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*Thank you for all your efforts to make our conference in Sheffield as constructive and enthusiastic as it was*
1 Framework

Far right political parties and extreme right groups across Europe have undergone a long period of growth and have established themselves on a national as well as European level. This development was underpinned by the European parliamentary elections held in June 2009, as far right parties from across Europe, experienced progress in the election with the fascist British National Party (BNP) winning its first two seats. There are many diverse consequences of this development, ranging from the continuing rise of fascism and racism to discrimination against minorities and the shameful conditions many refugees and asylum seekers now face. Thus, the challenges for European civil society are double-sided: on one hand combating the extreme right and on the other empowering minority communities and those combating the spread anti-immigrant prejudices.

From the 2nd – 7th of June 2009, 68 participants representing 63 organisations from 30 European countries, came together to participate in the ‘UNITED We Can Do It! Civil Society Against Right Wing Extremism’ conference in Yorkshire, UK, to address these issues through practical analysis and learning.

The conference was the final event of the three-year partnership project of UNITED ‘Civil Society Against Right Wing Extremism’, a project developed in the framework of the EU life-long learning program Grundtvig. The challenge of fighting hatred, fascism and neo-nazi discourse must be based on good strategies and practices. Public and political indifference has always been one of the best allies of fascism. So overcoming indifference is one of the most significant aspects of this challenge and education is an excellent instrument, as knowledge provides an anti-serum to the poison of hatred. Thus the conference aimed to create a space for discussing this challenge, as well as sharing experience and best practices from a European perspective, by providing the participants with a space to develop concrete instruments for combating intolerance and ideologies of hatred.

2 The UK in focus

The cultural and ethnic make-up of the UK has always been at flux and still is today and the diversity within the UK society presents an interesting case study for discussing the topics raised at the conference. Furthermore, this conference was the first UNITED conference organised in the UK (in cooperation with the Minority Rights Group International and Show Racism the Red Card) and therefore several of the presentations focused upon the situation in the UK.

2.1 Racism in the UK

Historically, Britain is a country used to immigration and in particular immigrants from its former colonies and other parts of the Commonwealth. White migrants from places like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have moved to and lived in Britain without noticeable problems. Alongside this, there were also significant waves of non-white migration from South Asia and the Caribbean in the 1950s and 60s, who were often settled in marginalised and neglected communities and subjected to racism. So while migration has historically been related to former colonies and the prejudices of the former British Empire, in the last 10-15 years, there has also been a large growth in migration predominantly from Europe and Africa. Following this development Britain has experienced new conflicts related to migration.

Recent British history confirms this development. Violent racially related riots took place in London in 1981 and again in Bradford in 2001, where more than 230 people, mostly from minority communities were tried resulting in 200 convictions leading to a total sum of 600 years of imprisonment. In both cases the riots took place in areas of poverty and social neglect and were ignited by the provocation of the police and groups such as the BNP. The Bradford riots, in the public eye, were essentially blamed on the minority communities themselves, and the communities were blamed for their own discrimination as further segregation was proposed as a way of solving the problem.

Even though racially related problems are well-documented, the British government has positioned Britain as a leading country in the fight against racism, not just nationally but globally. This positioning has only encouraged the British civil society in its efforts to draw attention to the problem of racism and combat the many race related problems that still exist in the UK.

One of the important lessons from the legacy of the Bradford riots is, that in this effort it is not enough only to focus on combating the BNP and the extreme right groups. It is further necessary to empower the minority communities as to change the current situation, where the communities constitute the poorest, the most deprived and the most excluded groups within the UK.

2.2 Homophobia

The issue of rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation was addressed during a presentation from The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth Student Organisation (IGLYO).

The speaker emphasised that recent studies have shown that the everyday reality for LGTBQ people, not only in the UK but also in
the entire European Union, is characterised by discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and homophobia. The rise of hate speech, religious intolerance and the banning of Pride marches across the continent document this development. The progress of the BNP shows the challenges the movement faces within the UK, as the party has characterised LGBTQ people as ‘revolting’ and aims to systematise the discrimination in anti-LGBTQ legislation.

The experience of the IGLYO is, that combating this development is best done in simple ways e.g. through arranging activities were LGBTQ people and people of heterosexual orientation can meet and face their prejudices.

3 Right Wing Extremism

The far right is on the move across Europe. During the conference two working groups and a series of plenary presentations addressed the agendas and strategies of the far right, as well as the imminent threat that it presents to minority groups. Best practices were shared and strategies were developed for combating the far right.

3.1 To be, or not to be an anti-fascist

It is important that the movement has found some time to analyse, criticise and reflect on its own strategies and tendencies. Two representatives of the Russian organisations Youth Network Against Racism and Youth Human Rights Movement – International Network addressed the issue of the ongoing crisis of the anti-fascist movement in Europe.

