

CONFERENCE REPORT

UNITED Conference

East - West

**International Solidarity and Co-operation Against Intolerance
October 17-21 St. Petersburg (Russia)**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This conference has been especially important, because for the first time, east-west solidarity has been the main goal of a UNITED conference. In the previous conferences, there were more people from central Europe than from the more eastern part. For many reasons, (language, distance, visas, acknowledgement, will of organisations to participate, etc) it has always been difficult to get more young participants from Eastern European countries involved. Thanks to our friends of the antifascist commission of Memorial Saint Petersburg and their network, it has been possible this time, to have participants from Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan.

The country where the conference took place was important as well: Russia is obviously not considered to be a dictatorship, but lacks many of the usual human rights standard. There is limited freedom of the press, institutionalised racism, there is a state of war with Chechnya. If we consider also the huge amount of nationalist and fascist groups that enjoy almost total freedom of action, we can see that choosing such a country for a European antiracist and antifascist conference is highly symbolic.

65 young persons from nearly 30 countries have got the possibility to come together to work, listen, learn and exchange experience. The organisers of the conference managed to reach almost an equal balance of female/male participants. They represented groups of various geographical origins, from Dublin to Samarkand, various size and sometimes really different political approaches. However, the motivation among all delegates was the same: to take part in a forum for discussions on racism, fascism and human rights all over Europe and to produce concrete results for practical actions in the future. Both the amount of participants and the balance of male/female participants has not been easy to reach. The policy of visas in Russia - as experienced for the first time by many westerners - as well as the situation of war, both as a result of the war in Chechnya and the attacks on the United States of 11 September, have made travelling difficult. In fact, for some delegates, it became impossible to reach Saint-Petersburg in time.

The conference took place in a lovely little city not far from Saint-Petersburg, called Pushkin, formerly Tsarskoe Selo, "Village of the Tsars". We were in a historic place of Russia.

Each delegate has taken home a different set of new information and skills: some participants were more interested in anti-racism, some in the methods of the anti-fascist struggle, some in the experience of basic support of Human Rights. But there are no doubts that the time of the conference and - for most participants - the long way to get to the place of the event did not go to waste.

Different methods of presentation were used during the conference: lectures, debates, workshops, working groups for planning campaigns and collective initiatives. This report aims to give a general idea about main topics and issues discussed during the conference, new plans and projects proposed by

participants and may be - who knows - one day to stimulate you to nominate for participation in future UNITED conferences.

2. LECTURES, PRESENTATIONS, DEBATES

As usual expert speakers were invited to share their knowledge about the topics of the conference. Such lectures are supposed to provide participants with a deeper understanding of a special topic. This time, the country where the conference was held gave a special character to the different presentations.

For most of the young people from the former soviet space, the speech of Viatcheslav Morosov about "Ethnic conflict in Western and Eastern Europe" spoke directly of their own past and present.

The presentation of Nicolaï Girenko about "state racism and totalitarianism" did the same. Despite the fact that this subject concerns both people from the West and from the East, participants from Eastern and Central Europe recognised more of the discussions.

The presentation about "Roma, Citizen of Europe", written by Saimir Mile who could not attend, showed how much this topic is important for UNITED. The visa of Saimir Mile, Rrom from Albania, was rejected by the Russian consulate without any explanation. He was not the only one. His presentation was read out in the plenary.

Immediately after, Stefania Kulaeva (Memorial Saint-Petersburg/ERRC) presented the situation of Rromas in Russia and spoke about activities of European Roma Rights centre she is working for as a monitor.

To the contrary, the speech of Ralph Du Long, from Holland, "Equal rights for gays and lesbians: part of our anti-racist struggle?" was definitely an intervention from the activists from the West. His experience is different from the experience of activists from the countries where homosexuality has been considered to be a crime until very recently.

2.1. ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN EUROPE

Viatcheslav Morosov, Memorial St-Petersburg

When we speak about ethnic conflict, we must speak first about nation and nationalism. In the West the concept of nation has been developed together with the concept of citizenship. In the East, culture was dominant in the development of the idea of 'nation'. In the West the concept of citizen was developed after the War of the Roses in England. There was a need for 'new blood' and thus a need for upward mobility. In the feudal view of the world, the nation consisted of the nobility only. At this point in history the idea of nation became linked to the 'people' or those who were governed instead of those who governed. As such the idea of citizenship is based on an idea of equality between citizens.

In the East (including Germany) the nation was based on blood and culture. It developed as a reaction against the French Revolution. It was proclaimed that

national culture is an essential part of being a human being. The individual is only part of a larger whole.

When in this last concept national culture is seen as being under attack, ethnic conflict soon arises. Although minorities are ignored and sometimes merely tolerated in the societies that base their nationalism on 'citizenship', the societies that base their nationalism on culture will tend to try and eliminate, assimilate or exterminate minorities. Minorities are a threat to national culture and have to be kept under control.

