UNITED Conference, 23-28 Oktober 2009 in Kiev, UA

UNITED we build the future!

Empowering civil society to face new challenges
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1 Framework

The theme of this conference: ‘UNITED We Build the Future! Empowering Civil Society to Face New Challenges’ came as follow up of a political café organised during the last UNITED conference held near Sheffield (UK), June 2009. The idea was to shake the anti discrimination movement out of its observer mode and find new methods, ideas and capacity for a stronger and more effective civil society.

Within the conference frame international participants from all over Europe committed themselves in working groups, workshops, plenary sessions and a special integrated seminar to work on specific issues, such as: concepts of commemoration; strategies against the rise of right wing extremism, populist propaganda and hate speech; revisionism and history interpretation; migration flows and ‘migrantophobia’; institutional racism; human rights education; minorities and community cohesion; new challenges and new alternatives; future of international networking.

As many as 82 organisations from 31 countries came together in Kiev under the framework of the UNITED conference and worked intensively together for five days in total – brainstorming, sharing experiences, learning from examples of best practice, deciding on recommendations – but also socialising and experiencing the host country, an emerging democracy from a Soviet past. In this report you can read about the results and contents discussed at the conference.

1.1 Hosting Organisations in Ukraine

The organisations hosting the event in Ukraine were No Borders Project – part of the NGO Social Action Centre and Diversity Initiative.

The origins of No Borders Project of the Social Action Centre were a series of protests in February 2006 against illegal extraditions of Uzbeks. A small network of organisations that worked with this issue was founded and links with refugees themselves were created. The network offered legal advice and social support to the refugees, and the nature of the organisation changed from street protests to daily work with refugees. It then developed into an NGO. No Borders Project now monitors and analyzes the refugees’ and border situation. It works on countering xenophobia, hate crimes and hate speech in the media and by politicians and offers training programs to journalists. It can also organise emergency interventions when people are in danger of being extradited.

Diversity Initiative is a Ukrainian forum for civil society that enables networking. It monitors hate speech and offers legal aid to victims of hate crimes. It was founded in 2007 by Amnesty International, UNHCR, IOM and other concerned civil society organisations as a response to a sudden rise in racially motivated attacks. It has more than 50 member organisations from the international, civil, corporate, and government sectors as well as diplomatic missions and interested individuals. Current projects by the Diversity Initiative are a Living Library, a multicultural curriculum for universities and videos in support of diversity broadcasted on TV. On the website of the Diversity Initiative it is possible to report about racist incidents.

1.2 The Danger of Words

As usual for UNITED events, on the first day there was a session called ‘The Danger of Words’. The idea of the session is to discuss different terms from anti-racist and anti-fascist work and understand that the same word may have different meanings in different countries and political contexts.

For example terms such as ‘right wing’ and ‘left wing’ do not apply to all countries. It is important to understand that these terms have become especially complicated in Central and Eastern Europe, where ‘socialism’ has begun to refer to conservative groups and ‘centre’ often refers to groups that would in the West be called ‘right’. For example, in Ukraine the so called Communist Party does not belong in the category ‘left wing’, meanwhile, in Germany the old Communist Party has changed its name into Die Linke (The Left).

The discussion was started off with UNITED’S Information Leaflet No. 13 – ‘The Danger of Words’, a result of previous conferences. Participants at this conference had several suggestions for an updated version, for example to add a definition for human rights and more terms about gender equality.

2 Ukraine in Focus

2.1 Post-Soviet Ukraine

Ukraine used to be a part of the Soviet Union, or USSR, until its break-up in 1991. Ukraine became independent on August 24th 1991 and has since then been going through a democratisation process. Five years ago the so-called ‘Orange Revolution’ took place, which was highlighted by a series of acts of civil disobedience, sit-ins and general strikes organised by the opposition movement.
But today, 18 years since its independence and five years since the ‘Orange Revolution’ Ukraine still faces a lot of problems. There are human rights violations in different spheres, xenophobia towards foreigners and ethnic minorities and a rise in racist incidents. Far right parties and groups are also gaining influence. In a recent local election in the Ternopil Region in the west of Ukraine, radical right-wing party Svoboda (Freedom) won as much as 34% of the votes. The party sees this as the approval by the average Ukrainian and now aims at winning seats in parliamentary elections in 2010. However, on a more positive note, this party was excluded from a mainstream alliance because of their anti-Semitic rhetoric.

During the free elections in Kiev, it was easy to spot nationalist graffiti on walls, among others for the neo-nazi group UNTP (Ukrainian National Labour Party). Most of them were crossed out though, see picture at page 15.

Ukraine is torn between European democratic values and eastern totalitarianism. The electorate is split between those who favour a European political course (mostly in the west and north of the country) and those who favour closer ties with Russia (mostly in the east and south). These two halves of Ukraine also have cultural and linguistic differences.

Ukraine is not a member state of the European Union, but borders with it and has ties with it, for example concerning migration policy. Because of its geopolitical position, Ukraine is a transit route for asylum seekers and other migrants who hope to enter the EU. On the other hand the EU also uses Ukraine to outsource detention centres. Ukraine has signed an agreement with the EU promising to accept undocumented migrants if there is a suspicion that they have entered the EU from Ukraine. In return, the EU promised to make a better visa regime for Ukrainian citizens. The visa regime has not yet been changed, but the EU has financed building of detention centres in Ukraine.