The speakers emphasised that the anti-fascist movement is not homogenous and defined the four different types of anti-fascist: the militant anti-fascist (street fighters, some hardcore punk musicians who join in antifascism for fights), the establishment anti-fascist (such as Youth National Councils, Public Chambers), the anti-fascist official and the anti-fascist NGO activist. Though operating on different levels and facing different challenges in their work, the speakers believe that all types of anti-fascist share the same notion that they fight totalitarianism and represents human rights and human dignity.

This common denominator between anti-fascist groups, which characterises the movements self-understanding, has led European anti-fascists to believe that they possess the answers to complex questions of preserving human rights and dignity, but in reality this is not necessarily the case. This exaggerated belief within the movement, in its own skills, has led it to become stagnant and passive and has played a part in making the movement reactive rather than proactive in its actions. This stagnation has led to a current period of crisis, which we are now experiencing.

Thus, being an anti-fascist today demands reflections on the current period of crisis as well as what we indeed understand when we claim to be a part of the anti-fascist movement.

3.2 When symbols mark ‘fear zones’

The Advisor on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination from the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights addressed the rise of hate symbols in Europe and presented a new OSCE database for officials to identify hate symbols.

Essentially, hate symbols are the same as hate speech only produced in graphical forms. The OSCE seeks to train police and prosecutors in addressing hate crimes, but the diverse legal systems across Europe constitute a troublesome platform for working with the issue of hate speech and symbols on a legal basis.

Therefore, the task at hand for the OSCE has been to monitor the development and thereby provide easy access to the information needed for combating this. This task has been undertaken by establishing a database now containing more than 220 hate symbols from more than 30 countries, which at current can serve as a source of information as well as hopefully be used for addressing the need for appropriate legal measurements to be met.

One of the manifestations of hate symbols is through hate graffiti. How to recognise and confront hate graffiti was the topic of one of the workshop held at the end of the conference.

Hate graffiti is not just an expression of an urban culture but promotes an inhuman ideology which cannot be seen as an opinion like any other. Such graffiti reflects both the mainstream racism anchored in the middle of society and the attempts of right-wing extremists to gain the discourse hegemony in the public space. Through their appearance and actions, right-wing extremists create public spheres in which people that do not fit into their worldview have to fear harassment and violence. Such ‘fear zones’ can be market places, train stations, supermarkets – any public places where right-wing extremists influence the everyday life by showing constant presence and intimidating and threatening people. Hate graffiti is one form of claiming extreme right dominance and marking own territory, e.g. in public transportation, around youth clubs and in pedestrians tunnels.

Continuing, a speaker from the Ukrainian Youth Union took the chair presenting best practices for combating hate symbols. Through collaborations with advertisement companies (for example Saatchi & Saatchi), who agreed to work on a volunteer basis, the organisation was able to undertake anti-hate symbol advertisements campaigns with great success. The key issues of this campaign is to communicate clear, catchy antifascist messages aimed at the specific target audience, the youngsters, and thereby succeed by presenting qualitatively better campaigns than what the right wing itself was capable of. This is possible through the combined efforts of activists and professionals working within communication and advertisement, and thus the creation of a broad coalition becomes essential.
3.3 No platform for hate in the media

There are many different examples of hate speech. It could be spread via hate graffiti on the city walls addressing migrant and minority communities, it could be found in the school text books when you read about the history of your country, or it could be spread by politicians in their statements highlighted by the mass media.

In the working group ‘No Platform for Hate in the Media’ participants addressed the issue of the rise of hate speech in the media. The working group focused their efforts on defining what can be interpreted as hate speech and what forms it is capable of taking. Continuing discussion focused on the relation between the freedom of speech and anti-hate speech legislation and who if anyone, can be said to be responsible for the dissemination of hate speech. Finally, practical tools and strategies were developed for combating hate speech in the media.

The strategies developed focus on two key concepts: intervention and prevention. The strategies for intervention emphasise the need for monitoring and a further establishing of a database of hate speech cases in the media (whether it be blogs, radio television or others types of media the hate speech originates from) documenting the spreading of hate speech in the media. The documentation will improve the conditions for lobbying against hate speech and can be used to bring journalists and others responsible for hate speech to the courts.

The strategies of prevention focus on preventive action. The media industry is a business like any other. Therefore, it is necessary for civil society organisations to engage in a dialogue that respects this premise, with the purpose of raising awareness of the danger of hate speech: as news based upon fear increases ratings, it is crucial to make visible the connection between fear and hate. Among the strategies discussed were training for journalists and establishing a ‘code of conduct’, as well as strategies of ‘shaming and faming’ different media institutions, including boycott of extreme media and the positive acknowledgment of the media who take the task of addressing hate speech seriously.