When a society sees a 'nation' as a collective individual, with its own values, its own will and its own world vision, it is on its way to totalitarianism. The individual freedom will become secondary to the existence and protection of 'the nation'.

We should measure every particular kind of nationalism by how human rights, individual freedom and democracy are safeguarded. 'Minority nationalism', for example, is not in itself a danger to democracy and human rights

If we see democracy as 'self-rule of a community' we have to recognise that there is no democracy without community and no community without a certain feeling of solidarity. Nationalism can be democratic if the community is incorporating democracy and openness in its identity. When the community is based on common origin, it is formulated in exclusive terms and will lead to a feeling of threatened identity. This is often used to mobilise for nationalistic xenophobic movements. The same fears are used in Western Europe by many of the extreme-right movements.

We need to accept people's identity, but we should also spread the idea of multiculturalism. Culture is not static, it is dynamic. Preserving 'our culture' as it is at a certain moment in time is a futile exercise and it is also dangerous.

There are many who, following an essay of Samuel Huntington, speak of a 'clash of civilisations'. This idea is used to simplify the idea people have of the world. These theories contribute to intolerance and are quite dangerous.

2.2. STATE RACISM AND TOTALITARIANISM

Nikolai Girenko,

Minority Rights Group of the St. Petersburg Association of Scientists and Scholars

Racism and totalitarianism can be seen under different approaches, even good ones in the sense that one can "justify" it, under the logic of "best intentions".

Last summer, during the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, NGOs were asking: what are the 'roots' of racism? Historical roots of racism were said to be based on colonialism and slavery and so, combating these roots would mean creating a form of "Historical justice". But this term is dangerous, as has been proven by the conflict between Azeris and Armenians, or in Chechnya and Middle Asian republics of Russia. We cannot 'reconstruct history'. In the former Soviet Union territory, slavery was perpetrated by people of the same ethnicity as their victims, so this concept can not work in that case.

Racism and intolerance have very deep roots first in our societies. We must understand that ideas of racism are living in our societies, in academic circles and governmental offices.

In Russia nation and nationalism became linked with the development of ethnic identity. These phenomena were not introduced by some power in society, but

inherent and developed in society. Every society has the potential to accept this racism, to accept discrimination for 'development of society'. There is a myth that extreme nationalism and racism is a kind of phenomena that can not be accepted by the average citizen. But people do not always think in political categories and often feel that all decisions have been made by culture, tradition etc. Racist groups in St Petersburg would never accept that they are fascist. They say they believe that all nations should live separately to survive. They do not feel that they have anything to do with national-socialism. We have tried to bring some of them to the court, but we failed to get any convictions. They are again doing it with 'good intentions'. The ideology they propagate is a threat for many people, of course. We have to fight racism but we should not believe that it would be possible to completely eradicate it. These tendencies of racism are linked with our societies and will stay linked with them.

In post-communist countries, the common ethnicity was at the base of all legislation; we are people first and then individual. A basic psychological attitude of human beings is to like being part of something. This is not good or bad, but a matter of reality. It is important to find a balance between individual and collective rights.

The basic trend toward totalitarianism and racism is among all sectors of society. As a result fighting against racism should be directed towards education about what totalitarianism entails.

When we say that slavery is a crime against humanity, we work with a concept that was not relevant at the time of slavery. The idea of 'humanity' in general is quite new. I question whether such a title makes sense.

The most important idea for the future would be pluralism and relationships: many conflicts are conflicts between different value systems. So let us not believe in boycotting, but in developing open relationships.

2.3. RROMA - CITIZENS OF EUROPE

Saimir Mile, Rromani Baxt

Rroma have been present in Europe for centuries already. If we speak of them as citizens of Europe it is because, geographically, they are not living in only one State, or in a limited area of Europe, but all over the Old Continent.

There are two most important issues we have to deal with, when we claim the recognition of a new category of European citizens. Firstly, the word "citizen" means a person who is attached to a political structure by rights and obligations. But from one country to another, and even inside the same political structure, citizens are not equal in practice.

Secondly, there is the difference between "nationality" and "citizenship". We say Rroma are European citizens, but Europe did not accept yet that Rroma are European citizens.

What we can say about Rroma, is that they massively are in the lowest social classes. And, for a lot of refugees in Western Europe, in an illegal situation. Very often, Rroma don't know their rights. And a deeply rooted distrust of the judiciary system pushes Rroma not to bring cases in front of the courts. To

