

CONFERENCE REPORT

UNITED Conference

Bridging Cultures and Identities **NOVEMBER 11-15 2005 in Cyprus**

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1 Bridging cultures and identities: the UNITED conference in Cyprus

The UNITED Conference "Bridging Cultures and Identities" brought together delegates of 85 NGOs from 38 European countries. They gathered for 4 days on the unique island of Cyprus, which is a historical and cultural bridge among three continents. Participants opened a dialogue on how to combat discrimination and promote diversity. Cyprus offered a unique environment to the venue. The island is still emerging from an unsolved conflict, which marks every day existence of youngsters and activists. Since NGOs representatives from both the North and the South side actively contributed to the organisation of the venue and sent some delegates as participants, the UNITED conference had a very special meaning in this sense as well.

The aim of the UNITED Conference was to strengthen the European antiracist movement, in response to the urgency felt by European NGOs within some common fields: managing conflict, defining identities and bridging the gaps within multiculturalism through an effective intercultural action. By setting up practical work together, sharing expertise, and enhancing networking strategies, the delegates stimulated debates and long-lasting reflections on the NGOs' role. In a world deeply affected by discrimination on all grounds, the work of NGOs in the fight for equal rights for all is essential to the development of civil society. Although aware of the fact that racism and discrimination cannot be stopped easily, participants joined the conference to get awareness of the diversity within the movement, deeply committed to overcome obstacles and to positively promote an open dialogue on racism, islamophobia, antisemitism, old and new forms of migration.

The hosting organisations, the Youth Board of Cyprus, 'Human Rights and Education Network' and KISA - 'Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism',

provided the whole event with inspiration and a remarkable example of conflict solving, intercultural action, and peace pursue.

KISA is a national NGO very active in assisting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, offering them free legal and social aid, involving them in activities such as the Rainbow Festival, and promoting their active participation within civil society.

Human Rights and Education Network is active in the fields of education, human rights and intercultural relations, with the aim of strengthening civil society through the involvement of youth.

The Youth Board of Cyprus is a semi-governmental organisation responsible for all the policies related to youth in Cyprus. Its mission is to promote progress and prosperity among all young people in Cyprus, irrespective of religion or ethnic origin. In the field of antiracism, it is specifically committed in promoting antiracism and antidiscrimination practices among children and teenagers through a series of successful projects.

The UNITED Conference in Cyprus attracted the attention of the local media. Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation dedicated three interviews to the conference. The event had also an echo through the Rainbow Festival in Nicosia, organised by KISA and entitled "United against Racism".

The UNITED Conference opened in Cyprus on November 11, 2005 and although it officially closed on November 15, organizers, participants and the whole network like to think that what has been done is just another beginning...

2 Breaking the blocks!

With all the participants gathered in the beautiful amphitheatre, the conference started with some activities aimed at getting awareness of the diversity within the group and, of course, at breaking the ice among participants. Participants were asked to form an alphabetically ordered circle. Very confusing at first, the practice unveiled its effectiveness once participants actually started to call each other by their first names for the first time. A circle was then formed according to each participant's travelling time to get to the conference. Surprisingly, one of the participants had only travelled 10 minutes. The longest travel had taken 22 hours. Then it was time for mapping Europe: participants formed a human map, which gave them a sense of diversity, but at the same time of belonging. The evening took a real turn when participants were divided into two groups on the opposite sides of the amphitheatre, according to the way they answered some questions. Are you a volunteer or a paid worker? Do you consider yourself as being part of a minority? Do you consider yourself left or right oriented, politically speaking? Do you live in the same country where you were born? Not easy to take sides, indeed! Interestingly, some participants stood in the middle. For instance, some of them had been born in the same geographical area where they still lived, but by the time they grew up, national borders had changed and new nations had formed, as in the case of former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia. The evening went on in and outside the kiosk: participants started to socialize and to exchange views, also thanks to an interviewing exercise: placed

in couples, participants had to interview their partners. Each interview, with a picture attached, was connected to a map of Europe to show the origin of each participant.

3 Discussion groups: The danger of words

With so much food for thoughts coming up, it was necessary to sit down first and discuss a little while about something very important: language and meaning. Some of the words that participants use in their daily work were discussed in groups to broad up the perspective on how meanings change according to the socio, cultural and political context they are used in. Terms such as race, interculturalism, multiculturalism, and discrimination, amongst others, were analysed and discussed within small groups. As far as the special environment of the venue involved the Cyprus issue, participants also reflected on the meaning, and danger, of developing one-sided documents, or even using the word "side" as well. The aim of the activity, rather than reaching a common definition for the terms, was to get awareness of the danger of words, to realise the variety of meanings and messages words can convey, and to avoid major misunderstandings in the following activities. Some groups were able to cover all the words taken into consideration, while others got stuck at the first one, because everyone had so much precious input for the whole group to share. In any case, it was a necessary practice for the success of the following working groups.

