MONTH OF ROMA WOMEN ACTIVISM CAMPAIGN

Women Space in cooperation with Roma women organizations and initiatives from entire Serbia, fifth time in the row organized Month of Roma Women Activism campaign. Campaign was implemented from March 8th, the International Women Day through April 8th, the International Roma Day.

The theme of this year’s campaign was the rights of Roma women to take part within the public and political life, in the scope of recent parliamentary elections for national councils of national minorities, as well in making decisions about their own health, education, employment, marriage, family, etc. The main slogan of the campaign FOR Active Participation of Roma Women within the Public and Political Life, in the subtext had questions addressed to all those who believe they are entitled to be decision makers in the form of a questions - In whose name? Who represents our interests?!

By participating of Roma women on March 8th women's march in Belgrade, we started this year’s Campaign. From this event, the message “Who represents our interests” was sent to the public and politicians, and we have expressed dissatisfaction with the complete lack of topics regarding Roma women problems within the political parties’ programs that took place within the pre-electoral race.

During 30 days of the campaign 29 actions were implemented in 19 cities and municipalities, Ilandža, Deronje, Novi Sad, Novi Bečej, Pančevo, Sremska Mitrovica, Belgrade, Lazarevac, Smederevska Palanka, Kruševac, Aleksinac, Niš, Prokuplje, Leskovac, Lebane, Vranje, Bujanovac, Pirot and Bela Palanka.

The participation of Roma Women Network at the conference in the Office for Human and Minority Rights, in cooperation with the National Council of the Roma national minority and the OSCE Mission in Serbia, which was organized on April 7th, on the occasion of the International Day of Roma, as a result of the requirement of the activists to put in agenda of marking this important date on a high level, Roma women activism take an equal place and present challenges and achievements of Roma women in Serbia. Some of the topics the Network presented were: activist contribution to the political process; Roma women on advisory bodies; the visibility of violence against Roma women as a social problem, the contribution of SOS helpline in Roma language for
women and children victims of violence; local action plans for improving the position of Roma women; one day in life of Roma woman, examples of feminist activist work.

Now traditionally, Roma Women Network activists have initiated and participated in a public hearing on the situation of Roma women in Serbia in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, this year organized by the Gender Equality Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Office for Human and Minority Rights. The public hearing was organized on the International Roma Day on April 8th, which was the final step in the campaign. The theme of the conference was the situation of Roma women in the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

These activities increased the visibility of activities for improving the position of Roma women in society we live in. During the past month various media published 94 positive reports about activities and life of Roma women in Serbia, which is an average of three reports a day.

**FEMINIST SUMMER SCHOOL**

Sixth Feminist Summer School (FSS) organized by Women Space in the beautiful ambient of the Bor Lake from 22 to 27 July, 2014, with aims of developing critical thought in young women, learning about women’s movement in the region and the world, strengthening of female solidarity, and supporting the women from marginalized social groups.

Since a lot of women in the region showed great interest in summer school, this year FSS had full regional character. The participants joined from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia. Besides 32 participants, present at the FSS were also volunteers, facilitators and women who organized the school; total of 50 women spent 6 unforgettable days talking about subjects of patriarchy in our lives and possible ways of resistance, violence through feminist approach, personal feminist questions about discrimination against women, short history of feminist movement, practical feminism and the workshops of empowerment through dance and movement and making political messages using stencil technique. We spoke about feminist critic of neoliberal capitalism and its effect on women; we talked about politics of identity and/or politics of solidarity, connection between veganism and feminism. This year, as well as in the previous years, full attention of participants was given to two important topics in feminist movement in Serbia – lesbian existence and position of Roma women.
ANTIFASCIST PROGRAM

Antifascist Studies

In 2014 we also continued with the organization of the discussions that dealt from different aspects with current topics that indicate the existence of continuity of ideas of fascism, its existence, and various forms of existence in contemporary society, as well as the dangers the growth of fascism and fascist ideas brings, but also the ways and possibilities which the society can oppose to these phenomena. The first part of the lecture series took place in the period from March until June and had a total of 79 visitors, and included:

- March 1st - **Russian Phenomenon, or On Elimination of Erroneous Serbian Policies** is a discussion incited by the current numerous reactions from the human rights defenders followed both the preparation and the Olympics Games itself Sochi and that and all regarding legitimization of the repressive Russian regime. The question of possible international activities impact remains open, regardless if these are related to sport or abolishment of repression and establishment of human rights within a sovereign state. In the scope of the lecture led by Dr. Đokica Jovanović, we acquainted with the history of Russia and its ruling ideology, as well as their influence on the political tendencies in Serbia.

