s, by the following:

- Fully aware that she was embarking on serious conflict with the reigning political ideology and monopolistic groups, she experienced all the drama that the weekly *Danas* went through. She is the author of articles which sent the weekly in its first years on a collision course with the

party oligarchy. The weekly was punished by the removal of many of the editors and harassment of the journalists, until 1992 when the paper was finished politically. The Tuđman government forced out the team of editors and journalists and turned the weekly over to its henchmen.

- Fearlessly she demonstrated her refusal to bow to the dictate of those in power, regardless of which side they were on, during the movement known as the "happening of the people" in Serbia, when *Danas*, the weekly, and she, as its leading writer, in what was otherwise a silent Croatia, reported on those remarkable times.
- Without regard for the repercussions, she was the first to provide a critical analysis of the rise of Slobodan Milošević, which resulted in a vicious assault against her by part of the Belgrade media.
- Because of her principled and consistent opposition to the language and practice of domination, she became a *persona non grata* in Tuđman's Croatia and was left without a job, publicly defamed. She was dogged by the state attorney and harangued by the pro-regime media. This reached its peak with the article "The Witches of Rio" in *Globus*, in which she, with several other women writers, were literally accused of "raping Croatia."
- She has shown her commitment to ethical and professional standards by quitting *Slobodna Dalmacija* with a group of other journalists after the paper was bought out in a scandalous way. She was one of the founders of *Feral Tribune* and shortlived *Pečat*.
- She has been inspiring young journalists for decades throughout the former Yugoslavia. By example she has been affirming civil courage, proving with countless articles on searing topics that even in the most difficult moments of war, crime, and hatred, a journalist can uphold the integrity and dignity of the profession.