2.2 Nationalism, Xenophobia and Hate Crimes

The ethnic picture of Ukraine is quite diverse. Of a total of 46 million inhabitants, 37 million are Ukrainian, more than 8 million Russian and there are many other ethnic minorities. Ukraine is a new nation state in Europe and faces the same problems as other Eastern European countries that were a part of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, Russian was the only official language, so now there is more emphasis on Ukrainian. The subject of language is one that splits the society and is often used by politicians.

Ukraine now has to catch up with what other European countries have had several hundred years to do in terms of democratisation and minority rights. Officially Ukraine is a multi-ethnic nation, but there is not really a good understanding of what ‘ethnic’ means or what a nation is. In the years since the independence the gap between majority and minorities in Ukraine has increased. The majority considers traditional minorities such as Russians, Jews, Hungarians, Greeks, Romanians etc. as closer to them than the new minorities from Asia. The latter are most often the victims of xenophobic attacks as they are co-called ‘visible minorities’.

Hate crimes are dramatically on the rise in Ukraine and there are even cases of murder. People of non-European origin, immigrants and minorities are most vulnerable to violent attacks that are carried out by skinheads. They are under substantial influence by Russian neo-nazis and their motto is ‘White Brotherhood’. As a general rule, the police do not recognise hate crimes as a special kind of crime. They are categorised as hooliganism and violence with no ideology, because then the case is solved, closed and looks good in the statistics. This is because politicians are mostly concerned with the image that Ukraine has in Europe, without showing a real interest in the actual situation.

2.3 Crimean Tatars – a Minority in Ukraine

In the 1950s, the entire population of Crimean Tatars was forcibly deported by the Stalin regime. While they were in exile, other people, particularly Russians, settled the peninsula and took control of the lands formerly belonging to them.

After Ukraine became independent, Crimean Tatars were allowed to return, but the government did nothing to provide them with basic support, rights or housing. There is no law on repatriation, only a decree that allows the Crimean Tatars to come back. The returnees are facing different social and economic obstacles. They live in horrible conditions and struggle for their basic rights, especially for the right to preserve their culture and language and to practice their religion. Until now approximately 300.000 Crimean Tatars have returned.

Crimean Tatars also struggle with identity issues. Being in exile for four decades is a social trauma that influences the collective self-perception. From this trauma emerges the self-image as victims. Regaining ownership of the land is a key element that would restore the dignity of the people. Since Crimean Tatars are Muslims, their opponents often only define them by their religion and thus try to ‘overwrite’ their ethnic identity. Parallel to that, some try to equal Slavs to Orthodox Christians, which also excludes Crimean Tatars.

2.4 Islamophobia

A representative of the Association of Middle East Studies gave a presentation about Islamophobia in Ukraine. Most Muslims in Ukraine live in the Crimea. There are religious and ethnic tensions in Crimea, that take place both between and within groups. For example, there are tensions within the Muslim group between those who think that it is more defining for the group that they are Tatars and those who think that it is more defining that they are Muslims.

There are also tensions between Muslims and Christians. When the Christian community was celebrating 1000 years of Christianity in Ukraine, a number of stone crosses were erected across from Tatar settlements. As an example of exclusion there is a monument in Simferopol for the victims of the disaster in Chernobyl that originally did not have a cross, but then it was added. There are often cases of inflammatory graffiti on mosques and acts of vandalism towards Muslim graveyards and national symbols.
One of the most violent clashes between Crimean Tatars and Russians happened in 2006 after failed negotiations about the removal of a market place from a holy Muslim site. Owners of the market place refused and the case was exploited by Russian nationalists. The local government tries to devalue the conflict and reduce it to a dispute over the market place, in other words merely as an economic conflict.

2.5 Minorities and tolerance education

State policy and the education system in Ukraine are very ethnocentric – for example, history of Ukraine is history of the Ukrainians. There is not education on tolerance at national level – it is not included in the curriculum. But there are NGOs who offer training to teachers on this subject. NGOs also try to press the government to deal with Roma issues as there is a big Roma population in Ukraine and a lot of discrimination towards them: ethnic profiling by the police, police cruelty, schools who will not accept Roma children. One of the NGOs that work in this field is the Congress of National Minorities in Ukraine (CNMU). A representative from CNMU described the various projects of the organisation.

One of the NGOs that work in this field is the Kyiv National Centre of Holocaust Studies. They conduct seminars for teachers and researchers and offers competitions for students. There is also a Kharkiv Human Rights Group, which monitors the human rights situation and conducts seminars in Ukraine.

2.6 Intercultural Navigators

The Intercultural Navigators project was developed by the British Council and is now running in 18 European countries, with 30–70 participants in each country. Two speakers presented the project at the UNITED conference.

The Intercultural Navigators project develops groups of young leaders in Europe who can easily ‘navigate’ within and between different cultures. The project also supports individuals and organisations that work for a positive social change, strengthen civil society and counteract exclusion and radicalisation. Participants are young leaders aged 20-35 from different paths of life. There are three stages in the project. First, participants are trained in leadership skills and intercultural communication and they attend international networking events. Afterwards, they are offered international internships in public, governmental and non-governmental institutions. Finally, the Navigators develop and implement their own project initiatives, the best of which are supported by the British Council and the project partners.

