

CONFERENCE REPORT

European youth preparation for the UN World Conference Against Racism in the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe

READY! STEADY! GO!
May 28 - June 4, 2000 Strasbourg (F)

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NEWSPAPER FROM THE CONFERENCE

1. OVERVIEW / INTRODUCTION

Young people are a major force in the Europe-wide battle against racism, fascism and discrimination. It is impossible for governments to erase racism without an active co-operation of European youth and their organisations.

Grass-roots anti-racist organisations must not be ignored. Otherwise all talk about anti-racist action on the governmental level remains superficial.

This is why UNITED for Intercultural Action - the European Network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees - decided to give a voice to youth from all over the continent in preparation for the UN World and European Conferences Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

69 representatives of 66 active non-governmental organisations from 30 countries gathered in Strasbourg on 28 May till 4 June 2000 to discuss freely and passionately the ways to fight racism and discrimination in all their forms, to exchange experience and to plan common action.

Are European governments hypocritical in their statements against racism or are they genuinely concerned? What is the impact of refugee and asylum policies? Why do politicians and mass media play down the real level of racism in some countries? Are certain societies more xenophobic than others? What are the most effective methods to combat racism? Should questions of disability, sexual orientation and other instances of discrimination be seen as related to the topic of racism? These are some of many subjects debated by participants of the conference.

Concrete demands were expressed regarding, among others, the implementation of existing anti-racist laws, multicultural training for teachers and multiculturalism in school curricula, equal rights to residence permits for immigrant women, support for victims of racist attacks, and international co-operation to fight nazi music industry.

It was generally agreed that racism is a problem in ALL European societies and it is our task to be **UNITED** against it and to counteract it through **Intercultural Action**.

UNITED for Intercultural Action is the largest anti-racist network in Europe. It has been active since 1992 and it currently consists of more than 500 organisations both from Western and Eastern Europe, which makes it a unique point of exchange of experience and ideas. UNITED organises conferences on a regular basis, bringing together activists from all over the continent.

This conference, "**Ready! Steady! Go! - European Youth Preparation for the UN World Conference Against Racism**" took place in the friendly setting of the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg from 28th May till 4th June 2000. The group of participants was characterised by an enormous diversity of backgrounds and opinions as well as by a unifying commitment to the fight against racism and discrimination. The organisations represented in the conference ranged from the Albanian Committee against Violence, Racism and Intolerance, and the African Students Union of Romania, to the Anti-Racist Film Festival in Sweden and the Show Racism the Red Card campaign in Great Britain.

2. MESSAGE FOR THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE

The relevance of both the European and the UN conference was a subject of many discussions. Why is it important for anti-racist NGO's to be involved in the preparatory process, in the NGO Forum and in the conference itself?

An insider's view on the preparations of the European and UN conferences, together with an encouragement for NGOs to participate actively, was presented by Mikael Poutiers (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance), Saskia Daru (UNITED for Intercultural Action) and Suzette Bronkhorst (ICARE - Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe).

The participants took part in discussion groups on the topics of the European Conference against Racism. A summary of the conclusions of the discussions, and of the issues raised, is presented in this report.

EDUCATION

Education is not just the institutionalised school system but a life-long process of learning. Knowledge is transmitted through institutions (mainly schools but not exclusively), media, family, friends and peer groups. In this context the **importance of non-formal education** must be acknowledged.

Education may lead to an increase in the level of equality in society, an improved development, a better functioning democracy and a higher level of solidarity among members of society based on a shared perception of human rights as a basis for modern society.

There are opposing views whether **the term "race"** should be used at all with regard to education. From the scientific point of view races do not exist. However, "race" is a social construct on the level of belief and in this sense races do exist. It was agreed that the term ought to be used with caution, preferably in inverted commas.

It is not enough to change school curricula so that they include elements of multiculturalism. **Structural changes in the educational system** may be necessary, too, e.g. changing the recruitment procedures for teachers if they discriminate against potential teachers with an ethnic minority background. The multicultural approach is especially important in **teaching history**. It should include information on multicultural influences in the process of identity formation, and also about tragic events and negative factors such as colonialism and their impact on today's social problems. It also has to be remembered that history is particularly prone to constructing myths based on prejudice and to obscuring the past, e.g. playing down of the past related to fascism and collaboration during World War II.

