

Barbara Müller

# **The Balkan Peace Team 1994-2001**

Non-violent Intervention in Crisis Areas  
with the Deployment of Volunteer Teams

Translated by  
Dr. Paul Foster

Barbara Müller

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## Introduction

### *The Balkan Peace Team - A treasure trove of valuable experience*

For seven years, from 1994 to 2001, the Balkan Peace Team employing small teams of volunteers, was active during conflicts taking place in Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo. It pursued new methods in order to respond to the pressing challenge: "Something must be done!"

Accordingly, up to thirteen peace organisations from western Europe and the USA formed an unprecedented coalition in order to find volunteers for operations of this kind, to train them and to accompany them during their activities. The project has opened up a way and, moreover, has become an example of how qualified foreigners operating in crisis areas can provide a meaningful contribution to resolving conflicts. More than nine active volunteers operating at the same time in Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo. Its effect could always be seen in small matters such as at the evictions in Split in 1995, for example: "... they were the first activists here in 1994, and when they arrived, this kind of eviction [the particularly brutal kind] came to an end", a Human Rights activist notes. Other effects can be found on the conceptual level: "*If reconciliation is going to happen, the work of the Balkan Peace Team must continue and be strengthened.*" This was the considered view in 1999 of the "Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms", Prishtina, Kosovo. However, until this point has been reached, several years passed, years in which the Balkan Peace Team felt very insecure.

Indeed, insecurity is something which accompanies this pioneer project at every turn. There are open questions: What, precisely, can our volunteers actually achieve? Again and again, the dynamics of conflict breaks in upon their endeavours as happened, for example, in 1995 in Croatia and again in 1999 in Kosovo, throwing up new challenges to which there are no certain solutions. Those participating are obliged to measure their commitment by the last objective, namely, to avoid war and violence or to overcome them. This is what drives them, and that which does not allow them to be satisfied with what they actually achieve.

When, in 1999, the long prognosticated war with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia finally broke out, there was a sense of personal failure, a feeling that no alternative could have been realized. "*We need to continue to work on the possibilities that peace teams offer*", said one of the initiators of the project. Yes, certainly, the potential in-

herent in non-violent intervention as far as the Balkan Peace Team is concerned is by no means exhausted, but it is the step from talking to doing. From wanting to do something to actually doing the job, and carrying out a project purposefully, having thought seriously about it beforehand. Just this happens again and again.

This book regards the experiences of the Balkan Peace Team as valuable and desires to bring these inestimable contributions to light. To this end, it seeks to examine motivation, impulse and the structural connections and associations, which come together in this coalition. It follows the teams in their work and describes what lies behind such abstractions as 'Networking', 'Human Rights Work', 'information channel' or 'dialogue', and what is implied by subtle, sensitive, painstaking, detailed work. High points and low points become clear, uncertainty and certainty.

It also attempts to show how the compulsive escalations of armed conflict provide new options for the teams involved and new tasks for the Balkan Peace Team. The observation of human rights and support for the local peace activists who find themselves constantly under pressure, is tough work for volunteers. No less hard is the task of getting people living in a profoundly divided society to talk to each other. So it is that volunteers are obliged to go through a hard school: *"I think if you manage to survive Otoc or BPT, then you are a very much stronger person"*, one volunteer has said.

Quite a number of volunteers remain in the region, and this is an advantage to their partners. One of them, a human rights activist, describes it as follows: *"It's not an end, it's not losing, because a lot of people from BPT are today in this area, because they have accepted these problems, they have understood them and they have entered into them. And at the same time these problems enter into them, into their hearts. And at the same time they know the language, after the period in BPT, after the school of BPT. Yes, it's true. And they are again with us, and we again cooperate with them, although they are a part of other organisations"*.

In keeping with its characteristically self-critical manner, the Balkan Peace Team has made all files accessible for this book. This enables the reader to gain certain insights into matters, which are normally withheld. In such cases, for example, experiences that have to do with difficulties come to light. These are to be found at every level: in the insecurity of leadership and strategy and, equally, in the processes of preparing and accompanying the teams. The book shows what progress the Balkan Peace Team has made in developing appropriate standards and procedures and what questions still



remain open, questions, which present themselves in connection with other projects, too. While the Balkan Peace Team as a coalition might well be unique, as a project organisation employing volunteers it is certainly nothing unusual.

Lack of money has kept the project within the tightest limits and hampered its natural development. A treasurer comments: *"The reason why we came as far as this on this project is that we would never allow ourselves to be stopped by a lack of material, computers, data, communication or anything else."* The book outlines the attempts to acquire money, the struggle to survive materially, and their consequences. It concludes with an attempt to recognize what has been achieved and also to classify the Balkan Peace Team. Looking ahead, it concerns the work of current initiatives active in further developing non-violent intervention who now see themselves faced with challenges which are very familiar after having acquainted themselves with the history of the Balkan Peace Team

### *Preliminary Note*

Together with Christian Büttner, I investigated the Balkan Peace Team during the years 1997 and 1998. This was made possible by the research association, Peace and Conflict Research (Lower Saxony), supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. Member organisations and the Balkan Peace Team itself have facilitated access to internal documents. We have been able to conduct interviews with many organisers and activists in the region, with organisers of other bodies and with volunteers. This has enabled us to acquire a broad view of the most varied perspectives of the Balkan Peace Team both from within and without.

