

“After Kosovo” Project Proposal for 100 Projects for Peace Contest

With recent reports of violent incidents, the Serbian province of Kosovo is again becoming synonymous with ethnic intolerance, prejudice and hatred. The heated negotiations over Kosovo’s final status are currently underway. An independent state of Kosovo with some degree of autonomy for the remaining Serbian minority is the most likely outcome, as early as in the coming months. Many fear that entire communities – Serbian and Albanian alike – will again face potential expulsion, increasing intolerance, insecurity and violence. Regrettably, abstract political considerations are taking precedence over concrete questions of human suffering in what many fear is a looming crisis in Kosovo. Ethnic and cultural reconciliation is impossible without some understanding of how different nationalities and minorities – as well as constituencies like refugees, internally-displaced persons, and young people – are experiencing this period. My project aims to build precisely this kind of understanding and thus contribute, however modestly, to eventual stabilization and reconciliation in and around Kosovo.

My project – the *After Kosovo* workshop series – is aimed at establishing a network of university students in the region to fight for inter-ethnic and inter-cultural respect among Serbs, Albanians, Roma and other minorities affected by the Kosovo tragedy. I intend to organize a series of workshops in Belgrade involving students from all academic fields from universities in Priština (Kosovo), Tirana (Albania), Belgrade and Novi Sad (Serbia). The purpose of these workshops (6 hours each, held three times a week, spanning for 3 months, involving around 30-40 students per workshop) is to educate about the concrete possibilities for ethnic reconciliation, to explore the effects of each Kosovo status possibility on these young people, and to foster productive and resourceful dialogue on painful political issues. Most importantly, the workshops will make the voices of these unheard young people in the region heard. My project will *address the prospects of peace* by directly empowering students to work for peace individually in their own local communities, as well as together for a broader, regional approach. It will be *creative* and *innovative* because it will combine participatory activism, grassroots education, creative communication and urgent politics. With the help of my NGO supporters (please see budget for details), the workshops will include reviews of Kosovo history, trainings in community activism, discussions of differing national narratives, creative communication training, media activism workshops, as well as cultural literacy programs promoting Serbian-Albanian-Roma tolerance. In addition, I will strive to arrange for one guest visitor per workshop to participate in discussions and enrich the educational experience. I have already secured the support of nine guest visitors – including a member of the Kosovo ‘status talks’ negotiating team, an international expert on youth policy development, an experienced media activism trainer, and even a former President of Yugoslavia and prominent figure in Kosovo’s history – and the list continues to grow.

In addition, I plan to lead some of the workshops myself, discussing my research on Kosovo and engaging participants in critical discussions of nationalism. I believe I am qualified to do so based on my experiences with Belgrade’s Association for Creative Communication and Debate (ACCD), with whom I have worked as a debate coach and workshop leader. Last summer, I’ve organized, coordinated and helped lead workshops and seminars on various topics as an intern for the Solidarity Center in Bangkok. I’ve also been a teaching assistant in sociology and political science at my former high school. Finally, I’ve had extensive organizing experience as an officer of the Princeton Justice Project, as editor and founder of *Dollars & Sins* and as an organizer for three more Princeton peace and justice groups. Academically, I’ve been researching the Kosovo nationalities question extensively for five years. My Junior Paper on Serbian national mythology in Kosovo won “Best Paper Award” at the nationwide 2006 Undergraduate Political Science and Sociology Student Convention at Monmouth University and a revised version of the paper is pending publication in *Nationalities Papers*, an academic journal of the Association for the Study of Nationalities. Thus I believe I have both the organizational and intellectual/scholarly potential to carry this project out in an especially valuable way for the workshop participants.

Finally, the workshops will translate into concrete activism. I intend to publicize *After Kosovo* activities as widely as possible through Serbian media outlets and to work with my colleagues to explore ways of putting constructive pressure on respective governments and NGOs to raise the issues being neglected in the Kosovo final status process. I will transcribe and publish highlights from the workshops in the form of testimonies or reports online and in local newspapers, whenever feasible. With the assistance of YesPro Media Company, I will record and professionally edit video footage of the workshops in order to potentially televise selections for RTS (Serbian

national television), with whom I have worked in the past. If timing is favorable, I will organize testimonials from participants before the Kosovo negotiating teams and various committees involved in the final status talks.

