UNITED for Intercultural Action
European network
against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees

INFORMATION

Racism, nationalism, fascism, discrimination, asylum policies, all of them have a European dimension even though they often look like pure national issues. Reports from all over Europe demonstrate the increasing dangers facing migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. Often these dangers are increased by undemocratic intergovernmental decisions like the Schengen Treaty. Strangely enough, racist and fascist organisations have strong European links from Portugal to Russia, from Sweden to Italy. Fortress Europe needs to be fought at local, regional and European levels – it cannot be fought on one level alone.

Linked through UNITED, hundreds of organisations 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 organisations meet each other, work on common actions and share information. Europe-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 on specific topics. The workers in the secretariat are in constant contact with the network organisations, ensuring that information and proposals for action are transmitted rapidly. Information is received from more than 2000 organisations and mailings are sent out to about 2500 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 you would like to join or receive information. And add us to your mailing list!

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BREAK our Limits
Through Intercultural Youth Action

23-28
October
2007
Baku
Azerbaijan

CONFERENCE REPORT
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Current Issues and Developments in Azerbaijan</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Rightwing Extremism, Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Forms and Shapes of Racism</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Migrants, Refugees and Internally Displaced People</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Gender Trouble - Homophobia, Sexism &amp; Gender Discrimination</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Intercultural Action, Youth Work and Active Participation</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Conference Programme</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>List of Participating Organisations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

This fall, the Italian government passed an emergency decree, which allows the expulsion of citizens, limiting procedural safeguards, and even introducing administrative detention for European citizens if they are considered a “threat to public safety”. The decree was issued after the alleged murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian of Roma origin.

This is just one example of how widely accepted stereotypes and discriminating practices can be transformed into structural racism. Alarmingly, not only populist politicians all over Europe use such cases to promote and find acceptance for more restrictive and repressive laws, but they can, at times, even find support in the high ranks of European Union institutions. The EU Commissioner for Justice, Franco Frattini, commented on the events in Italy: “What has to be done is simple. Go into a nomad camp in Rome, for example, and ask them: ‘Can you tell me where you live?’ If they say they do not know, take them and send them home to Romania”.

These developments show that even in the official “European Year of Equal Opportunities for All” there is no reason to lean back and believe that the European bodies and governments have come far enough in promoting equality, mutual respect and diversity. On the contrary, there is a strong need – especially for youth activists and active members of civil society organizations - to continue the struggle against discrimination, to stand up for human rights and to combat racism and xenophobia, in all different forms and on all levels.

UNITED for Intercultural Action is the largest pan-European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees. Linked through UNITED, more than 560 organizations work together on a voluntary basis. The UNITED network organizes conferences twice a year - their aim is to strengthen the movement against discrimination. They provide the opportunity to monitor important developments, highlight new trends, exchange experiences, good practice and methodology and develop joint campaigns.

The theme of the conference in Baku was “Break Our Limits Through Intercultural Youth Action”. At the beginning of this year, after a discussion with a group of local young people, the President of Azerbaijan declared 2007 to be the “Year of the Youth”, in recognition of the important role that youth and civil society organizations can play to protect the rights of migrants, refugees, IDPs and to stop intolerance, discrimination, fascism and racism.

UNITED for Intercultural Action and the Youth League for Intercultural Cooperation (AZ) with the kind support of Ministry of Youth and Sport of Azerbaijan organized the first international conference of this scale in Azerbaijan. 77 activists from 33 European countries participated. This report aims to reflect and summarize the main points and arguments of the five-day-lasting conference program: rightwing extremism and Holocaust denial, antisemitism and different forms and dimensions of racism. We studied themes that play an important role in Azerbaijan, but also elsewhere, as the legal and social situation of refugees and Internally Displaced People. We discussed in detail gender questions, homophobia and heterosexism. But surely, besides the analysis of current issues we also focused on the exchange of good practice examples and possible strategies how to tackle these problems.

METHODOLOGY

One of the most important characteristics of a UNITED conference is that manifold and multifaceted methods are applied. Learning takes the form of cognitive, emotional and behavioral learning - UNITED conferences use all three methods. Cognitive learning is stimulated by presentations and lectures as well as plentiful written material to take home and study later. Behavioral learning is taking place in the ‘thematic working groups’ as well as in the campaigning working groups. During the UNITED conference in Baku, the thematic working groups lasted for four sessions – in the course of three days - and were meant to look closely at issues with fellow specialists and practitioners.

The UNITED conference began with two interactive activities, called “Breaking the Blocks” and “The Danger of Words”. “Breaking the Blocks” provides the possibility for its participants to get a first glimpse on each other: Where do they come from? What kind of work do they do? Do they consider themselves left or right, part of a minority or a majority? What do they mean if they say they are male or female? Do they want to make a decision and take a position on each of these questions?

“The Danger of Words” also aimed at gaining new insights on what a fellow participant might mean with what he or she says. The participants were split in small groups to take a close look at terms as equality, tolerance, integration, racism, patriotism, etc. It became clear that each term had numerous connotations and meanings – differing from region to region, from context to context - the exchange of ideas highlighted how important it is to be sensitive to the possible danger of words.