We have accorded fictitious names to participants in order to maintain the confidentiality promised to them and, wherever possible, to preclude invasion of their private lives. This, with one exception, is also true for individual cases which are cited here as examples. The one exception concerns that of a conscientious objector whose case was published by Amnesty International.

For many of those interviewed, anonymity was not an important issue. Since the organisations are specifically alluded to and those taking part in them already known at the scene, conclusions as to their individual identity can hardly to be avoided.

If nothing is noted to the contrary, then the judgements and evaluations of situations in Croatia, Serbia or Kosovo reflect contemporary views and perspectives as these are expressed in the team reports and discussions within the Balkan Peace Teams.

The views and assessments of other authors are made clear in the text as they appear. They are cited either to describe matters of a higher order or represent external, contemporary views so to compare these with those of the team actually working in the country. Especially during the escalation phase of the conflict in Kosovo, which came to a head in 1998, we will find an interesting counter to those recommendations and evaluations, which maintain what is possible and what not.

In order to avoid a large-scale body of footnotes and commentaries, the relevant documents and literature alluded to in the text are briefly cited at the end of the chapter. A detailed list of references and sources concludes this report.

Responsibility for all kinds of error, misunderstanding and misinterpretation is to be attributed to the author.

Wahlenau, December, 2003

Barbara Müller

### *Sources*

Broken Rifle 2000; BPT June, 1999 Report; Interviews: Frances E. 1998; Raj S. 1997; Sebastian K. 1998; Müller, Büttner, Gleichmann 1999.

## **Chapter I War in Yugoslavia: "Something must be done!"**

### **(1) How the Balkan Peace Team came into Being: From the Idea to the Plan**

The Balkan Peace Team is inextricably bound up with the catastrophe which brought about the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 90's. This conflict with its appalling, apparently inexorable escalation, to which the international community reacted with total inadequacy, provided the essential impetus. There were three discernible strands of development which joined together to form the Balkan Peace Team.

The first impetus was the wish to support non-violent resistance in Kosovo which had developed since 1989. The second starting point was the call for non-violent escorts from threatened peace activists who had been working in Croatia since 1991, and the third inner imperative was the need to develop a civil alternative to UN troops and military intervention which had been a point of continued, intensive discussion in Western Europe since 1992. Various organisations respectively made it their job to tackle individual issues. In Kosovo, for example, the War Resisters' International were active, consisting of a worldwide network of anti-militarist groups with their headquarters in London. In 1992, the French organisation, Mouvement pour une Alternative Nonviolente (MAN) which comprised 300 persons organised into 22 groups throughout France, decided to support the non-violent struggle of the Kosovo Albanians after a short visit to Macedonia had provided the first contact.

The Federation for Social Defence in Germany is also showing a keen interest in non-violent alternatives to military intervention at this time. Questions with regard to escorts were directed to the International Peace Brigades, which have their headquarters in London who, in turn, concerned themselves with their organisation. What was finally decisive for the various components coming together were the varied personal interconnections affecting the organisations on the scene. The urgent demands from peace organisations within Yugoslavia not merely to look on at what was taking place, coupled with the intense, insistent reports on a war presented, so to speak, at our doorstep were seen as an obligation on our part to help, and, moreover, as a duty not to be shirked.

The idea that the presence of foreigners could have an effect on the warring parties motivated many people to risky undertakings. Examples of these are aid transports, marches, 'caravans' or delegations, but also the civilian observers of the European

Union and those belonging to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe – OSCE. Experiences in this area contributed later to considerations as to how things could be better managed. The Balkan Peace Team is the result of deliberations both regarding the conflict itself, and the possibilities of influencing it which were open to those who might be described as working ‘from below.’ The whole thing is a process which will take years and one which will have to take form within itself as it proceeds.

### *Escalation of the Conflict: The Beginnings, Kosovo, 1989*

The beginnings of the escalation take place in Kosovo when, in February, 1989, a general strike is put down by the army. In March, the autonomy of the province is suspended. This is followed by non-violent resistance, led by the LDK (The Kosovo Democratic League) whose leader is Ibrahim Rugova. The members of the resistance are Kosovo Albanians who pursue a strategy of non-co-operation in that they contest the legitimacy of Yugoslavian institutions, boycott elections and set up their own parallel concept of state independence. Under the weight of continued repression, they independently organize a revised education and health system. The second arrow to their bow is to internationalise the conflict in the fervid hope that the USA will intervene to their advantage.

### *1990: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia is Inevitable*

By 1990, the insistence on the part of individual republics to disassociate themselves from the union of Yugoslavia is quite clear. It seems less and less likely that the state can deal effectively with its difficult situation using the political means at its disposal. A plebiscite carried out in Slovenia underlines the seriousness of these efforts to detach themselves from the federation. However, despite this, the international community clings to the concept of Yugoslavia’s unity. Croatia, too, clamours for independence, while Serbian nationalists in the country who are also aware of what is going on are for another solution. They want to see a union of their settlements with other Serbian areas, which would mean a further partitioning of the country.

In July 1990, a ‘Serbian National Council’ is founded in Knin, the capital of Krajina which is mainly inhabited by Serbs. An opinion poll is organized and circulated

throughout the region, the result of which is that a majority is for autonomy in the area. This is a public affront to the authorities in Zagreb who are eager to establish their own state of Croatia.

