

**GROUP OF AUTHORS**

**INSTRUMENTS  
FOR IMPROVEMENT OF  
INTERETHNIC RELATIONS**

Podgorica, February 2007.

**Publisher:**

Nansen Dialogue Centre – Montenegro  
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**Web: [www.ndcmn.org](http://www.ndcmn.org)**

**For the Publisher:** Žarko Glušica

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**English translation:** Mihailo Marić

**English proofreading:** Erik Cleven, Alexandra Klein

**Editorial board:** Boris Raonić, Leon Gjokaj and Boris Ristović

**Prepress:** Aleksandar Pajević

**Print:** Lutrex – Podgorica

**Circulation:** 700 copies

CIP – Каталогизacija u publikaciji  
Централана народна библиотека Црне Горе, Цетиње  
323.1 (082)

INSTRUMENTI za poboljšanje interetničkih odnosa. – Podgorica: Nansen dijalog centar Crna Gora, 2007 (Podgorica: Lutrex). – 72, 72 str.: ilustr.; 21x 21 cm

Nasl. str. prištampanog prevoda: Instruments for Improvement of Interethnic Relations / english translation Mihailo Marić. – Tekst na srp. i engl. jeziku. – Oba teksta štampana u medjusobno obrnutim smjerovima. – Slike autora i kraća bilješka o njima uz svaki rad. – Tiraž 700.

ISBN 978-9940-9008-1-6

a) Међуетнички односи – Зборници  
COBISS.CG-ID 11149328; ISBN 978-86-80133-37-9

a) Рачуноводство - Трошкови  
COBISS.CG-ID 11061008

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# Introduction

The history of the Balkans is marked by tragic wars between members of different ethnic groups, fierce conflicts and divisions that even after peace has been introduced has not brought security, but rather new insecurity. This state has been characterised by irreconcilable opinions and ethnic distance. **Nansen Dialogue Network** has been active over the last ten years in the Balkan region in developing and promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and regional reconciliation using various methods, instruments and mechanisms to achieve sustainable peace in the area.

In addition to Nansen Dialogue Network and its eleven dialogue centres, a number of international and local organisations are active, working on improving interethnic relations. Through years of practice and direct engagement these organisations have developed a particular sensitivity for local distinctiveness and developed a practical methodology for the improvement of interethnic relations.

Our intention is to introduce these experiences to the general public and other interested parties through this publication, and to provide the possibility for openly exchanging experiences and applying them in other environments where issues of interethnic relations and the social responsibility of institutions are still a challenge.

This publication comes out of the conference *“Instruments for Improvement of Interethnic Relations”* (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2006, Ulcinj, Montenegro) as well as a forum of relevant organisations and individuals from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo.

We would like to thank all the authors of the articles for presenting the results of their work. We owe a special thanks to the East – East Programme of Foundation Open Society Institute – Montenegro for supporting this publication financially and the realisation of the entire project *“Instruments for Improvement of Interethnic Relations”*.

**Boris Raonić**  
**Žarko Glušica**

*Coordinators of Nansen Dialogue Centre, Montenegro*

# Nansen Dialogue

**D***ialogue* is not theory, but active communication between two or more parties. I will in this lecture describe dialogue the way it has developed through the Nansen Dialogue Network, with a special focus on interethnic dialogue in divided communities. These reflections on dialogue work have therefore mainly grown out of practice in the field, although the work of Martin Buber, with his small book “I and Thou”, has also been a major inspiration. Through saying Thou to “the other” you humanize him/her and he/she becomes an equal with the same rights and obligations in life as yourself. I will (1) briefly describe the background of the Nansen Network, then (2) provide an argument for the need for dialogue in peace building. I will go on (3) to describe the essence of Nansen Dialogue and how (4) it works and a few words (5) about the good Nansen facilitator. Finally a few words about the need for dialogue in all reconciliation work in ex-Yugoslavia.

From the mission statement of the Nansen Dialogue Network:

NANSEN DIALOGUE will, through applying the ideas and skills of dialogue, empower people who live in conflict situations to contribute to peaceful conflict transformation, and democratic development with promotion of human rights.

NANSEN DIALOGUE is marked by the wish to provide a neutral and open space where the different actors in a serious conflict can meet face to face in truthful



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and honest communication. The aim is to break down enemy images, as well as to increase understanding of each other's positions, interests and needs. Facilitators and lecturers try to stimulate the cognitive analysis of the conflict itself and the experience of "the other's" position. The focus is not on who is right or most guilty, but on how to build respect for democratic principles, human rights and peaceful conflict resolution for future improvement of society. These principles are to be an alternative in political organisation to national chauvinism and ethnic loyalty.

## 1. Historical Background

In 1995 Nansenskolen started the project "*Democracy, Human Rights and Peaceful Conflict Resolution*" which aimed to motivate and strengthen potential leaders from ex-Yugoslavia to work actively for democratisation, reconciliation and peace. We soon discovered that one of the strongest aspects of the project was that it provided dialogue spaces where the participants could compare notes, compare their "ethnic truths" and listen to the "other stories", thereby breaking down the one-dimensional enemy images built up by home education, school education and nationalistic media. In Lillehammer *it became possible for the participants to analyse the break up of Yugoslavia together, and build a common framework in which the possibilities of reconciliation, reconstruction, and preventive conflict resolution were explored.*

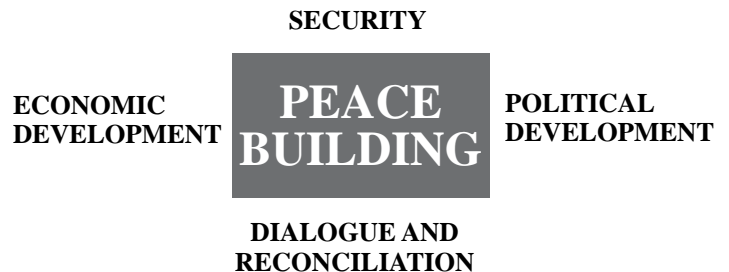
In 1999 the Balkan Dialogue Project was initiated. This was a serious effort to channel the knowledge and experience of the participants in Lillehammer into concrete action upon return home. The seminar in Lillehammer was too exclusive for the selected few, and it was

the participants themselves who initiated the organic growth of dialogue centres in the region. This started with 8 Serb-Albanian dialogue seminars, the so-called Herceg Novi seminars, from 97-99 and the first Nansen Dialogue Centre which opened in Pristina 1998.

The project changed its name to Nansen Dialogue Network in 2003. As of today it consists of 11 Nansen Dialogue Centres. They are in Skopje, Belgrade, Bujanovac, Podgorica, Kosovo (Pristina, MitrovicaS and MitrovicaN), Banjaluka, Mostar, Sarajevo and Osijek. There are 70 full-time coordinators and part-time assistants, 800 alumni all of whom have undergone dialogue training in Lillehammer, and thousands of participants in dialogue activities organized by the Centres. Many of them feel like an active part of the Nansen Dialogue Network. These centres are all locally registered and perceived as local centres, with Norwegian funding and support.

## 2. The Role of Interethnic Dialogue in Peace building

The following model, developed by Dan Smith (2002), illustrates the need of 1) the strengthening of security, 2) economic development, 3) democratisation and 4) dialogue and reconciliation in the process of peace building.



The international community wants the area of former Yugoslavia to be stable, peaceful and democratic with a foundation laid for economic development. This stability is also in the interest of the new states. This demands an effort from the international community to support all these components of the peace building process. This has not always been the case. The international humanitarian organizations tend to focus on the more emergent needs; food, medication and material reconstruction. Local and international authorities focus more on security and economic reconstruction. Dialogue and reconciliation has often been given too low a priority in peace building. The March events in Kosovo in 2004 are a good example of what can happen when dialogue and reconciliation are neglected.

