

## ***Children After War Roundtable***

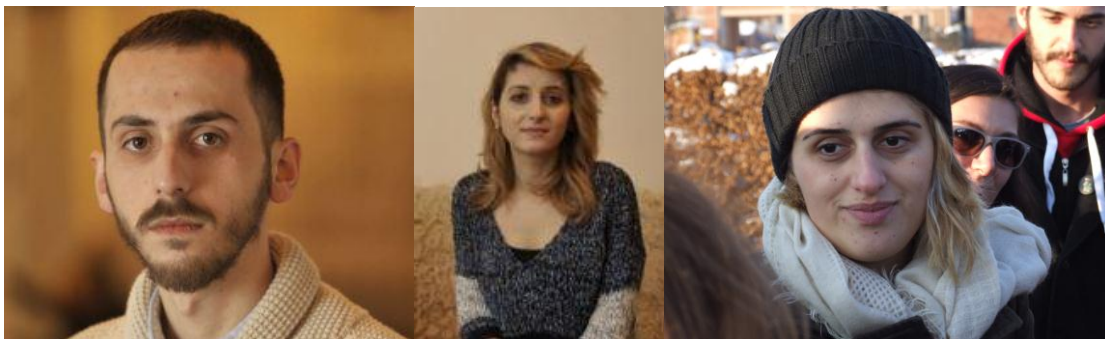
**Cultural Centre of Belgrade, Gallery Artget, December 19th, 2013 at 18:00**

In the wars waged on the territory of the former Yugoslavia during the nineteen-nineties, approximately 5,000 children were either killed or went missing. Children were killed by snipers, bombs, starvation. They were killed individually or and in mass executions, together with their families and peers. Some 800 of them are still registered as missing. During the war, children were witnesses of murders, torture, sex violence and forced abductions of their closest family members. Many were forcibly mobilized. They are victims who are, as a rule, mentioned only on rare occasions – sometimes because people are not able to imagine a crime against a child, and sometimes because of the fear that that might upset their feelings.

What does the life of children after war look like following such experiences? How can remembrance of evil contribute to the fight for good? Is it difficult, in the absence of justice and acknowledgment of their sufferings, to advocate for the values they believe in today?

Seven young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia, who survived serious crimes and tragedies alone or together with their family members, will speak at the roundtable. After the war, each of them embarked on their own fight for truth, justice and acknowledgment of what happened to them.

### **Biographies of participants**



**Saranda, Fatos and Jehona Bogujevci** survived the crime in Podujevo on March 28th, 1999, when they were kids. On that day, members of the “Scorpions” Unit gathered 19 women, children and elderly persons in a yard and opened automatic gunfire on them. These children lost close family members, their mothers, sisters, brothers and grandmothers, in this crime. They also sustained serious injuries. During the trial of the perpetrators, namely, members of the ‘Scorpions’ Police Unit, they confronted the ones who had shot at them and their family. They were the first child victims to testify in a war crimes trial in the former Yugoslavia. In their years’-long struggle that justice be done for what had happened to them and members of their families, they have never stopped courageously telling the truth and

reminding others that only the remembrance of evil may prevent a recurrence of similar events. Saranda, Fatos and Jehona Bogujevci are into artwork, and they have authored the 'Bogujevci-Visual History' exhibition, dedicated to the suffering they have endured and to all innocent victims of war.



**Zijo Ribić** was an eight-year-old boy when he survived the crime in his birth town of Skočići, near Zvornik, on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1992. Members of the “*Simo’s Chetniks*” Unit killed Zijo’s immediate family, relatives and other citizens of his village on that day and threw their bodies into a pit. Even though Zijo was seriously wounded, he managed to escape the pit in which 27 bodies of the killed were thrown. He testified before the court in Belgrade, at the proceedings against members of the “*Simo’s Chetniks*” Unit, about everything

that he had survived and seen - among other things, the rape of his thirteen-year-old sister, Zlatija Ribić, who was subsequently killed together with other members of Zijo’s family. His statement was decisive in the court rendering a guilty judgment, by which the perpetrators were sentenced to long-term imprisonment sentences. Today, he lives in Tuzla, where he works as a chef.



**Igor Matijašević** fled his birth town of Sotin, near Vukovar, together with his mother and brother, in autumn 1991. His father, grandmother and grandfather stayed in the house. Members of the Serbian Territorial Defence and Police entered the village in December 1991. They killed a number of citizens of the village. They took Igor’s father from the house in an unknown direction. Igor learned about the disappearance later on from his grandmother and grandfather. Upon his return to Sotin in 1998, he was engaged in the search for his missing father and other disappeared citizens of the village. Despite the fact that he is one of the youngest people in the village, he managed to gather all the families of the missing persons into a sort of informal association of victims’ families, and

became this association’s representative. He has been working relentlessly all these years on establishing the truth about the fate of the missing persons from Sotin. His work has shown results this year with the discovery of a mass gravesite with the mortal remains of 13 citizens of his village, amongst whom Igor found his father. Today, he works as an economist in Vupik, where his father used to work as well. He continues the search for the remaining 18 citizens of Sotin, who are still registered as missing.



**Radomir Nevajda** was with his family in their house in Glina on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1995, when “Operation Storm” began. After the shelling of the village, he headed, together with his family and relatives, for Serbia, where they found shelter in Vranjska banja. After several days, police officers carrying automatic rifles entered the collection centre and singled out Radomir, his father, and six other men. They took them to the village of Luč, in Baranja, to a camp of the Ministry of the Interior Special Operations Unit, where they were exposed to abuse and humiliation. Even though he was trying all the time to explain that he was a

student and that he had not done the mandatory military service, Radomir was sent to the frontline. A month and a half later, he managed to obtain a certificate proving that he was a fulltime student, and he was released to return to Serbia. After a long trial of many years, the court established that the state of Serbia had violated his right to freedom and granted him compensation for the suffering endured. Today, he lives in Belgrade. He graduated from the Faculty of Law and the Teachers' College.



**Sudbin Musić** was detained in the Trnopolje Camp, near Prijedor, in 1992, immediately after turning 18, together with his mother, brother and sisters. His father was killed at the very beginning of the war while working in a field with his neighbours. During several months of detention, he witnessed torture, starvation and humiliation by prison guards against Bosniak detainees. After two months, they were released from the camp. Three years after the end of the war, he decided to return to Prijedor, as one of the first returnees. From that day to the present, Sudbin has been reminding his fellow citizens every day of the evil that they have shut their eyes to and teaching them the truth, which they would rather

forget.