combat this passivity, our work must consist of information about precedents to convince the person that the only way to get his right is to fight for it. An important financial help is needed to go in front of the court. Possibilities exist, but they are very limited. As far as we know, the European Roma Rights Centre is the only organisation who provides grants to lawyers in cases concerning Roma (at least in front of the European Court). But we have also to think about the improvement of the economical situation of Roma, so they can pay for their own lawyers. That means education is needed. But in majority, Roma are poor and cannot afford good education. We're in a vicious circle. In the past, Roma often have been employed in jobs rejected by other people. State policies are mainly the cause of the phenomenon. Educational systems have never taken Rromani culture into consideration, or when they did, in a negative way, hostile to the conservation of this culture and its integration. School programs ignore Roma history, language and identity. Very few people know about the history of this people and about the persecutions that it have suffered by, like the slavery in Romania until the middle of 19th century or the nazi genocide committed against them during the Second World War. Even Roma often do not know their history. Survivors often prefer to forget. The problem needs to be treated and resolved at European level. The last Congress of International Rromani Union declared the existence of a Rromani Nation without compact territory, linked together by a common language and history. Actually, a territory is not seen as the most important criterion for establishing the existence of the nation. States have introduced this idea for ensuring their sovereignty. No claim of a territory and/or State exists in case of the Rromani Nation, and no Roma organisation wants it. The recognition of the Rromani Nation without compact territory could help the improvement of the situation of Roma. It means that States and European Union accept the existence of an identity ignored until now. And accept it as part of this Europe that the Member States are constructing. European states have to give their own place to 10 millions of Roma living on their territories.

2.4. THE SITUATION OF RROMA IN RUSSIA

Stefania Koulaeva, Memorial / European Roma Rights Centre

This presentation was specially interesting since the lecturer is working both with Russian Roma, as a coordinator of the Roma project in the Human Rights organisation Memorial St-Petersburg and for the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) whose work covers all of Europe. From the very beginning, Stefania Koulaeva underlined the importance of state racism against Roma and divided the problem into two parts: on the one hand aggressive racism and on the other hand all-pervasive discrimination.

This last concept includes the violation of the basic Human Rights of the Roma population: their right to education, housing, work, and their civil rights.

The "aggressive" racism includes physical attacks which stay unpunished, police terror (which includes torture and sometimes extortion) and penitentiary violations. These last two have to be distinguished from one another, as police terror mainly concerns those who are not yet charged, and the penitentiary violations regard those who are already in prison (arbitrary treatment by judges, public prosecutors and prison guards is included in this category).

After this general introduction, Stefania Koulaeva illustrated her speech with the experience and impressive photos of her trips as an ERRC monitor through the Russian Roma villages and settlements. Certain problems are very similar to those of other central and Eastern European Roma communities, certain concern only post soviet spaces. Stefania's introduction proved once more that in nowadays Russia, the situation with the Roma population, who already suffered so much from nazi genocide and repression during soviet times, remains catastrophic. Action to improve it could be successful only with the support of public opinion, which is almost completely missing until now.

2.5. EQUAL RIGHTS FOR GAYS AND LESBIANS: PART OF OUR ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLE?

Ralph Du Long, European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation (EGLSF)

Ralph Du Long began his presentation by explaining his personal experience. He argued that one cannot work in anti-discrimination field without asking himself about his own motivations. After Indonesia gained independence from the Netherlands, his mixed-family had chosen to live in the Netherlands. Their reception in this country varied from a cold welcome to pure racism and they had to move neighbourhoods to escape harassment. At school, he was advised, like any Indonesian child at that time, to follow the lowest kind of schooling, while he got good grades. His parents fought against this prejudice, and sent him to another school and later to university.

These and similar incidents made him aware of how society can work and why it is important to be conscious of these structural forms of discrimination. After receiving his degree, he became a lawyer and teacher of lawyers, specialising in anti-discrimination legislation. He gained a lot of experience in anti-discrimination work and of lobbying European institutions.

Two years ago the European Gay and Lesbian Sports Federation (EGLSF) started its European project, which included lobbying at EU and Council of Europe level. Believing the need to work on different kinds of discrimination to fight the structure beneath the discrimination, he went to an interview for a job at the EGLSF. At the end of the interview he was asked: "Is there any other thing you would like to share?" He answered: "I am not gay". To his surprise, he was even more welcome. And he could learn a lot from the experience, as first non-gay representative of an international gay organisation.

If you start working for equal rights it should not matter that much on a deeper level from what point of view you are fighting the structure. In society in general there are many very different sorts of discrimination. EGLSF thought it would be an advantage to link with other anti-discrimination organisations.

As an example, Ralph showed the cover of august 2001 of the International Lesbian and Gay Association - Europe's newsletter. A picture was taken at a Gay Pride parade in Belgrade. A Gay Pride parade is a common sort of event where gay people show who they are. Belgrade gay pride was not a high profile event. In the picture fascists are beating up a gay pride activist. The people that are beating up the gay man in the picture are the same that beat up Muslims, black people and anti-fascists. It is very easy to see why we should work together. On the basis of this logic, UNITED, ILGA and Mobility International entered in the "Stepping stones" project: from December 1999 until November 2000, three conferences were organised: first on disability, secondly on racial discrimination

and finally on sexual orientation. The overall conclusion was that the ideas and experiences of the different networks and movements would benefit all three organisations. The conclusions also included the following assessment: "The fact that someone experiences discrimination does not mean that it does not discriminate. The fact that an organisation campaigns against discrimination does not mean that that organisation does not discriminate."