The long-term objective of the Nansen Academy is to support the processes of interethnic dialogue and reconciliation in the Balkans. Nansenskolen is not an actor in the field like other organizations. It is involved due to the organic development of this particular project. The main challenge is not only to develop well functioning local NGOs, the NDCs must be understood as the means to support the processes of democratisation and of breaking down the dominant ethnic politics in the Balkans. The larger aim to stabilize the Western Balkans cannot be reached only by diplomatic efforts and agreements. It needs work on many different levels in society to prepare the ground for further integration into Europe.

### **3. What is Nansen Dialogue?**

Except for the inspiration from Martin Buber's "I and Thou" (1922), the Nansen Dialogue concept is mainly constructed from experiences in the field. It is simply a

way of communicating which focuses on understanding "the other", rather than convincing them that you are right. This understanding is a prerequisite for successful mediations and negotiations. In the dialogue workshops we attempt to create a space of support and safety, where it becomes possible for the participants to honestly communicate their experiences, feelings and thoughts. In a dialogue on the status of Kosovo, the aim is not to find the solution, but to explore the different standpoints and improve the understanding of why people have such opposing views. This means to practice tolerance and active listening, rather than handing out moral judgements or hunting for the weaknesses in the arguments of your opponent. Then, as the next step, based on this deeper understanding of each other's position, one can attempt to find acceptable solutions for all parties involved and in such a way secure more sustainable solutions. The differences between confrontational debate and dialogue as we have experienced it can be illustrated in the following model:

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
Aim is to win	Aim is to understand
Convince/Argue	Explain/tell your story
Talk	Listen
Hunt for the weak argument	Look for the strength in the other
Make opponent feel insecure	Make opponent feel safe
Moral Judge	Tolerance/Self-discipline
Confrontational body language	Inclusive body language
Change of mind is a sign weakness	Promjena mišljenja je znak snage

But to live in the dialogue mode is impossible. There is also a time for debates, but becoming partisans in political debates is not what the centres exist for, and it is hard to take up positions in contentious debates without being regarded as a party to one side or the other. But the NDCs know that debates are also an important part of the political world, and they are necessary to provide the very place and space for the important issues to be discussed. The political debate in many parts of the Western Balkans is seriously deficient, which is one of the fundamental problems of the region. The strategic choice the NDCs have made is to attempt to influence public debate over important issues and specifically to attempt to influence the tone of the debate. When engaging in public debate, the centres will focus on bringing forward facts, providing space for all arguments, and arguing in favour of mutual respect between disputants. The centres will, in short, promote a dialogical way of debating. This way is an alternative to the confrontational debate particularly because it emphasises the need to understand the opponent.

When the dialogue centres have the aim of promoting dialogue and reconciliation in their area, this moves them toward stimulating democratic thinking, respect for human rights (particularly minority rights) and awareness of modes of peaceful conflict resolution. Through this the centres are becoming key actors in civil society in their respective areas. The dialogue perspective stresses the understanding of democracy as much more than just an election and voting system. The essence of democracy is the acknowledgement that you might very well be wrong, that is why the public debates in open spaces are necessary. To rephrase John Stuart Mill – you don't really know your own arguments before you have listened to the counter arguments to your own

position. The centres should lend their dialogue space to important discussions in their local communities, even though the discussions are not purely interethnic (like the discussion about the status of Montenegro in 2005).

It is my experience as a dialogue worker that it is easier for people in conflict to engage in an honest dialogue than in negotiations. This model works as a tool. The participants understand the difference. In a dialogue you do not need to give up your positions, still you can more freely explore alternative ways of thinking. Nansen Dialogue differs somewhat from other approaches in this respect.

#### **4. How Does Nansen Dialogue Work?**

In segregated societies, the information systems are parallel. It is possible to grow up on one side of the river with a home education, school education and later media that provide you with certain "ethnic truths." If there is no interaction with the people on the other side of the river, who are developing almost the opposite set of ethnic truths, one's worldview is seldom challenged. In a dialogue space, people can simply compare notes, share the explanations they have to different events, confront each other with alternative frames of interpretation. This is why dialogue works.

While often looked upon as somewhat "soft", not challenging the deeper structures, dialogue can turn out to have real radical effect because it challenges the very self image and worldview of the participants. It is our experience through our work, that opposing parties believe they have the same set of facts. This means that they believe that the different issues (What happened? Who did it?) are closed issues. The problem is reduced



to the other side's denial of the facts. Julie Mertus (1999) describes how the Albanian demonstrations in 1981, the Paracin massacre, the Martinovic case, the alleged poisoning in Kosovo schools all had very different ethnic interpretations. And she argues that these different interpretations contributed to the war.

In a dialogue setting it becomes obvious that the parties have quite different interpretations of reality, and possess different sets of "facts" or factoids ("facts" that have been repeated so often that they are believed to be true). The problem is not so much that the other side denies reality, but that they have a quite different analysis of history and the present, and quite different hopes for the future. Dialogue groups provide the necessary cross fertilization between the parallel systems of information, and the "crazy" behaviour of the enemy becomes more meaningful when interpreted within his or her cultural and political context.

The first step is often to realize that the "other" also perceives him or herself as a victim with an accompanying enemy image of oneself as the aggressor. It is not uncommon to discover that people in conflict have one thing in common; their enemy image of each other. This discovery is first dismissed as a distortion of reality from the other side. But through dialogue exercises it becomes obvious that both sides have paid a price for the conflict, and that in certain ways they are both victims, with a common interest in fighting those conflict entrepreneurs who keep the conflict alive.

People in deep conflict are not necessarily open for win/win solutions. They want win/lose, and some might even prefer lose/lose if that means that the "other side" has to pay for what they did. They deserve to taste their own medicine. The suffering of the other side is seldom accounted for in one's own propaganda system. Through

dialogue work participants can learn that the other side already has tasted their own medicine and reach the conclusion that we have both suffered enough.

Through the practice of active listening and tolerance it becomes possible to see that one's own bitter enemy also perceives him/herself as a victim of forces outside his or her control, and that their political goals represent to them a way out of their misery. This deeper recognition of the validity of each other's positions fosters mutual respect and makes it easier to enter negotiations. At this point the parties in the dialogue might realize that while they have fundamentally different positions, their human needs and interests have a lot more in common.

A qualified facilitator can assist in shifting the focus from positions to interests, and make the participants realize that they have common interests in economic development, quality education, reliable system of security, improved job opportunities, crack down on corruption, more independent media, clearer separation of politics and business – and a peaceful cup of coffee in the morning.

The next step is to work toward the democratic position that it is acceptable both to fight for and to fight against powerful political positions, like "independence". One might argue that a political position is born out of one's own situation in society. It is very logical that a Norwegian farmer is very sceptical to Norwegian membership in the EU, it is very logical that a Norwegian businessman is inclined to be more in favour. In the same way it is very logical that an Albanian is in favour of Independent Kosova while a Serb is in favour of Kosovo as somehow a part of Serbia.

Political debates carry a strong element of stupidification of "the other". If you do not agree with me,

it is because you are less rational, less informed or simply more stupid than I am. A democracy pre-supposes a certain equal respect for the different political positions. The dialogical component can help that process. After a dialogue meeting between Serbs and Albanians, the Serbs understand better why the Albanians want independence and the Albanians understand better why the Serbs cannot accept it. When negotiations are based on a better understanding between the parties, the negotiations have a better chance to result in sustainable solutions. In that way I will argue that dialogue is a prerequisite for successful negotiations.