The *entrepreneurial* piece of my project is that it will create and establish a unique venue for Serbian and Albanian students to interact in a civilized setting and make their voices heard, which is unusual in three ways: (1) most organizations (grassroots or otherwise) addressing the Kosovo question in Serbia and Kosovo exclude young people from meaningful participation; (2) associations engaged in Kosovo final status activism in the region (as well as the official government negotiations themselves) are drawn along parochial nationalistic lines which tend to be in the interests of Serbian or Albanian ethnocentrism, not peace; (3) young people in the area in general have very little visibility in public activities and the media, let alone opportunities to interact with official negotiators and diplomats. This project will allow representatives of various human rights and refugee groups, grassroots activists, media outlets and students to meet and interact, as well as for truly unique ethnic and cultural mixing.

Besides by levels of media exposure, I will *measure the impact* of my project with written and oral post-workshop evaluations from the participants, which will reflect their satisfaction with the workshops and their ability to address issues like discrimination, ethnic prejudice and non-violence (I will model these on standardized evaluations from NGOs which use similar ones for adult seminars). More importantly, success will be reflected in the level of effective pressure put on local governments and officials to integrate participants' demands into the post-"final status" future. To give one example, if participants agree to direct their energies to demanding equal availability of languages in the universities in Priština and Belgrade, success will be measured by concrete administrative steps taken to provide language opportunities in both places.

I trust in this project's potential to have significant impact on the basis of similar projects I have observed. I was privileged to volunteer at a UNHCR refugee social support program which not only assisted children refugees materially, but educated adult refugees about non-violent conflict resolution. The program ultimately gained the spontaneous recognition of the Mayor of Belgrade. The ACCD has done similar programs aimed at "cultural literacy," such as a socio-cultural emancipation program for Roma adolescents, which included television campaigns dispelling ethnic stereotypes. I may also mention my involvement in the summer 2005 workshop on "Truth and Reconciliation: 10 Years After Srebrenica," which pioneered a campaign to raise awareness about the Srebrenica massacre and the Hague War Crimes Tribunal. Despite the unpopular message of responsibility, our effort contributed to the drafting of a resolution condemning the Srebrenica massacre in the Serbian parliament. With lessons from these and similar projects, I am confident "After Kosovo" can produce significant results.

Two potential challenges to the project are notable. Firstly, the unknown outcome of the final status talks over Kosovo's future allow for various contingencies by the beginning of the summer. A conceivable "worst-case scenario" might be some kind of upsurge in violence that hampers traveling from Kosovo or Albania and deters students from participation. In this unfortunate case, I plan to create incentives for attendance by raising financial assistance and organizing private carpools (with cuts in the number of workshops or additional fundraising). Secondly, a crucial challenge is to maintain true diversity and equal representation of viewpoints and ethnicities in the workshops. An all-Serbian or all-Albanian group would clearly be senseless. The workshops will only meet their purpose if varied ethnicities and backgrounds are included and reasonably balanced for a collaborative effort. To this end, I intend to have Serbs, Kosovo Albanians, Albanians and Roma represented equally, to have equal numbers of participants from each of the four universities, and to maximize the representation of rare constituencies or unique viewpoints (e.g. refugees, witnesses/victims of ethnic violence, etc.). This will ensure – albeit imperfectly – that differing perspectives interact and that minority perspectives are welcomed.

Far from an elusive abstraction that we cannot grasp, peace must be *made*. The only way the ethnic stereotypes and enmities that have cost the lives of so many innocents in Serbian-Albanian violence can be dispelled is through concrete experiences of cooperation and collaboration. Though we are constantly reminded that the youth of the former Yugoslavia is hopelessly scarred by the hideous wars of the recent past, I refuse to believe there are no alternatives for the future. The language and power of non-violence can overcome obstacles of greed, ill will, resentment, and racism, and I look forward to dedicating my summer to precisely this challenge.