4 Bridging, cultures and identities - lectures, presentations and panel discussions

4.1 Multicultural/Intercultural Societies: The NGO role in bridging cultures

Lecture by Zelia Grigoriou - University of Cyprus (CY)

The conference opened with a lecture offered by Zelia Grigoriou, professor at the University of Cyprus and very much involved in the issue of multiculturalism and interculturalism in Cyprus and within contemporary societies at large.

She explored some possible definitions of multiculturalism and interculturalism. Briefly, within a multicultural framework, elements of society, though multiple, are separate, and often segregated. Within intercultural societies, there is dialogue and exchange among the parts. Zelia confirmed that the definition of multiculturalism in Cyprus is highly problematic within the public discourse. She offered participants some examples taken directly from spaces of public discourse in Cyprus, quoting governmental representatives, spokespersons and media delegates.

Zelia went on shifting the focus of the attention from the issue of multiculturalism to the question of racism by setting up the case of migrant children in local schools. It was clear from the way Zelia dealt with the issue, that the racist trends she was referring to were not limited to racism tout court. Racist trends are to be understood as discrimination on all grounds. As it is in

Cyprus - and, according to the participants' reaction, Europe-wide as well - minorities are the ones suffering the most.

She dedicated the last section of her lecture to an activity, which she usually does with her university students. She showed participants some slides containing images taken from popular advertisement, past and present. Then she asked participants, as she would ask her students, to say whether and how those images were racist. The activity was successful because it made participants reflect on the workings of racism. In fact, it was not easy to establish to what extent those images were meant to be racist. They were, though. This proved how deeply racist images are embedded within our mind set and our tradition. They are sitting within our consciousness. The embarrassment in analysing those images also proved that often racist trends are so well rounded and rooted within our collective imagery that they actually paralyze our antiracist skills and instincts.

Participants were very interested in knowing what exactly happens in our mind when we are exposed to those images: are we really racist when we do not see racism in those images? Zelia had a good answer for that: it is not what it says, it is what it does.

4.2 Racism and Discrimination: a minority view

Presentation by Toan Nguyen - Blauschwung Society for Free Minded Cultural & Political Education (D) and Florencio Chicote Guimerans - Antidiscrimination Network of the Turkish Union (D)

Toan projected a short film that he had been using in the educational projects promoted by his organisation to raise awareness on the workings of racism among young students. The characters in the film - the best violinist in town, the toughest chief officer, the master of a Döner-kebab restaurant, the mayor, the most dangerous crime boss in town - were played by young people of different visible backgrounds. The technique used to provoke reflections, was to completely subvert stereotypes: the chief officer was in fact played by a young Muslim woman, while the master of a Döner-kebab was played by a non-Muslim young man. The film is used in schools. Students are asked to analyse the film and to reflect upon stereotypes. It helps young people realise not only the workings of stereotyping, and its social danger, but also the power relations within society: privileges, rights, access to social, cultural and economical resources are not available to everyone. There is a privileged majority and many unprivileged minorities. As for the German case, "white majority", as Toan cleverly pointed out, had nothing to do with colour: it means privileged majority. In fact, when they ask students to divide themselves between majority and minority, many people belonging to visible minorities actually feel as belonging to the majority because they never suffered discrimination and they have access to all privileges, social and economical.

Toan concluded his presentation by offering a well-organised scheme on the workings of discrimination. He gave thematic and pedagogical inputs to work with young students in the field of antiracism. He finally reflected upon the actual status of the German antiracism movement, admitting that, although

migrants' participation in projects is high compared to other countries, the movement is sadly missing a common voice.

Florencio went on providing a very interesting presentation on racism and discrimination from the minority perspective. He started by asking participants a quite provocative question: have you ever been discriminated? Not surprisingly, many offered their experience. Florencio treasured the examples offered by participants by including them within the framework of his interactive presentation. He started by explaining the normative instruments to fight discrimination at a European level. He focussed the attention on the minimum common standards to define direct and indirect forms of discrimination, hate crimes and sexual harassment. Unfortunately, most member States do not implement these European directives. Discrimination on all grounds is still permeating every aspect of everyday life. Florencio provided concrete examples of everyday discrimination: denied access to the job market, denied access to housing, denied access to health services, just to mention some. To provide participants with even a clearer idea, Florencio explained what it is generally meant with the term discrimination, making an accurate distinction among multiple discrimination (one person, different grounds), compounded discrimination (one person, combination of different grounds), and intersectional discrimination (one person, interaction of two or more forms of discrimination).