### ***The Role of the Nansen Facilitator***

In our experience and our form of peace education, the general principle is that it is essential that the person in charge of a peace education process gains the *trust and confidence* of the people whom she/he is training, particularly when the topics under discussion are sensitive and make people vulnerable. Without confidence in the trainer they will not feel safe to share important information with each other. There are several ways in which the trainer will gain this confidence of the group: Good trainers need to have solid *knowledge* of the situation and the conflict in which the people he educates live. She/he also needs to show *respect for all sides* involved, by not taking sides in the conflict or showing one-sided sympathy for one group of people. *Patience* is another essential quality for a trainer. There is no “quick fix” in deep conflicts and the trainer should realise that such processes take time in order to maintain her/his motivation and patience with others. This includes taking time to let people tell their stories and express their thoughts and feelings.

*Empathy* is essential in order to have proper understanding of what goes on in a group of people, and to get people’s confidence and trust. *Self confidence* is also important when working with difficult topics, - without believing that he/she can contribute to positive change, it is difficult to gain other people’s trust. The trainer needs to have the *capacity and energy* to maintain focus through emotionally challenging processes. A good support network, with which he can discuss challenges of the education process, is very useful in this regard. Another essential quality of a good trainer is someone who “*lives like she preaches*”, e.g. if dialogue is the main aim of the education, it is important that the trainer aims herself/himself to be a good listener and has good communication skills. Equally, if democracy is the topic, it is important that the trainer aims to have a democratic practice. When theory and practice correspond, it is easier to believe in what the trainer is trying to communicate to the group.

The trainer will have a much stronger effect, if *he/she believes* in the values and principles he/she is teaching, and even more so if the trainer seems committed to fight for these values. See the text Nansen Dialog for further description of the context and principles of this way of working.

Many people ask me if I have a difficult job. It is difficult to recruit the right participants, but when people are gathered in the dialogue room I feel very confident in the dialogue process itself. That process brings the people closer, increases their respect and understanding of each other. That process makes it possible to see a common ground. The dialogue itself has a liberating effect on the participants. Furthermore dialogue stimulates action. As a bridgebuilding tool it breaks down the ethnic organization of politics and stimulates multieth-

nic action. Most of the projects the NDCs are involved in have a clear multiethnic dimension. Dialogue is more than just words.

The main target groups for our dialogue work are teachers, journalists and municipal politicians, administrators and workers. It is important to anchor the dialogue work in institutions, in order to provide proper arenas for further cooperation and to implement meaningful changes.

### ***The role of dialogue in the future of ex-Yugoslavia***

While the inter-state conflicts are settled in ex-Yugoslavia, challenges remain with regard to refugee- and IDP-return, inter-ethnic relations, sustainability of achieved returns, as well as the development of an inclusive and non-confrontational political discourse. The continuing strength of a narrow nationalism in the political discourse and the continuing allure of ethnically exclusivist politics are very visible in each country, and in the region as a whole. Additionally, increased ethnic tension in the Sandzak region, instability and interethnic division in Macedonia, Kosovo and Southern Serbia, as well as persistent distrust and lack of interethnic cooperation in Croatia and B&H, emphasises the need for continuing conflict prevention and reconciliation efforts at the community level throughout the region. Dialogue and reconciliation work will be necessary in the years to come. Dialogue is an underestimated tool because it does not produce immediate effects. I used to stress that we must not forget dialogue and reconciliation! After ten years of experience with peace building I would argue much stronger: How is peace building at all possible, if it does not include a strong component of dialogue and reconciliation?

# The New School project

In the area of Eastern Croatia and especially in Vukovar schools are «divided». Parents have the option to choose either education in Croatian language or in Serbian. This not only segregates children of these two nationalities but forces children of other nationalities or from mixed marriages to choose “sides”. This kind of education is also deeply lacking in a sense of multiculturalism because it does not give knowledge or insight to children about other minorities because they only learn about themselves and (two) major ethnicities. The present system of education is, in fact, promoting segregation and doing nothing to help children understand each other better. It does not only acknowledge present dividedness (between Croats and Serbs), but also promotes further segregation, while, at the same time, neglecting needs of children of other nationalities and, as a whole, neglecting needs of the people of Vukovar to understand each other (values, cultural backgrounds, traditions etc.). Better understanding is a necessary precondition for Vukovar to become a fully functional town with a sense of responsibility for one’s neighbours.

Nansen Dialogue Centre Osijek is a nongovernmental organisation, founded in 2001. Our mission is to promote interethnic dialogue with the goal of the social reconstruction of the society.

NDC activities are focused on three main strategic fields: raising awareness about the problems in interethnic relations, creation of preconditions for interethnic dialogue and cooperation with different social actors

**Ivana Milas** was born in Osijek, 1972. Completed Grammar school in Osijek (1991) and four years of Medical study at the University of Osijek (1991-2000)

- From 1996 has worked with continuing education in the field of human rights and peace work, mediation and facilitation, community work, project design, development and implementation.
- From 1998 – 2001 she worked with Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights, Osijek as a member of peace team on a Project of Post-war Peacebuilding in Eastern Croatia.
- From 2001 she has worked as a project coordinator in Nansen Dialogue Centre, Osijek, and is in charge of several projects from the field of human and minority rights.
- From 2003 she has been a coordinator of The New School Project.



who are important for the peace building processes.

After two years of work with teachers and youth promoting interethnic dialogue in the post-war region of Eastern Croatia, and as a response to the fact that the region had divided schools, Nansen Dialogue Centre started The New School Project at the beginning of 2003.

## **Situation**

Fourteen years after the war and seven years after the process of Peaceful reintegration of Eastern Croatia, this area is burdened by a difficult economic situation, a slow process of return of refugees and displaced persons, and difficult living conditions for the population in the area. There is a climate of distrust and blame, and the process of rebuilding relationships between the groups previously torn apart by war is slow. One of the consequences of the war is that these multiethnic communities have remained ethnically segregated in most spheres of life. The ethnic gap is further deepened by a primary school education system that divides children into “Croatian” and “Serbian” classes.

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia has specified that “members of national minorities realise their constitutional right to education in three basic models and special forms of education” (according to The Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities).

Model A – education in the language and script of the national minority, where the obligatory public statutory plan and curriculum of primary education is translated into the national minority language.

Model B – bilingual education, which implies that

the social science subjects are taught in the national minority language, whereas the natural sciences are taught in the official language.

Model C – additional classes (five sessions a week) for the children belonging to national minorities in order to nurture their mother tongue and culture.

The members of the national minority themselves propose and choose a model and a programme in accordance with existing laws and their abilities to realise a programme.

In Eastern Croatia, and especially in Vukovar, teaching for children of the Serbian national minority is organised according to model A, and for other national minorities (Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Slovak) according to model C.

This system of primary education in Vukovar, as well as in some other multiethnic communities in Eastern Croatia, has consequently resulted in segregation of children in “Croatian” and “Serbian” classes. In the beginning of the reintegration process, children in both Croatian and Serbian classes were attending lectures on the same shifts, in the same buildings. However, they were gradually divided in separate shifts, and even in separate buildings, due to the organisation of teaching (and according to parents’ statements - to avoid conflicts).

So today, in three out of 7 primary schools in Vukovar, children of different nationalities attend classes in the same school building, but the classes in Serb and in Croatian language are on different shifts. In the remaining 4 schools, the classes are conducted exclusively either in Serb (one school) or in Croatian language (three schools).