All this takes place for the most part unnoticed by world opinion. In August 1990, Iraq occupies Kuwait. The attention of the international community as well as that of many activists for peace is directed to this area of the world for at least a year. Six years after this event, a young social scientist, MARIE-JANINE CALIC sums up the matter by saying: *"When in 1991 the Yugoslavian federation finally collapsed, political attention was still riveted on the consequences of the Gulf War...that one of the greatest diplomatic crises since 1945 could arise from the inner turmoil of Yugoslavia was something that hardly anyone could have seriously considered possible."*

In December, 1990, a congress assembled in Cologne to consider the theme of 'Europe without Armies'. At this assembly, Slovenia was cited as an example of a country where its independence was sought with peaceful means. What could organisations like the Association for Social Defence do which propagates the concept of non-violent defence against military aggression? At this conference contact was established between the Association for Social Defence and the Centre for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence in Ljubljana during which a plan for the peaceful defence of Slovenia was developed with feverish intensity. The War Resisters' International in London received the first enquiries from Kosovo about international observers in this year.

### *1991: New Frontiers Secured with Violence*

Kuwait is liberated by armed force in February 1991. The war in the Gulf is a controversial issue. The opponents of war try to avoid the last escalation using dramatic methods. Some of them volunteer to proceed to Baghdad and there present themselves as living shields, and others want to form themselves into human barriers in the desert against advancing tanks. Gandhi's idea of the 'living wall' consisting of trained volunteers setting up deliberate resistance to brute force had been revived.

New challenges are presented to the peace movements in Western Europe, challenges which first have to be inwardly processed. During the Cold War at a time when millions of people were actively engaged in halting nuclear re-armament by steadfastly working in groups and organisations committed to peace, they were primarily concerned with their own safety, and with their personal survival. Now this threat has

passed, other issues have pushed their way into the foreground. What is the attitude one should take with regard to conflicts in other societies and world regions? And what is our attitude in general to war and violence as a means of resolving conflicts? After the war in the Gulf came to an end in the spring of 1991, little by little the crisis in Yugoslavia gains more and more significance as a European trouble spot.

The first armed conflicts in Croatia at the beginning of 1991 create an atmosphere where *"fear is the dominant feeling. Self-organisation signifies, in most cases, militarisation, social mobilization, and the recruitment of males with guns. Thousands of small arms have been recently imported into the country. Everything is in place for a long conflict."* So writes MARKO HREN, social scientist and activist at Ljubljana's centre in April. After that, things follow thick and fast.

By the end of June 1991, Croatia and Slovenia have each decided for independence from Yugoslavia. The erection of frontiers in Slovenia provokes the Yugoslavian federal army to take action, which then exchanges fire with the newly recruited militia and also deploys its air force. The European Community sets up a negotiating committee, which in turn sets up a resolution to at least halt violence in the country.

When contacts had been established in the previous winter, a delegation formed by the Association for Social Defence departed for Ljubljana on 16th July, 1991. Once there, they were confronted with an extremely tense situation. *"The Centre for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence in Ljubljana requests support from the peace movement"*, the delegation reported.

Slovenia just manages to avoid catastrophe. While the Serbs can do without Slovenia, the other areas settled by Serbs in Croatia are important to Belgrade. The weekend of the 20th July is to be a 'Revolt for Peace' to which groups from all over Yugoslavia are called to be present in Sarajevo. Throughout the country, peace groups come together. However, the escalation of violence is quicker. Croatian and Serbian militia arm themselves and within Croatia itself the tendency to violent conflict now intensifies. The division of the country follows ethnic borders. For the first time, thousands of Serbs flee their villages in Croatia.

### *The Triennial of the War Resisters' International in 1991*

Only a few days later, at the end of July 1991, a conference took place in Belgium at another place. The War Resisters' International gathers together every three years at a large conference, and on this occasion met at Namur in Belgium. The national groups

of this worldwide organisation assembling at the conference concern themselves with the theme 'Peace on the Move'. The conflict in Yugoslavia is a new phenomenon for them at that moment. How are the 'ethnic' conflicts there arising within a crumbling block system to be understood? On Tuesday, 30th July, hardly a month after war had shattered Slovenia, Marko Hren, who is also on the executive committee of the War Resisters' International, reports on the situation in Yugoslavia to the whole assembly. In an accompanying essay, entitled *Essay on Borders*, he confronts idealists and activists as a whole who, for their part reject borders in general, with the question of how one can change borders. Is one at all at liberty to ask such a question or should one rather dismiss such an idea and talk about principles instead?

The War Resisters' International accepts the challenge. "*WRI was really willing to prioritise Yugoslavia,*" notes the secretary of the organisation at the time, looking back on this event. A theoretical concern with new conflicts and non-violent strategies is one thing, whereas actually managing them is quite another. And this is only possible when there are people in the affected country who wish to deal with conflict without using violence. To find such people, to understand their motives, to support them, to figure out solutions with them and in this way to activate the potential and knowledge of a worldwide network – that is what is meant by the practice of War Resisters' International.

*"I think the subgroup on Yugoslavia that met outside the bounds of any schedule was extremely important. It actually was an important body of people in terms of later work."* - this the reflection of a former WRI – secretary, Daniel M., and speaks of how many people were involved. Apart from Marko Hren, there are others from other organisations, notably Sabine M. of Germany who at this moment is working for the Association of Social Defence and who is also on the executive committee of the War Resisters' International along with Eugene D., who is the secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Alkmaar, Netherlands.