From the enthusiastic discussion that developed from the two presentations, it was clear that participants had many different understandings and emotional reactions on discrimination, racism, minorities' participation and anti discrimination work effectiveness, according to the specific situation in their countries.

In the end, everyone agreed on something very important for the development of the conference: oppression cannot be measured. Oppression is oppression in the first place. And so is discrimination, that is why the antiracist and anti discrimination vision needs support.

4.3 [Islamophobia and Antisemitism. A common struggle](#)

Panel discussion by Burcu Becerman - AEGEE (B), Savitri Groag - A Different Jewish Voice (NL), Bashy Quraishy - ENAR (B), and Ilya Khinskiy - Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life (RUS)

The purpose of the panel discussion was to present the opinions of 4 experts in the fields of islamophobia and antisemitism, to provoke reactions and open a dialogue among participants. The panelists provided input for discussion, getting inspiration from their work and their personal experience.

Burcu opened the discussion about islamophobia sharing her experience as a Turkish citizen living in Belgium. She shared her frustration about the misperceptions on Islam of which the public discourse is pervaded.

Bashy pointed out how islamophobia, although the term officially appeared in 1997, is far from being a new phenomenon. Giving an excursus on European racist trends, Bashy explained that islamophobia is rooted in Europe as a racist discourse and that it has always been there in the European collective mind set.

Ilya then opened the section on antisemitism, providing examples of stereotypes and antisemitism taken from history. He also shared his personal and family experience.

Savitri gave a deep and interesting insight on the meaning of antisemitism today. She provided an overview of the issue by bringing in the question of anti-Israelism. She combined her experience as a delegate for A Different Jewish Voice (NL) in promoting mutual understanding and an open dialogue on the issue to her personal experience as a Jewish young woman.

It was finally time to give the rest of participants a chance to express their opinion and to take advantage of the presence of the panelists. The discussion quickly shifted from emotions to definitions. Mirek (DUHA - CZ) brought in the question of anti-Americanism and linked it to anti-Israelism, to show how often these movements are deeply politicised and NGOs should therefore be careful when sticking up to certain definitions in their fight against islamophobia and antisemitism.

The attention finally touched the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many participants were willing to offer their insights, in particular Belal (KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism - CY) offered his testimony as a Palestinian refugee.

The panel discussion brought up a lot of unsolved questions indeed. The main purpose of the session though was reached. Participants had thought about the urgency of the question, had realised the state of denial some countries are in about islamophobia and antisemitism related crimes. The panel discussion closed up with two very important questions. Who is responsible for this kind of discrimination? Are islamophobia and antisemitism just forms of discrimination or are they also being manipulated for political purposes?

5 Sharing good practices and developing common strategies...Thematic working groups

5.1 Racism and Discrimination

From a round of overviews from the countries represented, there seemed to be a shared common situation Europe-wide. Most commonly, racism still exists even if it might have changed targets and workings. It is deeply rooted within society and, rather than being open, it lies hidden. This makes it more difficult for antiracist movements to spot it and challenge its ways. The group largely discussed about racism in the media, and how racist discourses deeply affect public opinion and lead to the criminalisation of specific sectors of society, namely minorities. With the participants' contributions, it was easy to map

Europe according to the latest trends of racism-related crimes and scapegoating media campaigns. In Eastern Europe, although more and more newcomers are starting to become target of hate crimes, the Roma community is facing a multiple and multi-layered discrimination. It affects minors the most, because they are both targets in their everyday life, and target of the segregation-oriented policies. They are denied access to formal education and left outside the integration projects often offered to other migrants. In Western Europe, racism and discrimination are more difficult to be openly found. This is a consequence of the state of denial collectively experienced in some countries by locals, but also a consequence of a well structured institutional racism. Minorities are denied access to a variety of services, often without being aware of it. The group largely discussed about migrants' direct involvement in the fight against racism. It emerged that while in Sweden migrants are extremely active in organising themselves or supporting NGOs in the fight for their own rights, the situation in Romania is quite different indeed, being migrants totally unaware of their basic rights. The situation in Cyprus, the hosting country, appears to be quite difficult as well, because migrants enjoy a very weak position on the social scale and are easy targets of scapegoating regarding the general economic and social situation. Quite differently, according to the participants' experience from France and Germany, migrants are active in lobbying, although Paris and Berlin have come a long way further than the rest of the country in the involvement of migrants within civil society.

The working group was enriched by presentations of the participants' work in the fight against discrimination. Different but similar in many ways, the projects presented ranged from very popular and successful ones, like Show Racism the Red Card (GB), to new and probably more fragile projects, which showed though a lot of potential and could definitely improve thanks to the inputs participants brought home from the conference.