Although the present solution is in accordance with the Erdut agreement<sup>1</sup> and although it follows political interests and interests of parts of the local population from the time of agreement, there is a significant number of people and parents of all nationalities that are not informed about the models of education for minorities which are offered by Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, nor with the ways these models can be implemented in the education system.

In November 2001, the research: *Attitudes about Education in Vukovar*, was carried out by Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, Society for Psychological Assistance in Zagreb (SPA) and the Human Rights Centre, Berkeley University, USA. Among the most important findings one can learn that: "A school is one of the key indicators of the dividedness of a community, but also a factor that could change the situation. ... Divided schools have a heavy impact on children: compared to their teachers and parents, children show the highest readiness to discriminate a member of the other group. This clearly shows that a segregated schooling system, which deprives children of contact in what is the most natural environment for them – the school –, has lasting consequences on the process of social reconstruction. Children have never experienced an undivided city, and grown-ups do not encourage them to have social contact outside school. So it is easy to predict that a continuation of the present situation would lead to complete division of Vukovar along ethnic lines. Serb and Croat children are growing up separately and do not have a chance to experience a different way of growing up." (Čorkalo and Ajduković, 2003).

1 Erdut agreement, signed on 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1995. ensured the process of Peaceful reintegration of the area

## **The New School project**

### **Project Aim:**

Aim of the project is to found/ establish an integrated primary school in Vukovar.

### **The objectives of the "New School Project" are:**

- To develop a school curriculum that will be more in accordance with the educational needs of multiethnic communities;
- To provide support and ensure for teachers and expert associates who work in a multiethnic and multicultural community in a post-war area to gain new knowledge through continuous education;
- Encourage and empower parents to actively participate, together with teachers and the local community, in the creation of a school that will be in accordance with the needs of pupils, meaning that it will be in accordance with educational, cultural and social needs of their children;
- Make representatives of the local government and the local community more sensitive towards these issues in order for them to take responsibility and become more active in solving problems that derive from distorted relations in their multiethnic community.

In the beginning, the plan was to make changes in the educational process through the system that already existed. But based on needs assessment and talking to people from the local community (teachers, parents etc.) the decision was made to offer a new model for education of pupils that differed from the three models mentioned above, but at the same time, to stay within the legal framework and recommendations made by the Ministry of Education.

## **Project development:**

NDC Osijek started The New school project in 2003 by research on the present situation; developing strategy and a plan for teacher's education.

As a first step, in cooperation with Agency for Education of the Republic of Croatia, over 40 teachers and expert associates were involved in the project in January 2004.

At the start of the education of teachers and at the beginning of the development of The New School curriculum, teachers were very aware of the possible implications if the divisions in the schools were to continue. When rethinking reasons for present situation, a vast majority of teachers stated that local politics (politicians) are responsible for the situation, especially political representatives of minorities ("they've got what they've asked for"), and secondly mentioned parents "who would not accept that their children go together" (in classes).

When looking for possible solutions, teachers mostly do not see it as their responsibility to solve the problem, stating again that it should be solved by "a Ministry by a decree," or "according to a request of representatives of minorities or parents."

Although all agreed that a problem exists, due to various reasons some teachers were not ready to take part in the process of the development of The New School Project and consequently shut themselves out from the project (unfortunately, most of those unwilling to contribute were teachers living and working in Vukovar itself, while teachers living in Vukovar surround-

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Reasons for abovementioned unwillingness to contribute to The New School Project vary from psychological inability of some of them to "share the same room and cooperate with the other side", to the feeling that their role is to "protect national interests of their side". Some also felt that "the time is not yet right" for such initiatives, or that their problems should be solved by someone else.

Most of the reasons were actually more personal: fear of losing jobs (if joint education is to be achieved in near future)<sup>2</sup>, and "social pressure" from their (ethnic) group, which many teachers who joined the project had to face and deal with.

The next step was to involve parents in the project,

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2 In Vukovar, there are presently only a third of the number of primary school children that there were in 1991, and seven schools are operating, while before the war there were eight. Also, according to the Law on Education for Members of Minority and in accordance to various legal regulations, the education for minorities can be organised for a minimum number of pupils, and such education is carried out by teachers that are members of the same minority. This resulted in the absurd situation where there was an average of 18 pupils per class (2004/05), which is far below the Croatian average; there is almost the same number of teachers as before the war.

and NDC has conducted **Research on the attitudes of parents on the quality of education of the children in Vukovar.**

In the region of Vukovar deep interviews were carried out with 256 parents of primary school children from October 2004 to January 2005.

*Aims of the research were:*

- Finding out how parents feel about the quality of their children's education and what their attitudes are towards the way teaching for minority groups in the Vukovar area is organised.
- Opening communication and building trust – to show the people that there is someone interested in their problems and willing to listen.
- Identifying a group of parents that is highly motivated to take an active role in the development of The New School.

The sample on which the research was conducted was random, based on accessibility and readiness of interviewees to take part in this research. A criterion was that there are primary school children in a household that attend primary schools in Vukovar.

The sample is in accordance to the ethnic pattern of the population of Vukovar. Out of the total number of interviewees 50% were Croatsians, 32,42% Serbs, 3,12% others, 14,46% undeclared, while according to population census in 2001 population of Vukovar consists of 57,46% of Croats, 32,88% Serbs and 9,65% others (source: official web-page of the city of Vukovar [www.vukovar.hr](http://www.vukovar.hr)).

Total number of children among interviewed families was 571, 361 of them were attending a primary school, which makes up 14,6% of all primary school

children in Vukovar (there are 2470 pupils in primary schools in Vukovar – [www.t.ht.hr/netuskoli/osnovne-skole](http://www.t.ht.hr/netuskoli/osnovne-skole)).

By conducting research/interviews with parents it was confirmed that parents see the existing divisions as a threat. Even in very first contact, by asking parents how do they see life in Vukovar and perspective for their children in Vukovar in the future, more than 70% of the interviewed parents referred to divided schools and the divided city as a problem.

When parents were asked: **“Can you tell us how satisfied you are with the way schooling is being organised for national minorities in Vukovar?”**; 71,4% of them said they were not satisfied because they think that the present model causes the division of children. A small number (5,8%) of interviewees said that they do not know whether they are satisfied or not and most of those were Croats.

Interviewees of all nationalities who are satisfied (22,8%) are similarly satisfied because they support division, but also they think this will contribute to conflict prevention.

A small number (5,8%) of interviewees said that they do not know whether they are satisfied or not and most of those were Croats.

In the course of conducting the first interviews, it became apparent that parents are not at all informed about the educational models for national minorities in the Republic of Croatia. This was the opposite of what was expected. Upon noticing the need, in the course of interviews, interviewers informed parents about models.

In this way we obtained two results: making families



familiar with the educational models and learning their opinions about them.

When asked: **“Are you familiar with the models of education for national minorities?”**, 37 (14,5%) of the examinees answered that they had heard about them; 3 (1,2 %) of the examinees claimed that they *knew exactly* what these referred to; 103 (40,2 %) of the examinees said that they *were not familiar with them*; and 113 (44 %) of the examinees gave *no answer at all*. Therefore, it can be assumed that the examinees had poor knowledge of the educational models for national minorities.

When comparing the examinees on the basis of their nationality, it is interesting to note that the only three examinees who had an excellent knowledge of all three models of education were Croatians (and the two of them work in a primary school!). It is also interesting to note that only 20, 5% of the Serbian examinees and only 20% of minority examinees in general (including Serbian minority) have heard of the models (but do not know them well).