During informal time such as evenings, free afternoon, we organized social activities to give participants the space to interact with each other and find a way to express what seemed most important to them. In this sense, they opened up the opportunity for emotional learning and for gaining new perspectives and understanding. Movies were shown, a political café took place and all participants were invited to go on a city tour and have an astonishing Azeri dinner with live music in the city center of Baku. An info market was organized - not only to give out and receive oral information and countless leaflets, stickers and posters. Moreover, it provided the opportunity for the participants to try snacks and drinks from the home regions of the others and to share the experience of how salty, rich or sweet an inter- and cross-cultural exchange can be at its best.
CURRENT ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is an oil-rich country in the Caucasus region and lays directly at the Caspian Sea. Since the 19th century, the country has been divided between Persian and Russian empires. North Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan Republic) gained independence in 1918. Then, Azerbaijan was occupied by Soviet Russia in 1920. In 1988, a popular movement for freedom widely spread throughout the country. The Azerbaijan Republic gained independency again after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

About 90% of the populations are Azerbaijanis or Azeri Turks, who speak in Turkic. The other 10% are Armenians, Russians, Lezgins, Talysh, Jews, etc. In regard to religion, the wide majority (96%) of the population is Muslim. However, only 5-13% of people are practicing the rules of Islam in their daily life.

Today Azerbaijan is involved in an armed conflict with Armenia in the dispute over the Karabakh area. Since 1988 Armenia has occupied with armed forces the Karabakh region, which had a negative social impact on the Azerbaijani population. Today, Azerbaijan has 250,000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and 760,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Karabakh. Although Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a ceasefire in 1994, the peace negotiations mediated since 1995 by the OSCE gave no results.

The largest country in Caucasus in terms of both area and population (over 8 million), Azerbaijan is a secular state with an authoritarian political regime. The country has serious problems in regards to political and civil liberties, particularly with freedom of speech.

The speaker of the Youth League for Intercultural Cooperation - YLIC (AZ) stated in his presentation that different forms of racism and discrimination (e.g. exposed in hate speeches but also in the shape of institutional discrimination) are worrying phenomena in Azerbaijan which can not been ignored but have to be monitored and fought.

As a good practice example of monitoring media and current developments which media reflect YLIC described a program launched by his organization in 2006: the "Media Tolerance Monitoring" program. This program drew special attention to the frequency of media coverage on the topics racism and discrimination. Moreover, it examined the vocabulary used by journalists to describe the problems of armed conflicts, racism, all forms of intolerance and the situation of refugees, minorities and migrants in Azerbaijan.

RIGHTWING EXTREMISM, ANTISEMITISM AND HOLOCAUST DENIAL

In spite of the fact that in Azerbaijan a concern of right-wing extremism is not officially expressed, it has been noticed that this phenomena grows unexpectedly in countries that were part of the Soviet Union or post-communist countries. With this panel the attention was drawn to these disquieting developments to raise the awareness about the possible consequences, giving an example from Russia and a second one from Greece.

A  ■ Rightwing Extremism in Russia

The representative of the organization Youth Human Rights Movement (RUS) gave a presentation on antisemitism in Russia and stressed how the local manifestations of antisemitism also reflect the universal trends.

The presentation focused on shifting tendencies in modern antisemitism in Russia that move towards more elaborate and discreet forms of propaganda. The patterns of promotion of hate typical to antisemitism also influence other forms of xenophobia, notably in depiction of objects of hatred and in myth production. Antisemitism, typical for the Russian nationalist movement, encompasses elements of inter-religious hatred, traditional to the Orthodox or pagan nationalistic circles, as well as populist arguments, promoted both by extreme-right and mainstream parties.

Government reaction stays inadequate and is more focused on hiding the most obvious expressions of antisemitism, while doing little to counteract the propagation of the hatred.

The speaker underlined that antisemitism is deeply rooted and its demonstration is not generally condemned by the society. Antifascist organizations not only in Russia and the former Soviet Union but elsewhere must take these factors in consideration when coming up with ways to address antisemitism and to combat it.

B  ■ Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial

A speaker from the Antinazi Initiative (GR) discussed the themes "Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial". She highlighted especially how these phenomena have recently expanded in Greece.

Holocaust denial is the claim that the systematic murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime during World War II did not occur. According to the deniers, the Holocaust is a wholly fabricated story, which was invented in the interests of the world Jews.
In January 2007, the United Nations General Assembly condemned "without reservation any denial of the Holocaust". In many countries in Europe law forbids Holocaust denial.

A recent characteristic example is the case of the Greek writer Kostas Plevris. He claims to be a historian, but he is an enthusiastic devotee of Hitler and can be seen as the ideological father and to some extent the political leader of all Greek neonazis. Plevris recently wrote a vehemently anti-Semitic book with the title “Jews - the Whole Truth”. He openly denies that Holocaust ever happened suggesting that this was one of Hitler’s faults: "Afterwards, history of humankind will accuse him (Hitler) of having done nothing to rid Europe of the Jews, though he could (...)."

The Antinazi Initiative supported the charge brought against Plevris by the Greek Jews. The writer has been prosecuted according to the Greek anti-discrimination law. Alarmingly, this happened after thousands of copies of his book had been sold already.

The prosecution of Plevris was of great importance because the open pro-Hitler and antisemitic literature thrives in Greece but the state and judicial authorities had done nothing to deal with it.

The speaker stated that the peculiarity of Greece in comparison with other European countries – with the exception of the more and more antisemitic Russia – is that antisemitism in Greece is not a marginal ideology, but a mainstream ideological current. The general acceptance or tolerance of these ideas have made it possible for a far-right anti-Semitic party in support of Kostas Plevris to enter the Parliament.

The Antinazi Initiative condemns the stand of silence and concealment that finally enabled the defenders of an overt antisemite to enter the Parliament of a European country with the far-right party LAOS.

C ■ Over the Edge! Nationalism, Patriotism, Fascism and Hate Speech

The working group “Nationalism, Patriotism, Fascism and Hate speech” examined the different forms in which nationalism appears in different countries and their relation to fascist practices. The participants focused on the ways that nationalistic ideas are used to promote hate towards other nations, national minorities and migrants.

