

NEWSLETTER

Civic Dialogue

December 2006.

- To create a region of peace, cooperation and tolerance.
- To form alliances among people of good will across ethnic divides.
- To facilitate open dialogue between the ethnically diverse populations in Kosovo as well as between Kosovo and Serbia
- To publicly oppose official policies that threaten human rights and weaken the capacity for establishing a rule of law

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“STUDENTS PARTICIPATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM” PRISTINE/A 26-27 OCTOBER 2006, GRAND HOTEL



CIVIC DIALOGUE Project, which is proudly implemented by Mother Teresa Society (Prishtinë) and Center for Regionalism (Novi Sad) in its continuity of activities had the honor to host the Conference “Student Participation and Higher Education Reform” which took place on 26th-27th of October 2006 at Grand Hotel in Prishtina.

This conference aimed to engage student representatives from Universities in the region (Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina) in a dialogue on the active contribution of students to Higher Education Reform, different models of student participation in Higher Education institutions, and the role of students as change agents in the society at large.

The “Student Participation and Higher Educational Reform” engaged the large and variety number of students from the region of Balkans with aim to share the experience on the process of Bologna and identify the ways how they can improve their educational system. The total number of participants reached on 125. 25 students from Universities of Novi Sad, Belgrade, and Nis, (Serbia) 3 students from University of Podgorica, (Montenegro) 16 from Universities of Skopje and Tetovo, (Macedonia) and 47 from Universities of Prishtina, UBT and AUK, (Kosovo). The Conference attracted also the staff of the local and International NGO’s, media outlets and personalities from; ATA, OSCE, FES, University of Prishtina, representatives from recto rate, CBM, BIRD, IREX,

former rector of University of Novi Sad etc.

This was the first key note speaker where Ms. Bardha Qirezi Head of International Relation Office near UP gave an overview on Higher Education Reforms in Europe and presented the continuing European engagement, efforts and mobility to improve the educational systems.

The points which assisted in development of a general chart of Bologna were topics such as student centered programs, mobility, course design, ETCS, social dimension and quality assurance. These were the main indicators which lead to successful implementation of Bologna in practice.

In addition it is very important to respect and implement Reformation of the education system by putting the student in the centre, Transparency for learning outcomes and competences, Quality of the curriculum, Quality of staff, Infrastructure and services, Research, Employability of students, Preparation of students for work, for further studies and for life. Following this discussion the students were divided into three workshops.

1) Mechanisms and models of student participation.
2) Best Practices in student participation/students as change agents.
3) Life long learning- A pro active approach of being student.



ROLE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Professor Fuada Stankovic explained the pace of university transformation through decades and pointed out the obstacles they've faced and how hard is to change the attitude and mind sets of the people." It is very important for students to discipline themselves and learn the ethic and life principles because this will help to form personality not only in professional aspect but also as a human being" said Professor Fuada. Magna Charta Universitatum was signed on 1988 by European Ministries of education which set some foundations of new reforms.



Later one the Bologna Charta presented student as a partner and showed off that the students aren't object in the University but they are subject which should have impact on Universities and is agent of transformation. The first University of Europe was established in Bologna hence the educational system was given this name. Another subject that professor stressed out was that the students should be out of political changes and influence, "The University is place where the future political leaders are educated in democratic spirit" she added.

1st WORKSHOP 'MECHANISMS AND MODELS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION'

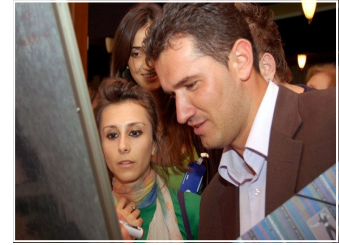
Main fields for improvement are seen in other Universities (besides Pristina and possibly SEE University in Tetovo) applying new models of student participation, that would allow students to access decision making process and let their voices to be heard. That is expected to happen in the nearer or not so near future.



Nevertheless, once new models have been applied it is always important not to forget the role of every single student, because very easily new models can become just as bad as the old ones. If there is only a frame, nothing will actually change. Therefore, events like this should also help students and their representatives to face and even confront each other and to try to work together in the very best interest of the students.

2nd Workshop "Best practices in student participation"

Representatives of University of Novi Sad, Montenegro, Tetovo and Pristina presented their practice on student participation. Up to now it was notable that only Pristina University is ahead with students' parliament. The other universities are in process of organizing the first elections and in addition explained the obstacles that they will face the restriction and legitimacy issues. The students of UP explained their process of



election and voting as a model of students participation. Further it was stressed that students from UP should contribute on higher education standards for all and to be compatible with EU university students in all levels.