These results pose the obvious question: whose interests were protected when a model for education of minorities was chosen? It is also obvious that there is a need to inform parents about their rights and possibilities granted to them by Croatian laws dealing with education and regulations issued by Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

The next question was: **«Which model do you consider the best and why?»**

*B model*, was selected as the best model of education by 7,8% of interviewees (out of this number: 10% Croats and 90% Serbs)

*C model*, was chosen as the best model of education by 71,5% of interviewees (comprised of: 55,7% Croats,

29,5% Serbs, 1,6% other minorities and 13,1% nationally undeclared).

When asked about **enrolling their children in “joint classes”**, 81% of parents thought joint classes were necessary. Arguments in favour of “joint classes” were based on a belief in the importance of the development of tolerance towards the different, and the problems of division. When stating arguments against joint classes, avoidance of conflict in divided schools was emphasised.

It is clear that the parents should have a chance to hear a professional’s opinion on this issue, in order to overcome the existing fears. Schools should also ensure activities for conflict prevention.

Parents were also asked about the **possibility of including teaching on the cultures and cultural attributes of all national minorities that live in the region in the school curriculum**.

84,8% of parents support such an option, some of them with reservations since they do not want their children to be further burdened by the amount of information they need to learn. In relation to the issues this research addresses, the (self) perception of parents’ role is especially interesting since they see themselves as responsible, but passive agents, unable to influence the issue of divided school.

Our opinion is that parents’ participation in school life is of immense importance since they should be one of the most important agents of change. Since the welfare and future of their children is at stake, it is reasonable that their role should not only be that of passive monitors. The parents’ answers about participation in the life and work of the school show

that most of them are prone to be passive collaborators. This means that they take part only when they have to – at parents' meetings and information hours when they come to inform themselves about their children's marks.

However, the parents, even when taking responsibility and mentioning the possibility of choosing, do that in relation to the past: "The parents had a choice." "We are all to blame a bit." "The children should have been joined long ago".

But, when they claim that now is the right time to broach the subject, a lot of them expect others to do that, either someone from "above" or they say the problem will be solved in due course: "A law should be passed"; "The town should organise the workshops which we would attend together"; "I think the problem will solve itself"; "If the state could settle that, so that nobody gets singled out.."

We also must emphasise that many parents, like many teachers are still suffering from war trauma, a direct consequence of their personal experiences from the war. Unfortunately many of them are still victims of manipulation of these feelings. The negative surroundings encouraged the development of some distrust among some teachers and parents. They simply do not believe fully that joint action of ethnically mixed group in a post-war area can result in a qualitative change in society.

After the research was compiled, we informed all who participated in the research about the results by mail, and invited those parents who had expressed a will to actively participate in curriculum development and furthering the development of The New School in

Vukovar to participate in the project.

Again, it was necessary to help this group of parents to become a well-functioning team, having in mind that those people do not know each other from before, and are coming from different ethnic backgrounds. For all of them «The best interest of the child is their most important interest». After a series of team-building and educational seminars and workshops and supportive meetings, group of parents formally registered their civil initiative as an organisation called Parents' Club "For the Children of Vukovar" in October 2005. Parents became involved in the process of curriculum development, together with teachers and expert associates, under the supervision of the Agency for schooling.

In a divided community such as Vukovar, it is a great achievement to have people of different nationalities, status, and background organised in a civil initiative through which they will try to do something to improve the future of their children and their divided city. This would be an achievement even in more urban communities in Croatia.

At this moment around 40 people are members of "For the Children of Vukovar". This parents' NGO, or its members, have come upon both approval and disapproval in their local community. Ambivalent responses will continue, as this project is certainly controversial.

Finally, after involving teachers and parents, NDC Osijek, together with the Parents' Club, have approached different formal and informal leaders in the community as well as representatives of the city of Vukovar and the county (Vukovar-Sirmyum) government in charge of education, who are sensitive towards this issue and are willing to engage in dialogue to work on finding solutions to a present situation.

A working group, consisting of representatives of local government, expert associates, NDC Osijek and the Parents' Club, was formed and developed a list of recommendations and next steps for the establishment of the New School.

It is extremely important that, on issues significant to the whole community, there is a continuous communication and exchange of information and knowledge between different structures and actors of the community. This will ensure that the achieved results (meaning the results of The New School project) will address the needs of all interested parties, but also that the result will satisfy the highest standards as such.

Major achievements in the project to date are:

- A group of teachers is formed, who are aware of the existing situation (present division and all of its implications), and who are highly motivated for active participation in the development and implementation of The New School.
- We have also identified and involved parents, from over 40 families, in the project, who have established the local NGO "For Children of Vukovar"
- During 2005 the New School Curriculum was developed through a process that involved all important actors: parents, teachers, expert associates and experts from the Agency for Education. The curriculum is in accordance with the Croatian National Curriculum, with two specifics: elective subject "Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region", and learning of minority languages as the languages of the region.
- "Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region" was developed by teachers, parents and expert

associates, based on the Research findings. This subject will ensure that children learn about each other (through learning about authentically multicultural past and present of Vukovar region). They will learn how Vukovar region was shaped by different ethnic groups through history, they will find out how people of different ethnic groups who are living in this region contributed to Vukovar and how each of these ethnic groups is, by itself, a value that needs to be cherished and nurtured. They will learn to understand each other and to grow and build on each other.

- Cooperation of parents, teachers and expert associates with NDC Osijek working on The New School project resulted in the *Initiative for the establishment of The New School in Vukovar*.
- A working group was formed, made up of representatives of different stakeholders, including parents, teachers, representatives of local City and County offices in charge of education, NGOs, the Agency for Education and informal leaders who will work on implementation of the New School Curriculum, and support the *Initiative for the establishment of The New School in Vukovar* that is about to be launched to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport.

Also, we are sure that through implementing this project we raised awareness about a situation that exists (and how it generates even greater dividedness of community) among the parents, teachers and other school staff in Vukovar, and that we informed and educated parents in Vukovar that there are other options of schooling for national minorities besides the existing one of complete dividedness. We assume that we raised awareness among the wider population too, through

promoting and advocating the idea of quality and integrated schooling to other individuals, groups/NGOs and institutions, by ourselves, teachers, parents and experts involved in the Project.

## **Conclusion**

The research NDC conducted in 2004 showed that parents think that the present model of education is not satisfactory for their children, nor is it satisfactory for a process of a social reconstruction of the community in which they live.

Hence, deciding to live in this region, parents care about the future of the area in which they live and in which their children live. Thus, a need to be familiar with, and to establish cooperation between inhabitants of different nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds and traditions is a natural need that enables creation of a modern community that lives *together* and which respects differences that become a creative potential of such a community (modern sociology calls it "social capital"). This is the opposite of the present situation where differences are the reason for division, and so people live in a *divided community*, which is *contradictio in adjecto*.

To live in a multicultural society which is divided by differences inside it, is an out-of-date notion and opposite to tendencies of European and world integrations that are among the stated strategic goals of Croatia.

It is obvious that a significant number of inhabitants of this region wish to be a part of the modern world and want to have an active role in attempts to find more creative and inclusive forms of co-existence in a society which still suffers consequences of war traumas on both individual and group levels. So, the need for a New

School (which would not be new just due to a different organisation of attending classes, but also new according to relations which will be established by their core factors – teachers, pupils and parents, and also according to volume of teaching material and ways in which it will be thought) should be perceived in the spectre of the needs of its inhabitants who live in a modern society of 21<sup>st</sup> century and also as a part of the process of change of a community from the period of war to the age of peace and cooperation.