The Navigators develop community action plans with different aims: inclusion, networking, linking the diaspora with home country communities, advocacy on behalf of intercultural understanding, youth leadership and more. In Ukraine, the project has resulted in the appointment of ‘Ambassadors of change’ whose task is to increase the level of participation of young Ukrainians and young with migrant background in the East of Ukraine and improve their knowledge about tolerance and human rights. They also promote democracy through training courses, panel discussions, seminars and more. There is also a ‘Students’ Embassy’ which works on including foreign students into the hosting society and for a stronger representation of foreign students in students’ self-government bodies. www.britishcouncil.org

3 Fortress Europe

3.1 Security and Migration

A delegate of the German NGOs Brandenburg Refugee Council and Borderline Europe - Human Rights without Borders presented the impact of the threat of terrorism on the phenomenon of migration. In the name of security Europe is implementing new policies that link anti-terrorism measures to migration policies, thus finding the ‘justification’ for the abuse of migrants’ and refugees’ rights. Borderline Europe has been active since 1994.

The origins of Fortress Europe go back to 1999, when Ministers of Interior and Justice from EU member states agreed on a five year plan to harmonise the asylum systems in the EU. The next five year plan was agreed on in 2004 and now Sweden, who has the EU
Presidency, is discussing the next one. What is important to notice is that these agreements are combining security with migration. The aim is a common EU asylum system, which is not in place yet but it is the goal. The Council of Ministers has established the Dublin II regulation, according to which a person may only apply for asylum in the first EU country of entry, and the Eurodac system, which registers refugees’ fingerprints. It has also named ‘regional protection areas’ or a ‘circle of friends’ around the EU, which are meant to externalise the asylum system. This includes establishing detention centres in Ukraine and other countries along the EU border.

The next step will be to register biometric data when someone applies for a visa to come to an EU member state. This will also include biometric data of the person who invites someone to the EU. The reason is that most illegal immigrants are ‘ overstayers’, i.e. people who stay in the EU after their visa is no longer valid. With biometric data, border control can keep a track on who has not left the country. There is a growing militarization of the EU borders. An agency called Frontex started its work with managing the external borders of the EU on 1 May 2005. Frontex is neither a governmental nor a non-governmental organisation; it is an agency at the top of which is the ministers of interior. It has no military equipment of its own but gets it from EU member states. It is EU financed (and the budget is quickly growing), but the European Parliament has no influence on it.

These issues were further discussed in a political café after a documentary about EU’s outsourcing of migration control to non-member states like Ukraine. It was pointed out that Frontex cooperates with Belarus border control, which is significant, because politically the EU does not want to talk to president Lukashenko – but when there is dirty work to be done, all of a sudden cooperation is possible.

### 3.2 Petition about Detention Centres in Libya

Money is EU’s strongest instrument and it uses it to externalise its asylum system. As already mentioned, Ukraine has also received finances to implement measures that ‘protect’ the EU from refugees. Another example is that Italy has given money to Libya to establish detention centres and prevent refugees from coming to Italy. There has not been shed much light on this, but there are reports that the conditions in these detention centres – or prisons – are terrible and that human rights are constantly being breached.

During the open forum, participants were invited to sign a petition calling the Italian and European Parliaments, the European Commission and the UNHCR to promote the establishment of an independent, international committee of enquiry to investigate what happens in Libya as a result of the agreement with Italy and send a humanitarian mission to Libya to look into the conditions of detainees.

### 3.3 Open Europe? Present and Future of Migration

Freedom of movement is one of the fundamental principles upon which the European Union (Community) was once founded. But this freedom is only for those inside the EU while around it there are big walls against those who live outside. Migration is being criminalised and migrantophobia is on the rise.

To the working group Open Europe? Present and Future of Migration it was quickly clear that Open Europe is not exactly what we have today. This was illustrated by presentations of participants about the situation in their countries. The group then discussed the present (‘Closed Europe’), the ideal (‘Open Europe’) and how to get there. These means include: strategic litigation, informing migrants about their rights, organising free language classes for migrants, raising awareness in the public, strong cooperation between NGOs and authorities, more monitoring of the situation of human rights in Europe and more.

### 4 Remember the Past, Monitor the Present and Act for the Future

The rising xenophobia and nazism in Europe (especially in the former so called ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries) testify to a not sufficient reflective education of youth, as well as not recovered traumas from the past. The last years showed all over Europe that right-wing extremist increasingly are taking over places of commemoration for propaganda purposes and traditional commemoration concepts often lack a clear stand against right-wing extremism.

It is a terrifying development reflected on Europe’s streets on a daily basis:

- each year hundreds of hate crimes and murders by neo-nazis are documented alone in Russia;
- each year thousands of neo-nazis march through the city of Dresden to ‘commemorate’ the bombing of Dresden in 1945;
- so called ‘no go areas’ are found in almost every bigger city in former ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries;
- far right political parties are found in national governments and the European Parliament and enjoy rising popularity all over Europe etc.

Against this background it became necessary to NGOs all over Europe to develop new strategies and concepts to spot and struggle extremist propaganda, revisionism and the threat of a general rightward shift in Europe based on an exorbitant arising nationalism. However, an effective and sustainable struggle against racism, fascism, nationalism and related discrimination, only can work out with the participation of an active civil society and especially its youth. Non-formal education and awareness raising are key factors to
involve young people in anti-discrimination work and consequently get a voice that is heard and not ignored by the general public.

A special seminar named ‘Remember the Past, Monitor the Present and Act for the Future’, dedicated to the above listed topics, was integrated in the framework of the UNITED conference. This part provides an abstract of shared and discussed good-practices and different concepts and strategies of commemoration actions; the fight against right-wing extremism, propaganda and revisionism; and the forward-looking work for a better understanding between generations, cultures, religions, and peoples.