Students from developed countries should be encouraged to join social work projects in developing countries. The Western business corporations operating in the post-colonial countries should take special responsibility and co-operate with those countries' governments to provide welfare and education to the people living there.

LOCAL PRACTICE

The grass-roots level - arguably the most important - of anti-racist work involves numerous aspects, some of which were discussed. Many of them are a reflection of wider issues which are important not just on the local but also at the national and international level.

Refugees and migrants are often victims of everyday racism fueled by restrictive and inhumane policies of national and local governments. The distinction between economic and political refugees is used to stir up hostility towards people who fled from their countries. In fact it should not make a difference whether someone has to leave the country because of a possibility of dying from famine or because of a political situation. In this context the Geneva Convention needs to be re-examined.

Asylum seekers should be entitled to the same forms of social support as the

general population, they should have the same rights and duties. **Deportation of asylum seekers should be considered a violation of human rights.** Victims of human trafficking should be recognised and treated as victims and not as criminals. Additional discrimination on the basis of gender is unacceptable.

Women who come into a country under family reunion rules or through marriage to a man who has the nationality of the country, should have the right to an independent residence permit. Refugees and migrants should be able to exercise their skills and knowledge. The procedure of **recognition of diplomas and certificates** as well as the recognition of prior working and studying experience should be facilitated so that refugees and migrants are not subject to either downwards mobility or underpayment.

Living in a multicultural society means also that people with different cultural and/or religious backgrounds have the **right to different dress-codes and customs** etc., without it affecting their right to work or to education.

There is clearly a gap between discussing racism as an abstract concept and improving the situation for the victims of racism. It is of enormous importance that victims of discrimination are provided with adequate support.

LEGAL MEASURES

The legal situation with regard to anti-discrimination laws is different in each country. There are different constitutional provisions which provide protection against discrimination for citizens and non-citizens. In some countries civil law is a more useful tool against cases of discrimination, in some other countries such cases are covered by criminal codes. It also has to be noted that in some countries international law is treated as superior to national laws whereas in other states international laws come into effect only if they are implemented through national legislation. Another factor is the European Union law which has a potentially important effect on EU member states since the introduction of Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty.

The fact that **states themselves do not enforce their national laws** against racism is a major problem, especially with regard to organised openly racist activities in certain East European countries.

The so-called "crime of solidarity" and the resulting **criminalisation of anti-racist activities** is of a grave concern to human rights activists in many countries. Laws that require denouncing friends, laws that criminalise those who wish to protect and help people seeking asylum must be changed. Governments should respect citizens who are sympathetic and willing to help people who are in need. The law cannot overrule moral norms and the basic human rights standards. It is a widely shared demand that members of human rights and anti-racist associations and organisations should not be prosecuted for their solidarity with refugees.

Other demands brought up during the discussion included:

Detention centres where foreigners are locked up for the single reason of being asylum seekers or undocumented should be closed down. In case foreigners are put in detention, it should be conducted according to a fair legal procedure allowing for a representation of interests of all sides and guaranteeing all individual liberties and rights. Wherever foreigners are still kept in detention for

their illegal entering or staying, or seeking asylum, they should be given the right to have regular visitors from solidarity associations.

In each country there should be a **monitoring system** to investigate and follow up cases of harassment, violence and repression committed by the police against foreigners and people of foreign origin.

Asylum seekers who have been granted a visa by member states of the European Union should be able to apply in any Member State. In conformity with the European Human Rights Convention all humiliating treatment during identity checks must be stopped as well as any control by DNA-tests.

In future the emphasis should be on national anti-discrimination law. The law should state clearly what is prohibited and the possible ways of redress. It is important that **legislation be "mainstreamed"** - ideally with one major piece of legislation plus special provisions in other laws. If the law is to function properly it is necessary to take into account the problem of **access to justice**: awareness of the existing laws, information on available legal services, free legal assistance, etc. **Specialised independent institutions** to help victims of discrimination are needed.

Anti-discrimination law should be introduced to students in the process of education, with special attention paid to raising awareness of different minorities issues.

The participants of the working group welcomed new initiatives for introducing anti-discrimination procedures, such as proposed directives of the EU Commission. They include a provision requiring the employers to prove their procedures do not allow for discrimination, also called "**reversal of the burden of proof**". Participants agreed that these measures could become exemplary. It is a subject for debate whether, how and when certain **positive measures** (e.g. various quota systems) can be used to erase discrimination in workplace and in other situations.