Another co-operation of the EGLSF has started with FARE - Football Against Racism Europe, a network of anti-racist football supporters. It is less well-known that gay football players and sportsmen and women face a lot of problems. Their problems are less visible. Since the football leagues started about 100 years ago, not one player has openly said 'I'm gay'. Even now. Given the fact that any society has about 5-10% gays and lesbians, of course there are some, but they do not dare to say it.

3. WORKING GROUPS / WORKSHOPS

Over 15 working groups were held during the conference. Two optional ones were left in case some participants would have wanted to propose a new topic. Finally, one was taken on Saturday morning to speak about "cultural antifascism".

3.1. WORKSHOPS: WHAT DOES ANTI-RACISM MEAN TO YOU? WHAT DOES DISCRIMINATION MEAN?

This workshop was organised on the first full day of the conference. Participants worked in separated but parallel groups. This was an idea, developed by the organisers to try to establish a common understanding of the different interpretations of some political terms in different countries. In previous conferences, the conference team had to face some unexpected but necessary debates on terms such as 'nationalism'.

This time, from one group to the other, it was interesting to note that some people preferred to find a common definition of racism and fascism than a definition of anti-, others debated on nationalism, and everybody discovered a lot about each other. Actually, after the personal and organisational introduction, this was the political introduction for all participants.

Participants were invited to read again the info-leaflet "The Danger of Words" which was provided in their information packs for the conference. It is also available on internet on <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/publications/>.

3.2. ETHNIC WAR AND CONSEQUENCES: EXAMPLE OF THE WAR IN CHECHNYA

Wars never happen suddenly. They are always the consequence of something, but not always of what is generally seen as the cause. For example, the Chechnya war is being portrayed as an ethnic war, but it has not really been like that from the beginning. It has been used for internal political, colonial, and economical reasons. Media is used to propagate the war and to create a united Russia against a common enemy. War also "proves" the necessity of the military and weapon industry (weapons which are also sold to Chechen fighters). So the war did not start as an ethnic war, but little by little, it became one. The Chechen people were

not against Russians, but the war was so terrible that there is now hatred everywhere, especially in the troops where young soldiers saw their friends killed. The influence by the weapon industry should be made known. Participants of the working group also mentioned the corruption of Russian officers and contract soldiers, who act like mafiosi and mercenaries. Reports on human rights violations can be used to raise awareness about the war in the general public. A participant from insisted that we should counter state propaganda, in every country. As an example, he presented the site of his organisation: (<http://www.memo.ru> - in English, German and Russian) and the Caucasian Knot (<http://kavkaz.memo.ru>- in Russian), which explore the truth about the war in Chechnya. The experiences of several committees in support of Chechnya in other European countries were shared by the participants. It has been obvious but interesting to make a parallel with the war in former-Yugoslavia, which was also seen as an ethnic conflict. Participants from this region said how much it is necessary to make peace with the past. The Tribunal in Den Haag is very useful in this way, making people discover the shadowy part of their history. The contribution of pacifist groups in every country is also huge, who never act to support a war. Unfortunately only a few tiny groups are trained to act in or near war zones.

3.3. RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Partly because of the events of 11th of September, the working group mainly spoke about Islam and islamophobia and how it is possible to reduce this fear and hatred of this religion.

Religion is an instrument for group identity and solidarity. In the same time, it can be factor for division inside and outside the religious community. Activists must be conscious of these contradictory tendencies.

There is no religion that is static, there is no such thing as 'the Islam', but many way to understand the philosophy of it or to practice the religion. The same was said about Christianity. While many immediately recognise the diversity of the Christian faiths, they see Islam as one 'evil'.

Some politicians spread Islamophobia, wittingly or unwittingly. In different countries, the patterns of islamophobia are the same. The fear is coming from ignorance, but paradoxically, academics are also very racist sometimes. So that proves that there is not always a link between the level of education and the level of respect, or at least tolerance.

Short-term strategies are needed. The group discussed ideas such as: we should explain (by means of posters, postcards, and brochures) basic ideas of the Islam (for example: jihad is NOT armed struggle, although it does mean struggle).

Organisations that are secular should also be part of this information, in organising for example joint peaceful demonstrations. They even would be more efficient, as they could be considered to be neutral, and avoid contra effects and misunderstandings.

These short term initiatives can only support a more longer term strategy aimed at using the positive influence of religion while rejecting its intolerant parts.

3.4. EFFECTS OF WESTERN MIGRATION POLICY ON EASTERN EUROPE

In most Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries the situation is the similar: candidate countries for joining the European Union (EU) have to do

many things to follow EU directives, such as introducing visa for countries that they never had visa for before. The strict entrance regulations of EU need to be safe-guarded. CEE countries are playing the role of watchdog countries. There is a so-called solution that involves sending people away to so-called safe third countries. This is not a real solution, because many of those 'safe third countries' do not have adequate asylum procedures or are only in the process of becoming democracies. Croatia is considered to be a safe country, for example, but the situation is still not so good there.