In Russia, nationalism is extremely strong. As explained in the presentation mentioned above (see 4.a), the notion of purity of the Russian nation appears in the mainstream political scene and exclusion practices of migrants and other ethnic groups are being enforced. Hate speech, especially against migrants, is widely spread promoting violent attacks by neonazi groups.

In Austria, the far right and extreme nationalist leader Georg Haider condemned by the European Union for supporting Nazi ideas, was elected governor of the province of Carinthia. All over Austria too, the nationalistic ideas are gaining ground.

In Bulgaria, the leader of the extreme nationalistic party “Ataka” (Attack) that is represented in Parliament openly advocates hostility and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities. In Azerbaijan, hostilities were reported against ethnic Armenians in the context of the conflict of the Karabakh area. In Latvia, many people from Russian minority were denied citizenship and are stateless.

Trying to explore the grounds of the rise of nationalism, the group identified as a common characteristic in different countries that citizenship and citizens’ rights are being more and more connected with ethnicity/ethnic origin. The false theory of the superiority of one nation against others is used to promote ethnic purity and as a result the rights of minority groups are violated. Going deeper into the roots of nationalism, there was a common agreement that the dominance of national identity over human identity, and the national form as a form of distinction between people are factors that promote nationalism. In this sense, the most important strategy to fight against nationalism is to promote human values over national barriers.

D ■ Political Café on Left-wing Extremism

In the last UNITED conferences there have been discussions among participants if - and if yes, how - concepts that are traditionally linked with the right wing field appear nowadays in the left wing, like anti-Semitism and nationalism.

It was proposed that “Left-Wing Extremism as opposed to Right-Wing Extremism” could be the title of this discussion, but this proved to be confusing. The political phenomenon the discussion referred to was rather "red-brown alliance".

One of the participants gave a first input to the discussion about the situation in Greece. She drew the attention to the situation in Greece, where during the last elections in fall 2007, the far-right party LAOS with extremely xenophobic, nationalistic and anti-Semitic positions was very successful, since ten members were elected to be Parliament members. This happened, according to her, under the complete tolerance of the two left parliamentary parties, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Coalition of the Left and Progress (Synaspismos).

In addition, she highlighted more examples, which from her point of view showed a similar worrying tendency of “red-brown alliances”. Her conclusion was that nowadays left form is used to dress up reactionary positions and the task that is set for antifascist struggle is to stand up to these positions either they appear under a right or a left label.

There were different reactions from the audience. One participant argued that although the left approaches the right at certain points today, antisemitism is not one of them and thus the above described issue is secondary in regards to the antifascist movement.
Two participants agreed with the point of view of the first speaker. They pointed at the example of Hugo Chavez as a politician "who upholds a left profile but exercises oppressive policy on his people, shutting up opposition TV channels, and has also friendly relations with the oppressive and vehemently antisemitic regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad".

Others referred to the fact that countries like China, Cuba and North Korea claim to be communist but are openly oppressive and that in Russia “communists openly adopt fascist positions”.

In the end, many of the participants who took part in the political café recognized that it was an interesting but also difficult and emotional discussion - mainly because it touched a “taboo” subject. Many agreed that the exchange on it has to continue and deepen in the future – but some attendees pointed out that it is very important to look closely at how such a discussion will be organized to avoid misunderstandings and the commingling of topics, which should be discussed separately.

One participant noted: “I believe that the most important accomplishment of that night was that the discussion actually took place, and that people were triggered to think and reflect on the subject.”

**E  ■ Fascism: A Shadow from the Past, A Warning for the Future**

On 9 November each year the UNITED network organizes and coordinates a European-wide campaign ‘Kristallnacht’ Commemoration - International Day Against Fascism and Antisemitism” to commemorate the past and to protest against contemporary forms of fascism and antisemitism.

The campaign working group “Against Fascism and Antisemitism“ discussed how important it is today to increase awareness for Nazi crimes as a result of Nazi ideology in order to show how dangerous the adoption of Nazi positions - appearing in modern forms - can be and where they can lead. The results of the discussion were put into the following lines:

“No Nazi crimes seem to have happened many years ago. Nowadays lots of the elements of the Nazi propaganda that supported them are coming back through political speech not only in right-wing extremism but also in mainstream politics.

Nationalism, antisemitism, racism and xenophobia in various forms have been rising and promoted in most extreme ways. Policies depending on the exercise of force instead of democratic procedures are imposed. Awareness should be raised in young generations not only regarding the Nazi crimes and criminal ideology but also regarding the enhancement of values like human dignity, human rights, justice and equality.”

**FORMS AND SHAPE OF RACISM**

Racism takes different forms in different countries and regions, depending on history, public discourse, political culture and many other factors. It can be described as a belief that some people are superior because they belong to a particular race. In many cases this feeling of superiority is connected with hatred, physical or verbal violence and institutional discrimination against minority groups. During the conference, racism was discussed in different dimensions and shapes - a particularly close look was taken at institutional racism and Romaphobia.

**A  ■ E-Race it! Institutional Racism**

The main issues tackled during the first part of the working group “E-race it! Institutional Racism”, were based on different levels of acting conscious and awareness. In the beginning, it was clarified that the group would concentrate on the minority perspective as to distinguish the victimization and the threat to human dignity.

A question, which was intensively discussed in the group, was how to identify and decide when racism is institutionalized and how to take action on it. Participants shared examples drawn from their experience about institutional racism as a means to answer collectively the aforementioned question. One participant drew the attention to the striking example of an Ombudsman who rejected the examination of cases due to bad use of language on the part of migrants. In the course of the discussion, the participants agreed that the use of language can’t be regulated, neither can attitudes - despite existing laws and regulations.