Other laws, including family law and international conventions, e.g. the Covenant of the Rights of the Child can be used also to cover cases of discrimination.

Governments should commit themselves to **providing citizenship** for as large a number as possible of their countries' inhabitants. The procedure for granting citizenship should be simple and non-discriminatory.

NGOs can play an important role in implementing anti-racist legislation.

Possibilities for NGOs to participate in legal procedures helping and representing individuals should be made. An Ombudsman could play a similar role.

In general **anti-discrimination law against discrimination of all minority groups** is relevant for the topic of racial discrimination, too. Anti-discrimination law should state that discrimination on the basis of (foreign) name, age, gender, skin colour, ethnic and national origin, religion or political opinion or belief, sexual orientation, disability and apparel is prohibited.

MEDIA

It is a common knowledge that media are among the most important actors both in the fight against racism and, unfortunately, in spreading prejudice and stereotypes. Well-functioning **co-operation between the media and anti-racist non-governmental organisations** (especially anti-racist youth NGOs) is necessary.

It must be emphasised that racist views are not just like any other views present in society to be reflected in the media. Racism is not just an opinion, but a deadly poison responsible for death and suffering. **Racism is not a view, it is a crime.** Laws against hate speech must be observed with an active participation of governments, judicial systems as well as journalists and their professional organisations.

Modern forms of hate speech include **Holocaust denial**. Denying and/or relativising the Nazi atrocities are part and parcel of today's neofascist propaganda all over Europe. It must be fought vigorously both by legal means as well as by counter-action in the field of education.

The existence of an **European network of anti-fascist magazines** (such as Searchlight, Nigdy Wiecej, Toum Balalaika) must be noted as a very important part of the international struggle against racism and neofascism. Examples from across Europe illustrate attempts by the extreme right to silence criticism from anti-racists by using physical threats as well as libel law. It was agreed that such **intimidation of the independent media is unacceptable.**

It has to be noted that racist messages are often to be found not just in the conventional media such as newspapers and pamphlets but they are also spread through the Internet and through neo-nazi rock music. These new media for transmitting hatred are increasingly used by extreme-right groups co-operating on a transnational level and they need to be counteracted through international co-operation as well. The **existing international monitoring and law enforcement agencies should be used** for that purpose and new bodies should be created where appropriate, in partnership with interested NGOs.

The **mainstream media**, too, can be blamed for outbursts of xenophobia edging on racism, e.g. stirring up anti-refugee hysteria. It is important they are sensitised to the vocabulary they use and realise their responsibility for maintaining good inter-ethnic relations.

It is hoped they can play a **positive role in promoting role models** and showing daily life of migrants and ethnic minorities. A **larger number of journalists with an ethnic minority background** are another means of promoting multi-culturalism.

Commercials are a particular form of presenting images which can be both positive and negative. Music, too, can play a very important role as a media for a positive, anti-racist message: there are good examples of **anti-racist music** campaigns aimed at young people in various European countries.

It is important for the media not to deny or trivialise the problem of racism but to raise awareness of those issues in democratic society. It is also a matter of **professional ethics** not to give a platform to racist and extreme-right organisations.

The **media outlets created by and for young people** are to be seen as highly important in the fight against racism. The growth in information technology offers both possibilities and risks as it is a potential for excluding those who do not have access to it. It is equally important to educate young people how to use media critically and consciously.

3. PRESENTATION

RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION: HOW OUR CULTURES PROMOTE INTOLERANCE?

Anne Morelli, Professor in the University of Brussels and a leading member of the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia (MRAX), gave a truly inspiring and thought-provoking plenary presentation on "Racism and Other Forms of Discrimination". Professor Morelli focused on the mechanism of constructing of a nation's identity by re-writing history and forging a sense of collective superiority.

There are several possible approaches to the concept of racism: psychological, economic, resulting from the colonial experience - all of them equally valid. One way of looking at racism is to see it a consequence of a certain type of transmission of cultural values. "Culture" in this context is seen in the broadest possible meaning of the term, not just in the elitist sense of the word. Social groups create cultural standards deemed "natural" and "normal". Those standards are necessary for the survival of the group. They can be compared to user's guides or recipes. Groups naturally believe they possess features that are superior to other groups, which amounts to ethnocentrism.