4.1 Remember the Past: An Encounter from the very Beginning

The German association Gedenkstätte Augustaschacht works with commemoration and reconciliation. The Augustaschacht was a labour camp in the Osnabrück region during World War II. The nazis were responsible for the biggest case of forced use of foreign labourers in history since the end of slavery: there were between 13 and 15 million forced workers in Germany at the time. In the Osnabrück region there were 25,030 foreign children, women and men who were forced workers; about 10,000 of them were from Ukraine.

An expert on commemoration from Augustaschacht Memorial gave an account of one of the main projects of the association: encountering actual witnesses (former forced workers) from Augustaschacht. Since the year 2000 the association has been inviting former forced labourers to visit Osnabrück, both in order to help them dealing with their fate but also to learn about their experiences by conducting interviews and document their memories.

The association has an ongoing program of exchange with Simferopol, Ukraine, and this year the third exchange took place. The project involves participants from two countries, organised in several groups. Each group consists of an eyewitness accompanied by a relative, a German-Ukrainian pair of pupils, a representative from the memorial site with a background in History and an interpreter. Before the encounter begins in both countries preparatory workshops are organised for the pupils by the memorial site and its Ukrainian partners.

The project consists of two parts. The first part takes place in Crimea, in Ukraine. The main aim is to get to know the eyewitnesses and their story. For this purpose life-story interviews are conducted, and various workshops are organised. Besides, German participants get to know Ukrainian partners, their daily life, culture and traditions. A special attention is paid to remembrance culture in Ukrainian society, for example German guests have the chance to experience the commemoration parade, which takes place in Sevastopol on 9 May. In the second part of the project the eyewitnesses, accompanied by a relative, and the Ukrainian pupils come to Germany. There each group traces the history of forced labour during WWII by dealing with the fate of their particular eyewitness. During their stay the groups visit the sites where former forced labourers were deployed to work and other relevant places. Furthermore, the group is officially welcomed by the mayor of Osnabrück, and meetings with pupils from local schools and the public are organised. Witnesses who come back for the first time are usually very quiet, but normally feel better after the encounters with German pupils. The general feedback to the association is that the exchange has helped them and some come back for a second or even third exchange. Some former forced workers are still afraid and decline to participate in an exchange when the association invites them, which shows how deep the scars can go and how serious damage can be done to people when nazism gains enough influence.

4.2 Monitor the Present: Geh Denken!

In Dresden (D) are two opposing collective memories connected to World War II. While most people acknowledge both the victims of the nazi regime and the victims of the bombing of Dresden in 1945, a growing group of neo-nazis exploit the remembrance of the latter for their propaganda (they call it ‘Bombing-Holocaust’). Each year on February 14th neo-nazis organise a march through Dresden. It is by far the biggest gathering of neo-nazis in Europe after WWII and the neo-nazi party NPD (National Party Germany), one of the co-organisers of this march, refers to the destruction of Dresden in 1945 as a ‘bombing Holocaust’, comparing the air raids with the murder of millions of Jews.

Right-wing extremist mass events like in Dresden promote the entrance into the anti-democratic movement among the participants, celebrate the brotherhood of a supposed national-socialist identity and provide a networking platform for right-wing extremists from all over Europe. Such revisionist remembrance events strengthen the traditional lines towards the historical National Socialism. Equalising the victims of the air raids on Dresden and the victims who died in the concentration and destruction camps downplays and trivialises the Holocaust. Sadly, the city’s official commemoration concept - a ‘silent commemoration’ - lacks a clear stand against modern right-wing extremism and so opens the way for a massive right-wing extremist crowd to take over places of commemoration. To create an active and strong opposition to this development the German organisation Kulturbüro Sachsen gathered many different civil society organisations within the regional platform ‘Geh Denken’ (Go and Think). The coalition organised successfully several awareness-raising actions and a huge counter demonstration with more than 10,000 protesters and popular support of politicians, artists, entrepreneurs, trade unions, the Jewish community in Dresden etc.

Nevertheless, in 2009 about 7,500 neo-nazis from several European countries were able to march under the rigorous protection of German police forces through the city of Dresden. It became clear that the way the concepts and strategies the counter actions were based on, eventually unintentionally supported the usual police tactics in Dresden of strict separation. The lesson learned in 2009 lead to a new set of strategies for planned counter actions in 2010. Main aims of 2010 counter movements against the neo-nazi march are: protests in ear- and eyeshot of the neo-nazi march; a human chain to not let neo-nazis march in the inner part of the city; peaceful sit-in protests where possible to block the neo-nazi manifestation; participation of civil society to the protest actions without police restraints.
4.3 Act for the Future: Action Reconciliation Service for Peace

One of the UNITED delegate in the group has its roots in the organisation Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP), an organisation founded 1958 in Germany to confront the legacy of Nazism. Consequently a discussion of some of the key working concepts of ARSP came to discussion:

ARSP conducts its work with the awareness of the present-day significance of National Socialism and the Holocaust. The concept behind it is to be responsible for the Nazi past in a symbolic way. The Nazi crimes cannot be amended. However, through concrete acts a process of reconciliation can take place. At its onset, the mission of ARSP was to volunteer in countries affected by World War II and to work with the peoples who suffered during the Nazi regime. Now, in the 21th Century, ARSP working has grown broader and young volunteers work with survivors and their descendants, with socially disadvantaged people (e.g. with handicapped persons, drug addicted or with refugees) and in historical/political education programs such as in memorial sites, or anti racism organisations. In the youth encounter centers in Auschwitz and Jerusalem built by ARSP, the organisation offers opportunities for international encounters and intercultural understanding to its partner organisations and to other groups. In Germany ARSP organises campaigns, undertakes public relations efforts, and produces educational materials and lesson plans for local groups. By participating in peace-oriented activities, ARSP enables different generations to further peace in a self-critical and politically responsible manner.