There is a need to find out new ways of living together (for people in Vukovar), ways that try to change overused term of "coexistence" (which in the example of the primary schools represents parallel co-living and passive acceptance of such solutions) into the idea of the social reconstruction of the society, that emphasises potentially active positions of members of society. These members of the society reconstruct this society by living in the way that by following their personal needs initiate social actions in the best tradition of civil democratic society. Such initiative attempts to respect whole historical, cultural, national and personal experience of all inhabitants of this region (which is obvious from many answers obtained from parents in the survey). The intention of the new school is not to deny, forget or belittle injustices and traumas that happened in the last (or any other) war in this region, nor to deny national, language, cultural and religious differences and heritage, but is an attempt to try to find new and up-to-date way of respecting all differences and historical facts in a way that will enable people to live together in a way that will liberate and put to use all the potentials of the society for its own benefit and for the benefit of the country.

As mostly a result of constant pressure from International community and their regular complaints on

the educational system present in Danube region of Croatia, addressed mostly at local governments (City and county), but especially at the local Office of state administration, it was decided that from the start of this school year all high school pupils will go together in the same school building and same shifts (classes stayed divided, of course).

The intensity of media noise as well as a misleading message that “children are now together” and that it was “a great step forward in inter-ethnic relations” makes us believe that the main reason for this step was, for local government, to transfer the responsibility onto parents, teachers and headmasters. Due to our activities and our contacts with IC connected with The New School projects we were not surprised that the IC will see this as a great step forward and present it as such.

NDC Osijek is very dissatisfied with this attitude of IC who, partially, enforced such an artificial solution, due to political reasons, without respect for the part of the population that is carrying deep scars from the war, and also without involving in this process those who should be first one to ask – parents and their children.

Reconciliation cannot and must not be forced.

It is true that a significant percentage of the interviewees called for a solution forced from the above (state) that would, at least, create possibility for children to meet (at least to be physically at the same place at the same time); in order not to take responsibility for decision.

This is, however, not healthy and not democratic. The incidents that occurred after pupils were placed under a same roof, without any preparation done with parents and pupils prove, unfortunately, our point.

The New School project, by its nature, avoids this problem. Curriculum was developed according to the needs of children/parents of Vukovar, by teachers who are also highly motivated to implement it. It is not saying that The New School it is the best solution for Vukovar – but it is beyond any doubt that it has to be one of the options citizens of Vukovar can choose. If it succeeds it will send a message to a whole Vukovar community. But its message will be acceptable to many.

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**Project:**

## **“Support of the local self governance – municipality of Jegunovce”**

**N**ansen Dialogue Centre, Skopje is a small organization with a unique approach, a well trained team determined to achieve their goals, and working on all levels of one community with different problems and needs. It is a multiethnic organization that works with, for, and believes in “NANSEN DIALOGUE.”

Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje is a non-governmental organization that has been working in the Republic of Macedonia since 2000. NDC Skopje’s main objective is problem solving through dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. NDC Skopje is part of the Nansen Dialogue Network, and has worked with many target groups such as children, high school students, journalists, politicians etc. This work has given NDC Skopje a deep understanding of the needs and the problems facing the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia.

In 2004, the team of NDC Skopje decided to start a project targeting one municipality and concentrating all their efforts there. After some preliminary research in

five municipalities in Macedonia, NDC Skopje decided to work in the municipality of Jegunovce.

This municipality is located in the western part of Macedonia near Tetovo and near the border with Kosovo. It consists of 17 villages and around 11 000 inhabitants (56 % Macedonians, 43 % Albanians, 1 % Serbians, 0.05 Romas and 0.02 % others).

This municipality was directly involved in the 2001 conflict with fighting and shooting taking place in the villages between the National Liberation Army of the Albanians and the Macedonian Army. Jegunovce is a multiethnic municipality and was one of the municipalities in Macedonia with a lot of unsolved ethnic problems, which was the main reason that NDC Skopje chose to work in this municipality.

Since the main focus of NDC Skopje was education and since the educational system in the municipality of Jegunovce had suffered greatly since 2002, NDC Skopje decided to work with education and try to locate the root of the problem. The municipality of Jegunovce has three central primary schools in three villages and all three of them have their satellite – regional schools. The central primary schools are located in the villages of Shemshovo, Jegunovce and Vratnica. In addition to the technical problems that the schools had, such as lack of basic equipment the central primary school in the village of Shemshovo (which is a 90 % Albanian village) had a bigger and more complicated (political) problem in 2002. The primary school in the village of Shemshovo was a multiethnic school where Macedonians and Albanians studied together. The name of the school in Shemshovo before 2002 was “Dame Gruev” (a Macedonian revolutionary from 1903). What happened in 2002?

The villagers of Shemshovo decided to put the bust of the first Albanian professor in this region Jumni Jonuzi in front of the school without consulting the parents of the Macedonian children attending this school on this decision. The Macedonian villagers were against the decision of putting the bust of an Albanian in front of the school. After the bust was put in front of the school the problems started evolving and resulted in separation of the pupils from the neighbouring villages. Since then the Macedonian pupils did not go to that central primary school anymore, they travelled to other ethnically Macedonian central schools. The cooperation and communication between the villages stopped and the incidents just kept increasing. Some political factors became visible during this problem; of course their goal was to enhance the problem and the incidents so that they can earn points in the political arena. Unfortunately they succeeded even though the situation was fragile because of the conflict in 2001. At this point the ethnic division reached its maximum.

In the beginning of 2005 NDC Skopje started working in the municipality of Jegunovce. Our first activity was meeting with different people in all the villages: professors, parents, directors of the schools, municipal officials and ordinary villagers. Our communication was strictly about the situation and people’s lives in this municipality, their problems and their needs. A research was made with 12 focus groups containing 230 parents, the mayor of the municipality, municipal officials and the village leaders. Mainly this research was based on the key people of this municipality. Right after the research NDC Skopje created a draft program for the future work in the municipality of Jegunovce. This program was presented to all the target groups in Jegunovce and after their approval, NDC Skopje started with its formal activities.

A dialogue seminar was held in Ohrid with parents from the villages of Ratae, Shemshovo, Siricino, Preljubiste, Ozormiste and Tudence in February 2005. In this seminar NDC Skopje presented their future plans and activities regarding the municipality of Jegunovce. On this dialogue seminar we invited Steinar Bryn, professor from the Fridtjof Nansen Academy in Lillehammer, Norway who led sessions on dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. The parents had time and space to sit and discuss about the current situation in their villages, they also were divided in work groups and they prepared presentations about their problems and needs. Right after this seminar NDC Skopje organized seminars with their children and made needs assessment with them. After a couple of seminars with the parents of these villages and their children, NDC Skopje had some clear indicators on where to start working.

Problems and obstruction by some villagers also appeared, especially by the village of Zhilce which is a nationalist and ethnically clean Macedonian village. They rejected our invitations for dialogue seminars and they didn't approve of our activities and program.

The starting point of the activities of NDC Skopje was in May 2005 when we opened three cabinets for Information Technology in the village of Shemshovo, a cabinet for Basic English language in the village of Ratae and a cabinet for Advance English language in the village of Preljubiste. All the courses had a mixed team of lecturers (one Macedonian and one Albanian lecturer) and children from all the villages (except for Zhilce) travelled to take part in these courses. The IT cabinet in Shemshovo was located outside the school at first, that was decided with the parents, but after the first semester of this course the interest of the children that wanted to take part in the cabinet for IT courses kept

increasing. The cabinet for IT that was located outside of the central school in Shemshovo did not have the capacity to fulfil the wish of all the students from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade therefore after some organized meetings with the parents we decided to relocate the IT cabinet inside the primary school in Shemshovo with more computers and more space for the students. All the lecturers that are responsible for the courses are locals, in this way they are completely engaged in the process and our activities and in this way NDC Skopje created a lobby group in the municipality. Step by step the interaction between the Macedonian and Albanian students started, the evaluations showed great results and the parents were satisfied with these courses.