The new trend in West is to give only migration permission for migrants considered being useful. Not on the basis of their needs, but on economic needs of the country. The events of 11 September are used as an excuse for European countries to close the borders and use stronger security/military measures to guard the borders. This is strengthening the walls of Fortress Europe.

In Italy the new right-wing government adapted a new law concerning migrants, violating basic human rights and the Geneva Convention.

Finland is an exception: Although there is enough money for projects in support of migrants and refugees, it is not spend in good way. NGOs are not involved as much as they should be.

A discussion paper has been published as a result of the last UNITED conference that took place in Göteborg last summer. It is available on the UNITED website www.unitedagainstracism.org/conferences.

3.5. VIOLENCE AND RACISM WITHIN THE POLICE

The group started speaking about the excessive police violence, which happened during the G8 summit in Genoa. Participants were impressed by the images on the television and some were present during the Summit. This violence cost one activist his life and wounded hundreds. Court cases are still going on against the Italian state.

Going around the table, the group realised that racism and violence is strongly linked within the police in any country we can speak about.

In France, the police take the right to do what they want and have been known to kill, even if there is no "objective" reason. 95% of the victims of police violence are of migrant background. When police officers are put on trial, most of them are released. Because of that, and because of re-occurring torture in police stations, France is regularly cited in Amnesty International reports.

In Russia, Chechen people have no rights in daily life; they often have no identity papers and when they are checked in the street they are often arrested and beaten for not carrying the correct papers. Chechen have generally black hair, so, if you resemble a Chechen you will be treated badly. That is the case for all people of Caucasian origin. Because of the conflicts in the Caucasus, many people have fled the region and try to make a living in Moscow or St Petersburg. In Belarus, the same prejudice against Caucasians exists.

In Bulgaria police brutality happens a lot, especially against Roma. A participant gave the example of a Roma who died in police custody. The police said that it was heart attack but the doctor concluded that the man had broken ribs... In Macedonia as in Bulgaria, Roma suffer police violence.

In Finland there is more indirect discrimination by the police and the justice system. Black people are punished more severely. As an immigrant in Finland, you are presumed to be guilty.

The working group proposed to stimulate some concrete action: The 15th of March has been declared international day against police violence. We could use the fact that 21st of March will be the European-wide Action Week Against Racism and link the two events.

3.6. MAINSTREAM RACISM AND ANTISEMITISM

The participants decided to discuss issues of racial/ethnic discrimination in general, although it was agreed that anti-Semitism is a perfect example of deep-rooted intolerance in our societies. The discussion first focussed on institutionalised discrimination. Even official legislation in EU countries contain parts that foster discrimination. The groups discussion was centred on employment issues, where it is common practice to make employers prefer their own citizens and EU nationals to immigrants from other countries. It is important to work towards changing discriminatory legislation.

Participants from Central and Eastern Europe pointed out that while institutionalised discrimination (systematic racism in police controls, for example) is a serious issue in their countries, the low level of institutionalisation in society makes it important to focus on more diffuse forms of discrimination. In the former Soviet Union, 'ethnic origin' in official documents leads to society-wide discrimination against unpopular minorities. In the Baltic States, Latvia has conserved the 'ethnicity'-based passport system, and even Latvian citizens with Russian names are often discriminated.

Many Central and Eastern European governments openly advocate and implement various forms of ethnic discrimination and perceive demands to curb it (Copenhagen criteria for EU candidates) as outside pressure.

The EU Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty and the Union's directives on discrimination provide a legal framework for fighting institutionalised racism, but these are clearly not enough. Some governmental or government-sponsored bodies are fighting discrimination, but their effectiveness can be doubted. It has now become common practice to ask anti-racist measures also to address types of discrimination other than racial and ethnic bias, e.g. discrimination against women or people with disabilities. While NGOs should unite their effort to increase leverage, it is seen to be important to keep governmental anti-discrimination bodies separate, in order to develop specialised competence and flexibility.

For the specific problems of Central and Eastern Europe, it was suggested to find and publicise arguments showing that anti-discrimination measures would benefit them economically and in other ways.

In all cases, it is important to marshal public opinion and use the media to exert pressure to enforce anti-discrimination measures; in this area, anti-racist activists could learn from environmental organisations such as Greenpeace.

3.7. COMBATING NEO-NAZI VIOLENCE

The working group started by defining the main characteristics of fascist organisations:

- a strong hierarchy
- a charismatic leader
- antidemocratic structures and beliefs
- a militaristic approach
- a philosophy of violence

Fascist organisations can be divided into phase 1 (small, randomly violent) and phase 2 (larger, the violence is used strategically and is hidden, the organisation is pseudo-democratic).