Combating hate speech was further addressed in one of the conference’s workshops focused on developing methods for tackling hate speech online.

3.4 Vote for Hope - combating the political right

The political right in Europe is on the rise. In the Netherlands, the anti-Islamic and bitterly anti-EU Party for Freedom with its infamous leader Geert Wilders, grabbed 17% of the vote in the European Parliament election and catapulted itself into the position of the country’s second strongest party. Also in other countries - like in Great Britain, Denmark, Italy or Hungary - the political extreme right made further gains in the European Parliament Elections.

Across Europe the far right is involved in the national parliaments, or even in the governments. In Russia, the ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia founded and led by the neo-fascist Vladimir Zhirinovsky sits comfortably in the Duma. In Austria, the block of the two far-right parties BZO and FPÖ together earned almost 30% of the votes in the last general elections 2008. In the last elections to the Serbian Parliament in 2008 the ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party came in second with 29% of the votes. In Bulgaria the extreme-right party Attack has been represented in the Parliament since 2005, and following the recent elections for the European Parliament the party is represented there as well.

Unfortunately, stories like these exist from most parts of Europe as right wing movements are trying to infiltrate every part of society with the political arena as their ideal target for pushing forward their agenda. In the working group ‘Vote for HOPE – combating the political right’ participants discussed the ongoing rise of the extreme right, its agendas and strategies as well as strategies and best practices for combating this development.

It was concluded, that the extreme right across Europe is pursuing its objectives primarily through four common agendas: 1) anti-immigration, 2) anti-Islam, 3) strengthening the nation state and 4) historical revisionism. Any of the four can often come together in one common agenda, emphasising, especially one or more of the abovementioned, depending upon the national context. Furthermore, a distinction was made between the sub-cultures of the far right movements, which exist in the shadows, and the far right movements that seek to establish themselves on a parliamentary basis.

Again, the need for monitoring these developments was emphasised by the participants. An example of best practice was given, on the monitoring the extreme right in Poland, which had led to the publication of books (such as ‘The Brown Book’) and other materials. Furthermore, the diverse legal systems of Europe have encouraged the extreme right to cross borders, and thus Croatian right wing extremists have held rallies in Austria and nazis in Denmark are producing and distributing nazi materials to right wing movements across entire northern Europe. Therefore, cross-country collaboration between civil society organisations is absolutely crucial in combating this movement that in many senses is already regionalised.

The far right is a complex unity of different organisations. Combating the movement and achieving sustainable changes can therefore only be made possible if a comprehensive strategy is pursued. The discussion of this strategy was primarily focused on issues of education and monitoring the movement, with special emphasis on the need for awareness of historical revisionism. It must not become possible for the far right to rewrite history and thereby hide the many crimes against humanity the movement has caused.

“I am convinced that we are fighting the same fight and therefore we should cooperate and coordinate our activities.”
4 Youth action against racism

Youth-driven social action groups have always been at the forefront of addressing and combating racism and other forms of inequality. But contemporary youth activism differs from country to country and from subculture to subculture. As mobilising youth for social action is an important aspect of continuing the fight against racism and right wing extremism, participants in the working group ‘Get it Moving: Mobilising Youth for Social Action’ addressed the issue of what is the driving power and purpose of youth-led social activism.

4.1 Get it moving: Mobilising youth for social action

For many young people participation in campaigns and events and getting active in civil society movements is an important part of the individuals’ formation of a political consciousness. Youth empowering organisations and activities can enable youth, often disenfranchised from electoral politics, to engage in practice of democracy. However, there are no guarantees that the next generations will be joining individuals’ formation of a political consciousness. Youth empowering organisations and activities can enable youth, often disenfranchised from electoral politics, to engage in practice of democracy. However, there are no guarantees that the next generations will be joining

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There is an inherent risk that youth-led social activities will be confused for politicised left-wing organisations by many young people, who have no previous contact or experience with youth-led work. It is therefore necessary to provide clarity as to the 'product we are selling' in order for the movement to be inclusive – also for the young people who would not normally be working with youth activities.

In order to reach a broader target group of young people the participants agreed that a strategy build upon a few fundamental principals must be adopted: the organisations need to avoid labelling themselves in order to maintain an inclusive appearance, the activities arranged and carried out by young people for young people and finally the organisations must be self-governed: activists have to make the rules themselves.

In summary, in order to mobilise youth for social action the organisations must present ‘the product’ they are offering and make efforts to be as inclusive as possible. The key to doing this is by making the difference between politicised top-down organisations and the depolitised bottom-up youth organisations visible.