The issue of the minority perspective was definitely the main drive of the working group, which, rather than reaching common definitions or concentrating on idealistic goals, actually shared experiences and good practices and established a common ground for discussion and future cross movement partnerships.

5.2 [Multicultural/Intercultural Societies](#)

The purpose of the group was to share understandings and views upon the concepts of multi- and intercultural societies, examples of situations in the countries represented, successes and barriers in working with multi/intercultural groups. With the commitment and active contribution of the participants, the group actively exchanged information and discussed about the key concepts involved. The common work resulted in establishing valuable professional and personal contact for future cooperation.

Diversity has always been a challenge to be dealt with, as it was in the working group. In order to involve all participants to value their experience and use to the best the variety within the group, different methods of interaction were applied. Brainstorming, presentations, mindmap and discussions were useful tools to

bring understanding and dialogue into the working group. Starting from their individual perspective, participants gradually bridged the discussed issues in a broader European context. The terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural' were discussed and different interpretations were shared. Many similarities and differences were outlined, as well as a common space of overlapping between the two terms in the reality was recognised. Key challenges and problems were identified. Participants shared concrete examples and tools, which served them in their work. Specific situations and projects from represented countries were introduced and discussed. Thus, from the challenges and the problems, through the practices and the ideas, the working group came to a very important part of the common work: identifying possible strategies and solutions. All participants agreed that their suggestions were just the beginning of a long and complex theme, where all of the mentioned ideas should be taken as interlinked and equally important in order to achieve a sustainable and efficient work. As challenging as the topic itself was, participants agreed on a common self-definition: "What we need are more people who specialise in the impossible".

5.3 Islamophobia and Antisemitism

The main purpose of the group was to analyse islamophobia and antisemitism as social phenomena. The different backgrounds of the participants enriched the discussion and brought variety within the framework of the whole activity. To reach a better understanding on the issues, small lectures were offered by some participants.

Bashy (Ethnic Debate Forum - DK) draw the attention to the media as a source producing numerous stereotypes about Muslim and Jewish communities. The participants challenged the role of the Christian Church in re-producing antisemitism and islamophobia along the centuries.

Ilya (Euro-Asian Jewish Congress - RUS) involved fellow participants in a interactive game, which demonstrated the frustration Jewish people feel when they are targeted by prejudice. He also deconstructed a few stereotypes on Jewish culture by explaining the meaning of some traditions and collocating the misperceptions within a historical frame.

Savitri (A Different Jewish Voice - NL) introduced the concept of anti-Israelism, as opposed to antisemitism, which she considered as confined to the past. This shift of perspective was aimed at demonstrating that, in order to promote dialogue between Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe, a great effort has to be focussed on solving the conflict in the Middle East.

Irina (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - MD) presented a contest for written works by teenagers, entitled "What do I know about the Holocaust?" She shared with fellow participants some practical tips to set up contests dedicated to youth with such an important theme.

Burcu (AEGEE - B) further explained the project Euroislam. The term refers to the Muslim community living in Europe and being part of Europe. The project

lies on the assumption that Islam did not enter Europe through migration, as it is commonly misperceived, but it has always been part of Europe and existed in harmony with democratic structures and diversity. The project aims also at fostering inter-religious dialogue and at enhancing the work of NGOs in the field.

Jan (Polish Union of Jewish Students) presented an interesting activity that had taken place in Poland: activists of the Polish Union organised a 'human chain' going from the embassy of Israel to the embassy of Palestine, symbolising friendship and connection between the communities.

Maysoun (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee - BG) offered a small lecture on the meaning of Jihad in Islam. Her presentation gave a striking example on how to organise interesting lectures and discussion even on the most arguable, contradictory and misused term with religious background.

In spite of many unanswered questions, participants got good ideas on how to promote dialogue among members from different religious background. What is more valuable, they got acquainted with people, who work in the same field, in similar projects Europe-wide.

5.4 [Migrants and Refugees](#)

The main focus of this working group was to analyse the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers Europe-wide and share practices from some of the countries represented. The group discussion clearly showed that there is no common policy in European countries, although the necessity of a common approach to issues such as immigration, border control and asylum policy has become apparent. Nicoletta (KISA, Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism - CY) offered an informative update on the developments in the search for a common stand at the European level.

The group then mainly focused on the analyses of the situations in the countries represented:

Bulgaria. Mariana Stoyanova (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee) pointed out that most of the refugees are rejected: an average of 1 out of 100 requests is marked positively. Rejected asylum seekers have 7 days to leave the country, but they usually end up to 1,2 or even 3 years of detention without legal assistance and any perspective on repatriation.