Belgium can serve as an example how myths were used in the process of nation-building and identity-construction. Similar mechanisms worked - and are still at work - in many other countries, both in Western and Eastern Europe. Ambiorix, the mythical hero who fought against "aliens" (in this case: Romans), has almost identical equivalents in France and Germany. Other elements used in national mythology include the folklore, songs, dances, language (if it does not exist it can be easily created), monuments, landscape, climate, food, etc. All these characteristics are seen as unique and superior to other societies and cultural groups. It leads to devaluation of other cultures. Modern racism is first and foremost cultural and not biological.

It is important to understand the dynamics of this mechanism and to recognise that some of our deeply embedded cultural norms are results of this kind of identity-building process. Does it mean that cultural relativism is a necessary basis for anti-racism? Do we have to accept all lifestyles and customs, such as polygamy (quite normal in West Africa)? We have to face the fact that certain standards ARE relative as they change in time and space.

It should be also remembered that history can be used both to divide people on the basis of their ethnicity as well as to bring them together. Teaching history can be a very useful tool for anti-racist education. It should include teaching about universal problems, common issues faced by humanity, historical similarities, e.g. in the history of migrations. Cultural diversity is not just a feature of modernity but can be traced back, e.g. to the Middle Ages when cities prospered and universities flourished thanks to their diversity and openness. It is also important to know we are all descendants of economic and political migrants. Each nation experienced it and it should be reminded through teaching history. It is also vital to teach about beneficial effects of immigration such as enriching the country's culture and the economy.

Is racism natural? It is as natural as murder. It is something that happens, but not something we necessarily need to accept. Racism and prejudice may be natural for societies, but a learned behaviour for individuals. Racism and prejudice are

an intrinsic part of the structure of society, not necessarily of the minds of people. We should take care not to confuse 'natural' with unchangeable. Anne Morelli's presentation sparked off much discussion. Is racism just prejudice or also something to do with economic and cultural power? Professor Morelli explained that she believed racism was based on different things, one part is prejudice, another part is power, and another part is psychology. In the US the idea "racism is prejudice plus power" has long been used to explain the difference between prejudice and having an active ideology promoting the suppression of another "race". It was also pointed out that even if the belief in the superiority of one's society is natural then it can also be a belief in the superiority of a multicultural society. It was concluded there is a strong cultural potential for racism and it has many different shapes. Anti-racism does not mean uniformisation. We should avoid constructing a hierarchy of superior and inferior cultures, e.g. pop music is not necessarily inferior to Mozart or to tam-tam music.

The lively discussion continued in smaller groups. Additional points which were brought out included the historical roots of racism and how long back they can be traced, the existence of institutional or implicit racism, the multitude of possible definitions of race and racism, the contradictions between the personal and societal level of experience of racism, the economic causes and results of racism, the advantages and limitations of 'cultural relativism' in the context of human rights, etc.

4. EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE AND GOOD PRACTICE

Throughout the conference there were numerous opportunities for exchange of experience between participants. The topics ranged from the preferred size of stickers to the complex problems of overcoming cultural obstacles for co-operation between gay and immigrant organisations.

MIGRANTS AND MINORITIES

Participants from Iceland, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Estonia and Latvia exchanged information about the legal situation of non-citizens in their countries, both immigrants and people who were born in the country but have been denied citizenship (the case of Russian-speakers in Baltic states). It was noted that the situation in each country is different and various quota systems and procedures are used by states to grant citizenship or residence permits. Participants also exchanged experience of their organisation's activities in providing legal assistance and support to non-citizens.

ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION

The main subject of discussion was the evolution from getting **equal rights** instead of merely **tolerance**, taking into consideration two levels of racism - **structural** and **ideological**, and finally emphasising **equality** in general, though paying attention to **differences** at the same time.

Tools suggested for anti-racist education included:

- workshops, training courses, language courses
- summer and work camps of different types
- travels, exchanges, excursions
- meetings, contacts (on official level, on the level of partnership between organisations, and on the individual level)
- street actions / demonstrations
- arts (concerts, dance-exhibitions, competitions, theatre, including so-called "invisible theatre" etc)
- quizzes, games
- mass media
- multimedia
- sports

CO-OPERATION TO FIGHT DIFFERENT FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Participants of this workshop discussed ways of combining forces in the wider battle against discrimination and for a more tolerant society, which includes both anti-racism as well as disability issues and gay/lesbian issues. It is possible to learn from each other's experience in order to understand the nature of discrimination.