**4.2 Inspiring others to join the fight**

The workshop ‘Inspiring others to join the fight’, worked with the challenge of ensuring that new generations of young people will join the movement against right wing extremism. The lively discussions in the workshop evolved around the strategies that had been discussed and the examples of best practices that had been presented during the plenary sessions. The participants emphasised the need for youth organisations to present themselves and their message with a positive appeal through hip and attractive actions. In the discussions of what ‘hip and attractive’ action is the inclusive and positive message of projects such as Living Libraries and musical festivals was highlighted as ways to reach out to the youth with a positive message of tolerance and diversity.

**4.3 Beat the system! Strategies to combat institutional racism**

Racism is a chameleon capable of attaining many different forms and shapes and a distinction is needed between the different forms of racism. The most obvious distinction of types of racism is between the open and visible racism and the hidden racism that exist in all European countries and which has far-reaching consequences for migrants and minorities across the continent.

During the conference a specific focus was put on the often hidden ‘institutional racism’, both through plenary sessions and the shared effort of participants in the working group ‘Beat the System! Strategies to Combat Institutional Racism’.

The contested definition of institutional racism, which has been used in the past ten years in the UK, was used as the starting point for discussing the concept in the working group. This definition was created in the MacPherson report. A report into how the police in the UK failed to effectively prosecute the racist murder of a black teenager in London, exposing the institutional racism within public bodies such as the Police force. The MacPherson definition states that institutional racism is a result of ‘unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping’. The participants disagreed on Lord MacPherson’s definition, as institutional racism is not necessarily performed unwittingly. Instead, institutional racism is best characterised as the ‘everyday’ racism that can often be explained with reference to people ‘only doing their job’, but the acceptance of these racist acts does not mean that they performed unwittingly per se. Institutional racism takes many different forms, often also depending upon the minority groups discriminated against, whether refugees, migrants or minority groups historically living within the country. However, it was possible to identify two general types of institutional racism: 1) the open and explicit institutional racism exemplified in the human rights violations against refugees that take place in most European countries and 2) the unwitting and hidden institutional racism as described by MacPherson, which is caused primarily by ignorance and flaws within the system.

While strategies that include lobbying for anti-institutional racism legislation, education and empowering of discriminated minorities can be pursued through cases of open and explicit institutional racism, everyday institutional racism first needs to be uncovered before it can be combated. In light of this, monitoring was again highlighted as a necessity for the further development of new strategies on the area.

**EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES**

**Music against racism**

A delegate from the Polish anti-racist, anti-fascist organisation Never Again presented the Music Against Racism campaign. Never Again monitors and documents racist and fascist activities and conducts educational campaigns focused on music and sports against racism.

Poland remains a society in which the issues of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance are still relatively unacknowledged. There appears to be little concrete knowledge or monitoring of the extent and manifestations of racism and discrimination within society, which means that specific measures to combat these phenomena are often lacking in various fields. The 'Music Against Racism' campaign was initiated in the attempt to overcome these barriers.
The campaign was inspired by the British Rock Against Racism movement, which was initiated by a group of political activists and musicians in the late 1970’s. Never Again has published seven CDs with the ‘Music Against Racism’ campaign, but more importantly, more than 500 artists have used their anti-racist logo on covers of their albums. Thus, the icons and role models of the music industry, including the popular British band Chumbawamba, have embraced the anti-racism agenda and sent a strong signal to the people listening to the music. Further, the organisation has arranged concerts and established stands at music festival and thereby reached a large and diverse audience with their message of tolerance and fighting racism.

In conducting campaigns like the Music Against Racism need the build up of strong coalitions. Being an activist does not necessarily make you capable of arranging large concerts or establishing contact for new bands, but other people are available who can share this know-how and the general atmosphere in the music industry is positive towards supporting anti-racist initiatives. Establishing a broad coalition of relevant contacts within the music industry is therefore crucial for succeeding.

**Football Unites - Racism Divides**

Football is the world’s most popular sport and is played all over the world, still the issue of racism troubles this sport!!

Two speakers of the organisation Football Unites – Racism Divides (FURD) located in Sheffield, presented their work against racism in football.

The organisation was created as a response to concrete problems experienced in Sheffield, were racially related conflicts had occurred as Pakistani players had been attacked when playing football. The organisation works closely with local football clubs, amongst them Sheffield United, to help them implement anti-racist strategies and become part of the community and organises regular tournaments and leagues, bringing together otherwise isolated communities. This work also includes refugees and asylum seekers in the Unity Cup Festival and the All Nations Tournament, which is held as a part of the International Refugee Week. The Unity Cup is a national football festival, held annually in different cities across the UK and organised by kick It Out. The Unity Cup brings together teams of refugees and asylum seekers from all over the UK to play against each other and in front of the local community. The All Nations Tournament offers teams from all over the world the opportunity to play football against each other. The league has been running every summer since and continues to attract more teams and competition.