Examples of phase 2 fascist organisations include the Front National in France, which is a party with mass appeal, which has links with small militant groups and has gained up to 15% on a national level before it split in two a little while ago. All its leaders have convictions for violence but as the group is trying to gain broad-based support, violence is strictly controlled by an internal security organisation.

Phase 1 fascist organisations usually have less than 1,000 members and can be combated more directly. For example, 10 years ago in Germany only small numbers of people were attracted to the skinhead concerts but now there are too many (more than 2,000) for direct action.

The lessons from this are:

- Take fascist organisations seriously and identify their leaders
- Counter demonstrate
- Challenge them when they are small
- Fight them through broad coalitions, even with unlikely allies

Fascism is inherently violent and participants agreed that violence or "direct action" is occasionally necessary to combat it.

The Vladimir anti-fascists' delegation gave an account of the activities of the Nazi Russian National Unity (RNE) in Vladimir, which was a perfect demonstration of a lot of what has been said above. Its spread was slow and persuasive and although they were successful in combating it initially (with the support of the FSB, ex-KGB), it splintered and gained support among academics at the local university, making it more difficult to fight. She attributed its spread to the lack of stability and security in contemporary Russia that causes low quality of life and the growth of fascist organisations. She was unable to get support from the local authorities or the judiciary and the laws against inciting ethnic violence were used against her.

The working group then debated the issues of free speech for fascists, acknowledging that the perspectives in Western Europe (from "no platform" to a complete ban) differ from those in the East where people are reluctant to increase the legislative powers of the state to curb free speech. The group agreed that the use of measured degrees of violence was acceptable when it was targeted (for example, destroying a concert hall in the Netherlands but leaving the fascists' accommodation alone) and combined with public education.

The group agreed that successful antifascist action must contain the following: Education, information, organisation, courage, and the will to fight.

3.8. MILITARISATION OF SOCIETY

After various examples from the west, east and south, it has been clear for everyone that the concept of militarisation of society is actually the imposing of tighter and stronger control on the society. Even if the situations are different from country to country, they have a common point: the use of military force, or police, or para-military to impose and enforce control. For this purpose, a militaristic ideology is needed: definition of an enemy, state of war, united

population ready to follow orders. All this is achieved through "militarisation of information", or propaganda. Unfortunately, the difficulty to impose civil control on the army makes militarisation of society possible.

When one sees the complexity of the military structure, it becomes even more clear that it is not easy to influence. The situation in nowadays Russia and the way that Vladimir Putin came to power with the help of the army is a good example. Militarisation is always against democracy. And militarisation in one country can cause militarisation in other countries. It is an ideology we need to fight at the international level. Militarisation is a threat to many of the values that anti-racists and anti-fascists hold dear. It can also be a good reason for connecting with the peace movement and general Human Rights organisations. This topic becomes even more actual after the attacks on the United States of 11 September and the reaction by many governments in Europe. New 'anti-terrorism' laws are passed and more power is given to police and/or military.

3.9. HOW TO INTEREST MEDIA IN ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

The relationship of the participants of the working group to the media was varied: some were practising journalists themselves, some produced 'alternative media' within their organisation and some only approached the media when they would prepare an action.

Interesting examples and strategic tips were given. In Finland, Africans are discriminated in Finnish TV and tabloids and there is no 'right to answer' in any meaningful way. In Latvia the Latvian press and Russian press are discriminating against each other. TV is considered as the most influential type of media and not accessible for objective or alternative information. This problem is even more serious if it is state controlled, like in Bulgaria, or former-Yugoslavia.

The rules of the market economy make media look for sensation rather than for real information. So even contacts with good journalists are not always effective. Some positive experiences and ideas were given. Russian activists contact the media some days before their action, and continue to work with them till the very day. The UNITED secretariat is regularly distributing information concerning deaths caused by "Fortress Europe" to the press, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. Journalists often call with questions, asking for interesting topics or interesting people to interview. UNITED prepares a project concerning media, at this point unfortunately concentrated on the EU Member States only. Examples were given of how independent or 'alternative' media can also be used, such as the internet: for example indymedia in several European countries, samizdat or Zalea TV alternative project from France.

The working group agreed that it would be useful to create a special e-mailing list for anti-discrimination and the media, aiming to exchange information and experience. Such a list could easily run by itself on one of the free e-mailing list services such as Yahoo-groups or E-groups. It could be a way to include non-EU participants in the upcoming EU media project. Although the group can function independently from the UNITED secretariat, for the moment the secretariat will function as a contact point. If you are interested: drop the office a line.