Participants noted that organisations working in the field of one kind of discrimination should be encouraged to give their support to other groups dealing with other forms of discrimination. Together they have more weight and their voice is more likely to be heard by public opinion and by decision-makers. It is also important to collaborate on the international (e.g. European) level. Participants agreed there is nothing wrong for organisations to specialise in just one area of anti-discrimination work. However, they should co-operate whenever there is a common interest. There should be some level of solidarity amongst them.

Examples were given of successful initiatives cross-cutting the traditional fields of anti-discrimination work: e.g. a seminar in Finland co-organised by disabled people's organisations, gay activists, and Nature Friends Association. This event helped overcome mutual prejudice and showed that groups were not homogeneous as they overlapped. Another example was given by a Moldavian delegate who described the difficult situation of gay people and educational activities undertaken to improve it.

Finally, the participants discussed the example of MAG, a Paris-based gay-rights group which has a successful record of co-operating with numerous youth organisations, including students' unions, immigrants' associations, family and parents' organisations, young workers' organisations as well as anti-racist/anti-fascist groups. An open-minded approach was deemed necessary to overcome mutual prejudice (e.g. between gays and Muslims).

The participants agreed that the resources necessary for creating joint projects with other organisations included:

- ideas
- human resources
- financial resources

ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

The starting point for discussion was the presentation of an annual Swedish Anti-Racist Film Festival. The festival is an alternative/different way to fight racism and xenophobia. The idea of this film festival is to show quality movies in small cinemas with a lecture before or after the film. It is followed by a discussion about the theme in the movie and its essence. People have feelings and thoughts that have to be taken seriously and come up to the surface. Nothing is a taboo.

There are many ways to show that discrimination should never be acceptable. There is neither a right nor a wrong way to work. And everybody has his own style. By using art, theatre, music, poems, magazines and fanzines as tools, we can find a natural way to communicate. Every event and initiative that is based on honesty and a real passion for the cause in which you believe, has a big chance to turn out successful. It was agreed that a creative use of arts (e.g. music) is one of the most effective means in the struggle against racism.

THE LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY

Amanda Huxtable from "Proper-Job Theatre Project" manages a project called "Above and Beyond". It is a training program for black people in the community, intended to teach them to be active on the community level. Part of the training is to conduct research in the library. Amanda called a month in advance, saying there will be a group of 6 black people coming to do research and asked for the documents to be prepared. When they came they were treated in a hostile and disrespectful way by the librarian. They were given a separate room "just in case" and accompanied to it by a security guard, words like "tribe" were used in addressing them, and they were denied the chance to come back the next day. The explanation was that they need to book in advance. How do you deal with this situation? What do you do? Is it a case of racism? Are there different levels of racism? In England, for instance, so called "subtle racism" is spread all over the country. How do you recognise racism?

The reactions could be different: from trying to appeal to humanity of the librarian to indirectly insulting her and being nasty. There is no right or wrong reaction; there's an emotional and a rational one. Here is what was done in reality. The group involved in the training program discussed the situation and decided to write a letter of complaint to the director of the library (a copy of the letter was sent to the librarian). Two responses were written to them, in both the director apologised, admitted the fault, and promised to correct the situation so it wouldn't happen again. The group found a way to deal with the situation. They reacted instead of leaving it the way it was.

Society is pushing us towards disunity and individualism. But in this case the group realised how important it is to establish community links and unity among minorities.

MEDIA LOBBYING: A CASE STUDY

The case study was presented by Albanian Committee against Violence, Racism and Intolerance (ACVRI).

Working with mass media is a way to influence public opinion and political life as well. In Albania nearly 50 volunteers with different background, working in

different fields - journalists, politicians, students, social workers joined their common passion, experience and energy in a joint project on human rights. On the basis of the Albanian example the participants of the working group further discussed the topic how to influence mass media?

The following advice was exchanged:

- To find an interesting issue for publication and/or interesting way of presentation of the activity which took place. It is important for a piece of information both to be readable and interesting for the general public and on the other hand attractive enough for journalists and sponsors.
- To find the right person in the right position in the right moment. Personal lobbying is essential in societies in transition such as countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Networks of relatives and interests are often more important than the needs of society or the quality of the projects.
- The media need NEWS, something really extraordinary to happen. The easiest way to ensure their interest is to involve them as a partner in the activity - which should be big enough, well publicised and with involvement of strong political figures.
- To initiate a Training on Human Rights (for example) in order to raise awareness of the journalists of the importance of the problem and as well to give them a bit of knowledge.