Non-governmental organisations, churches and religious communities are important partners, which contribute to a permanent learning process of ARSP concerning the substance and form of its work. Cooperation with these partners is an expression of democratic involvement in civil society. www.asf-ev.de

4.4 Babiy Yar

To get an idea about the local commemoration culture, participants visited during an excursion the commemoration site ‘Babiy Yar’, outside of Kiev. In World War II this place was the tragic scenery where tens of thousand of people were executed by the Nazis. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of memorials have been erected on the site and elsewhere. German forces entered Kiev in 1941. At the time, many Jews had already fled, but there were still approximately 60,000 in the city – most of them women, children, elderly and the sick, which could not flee. On September 29-30, 1941, SS and German police units and their auxiliaries murdered the Jewish population of Kiev at Babiy Yar, a ravine in the centre of the city. This was one of the largest mass murders at an individual location during World War II. According to reports by the Einsatzgruppe to headquarters, 33,771 Jews and their auxiliaries murdered the Jewish population of Kiev at Babiy Yar, a ravine in the centre of the city. This was one of the largest mass murders at an individual location during World War II. According to reports by the Einsatzgruppe to headquarters, 33,771 Jews were massacred in two days. In the months following the massacre, German authorities stationed at Kiev killed thousands more Jews at Babiy Yar, as well as non-Jews including Roma, Communists, and Soviet prisoners of war. It is estimated that some 100,000 people were murdered at Babiy Yar.

5 Minority Voices

5.1 Roma – A European Minority

A representative of the Roma Democratic Development Association Sonce from Macedonia presented the experiences of the association.

Sonce started its work in 1996 during the refugee crisis caused by the Yugoslav wars. Most refugees were minorities. Sonce organised humanitarian aid but also sustainable help like jobs and education. It focused on providing basic information for Roma, for example about their rights, the educational and health systems. From the year 2000 until 2005, the association developed and spread its activities. It established a Roma Community Centre and branched out into a women’s organisation and a youth forum. Its work was more and more directed towards projects that would offer sustainable solutions of the socio-economic problems of the Roma population, work on Roma women’s issues and work on the young Roma needs. About the importance of lobbying with authorities, the speaker said: ‘We can exist for ages and help thousands but if there is no systematic change, and if we are gone, the Roma will again be nowhere.’ Since its establishment, Sonce has realised 32 projects and a number of other activities in various fields: education, rebuilding of infrastructure, health, improvement of inter ethnic relations, lobbying, promotion of human and minority rights etc. www.sonce.org.mk

5.2 Building of a Minority Network in Russia

The Centre for Interethnic Cooperation was founded in November 1997. It is a Russia-wide network of different organisations, inspired among others by UNITED. Its main objective is the protection of minorities and support to ethnic communities. The network offers trainings to teachers of public schools and leaders of ethnic communities and organisations, it works with the police, has conducted youth camps, works on empowering women from different ethnic organisations etc. The network is open towards any ethnic group
and is currently working with a large number of organisations. A big part of the network’s work focuses on the relations between the organisations and local authorities. It is no easy task, but when there is a success with a project in one region, other regions tend to show a lot more interest.

5.3 Building community cohesion through minority rights

It is estimated that more than 100 million Europeans, approximately every seventh person in Europe, belongs to a minority. Across Europe, evidence shows that minority communities are nearly always amongst the most marginalised. As the impact of the current economic crisis deepens, protective and often nationalistic discourses emerge aimed at protecting the livelihoods of the majority. This working group looked at possibilities to use minority rights to provide greater community cohesion at a time of increased tension. Forms of discrimination are very different in the different countries represented in the group. Somewhere it is institutional and open, while in other places (mostly in the richer countries) it is more subtle – but it is still a challenge. Another widespread challenge is the majority’s lack of knowledge about minority issues. As examples of best practice were mentioned strategic litigation, using of international standards in advocacy and empowering minorities. The group’s recommendations were to work on a common and shared informational database, use the newly formed European Network of Minority Rights and exchange know how between NGOs both within and across borders.

6 Use and abuse of freedom of speech

6.1 Positive Trends and Misuse of Anti Extremist Legislation

An expert from the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis, a Moscow-based Russian non-profit organisation, presented some trends in how anti extremist legislation is used. There is a huge problem with hate crimes in Russia and in the past years, the number of cases has been on the rise. Last year SOVA counted 109 murders, 500 people wounded or seriously beaten – but in reality there are probably many more that are not documented. Legislation in the field has been changed, but it is still not strong enough and there are problems with the police, which have no interest in investigating hate crimes or are even sympathetic to the perpetrators. Thus, the situation has been getting worse and worse. However, there is a team in the police that deals with the problem. It has made many arrests and the result is very visible. The National Socialist network has almost been destroyed, and most of its members are in prison. The main problem with the anti extremism law is that it covers everything from terrorism to hate crime to any speech which may be seen as inspiring to disturbance of public order (not even violence). Police officers do not understand what to do with the law and there are big regional differences in how it is understood and used. The SOVA Centre has recently published a report with the title ‘Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2008’.