FURD works within and with the local communities at various levels: they arrange free weekly coaching sessions and tournaments for local youngsters, mostly at Sheffield United’s training Academy, and further a ‘Positive Futures’ program, which uses sport as the ‘hook’ to build relationships with young people at risk of offending/drug abuse and leads them to a better future. FURD’s Youth Worker delivers programs of anti-racist education for local schools, colleges, youth groups and prisons as a part of their youth-led activities and FURD further provides books, DVDs, videos, fanzines, posters, press cuttings, magazines and teaching packs that are free to borrow and use. All together, FURD has exceptional experience in establishing contacts to minority communities and create social cohesion between different ethnic communities through football and the use of youth-led social activities.

Following the presentation the speakers and the conference participants began discussing the possibilities of continuing working with minority groups and the local communities once the football match is finished. The speakers emphasised, that the work they are conducting is an effective way of establishing contact between minority groups and the local communities. Empowering and gaining trust of the diverse resident communities enables them to actively combat racism, but further collaboration with other organisations is needed in order to ensure there is a follow up that solidifies this progress.

5.

**Refugees, asylum seekers and minority groups**

In many European countries, asylum seekers live in isolated camps away from the local population. This situation makes it hard for regular citizens to gain first-hand knowledge about refugees. Right-wing politicians use this situation to spread propaganda about refugees and other migrants. As a result, it can be hard to engage citizens in asylum and refugee matters because of an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ attitude and some become outright xenophobic.

5.1. **Combating anti-refugee prejudice**

Discrimination and human rights violations of refugees and asylum seekers are easily instigated in societies where the local population has no relationship to refugees. But, many examples from different countries also show that the authorities have difficulties implementing such policies if the local community gets involved in a case and supports the asylum seekers and refugees. These issues where addressed in the working group ‘The Unwanted: Normalisation of Anti-Refugees Prejudices’, which aimed to develop strategies to combat anti-refugee prejudices. The starting point for the discussions were the conditions for refugees in the participant’s countries: Denmark, Cyprus, Italy, Greece, UK, Spain and Finland.

Participants agreed that prejudices and a general lack of interest in refugees and asylum seekers’ rights exist in their respective...
countries. This, to a large degree, can be caused by the isolation of refugees and asylum seekers in the detention centers of Europe, which keep the refugees out of sight and thereby out of mind. The lack of interest in ensuring refugee rights, allows politicians across Europe to implement discriminating and inhuman policies, as recently seen with the Italian ‘Push Strategy’, where boat refugees are denied access to Italian shores and thereby left drifting in the Mediterranean Sea.

Thus, the group concluded that as communities are social structures that we aim to include refugees within, strategies aiming to sensitize the electorate must be developed, focusing on visualising and inclusion.

Monitoring refugee conditions and further informing and educating the general public on these conditions plays an important role in doing so. It was further proposed, that campaigning with famous refugees, to portray the positive stories of refugees contributing to the society, could be an effective strategy in combatting anti-refugee prejudice. Finally, the media was given a central role in combating anti-refugee prejudice and further opening the communities to refugees. Sensibilising the media can be as a way of sensibilising the electorate and visualising the conditions that refugees and asylum seekers live under.

5.2 Relation of propaganda and conflict

Propaganda has an important role in creating ‘the enemy’ and we are constantly subject to its effects. The UNITED conference ‘UNITED We Can Do It! Civil Society Against Right Wing Extremism’ analysed the challenges of xenophobic propaganda and the relationship between propaganda and conflict.

A delegate from the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) described xenophobic propaganda as processes that stereotypes and dehumanises foreigners and thereby legitimises structures that discriminate against them. This form of propaganda does not come from one source only, but it originates from the extreme right anti-immigrant and islamophobic parties as well as the media and the mainstream political parties. The purpose of the propaganda is to erode the international law, namely the Geneva Convention, defined in 1951 to define and protects the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Thereby they seek to leave these groups in a vacuum where they are guaranteed no rights by states who should be the guarantors of rights, held in international law, reducing them to less than human.

Worrying examples from Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh of propaganda designed to stereotype and dehumanise certain groups were then presented by the representatives from Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation (TCHRF) and Nagorno-Karabakh Committee of Helsinki Initiative 92 (NKC HI-92). In the case of Cyprus historical revisionism and propaganda has been closely connected as leaders from both sides have tried to justify their own claims by dehumanising the other. Not only the politicians are responsible for the spreading of propaganda, but also the media and the powerful church. Further, historical revisionism and a hostile educational system that portrays a negative image of ‘Greek Cypriots’ reach most Turkish Cypriots even at a very young age.

