



## **Memo: The RECOM Initiative - The Case for Support of the European Union**

December 7th 2009

The Coalition for RECOM is a network of civil society organisations and individuals, who advocate the establishment of the Regional Commission for Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling about War Crimes and Other Serious Violations of Human Rights in the former Yugoslavia (RECOM) by the governments of the successor states to the former Yugoslavia. This grass-roots initiative gathers several hundred civil society groups, including victims' associations, human rights groups, former detention camp inmates, veterans' groups, youth organisations, women's groups, historians, journalists and artists, from all parts of the former Yugoslavia. The Coalition for RECOM was formally founded in October 2008 in Pristina, Kosovo, having grown out of a civil society consultative process on truth-seeking about war crimes at a regional level.

The RECOM initiative does not offer an alternative to war crime trials conducted at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) or by local judiciaries in the Balkans, but addresses the limitations of a perpetrator-oriented approach to the truth about a conflict-ridden past. The trials have not resulted in a broader public debate about war crimes inside the countries or between the countries in the region, nor are perceived as a legitimate mechanism for establishing the truth about what happened in the past.

The RECOM initiative is a local response to a local demand to face the past. Its legitimacy derives from a strong sense of ownership among various groups of civil society across the former Yugoslavia who share the goal of establishing the truth about the past based on the facts of war crimes and other serious violations of human rights. Such a truth is owed to the victims and their families throughout the former Yugoslavia. It is also a necessary protection against any future abuse of past crimes for political purposes that may plunge the region into a new cycle of conflict. The RECOM initiative is the only appropriate and effective response to the legacy of conflict in the former Yugoslavia that was transnational in character. It is the first regional, i.e. multi-country, post-conflict truth-seeking initiative ever to be established and provides a model for strategies of dealing with the legacy of mass crime globally, as in Africa or in the Caucasus.

The Coalition for RECOM needs the support of the European Union. The RECOM initiative has galvanised civil society across the former Yugoslavia. The aims and activities of the Coalition for RECOM including hundreds of consultations held regionally, nationally, and locally with a variety of constituencies on a range of truth-seeking and truth-finding issues (such as its mandate, the definition of victims, etc.) are wholly compatible with normative and state-building goals of the European Union in the Western Balkans. The RECOM initiative promotes the European integration project for the Balkans as a peace project and directly strengthens the rule of law in the region. It embodies regional cooperation, one of the EU's key policies in the region, while building solidarity and compassion towards victims across the conflict divide, but also trust between communities and state institutions.

The Coalition for RECOM needs European support beyond funding and short of new conditionalities. The European Union can enhance the RECOM initiative's visibility through existing policy instruments for the Western Balkans, which, in turn, will give the RECOM initiative greater leverage towards national political elites ultimately contributing to a transition from conflict to sustainable peace in the Western Balkans.