3.10. HOW TO WORK TOWARD A MORE POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE RROMA COMMUNITY

In this workshop which followed the previous lecture and debate, discussion started on the different situation in different countries. Education for Roma is important, but it is also important to educate others about Roma culture. Anti-racism education in schools is necessary to teach students to respect each other no matter what nationality they are. Roma should be accepted as part of the society and be given the opportunity to study, but some participants declared themselves against separate schools for Roma. It will be necessary to introduce special programme to help Roma to solve problems of health, housing etc. We should also help Roma to take part in the political life of the society. One example of good practice was to make information packs about Romas for media centres, so that they know basic facts and know who to contact. Participants suggested that UNITED could prepare a special conference on Roma issue in our network.

3.11. EDUCATION OF MARGINALISED GROUPS

The theme was too general for the participants. So they divided the group into two subgroups. Martin and Michael have made short input about the situation of asylum seekers and education. Two working groups followed: one on the concrete experience of School Without Racism and one on training and practical education.

This last group discussed education as a means for integration: How to work with a group of children from different ethnic backgrounds? Should we press children to integrate or not? It is very important that children have freedom of choice. Training should be based on needs of the group, not the trainer. Integration should mean that two cultures enhance each other, not only one culture dominating.

The experience of School Without Racism is based on activity of the students themselves. The idea is not to have teachers or parents tell them what to do, but to have students themselves develop the action. More information on the experience of School Without Racism can be found on: www.uni-marburg.de/dir/gruppen/projekte/sor/sor.html (in German) and www.schoolwithoutracism-europe.org (in English, Dutch, French and Spanish)

3.12. CULTURAL ANTI-FASCISM

This working group spoke about music, literature, cinema, and football as means of fighting fascism. The participants presented their experience in their country. In France different sorts of bands and music are involved in antifascism, generally only culturally, but helping for solidarity concerts, free festivals and CD's to support anti-fascism. In Belarus, concerts are also a place for giving information. Often alternative music is very subcultural, with a small group of people that regularly come to the concerts.

In France several authors, who do not hide their antifascist ideas and background, write police novels, which are very cheap and popular. Their novels often have a social message, sometimes also political and they can explore past and present. Literature can introduce this information to a whole different audience.

Antifascists do not use enough films for discussion meetings. But there are a lot of antifa films available. Participants discussed about the so-called antiracist film

" An American History X". Some people found it extremely dangerous as it only gives the opinion of neo-nazis but no alternative. Neo-nazis are making publicity for it in their magazine. The working group decided to work on an international list of good antifa-films.

Two big anti-racist campaigns have been going on in football, one is called 'kick it out' and one is called 'show racism the red card'. This topic is a problem for the antifa movement because the movement is often not interested in football, and there are only very rarely antiracist supporter clubs. There is the example of St-Pauli fan group, which is disputed to be a good example by German anti-racists. Such initiatives are unrealistic in a lot of other countries. Football clubs should take action themselves or antifas should go to the stadium.

For more information, you could contact FARE, the Football Against Racism Europe network: www.furd.org/fare/english/default.asp

3.13. CAMPAIGN WORKING GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST FASCISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM 9TH OF NOVEMBER

The International Day Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism takes place on 9 November each year. This is a special date. In 1938, in Nazi Germany, the "Kristallnacht" pogrom took place. It is often seen as the symbolic beginning of the Holocaust. Since several years commemorations of the "Kristallnacht" pogrom have taken on extra meaning. The day has become a symbol for protest against contemporary fascism and discrimination as well. In past years links have been made with different minority groups, that suffered during the Nazi-era, such as Jewish groups, Roma organisations, gay rights groups, etc. Reports about activities in different countries were made, which showed that there are some differences: In Russia, this date is generally not known while in Germany many activities take place. Activists from Belarus reported about an extremely difficult situation in their country, as the government prohibited the planned actions for 9/11 last year.

Participants think it is important to build up the network inside the network: not only from Amsterdam to Belarus, but also Belarus to Czechia etc. The list of activities that is produced by the Amsterdam secretariat can be used as a base for such a network. Memorial St Petersburg has a long experience organising 9 November activities, how to organise a grassroots level action, and how to involve other groups.

Organising an action does not have to be difficult; you can organise locally very easily. You should then give the info to UNITED to make the campaign stronger both on international and local level. The most important is to exchange information.

3.14. CAMPAIGN WORKING GROUP: EUROPEAN ACTION-WEEK AGAINST RACISM, 16-24 MARCH 2001

"There is no racism, so it is not necessary to make an action". That was the statement of Kyrgyz government refusing to give the necessary authorisation for a public event in Bishkek. Luckily, many governments do not directly block actions, many just do not support them.

A discussion took place in the working group: should we make it an action-week against discrimination in general instead of against racism? 21 March is the

official "UN Day Against All Forms of Racism and Racial Discrimination", so it is against racism. However, organisations can develop different accents and approaches. A very important topic could be the rise of islamophobia after 11th of September. In many countries Muslim schools, mosques and women wearing the traditional headscarf have been attacked.

The theme of prejudice and education against prejudice is also important.