6.2 Petition in Solidarity of Russian Antifascists

While this conference report was still under preparation, another young antifascist was killed in Russia. On November 16, a well-known Russian antifascist, Ivan Khutorskoi, was shot to death in Moscow. He was 26 years old. In several of the past conferences, it has been emphasised that there is a need for international solidarity with Russian antifascists. This is especially true now. During the spring 2009 conference in Sheffield, there was a petition in order to save a house used by several human rights organisations that local authorities wanted to demolish. The petition has been successful and the authorities have told the organisations that their house will be safe. Clearly, international attention and solidarity have an effect, which is why it is so important to keep showing it. During this conference, another petition in solidarity with Russian antifascists was signed by the participants.

6.3 Hate Speech vs. Freedom of Expression

It is not uncommon that politicians use populist propaganda as a shortcut to power. Populism becomes even more dangerous when it contains hate speech: hate directed at certain groups or social phenomena aimed to intimidate or incite violence or prejudice against a person or a group. One of the working groups looked at the relationship between freedom of expression, hate speech and propaganda. It seems that politicians bend the concept according to their own needs and wishes. Finding the balance between actual freedom of speech and the protection of minorities from hate speech is not simple. In France, there is a lot of legislation to protect minorities, but sometimes the judicial system exaggerates with the interpretation of the laws and is at risk of interfering with freedom of speech. In Serbia, the Church is seen as ‘exempt’ from the anti discrimination law, so if a priest decides to spread propaganda in his sermons, it is OK. In Greece, one of the problems is that politicians do not condemn
clearly nazi propaganda. The current law only recognizes hate speech when it concerns race. In the UK, BNP leader Nick Griffin won a case because he argued that he was criticising a religion and not people (of that religion). The working group recommended among other things that they work closely with journalists to make them aware of hate speech, so they do not spread it. They need to lobby for better legislation, for example if there is an unfair burden of proof on the victim. And they need to work on opening the public’s eye to the fact that hate speech affects different types of groups, not only ethnic, but also for example sexual minorities.

From Words to Action

7.1 UNITED Campaigns
Racism is not a local issue. Equal rights are an international demand. European campaigns can help set the agenda on all levels. By linking local and national actions, we can generate European-wide publicity.
UNITED has four ongoing European campaigns that organisations are welcome to join:
• European-wide Action Week Against Racism (around 21 March)
• Refugee Day (20 June)
• International Day Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism (9 November)
• Fatal Realities of ‘Fortress Europe’ (a collection of data about deaths caused by the migration policy of the EU)

During this conference participants were asked to create the slogan and the poster idea for the upcoming ‘European Action Week Against Racism’, the 13-21 March 2010. The most important point discussed was to bring a positive, visible message during the campaign in order to reach out to the thousands of people that will be involved in the activities. The campaign should also show the different faces of racism and how to recognize them.

UNITED will provide organisations with campaign material for these campaigns and organisations are encouraged to inform UNITED about events planned. Activities will be added to the ‘List of Activities’ in the ‘Calendar of Internationalism’, available both in print and on the web site of UNITED. The Calendar is used as a source of inspiration to other activists in anti-racism and anti-fascism work. www.unitedagainstracism.org/pages/campaigns.htm

7.2 Empowering Youth
It is common that young people and those who work with them are not taken seriously. And often projects for young people from minorities just amount to some singing and dancing because it is nice PR. Authorities tend to mostly look at cultural issues when it comes to ethnic minorities, and other issues are not addressed. However, while it is important to make sure that projects in youth work have a useful content; it is also important to remember that we are working with young people who are freely thinking and creative. There should be room for singing and dancing and sports and other activities to maintain their interest.

Empowering means educating, making people aware, motivating them to want to change things themselves and letting them know they can. In other words, the goal is that the young people take matters into their own hands.
One example of best practice in the field was a Living Library with ethnic minorities organised in Ukraine. It was addressing the issue of racism and took place in schools. That way the young people could participate in anti racism work in schools and the project was a big success with the school children.

7.3 Alternative Media
Media is a weapon. Alternative media can also be a weapon. It can be the voice of NGOs and everyone who for one reason or another is not heard in the mainstream media. Alternative media is an extremely wide concept; it can be anything from a wall to the internet. It is basically anything that helps pass a message around to an audience.
There are ‘old school’ methods like printing your own newsletter and putting it up on bulletin boards, making stickers etc. and then there is a big variety of online tools that we can use: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Indy media and so on. Cell phones have also proved to be a very useful tool for quick mobilisation.
When using the internet and especially social media, it is always important to know who the owner of the media is and what its terms are. Make sure you protect yourself! There are guides on the internet about how to stay anonymous online.

7.4 Sport Against Racism
Unfortunately, there are still cases of open racism in sports, both from players, spectators and referees. Racism in sport has different
forms, whether it is racist chants and insults against an African player, discrimination of players of different ethnic background or the spread of racist and neonazi propaganda in some stadiums. Participants in this workshop brainstormed about forms of racism in sports and shared experiences and good practices.

Especially in Eastern Europe anti-racist initiatives are very much needed. The Never Again Association and the Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) set up the East Europe Monitoring Centre. This year the Centre paid special attention to the situation in Ukraine, in cooperation with local monitoring and advocacy organisations. Thus it was very important to focus a specific workshop on sport against racism during the UNITED conference in Ukraine.