The group agreed that challenges arise in the realization of projects that strive to fight institutional racism. Changing power structures can be seen as an immense challenge. Therefore many projects intend to raise awareness and use the concept of “mainstreaming”.

Above all, the conclusion of this working group was that any person who or any organizations which decides to address and realize projects in the field of institutional racism needs to be persistent and patient: Persistent in their efforts and patient with the appearance of visible results.
B ■ Romaphobia in Europe

A representative of the European Roma Grassroots Organisation was invited to speak about Romaphobia in Europe. The speaker argued that Romaphobia or - referring to the term he used – anti-Gypsyism is a distinct type of racist ideology. Despite the fact that anti-Gypsyism fits academic descriptions of racism, until very recently academic discussions and analyses of racism have ignored the plight of the Roma, and have not made much effort to theorize the discrimination faced by Roma.

Anti-Gypsyism is a complex social phenomenon, which manifests itself through violence, hate speech, exploitation, and discrimination in its most visible form. The speaker gave numerous frightening examples of quotations, cases, articles, commercials and images demonstrating anti-Gypsyism – examples from all over Europe. He summed up his presentation by stressing that prejudices against Roma clearly go beyond racist stereotyping which associates them with negative traits and behaviours. Dehumanisation is its central point. Roma are viewed as less than human and therefore, they are perceived as not morally entitled to human rights equal to those of the rest of the population.

One participant in the audience asked what could be done to challenge anti-Gypsyism. The speaker said in his view Roma associations can play a key role by fighting the social stigma. Moreover, affirmative action could be very helpful in this process as well.

C ■ Campaign Against Racism

The campaign 21 March – European Action Week Against Racism - coordinated by UNITED aims to highlight the issues of racism from a non-governmental perspective on all levels - local, national and international. The campaign is centered on March 21 - the “International Day of Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination”.

In this working group participants exchanged their thoughts on how new material for the campaign should look like to attract wide attention. Secondly, the group members developed suggestions on how to complement the material with activities: the ideas ranged from lectures and trainings to performances or movie screenings.

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

In the current political debates in Azerbaijan the themes of refugees and IDP’s play an important role, which is not surprising: the total population of the country counts approximative 8 million people, more than 1 million of them are IDP’s and refugees.

A ■ Inclusion, Make it Available!

In former conferences it was suggested to discuss separately the issue of refugees, IDP’s and migrants in two groups. One focusing on asylum and migration law while the second concentrating on the social dimension. In consequence, at the conference in Baku the working group “Inclusion, Make it Available!” looked in detail at the social aspects of the theme and discussed inclusion, especially in regard to access to education and the labor market.

When discussing inclusion in education participants suggested the following strategies:

- Teaching assistants for minorities could help integration as soon as possible and reduce the “need” to segregate.
- Wider integration in form of language and vocational training is often necessary, affirmative action and peer to peer education can be very successful (e.g. Roma children in one program in Poland taught other children in practical projects with support of professionals e.g. photographers).
- Other positive examples were: preschool preparation, cross cultural interactive tools, mixed teaching.
- A school curriculum beyond history books and an interdisciplinary approach are necessary.
- Train the trainers – ongoing permanent mutual education of social workers – goal: to be more aware of the background of clients and be better equipped to meet their needs & contribute to shift in public reception.
- Evaluation of new activities is also very important e.g. cost/benefit analysis to proof the benefits social inclusion of marginalized groups and minorities can bring about for society.

Furthermore, the group understood why employment of excluded and discriminated groups is such an important aspect: inclusion in the labor market is fundamental for the recognition of human rights and human dignity. Additionally, it helps to avoid the situation in which people without a work permit are forced to work illegally in order to be able to pay for food, housing, health insurances etc.
B ■ Stand Up For Your Rights! Refugees and IDP’s

The second working group in this field decided to concentrate their sessions on the themes: asylum politics and the situation of IDP’s in each country represented in the group, conditions at asylum centers, strategies and methods of the represented organizations and, ideally, how to work UNITED in the future.

The participants explained the current situation in their respective countries in regard to the number of asylum seekers, refugees and IDP’s, the legal situation of these groups, their access to the labor market, health system and education.

One major challenge was highlighted: the fact that the asylum systems are not working well in any of the represented countries. The working group members agreed that the procedure of achieving asylum is too long, the condition in the centers are deeply unworthy, the integration process is not brought forward by most governmental authorities and the lack of access to the labor market. Moreover, the Geneva Conventions are in many cases and in many countries not fully taken into account.

Among the strategies and solutions in dealing with these challenges, participants suggested: cooperation between the organizations and the authorities, cooperation with; but NGO’s always have to be careful that they are not used as vehicles to give the asylum and migration law and policy a “human costume” while the structural discrimination and the institutional racism against excluded, discriminated and illegalized groups holds on.

During one of the working group sessions and also in the framework of the open forum three participants introduced their “follow-up working group in support of migrants and refugees”. The initiative was founded at a UNITED conference in spring 2006 and the group has met twice since, once in Berlin and once in Amsterdam and continues working on its own initiative. Everyone who is interested in this ongoing NGO cooperation is invited to join the group. For further information contact the UNITED secretariat.

C ■ Hear the Voices - Refugee in Your own Country

One delegate from the Yuva Humanitarian Center (AZ) gave a presentation on her personal experience as an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), living in Baku. She described how she and all of her family members had to flee from their hometown in the period of the breakout of violent conflict in Karabakh. Furthermore, she explained strikingly how difficult it was for her in the beginning to be marked as “unacceptable” in her new surrounding because suddenly she was seen only in the light of her status as an IDP. In regard to her current situation she said that, luckily, she has full access to the labor market and works as a school teacher.