### *An Appeal for Support*

Marko Hren made use of the meeting in Namur to call for support for the newly formed peace groups in Yugoslavia. He offers the centre in Ljubljana as a meeting place and for making contacts. He says: "*Don't ask what is needed in Yugoslavia, because the answer will be - everything, since there are all kinds of problems, and they vary from village to village.*"

This and other appeals did not fall on deaf ears, even when the war cannot be halted. The question of 'What can we do?' concerned the peace groups of many countries in Europe from that moment on. The history of civil commitment in this conflict remains to be written, but it is important because it is the history of mutually experienced solidarity. At the same time, it runs precisely counter to the idea of a barricaded fortress of Europe, against increasing hate for foreigners and the sealing off of national frontiers against refugees. The amount of activities cannot be assessed. If we were to really understand the European context even in part, then we would have add groups and organisations from France, Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Scandinavia and those belonging to the Low Countries to the list. The few described here represent the many, which have played a role in former Yugoslavia since 1991.

*Training and 'Mr. e-Mail': The Communications- and Empowerment Approach of the Association for Social Defence 1991*

The Federation for Social Defence has undertaken the work of training in Croatia since the summer of 1991: *"Conflict trainer from Minden soon to be working in Yugoslavia"*, the local newspaper reported. In Zagreb there is contact with the newly founded anti-war campaign whose newspaper is also to be financed and in the course of setting up an office there is also to be fitted with technical apparatus. In Germany, the Federation collects donations for the maintenance of the centre's office in Ljubljana. *"The centre in Ljubljana is urgently dependent on financial support. The telephone bill for July alone accounts for more than DM 2000."*

At the end of 1991, Oskar K., the Federation's trainer, travelled down to Yugoslavia on a special mission. There, he installed modems at the peace centres in Zagreb, Ljubljana and Belgrade, which then, via mailboxes, enabled them to communicate abroad. This is why he is referred to as 'Mr. E-Mail'. He set up independent communication possibilities for the activists working there by making use of the electronic media which were just coming into operation at the time. Meanwhile, the conflict continued to escalate.

In the autumn of the same year, the first reports of tension between various ethnic groups in Bosnia come in. However, for the moment, Croatia has remained the main theatre of conflict, a conflict which, in the meantime, had taken on military characteristics. During these spells of tension, the civilian population found itself crushed be-



tween two fronts. Ethnic 'cleansing' is not a by-product in this war, but a systematic strategy. In November, the east Slavonian town of Vukovar is conquered after a siege lasting several months. Seventy thousand Croats flee.

### *The War Year of 1992*

In January 1992, the armed conflict between Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia can be stopped. After many abortive attempts on the part of negotiators from the international community to mediate between the warring parties, the fourteenth cease-fire is maintained. The so-called 'Vance Plan' places the controversial areas in Croatia under the protection of the United Nations' forces. More than 10,000 UN troops are employed in preventing further bloodshed along the crumbling demarcation lines. Croatia and Slovenia are recognized by the European Union as independent states, but almost a third of the Croatian state territory is not controlled by the central government in Zagreb. This is the interim result of military conflict. Just how the relationship between Serbs and Croats in Croatia will develop is now one of the greatest challenges facing peace groups in Croatia.

After the beginning of April when the European Union had recognized Bosnia as an independent state, and the 'Serbian Democratic Party' (in Bosnia) had called a Serbian republic, that of Bosnia-Herzegovina into being, hostilities began. Armed conflict continues and these cast a shadow over the peace negotiations, which have been renewed in May. While all the warring parties are made responsible for this escalation, it is felt above all that Serbia is primarily at fault for this. The European Union and the UN Security Council together decide to levy sanctions, and EU observers and the UNO representative in Sarajevo leave Bosnia. Thereafter, heavy fighting breaks out, and the town of Sarajevo is the target of more and more intensive artillery fire, and shells are responsible for the first massacre among the civilian population.

In June, discussions arise for the first time between the Western European Union and NATO as to whether Serbian positions should be attacked by air. The European Union, too, threatens military action in order to secure a corridor for aid to Sarajevo. At the same time, there are mass demonstrations in Belgrade against the war and against Milosevic. In August, Bosnian refugees speak of Serbian concentration camps and torture. The Serbs for their part make serious accusations against Moslems to the effect that these had murdered 6000 Serbs. In October, Bosnian-Serbian troops take the

town of Jajce. Thousands flee to the mountains. The first reports of systematic rapes are reported. At the beginning of December, Sarajevo is completely cut off.

In the attempts made by the international community to get to grips with the Yugoslavian crisis, many actors appear at various times with various mandates, but what is lacking is general agreement about how to tackle the problem in a concerted way. There is a mutual wish to end the violence in Yugoslavia. While, on the one hand, this is broadly proclaimed rhetorically, on the other it turns out to be, a matter which is only half-heartedly put into practice, and even when this is the case, it is anyway quite out of step with the dynamics of what is actually taking place. After the east-west confrontation, this new challenge finds precisely these European states unprepared.