Bosnia-Herzegovina. Dragan (MPDL - BH) explained that his organisation currently offers free legal aid, small funding for social aid to those who return to their home countries. This is what they mean by 'sustainable return'.

Georgia. As a result of a civil war in the early 90s, when many people had to flee the country, nearly 300,000 received the status of Internal Displaced Persons (IDP). Eka (Charity Humanitarian Centre - GE) explained how her organization provides IDPs with vocational training courses and promotes follow-up projects, which also include interest-free loans to start a business or to study.

Denmark. The situation has changed a lot in the past six years. The asylum policy has become stricter and stricter and figures of incoming asylum seekers dropped. As Jannie (SOS Against Racism - DK) pointed out, new legislation on immigration comes too quick for NGOs to react: only in the past year, 80 new laws have been presented. Jannie showed the group the integration contract that asylum seekers have to sign in Denmark. It has a clear discriminating, stereotyping message.

Italy. There is no specific legislation on asylum procedures. They are regulated by the immigration law. This leads to a very complex juridical situation when dealing with cases, because many different laws interconnect and can be used. Of course, only those asylum seekers who manage to get legal aid are provided with successful tools. In fact, Renaud (Associazione Rieti Immigrant - I) works for an organization that provides legal advice to both refugees and asylum seekers.

Netherlands. Policy has become stricter and focused on fastening the asylum procedure and repatriation for those who are not allowed to stay. To serve this purpose, asylum seekers are placed in camps, which do not allow full integration and where guidance and activities are focused on return. The organization represented by Adimka (Association for Unaccompanied Minor Asylumseekers Humanitas - NL) tries to improve the situation of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and actively approaches them to participate in social and political issues.

After an intense overview on Europe, followed by discussion and exchange of practices and ideas from the represented organisations, the group went on discussing the challenges and possibilities of the presented projects.

5.5 [Media and Communication](#)

The main focus of this working group was communication in, through and for the media. The participants in this group discussed about the situation of the media in some European countries, analysed the existing channel between NGOs and the media, and proposed strategies to reach the media more effectively. A major part of the discussion was dedicated to the role of the media. The group agreed on the fact that media are essential in each campaigning action with the purpose of raising awareness in the public opinion, provided they are used on a large scale and that the message passed through is the correct one. Unfortunately, as it emerged from the discussion within the group, media are nowadays sending out messages, which totally go against the work of most NGOs.

Three participants offered their expertise to the group by presenting the situation of the media in their countries and by introducing a case study each:

Victor (National Bureau Against Racial Discrimination - NL) offered a very informative presentation about the media workings, with some useful suggestion for further improvement. He firstly made a point on the meaning of "media" and "communication" listing all the major channels used in media work at local, regional, and national level, as well on a European scale.

Arif (The Monitoring Group - GB) offered a presentation on media coverage in the UK and he also enriched the topic by bringing a concrete example from the work of The Monitoring Group. As a case study, Arif took a recent legal case opened by the family of Zahid Mubarek, who was killed in a British prison where he was sharing a cell with a known racist. The Monitoring Group took up a campaign, building connections with the media, so that coverage was guaranteed.

Julia (Legal Information Center for Human Rights - EE) then gave a presentation about the media situation in Estonia, where one of the major issues is the linguistic divide between Estonian-language papers and Russian-language ones. She also gave practical pointers on how to approach and engage the media. The case study she presented was called "Promoting tolerance in the Estonian society through the media".

The whole group also took into consideration an interesting question: why should the media be interested in the UNITED Conference? First of all, the group pointed out the importance of bridging cultures in still divided country. Second of all, participants realised the importance of bringing together delegates from so many different areas of the continent both to give inspiration to local initiatives, and to send out a powerful echo on antiracist activities Europe-wide. Last but not least, media should be interested in such an event, because part of it is precisely dedicated to denounce the limits and failures of media coverage of the issues discussed throughout the conference.

6 Common issues, common campaigns: Action planning working groups

An important moment for the Conference and for the network is finding common action grounds. Participants could therefore play an active role in enhancing existing campaigns and in finding new ways to promote the actions of the network. Five action-planning groups were created: three were focused on the annual UNITED Campaigns, while two were rather new. The media campaign and the fund-raising campaign for UNITED responded to the need of, respectively, publicising the network and make an intelligent use of the media on the one hand, and on the other hand finding feasible ways to guarantee a future to the UNITED network, which finds itself now in serious financial difficulties.