In the war between Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia from 1991-1994 the propaganda systems of all sides of the conflict had a considerable role in ‘justifying’ war crimes and continued bloodshed. The portrayal of war crimes as ‘historic and important victories’ was absolutely crucial for continuing the battle and keeping the hopes and morale of the implicated populations high, and on the other hand accusations of genocide were used to attract international awareness and put pressure on counterparts. In this particular atmosphere of hate, mistrust and war the NKC HI-92 was an important actor in leveling the image of the enemy as they arranged meetings between Azerbaijani and Nagorno-Karabakh NGO workers and politicians, and thereby established the first counterproof of the propaganda that had been spread on both sides of the conflict.

All three speakers agreed on the important role of the mass media in stopping the spread of propaganda. If the mass media embrace and distribute propaganda as facts, it is very hard to rollback this spreading. On the other hand, humanising the image of the other in the media also has long lasting effects resulting in sustainable changes, and in this process the role of civil society to combat negative stereotypes becomes crucial. Finally, fighting historical revisionism, which is on the rise and great parts of Europe, is a key to combating the spread of propaganda.

5.3 Empowering minority communities

Not only refugees and asylum seekers are affected by the rising xenophobia and right wing extremism since European countries are all home to a wide range of national, ethnic, religious and/or linguistic minority communities, which participation in political, economic and social processes often leave much to be desired. Whether part of a Nation-State since its creation or constituted through recent migrations, minority communities happen to face a number of issues, which vary from preservation of culture and identity to exclusion and extreme poverty, from institutional racism to widespread discrimination. However, minority communities often do not have sufficient capacity to effectively challenge minority rights violations at a national, regional or international level.

These issues were discussed in the working group ‘Build it Up! Empowering Minority Communities’ through discussions of the core issues concerned, sharing of best practices and skills and national diagnostics from the participants home countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, UK, Hungary, Ireland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

Through national diagnostics it was concluded, that common problems regarding minority rights appeared in all countries: the problem of ghettoisation, lower levels of education, racial discrimination and the right to keep your identity. The consequence of these problems is a massive exclusion of minority communities from the rest of society, further dividing minorities into different parts and groups.
Participants engaged in lively discussions on the many levels, which work for empowering minority groups must be conducted: the community level, the national level and the international level. Thus, work must be conducted within the communities themselves in order to establish the necessary capacity and with the community to effectively challenge minority rights violations. Furthermore, making visible the discrimination and rights violation of minority communities and further lobbying for strategic legislation that can improve the situation is necessary. Shadow reporting was emphasised as an instrument that has proved itself effective in this aspect. Shadow reports are a method for NGOs to supplement or present alternative information to the periodic government reports that State parties are required to submit under treaties.

The need for cooperation between organisations working on different levels was emphasised as crucial, as the information gathered by organisations working on community level is of great importance for those who work on national, regional and international level.

**EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES**

**Living Library - Understanding diversity**

The Living Library is ‘a simple and no-nonsense contribution to social cohesion’ with the aim of challenging prejudice, promoting diversity and creating community cohesion and partnerships through education and information. The concept behind the Living Library is to replace the library books with human beings belonging to different minority groups: refugees, homosexuals, transgender, migrants and addicts. Only imagination sets the limits to whom can play the role of ‘the book’. As in a traditional library, it is now possible for community members to ‘borrow a book’ for a period of time.

The Living Library in Norfolk (UK) has so far held 6 events resulting in more than 40 books for loan, 15 staff members working and more than 400 readers and 600 loans. The experience of the speaker is, that the personal contact to the exposed minority groups can strengthen understanding and has a big impact on the lives of the loaner, and thereby contribute significantly to social cohesion in the community. In order to undertake a Living Library there are however practical challenges that must be taken into account. The obvious part is to organise the event in a friendly atmosphere that makes both books and readers comfortable with the situation, and further rules for loaning books must be established so that both books and loaners feel safe and can open themselves to each other. However, the biggest problem is often to persons from exposed minority groups to play the part of ‘the book’, and thereby presenting an interesting catalogue of books. In this effort, the speaker emphasises the need to establish coalitions with organisations who work with the minorities and have contacts as well as their confidence.

Working with the Living Library concept is also suitable in specific context. As an example, the speaker presented The Living Library that was undertaken in Norfolk during The International Refugee Week. The library contained books to include Refugees, Social Workers, Housing Officers, Support Workers, Community Leaders, Police, and Red Cross workers and thereby variety of people who all work with a specific issue. Thus, the concept can easily be transformed and used in different national contexts as an instrument of education and information.

