

Strategic Nonviolent Action – a course held in Belgrade by ERSTE Foundation NGO Academy, 7 – 8 June, 2018.



A two-days course on ‘Strategic Nonviolent Action’ was organised by the ERSTE Foundation NGO Academy and offered to non-governmental organisations from Eastern and Central Europe. The course took place in Belgrade, Serbia, 7-8 June, 2018. It was led by Srđa Popović, Siniša Šikman and Sandra Kačavendić from CANVAS. RENATE member, Aneta Grabowska, took part in this course on behalf of PoMOC Association from Poland.

Workshop description

This workshop brought together theory and practice of various nonviolent movements to evaluate the nature of nonviolent social change. Students had a chance to analyze historical and contemporary cases of civilian-led struggles, including movements for civil and political rights, struggles against dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, and movements for self-determination against foreign occupations. The workshop also sought to raise awareness on the effectiveness of strategic nonviolence, in contrast to armed struggle, as a tool of social and political change.

Modules covered during the two-days course included an introduction to nonviolent strategy, theories of power, the theory of ‘Pillars of Support’, nonviolent tactics, digital security, new media, defending democracy through social movements, and how to plan both forward and backward in a movement.

This workshop was intended for those interested in democratization, international development, conflict management, social justice, advocacy and grassroots organizing, human rights, and security studies. While there were no strict requirements for participants, it was important that they had a strong interest in some broad or particular movements around the world, to be able to apply the knowledge and principles learned.

Lecturers

Participants in this workshop were introduced to the world of nonviolence by leading experts in the field. Since its establishment in 2004, CANVAS (<http://canvasopedia.org/>) has worked with thousands of activists around the globe, in places like Venezuela, Syria, Ukraine, Cambodia, Zimbabwe, and Egypt. From the front lines of these dynamic citizen-led





movements, the organization has accumulated a wealth of unparalleled first-hand experience that it is eager to share. CANVAS instructors seek to empower participants with tools and skills for future use in their social and political endeavors. In addition to its work with activists, CANVAS presenters hold university courses on movements building across the world Ivy-League universities including Harvard, NYU and University of Essex, UK.

Srđa Popović is the Founder and Executive director of the Center for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS), a non-profit organization based in Belgrade, Serbia that aims to teach the use of nonviolence to make a change. So far, the organization has worked with activists

from 46 different countries, spreading the knowledge of the nonviolent strategies and tactics worldwide. In 1998, Popović founded the student movement “Otpor!” (“Resistance!”) which played a crucial role in ousting president Slobodan Milošević, former Serbian dictator accused of war crimes. After Milošević was defeated in 2000, Popović was elected to the Serbian Parliament where he served from 2000 until 2004. Apart from being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, Popović was listed as one of the "Top 100 Global Thinkers" of 2011 by the Foreign Policy Magazine. And in 2014 he was listed as a "Young Global Leader" by the World Economic Forum in Davos. Popović is also the author of the recent book *Blueprint for Revolution*. He is currently the 53rd Rector of the University of St. Andrews. He commenced the role of the University Rector for a period of 3 years from 1 November 2017.

Siniša Šikman was involved in the Serbian student-led OTPOR movement from the beginning, having first taken part in protests against President Slobodan Milošević and police brutality in early 1991, while still at school. He was one of the main organizers of all OTPOR’s campaigns until Milošević finally stepped down on October 5th 2000. While his background was in student activism and organisation (MP in the student Parliament of Belgrade University, founder of the Serbian Students Movement NGO), from the beginning of OTPOR (October, 1998) Siniša Šikman made a constant effort to expand it to a broad political movement, which happened in February 2000, when OTPOR became the People's Movement OTPOR. Since 2003 Siniša has been sharing his experience and knowledge with other activists as a CANVAS trainer. He has so far worked with participants from more than 40 countries, promoting nonviolent struggle worldwide.



Sandra Kačavendić is one of the most experienced trainers with CANVAS, with over 70 conducted workshops across the globe. Born and raised in Belgrade Serbia, she was involved



in student protests organized by OTPOR movement, a pivotal force behind ousting Slobodan Milošević's regime in the 90'. Since she joined CANVAS team nearly 12 years ago, she has been involved in development of CANVAS curriculum, research, geo-political analysis/studies and numerous other CANVAS projects. Sandra's expertise ranges from conducting trainings in non-violent action and strategies, capacity building, movement

management, campaigning, to consulting local movements, political activists, eco activists and artists. One of her strengths is the ability to adapt curriculum to diverse cultural, ethnical and gender groups. She has field work experience from several continents like Americas, Eastern Europe, Asia, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. As the leading trainer for African projects she has spent several months in Africa conducting back-to-back trainings with political activists. One of her greatest achievements was training now famous Egyptian group from Alexandria April 6, plus working with nonviolent groups from Iran, Syria, Iraq and Israel. Additionally, she holds a BA in Media and Communications, and was a debate team leader. As well as, she was the guest speaker at Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences in topic "Use of New Media in Social and Political Campaigns".

The time at the course in Belgrade was well invested and eye-opening for still fresh history of the Balkans freed from dictatorship not so long ago. It was great to meet and interact with people who contributed to this big change and shared generously so much. A rich library of videos is available here: <http://canvasopedia.org/videos/> and here: <http://canvasopedia.org/must-watch/> A great added value to the course was guided walking tour at the end of the second day offered by Siniša Šikman, a living witness of the difficult past. The stories shared and the objects pointed as crucial places during the OTPOR actions, spoke so much to each of the 15 participants from 7 European countries. The remains of the NATO bombings in Belgrade were a clear indication of what violence brings. Compliments to all the trainers! Thank you to the organisers for making the course happen!

Aneta Grabowska

(Workshop Description comes from the official information from the organisers)

Keywords / Tags: nonviolent, violent, violence, Belgrade, Serbia, CANVAS, Srđa Popović, Siniša Šikman, Sandra Kačavendić, Otpor, ERSTE Foundation, NGO Academy, PoMOC Association, workshop, course, training