When asked by a member of the audience, what her personal hope for the future would be she underlined that she strongly hopes for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

D ■ Campaign in Support of Migrants, Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Every year the UNITED secretariat calls upon all organizations in the network to take part in the campaign in support of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the International Refugee Day (June 20). The aims of the campaign are closely connected to the monitoring activity of UNITED on the Fatal Realities of Fortress Europe – since 1993 UNITED documents the names of those refugees and migrants who died at the borders of Europe and puts them on “The List of Deaths” (www.unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/actual_listofdeath.pdf).

Taking this into account, the campaigning group discussed possible ways of strengthening the campaigns. One participant from Turkey pointed out that it is necessary to focus on reasons, which “create refugees”, for example the excessive producing of weapons etc. Most people flee because of armed conflicts or other life threatening situations and activists should not overlook the roots of problems in their practical work.

The group created the slogan: Stop making Refugees!, which can be used in every country and region to raise awareness not only about refugees, but also about the reasons creating the conflicts and problems which make people flee.

GENDER TROUBLE - HOMOPHOBIA, SEXISM AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

During the game “Breaking the blocks” when the attendants were asked if they consider themselves as being male or female, and why the one or the other, one participant explained: “I consider myself being male, but only because I was told from the beginning of my life that this is what I am supposed to be.”

In the course of the conference, different forms and dimensions of homophobia, heterosexism, gender discrimination and sexism were discussed. The discussions proved to be demanding at times – and some participants pointed out that they return home with more questions then answers in regard to these themes.
A ■ Unequal Situation of Women in Azerbaijan

A speaker of the Yuva Humanitarian Center (AZ) presented an in-depth analysis on the current situation of women and gender related themes in Azerbaijan. She underlined that despite the equality of men and women declared in the Constitution and other laws including the recent Law on Gender Equality, there is still considerable gender inequality in many spheres of social, political and economic life. During the last decade, patriarchal traditions and gender norms are reemerging in Azerbaijani culture.

In many spheres in which inequalities between men and women are identified, Azerbaijan's "traditional" or "Eastern" culture is used as an explanation and even a justification for continued inequality. The attachment to "Azerbaijani culture" adds complexity when developing a strategy to overcome such inequalities. When asked by participants in the audience about practical problems women face, the speaker explains that in Azerbaijani culture, marriage is synonymous with children and a new wife is expected to have the first child within the first year of marriage. Moreover, women also assume both youth and elder care, and most health-related responsibilities for the entire family.

Throughout Azerbaijan, but especially in the rural areas, women face family restrictions to equal access to education, work and travel. Nonetheless, in certain categories of work such as secretarial and administrative, employers even prefer (young) women – both because it is traditionally a "woman's job" and low paid, and because those positions are given with an expectation of male privilege - not seldom including sexual harassment from either their employer or co-worker.

The speaker closed her presentation by underlining that a lot of work still needs to be done to combat the lack of awareness of women's rights – even on basic issues as the right to work, the right to go outside the home, and the right to be free from domestic violence. Definitely, the awareness-raising activities should be conducted with both women and men. Most NGOs, especially in the rural areas, use a low-key approach that recognizes the step-by-step progress needed to change strongly held opinions and traditions. In some instances, community pressure is used and in others, increasing the woman's knowledge and importance to the community (e.g., becoming a peer educator) resulted in a parallel increase in how she was valued and treated at home.

B ■ Selective Tolerance and Stereotypes

A speaker of the Campaign Against Homophobia (PL) was invited to present the topic “Selective Tolerance and Stereotypes” in the context of Homophobia and Heterosexism in Poland.

In the beginning of his presentation he highlighted the differences between homophobia and heterosexism: Homophobia describes the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals, while heterosexism is based on societal values that dictate that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual. Heterosexism has different dimensions: institutional, cultural and societal, all three exist in large extent in Poland. The speaker emphasized that tolerance is often a façade, which allows people to continue institutional heterosexism.

His organization works with media campaigning to combat heterosexism and selective tolerance. The reactions to its first big campaign were far-reaching: some people who participated in it lost their jobs, billboards were destroyed, the poster models were harassed. Nonetheless, it sparked the most lively debate in Poland regarding the issue. The Polish parliament elections, which took place two days before the conference started, brought upon a new balance in the Polish government. If this will help to tackle homophobia and heterosexism remains to be seen… but the struggle of the activists who work in support for the Campaign Against Homophobia will surely continue.

INTERCULTURAL ACTION, YOUTH WORK AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Many governmental organizations and authorities highlight the great importance of intercultural cooperation, youth work and active participation. Nonetheless, it seems evident, that it is easier to sign charters and treaties than to live up to what they promise: equal rights and opportunities for all, including minorities and marginalized groups as well as opportunities for participation on all levels of social and political life.

It was the major strength of this conference that it brought together delegates from grassroots and network organizations, practitioners and academics - over eighty people from different countries and regions with a wide range of expertise and perspectives.

A ■ United Colors in Action…Diversity and Active Participation

The challenges, which were addressed in this working group pertained to equal access to opportunity (as in jobs, education, voting, etc) for members of minorities and other traditionally excluded and discriminated groups.

In the course of the thematic working group sessions, some participants felt that the different views on religion and culture were a very practical challenge for the group process. One group member noted: “The adherence to religion lent support or took away support for certain debates that weren't neces-
sarily the topic we were addressing but nevertheless helped us experience the diversity of opinion and ideology of our group members”.

