

REPORT FROM THE FINAL CONFERENCE OF UCLSC PROJECT IN SLOVENIA

THE DATE : February 14,2022.

THE VENUE: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Milena janković

Dear Madam Perko, dear Mr Kristoff, dear distinguished professors and all present guests,

We have gathered today to summarize our joint results on this project. This project took place on the anniversary of the promulgation of the European Charter on Human Rights in 2020, the Palermo Convention from 2000., paying attention to its Protocol for the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of Trafficking in Human beings, especially women and children.

The goal of this joint international project is to raise the awareness of lost and stolen children, with reference to the violation of their human rights, regardless of the country, state system or time period.

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to our partners in this international project who achieved the unification of non-governmental organizations from Slovenia, Germany and Serbia in an effort to comprehensively treat the problem of child trafficking.

Then from the point of view of the states, we highlighted the problem as it had no borders, and that they should be united in their efforts to combat human trafficking.

From the point of view of the political regime, we tried to present the problem according to scientific principles and standards that apply to the fight against human trafficking and any type of exploitation and we pointed out the responsibility of public policy actors in our country but in the whole world as well.

I give special compliments to our fraternal partner on this project Zavod Samostojen si, without whose advice and coordination we would not have succeeded in the project. Zavod Samostojen si, is a non-governmental organization with a lot of experience in the field of civic engagement and initiatives to solve the issues of stolen migrant children.

Germany, our third partner in this project, Geraubte Kinder-Vergessen, deals with the children stolen during the Second World War and organizes meetings between child victims who were stolen as children during the Second World War. The achievements of this joint project should contribute to the fight against human trafficking.

And now, let me introduce you to our Campaign that deals with issues of stolen newborns from maternity hospitals in Serbia and Western Balkan.

When designing the campaign, we used a strategy that was seen in Barak Obama Election Campaign. It contains only two elements : 1. A question to the audience : „Who are we waiting for to change something?“ 2. A basic message that encourages citizens to do something: „ In fact we are the ones we are waiting for. We, ourselves represent the changes we strive for.“

Our Campaign started and ended with a single question : Do you really hear cryings? During the Campaign we insisted on the word “really” in order to awaken the conscience of decision-makers and members of public policy through constant repetition and speeches. Such emotionally powerful message to the public, was reinforced during the Campaign with street performance activities, visual and sound effects that imitate the suffering and crying as the most touching consequence of the suffering of newborns; victims' stories; professional actors and the general public, the collection of nearly a hundred "Messages to the European Union" by the participants of the events, the creation of a permanent work of art that will forever remind the public, and a citizen's initiative to change the legislation.

During the Campaign, we used international training manuals for the police and criminal inspectors who deal with this type of crime. Compared to arms or drug trafficking, it is evident that human trafficking is more profitable. The manual says: "Look for money and follow it and it will lead you to traffickers...", or "Trafficking is a highly profitable crime with low risk and light penalties." Knowing this, we are speechless.

The Serbian project "Do you really hear babies crying?" deals with the theft of newborns from maternity hospitals in Serbia. The first cases of missing babies in Serbia occurred in the 1960s, but most cases date from the 1970s and 1980s. According to the parents, since the 1960s onwards, newborns have been stolen after being declared dead under suspicious circumstances, without providing a death certificate or other supporting documentation.

They suspect that the newborns were stolen from them, immediately after birth, and sold to rich couples in Europe, due to the fact they were declared dead without an explanation or a doctor's confirmation.

This criminal act represents a violation of a basic human right - the right to life. Newborns are the most vulnerable group of people and the most vulnerable group of children.

Parents-victims believe that the state must have a comprehensive strategy to prevent trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and exploitation of mothers. To the extent that this harmful phenomenon arose as a consequence of the bureaucracy's improper behavior, it must be legally eliminated. Human trafficking combined with corruption makes it even more difficult to fight this type of crime. Bearing in mind that civil rights and basic human freedoms are more important than acts of bureaucracy, it is necessary to establish the principle of equal punishment for all. The strategic goal is to improve the national mechanism for the identification, assistance and protection of victims.

The proposal prepared by the legal team requesting the amendment of the law was submitted to the competent institutions. The proposal states that all current and future conditions must be regulated by law so that no one would think of committing an illegal act or causing parents to suspect that their children were kidnapped and/or sold at birth. On February 29, 2020, the Parliament of Serbia adopted the Law on Missing Babies, originally called the "Law on establishing the facts about the status of newborn children who are suspected of having disappeared from the maternity hospital in the Republic of Serbia". The law should allow the truth about missing children to come to light.

In the end, we can't help but wonder how it is possible for such an evil practice, such as human trafficking, to exist? What does that say about our civilization, society, progress, humanity and us as people in general?

All police forces, states, laws, societies and individuals around the world fight against human trafficking.

The Association of Missing Babies of Belgrade was founded in 2018. The Association was established with the aim of working as a regulatory agency of civil society and was established to propose the adoption of laws, by-laws and the rule of law. The president of the Association of "Missing Babies of Belgrade" Milena Janković, is a woman, a mother who has gone through all the horrors that a mother can experience in a maternity ward. It gave her the strength to continue the fight for the truth. As a lawyer and someone who knows the law, the founding of the association was a logical consequence of continuing the fight for the truth.

In the beginning, Mrs. Janković and her companions were only on the street. But then they might have heard Mr. Barack Obama's slogan:

"There will be no change (in the behavior of institutions) if we wait for someone else or another time." We are actually the ones we are waiting for. We ourselves represent the change we strive for. So, Mrs. Janković decided to create an Association and to continue her struggle through institutions.