Since the courses were going in the right direction the team of NDC Skopje organized another dialogue seminar with the mayor and the members of the council from the municipality of Jegunovce. In this seminar NDC Skopje presented their activities and the courses in the municipality and also with the presence of these municipal officials and the mayor we presented our future plans for the activities in the municipality of Jegunovce. NDC Skopje kept organizing dialogue seminars with the parents from Jegunovce and afterwards with their children, in this way we kept informing the population from Jegunovce of our work and our vision and also in this way they started communicating with each other after three years. We realized that the main reason why the problems stayed unsolved was the lack of communication which leads to lack of information which results in negative effects.

The 2005 experience with the Jegunovce project showed that applying a gradual, step-by-step approach is critical to success. The key community stakeholders had already developed confidence in the NDC project



by participating in different seminars and activities. This allowed NDC to successfully introduce the ethnically mixed Cabinets for IT and English language courses. The education activities aimed to create safe ground for dialogue and reconciliation, and raise awareness between Albanians and Macedonians for fostering the concepts of multiethnic community and cultural differences. NDC Skopje succeeded in gathering and creating a safe space for dialogue after 5 years of complete division of both communities.

In April 2006, NDC Skopje opened three more cabinets; a cabinet for IT courses and a cabinet for Albanian language in the village of Zhilce and one cabinet for Macedonian language in the village of Shemshovo. This was a big success for NDC Skopje having in mind that the village of Zhilce in the first six months did not communicate or cooperate with the team of NDC Skopje, it was a big surprise for us and at the same time a big challenge because the villagers from Zhilce took the initiative for opening the cabinet for Albanian language (Zhilce is an ethnically clean Macedonian village) and the cabinet for IT courses. All the students from 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade that studied in the regional school in Zhilce applied for taking part in the courses for IT and Albanian language. As a result of this initiative the parents from village of Shemshovo responded positively to the idea for opening a course for Macedonian language in their village (the village of Shemshovo was the nest of the NLA soldiers in 2001).

One of the conclusions of the seminars with the villagers from the municipality of Jegunovce was that they viewed the educational system in the municipality of Jegunovce as being of poor quality. Therefore NDC Skopje formed a workgroup of parents, professors and municipal officials and started a strategic planning of the

educational system in Jegunovce. This strategic plan is finished now and NDC Skopje is in the process of forming a group of people that will be focused on implementing the recommendations from the strategic plan.

NDC Skopje in the educational component has undertaken the following activities:

- Seminars with parents (Macedonians and Albanians)
- Seminars with children (Macedonian and Albanian pupils from 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Follow up events with children from the seminars (early summer event and New Year's celebration)
- Seminars with chief of the villages and municipal establishment
- Seminar with teachers and directors of the schools in the municipality of Jegunovce
- Courses on Information Technology and English Language (three cabinets in communities of Ratae, Shemshovo and Preljubiste) and one cabinet for IT in the opening phase in village Zilce
- "Open Fun Football" activities, implemented by Norwegian Football Association in cooperation with NDC Skopje.
- Strategic Planning process for the education system in municipality of Jegunovce
- Meetings with key stakeholders of the municipality (mayor, chief of the villages, members of the municipal council, directors of the schools, teachers, parents) on regular and ad-hoc basis.
- Follow-up for all participants in our activities (March 2006)
- Opening of cabinet for IT classes in Zhilce (March 2006)

- Opening of two cabinets for Albanian and Macedonian language classes ( Zhilce and Shemsovo, April 2006).
- Seminar with preschool children "We belong Together" (May 2006).

In cooperation with Open Fun Football association, NDC Skopje started a new activity in the municipality of Jegunovce called School Sports. Children from 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade were included in various sports activities such as football, volleyball, handball, etc. 800 students in total applied for these activities and we can proudly say that it was the biggest sport event in Macedonia with a multiethnic character. The students were equipped with all the equipment that was necessary for training.

In March 2006 another partnership was made with one Norwegian organization "Norges Vel". This organization has worked in eastern Macedonia mostly and in Kosovo, but they decided to develop their project in Jegunovce also. Since Norges Vel is an organization that works with agriculture and Jegunovce is a rural municipality and agriculture is their main resource, it was easy to establish a link. We helped the villagers to form one Association of potato producers from Jegunovce, the association had around 90 members (Albanians and Macedonians) Immediately after they got formed as an association they sold 60 tons of potatoes in Romania. This was a great success for them because it helped them a little economically having in mind that the employment rate in Jegunovce is really low.

The team of Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje has always tried to involve every level of the inhabitants from the municipality of Jegunovce, we have tried to give some small but important things to each village, even though our capacity and field of action is small.

On the other hand we had other partners that helped us implement some infrastructure components.

NDC Skopje has been involved as a **consultative partner in:**

- **Rehabilitation of the 5 schools in Semsovo, Tudence, Kopance, Ratae and Preljubiste (SEA and NMFA Oslo, implemented by IMG)**
- **Support in the form of equipment (technical and furniture) for schools in municipality of Jegunovce by Norwegian Military camp at Banski Rid**
- **Establishment of the Association of the production of the potatoes in municipality of Jegunovce (NMFA Oslo and Norges Vel in cooperation with municipality of Jegunovce)**
- **"Friendly libraries for all citizens" (NMFA Oslo and UNDP in cooperation with municipality of Jegunovce )**
- **Rehabilitation of the ambulance in village of Shemshovo and building a new ambulance in Jegunovce (NMFA Oslo and NORWAC in consultation with municipality of Jegunovce). The project is still in an early phase.**

The role of NDC Skopje in these components is strictly consultative, due to our mission as an organization. But it plays a major role in the sense that these activities on infrastructure support do contribute to generating confidence within the community, as well as to conveying a message that they are able to accomplish results only by mutual collaboration in a diverse structures and impartial decision making processes.

The improvement of the living and working condi-

tions certainly influences the acceptance of diversity and decreasing ethnic differences.

Nevertheless, for NDC Skopje there is still a huge challenge to go further. That is to say, to establish a new model for the education system, in which Albanians and Macedonians have mutual learning, using their differences as strengths to cultivate a multiethnic state.

The level of confidence will be maintained and further deepened by delivering high quality seminars in dialogue and reconciliation.

## **Project:**

# **“Ethnic distance in Montenegro”**

*Key words: ethnic distance, value orientation, stereotypes, prejudices, social cohesion*

## **Introductory Notes**

**S**ocial life as a primary reality of an individual, in essence represents the system of their interrelations. Individuals as members of society are not secluded persons but they belong to certain social groups which are the result of social grouping by various bases. Every concrete totality has its history, culture, forms of social organisation, mechanisms of stratification and whole number of key and accidental mechanisms responsible for social grouping. Analogue to this, relations between members of different social groups may vary. In an undifferentiated society, hypothetically speaking, all individuals would be members of one basic social group. In other words the key factor of such a society would be the “uniformity” of its members.