The FARE Eastern European Development Project administered by the Never Again Association includes a small grants pool for local anti-racist organisations in Poland and Ukraine. In 2009/2010 the whole available amount was devoted to support Ukrainian initiatives against xenophobia and racist extremism. Throughout the duration of the project, Never Again provides assistance to organisations in Eastern Europe in terms of guidance, advice, inspiration, and material to be used in local activities.


7.5 Teach it! Human rights in action

Racism is a feature of everyday life in Europe. Promoting racial equality demands a whole educational system approach and commitment. The working group’s aim was to collect and summarize the existing good practices and techniques, as tools for anti-racist activists training young people.

At the beginning participants shared information about the situation of racism and discrimination in their countries. At this analysis participants could agree on the similar issues and spotted some differences. Participants then presented different projects from their organisations. This was followed by a summary of the aims and goals of the activities that were discussed.

The participants worked on a common strategy. The existing methods and strategies were collected, the most important ones being the following: interaction, making it interesting, using informal and non-cognitive messages, involving parents and teachers, taking in account the age of the students.

7.6 Refugee Chair

The Network for Democracy and Courage offers anti-racist project days for high-school students (aged between 14 and 18). One of these project days intensively deals with clichés, stereotypes, prejudices and racism. To enhance students’ solidarity with victims of racism, the facilitators analyze the background and living conditions of migrants in Germany.

One of the tools the network uses is the interactive game ‘Refugee Chair’ which was played with the participants of the conference. First, five ‘continent-cards’ were pinned to the wall in different corners of the room. The participants were told they represent the world population and asked to spread over the different continents according to how they think the world population is distributed globally. Then they were told that the chairs represent the wealth of the world population. They got the task to take the chairs to the different continents according to how rich they think the continents are. To show the global inequality of wealth, the participants (i.e. the population of each continent) had to try to all sit on the chairs in the continents (i.e. use the wealth of each continent) – in some places having to sit on top of each other, while on other ‘continents’ people were lying across several chairs. The participants were then told they represent all refugees worldwide and asked to spread over the different continents according to what they think the global distribution of refugees looks like. The facilitator corrected the participants’ distribution according to real numbers.

The game illustrates the distribution of the world population, wealth and refugees and is very effective when working with young people. The aim is to make students understand that the world population and global wealth are unevenly distributed among the different continents, with Europe and North America enjoying the greatest benefits. The students also become aware that only a small proportion of refugees flee to Europe and mostly flee to safe places within their home country or continent. Thus, the prejudice that the largest ‘refugee streams’ head towards Europe and North America, is confronted.

It is very important to do this game in the appropriate context; otherwise it might not have any effect. This exercise is one of many elements the Network for Democracy and Courage uses in the project days. Only the combination of discussions, contents and methods during a whole day leaves an impact on the students.  

www.netzwerk-courage.de

8 New Challenges & Support Structures

8.1 Civil Society Addressing New Challenges

One of the thematic working groups was looking ahead at the new challenges and developments that the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement can expect in the years to come. Unfortunately, mainstreaming of right-wing ideologies is a European trend seen in
several countries, and the anti racist movement needs to address this development. The group first identified what works and does not work right now. It was emphasised that pure information campaigns and especially sporadic ones do not work well. One way communication is too boring and ineffective. The best way to change people’s mindset is to get them to reflect and reach some conclusions on their own. It is important to talk as individuals in order to break stereotypes. Campaigns that spread over different types of media and tools are more likely to work than simple poster campaigns, and the more interactive they are the better. We should aim at creating traditions out of campaigns, for example have recurring campaigns with the same objective and in that way embed them into society.

In order to get companies involved, it is necessary to speak their language and explain how good policies will result in good business. For example when calling on web hosts to close down nazi web sites, it has proven efficient to let them know what that means for their image and how it leads to bad PR.

Media relations need to be taken very seriously: NGOs need to have well prepared materials and always add a phone number where the journalists can get more information. Building a strong relationship with the media is imperative.

In the coming years the need for an active civil society will be bigger than ever. We need to go away from too much discussing and theory and step up to some good, old fashioned activism. We need to go from just networking to solidarity. The recommendations of the group to the UNITED network were among other things that UNITED should coordinate more international projects and help create more regional networks and to have even more simultaneous activities in order to get more media coverage but also to benefit from the synergy that coordinated activities create. An obvious opportunity is the European Championship in football that will take place in Poland and Ukraine.

8.2 Foundation ‘Remembrance, Responsibility and Future’

A delegate of the German Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future gave an overview on their programme and activities. The foundation is an expression of the responsibility of the German state, industry and society to continue to confront National Socialist injustice and to work for understanding between peoples. It was established in 2000 to make payments to former forced labourers. Their main work is to permanently anchor the history of forced labour under National Socialism in the German and European culture of remembrance, as it has until now only had a minor role in history books. One particular aim is to convey the experience of the victims to future generations. The foundation also supports international projects working for democracy and human rights, especially in education, because history has shown that the structure of a civil society provides important guarantees for democracy, human rights and understanding between peoples. In other words, promoting human rights and fighting anti-Semitism and xenophobia is an important contribution for a peaceful future.

The foundation supports and helps victims of hate crimes in several countries. Hate crimes are a threat to both personal and public security and to democracy and mutual understanding, which are some of the objectives of the foundation. In all these fields it is possible to apply for funds and cooperate with the foundation and draw from the knowledge and experience of its experts. The foundation is active in several countries and has exchange programs with even more, so it has a broad network.

www.stiftung-evz.de

8.3 Council of Europe – Directorate of Youth and Sports

One of the sponsors who have supported UNITED from the very beginning is the Directorate of Youth and Sports in the Council of Europe (CoE). A speaker from the CoE presented the support structures relevant to NGOs across Europe.