To sum up the representatives of student parliament of Pristine were invited to Tetovo university and give lecture and training how to organize the democratic elections. Students should be well informed about their process of educational transformation. In addition the student's parties shouldn't be politicized they should promote students values and advocate for their rights.



3rd Workshop; "Life long learning"

„A PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH TO BEING A STUDENT"

This workshop was moderated by Dr. Jimmy and Christopher Pratt which gave the practical and concrete advices to the students on how to improve their approach in job position. The third workshop offered them beside the theoretical concept of lifelong learning and permanent education they also had a chance to experience some of the practical work by

having to explore the job fair that was organized in the same day, in order to afterwards analyze their skills, and their deficiencies for finding jobs or pursuing their career. This workshop was offered in the same format both in the morning session and in the afternoon. The workshop was offered as a contribution to the conference by Dr. C. Pratt and Dr. Jimmie Pratt.

In both occasions the recommendations were that it is needed to work also with the employers in terms of offering them advice how to attract students and how to approach them. But it was a unanimous opinion that Universities should definitively offer carrier and academic advice for their students.



Conference - Inter religious Dialogue - Youth and Religion Belgrade, 15-16 December 2006, Palas Hotel



In Belgrade, Hotel Palas, 15-16 December 2006, conference Inter religious Dialogue - Youth and Religion was held. That was the second meeting dealing with issues of Inter religious communication organized by the Civic Dialogue. The participants had an opportunity to see seven presentations delivered by experts and NGO activists who addressed different issues related to this subject. In cooperation with Radovan Bigovic, professor of the Faculty of Theology in Belgrade and director of the Christian Cultural Centre we closely defined subjects and selected presenters. Inter religious dialogue between youth from Kosovo and Serbia gathered huge number of participants and drew significant media attention. The following subjects were addressed:

- Youth and Religion: An Overview of the Situation on Kosovo and Serbia;
- The Role of Religion in the Reconciliation Process from Perspectives of Kosovo and Serbia;
- Experiences of Multiethnic and Inter religious Dialogue in the Region;

-The Role of Internet in the Inter religious Dialogue – Forums for Exchange of Ideas (pathology of religion, tolerance of intolerant etc.)

Around fifty participants, representatives of different confessions and organizations from Kosovo and Serbia participated in the conference. Those were students of the Faculty of Theology and students of the University of Pristina, representatives of Christian Cultural Centre, organizations such as Philanthropy, Caritas, Mother Theresa Society and representatives of different NGOs.



The conference was covered by several national and local TV stations and several newspapers informed public about the event.

The conference was opened by Zef Shala, director of the Mother Theresa Society from Pristina and Aleksandar Popov, director of the Centre for Regionalism from Novi Sad. After welcoming and introductory speeches in which they presented previous activities of the Civic Dialogue, origins of the initia-



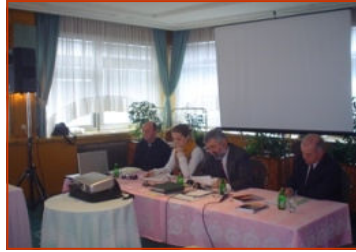
tive, motivation to organize such a conference, expectation of organizers and conference agenda, moderators introduced the first subject entitled Youth and Religion: An Overview of the Situation on Kosovo and Serbia. In his comprehensive and inspiring presentation, Gazmend Kuqi, psychologist, addressed the issue of Islam among Albanians, its secular nature in regards to the principles of faith and rituals but traditional character of its norms regulating marital relations, successive inheriting and solutions of interpersonal problems. Noting that Islam among Albanians differs considerably in comparison with Islam in the Middle East, Mr Kuqi marked this difference as a reason for dilemma present among young Albanians interested in the religion. Introducing several rhetorical issues about the status of young believers in the 21st century and noting that young people, if their education, intensive intercultural communication and influence of the internet are considered, are confronted with those dilemmas more intensively than ever,

Gazmendi Kuqi set the ground for intensive discussion that followed presentation of Zorica Kuburic. Ms Kuburic, PhD in Sociology of Religion gave an overview of the situation in Serbia regarding the same issue.

