

FIRST CONGRESS OF PSYCHOTHERAPISTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION: PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH A WORLD OF CHANGES

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The Union of Psychotherapy Associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) successfully organized and concluded the First Congress of Psychotherapists with international participation: Psychotherapy with a world of changes. The congress was held from 23 to 26 March 2023 at the "Hills" hotel in Sarajevo and gathered psychotherapists and psychotherapy associations from BH, the region, and invited guests from Austria, Italy and United Kingdom.

The event attracted over 240 participants from BH and the region, as well as experts from Europe and the world contributed to the development of psychotherapy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hasanović et al. 2011, 2012, 2018, 2021). The participants showed a common interest in connecting, exchanging knowledge and experiences with the aim of getting to know each other better and acting in the direction of ensuring the highest standards in psychotherapy practice. During the congress, the need for strengthening the mutual cooperation of psychotherapy associations, for additional creation of standards in education and psychotherapy practice, and the importance of legal regulation of psychotherapy activities through the Law on Psychotherapy in BH was highlighted.

The congress participants had the opportunity to attend a diverse program that included various forms of presentations and interactive events. Nine plenary lectures provided insight into the latest trends and research in current psychotherapy, while oral and poster presentations provided a more detailed presentation of various studies and projects. Six round tables opened up space for a dynamic exchange of opinions and experiences between experts. In 14 workshops, the participants had the opportunity to learn more about different techniques and approaches in psychotherapy, thereby gaining practical knowledge and skills. Two recently published books were also presented at the congress, which enriched the professional literature and contributed to the spread of knowledge about psychotherapy.

The congress program allowed the participants not only to acquire new knowledge, but also the opportunity to develop creativity, innovation and networking with colleagues from the BH and abroad. The successful completion of the First Congress of Psychotherapists in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a significant step forward in the development and affirmation of psychotherapy as a professional and scientific discipline in BH (Hasanović et al 2011). This was an opportunity for an open, scientific and professional debate and personal dialogue about philosophy, theory, practice and research in psychotherapy, and about its meaning in contemporary societies in the World of Changes offering the culture of empathy, dialogue and better world related to actual problems that humankind is suffering from (Jakovljević & Jakovljević 2021). This will make our professional work more efficient and our overall professional impact more significant to increase resiliency of suffering people and help in creating empathic civilization instead of passive accepting of bad politics that lead World to international enmity and new wars (Jakovljević 2017).

Participants and organizers believe that the foundation has been laid for long-term and continuous cooperation and development of psychotherapy in the country, which will undoubtedly leave a lasting positive impact on the mental health of individuals, groups and society as a whole. This unique event highlighted the commitment of psychotherapists to the development and establishment of psychotherapy as an extremely important scientific and professional discipline (Hasanović 2021).

President of the World Council for Psychotherapy **Alfred Pritz (Vienna, Austria)** in his lecture with title "The development of Psychotherapy in Europe", emphasized that: „Since 1986 more and more countries in Europe are regulating psychotherapy as a profession. In this context there is an ongoing discussion about the quality standard of training and application. There is also an ongoing discussion about the role of the different modalities in the

training. In the meanwhile there is a new development visible on offering academic studies like in Germany where is a law, since two years in power, which offers academic studies for psychotherapists, and 17 years ago (2005), the University „Sigmund Freud“ has been established with the first bachelor and master studies in psychotherapy.

„The importance of psychotherapy in working with children and adolescents in a world of changes“ was title of the lecture of **Professor dr. Dubravka Kocijan Hercigonja, Zagreb, Croatia**. In short, in her lecture, she sent several important messages about the need for better understanding of facts that everything in personal life starts in early childhood. She concluded: „The critical question is whether we expect the child to adapt to the newly changed conditions without expressing emotions, instead choosing to suppress them. It is crucial in the newly created conditions to modify previously adopted forms of therapeutic work with the mandatory inclusion of both the child and the environment. Apart from modifications in the therapeutic process, therapy includes environmental counseling and additional expert education and supervision“.

The Membership Committee Chair of the European Association for Psychotherapy: EAP and the Deputy General Secretary of the EAP, **Tom Warnecke, London, United Kingdom**, in his lecture: „Building bridges - contemporary perspectives on fragmentation in psychotherapy“ discussed on the fragmentation, dissociation, and associated polarization dynamics which have been a primary focus for psychotherapists ever since Freud, Breuer and Janet. In the meantime, neuroscientists and physiologists have added greatly to our contemporary understanding and allowed us to expand our therapeutic perspectives and develop a range of clinical interventions. At the other end of this spectrum, multiple self-states and associated psychophysiological presentations appear crucial for „higher order“ psychological functioning. The questions on which we need answers are: „How can we orient within this complex field? And how might we utilize psychophysiological self-state dynamics constructively as a valuable resource in the therapeutic relationship“?

