

From the blackboards and school desks, children go to the Community Youth Councils and act outside the school walls.

The Community Youth Councils are the place where the expression, the worries and the materialization of the ideas of the participating youngsters take place. The committees and the groups of the C.Y.C. characteristically focus on humane, ecological and cultural concerns.

The dramatic events in our neighboring country cannot leave unaffected the members participating in the institutions of the C.Y.C, in which the most important questions are asked concerning the philosophy of the European Union, the justification of the bombings, the role of NATO and what its aims are. And even if they are difficult to understand for a young person, someone has to explain:

**How will the environmental balance of the area be preserved?
Who will take on the responsibility for the child victims of this war?**

AND FINALLY, SOMEONE HAS TO EXPLAIN TO US WHAT WE MEAN
WHEN WE SAY **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE**

IS THE RIGHT TO LIVE A HUMAN RIGHT?



NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL of GREECE

Forum **"All different, all equal"**

Environmental Network

Environmental Education Network

Cultural Youth Network

Community Youth Councils Network

ΕΣΥΝ

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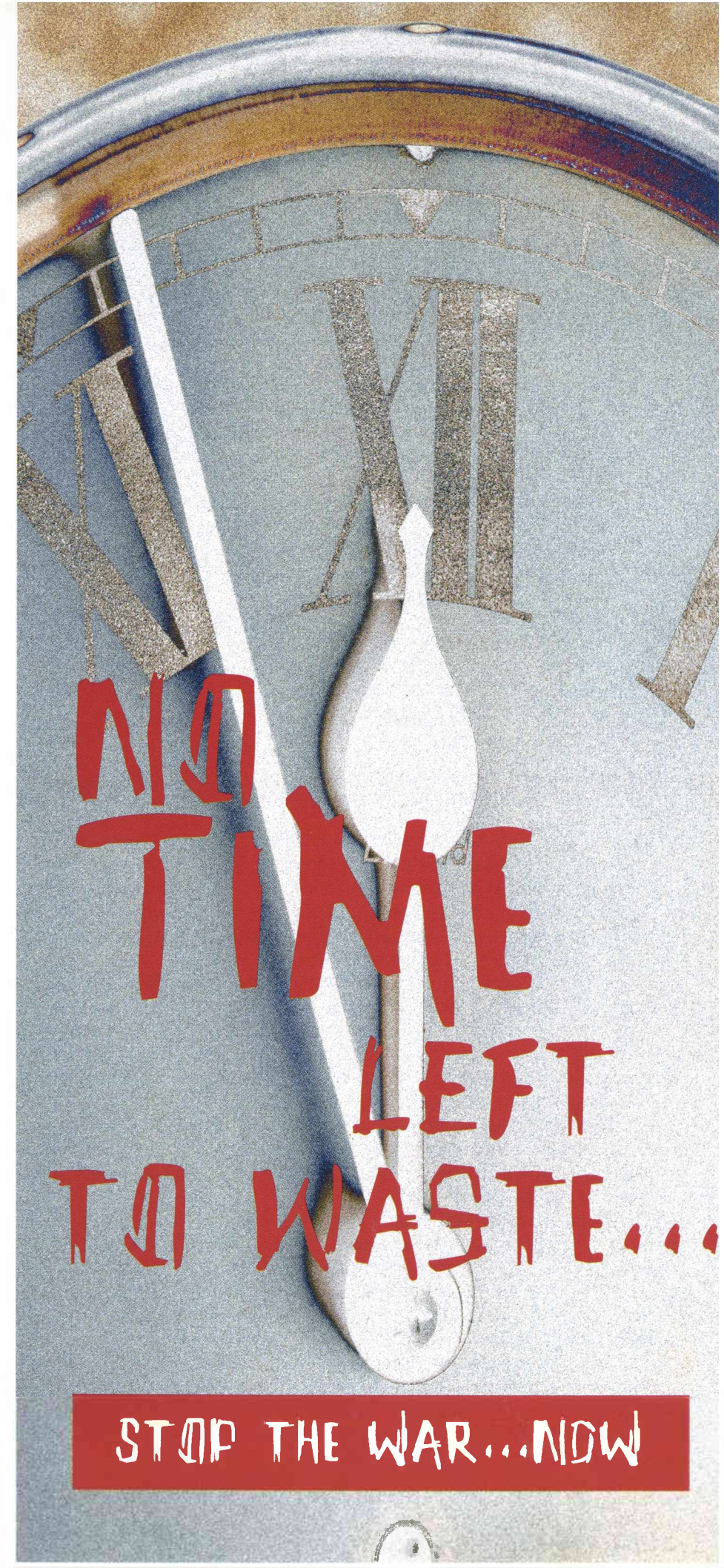
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THE BALKAN WAR: THE OPINION OF YOUTH IN GREECE