She raised the issue of religious education and problems emerging from it and presented the outcomes of the research on influence of family and school on the sensitization of young people to religion. In her presentation Ms Kuburic addressed various issues ranging from the existence of differences between believers and non-believers, the creation of one's identity in the adolescent period, the percentage of believers among youth today and performance of religious teaching to the roles of family and schools in the creation of one's religious affiliation.



She mentioned researches that indicate that religion has particular influence on the family that transmits religious beliefs during the socialization period. According to researches, family, due to its primary relations in the earliest period of life, is more powerful factor than education. Children from stable families with both parents adopt value system of their parents. Contrary to this, abandoned children who felt that religion did not bring peace and happiness in their families were ready to accept God different from their parent's God. Especially children from mixed marriages used to have identity problems in war times and many of them turn to religion as a mean of integration since it did not emphasize national identity. Researches conducted in Serbia indicate that attitude towards religion has been changed. Data show that population has been differentiated on believers who approach their religion from the



different point of view – a dogmatic or ritual and critical. Large majority has a critical attitude towards religion and do not accept all the things religion is teaching us. However, other half of population, somewhat smaller in number than believers, does not believe or act in the essential, religious manner but only ritual. Another thing that worry young people are hypocrisy and insincerity typical for those who tend to declare themselves as believers only from conformistic reasons and do not live authentically religious life. When young people note the discrepancy of older people between what they say and what they do, they tend to abandon their religion. Division between youth in Serbia is also visible in educational system since half of them attend religious and other half attend the civic education. Among those attending the religious teaching, the segregation is established on the belonging to seven traditional denominations that correspond to the national affiliation. Ms Kuburic also presented magazine Religion and Tolerance published by the Centre for Empirical Research of Religion and distributed it to the participants. Anita Zenuni, psychologist from Pristina opened the next session The Role of Religion in the Reconciliation Process. She emphasized great contribution of religion to the establishment of mutual trust among different religious and national communities, especially after conflicts that happened in the recent past. The mission and imperative of religion is, she stressed, to help create love among people, to increase degree of mutual respect and to combat hatred and intolerance. **Anita Zenuni**, psychologist from Pristina opened the next session

The Role of Religion in the Reconciliation Process.

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Jakob Pfeiffer, parish priest from Odzaci, also discussed those issues and showed the importance of mutual communication and the development of ecumenical spirit on the example of cooperation of Catholic and other churches. The fundamental principle of God is the principle of love, so in our spiritual development we have to direct ourselves to forgiveness, penitence and to ask condonation.

The afternoon session began with the presentation **Experiences of Multiethnic and Interreligious Dialogue on Kosovo** delivered by **Zef Shala**, director of the Mother Theresa Society from Pristina. He presented the first Interreligious meeting organized by the Civic Dialogue in Pristina, November 25-26, 2006. That was the first meeting where representatives of Catholic, Orthodox and Islam confessions, both from Kosovo and Serbia, gathered together on one place. He pointed out positive outcomes of that meeting where participants agreed about the necessity of interchurch cooperation and Interreligious cooperation. The next example of interchurch cooperation presented by Mr Shala was the meeting organized by Norwegian Church Aid held in monastery in Pec, May 2-3, 2006. The highest representatives of religious communities had the opportunity to discuss key issues and common values of their communities, to identify common initiatives promoting peace, reconciliation, mutual respect and acceptance, co-existence and cooperation. The participants released the statement and took up the responsibility to hold regular meeting of religious communities, to intensify Interreligious dialogue and cooperation, to promote exchange among different religious communities (visits to religious objects, exchange of lecturers among theological

faculties, common organization of seminars), to improve communication among religious communities etc.



Aleksandar Popov, director of the Centre for Regionalism from Novi Sad presented the outcomes of the meeting held in Trebinje a week before. That ecumenical meeting attended by high officials of religious communities, representatives of NGOs and experts, was organized by the Igman Initiative and Citizens Forum of Tuzla in cooperation with Bishop of Zahumlje and Herzegovina and Coastlands Grigorije. Mr Popov stressed the importance and specificity of gathering exactly in Trebinje. This city is still marked with conflicts in the past but was also the first meeting of this kind whose aim was to discuss the attempt to prevent laying of the foundation stone for a new mosque. Exchange of ideas on the meeting was very affirmative and common conclusion was that this meeting should be held on regular basis. **Milan Sitarski**, coordinator of the Centre for Religious Studies of the Belgrade Open School introduced the paper ***The Role of Internet in the Interreligious Dialogue – Forums for Exchange of Ideas: Tolerance of Intolerant?***

He presented the project *School of Tolerance – Ethnic and Religious Communities in the Transitional Period*. It is an online programme, i.e. “virtual school” that, relying on the experiences of the Center for Research of Information Technologies, addressed 11 subjects relating to the different aspect of the religious life of contemporary world and Western Balkan region. Lecturers were prominent experts – theologians, sociologists, politicologists, historians, philosophers and experienced activists while attendees were students, young scientists, theologians, politicians, journalists, activist and teachers from whole region.