### *The Debate on Humanitarian Intervention*

In a situation where there are no simple answers at hand, violence at least appears to be a simple solution. The longer a war lasts and the more devastating the self-induced paralysis of the international community becomes, the more vehement the debate on military intervention. Peace groups working in the war areas demand this, too. A rift opens up. 'No to intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina' say the War Resisters' International and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in an open letter in June, 1992, to the anti-war groups in Yugoslavia. The peace group in Sarajevo in July 1992, contradicts this by saying that only military intervention can secure survival, and that now there is no intention of entering into a discussion about alternatives. In Western Europe, the feeling that something really must be done becomes more and more imperative. There is the growing conviction that military options should be abandoned, and that alternatives to military solutions must also be given room for consideration.

In the autumn of 1992, the Federation for Social Defence invited attendance at its conference entitled 'Crisis Intervention: Olive, Blue or Non-Violent'. From the title it is already clear that the question of 'whether' there shall be intervention or not is no longer a matter for debate. The experiences of observer missions in former Yugoslavia are reflected upon, and not only these, but also those of Peace Brigades International active in other continents. In talks taking place outside the conference itself

there was a general consensus of opinion among members of the Federation that, *"we should go ahead ourselves and tackle the job of setting up a non-violent alternative to the UN forces."*

Peace activists are already on the way to war zones. The French organisation, Equilibre, for example, regularly travels to Yugoslavia in convoys, bringing humanitarian aid and it also tries to rescue children from acute situations by housing them with families in France. In Verona, in September, 1992, the 'Forum for Peace and Reconciliation' is founded which, as a permanent forum recruited from the civil society, will work out suggestions for a settlement of the conflict. A peace march to Sarajevo is to demonstrate solidarity with those under siege, and provide practical assistance for them. The Italian organisation, 'Beati i costruttori di Pace', organizes this initiative which meets with great enthusiasm in Italy especially.

As the ring around Sarajevo tightens in December, activists are able to enter the beleaguered city. *"Around 500 pacifists from Europe have been able to come to this capital under siege at the weekend. As the Federation for Social Defence reported on Monday in Minden, the group received a friendly and, to some extent, an enthusiastic welcome,"* the newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau reported in an article of 15th December, 1992, and spoke of a successful action. However, there is some doubt among the activists, who ask whether, where there is such a large number of people, these can't be active in more than a merely symbolic way. Kosovo again comes to mind. At the end of 1992, at an international conference, the Ljubljana Peace Institute concerns itself with the 'Albanian Question' and demands that the UNO intervene in time and in this case not with weapons, but by diplomatic means.

### *Intervening in Kosovo in time: The Preventive Approach of the War Resisters' International*

At the beginning of 1992 at a meeting of the War Resisters' International, deliberations were made about holding a seminar in Kosovo which could support the Albanians in their non-violent struggle. To this end, international experts and consultants in social defence should come together with local resistance leaders to work out a strategy of non-violence. Even at the planning stage, there was talk about possible steps to be taken later such as sending observers into the region. However, this was later considered as too big a job for the current resources of the War Resisters International. Could the Peace Brigades International, which had had experience in this field help

out here? The War Resisters' International, among other matters, spent the whole of 1992 on preparing this seminar. Notwithstanding, the security situation in Kosovo is still critical. The seminar has twice to be postponed and finally does not materialize at all.

### *Protective Escorts on Demand – the Hallmark of Peace Brigades International*

The Peace Brigades International had already developed their concept in the crisis areas of Latin America in the 80's and, as unarmed escorts, they accompany threatened persons or are in attendance on the premises of threatened organisations.

The idea of deterrence is based on a simple if somewhat risky calculation. Peace Brigades International make sure that their presence in the host country is known to people enjoying high standing in that country, in the higher ranks of military personnel, for example, the police and political circles and even in the embassies of influential countries upon whose goodwill the host country is dependent. In Latin America, for example, this is the USA in particular. Infringement of human rights, for example, is most certainly a consideration that can tip the scales when it comes to decisions about military aid for certain countries. As long as the top level in political and military circles wish to avoid being exposed for the infringement of human rights, then such unarmed escorts provide real protection.

On the other hand, should the elimination of undesirable opposition elements be worthwhile, despite the loss of status and financial support, then the whole thing becomes a little hazardous. It becomes a particularly delicate issue, for example, when there is no certainty as to whether the gangs of killers who carry out the dirty work actually know about the tenuous immunity of unarmed escorts. The conditions for success of the peace brigades present an intricate analysis, a sophisticated information structure and an alarm system which functions very quickly. A host country dependent on goodwill from outside and on a functional system which relays orders both in the political and military sectors right up to the murderers themselves is one of the conditions for their effectiveness. Basis organisations in the host country can rely on these structures to widen their scope for action and strengthen their infrastructure.

It is small wonder, then, that the example of the Peace Brigades is an inspiration. At its London office there are many requests for escorts and accompanying protection of the Peace Brigades International. By the end of November, 1992, the point has been

reached whereby one needs to know what possibilities there are for the members of the Peace Centre in Ossijek in Croatia to be protected from murderous attack, and to this end an investigation is organized to ascertain this. In December, 1992 and January, 1993, those commissioned to find out these facts are of the opinion that escort protection is no longer necessary.