6.1 Campaigning Against Fascism and Antisemitism

The UNITED Campaign against Fascism and Antisemitism is one of the pillars of UNITED actions. It is concentrated on the activities made Europe-wide on the 9th of November for the International Day against Fascism and Antisemitism - 'Kristallnacht' Commemoration. Some good suggestions for future activities came from the action-planning group: in order to attract the youth and to give high visibility to the events, activities should include, concerts, competitions, graffiti and street performances. The group also agreed on the effectiveness of the already existing practices, such as spreading UNITED posters and stickers,

organising lectures, demonstrations and exhibitions. The group came up with a quite impressive slogan: "Who wants your neighbour in a ghetto kills your freedom too".

6.2 [Campaigning Against Racism](#)

The UNITED Campaign against Racism focuses on the annual European-wide Action Week, which centres around March 21. The action week is an important moment for the network, because it involves all the organisations committed in the fight against discrimination on all grounds. The group discussed about the various meanings that antiracism undertakes in different contexts, and how the fight against racism has recently embraced many new fields of action. Racism itself has come to mean much more than discrimination on the ground of race. Therefore, participants suggested the campaign be general and the slogan open and flexible, so that it could be easily used Europe-wide and adapt to each context.

6.3 [Campaigning in Support of Migrants and Refugees](#)

The UNITED Campaign in support of Migrants and Refugees takes the International Refugee Day on the 20th of June as a point of reference. Under the more general Campaign, the "Fatal Realities of Fortress Europe" Campaign plays a major role. The group discussed about the importance of the list of deaths of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, now counting more than 6,700 documented cases, which is being constantly updated in the Secretariat with the help of the whole network. The group discussed ways to enhance its visibility, to spread it and to use it in a more powerful way. Moreover, participants suggested that Campaign could be stronger if workshops with specific targets were organised. The group also discussed about the danger of using testimonies in the campaign: testimonies should be well prepared, especially before facing the media and words should be carefully analysed not to be misused.

6.4 [Media Campaign](#)

The media action-working group focused on communication. The group mainly worked on ideas for slogans. Most importantly, they wrote a press-release on the conference, which was read in the plenary when the action-planning results were being presented. The press release perfectly summarised the importance of the conference action-wise: "UNITED is the European anti-racist network of more than 560 organisations. Through its activities activists from all over Europe get a unique chance to meet and discuss effective ways of combating racism, discrimination, islamophobia and other urgent questions, share good practices and ideas of combating the situation when world is full of hate and violence towards those who look or feel different."

6.5 [Fund-raising Campaign for UNITED](#)

As anticipated in the opening session of the conference, the future of the UNITED network is now in serious danger due to financial difficulties. Therefore, the

International Preparatory Group thought it was necessary to include a section of the action-planning to fund-raising for UNITED. The results were not too much encouraging, not because of a lack of spirit or ideas, on the contrary. Participants were willing to share their exper-tise and to establish a closer co-operation within the network in the fund-raising field. Rather, the difficulties in discussing such issues rely on the general condition of uncertainty that NGOs Europe-wide are nowadays faced with.

7 Europe in action: An update on the status and some food for thoughts

On such a good occasion with so many NGOs gathered together, it was necessary to provide participants with an overview of the situation in Europe as far as action, opportunities and Europe-wide campaigns. On different days, four important presentations were provided concerning the status of European action and initiatives for NGOs and youth. The participants showed a great interest in the projects presented. It was also very important that time was left beyond the plenary session for participants to address more detailed questions to the presenters.

European Social Forum - ESF

Mirek Prokes (DUHA-Rainbow Association - CZ) presented the ESF and he particularly focused the attention on the 4th edition to be held in Athens in April 2006. The ESF is "an open space where civil society groups and movements opposed to neoliberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism, but engaged in building a society centered on the human person, come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, to formulate proposals, to share their experiences freely and to network for effective action." While some of the participating organisations were quite familiar to the previous ESF, others were interested in knowing how to take an active part into it. As a matter of fact, this event is attended by many organisations active in the field of antiracism and antidiscrimination. It's a unique chance for interaction and contact making, to present organisations and promote good practices.

<http://www.fse-esf.org> or <http://www.socialforum.gr>

Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Section of the OSCE

Anne-Sophie Le Beux (OSCE - PL) presented the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Section. OSCE is the largest regional security organisation in the world, with 55 participating States from Europe, Central Asia and North America, active in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Based in Warsaw (PL), the ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) is the principal institution of the OSCE responsible for the human dimension, "to help OSCE States ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, abide by the rule of law, promote democratic principles, build and strengthen democratic institutions and promote tolerance." In the field of antiracism and in the fight against xenophobia, the ODIHR is active through a series of projects targeting some key issues. Amongst

others, a panel of experts on freedom of religion or belief to serve as an advisory and consultative body. Lastly, the Odihr believes in "strengthening co-operation with civil society as well as furthering the capacity of civil society to monitor, report and address these issues", the issues being hate crimes and manifestations of intolerance. That is why it was important to present OSCE and introduce its work to an audience of delegates from NGOs, who are certainly interested in any possibility of good and productive co-operation.