Since the end of March Yugoslavia is being bombed by NATO as an act of "respect" towards the human rights of the Albanian minority of Kossovo.

Since then and up to now many civilians - mainly women and children- have lost their lives, whereas along with the military targets, the curse of this terrible and stupid war is wiping out the monuments of civilization and continually polluting the environment in various ways. We are witnessing, in other words, a country being methodically erased from the map.

The paradox in this case is that this war seems to enjoy the approval of a lot of young people in Europe, with the exception of the Greek youth who protest against the choice of violence because we are deeply worried about the escalating human, cultural and environmental destruction that is being caused.

As we fight for human rights, civilization, the environment and the improvement of our society, we strongly believe that war or any other form of violence, doesn't solve problems, doesn't motivate citizens to face what is right and doesn't teach young people and children to protect human rights and individual decency, to protect the cultural heritage of all peoples on the planet and to love and protect the environment in which we live.

The damage caused by the bombings to the struggle to promote respect for human rights, the environment, the culture and to our souls is described in detail by the five NGO networks which are dealing with these issues and represent over 150 organizations in Greece.

1. HUMAN RIGHTS



The essence of human rights is in total opposition with the concept of violence and enforcement. Human rights originate from the value of human decency, which is born with a human. Respect in this fundamental principle has meaning when we understand its meaning. Imposed respect for diversity is of absolutely no value whatsoever.

For many decades defenders of human rights have been setting up organizations which explain their meaning patiently and persistently, they have been fighting to establish them and have been training new generations to understand, respect, accept and embrace diversity. We help societies understand the wealth offered in our lives by different things.

The "humanitarian bombings" as a means of imposing human rights set at risk all efforts that have been made up to now, considering human rights to be a field which can be framed by and outlined with borders and anti-personnel mines.

Since it is clear that military leaders are being trained in a mentality which is far from any concept of respect towards life, any absence of violence, any acceptance of what is different - the army itself is based on the concept of assimilation and elimination of any differences- it is extremely dangerous to trust bombs and tanks with the most important issues of human rights.

Also, we, the volunteers for protection of human rights, are called to make compromises. We achieve, for example, better treatment of religious minorities and wait patiently until we can achieve the full extent of its rights, or insist that immigrant children go to school even if their parents have no legal permission to stay in a country etc. We always have to compromise a little and things move slowly but steadily and differences

fade and disputes are smoothed out. But we strongly refuse to enter the mentality of priorities and justify the killing of innocent civilians. We refuse to accept that the killing of civilians in Serbia by NATO, as a revenge for the killing of innocent Albanians by Serb nationalists, is morally superior. We refuse to choose which dead to cry for and murderers of civilians to make heroes of. For all of us, anyone who murders civilians is a criminal - regardless of their excuses - and all victims - Serb or Albanian - were fellow citizens whose memory we honor and wish that the earth which covers them now is light.

2. THEIR WAR, OUR ENVIRONMENT.



As young people and volunteer citizens, actively cooperating to promote environmental preservation and education, we feel that we are absolutely responsible for and obliged to make known and emphasize our views.

We express our dislike towards:

The destruction of biological areas, animals and plants (among which there are many rare migrating birds), and of the natural environment of Serbia and its people. The wild animals of the area suffer the same fate as the people. Unfortunately, it has already been reported that there are some birds and big mammals, which have taken refuge in countries such as the FYROM and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The destruction of religious monuments, archeological and historical sites, not to mention of the cultural life of Serbia and its citizens.