- April 5th - **Society of the Spectacle Vs. Wonderland** is a topic that is recognizing fascism in its core form, but also compromises done due to human need to satisfy all of the senses. Are these methods, but also needs themselves sole construction in order to create and perpetuate the society of spectacle? Who benefits from the spectacle and what is its purpose, are some of the questions that we tried to give answer to, together with Prof. Jelisaveta Blagojević, Ph.D.

- June 14th - **Fascism in a Motion Picture: The Spectacle of Ideology of Destruction** is a lecture that aims to criticize Fascism and Nazism presented through significant achievements of modern Italian political cinema (Rossellini, Kavani, Pasolini, Visconti), but also through access to this subject in the films of contemporary European, American and Serbian cinematography from the historical (Spielberg) and genre (Tarantino) to copyright (Fassbinder, Fellini, Schlöndorff, Haneke) and alternative works, which treat this problem in historical as well as contemporary context of neo-Nazism and the culture of destruction (eg. domestic films “Haircut" and “Life and Death of a Porno Gang”). In particular, we talked about eroticisation of fascism and the place of woman in it. The discussion on this topics was led by Dr. Ivana Kronja, filmologist, professor at the University College of Fine and Applied Arts in Belgrade.

- June 27th - **Nazism and Homosexuality: Terror of the Hegemonic Masculinity** was a lecture led by Miloš Jovanović, sociologist and research assistant at the department of Sociology, University of Niš, and gave insight in applying the concept of the **hegemonic masculinity** on the gender dynamics of fascist societies (above all Nazi Germany), with special emphasis on the place and treatment of homosexuality in these societies.

In the scope of the Week of Fight against Fascism from 2 to 9 November, were organized lectures, workshops and socializing with the aim of cherishing and promoting antifascist history and values. These activities are intended for and open to all who want to expand their theoretical knowledge of history, sociology, philosophy, and practical application of creative ideas - as well as for those who want to become involved in activism. The events were attended by a total of 74 people.
• November 3rd – With Staša Zajović, an activist of Women in Black peace organization, we discussed on the topic of the Human Rights Defenders Safety, who are under the attacks of fascism, and the ways of survival of the critical thought nowadays.

• November 4th – About Normalizing Fascism in our time, discussed a sociologist Đokica Jovanović, PhD, and reminded us of recent significant cultural events in our country that falsify socialism or equate chetniks with partisans. He also talked about falsification of Belgrade liberation, commemoration of racists in our culture and other dominant discourses show us the pervasive attitude of state representatives in all areas of social life.

• November 6th - The discussion entitled Fascism of Humankind was held by long-term activists from our city: Aleksandra Žikić, Ekofemina group and Ana Zorbić, Women Space. This was an opportunity for reviewing of human relationship to animals that are not human and whether there lies the answer to humankind problems?

• November 9th - On the International Day of Fight against Fascism, was a lecture The Memorial to our antifascist predecessors: Women peace and feminist movement between two world wars, during which a historian Dr. Gordana Stojaković, one of the founders of S.T.R.I.K.E group from Novi Sad, talked about correcting historical injustice to women and left movement: neglecting the existence of feminist and peace workers in Yugoslavia, with the heritage of women’s efforts since the 19th century, and also emphasized the importance of the continuity and similarity to feminist and peace movement today.

**Antifascist Actions**

Women Space, together with other antifascist groups and organizations, commemorate these important dates through the following activities:

• **March 8th, the International Women Day**, participation in March 8th women's march organized by Women in Black Network.

• **March 21st, the International Day Against Racism** – together with Antifascist Collective Niš, we organized a standing action in the center of Niš and distributed printed materials.

• **April 8th, the International Roma Day** - putting up a street banner with the inscription April 8th - International Roma Day.

• Peace action "Food, NO Bombs!” on June 7th, together with the organization Women in Black from Belgrade, organized to mark the 15th anniversary of cluster bombs attacks on Niš, but also regarding recent floods that left many citizens homeless, and even lead to lives were lost, for which our country wasn’t ready for.

