

International conference "Combating racism: non-violent strategies and tactics"

April 21-23, Voronezh (Russia)

Brief overview

The conference took place in the Regional Youth Center in Voronezh (Russian Federation) at April 21-23. It was organized by the International Youth Human Rights Movement, which is headquartered in Voronezh, together with European network UNITED for Intercultural Action.

This event has gathered over 47 participants from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Germany and Poland: teachers, activists, officials, foreign students, journalists etc. Unfortunately, because of the recent volcano's eruption and caused problems with the air transportations from Europe, a number of experts and speakers couldn't attend the conference.

April 21 - first day

The conference started with the introductory speeches given by Andrey Yurov, the honorary YHRM president, Gennadiy Kirichenkov, the vice-chairman of the regional Department of education, science and youth policy, and Dirk Hebecker, the Senior Human Rights Advisor to the UN Country Team.

First session of the conference was devoted to international challenges in antiracism and antifacism. Dirk Hebecker, who gave a brief overview of the UN activities in the field of antiracism and antidiscrimination, put a stress on a Durban process and recent scandalous conference on this topic, that was held in Geneva last year. In 2001 the world-wide conference to combat racism took place in Durban (South Africa) and its participants adopted the Durban declaration and Programme of Action. So, in 2009 there were an attempt to conclude achievements of implementation of these documents in different countries. See more details here <http://www.un.org/durbanreview2009/ddpa.shtml>

Mr. Hebecker also presented UN structure and those tools, which are available for antidiscriminational and antiracist work of NGOs.

The further speaker Andrey Yurov reasoned about the existing situation with xenophobia amongst youth on the European level and incapacity of civil movement to counteract the rising popularity of right-wing ideas in the society. He also gave an introduction to the concept of the so-called humanitarian antifacism, that includes antiracism, anti-totalitarianism and anti-militarism. Thus he told: *"Fascism is just an extremely aggressive fundamentalism, a simple answer on those questions, which are raised by the modern society. But the humanitarian antifascism is based on the idea, that the complicated world requires complicated answers. Which haven't been found up today..."*.

April 22 – second day

This working day was opened with the session "Combating right-wing

extremism and xenophobia amongst youth". Alexey Kozlov from the Movement GROZA spoke about the situation with right-wings on different levels: about political parties, networks and organisations, subcultures (football fans, white noise scene etc). *"The first large block is political nationalism. The discussion deals with those organisations that occupy a legal political space and try to participate in parliament. Specifically, they bear various ultra-right slogans in the political arena as a choice for both national and Euro-parliamentary elections. Finally, in both cases they receive a sufficiently decent quantity of votes"*.

Elena Dudukina from the Youth network against racism and intolerance presented results of the regional monitoring of xenophobia amongst youth, which was conducted in Russia last year by YHRM and Moscow Helsinki Group. She focused her speech on the state policy in the field of promotion tolerance, equality and intercultural dialogue: *"They organise always the same festivals of so-called "friendship of nations", events about various cultures, dances and cuisine. But really challenging and important issues such as migration, history interpretation etc. - those which form the xenophobic attitudes in Russian society - are kept ignored"*. The state policy rised a huge and vigorous discussion among participants, who where more or less aware about recent initiatives (I.e. "Year of Youth" in 2009) and had an experience of cooperation with officials in this sphere. Meanwhile a lot of activists have admitted that non-govermental organisations don't have a clear perception of what should be done on federal or regional levels as well. They have strong doubts about the proper way to promote tolerance and Human Rights in schools and students audiences.

The conference continued with a series of workshops from experienced activitsts from Vladimir, Saint-Petersburg, Voronezh (Russia), Kiev (Ukraine): "Monitoring of xenofobia as a tool of social changes", Cinema against fascism", "Journalists vs racists - media work against right-wing extremism", "Antiracist work in schools", "Outreach projects for refugees and migrants".

The afternoon was devoted to the "New tactics of combating racism", which included sufficient practices from different regions: i.e. "Antifascist archive of non-violent action' www.a-archive.org, Coalition "Xenofobii.Net" from Saint-Petersburg community.livejournal.com/ksenofobii_net/ Maria Gordeea from Free University provided participants with the more detailed information about the concept of "new tactics" itself and international project "New Tactics in Human Rights" www.newtactics.org This project is intended to collect and classify most sufficient and interesting methods of actions in the field of Human Rights defence (from the direct civil resistance to state human rights programmes or informational campaigns for youth). It's aimed to multiply this tactics and make them accessable in other countries and within different conditions.

This wirking day ended with working groups on following topics: "Antifascist publishing projects", "Educational programmes against racism", "Defence of rights of foreign students", "Informational and web-projects". Participants discussed crucial problems and needs in their activities and tried to plan common actions within topics of working groups. Thus the tough discussion appeared in the group about the antiracist education. It consisted of activists

from Central Russia and Caucasus (Chechnya), trainers of non-formal education and teachers from state universities. They argued about the main message of antiracist education, the real possibility to do it within the formal educational system in Russia, inclusion of other discrimination-related topics in such programmes. The most challenging question was how not to make the situation worse by usage of inadequate methods and approaches.

April 23 – third day

In the morning participants gathered together to conclude the conference outcomes. They got the opportunity to present their regional projects during the Open forum: i.e. the project “Remembrance” from German-Russian Exchange (Saint-Petersburg), devoted to the totalitarianism in Russia and Germany; interregional initiative for translation of the German manual “Baustein fuer nonrassistisch buldingarbeit” into Russian etc.

During the closing round a lot of participants underlined that this conference gave them a unique opportunity to meet people with different – even-opposite – backgrounds in a common space. Thus for many activists it was first time when they could discuss their work with UN or local officials.

This conference was held within the project “Civil organizations serving society: youth actions against racism, nationalism and xenophobia and for human rights and multicultural dialogue”, supported by the MATRA program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and within the project “Building partnership for successful non-violent youth action to promote human rights culture, tolerance and inter-cultural dialogue”, supported by the Delegation of European Commission to Russian Federation.

Organizers

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