Other ideas for campaigning in the media:

- To present and publicise concrete cases of violence. The role of the NGOs is to support the process of collecting information from "first hand".
- To publish more theoretical opinions that will present the meaning and the importance of the anti-racist work.
- To use the opinion pages in newspapers for presentation and discussion, not only the sections on "crime news".

CASE STUDY ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

The first part of the workshop was dedicated to the discussion about the situation in different countries in general. The European situation is quite diversified, e.g. in Great Britain 54 per cent of the applications for asylum are still accepted in contrast to a mere 4-5 per cent in Belgium. However, in Great Britain the rights of asylum seekers are quite limited, they have to live in detention centres, respect curfew rules, they have no right to receive money but just vouchers accepted only in certain shops.

The second part was a real case study with a real situation currently monitored by Show racism the red card (GB), concerning seven asylum seekers imprisoned only because they protested against the private company which is in charge of their accommodation. Participants were asked to produce ideas as to possible solutions to the problem. They decided that there were at least two aspects of the problem: how to set them free - so to say the short-term task, and the second one - what are the ways to improve the situation in general - in other words a long-term approach.

So the solutions suggested were the following:

Short-term

- Spreading information (increased media coverage of the case)
- Putting (moral) pressure on the officials (petitions to the courts to release the prisoners)
- Contacting other asylum seekers
- Church asylum (looking for priests who can be of some help as far as accommodation is concerned)
- Fund raising
- Free legal/medical assistance and language courses for refugees

Long-term

- Try to find the ways to eliminate monopoly in accommodation of the asylum seekers.
- Creating a network of free (for the asylum seekers) lawyers and medical assistance.
- Creating links with other people, starting with the people within organisations sympathetic to the cause of asylum seekers and Human Rights, at personal level in order to increase their interest towards the asylum seekers and refugees, for them to see these people as humans, as personalities and to raise the sympathetic feelings.

MEDIA IMAGES OF MIGRANTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACISM

The debate started with the example of a Norwegian newspaper publishing material about criminality in the country. The article stated that immigrants committed most of the crimes and that criminals are mostly immigrants. The media sometimes create stereotypes and influences the public in a very unethical way. E.g. when they emphasise the ethnic background of delinquents. The participants shared their experience in the related field and concluded that the media acts very similarly in various European countries.

The questions that were raised were the following:

- Should we work with the media?
- If yes, HOW?
- How should we struggle against freedom of publishing fascist propaganda in the press? How should we work against racism in the media?

The following conclusions were reached:

- First of all, choose the right media.
- Then, promote anti-racism campaigns in the media.
and be optimistic....

PEOPLE WITH LIMITED ABILITIES

Have you ever tried a wheel chair? Participants of this group first tried it and then discussed their emotions. They agreed that trying a wheel chair for a few minutes is not the same as using it every day. It was a good point to start the discussion.

Tanel Joost and Virpi Siiskonen, activists of organisations for disabled people's rights, spoke about their personal experience. Participants spoke about situations in different countries but at the end shared the same opinion that the situation is improving. A question was raised whether disability is more a problem of environment and society or a health problem. A person has an impairment or health problems, but it depends on his/her environment if that disables him/her. It was pointed out that everybody is in some way disabled and cannot use all tools available in everyday life.

ANTISEMITISM

The workshop on antisemitism began with a brief question and answer session which was designed to explore the current knowledge of the participants had about Jewish people across the world. The group later went over the main issues surrounding antisemitism starting with a reason why a single word has been used rather than using two words which are hyphenated ("anti-Semitism"). Some participants of the group researched the Internet and concluded there was no single website that provided general information on antisemitism and how to fight it. No definition of antisemitism was to be found either.

The group then proceeded to formulate its own definition:

- Antisemitism is the belief that Jews are inferior to non-Jews. It is also an ideology which has its own dogmas (e.g. so-called "Jewish conspiracy").
- Antisemitism is a specific kind of racism. Both phenomena are closely linked.
- The most important form of contemporary antisemitism is Holocaust denial. It targets young people who may not have enough knowledge to challenge it.