### *1993: Methods and Means coalesce*

In January, 1993, the executive committee of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation with its seat in Alkmaar, Netherlands runs through its scenario: the United Nations Organisation sends 10,000 troops to Kosovo; how do we react? The idea in the heads of those attending is that of an unarmed presence of foreigners. US Americans organized such a thing in the 80's on the borders of Nicaragua at a time when a US invasion of that country was feared. Here, too, the basic idea is that, *"typically, where there is the voluntary presence of outsiders, this will lead to a decline in violence."*

At the end of January, 1993, a co-ordination committee of the Peace Initiative for Ex-Yugoslavia met in Germany, and here, too, its immediate concern was not with the war going on in Bosnia: *"In view of the current situation which could make an extension of the war in Kosovo possible at any time, we feel that it is sensible to try to assemble all the ideas we have at hand to see what can be done to prevent such an escalation."* One of these ideas was the non-violent alternative to UN troops. Basically, this is the concept of the Balkan Peace Team which, during these talks, was being sounded out.

In February, 1993, Daniel M. for the War Resisters' International and Sabine M. for the Federation for Social Defence and the War Resisters' International drive to Kosovo to hold talks on the spot about what should be done next. During these, the idea is put forward of a possible continued presence there of international volunteers. Of the many impressions which they gain, one is dominant: the presence of foreigners seems to have the effect of checking the ever more brutal assaults of the police. In their debates, they ask: when the Kosovo-Albanian Committee for Human Rights drives into the villages in order to mitigate the harshness of the situation – is that not just the kind of work in which international volunteers can be supportive?

Like stone falling into water, this idea widens out to produce interest among more and more circles. It was introduced to the International Conference on Strategy for

Ex-Yugoslavia, which then organized the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. At the end of March in the same year, twenty-one organisations gather in Basle, Switzerland. Half of them are national branch organisations of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the other half consists of Christian and secular peace groups from the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Croatia, Great Britain, Spain and Sweden. This exchange enables participants to express the incredible pressure which activists everywhere can sense. Oskar K. supplied the details on this occasion: *"One Kosovo Intervention Idea is to have 10-100 observers in different cities to bring out what they observe in order to build up public pressure. It will take a lot of energy."* The idea finds a positive echo among those assembled. Can tenable concepts be developed and turned into practical effect at last?

At the same time, the Anti-War Campaign from Zagreb and activists in Kosovo again request the presence of the Peace Brigade International. The circles close. Kosovo stands at the centre as an international presence and as the idea of prevention.

After a further two days of intensive work on formulation, Sabine M. has completed her project proposal on 'Non-violent Intervention in the Conflicts of former Yugoslavia: Sending teams of international volunteers' ready. What is the idea? Voluntary observers, first ten and then growing to a hundred, are to be present at various towns in Kosovo at events, in private schools and also in the offices of Albanian organisations. Their presence indicates a public body, since they are equipped with telephones, fax machines and vehicles, and can document possible infringements and publicize them. Where possible they are to mediate in conflict situations and supply threatened persons with unarmed escorts.

The plan, then, is a mixture of the Peace Brigade's idea of escorts, of experience gained from the presence of international volunteers in crisis areas, of dealing with conflict, of Human Rights and publicity work. It is also the result of experiences with symbolic operations against war from which it desires to disassociate itself. Looking back, Daniel M. describes the reasons, which speak for Kosovo and the chances available on the side of non-violent resistance for those committing themselves to the project: *"We saw as well that this was a classic case of there being a non-violent struggle appealing for international support. A key strategy of theirs was to internationalise their situation. And we, we needed to do what we could to help to speak with the voice of non-violence as well. I mean you don't want to be forever chasing a situation when it's too late and for once we seemed to be there in good time."* He also

stresses another aspect. *"When I first went to Kosovo in December 91, I managed to meet so many people in leading positions in the resistance, it was very short- and the next summer when we met Demaci in New York, in August, that got reported in the only paper the Albanians had at that time. You know people would say, we remember reading about that'. And so we were a much bigger deal in this relatively cut -off place that was just being ignored. And so it seemed more useful to us to apply our energies there than in Bosnia where we didn't have actual counterparts."*

However, things were going to turn out differently. The way to Kosovo was to become a detour.

### *Sources*

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## **(2) From Plan to Performance: The Balkan Peace Team**

From the time the first concept was committed to paper in the spring of 1993, it is almost a year before the first volunteers set off for the conflict area. One of the participants reviews this planning phase: *"We started to look at the whole naive way of thinking when we said to ourselves we could do it better than the army. You know, this sort of thing. However, when we tried to put it into practice, we discovered how hard it was. Of course, if we had had ten thousand, qualified, civilian, non-violent peace keepers in former Yugoslavia - wouldn't that have been a more effective use of money, than sending ten thousand soldiers in? That's all very well, but where are you going to find that sort of support? That was the kind of reality that overtook us."* Looking back, Eugene D. is astonished at how quickly the plan developed to become a negotiable project organisation. At the time, however, he felt that things were proceeding with painful slowness. This is not really surprising, since the war in Bosnia was drifting towards its gruesome climax.

### *The War Year, 1993*

The theatre of military operations for this year is Bosnia. This year saw the United Nations engaging more and more fiercely in military activity. In October 1992, the UN Security Council empowered NATO to militarily enforce the imposed flight ban over Bosnia. In mid-April, NATO carried out its first combat mission in the region. Military advantage between the warring parties in Bosnia had shifted dramatically from the point where the formerly allied Croation and Moslem troops were now fighting against each other. Territorial gains secured by one or other of the armies were lost again shortly afterwards, and the armed struggle was atomised into small, diffused, sharply- focused areas.