Participants talked about different target groups and different activities that fit the different target groups:

-politicians: in some of the countries elections are coming up, it could be worth it to set up for a of politicians discussing issues concerning anti-racism and xenophobia

-youth: the most obvious idea would be to engage schools in preparing actions during the European-wide Action Week, there are many examples of successful school activities, including: special lessons, working with students towards a "School Without Racism", essay competition

-children: an activity that involves younger children could be to decorate an empty wall in the village, to hand-paint t-shirts and other creative ways of introducing intercultural themes

-media: it might be a good idea to work together with the media from the beginning in organising an activity, a suggestion was also made to contact mainstream media (e.g. women's magazines) to do a special about something connected to the week.

If you want to do something for the European-wide Action Week 16-24 March 2002, start now! Link with other organisations.

3.15 **CAMPAIGN WORKING GROUP: REFUGEE DAY 20TH OF JUNE**

Since several years the International Refugee Day has been taken up as a possibility for campaigning for the rights of refugees. In the UNITED network the day is another chance to give more publicity to the "Fortress Europe" policies that have been instated both in the EU and around its borders. The term refugee is often used only for those people with a recognised refugee status. However, activists often use the term differently. They feel that it should be used for everyone who fled their country and is in need of protection. Western organisations should support Russian and Central and Eastern Europe organisations that often have no funds to organise events. In Belarus, there will be a concert and discussions with political leaders. Refugees could make profit of this day to appear in public and present their experience. Members of UNITED should inform the network what they will do. A lot of material is available on the UNITED website www.unitedagainstracism.org. Paper copies can be ordered as well.

3.16 AD HOC CAMPAIGNING

The working group on ad hoc campaigning has discussed the difficulties and possibilities of setting up a campaign on short notice. The group has discussed how to maintain a network of contacts, that can become useful in the event of a sudden need for a campaign. This very special workshop has mostly been a collection of concrete examples of had hoc campaigning, on a lot of different subjects, such as a long term strategy to support Chechnya in France, or an ecological emergency fax campaign in Russia. Direct action has been discussed as

a tool, and lobbying institutions. Such campaigning is important at a grassroots level, but also on an international level.

4. OPEN FORUM

This space was made in the end of the conference for people to express themselves about different topics, or to add things not enough developed during the previous days, in the plenary. Two points were especially mentioned.

- During the G8 meeting in Genoa, there have been several violent actions by the police. The victims of this police brutality are preparing a court case. They are looking for witnesses, who can help substantiate their case.

- 8 April is the international day of Rroma people. All activists are encouraged to contact local or national Rroma organisations to organise a common activity. For more info, contact Rromani Criss in Romania.

The UNITED network was asked to organise something specifically on Rroma issues.

5. SOCIAL PROGRAM

The late afternoon of Friday has been devoted to a visit of Saint Petersburg with Sasha and Masha as guides. This tour permitted everybody to have at least a few impressions of this imperial and revolutionary city. Two monuments touched the participants in particular: The memorial and museum of the siege of Leningrad (1941-1944), and the impressive monument commemorating political repression during communist times, opposite to the Kristy prison, where much of this repression took place. The tour ended in an Armenian restaurant. Everyone who has not tasted Armenian food and Georgian wines has a big hole in their internationalism.

The **Info market** as usual was a great success. It gave everyone the opportunity to collect and to offer a lot of materials, posters, books, leaflets, stickers etc. Our bags became twice as heavy as they were when coming to the conference. The **International Snacks**, brought by the participants offered a lot of delicacies from the cultures of participants.

The **Political cafe** gave participants the chance to discuss in an informal atmosphere about the events of 11th of September, the war in Afghanistan and what it means in different countries, in terms of social control, "antiterrorist" laws or direct "operations", what fascists and antifascists think about it in different countries, etc

The **Intercultural evening** is an evening during which all participants contribute with dances, songs, theatre plays, etc. It showed as always such a variety of talents among participants that we could only wonder what else we do not know. Thanks a lot to our dear Anatoly from Samarkand, who made the evening go smoothly. Place to the youth! By the way, applause to little Peter (Piterotchik), faithful and youngest participant of three years old, who performed voluntarily and courageously a little poem in front of everybody.

We want to give our special thanks to the Eskimo-Tchouktche dancing and singing group **Severnoe Siyaniye**, which have given us an unforgettable evening and local international musical group

Among other social programs we probably shouldn't forget long and warm discussions mixed with drinks and dances, dances, dances, with Benjamin and Arno as fantastic DJs.

6 PREPARATION / THANKS

In co-operation with UNITED the conference was prepared by International Preparatory Group. This group consisted of Memorial Saint-Petersburg (RUS), Citizen's Watch (RUS), MOST-SCI Slovenia, Rromani Criss (RO), REFLEXes (F), Senzaconfine (I). We owe a great deal of thanks, especially to the organisations based in Saint-Petersburg as without their help, none of this would have been possible. We also thank the European Youth Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation for making this conference possible.

7 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

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