• **Pride Day** on June 27th by giving promotional materials dedicated to this day and hundred balloons in rainbow colors were symbolically released in to the sky.

• **The International Day Against Fascism** November 9th, by organizing a press conference and putting up banners with the inscription Week of Fight against Fascism at two points in Niš.
• **Human Rights Day December 10th**, through participation in a press conference dedicated to the situation of Roma in Niš, organized by Human Rights Board Niš.

• **International Migrants Day December 18th** and **International Human Solidarity Day December 20th**, by collecting winter clothing for migrants in Bogovada.

• Visit the **Migrant Reception Center** on December 31st, and delivery of the collected wardrobe to migrants, together with an informal group Zero Tolerance Serbia.

### ADVOCACY FOR SYSTEM SOLUTIONS OF PROBLEMS THAT ROMA WOMEN FACE IN SERBIA

This year, Women Space continued to contribute to the introduction and implementation of system solutions for improving the position of Roma women.

**Strengthening the capacity for improving the health of Roma women and their access to health care**

In the following process of strengthening the capacity of Roma women activists from South Serbia, aiming to learn about workshop facilitation of the right to achieve health protection and improve general health among Roma women, was held the training for activists of Roma Women Network. Together, we discussed the importance of women workshops, skills needed to successfully implement them and working in groups, and the methods that can be empowering for the participants. Moreover, we examined important topics that will be further discussed with Roma women in their communities. Although some of the participants learned about women workshops for the first time, all activists gladly took part in this training and stressed the importance of direct working with women.

**Workshops on the Right to Achieve Health Protection and Improve General Health among Roma Women**

After successfully adopted information on the training, our friends, activists from ten cities in April and May held a total of 50 workshops on the right to achieve health protection and improve general health among Roma women.

Five workshops were held in each cities, Bujanovac, Preševo, Vranje, Leskovac, Vlasotince, Surdulica, Medveda, Lebane, Prokuplje and Kuršumlija, where women could be informed and think about women's rights in the family, the right to health, health care and equality in the health care system. These topics were rated as very important and interesting, and over fifty women actively participated from workshop to workshop. They openly discussed about their daily lives, the problems they are facing, whether they have enough information on this topics, whether and how to advocate for their rights, how to recognize and deal with discrimination, etc.

**Empowerment of Roma Women’s Initiatives in the South Serbia– Together We Can**

Women Space and partner organization Ternipe from Pirot organized a series of activities to empower local Roma women's initiatives in the South Serbia, through the promotion of human and technical capacity of informal women groups for active participation on local and national level, as well as through strengthening cooperation of Roma women's initiatives and local governments in developing public policies for improving the position of Roma women.

In addition to activities on the initial assessment of Roma women's initiatives capacities, we
organized seminars for their improvement. A total of 22 activists from Prokuplje, Leskovac, Pirot, Dimirovgrad, Babušnica, Bela Palanka, Aleksinac, Lebane, Vlasotince, Bujanovac and Vranje, gained skills and knowledge for independent and autonomous activism through four seminars on topics on advocacy, NGO management, writing and management of the projects, fundraising. A special part on each seminar was dedicated to basic training for the computer operation and the practical application of the knowledge through the use of the Internet and computer programs. The program was led by Biljana Maletin, feminist consultant and Hristina Piskulidis and Ana Zorbić, Women Space activists.

As a first result of this education, and advocacy of the activists, in a short time the registration of three new organizations started in Lebane, Leskovac and Babušnica.

Initiating of Local Action Plans for Improving the Position of Roma Women in the Cities and Municipalities in South Serbia – Together We Can

In the scope of the project Together We Can, activists of Women Space activists and organization Ternipe organized a series of meetings with local governments initiating the development of local policies and adoption of local action plans for improving the position of Roma women. As one of the results of working meetings, held in the period from March to June, representatives of five local governments signed Memorandum of Cooperation, which formally specified current cooperation and mutual obligations of signatories.

In 2014, in the municipalities of Lebane, Aleksinac, Vlasotince, Babušnica and the city of Vranje started the process of forming working groups and the creation of local action plans, and in the municipality of Bela Palnka and the city of Leskovac process of revising existing ones.

EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF ROMA WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ROMA NATIONAL MINORITY

Regarding the elections for National Councils, Women Space organized series of activities aimed at National Councils of National Minorities in order to support greater participation of Roma women as well as the distribution of relevant, clear and understandable information about the interests of Roma women in the selection process.

These activities were performed in cooperation with organizations and initiatives of Roma Women Network and included joint meetings, planning, workshops in the field, development of common Platform and empowerment of women candidates for electoral lists.

Women Space activists have developed guide for conducting workshops and developed the
Platform of Roma Women Network about gender equality respect in the elections for the National Councils of National Minorities. During a press conference in the Media Center in Belgrade, Platform was presented to the public and signed by list leaders and candidates. Leaders of electoral lists signed a platform whereby they committed to respect gender equality on their lists for election for the NCRNM.

To indicate the importance of active participation in the election process and to closer explain the role of the National Council, Roma Women Network activists held 90 workshops for Roma women in Serbia in September and October, and 1,772 women participated.

In October we organized a two-day seminar entitled Support to equal participation of Roma women in National Council of Roma National Minority, intended for Roma women candidates for electoral lists, with the goal of empowerment of women from the electoral lists, gaining of self-confidence, improving public performing skills, candidates public promotion, as well as facilitating networking of the future members of the National and Roma Women Network activists.

Further activities include gathering of learned lessons in the process that will further improve Roma women activism.

**SUPPORT OF LGBTTIQ ACTIVISM IN NIŠ AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN OF DIFFERENT SEXUAL ORIENTATION THAN HETEROSEXUAL**

**Workshops Lesbian existence - coming out and partner relationships**

In the scope of support of young women activism - The Mirror, young activists of Women Space, gathered in the informal group Afemme, organized the two-day workshop Lesbian existence-coming out and partner relationships. Both workshops were facilitated by feminist consultant Tijana Popivoda from Belgrade, and these workshops are meant for women who love women, lesbians, queer, bisexual and trans-women and girls, with the aim of their strengthening. There were 13 young women from Niš and neighboring towns present in the workshops.
Presentation of Research Đžuvljarke – Lesbian Existence of Roma Women

This paper, by Vera Kurtić, Women Space activist, tackles the problem of invisibility that women who are both Roma and lesbians face through the negation of their personal identities and established relations and unions both within the Roma but also wider social communities. In giving us examples of Roma lesbian existence the author explains burden of gender, race, nationality, class and minority sexual existence but also their intersectionality through discrimination.

The paper, written for the feminist movement, Roma and LGBT communities but also for all those striving for protection and implementation of human rights, originated in 2013, and in 2014 was presented in Budapest, on October 12, on gathering organized by Roma Research and Empowerment Network and the European Roma Rights Centre, under the name Nothing About Us Without Us? Roma Participation in Knowledge Production and Policy Making... In Belgrade the presentation was at the Festival of feminist culture and action BeFem, on December 7 during the panel named "I believe in Conscious Solidarity" and at the International Festival of Queer Film Merlinka, on December 16th, within the framework of the discussion on the topic of multiple discrimination. Both conversations were led by feminist activist Lepa Mlađenović.

FEMINISM AND VEGANISM

With the workshops Patriarchy in Our Plate and Humankind Fascism, we continue to explain circles of exploitation through the attitude towards animals and the attitude towards women, which is identical, the exploitation of animals and the exploitation of women's bodies, and unsustainable to accept and keep one part of the of patriarchy, while at the same time is fighting against it.

Workshops led by Ana Zorbić and Vera Kurtić, Women Space activists and vegans, in 2014 were performed on women Festival of Arts and Activism PitchWise in Sarajevo on September 12th, on the meeting of Kvinn till Kvinn Network, in Vrnjačka Banja on September 19th, in the premises of Women in Black in Belgrade, on December 17th, and the program was also presented at the Festival of Women Friendship in Tutin on August 9th.

FEMINIST DISCUSSIONS

Workshop on Editing Wikipedia for Women

Workshop on editing Wikipedia for Women was held on June 19th in the premises of Women Space, led by Sanja Pavlovic, one of the editors of Wikipedia and was designed for women's groups activists and interested individuals from Niš that want by their presence on the Internet to contribute to increasing the content related to women's activism, significant women in domestic and world history and events relevant to improve the position of women in our
Participants gained insight into the ways of writing articles and necessary conditions for a specific article on Wikipedia comes to life and each participant gained a practical and applied knowledge on the workshop by placing the article.