The Directorate of Youth and Sports focuses on education, both formal and non-formal. The Directorate sponsors study sessions, seminars, trainings, educational advisors, methodology etc. They are carried out by NGOs that apply for funds from the CoE. The Directorate of Youth and Sports believes in ‘building a Europe of young people, for young people, with young people’ (young people being between 18 and 30 years old). There are two youth centres where study sessions and seminars often take place, one in Strasbourg and one in Budapest.

The Directorate also publishes magazines and useful publications such as Compass – A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People. Compass can be downloaded at http://eycb.coe.int/compass. It is available in English, French, Russian and Arabic. Other downloadable materials include: ‘All Different All Equal’ (intercultural education), ‘Domino’ (peer group education as a means to fight racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance) and different ‘T-Kits’ (training resources).

The European Youth Foundation is a CoE foundation from which NGOs can apply for funding. Their projects need to have a European dimension and comply with the priorities of the Youth Directorate (human rights, European citizenship, participation of young people in the democratic process, living together in diverse societies, social cohesion).

Small organisations can especially benefit by applying for pilot projects, although there is less money for pilot projects. Priorities are: disadvantaged youth, human rights education and a third priority that changes annually. Next year focus might be on Russia, Turkey, conflict zones (one could try to fit projects with asylum seekers in this category), young offenders and crime prevention.

Council of Europe - www.coe.int,  
Directorate of Youth & Sports - www.coe.int/youth  
European Youth Foundation - www.eutf.coe.int/fej
8.4 OSCE / ODIHR

Another support structure in anti racism and tolerance work is the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). As a result of the increasing number of racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic acts throughout the OSCE region, ODIHR gives special attention to tolerance and non-discrimination work. Hate crimes have consequences for societies beyond the victim and it is important to address them.

ODIHR has two objectives:
1: increase the capacity of civil society to address hate motivated crimes and incidents
2: strengthen the involvement of civil society in OSCE events and channels of communication between participating states and NGOs

ODIHR offers trainings, advice and support, organises round table meetings with civil society, publishes hate crime reports, and helps with capacity building and more. There are also trainings that have a specific target group, for example the Law Enforcement Officer Programme, which has already been conducted in a number of countries.

ODIHR has created a collection point for information on hate motivated incidents and hate crimes called TANDIS, Tolerance and non-Discrimination Information System. TANDIS contains information received from the OSCE states and NGOs. NGOs are encouraged to submit information about their practices and initiatives to the web site. OSCE-ODIHR www.osce.org/odihr, TANDIS tandis.odihr.pl

9 Last but not Least: Thank You!

This week full of activities was made possible through the combined efforts of a number of organisations, individuals and sponsors, who all deserve great thanks for their commitment. A big thanks goes also to participants and their sending organisations, which supported the conference with their ideas, good spirit and their valuable suggestions.

We especially thank:
• No Border Project - Social Action Centre (Ukraine) • Diversity Initiative (Ukraine)
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• Youth Human Rights Movement • UNITED for Intercultural Action
• All experts for their valuable lectures.
• All working group reporters who contributed to this report and Amila for editing it.

Many thanks to the sponsors who contributed financially to the event: The Council of Europe - European Youth Foundation, European Union (Youth in Action Programme), European Commission Delegation Moscow, Cyprus Youth Board.

Not to forget, the enthusiastic and dedicated workers in the UNITED secretariat and the volunteers without whom none of this had been possible.

Report edited by Amila, SOS Racism – Denmark

UNITED is supported by:
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This publication is a supplement to the Calendar of Internationalism
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<td><a href="mailto:info@airecentre.org">info@airecentre.org</a></td>
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UNITED We believe that racism can only be combated by unity. Since 1993, more than 560 organisations from 46 European countries have joined to make Europe a better place - for all. We have to stand together, be united to support the anti-racist and anti-discrimination vision and to speak out against racism and the negative political tendencies in Europe! With an authentic and living movement we can put antiracism into the mainstream of contemporary culture. Young people can and should be a part of the solution to the problem of racism. The movement can grow with their opinions and their visions of the Europe they want to live in.

FOR We stand for unity and hope, fascists spread division and fear. Our vision is one of peaceful co-existence and intercultural respect all over the world. Together we want to build a Europe of tolerance and solidarity, a Europe of respect and perspectives. Diversity is for us more than just living our lives next to each other. Intercultural understanding and cooperation is our goal.

INTERCULTURAL The best way to stop racism is to get to know each other and to learn from common experience. Every organisation is an expert in its field and in its region, all sharing the same goals. Strengthening these existing intercultural relations between civil societies, minority groups and political and economical actors is UNITED’s most important target. Diversity is a virtue, solidarity a duty.

ACTION It’s the variety and creativity that makes UNITED campaigns unique. By linking local and national actions, we can generate European-wide solidarity and publicity. We can show that there is an enormous amount of people that believe in an intercultural open society.

European-wide campaigns against racism (21 March), in support of refugees (20 June) and against fascism and antisemitism (9 November) have been overwhelmingly successfully coordinated by UNITED for more than a decade. UNITED also does effective lobby-work at the European level to make our voice heard. Raising awareness in all fields of life - that’s the key to defeat racism!