We express our anxiety about:

The huge quantities of fumes of suspended particles (nitrogen oxides, carbon hydrates and other compounds), which continue to be emitted by the 15, so far, bombed distilleries and petro - chemical plants, creating toxic clouds. Compounds which can cause damage, primarily to civilians (asthma crises, respiratory and cardio vascular problems, and even cancer), and to any living organisms in Serbia. Apart from climatic conditions in Serbia and elsewhere which have been adversely affected by the bombings, the physical and chemical characteristics of these emissions cause irreversible damage, by interfering with the cleaning processes of mechanisms which maintain the respiratory system; and through the transfer of toxic substances (dioxines, PCBs, etc), which at least in small amounts have been absorbed by all organisms through mainly their respiratory systems.

So far the chemical substances that have escaped the four burning factories of fertilizers and other products, which are capable of irreversibly harming organisms, even in small quantities, (animal and plant alike), have caused cancer and genetic mutation, with immediate impact on normal development and reproduction of all living things in the area.

The use of uranium by NATO in their attacks on Serbian targets releases tiny suspended particles, which, being radioactive, can cause serious damage to all organisms living in the area where they fall - even to the soldiers that will live in them- that is, the whole country.

The dissolving and absorption of all the above substances, via rain, through the soil, surface and underground water, has both a direct and indirect ability to cause short-term and long- term diseases to the Serbian population and to the rest of the organisms, resulting in cancer, tissue and genetic mutation. Moreover, some of the most important sources of underground water currents in the region are located in Serbia.

We express our fears given the fact that pollution knows no boundaries:

For the transfer of the above chemicals and especially of gaseous fumes. Because of the combination of meteorological conditions in the region (the Balkan countries, and also Austria, Hungary and Italy), there is an immediate danger to the environment and public health. That is a possibility which will increase for as long as the war carries on and escalates.

For the bombing of the two chemical units for the production of chlorine and hydro-fluoride (whose raw material is mercury), which will effectively spread highly toxic substances in the atmosphere, which in turn, will cause an irreversible ecological catastrophe of Biblical scale (large numbers of living organisms will die, the natural environment will be completely destroyed, crippling the food chain), for decades in Serbia and its neighbouring area. This is a possibility which will continue to increase as the war continues and escalates out of control.

For the return of the refugees back to their homes, and under the correct conditions according to the "humanitarian" declarations of NATO, (who started and continues to bomb and pollute the natural environment of Serbia), destroying at the same time every source of financial and cultural life, in places where refugees form the biggest part of the native population. The prospect of return is continuously decreasing, having its consequences on the refugees (living under sub - human conditions in concentration camps) and on Europe itself. It would be naive anyway to believe that fires can be put out with bombs.

3. THE MEMORIES OF CIVILIZATION.



Bombs and missiles of any kind and size have no respect for anything.

Along with military targets, this terrible and stupid war wipes out the cultural monuments of a country. Monasteries are bombed, buildings and other monuments, which represent the history and culture of a country and its people, are obliterated.

Forty-two monasteries and churches of Byzantine origin, Moslem mosques, and ancient monuments, are included in the targets of the NATO bombing sites in the Kossovo area and the rest of Serbia.

Great damage has been caused so far at Gratsanitsa, where a 14th century monastery, which held holy icons of saints painted by artists of the Byzantine School from Salonica was hit, and the neighboring house suffered even bigger damage. This is a monastery which was founded by the same monk who later founded the Monastery of Hiliandario at the Agio Oros.

The Hatoum mosque at Diakovitsa was destroyed, and greater damage has been caused on the churches and mosques at Prizren.

Other monuments and historical centers in Pristina and Belgrade, along with monasteries at Sopotsani, Studenitsa and the medieval city of Kotor, did not escape destruction either.

These monuments are part of the world's cultural heritage, whereas the bombs only cause annihilation and destruction of historical, national and religious memory in Yugoslavia.

To what end are all these crimes being committed? Only a monstrous dementia can characterize this war. No one can really understand what purpose this destruction, this evil, actually has.