In regard of good practices the group highlighted the following examples:
- Program by the National Afro-Swedish Association designed as a way to integrate migrants into the job stream. Providing training, job search and childcare during training. Very successful program, bought by Swedish government and funded by them.
- Intercultural youth camps
- Manual made for migrants to Romania by the Culture of Peace Association, in question and answer format, addressing 250 issues related to immigration in Romania.
- Methods to point out the three components of participation (Information, Consultation, and Active Participation), developed by FEMAN – Slovak-European Cultural Association.

The working group concluded: “Diversity leads to mutual enrichment of all members of society. This enrichment covers all spheres, from the cultural to the economic and goes beyond boundaries (e.g. remittances sent abroad, ideas send abroad, etc.). Celebration of this diversity helps us recognize and enlarge its power.”

B ■ Intercultural Action Post Conflict

In the last 15 years we have once more seen the return of armed conflict in Europe. In particular the nature of these conflicts is not between nations but between ethnic and religious groups. The international community has invested much in finding ways to bring these conflicts to an impasse, but often has not done so through bringing communities together but by keeping them apart. Whilst communities who were once neighbors stand apart from each other, they become strangers - antipathy, resentment, a sense of retribution and injustice embed themselves. Until these divisions are broken, there is no guaranteed peace, only a managed tension.

The working group “Intercultural Action Post Conflict” has - through a series of practical presentations and group discussions - looked at ways in which inter-ethnic dialogue and action post-conflict can be developed. The group put emphasize on the following key challenges: Young people often have no experience of society prior to a conflict, thus their whole identity is often defined purely in relation to that conflict. Politicians perpetuate the divisions created by a conflict for their own ends and power bases, this needs to be challenged by NGOs and young people at local and national level. Communities become isolated, lose interest and stop communicating with each other. Therefore, NGOs need to promote inclusion within society. In this context it is crucial to keep in mind that conflicts are often perpetuated by myths and singular perspectives.

The group members put light projects that create awareness of other communities affected by the conflict and how the conflict equally affects their identities. Some participants pointed out that it is key to broaden identities beyond one side of a conflict, by looking for common values and developing friendship as a source of identity amongst young people. Moreover, it is important to challenge the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, by recognising that each loses part of their humanity by their actions, addressing both justice and reconciliation. Objective dialogue needs to be developed on trust and this on shared versions of the truth, without blame between governments. Civil society can play the role of a mediator and can be the instigator of dialogue.

The working group concluded that the main challenge is to raise an understanding of how conflict shapes us and how we can deal with it at particular levels. It is crucial to promote inclusion - so young people can start working together, by building trust as well as active participation and sense of identity with other countries and communities.

C ■ Democratic Participation

One representative of the Minority Rights Group International - MRGI (GB) gave a presentation on “Strategic Litigation in context of Democratic Participation”. She highlighted that in the framework of the “strategic litigation program” of the MRGI, effective participation means the right of members of minorities to participate – particularly in decisions that affect them. Consultations must be held in good faith, and make it possible to influence outcome. Effective participation is closely linked with conflict prevention and is meant to ensure that policy decisions respond to real needs. The MRG developed the “strategic litigation program” to improve access to justice for minority and indigenous communities and to fill existing gaps in the law which mean these communities are disproportionately affected.

The main characteristic of strategic litigation is that it affects not only a immediate applicant but all other similarly situated groups within a country or wider region. The MRGI generally undertakes its litigations in a tri-partite fashion. Next to the MRGI, which gives advice or takes on the case, their is the applicant and moreover, there is the strong need for domestic/local NGO’s to bring in their expertise on the situation and problems at place. Therefore, she emphasized that her organization is keen to establish links and cooperation with national and international NGOs with experience or interest in strategic litigation on minority and indigenous rights.

For further information visit: www.minorityrights.org/
D  ■  The Invisibles
A delegate of the Turkish Cypriot Human Rights Foundation (CY) also presented the work of his organization. The foundation aims to increase public awareness for the widespread violation against the rights of discriminated and marginalized groups (e.g. children, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people). These groups can be called the “invisibles” because of the lack of information (no previous studies, no reliable data) and public interest in their situation in Cyprus. By doing research, publishing reports and developing campaigns the foundation tries to press the government to amend the existing laws and promote equality and human rights. Moreover, the organization tries to bring different groups together to start cooperating.

E  ■  Youth Campaign All Different, All Equal
The European Campaign All Different, All Equal ended on October 2007, although many National Campaign Committees decided to continue the campaign on national level. This is also the case of Azerbaijan, where the campaign committee will continue the campaign. The national coordinator of this campaign gave us an overview about what has been done in the campaign on European level and how it was organized in Azerbaijan. Having the willingness to continue, we received some information about follow-up activities that will be organized in Azerbaijan.

F  ■  Hitting the Headlines! Media Campaigning
The media campaigning group discussed and emphasized the importance of NGOs working with media. The main focus of the group was on tools and methods in regard to attracting the interest of journalists towards civil society activities. The participants came to the conclusion that in order to multiply the effect of media campaigning, NGOs should speak about the issue right on time and contact the right editorial offices and journalists. Sometimes activists have to be provocative and challenging in order to attract the interest of journalists.

G  ■  Work it Out - Campaigning and Networking
The campaign working group “Work it out! - Campaigning and Networking” exchanged thoughts on what could be positive outcomes if the chances of networking and using networks were taken seriously and put into practice.