Sarajevo remains in the memory as a besieged city. At considerable risk, private persons, aid organisations, international organisations and UN soldiers transport the millions of tons of provisions and medical supplies dropped from the air or transported overland into the streets of the city in an attempt at least to alleviate distress if they could not stop the murder.

The Security Council's flight ban over Bosnia was devised to put an end to constant attacks on the civilian population and on those who were trying to keep the city's people alive. However, this did not deter the warring parties in the least. In May



1993, the UN Security Council declared several beleaguered towns as 'protected zones'. The defiance of human rights continues. The negotiating tactics of the international community and the pressure exerted on the warring armies using coercion and offers in order to bring about a ceasefire now, at the end of the year, have to be recognized as having failed. The warring factions hold fast to their military advantages.

Under the influence of constantly increasing horror, the idea of 'Mir Sada' (Peace Now) was born. Where possible, a large group of people are to drive from Split in Croatia to Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there to remain for several days in order to contribute to reducing the fighting and perhaps even to bringing about a ceasefire as well as initiating the desire to find a peaceful settlement.

Beati i Costruttori di Pace, the Italian peace organisation and 'Equilibre', a French humanitarian organisation, were the main organizers of this action during which many European countries including the USA were mobilized. Two thousand people join in at the beginning of August and get as far as the edge of the war area. There, the journey comes to an end for almost all those taking part. When it becomes clear that none of the military leaders can guarantee a passage without being harmed, the organisations bring the action to an end. The great majority of the participants, after first taking part in a demonstration in Mostar, now return to Split. Small groups succeed in making their way through to Sarajevo where they are received by representatives of the city and make acquaintance with initiatives there and with its citizens.

Critical assessment of these actions turns out to be diametrically opposed. While some emphasize the motivation for the march as a sign of hope and an act of multi-ethnic co-operation based on fraternal kinship, others are scathing in their condemnation of it: *"L'opération 'Mir-Sada' qui devait aller jusqu'à Sarajevo a été un échec"*, the news bulletin of the French International Association for Reconciliation asserts. *"This failure must be analysed in order to better organize actions in future."*

The lessons learned from failures such as these stimulate the organizers of the Balkan Peace Team Project to find forms which go beyond mere symbolic demonstration and from there to others which can achieve a more sustainable impact in the affected region. This is an impulse, which unites everyone in the next few months, stirs people to action. Former experience has taught us to be better prepared and has schooled us in better management.

In April, 1993, the two organisations, War Resisters' International and the Federation for Social Defence, take up the project idea. Since that time, the kernel crew of the organisation, so to speak, the founders, Daniel M. and Sabine M. have sought to bring other organisations into their ranks. It is hoped that in this way time and energy will be saved, and that in working towards the realization of one project, the strengths of the various organisations can be put to good use.

In May 1993, representatives of the Peace Brigades International and the French organisation 'MAN' (Mouvemente pour une alternative nonviolente) come together in London. MAN has been active in Kosovo since 1992, accompanies convoys belonging to 'Equilibre' in crisis areas, and works together with teachers in the underground. In order to work more efficiently, they need a team there, but are unable to create one with their current resources. The Peace Brigades International has experience with escorts and with teams operating in war zones. The Federation for Social Defence brings a lot of energy, regional experience, the capacity to work and money into the project. The International Fellowship of Reconciliation has experience in organizing training and preparing people for their subsequent tasks.

For a project like the Kosovo Peace Team "*we are the ones who are responsible*". Thus, the argument of the coordinator of the Peace Brigade International. The Peace Brigades, however, cannot testify to any expertise in the Balkans. This is something the WRI and the Federation (BSV) could bring into play, and so the Peace Brigades which, as a rule, go it alone would on this occasion 'only' be asked to co-operate as partners. There was agreement on a co-operative test phase. Now the plan had to be discussed with potential partners in Kosovo.

In May, Sabine M., Daniel M. and Ernst V., the director of the Federation for Social Defence, set off for Prishtina to obtain first-hand knowledge of the locality. There, the last publishing house has just closed, and since then ten of its editing personnel have gone on hunger strike. The atmosphere is tense. No one knows what will happen if one of the strikers dies. The exploration visit on the part of Western Europeans arouses great enthusiasm among those spoken to in the resistance groups. An international team is welcome and the sooner it is here the better, they say. However, just how the internationals will be able to get hold of a work permit is something no one really knows. Serbian authorities are known for their strict control and surveillance, and access to the country is something akin to passing through the eye of a needle.

After this trip, the concept is re-considered. The independence of the peace team must be a matter to push into the foreground, otherwise the Serbian authorities, who are responsible for issuing residence permits will automatically assume that foreigners are supporters of the resistance movements. The question remains as to how one can make the acceptance of teams attractive to the authorities. The tasks and objectives of the teams' work are formulated in neutral terms. The theme of escorts is kept in the background. There is no more talk of a hundred people, but only ten.

### *Paris in the Summer of 1993: The Balkan Peace Team Takes on Form*

There has been enthusiasm for the plan for some time and the list of interested persons and organisation gets longer and longer. In June, this growing circle of interest comes together in the French capital. Their host is the French organisation, MAN (Mouvement pour une alternative nonviolente). The meeting in Paris becomes the cradle of the Balkan Peace Team. It receives its official title and acquires an effective system of co-ordination.