**Discussions with Isabel Markus**

Isabel Marcus, a professor at State University of New York, USA in the scope of her visits and guest lectures visited Niš. In addition to male and female students of the University of Niš and activists of Niš’s feminist scene and the surrounding cities had the opportunity to meet with her on May 13 in the premises of Women Space. This was an opportunity for activists of the Center for Girls Niš, SOS Vlasotince and the Women Space to meet the activist of the second wave of feminism, who began her struggle during the 60’s in the United States, especially dedicated to the struggle for women's human rights within the legal framework and system solutions for the elimination of violence against women.

**MENTORSHIP OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN ORGANIZATIONS IN 20 MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES**

Program of mentoring support of the Women Space is an accompanying program of the project implemented by the OSCE Mission to Serbia in 20 municipalities in Serbia, intended for civil society organizations from Sombor, Odžak, Pančevo, Novi Sad, Smederevo, Valjevo, Kragujevac, Kruševac, Bela Palanka, Knjaževac, Prokuplje, Žitorada, Leskovac, Vranje, Bujanovac and Belgrade municipalities Palilula and Zvezdara. The aim of the support is to improve the capacity for advocacy and monitoring of public policies at the local level, especially local action plans for improving the situation of Roma.

During October and November, three trainings of the first module that dealt with discrimination, advocacy and the creation of public policies, were held, and the trainers were Biljana Maletin and Višnja Baćanović.

In addition to training in December were held consultative meetings of mentors and activists of civil society organizations were held, and the program continues in 2015.
PARTICIPATION IN PROJECTS OF OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The Interethnic Partnerships for the Empowerment of Roma Women

The project, which aims to strengthen the capacity of Roma women in Kraljevo and Kragujevac, improve regional and local mechanisms for implementation of human rights of Roma women and their involvement in social life, is being implemented in partnership with the Association Phenomena from Kraljevo, Educational - cultural community Romanipen from Kragujevac and Women Space. Project activities include a series of workshops on empowerment and training on the basis of local budgets and monitoring of LAP for Roma from a gender perspective, and monitoring of equal opportunities and empirical research on the socio-economic status and needs of Roma women, seminar for representatives of local government for sensitization on gender balanced approach to Roma issues, update of LAP for improving the situation of Roma from a gender perspective. In addition, activities include advocating for the adoption of an updated LAP in Kragujevac, which was created in 2011 on the initiative of the Women Space and Roma Women's Centre Bibija.

In the scope of this project, Women Space created and held workshops on Roma community and patriarchy in Kragujevac and Kraljevo, which represents the introduction of the work with Roma women from the community. In addition, workshops on domestic violence, self-help and support groups, associations of citizens - the legal framework and the work of civil society organizations, were held.

Gender Assessment of Women Safety in Niš

The result of the program "Development of the capacity of local stakeholders in charge of security and gender equality" implemented by the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, where Women Space participated, is conducting research on the safety of women in Niš. During November and December the research was conducted in Niš by representatives of the Commission for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the city of Niš, the Commission for Gender Equality of the Municipality of Pantelej and the Municipality of Crveni Krst, the Office of the Ombudsman in Niš, elementary school "Kralj Petar I", Centre for Social Work Sveti Sava city municipality Medijana, health, and civil society organizations: Dawn, Center for Girls, Youth Center for Democracy and Women Space. The aim of the research was usage of the results in the preparation of strategic documents of the city of Niš, as well as the strategy for improving the status of women, which still does not exist in our city and Security Strategy, which is not gender sensitive and does not recognize the specific needs of women when it comes to safety.

The survey was conducted on a sample of 741 respondents aged fifteen and above and women from the city and from suburban and rural areas, members of minority groups, employed and unemployed, pupils, students and pensioners.

In front of the Women Space the sociologist Snežana Stojanović participated in the study.
WOMEN SPACE PROGRAMS IN 2014 WERE SUPPORTED IN SOLIDARITY BY:

Kvinna till Kvinna, Sweden
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South East Europe
Open Society Institute, Budapest
Women Fund - Reconstruction
OSCE Mission to Serbia
International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia
Government Office for Cooperation with Civil Society