The group members agreed that the main advantages of networking were the possible support and assistance from fellow organizations, the chance to work with extra partners (possibly from different regions and countries which could ideally add new perspectives from different contexts) and the opportunity to get to know new methods and tools. Moreover, networking could add value through an interdisciplinary cooperation and this could bring about more credibility, e.g. when applying for funding.

During the “Open Forum” two participants took their chance for active networking. A delegate of the Samora Magazine - Horisont Foundation (N) invited all attendants to get informed about and possibly attend to the Oslo MELA festival. This event is the biggest diversity festival throughout the world and takes place every summer in August. For more information visit: www.antirasistisk-senter.no/english/index.html

Moreover, the representative of the Czech Red Cross Youth gave a brief introduction on the international projects of his organization and emphasized the possibilities for further cooperation. For more information visit: www.cck-cr.cz/en.php?id=youth

H  ■  Where is the Youth? - Campaigning with Young People
The campaign working group “Where is the Youth? - Campaigning with Young People” discussed which challenges are often encountered in the field of youth work: young people are often patronized and seen as people who should be directed rather than people who can do the directing themselves. In many projects and programs for youth too many “experts” are involved and too little action is done in the field.

The group members highlighted that the following strategies are very important and useful in the practical work:

- Outreach to groups which are often overlooked and left out (e.g. unaccompanied minor refugees) and have a presence at places youth tends to gather (e.g. school, malls, clubs, discos).
- Visit their places of work since not all youth goes to school.
- Organize events (such as football matches or other sports tournaments) and give youth an incentive to participate by using a common language (music, arts...).
- Interact with youth at every stage of a project or program (share the work regarding preparation, implementation and wrap up phase)
- Persistent, don't give up.
- When writing funding proposals, make sure to identify large numbers of youth affected, because in successful proposals, it's often quantity and not quality that counts (Or: Be aware of whom you want to convince with which line of argument).

The bottom line the working group participants drew from their discussions was “Give youth incentives in ways that focus on their interests and strengths. Don't be paternalistic and let youth take the lead in their projects.”
CONCLUSIONS

“Break Our Limits Through Intercultural Youth Action” was chosen as the title of the conference.

Our limits are connected not only to our personal life, our work and how we relate to our environment; our limits are also connected to our level of awareness. Increase of awareness often leads to realizations, which may expand or shrink our limits. Thereafter, we either choose to take action or to withdraw.

Do people in Europe learn how to overcome their limits, increase their level of awareness, and take action in empowering minorities and promoting respect for all human beings and their dignity, irrespective of age, physical characteristics, religion, gender and nationality? What is the role of the youth in all this? What is our role?

In the frame of the UNITED conference we shared five days and nights at the Caspian Sea in Baku: we had the opportunity to learn from each other, we shared contacts, experiences and ideas. On the other hand, we surely had to deal with challenges and sometimes felt disturbed by what was said or what was left out. In the end, it may take some time for each one of us to reflect what the conference brought and meant to us. What do we want to take home with us? And was the end of the conference really the end of our joint work and process? Or was it actually just the start?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference was prepared by the members of the International Preparatory Group (IPG). They contributed their experience and expertise to design the entire program and took on the responsibility for the day to day and night to night running of the conference.

Tribute and big thanks to...
- Anna - Youth Board of Cyprus (CY)
- Camelia - MTP Oradea (RO)
- Dragan - Initiative for Development & Cooperation (BiH)
- Elgun & Anar - Youth League for Intercultural Cooperation (AZ)
- Irene - Anti-Nazi Initiative (GR)
- Ksenia - Civil Assistance Committee for Refugees and Migrants (RUS)
- Neil - Minority Rights Group International (GB)
- Pervana - Yuva Humanitarian Center (AZ)

Many thanks to our sponsors and financial supporters:
- European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe
- Ministry of Youth and Sport (AZ)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AZ), for providing free visa

Warm thanks for their untiring will and enormous energy investment to the Youth League for Intercultural Cooperation, our host organization in Azerbaijan and it’s volunteers. They made possible this conference in Baku, answered every question, solved all emerging practical problems and assisted with translation whenever necessary. The human investment they brought in this conference is priceless.

Special thanks to the wonderful and indefatigable staff members and volunteers of the UNITED secretariat for the incredible amount of work they invested in the preparation and realization of our gathering. Without their commitment and motivation this conference would never have been possible!