<http://www.osce.org/odihr>

All Different-All Equal - The European Youth Campaign on Diversity, Human Rights and Participation

Anca Sirbu (UNITED for Intercultural Action) introduced the participants to the All Different-All Equal Campaign. The aim of the Council of Europe Youth Directorate Campaign for Diversity and Participation is "to encourage and enable young people to participate in building peaceful societies based on diversity and inclusion, in a spirit of respect, tolerance, and mutual understanding." Anca gave an overview of the campaign (www.coe.int/youth) and encouraged NGOs to get actively involved in it, especially those targeting youth, or most importantly having young people as the majority of activists and volunteers. The campaign will be officially launched in June 2006 and will include national campaign committees.

Youth Programme of the European Commission

Last but not least, **Jana Stetkova** (Socrates, Leonardo and Youth, Technical assistance office) presented then the Youth Programme, providing participants with a good option for finding resources and a space for their projects.

europa.eu.int/comm/youth/program/index_en.html

8 Activities promoting diversity: Examples in Eastern and Western Europe and in the Mediterranean area

It was finally time to present relevant and successful projects from participating organisations. It was important to explore the possibilities of transnational practices and to learn from the success of good projects

8.1 Show Racism the Red Card - Presentation by Roddy McNulty (GB)

The project "Show racism the red card" was created to respond to the difficult situation of racism in football across England. The idea to use professional football to combat racism was of course combined to target both the football world and society on a wider scale. Being football the most popular sport in England - and definitely an important area of public life - it has been effectively reaching its target so far. Professional football players are directly involved in the campaign. The basic idea is that young people would listen when a professional football player talks about racism. What's more, since football is multicultural itself nowadays, and most importantly, since some players belong to minorities, the message gets even more powerful. Roddy McNulty presented a

DVD, which was produced for the campaign and which clearly showed how the campaign is based on the idea of educating young people about antiracism.

8.2 Center for Ethnic Interaction "Dialogue" - Presentation by Ekaterina Borissova (RUS)

The project presented by Ekaterina aimed at introducing ways to use internet to promote diversity. As a powerful means of communication, and a familiar tool for young people, internet has a great potential for becoming a powerful channel to promote diversity, antiracism and antidiscrimination. As Katia noticed, in response to some participants objecting that internet can also be dangerous and needs constant updating, there is a war between racist and antiracist, fascist and antifascist movements on the internet. It is time to get in with some positive input, to bring a proactive message for diversity, rather than a reactive countermeasure.

8.3 Youth Encounters for Peace - Presentation by Sarper Ince (CY)

Last but not least a project from the hosting country was presented. Youth Encounters for Peace started in 1997. The aim of the project was to bring students from both sides of Cyprus together and facilitate their dialogue. This bi-communal activity was of course based on the effort of overcoming bias ideas and stereotypes about the other side of Cyprus. Sarper gave an interesting example of the activities by explaining how students confronted history interpretation. The activity was implemented with the help of translators. Students were selected on a voluntary basis and it was easy to have them spread the word and recruit their own friends into the program.

9 A Time for socialising

With so many cultures represented, the UNITED Conference offered a real chance for intercultural practices not only during the working activities, but also in the free time and during the well-organised evening activities. Participants had the possibility of meeting each other, introduce fellow participants to their country, express their identities, find existing bridges among cultures, and build new ones.

The **Infomarket**. Delegates had the chance to formally introduce their organisations by displaying their informative material in the kiosk. National NGOs also attended the event. A great variety of campaigning posters, informative leaflets and interesting publications were displayed. Participants introduced each other's organisations, exchanged opinions and practices, and explored the possibilities of future partnerships. Despite a long working day, everyone put energy in talking and listening. It was a special moment to bond energy and to get an up-dated view of the antiracism activities across Europe.

International snacks and intercultural evening. These two events were a real burst to socialising and getting close to each other's culture.

For the **International snacks** evening participants displayed food and drink they had brought from their home country on a large table outside. Despite the unfamiliarity for certain food, everyone tried to taste the variety representing diversity. There was also space for familiarity, though, as many participants found themselves saying: "We also have this in my country!"

The **Intercultural evening** was opened by the most awaited performance: Igor (BY) delivered an outstanding interpretation of a Belarus traditional song. He then gave the floor to other performances: popular songs and dances from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Cyprus. It was then time for comedy: Bashy (DK) and Collins (I) told some intercultural jokes. The floor was then open to music and dancing again...