On the subject of how to fight antisemitism the group reached numerous conclusions, among them:

- The need to oppose fascism and expansionist nationalism.
- The need for a policy of 'No Platform' for the peddlers of antisemitic ideas such as Holocaust denial.
- To maintain a permanent ideological and physical opposition to organised antisemitic activities.
- The need for a broad-based political alliance of all those who oppose antisemitism.
- The need for close monitoring of antisemitic groups by antifascists.
- Working with academics and experienced activists.
- Working on a community level to oppose antisemitism at all levels of society.

5. SHARING SKILLS

Participants of the conference took the opportunity to learn from each other practical skills necessary for effective organising and campaigning for a non-racist Europe.

LOBBYING

The following topics were discussed and experiences were exchanged with regard to consecutive stages of lobbying:

Choosing your subjects

- be prepared to answer questions
- combine finances with contents
- combine people's interests with your topic

Targeting the right people

- choose according to your aim
- do not underestimate people now, you may regret it later
- "know your secretary"
- share contacts
- find out about people's interest

Alliances and networking

- think creatively: who can be your ally?
- networking: both social and political
- dealing with your partners: giving and taking (beneficial for both sides)
- sharing information

Communication material

- your mouth
- your phone/e-mail/fax
- written material
- image: organisational, personal, etc.

Follow-up

- create a database of addresses
- briefing the homebase
- confirming your first steps
- paying attention/being thoughtful to the person

The participants engaged themselves in a discussion on whether lobbying is a necessary tool for participating in a democratic society, and took part in simulation games to exercise the skills learned.

DIRECT ACTION / STREET ACTION

One of the major strengths of this workshop was the fact that it was based primarily on examples and experiences coming from Eastern Europe (especially countries in ex-Yugoslavia) which are less well known on a European level.

The discussion concerned different kinds of protest actions and most effective and spectacular methods of presenting our message to the public. Examples of actions from different countries were given. One of them was a campaign in Belgrade where anti-Milosevic campaigners protested by using noise to obscure the television news programme censored by the Serb government. There were also good examples of political-cultural demonstrations and festivals in Slovenia. Participants went on to discuss the very important role of media in spreading information about our actions. We have to be aware of consequences of our activity.

It is important that people who take part in big events like concerts should be well informed about what is going on and what is the message of the event. The organisers should make sure the event is not boring or going in a wrong direction e.g. because of too much alcohol.

We should have fun during a demonstration but gathering without any reflection is pointless. So there is a need for a pre-prepared short and clear message and information (e.g. leaflets) about the meaning and aim of the event to inform participants and the media.

There is an eternal dilemma with choosing methods of demonstration - using violence or peaceful. The participants agreed on a general rule that when anyone attacks us we are entitled to defend ourselves using force but we never use violence as a means of our own political protest.

THE INTERNET AND HOW TO USE IT TO COMBAT RACISM

The working group began with an historical presentation about the development of the Internet. Then the discussion continued about the technical part and the different providers and services which can help us find information. Another topic was security and how to protect our important information.

Then the participants came to the main part of the working group which was about combating racism by using the Internet.

There were examples of how NGOs (like I CARE - Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe and Magenta foundation) can use web pages to introduce themselves to the world. The participants realised how important it is for every one of our organisations to be represented on the Internet: what are our aims, who we are, activities etc. It is not only important to use Internet for presenting oneself, it can also promote interactivity, so feedback from people to your organisation. You can use it to discuss topics with a group of people, like organising a conference not by meeting in one place, but by meeting in a chat session on the net.

Of course organisations need to fight against racism expressed through the Internet, there are several ways of doing this. Some organisations show on their WebPages links to racist web sites, but this idea met with strong criticism, because not only anti-racists can use that, also racists use it to find other nazi groups to contact.

"This workshop was useful for me because I think you should use every possible thing you can to further your cause and the Internet looks like a good way to do that"

said Marsela Hoxhaj from Associazine Rieti Immigrant (I), a participant of the working group.

6. PLANNING JOINT ACTION

ACTION GROUP ON REFUGEES

A definition of "refugee" was discussed which includes any person forced to leave his or her country for various reasons. This is because anyone who decides to leave for another country is faced with enormous problems forcing him/her to take such a decision. The difficult situation faced by refugees in Europe was discussed as well as the risks they face (often to their lives) when crossing the borders.