Report by: Yvonne Hylla, ARiC Berlin e.V., Germany

Towards a common understanding  Let’s find a way to work together  UNITED News: Hope to meet you again!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>Tuesday 23 October</th>
<th>Wednesday 24 October</th>
<th>Thursday 25 October</th>
<th>Friday 26 October</th>
<th>Saturday 27 October</th>
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<td>Minority Rights Group International (GB)</td>
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<td>Pervana Mamedova, YUVA Humanitarian Center (AZ)</td>
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<td>Definitions and concepts most used in Anti-racist and anti-discrimination work</td>
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<td>Dinner</td>
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<td>'Dirty pretty things'</td>
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<td>20:30 Info Market: Present your organisation!</td>
<td>with participation of local NGO's</td>
<td>21:00 Political Café</td>
<td>Left-wing Extremism</td>
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<td>21:30 International Snacks</td>
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<td>20:00 Dinner Out in Baku</td>
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<td>15:00-16:00</td>
<td>HEAR THE VOICES</td>
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<td>Refugee in Your Own Country?</td>
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<td>Zlaha Nasibova, YUVA Center (AZ)</td>
<td>Selective Tolerance, Stereotypes</td>
<td>Greg Czarnecki, Campaign Against Homophobia (PL)</td>
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<td>16:45-19:00 Thematic Working Groups</td>
<td>Introduction of key issues -</td>
<td>A. United Colours in Action! Diversity &amp; Participation</td>
<td>B. E-Race It! Institutional Racism</td>
<td>C. Stand Up for your Rights! Refugees and IDPs</td>
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<td>Conference Evaluation/Official Closing</td>
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<td>20:30 Intercultural Evening and Farewell Party</td>
<td>Traditional Azeri Folk Music</td>
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<td>Karibi - Interculturelle Bibliothek</td>
<td>Postfach</td>
<td>CH-8028 Zürich</td>
<td>41-44-2915671</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@karibi.ch">info@karibi.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.karibi.ch">www.karibi.ch</a></td>
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<td>Kohiner Jacobs Jewish Campus</td>
<td>KJC</td>
<td>Str. Doriatska 5</td>
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<td>MRBB</td>
<td>Dranierstraat 34</td>
<td>C-10999</td>
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<td>49-30-6165755</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Olimpiya str.</td>
<td>AZ-1072</td>
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<td>994-12-4656796</td>
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<td>MRGI</td>
<td>54 Commercial Street</td>
<td>GB-London E1 8LT</td>
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<td>Movement for Peace Disarmament and Freedom</td>
<td>MPDL</td>
<td>Jevrejevska 83</td>
<td>BH-78000</td>
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<td>National Youth Council of Ireland</td>
<td>NYCY</td>
<td>3 Montague Street</td>
<td>IRL-2</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
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<td>National Afro-Swedish Association</td>
<td>ASR</td>
<td>Box 92136 - Hammarby Ake 91</td>
<td>S-12008</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>46-8-7023450</td>
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<td>One World Youth Project</td>
<td>OWYP</td>
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<td>Bishkek</td>
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<td>Österreichischer Auslandsdienst</td>
<td>Hutterweg 6</td>
<td>A-6020 Innsbruck</td>
<td>43-512-291087</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:info@auslandsdienst.at">info@auslandsdienst.at</a></td>
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<td>PER Reg. Center for Central/East and South-East Europe</td>
<td>PER</td>
<td>Gogorie Bitrianiu 7</td>
<td>RO-011413</td>
<td>Bucharest 1</td>
<td>40-21-2522345</td>
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<td>Red Cross Society of Georgia</td>
<td>15 Kirill Street</td>
<td>GE-380002 Tbilisi</td>
<td>996-32-981602</td>
<td>996-32-953304</td>
<td><a href="mailto:redcross@redcross.ge">redcross@redcross.ge</a></td>
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<td>Red Cross Youth CZ - Mladex Czech. Cerveneho Kizle</td>
<td>M-CCK</td>
<td>Thunovaka 18</td>
<td>CZ-115 04 Proh. 1</td>
<td>420-251-04263</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@mladexczc.org">info@mladexczc.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Samora Magazine - Horncrad Foundation</td>
<td>Postibus 66 - Hausmannsgate 27</td>
<td>N-0101 Oslo</td>
<td>47-22-299690</td>
<td>47-22-299691</td>
<td><a href="mailto:samora@samora.no">samora@samora.no</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sankofa - Platform for People of African Heritage</td>
<td>Sankofa</td>
<td>Postfach 8377 - Hofstr. 9</td>
<td>CH-8038</td>
<td>Zürich</td>
<td>41-44-2128640</td>
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<td>SOS mod Racisme - SOS Against Racism - Denmark</td>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>Medborgarhus - Nørre Allé 7, 2 sal</td>
<td>DK-2200</td>
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<td>CY-10</td>
<td>Lefkosa-MerSin</td>
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<td>UN Association Azerbaijan - Brailshimsh Militaria Dastak</td>
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<td>Baku</td>
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<td>UNITED for Intercultural Action</td>
<td>UNITED</td>
<td>Postbus 413</td>
<td>NL-1000 AK</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
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<td>Voluntary Service International - SCI Ireland</td>
<td>SCI-IRL</td>
<td>30 Mountjoy Square</td>
<td>IRL-1</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>353-1-8551011</td>
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<td>World Federation of Democratic Youth</td>
<td>WFUDY</td>
<td>Postfach 147 - XII Frangipani utca 16</td>
<td>H-1389</td>
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<td>Youth Board of Cyprus</td>
<td>YBC</td>
<td>PO-Box 2082</td>
<td>LV-2150</td>
<td>Riga</td>
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<td>Youth Human Rights Movement - International Network</td>
<td>YHRM</td>
<td>PO Box 152 - Volodarsko 75-51</td>
<td>PL-284000 Pulkovnich-Centre</td>
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<td>AZ-1133</td>
<td>Baku</td>
<td>994-12-470063</td>
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<td>YUVA</td>
<td>99 Garme avenue; apt 5</td>
<td>AZ-1126</td>
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<td>994-12-4972129</td>
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UNITED for Intercultural Action
European network
against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees

INFORMATION

Racism, nationalism, fascism, discrimination, asylum policies... all of them have a European dimension even though they often look like pure national issues. Reports from all over Europe demonstrate the increasing dangers facing migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. Often these dangers are increased by undemocratic intergovernmental decisions like the Schengen Treaty. Strangely enough, racist and fascist organisations have strong European links from Portugal to Russia, from Sweden to Italy. Fortress Europe needs to be fought at local, regional and European levels - it cannot be fought on one level alone.

Linked through UNITED, hundreds of organisations 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 organisations meet each other, work on common actions and share information. Europe-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 on specific topics. The workers in the secretariat are in constant contact with the network organisations, ensuring that information and proposals for action are transmitted rapidly. Information is received from more than 2000 organisations and mailings are sent out to about 2500 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 you would like to join or receive information. And add us to your mailing list!

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