A trip to Nicosia. On their free afternoon, participants visited the beautiful city of Nicosia, which was hosting the 9th edition of the **Rainbow Festival**, entitled '**United against racism**', in the Municipal Park 'Tripoli', organised by KISA (Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism): a truly intercultural Festival, where migrants, asylum seekers, refugee communities, students and, last but not least, NGOs put up a variety of refreshments stands, exhibitions, and performances aimed at proving that "the existence of different peoples and cultures is not a curse but a blessing and a source of human wealth". In the evening, most of the participants visited the northern side of Nicosia. After a walk around the inner city, participants were joined for dinner by Turkish-Cypriot NGOs representatives at a nice and warm restaurant a few steps from the magnificent mosque. It was again a chance for intercultural action.

Political cafe. Participants had another concrete option to continue their work during their free time through the political cafe, an informal venue for discussing and sharing ideas on a given subject. The first political cafe saw the riots in Paris - i.e. the up-risings in the suburbs of the city, where mostly migrants live, which had occurred between October and November 2005 - as the main theme of discussion. Participants took advantage of the presence of fellow delegates from France who wanted to share their view on the situation and were willing to bring into the discussion their first-hand experience. The second political cafe was built around the Cyprus issue. It was very much needed and all participants truly felt the urgency, both from a human and professional point of view, to get deeper into the question. It was a precious moment, since NGOs from both sides attended the conference. Again a time for reflecting on our role as activists against conflict and discrimination in a world profoundly divided by barriers.

10 Leaving the conference: What will you bring home?

Gathered in the conference room for the last time, participants were faced with an important question: what will you bring home and what will you throw away? Not easy to answer, indeed. As part of the evaluation, delegates could express their ideas in a round of quick answers, which gave an overview on the whole conference: its meaning, its turnout, and even its limits. It was a precious moment that gave feedback and food for thoughts to bring home. Some of the participants had really interesting answers to the question. As for what to bring

home, most participants agreed upon experience, inspiration and knowledge. Anne-Sophie (B) expressed her good impression on the UNITED network, Collins (I) thanked the Cypriot NGOs for inspiring the work of the whole network, and Reinhard (A) explained how the conference had helped him understand that variety and diversity truly are our know-how. As for the things to throw away, Meira (SI) said she wanted to throw away the frustration she had been feeling before the conference. Now she has realised that she is not alone in her struggle for equal rights and in her fight against discrimination: the network has made her feel stronger and more determined to keep up the good work! Some participants said they did not want to throw away anything of the conference, because in principle even its negatively perceived moments were indeed the most precious ones, giving inspiration for further improvement for the movement. Others said they wanted to get rid of some words, such as 'race', 'sides', 'other', because what emerged from the conference as a common direction, in theory and practice, is that we all belong to one race, the human race, that we all stand on the same side when it comes to combat discrimination on all grounds, and that there are no more 'others' once you built many bridges...

11 Thanks to...

The UNITED Conference in Cyprus would not have been possible without a collective effort from many sides. The whole outcome is in fact the result of an intercultural and multi layered work, which has left a lot of inspiration for the next venues.

Thanks to every single participant, who contributed with their expertise, their ideas and energy to the conference. Thanks to the organisations for sending their delegates to the UNITED conference and for being actively involved in the network.

Special thanks to the International Preparatory Group, who conceived and brought to a successful end the program: representatives from Youth Board of Cyprus (CY), Youth Action for Peace - Oradea (RO), Antidiscrimination Network of the Turkish Union (D), Human Rights and Education Network (CY), Dialogue - Center for Ethnic Interaction (RUS), Luxembourg Against Racism (L), KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism (CY), Rotterdam Youth Council (NL) and UNITED for Intercultural Action.

Many thanks to our host organisations: the Youth Board of Cyprus, KISA - Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism, the Human Rights and Education Network and to all the representatives from the other Cypriot organisations.

Special thanks to our sponsors: European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe and the Youth Board of Cyprus.

Thanks to the management and staff at PEO Rest House, for providing a perfect environment for the UNITED conference. Thanks to the PEO Trade Union for making our stay comfortable and financially sustainable.

Last but not least, warm thanks to the volunteers who technically supported the conference.

Thanks to anyone who worked with their presence, ideas and help to strengthen the movement and keep up the good work!!!

12 UNITED for Intercultural Action

UNITED for Intercultural Action

European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees

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 2300 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!

More information you can find at www.unitedagainstracism.org or write to info@unitedagainstracism.org

UNITED for Intercultural Action

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