Dr. Goran Arbanas, Zagreb/Rijeka, Croatia in his lecture “Sexual therapy – A specialized therapy or part of any and every psychotherapy” outlined the most important aspects of sexual therapy in the changing World. He gave short historical background and stressed an issue of “whether sexual therapy is a distinct and unique type (specialization) of psychotherapy or any and every psychotherapy should include addressing the sexual aspects of one's life?” In his lecture he tried to give some answers to the certain actual questions and he tried to distinguish sexual therapy from other psychotherapeutic teachings and procedures. Also he tried to answer the question of why people who work with patients/clients with sexual problems do need additional education in sexual therapy or sexual counselling.

The President of EMDR Europe Association **Isabel Fernandez, Milan, Italy**, in her lecture “The role of

trauma in mental health - The contribution of EMDR therapy” presented about EMDR as the first-line trauma treatment in the international practice guidelines of several organizations, including the American Psychiatric Association (2004), the World Health Organization (2013) and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (2018). She quoted several randomized controlled studies to show the clinical effectiveness of EMDR for treatment of trauma in adults and in children too. She underlined that the recent research has evidenced that, after EMDR changes were associated with the decrease of depressive and traumatic symptoms, and with the improvement of emotional-adaptive functioning over time. In light of these results, she discussed the role of early trauma in mental health and the implications of EMDR in clinical practice, highlighting the importance of focusing interventions with traumatized children and adults on cognitive and emotional processing of emotions and resolution of the consequences of trauma.

Professor. dr. Nevena Čalovska Hercog, Belgrade, Serbia in her lecture „Systemic family therapy in context of transition“ explained that awareness of permanent and imminent social transitions impacted systemic practice since its beginnings. Today, this is true more than ever, she underlined. Encountering unpredicted and novel global experiences, there is a need for new therapy, as well. Working in context, recognizing and promoting feedbacks, constructing narratives in collaborative approach, understanding and utilizing emotional resonance, are constituents of systemic family therapy today. She said that contextual framework and reflective, both Self and relational, practices are aiming to address: clients' needs, therapists' ways of activating resources and trainers'/supervisors' transfer of knowledge, experience and skill development. As she pointed out, key concepts in “new practice” are proposed five criteria for quality control of therapy, namely addressing clients' subjectivity, dichotomy of personal and social, working reflexively promoting complexity congruence and search for alternatives.

Professor dr. Gregor Žvelc, Ljubljana, Slovenia in his lecture „Mindfulness- and Compassion-Oriented Integrative Psychotherapy“ pointed out that Mindfulness and Compassion-Oriented Integrative Psychotherapy (MCIP) is a new approach to psychotherapy that integrates relationally-focused integrative psychotherapy with mindfulness- and compassion-oriented approaches, research and practice. He underlined that MCIP is a holistic, experiential approach to psychotherapy based on processes of change related to the main dimensions of human experience: interpersonal, cognitive, affective, physiological, behavioral, spiritual and systemic/contextual. The therapist acts as a guide for the client to embody present moment awareness, a decentered perspective, acceptance and self-compassion. In the lecture, he described the main theoretical concepts of MCIP and methods of MCIP, such as the diamond model of observing self, mindful processing and self-compassion processing.

In her lecture, titled “Trauma - Our story: Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - The story of the Balkans” **dr. Tijana Mirović, Belgrade, Serbia** defined Complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD), also known as Complex Trauma and its’ etiology. Since the complex traumatic events happen one after the other, over a long period of time, the person drains the existing resources, with very limited opportunities to develop new ones. In this presentation she showed how historical, transgenerational and developmental trauma is recognized, manifested and treated in our cultural-historical and clinical setting in the Balkan region (Hasanović 2011). She pointed some good actions and harmful practices in our culture and society and portrayed trauma as our, Balkan story.

Professor dr. Tanja Frančičković, Rijeka, Croatia was the final plenary lecturer with the title: „Ethics in psychotherapy in the present time“. She outlined that the ethical principles that applied to psychotherapy as a method of treatment came from medicine and were based on Hippocrates' basic principles. In recent decades, psychotherapy has undergone a number of changes. As she underlined, the different professions far from medicine or psychology have begun to deal with psychotherapy. In parallel with efforts to establish legal frameworks for psychotherapy, in some countries it has gone beyond medical frameworks and is no longer defined as a healing technique. She concluded, that all this raised a number of ethical questions and dilemmas, and the key question is how, and whether at all, to strive for the old Hippocratic principles, but also how to change them?

“This is a very important event and an extremely important resource for our region. It was a great honor and pleasure to be a part of this story and to share "our story". The first congress of psychotherapists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, left us with many wonderful impressions and moments. It was really nice and important” said Tijana Mirović in her impressions about Congress.

This Congress started in the month of Ramadan, the month of spiritual ascending, of self-control, of giving and sharing and increasing of understanding of those who are in need (Hasanović et al. 2021).

The second psychotherapy congress organized by the Union of Psychotherapy Associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been announced for 2025, and the organizers are looking forward to continuing the strengthening of psychotherapy as a separate scientific activity in BH. It will continue work on strengthening psychotherapy and

will additionally contribute to the development of the health sector, improvement of mental health and improvement of the quality of life of citizens, with the perspective of culture of dialogue and an emphatic civilization.

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