**Unity is Strength Awards**

The Netherlands has traditionally been known as a very tolerant country, but following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and the assassinations of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn and controversial movie director Theo van Gogh, changes within both the communities and the political elite occurred. As a response to this, some members of the Dutch youth took action and in 2004 the Rotterdam Youth Council announced diversity as a priority on the agenda; as result, the Unity is Strength Foundation (USF) promoted a campaign with the main goal of using the diverse talents of young people to improve the integration process and respect for cultural diversity.

With the Unity is Strength Award Show, the USF has created a show for young people that is characterised by high energy and hip performances and introduces the audience to role models that have fought for diversity cohesion. The Awards and Festival evolves around the presentations of the Colour Award, the Active Citizen Award, the International Anti–Discrimination Award and the Country Award, and the young people nominate their heroes/inspirations themselves. Thus, the Awards show the positive and powerful side of diversity instead of focusing on the negative effects of lack of tolerance and become a source of inspiration for the Dutch youth.

The project is undertaken in cooperation with a coalition of national and international partners including the Dutch Ministry of Integration, the City Council of Rotterdam, Amnesty International, RADAR and more.

http://living-library.org

“IT was an amazing experience in every sense of the word.”
UNITED in (Inter)Cultural Action

The ‘UNITED We Can Do It! Civil Society Against Right Wing Extremism’ conference provided room for abstract as well as concrete discussions of the fight against right wing extremism. Important was not only to create space for practical training and informal exchange in-between activists, but also to create a very friendly and relaxed working environment.

6.1 As one activist to another

By the end of the conference participants could choose between five different workshops: ‘Get Active and UNITED’, ‘How to Deal with Hate Graffiti and Hate Symbols’, ‘Tackling Hate Speech Online’, ‘Capacity Building for your organisation’ and ‘Inspiring other to join the fight’. The purpose of the workshops was to provide training on proven working methods and techniques. Here the two workshops that where not already described in previous parts of the conference report:

Methods of capacity building

The ‘Capacity building for your organisation’ workshop focused on providing concrete methods of how to organising project work, for the participants. The workshop was facilitated by two experienced members of the co-host organisation Minority Rights Group who held the training focusing on the six steps of carrying out a project: 1) identification of the problem/issue, 2) research on the problem/issue at hand, 3) drafting the project, 4) fundraising, 5) implementing the project and 6) evaluating the project. Further, the concept of a ‘logical framework’ that again systematises different variables in order to frame the project was introduced. The methods introduced and their importance for project management were then discussed with the participants.

The response from the participants to this systematic approach to project managing was very positive, and led to further discussions of how different approaches each have strengths and weaknesses depending upon the context of and the aims of the project.

Building the fundament of the upcoming UNITED campaign

In the ‘Get active and UNITED’ workshop participants worked on new ideas and slogans for this year UNITED 9th of November Campaign ‘International Day Against Fascism and Antisemitism’. Several ideas were discussed and the essence of these discussions became addressing topics such antifascism and antinationalism with catchy slogans and pictures, used to attract the attention of the general public and not just those already involved activists. However, this task is not an easy one, as the topics raised, is not funny in itself. Therefore a delicate approach to a campaign with this focus was needed.

Through discussions the participants came to an agreement, and it was decided to use a pack of cigarettes as the theme for the poster campaign – only this pack would not contain cigarettes but fascists instead. The message is that hatred is a dangerous disease, which can destroy societies. It spreads like a cancer and it has to be confronted because: Hatred Kills.

6.2 Call for a ‘European Minority Rights Network’

Participants had the possibility of addressing issues not discussed in plenaries during the open forum. A call for organisations working with minority rights protection to found a European Minority Rights Network was held. The network aims to create links between activists across borders to collect data, information and know-how on a regional level and thereby improve the possibilities for international advocacy for minority rights. For further collaboration on the topic a mailing list was created.

6.3 What is the road the Network takes?

The political café provides an opportunity for the participants to get together in an informal and comfortable setting to engage in discussions on a topic that is very actual and did not fit in the program, which was made already months beforehand.

The need to discuss about the future of the European anti-racism network and how to guarantee its progress was the main topic of the political café. The discussion addressed whether or not the EU can be seen as the most important level at which the civil society should advocate for minority rights and against right wing extremism. Following the presentation lively discussions on the subject took place.

6.4 The ‘UNITED family’ on the road again

Besides all the work that was undertaken during plenary sessions, working groups and workshops, social activities were prioritised as well. These activities serve in their own right, for creating a productive atmosphere, as well as for providing the participants with the chance of getting to know each other, exchange projects ideas and look for new partners in a non-formal atmosphere. Besides from the non-planned activities, such as football matches, the following social activities were scheduled in the conference program.

Participants were given also the opportunity of visiting the city and some city projects during their free afternoon: 1) a trip to the historical building of Chatsworth House 2) a guided tour around and through Sheffield and 3) a guided tour to Bramall Lane, the stadium of Sheffield United with a following visit to FURD’s office nearby.