The main problems highlighted included:

- deportation
- border police
- inhumane conditions in refugee camps and detention centres
- the wasted time spent waiting for their papers to be processed

The following activities were proposed to take place in the framework of the UNITED network:

- training courses at the European level for people working with refugees
- centralised source of information about those working in the field
- training for lawyers and cultural and linguistic mediators on legal representation and initiatives such as hotlines for refugees and administrative procedures
- training for border police and immigration officials
- publicity campaigns highlighting the refugees' deprivation of human rights and the relationship between racism and the treatment of refugees also at the level of national awareness-raising campaigns.

ACTION GROUP ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST FASCISM AND ANTISEMITISM (9 November)

It was agreed that street demonstrations are not the only means of commemorating the anniversary of "Kristallnacht" pogrom - International Day against Fascism and Antisemitism. Educational activities around this day are needed too, e.g. meetings in schools on the subject of the Holocaust and answering questions from students. Activities at local level (preferably for 1-2 weeks) should be accompanied by the national and international levels. The idea of a larger international conference was discussed. It could take place this or the next year. It was suggested that participants of such a conference could also go to schools and take part in a local event. The necessity for an international dimension to events on the local level was emphasised.

ACTION GROUP ON THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM

Participants of this group were members of organisations that have been selected for participation in the European intergovernmental conference against racism organised by the Council of Europe. The working group analysed the procedures and structure of the conference with a view on co-ordinating activities of NGOs with similar goals and viewpoints. The group decided it is extremely important for NGOs to keep each other informed about preparations to the conference and to stay in contact regarding possible areas of cooperation.

7. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

"I have learned a lot for myself (on racism, homophobia). I have developed my character and I am able to give much more information. I have made some new connections and have now a better knowledge about European organisations and the UNITED network. The team was really great. There was a lot of work to be done in a little time. Haven't slept that much so the conference must have been successful.

Thanks a lot!"

Ben Schaffer, International Youth Meeting Centre, Oswiecim/Auschwitz (PL)

"This conference has been invaluable for me mainly because of the contacts I have made and the information I obtained for the two organisations I work for. Hopefully I will be able to influence other organisations with my newfound knowledge and contacts. Also on a personal note, I have made many new friends and have been influenced to travel more and maybe even learn a second language. I now feel more motivated and have seen many possibilities that I can implement in the future. Many thanks."

Will, Archway Project (GB)

"This conference is a great opportunity for me to meet a multicultural variety of people in Europe, personal encounters with people with various backgrounds are an important step in combating xenophobia and various kinds of discrimination. I got some new information, I got introduced to some issues I didn't know much about before and about various ways people are involved in anti-racist work. Personal contacts and sharing were very important to me and empowered me and gave me strength for my future work. Due to the fact I am living in Belgrade I feel very isolated from the rest of the world and because of the difficult political and economic situation I need support in my NGO activism. I'll take back to my organisation new contacts, a few ideas for new projects and new information. I'd like to emphasise there are many NGOs in Serbia and they have been active for years in doing important work in combating nationalism and the totalitarian regime of the Yugoslavian government. Many of these NGOs are very isolated and somehow excluded from international NGOs' activity. Because of that reason I am glad my organisation and me as its representative are part of the UNITED network."

Vojislava Tomic, Group MOST- Center for Antiwar Action (YU)

This report is by no means complete. Other working groups, workshops, and discussions took part throughout the conference. They included the exchanges of information on the situation of refugees and women from minorities, political cafe discussions on "Citizenship and Participation" as well as "What Have We Learned From World War II?", an action group on anti-racist activities organised by socialists and social democrats, and many more. To understand better the socio-psychological mechanisms of prejudice and exclusion participants took part in interactive simulation games and role games. They also produced an Internet newspaper. Despite the heavy load of serious discussion the participants were still able to take part in a lively social programme prepared by the Social Committee. The personal friendships forged during the week should be seen as an equally valuable outcome of the conference as the political initiatives.

8 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

Conference report prepared by Rafal Pankowski.
This report would not have been possible without the work of all the working group rapporteurs as well as additional help from Tanya Kozlovska and Suzette Bronkhorst Thank you!

UNITED for Intercultural Action
European network against nationalism, racism, fascism
and in support of migrants and refugees
Postbus 413, NL-1000 AK Amsterdam, Netherlands
phone +31-20-6834778, fax +31-20-6834582
info@unitedagainstracism.org, www.unitedagainstracism.org