Those responsible for organizing the interested organisations change the name of the project into 'Balkan Peace Team', since it could be that it will have to work in other countries before a move into Kosovo is possible. They engage a coordinating group which keeps abreast of what is going on there. Like a magnifying glass, the Balkan Peace Team now begins to focus intensely on how to gain access to Kosovo, employing all the experience gathered in previous activities as separate working organisations and peace groups, a thankless job if ever there was one!

Gradually, matters boil down to what at first turns out to be a tactical variant, namely, that of making the first approach via Croatia. Why Croatia? Having at one time gained access to Croatia, this might well serve as an argument for the Serbian authorities to allow the teams a work permit in Kosovo. In Croatia, too, the presence of foreigners for local activists can be advantageous as repeated requests show. It is easier to work in Croatia. One does not require a visa; there is greater dependence on pressure from outside as far as the Croatian government is concerned, and there is only one new language to learn. It is possible to build up an infrastructure, gather experience and after that one will be immediately fit for action as soon as the doors to Kosovo are open.

In addition to this, there is also the 'Antiwar-Campaign Zagreb' in Zagreb itself, which would support us as partners, and in any case and would, of its own accord, be

interested in the presence of international activists. In 1993, activists in Croatia had come to realize again and again that the police were not particularly impressed when they, as local inhabitants, tried to proceed against them for discriminating against minority groups. With this in mind, Anna D. entered into what she called 'negotiations' on the Balkan Peace Team, negotiations which, for her, took an incredibly long time. Finally, in the summer of 1993, Jacques B. of the Peace Brigades, took over the initiative and discussed with her what the essential expectations of a team could be. From this, a formal request was drawn up by the Antiwar-Campaign and the latter is now able to pass on the information to the Peace Brigades for further processing by the Balkan Peace Team. At the next meeting in co-ordinating the Balkan Peace Team on 19th July in Verona, this request becomes in effect a ticket to Zagreb.

The idea of getting a foot in the door for work in Croatia takes on form at this meeting. Three experienced volunteers in Croatia are to be sent as quickly as possible on an orientation phase. Afterwards, the final decision about staying will be made, and the possible areas of intensive work for a further four months clarified. The first announcements are made in the relevant magazines belonging to the movement: *"The Balkan Peace Team seeks volunteers with experience in non-violent activity to work for at least half a year in either Croatia or Serbia."* However, in September of the same year things come to an abrupt halt because there are not enough qualified personnel to set up a team. January comes into consideration as a possible alternative timeline. Things don't look too rosy for the next meeting of the Balkan Peace Team meeting in September! On the other hand, there is no sense in making premature decisions merely to fulfil expectations.

On 15th September, twenty-one people from fourteen different organisations from France, Germany and Switzerland meet in Paris together with the international offices of the large network of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and WRI as well as other organisations such as the Peace Brigades. A volunteer organisation called the 'Brethren Peace Service', a US-American is also represented whose members also work in crisis areas in Europe. However, there is no hope yet of an entry into Kosovo or a quick access to Croatia, and this could rapidly dampen developing interest in the project. Notwithstanding, the meeting ended with what the coordinator summed up as *"a whole lot of important decisions"*. They are what give the Balkan Peace Team its substantial structure. These are: the description of concrete task plans, what the function of individual bodies is to be, making decisions about what direction to take as far

as the main tasks of the teams are concerned, which are supporting local activists in their work for peace and the establishment of human rights. It also decides not to develop its own independent activities. Financial contributions of future member organisations should lay down a firm basis. Now it is time for those who have shown interest so far to decide whether and in what form they wish to accept responsibility.

### *Between Principles and Pragmatism: The Internal Dynamics of the Balkan Peace Team*

The Peace Brigades International finds itself faced with several dilemmas. As far as its commitment in Yugoslavia is concerned, it is in two minds. Jacques B., its representative, would like to make use of the experiences of the Peace Brigades International in the Balkan Peace Team. And not only this; there is much debate about a Peace Brigades' coalition. Finally, the office of an international co-ordinator is thoroughly examined. John M, who from this position co-operates in looking after the interests of the Balkan Peace Team, finds himself more and more under pressure from all sides within the organisation during the autumn of 1993.

For the International Council of the Peace Brigades, the steering committee, it is important that the Balkan Peace Team's project development closely follow its own principles. This claim leads to numerous demands and improvements from the Peace Brigades to the Balkan Peace Team, so that a proper handbook has come into being which is referred to as 'the yellow bible' because the suggestions in it were printed on yellow paper. This 'bible' then formed the basic principles of the project. To it also belonged a questionnaire for volunteers as well as most of the criteria of selection relevant to volunteers, the concept of training and the process of selection. Later, the principle of impartiality for teamwork in Croatia is precisely defined, the Croatian project overhauled, rules introduced for the alarm network and a duty agreement worked out. The planned exploration in Kosovo is postponed until some time in the future. The other organisations also have their standards. However, the role of critical observer of principles is something adopted by the peace brigades. Basically speaking, this role is a task which is freely accorded them, but not one which could act as brake on affairs.

The internal background and disputes within the peace brigades is a matter which remains pretty obscure for outsiders. Delays which make it possible to consider experiences are interpreted as taking a superior attitude, while the Federation for Social De-