With her work, she actively contributes to the requests of other parents in search of their missing and abducted children, as well as children who are looking for their biological parents.

One of the victims of these terrible events in hospitals is the president of our association, who has been fighting for years to find her missing child, whom she strongly suspects was stolen after giving birth, in the maternity hospital. After all these terrible cases, all the mothers received almost the same explanation: the sudden death of a healthy newborn child, the inability to see its body, very messy documentation after leaving the hospital and always the same message for all such cases that the mothers are young, and soon will have a child. They don't say, but it seems like they say: everything is so normal and everything is so OK. Of course nothing is normal.

Both events organized by our Association dealt with this difficult topic. Both events are organized outdoors with the idea that as many people as possible can hear, see and attend... not only invited guests but also passers-by.

The first manifestation was held in May 2021 in one of Belgrade's largest park, Kalemegdan, in the immediate vicinity of the city center. The event was organized under the name "Do you hear the babies crying". The event took place on a beautiful spring day and not only invited guests, but also deliberate walkers stood and listened to the program. About 70 people were present. The event consisted of several units.

The first part dealt with the presentation of guests and members of the project team and their short speeches. After that, the guest from Slovenia, our partner in this project, Mrs. Julija Perko, greeted the attendees. The second part was the performance and reading of the text of our famous writer, which was read with great skill by a famous actress. She also sang a beautiful song about love and family life. The last part consisted of reading shocking true stories written especially for this occasion by mothers, victims of terrible events, stolen children from the maternity hospital. All this was accompanied by the gentle music of the jazz orchestra that was on stage the whole time.

At the end of the program, the volunteers handed out forms to the participants, which they then filled in with their opinions about the whole event, as well as messages that will be sent to the EU. We have collected more than 40 messages. Everyone was so eager to participate.

The second event was held in December 2021 and took place in the very center of the city, at 50 Vojvode Dobrnjca street, among numerous well-known restaurants, bars, cafes, in the middle of a beautiful, small park. It is organized in the winter period, under a very low outside temperature. However, we managed to choose a day for the happening when there was no rain or snow. The extension of the second performance was due to bad weather conditions during autumn, with a lot of rainy days, and again due to the problem with the worsening situation with the corona virus.

The work on the mural required good weather conditions, because the work was constantly taking place outdoors. Compared to the first event and almost a hundred attendees, this time the bad weather conditions caused a smaller number of visitors, but despite everything, we collected about 30 messages that will be sent to the EU.

The second event was also conceived to be performed in several parts.

As during the first manifestation, the director of the association also addressed the attendees. This time the program was very diverse: the performance of a drama piece, specially written for this occasion, but also a musical play for the flute composed under the name "Silent Cry". Everyone was so moved by the program. Journalists were present and the event was mentioned in several media. This event also found an exceptional place on social networks.

The presentation of the exhibition, 8 drawings by a young academic painter, was extremely strong in its theme. The artist stated that she was very proud to have had the opportunity to participate with her paintings in such an event.

Each drawing tried to show the violation of human rights through artistic expression and to send a strong message of how painful it is. Since the entire event was next to the cafe, the billboard with the drawings was moved to the cafe restaurant, situated in the building where the mural is located, so that other visitors could see it for a few more days.

We can safely say that the unveiling of the mural is certainly the greatest success of this event. Mural entitled "Do you really hear the cry?" is a unique painting - a permanent work of art, painted directly on the wall 3.5m X 18ms, symbolizes the mother's relationship to motherhood, the secret of birth and the child being born. On the mural is the key that leads to the truth and encourages the memory of all victims of human trafficking, especially children.

Two artists, Maria and Stefan Sholm, parents of two children, were more than willing to work on this project. As we said, the artists were parents themselves, and felt the need to contribute to this project with their work. Both graduated in applied art, and have many years of experience in street art, wall painting and classical painting.

First of all, the mural was made with a lot of love, skill and professionalism. The colors, lines and expressiveness of the entire drawing marked the entire space. Even today, a several months after the event, people are talking about it. And that was the main goal of this Project: to make our ideas as visible as possible and to constantly remind us that we must be a better society and better people. The mural will remain there for many years to come, constantly warning us with its image.

In our petition, we expect the issues arising from the disappearance or theft of children to be dealt with quickly, energetically and professionally led activities, by law enforcement authorities at the national and international level in South East Europe, Europe as a whole and the world. For this purpose, they should have adequate legal means. We also pointed out that it would be in line with the audience's expectations if, in return, we received messages of support from the EU to the associations of parents and children in Serbia and our brother associations in the EU. That is why we put on the agenda of our campaign the Request for an examination of the constitutionality and legality of the Law on establishing the facts about the status of newborn children suspected of disappearing from a maternity hospital in the Republic of Serbia (Official Republic of Serbia, number 18/2020) and submitted it to the Constitutional Court of Serbia.

Also, the Initiative was sent to the National Assembly in the same course, in accordance with its competences. This was the final activity on Day 2 of the Event and the most serious impact of our public awareness campaign in the official sector of our society. It is expected to have consequences in legislative changes. We expect that this will raise interest in whether there is an adequate socio-legal response to the disappearance of babies from maternity hospitals, not only on the domestic front, but in the EU and the world. It is about a phenomenon that is claimed to have been present for decades not only in Serbia but practically in all countries. In Serbia, for many years, parents who claim that their baby was stolen from the maternity hospital have been asked to pass a law that would treat their cases appropriately.