Following the three excursions, participants could enjoy the English summer in Sheffield city centre before meeting for dinner at a local African restaurant.

*Really motivated and experienced participants, inspiring lectures, very high involvement of participants during workshops*
This conference was developed as a result of the project ‘Civil Society Against Right-Wing Extremism - Developing New Lifelong-learning Strategies for NGOs’ – a project supported by the Grundtvig Program of the European Commission and implemented by UNITED for Intercultural Action in partnership with:

- ARI Immigrant Association Rieti, Italy - www.ariweb.it
- DUHA - Rainbow Association, Czech Republic - www.duha.cz
- Kulturbüro Sachsen, Germany - www.kulturbuero-sachsen.de
- Master on Immigration Programme University of Venice, Italy - www.unive.it/masterim
- Never Again Association, Poland - www.nigdywieczej.org
- Norwegian People’s Aid, Norway - www.antrasissme.no
- Movement Against Intolerance, Spain - www.movimientocontraalaintolerancia.com
- People Against Racism, Slovakia - www.rasizmus.sk
- Youth Human Rights Movement, Russia - www.yhrm.org

This conference 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 to participants and their sending organisations, which supported the conference with their ideas, good spirit and their suggestions.

We especially thank:

- Minority Rights Group (UK) and Show Racism the Red Card (UK), for making it possible to host this event in the United Kingdom.
- The underneath mentioned activists from across Europe, for facilitating working groups and helping to realise the programme:
  - Amila - SOS Against Racism (Denmark)
  - Eva - Minority Rights Group (United Kingdom)
  - Iryna - No Border Project - Social Action Centre (Ukraine)
  - Khanh - Youth Fabric (Norway)
  - Laura - Show Racism the Red Card (United Kingdom)
  - Michal - People Against Racism (Slovakia)
  - Neil - Minority Rights Group (United Kingdom)
  - Paola - Master’s on Immigration Ca’ Foscari Universita’ Venezia (Italy)
  - All experts for their valuabale lectures.
  - All working group rapporteurs who contributed to this report and Mikkel for editing it.

Many thanks to the sponsors who contributed financially to the event: The Grundtvig Program of the European Commission; The Council of Europe European Youth Foundation and Cyprus Youth Board.

Lastly, the enthusiastic and dedicated workers in the United secretariat and the volunteers without whom none of this had been possible.

Report edited by Mikkel Marienlund, Worthy Life for Asylum Seekers – Denmark
UNITED Conference Program

UNITED WE CAN DO IT! Civil Society Against Right Wing Extremism

2 - 7 June 2009 in Sheffield, United Kingdom

UNITED Conference Program
## List of Participating Organisations

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Civil Society Against Right-Wing Extremism

This project was developed after many years experience of UNITED network in antidiscrimination campaigns and deep analysis on the current trends of European civil society active in the fight against right-winged extremism, racism and discrimination. Experience shows that despite the quantitative and qualitative work done by many organizations active in this field, many NGO’s have little knowledge about democratic institutions and processes. Nevertheless, there are effective ways to tackle discrimination at its local and regional level through innovative and informal learning strategies. There are as well ways to give the best practices a European dimension. The aim of the project is to create a space for antiracial adult education and make it qualified, available and accessible throughout Europe. The objectives are: the creation of feasible ways to enhance the work of local grassroots groups and NGO’s active in the field of antiracial education, their training as learning facilitators in antiracial education, and the counterbalance of the unevenness in antiracial fight Europe-wide. The project has as its direct target group precisely NGOs activists. Ultimately, the project is also expected reach-out the NGOs’ target groups, mainly disadvantaged social categories with less opportunities to access education else way. The main activities envisaged include identification, selection and dissemination of best practices in the antiracist field, conferences, workshops and campaigns, which will eventually bring the following outputs: publications, handbooks, info leaflets, web-pages and campaigning material.

The UNITED Network

UNITED for Intercultural Action is the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees. Linked through UNITED, more than 560 organizations from a wide variety of backgrounds, from all European countries, work together on a voluntary basis. They base their cooperation on common actions and shared activities on a mutual respect. UNITED is and will remain independent from all political parties, organisations and states, but seeks an active co-operation with other anti-racist initiatives in Europe. Through the UNITED network organizations meet each other, work on common actions and share information. European-wide action weeks, campaigns and such are planned and discussed on UNITED conferences. Like-minded organisations find each other on such conferences and work together on specific projects and on specific topics. Information is received from more than 2000 organisations and mailings go out to about 2200 groups in Europe. If you want to get involved, discuss the ideas and aims of the UNITED network within your organisation. Let us know that your organization would like to join or receive information. And add us to your mailing list!