The special web portal <http://veraznanjemir.bos.org.yu/tolerancija/> was designed for these purposes. Communication between lecturers and attendees takes place in this virtual space and use different internet services: forum, chat rooms and blogs. Beside preparing materials for the preparation of students, lecturers are also leading debates on forums with the assistance of moderators. The lecturers and participants are coming from almost all religious communities or they are the advocates of all the relevant theoretical approaches in regards to the subjects considered on forum, so discussions are very vivid and contentful. Ms Sitarski addressed particularly interesting phenomenon so called *pathology of religion*.

Namely, characteristic of this programme is the emergence of different visitors on forum who are not attendees and who strongly oppose to communication and inter religious dialogue between the Serbian Orthodox Church and other religious communities. However, their appearance of forum did not interrupted the planned realization of the programme while relatively short debate between project coordinator, lecturers and visitors presents an interesting illustration of both possibilities and risks of internet as a communication mean for people with different beliefs and attitudes.

After interesting vivid discussion, the participants reached communal conclusions and recommendations and fulfill evaluation lists which will helps us assessing the outcomes of this conference and designing our future activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary to discuss different issues since young people are the most exposed to manipulation, particularly in regards to religion; It is necessary to provide better understanding of different religions through religious education, both in religious object and religious teaching, in order to eliminate prejudices, stereotypes and false attitudes towards other religions that lead to intolerance; Participants welcome meetings of high representatives of religious communities active in this area aimed at overcoming of conflicts brought up by differences and leading to dialogue and establishment of tolerance; This meetings should be organized in future, subjects should be focused on the fields of particular interest to youth and in their definition suggestion given on this meeting should be considered; Support should be given to initiatives given by participants by providing funds for their realization through Small Grants Programme.

VISIT TO THE ST. SAVA TEMPLE

Center for Regionalism
Zeleznicka 35, 21000 Novi Sad
Republic of Serbia
Phone: +381 21 528 241
+381 21 520 336
Fax: +381 21 528 241
Web: www.civil-dialogue.org
E-mail: smallgrants@nscable.net
civil.dialogue@gmail.com

Mother Theresa Society
10000 Prishtina
Ulpiana U1/1
Tel: +381 38 542 864
Tel/fax: +381 38 542 869
Email: ntereze@yahoo.com



After the end of the meeting, visit to the St. Sava Temple was organized. Protoneimar Vojislav Milanovic welcomed the participants and informed them about the history of the Temple and current works that are taking place in the Temple. News about that visit was posted on the web site of the St. Sava Temple. (www.hramsvetosave.com)

Facts about Civil Dialogue Kosovo - Serbia.

Civic Dialogue (CiD), a non-partisan, multi-ethnic initiative of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Serbia and Kosovo, was launched in 2002 to abrogate the consequences of the violent conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

After the tragic events in 1998 and 1999 that led to a political deadlock in relations between Kosovo and Serbia, civil society leaders joined forces in a focused and sensitive engagement to facilitate dialogue, promote tolerance and trust, guided by a vision of a democratic and stable Balkans.

Through policy research, regional and international conferences, workshops, publications, public debates and cultural events, the CiD designs, implements and promotes civil society-led projects that are of concern and in the interests shared by all ethnic groups in Kosovo and Serbia, including, but not limited to: coming to terms with the recent past, youth and gender issues, media freedoms, free movement of people and free trade.

Civic Dialogue is an initiative that engages over 250 NGOs from Kosovo, Serbia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

Two NGOs, the Novi Sad-based Center for Regionalism and the Pristine-based "Mother Theresa" Society, are the founding partners. They are supported by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK), Freedom House, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Mott).

CiD activities are coordinated by a Board of ten individuals from Kosovo and Serbia, headed by two co-presidents, public figures from Pristine and Belgrade, whose integrity and public engagement secure a high level of media attention for activities and values promoted by the initiative.