

## **Developing Anti-discrimination Tools in a New European Context**

The UNITED Conference that took place in Luxembourg in June 2003 on "developing anti-discrimination tools in a new European context" has demonstrated again the importance of European NGOs networking. The conference was divided into workshops on anti-discrimination tools addressing refugees and migrants, minorities groups as well as far right tendencies and intercultural education issues. These issues were discussed at the same workshops that were held during three days. They started from introductory discussions about multicultural Europe and positive experiences of anti-discrimination activity and were finalized by development of common strategies.

At the workshop concerning the situation of minorities in Europe, the challenging issue was discussion of our respective definition of what "minority" means in each country. For instance, some participants coming from Eastern Europe considered that "minority" refers only to "national minorities"; in other words, immigrants who sometimes live in the host countries for over 30 years are not considered as belonging to this category.

It was also interesting to challenge our own "stereotypes", or what a Luxembourg participant calls the "racist education" we have been transmitted. According to him, activists against racism are not excluded from this attitude and are not always aware of it.

During the conference, we also had a very interesting visit of Harald Gloede, member of the anti-racist and refugee organisation FFM in Berlin, who had been arrested by the German authorities on 19/12/99. He was accused of membership in the Revolutionary Cells and the Red Zora as well as of his participation in anti-racist actions demonstrating solidarity with refugees in the years 1986/87, which have mostly expired. UNITED vehemently opposed this arbitrary arrest and together with other movements and organisations fought for his release.

The UNITED Conferences are usually very fruitful not only because of the debates that are raised but also due to the exchange (both at formal and informal levels) that takes place between NGOs participants. Usually local NGOs from all over Europe do not have sufficient contacts with other realities. They also need to be encouraged and empowered, and this kind of meetings has this very positive effect of bringing together people who work on the same issues.

The Open Forum, for instance, has given opportunity to one of the participants to present a video on minority media in Aarhus (Denmark). It is a Regional program called "The Foreigners' Television" aimed at presenting various cultural communities living in Denmark in their native languages (subtitled in Danish). It is divided into current news, personal lives, cooking, children, etc. Then, the most interesting feature in this program is that it tends to create bridges between the majority and the minorities.

At such events, we often expect to have more time for debates than we actually have. Unfortunately, at this conference, we also often remained on the surface of our discussions. For instance, at the end of the workshop, the minority group has not managed to develop a common strategy except for possible participation in a joint Newsletter on Fighting Discriminations Against Minorities in Europe.

The great strength of UNITED is its power to gather together various organisations fighting against racism, nationalism, anti-semitism, or to support refugees and immigrants in Europe. However, this wide representation sometimes weakens the debates because all the participants do not discuss the single common issue.

Why should not we think about a European conference that would deal with one particular major issue (like immigrants, refugees, Roma people, anti-fascism, etc.) that could reach consensus as a result of the debates?

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