Modern society, however, has been differentiated by numerous criteria. In modern society sociologically we primarily mutually differentiate members of different classes, different layers and interest groups. Often, society can be differentiated by cultural and historical criteria so in that way one can recognise members of different national and religious groups. In other words, thanks to differentiation that characterises modern society, existence and relations among different social

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groups (factions), it becomes particularly important issue<sup>3</sup>. Relations among these social groups and individuals making up those groups can vary as well. More precisely, they can be more or less “intimate”, more or less tolerant etc.

Reasons for social cohesion or social disintegration can be different and they vary on the basis of historical conditions, through differences in ideology and values to certain micro-social conditions. In this way, the social grouping problem is poses a danger of inter-group conflicts and social disintegration. In other words, in circumstances where certain social and cultural differences among social groups are present, a latent danger of losing mechanisms of social cohesion crucial for functioning of the entire society as a whole exists.

In that light, one of the important tasks of social science is to determine relations among social groups i.e. members that constitute those groups. Those relations in social life occur as readiness to establish more or less intimate relations with members of different social groups. This is the key idea for the term “social distance”.

3 On the individual level, members of social groups develop their social identity relying on a referent (their own) social group. The social identity is an inner, personal awareness of belonging to a group that carries emotional and value importance; group is constituted of members who poses shared, social identifications, and who see themselves as members of the same social category (nationality, vocation, party membership etc.) In conducting public opinion research for analysing attitudes, the answer to the question ‘who and what we are’ is significant and is determined largely by belonging to a social group. The level and content of social identification can be observed through **joint attitudes that an individual shares with members of its referent group**. Therefore among the rest, political behaviour of individual is set not only by *subjective norms* but also *motivation of acceptance*, i.e. willingness to obey the expectations of like others.

Speaking of ethnic distance, we mean the ‘measure’ or ‘degree’ to which members of one group are ready to establish concrete relations with members of other groups. Criteria for (non) acceptance of members of other social groups are **attitudes** that members of one social group have towards those other social groups. These attitudes are the result of a large number of social factors upon which they are based and as such they represent dispositions i.e. they are characterised by a solidness based both on findings and contents of emotions and will. Every attitude basically represents a ‘conviction’ which not rarely relies on mechanisms of simplification and stereotypical perception<sup>4</sup>. These are the key reasons

4 Stereotype is a schematic and to some extent simplified perception of an individual based on characteristics given to a social group that individual belongs to. By its psychological nature, it can be conscious or subconscious and it can belong to individual inventory of a person or appear as a more common model of smaller or bigger volume. In wider use is meaning of single-form perception of social phenomenon or (more often) other people. The term stereotype was made in the period between world wars along with the development of racial, ethnic and social intolerance.

Basic meaning of the term *prejudice* indicates the development of a relation before “reasoning”, its irrational nature. And apart from real evidence, an individual develops favourable or unfavourable relations toward something, resistant to changes in spite of possible later evidence.

A negative attitude toward a certain group or individuals that belong to it is generally what is meant by the term prejudice. The most commonly used term is the stand (a levelled and solid type of attitude toward something or a class of something; an important characteristic of the stand is its consistency, even though it is not permanent and unchanging in the long term) with a complex structure with numerous links to declarative and actual ideology, ethnocentrism, social and group behaviour in all aspects, social perception, stereotypes.

Prejudice has a supposed rational base, and is composed of partial characteristics, usually exaggerated, and taken as real traits

for which there are rather 'solid' (firm and long-lasting) attitudes that determine nature and profoundness of their mutual communication and relations between social groups.

## **Ethnic Distance**

Ethnic distance is just one form of social distance. More precisely, ethnic distance is a type of horizontal social distance where as referents one has social groups of ethnic community. In multinational society, ethnic distance is especially important, because through measuring it one can determine the degree of social cohesion and the potential for conflicts on national/ethnic basis. Measuring of ethnic distance is not a recent invention. The measuring of ethnic distance, as a research platform, was defined for the first time by the American sociologist Bogardus<sup>5</sup>. Bogardus' concept and operational platform have remained the same in essence till the present day.

Methodologically, the key idea in the measurement of ethnic distance is the system of bivalent questions (items), where every following question represents a greater degree of "intimacy" from the point of view of potential relations among individuals that belong to different social groups. The items are given in manner so that in several (7-9) questions members of one social group express 'intimacy' or 'distance' towards members of other social groups. The idea is to have examinees

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of the person in question (even though those traits are, as a rule, insignificant or nonexistent) and after several cases one generalises it to an entire group, despite the fact that they cannot serve as a reliable sample of the group in question.

5 Bogardus, Emory S. (1925b). Measuring Social Distances. *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 9, 299-308.

in research accept or reject social connections with members of some ethnic groups. In that manner, items compose one comprehensive scale that cumulatively expresses relations between certain ethnic groups. In its original version Bogardus' scale had 7 questions.<sup>6</sup> Later, numerous researchers modified Bogardus' scale introducing new or different items. Modification of Bogardus scale was necessary because every society is culturally specific i.e. social relations that define 'intimacy' due to cultural reasons can be different. In former Yugoslavia, Rot and Havelka (1973)<sup>7</sup> first undertook research on ethnic distance and they used a modified Bogardus scale composed of the following items:

1. As living permanently in my Republic
2. As neighbours on the same street or building
3. As my close personal friends
4. As my sister's (brother's) spouse
5. As my spouse
6. As my superior at work
7. As to occupy an executive or some other important position in my Republic

## **Measuring Ethnic Distance in Montenegro**

Ethnic distance was measured several times relatively recently. Part of the results interpreted here represents the last measurement of ethnic distance conducted in

6 (1) close relation through marriage, (2) membership in club, (3) neighbour from the street, (4) work in same field, (5) citizenship, (6) only as a visitor to country, (7) expulsion from the country; Bogardus measured distance of Americans towards four ethnic groups (Canadians, Swedes, Poles and Koreans).

7 Rot, N., Havelka, N., (1973): *National context and values of high school*, Institute for Psychology and IDN, Beograd.

2004<sup>8</sup>. For these purposes a modified Bogardus scale composed of nine items<sup>9</sup> was used:

1. As citizens in my country
2. As neighbours (on the same building or street)
3. As my colleague at work
4. As my superior at work
5. As an educator of my children
6. As friend to socialise and visit
7. As to occupy executive position in my country
8. As close relatives by marriage
9. As close relatives by marriage of us or our children

Based on research from 2004, we present results of measuring ethnic distance, understood as a measure of value orientations in Montenegro. The research showed that there is conditionality between opinions on ethnic groups and value orientations, or in other words that stands towards members of different ethnic groups are an elemental part of wider structure of stances that derive from value orientations. In the research on value orientation the attention of the researchers was focused on three key dimensions: **traditionalism, etatism/egalitarianism and civil awareness/liberalism**. Each dimension has been operated on the appropriate scale and each scale is composed of a larger number of claims (statements) which are more or less identical with statements used in much research of this type. The claims

8 Bešić, M., Pavićević, V, (2004), *Value Orientations and Ethnic Distance*, Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM), Podgorica.

9 In Montenegro this scale was applied for the first time by researcher B. Kuzmanović 2001: *Ethnic distance in Montenegro*: Đukanović, B., Kuzmanović, B., Lazić. M., Bešić, *Nation and State*, CID, Podgorica.

represent five-degree ordinal scales of Likert type, as usual in research on values. Selection of these value orientations was not coincidental.

Traditionalism as a value orientation is logical choice considering the fact that breakdown of real socialism led to a strong process of re-traditionalisation of society. This is not only the case with Montenegro but with all transitional societies.

Egalitarianism/Etatism are in fact two value orientations in the theoretical sense. However, general research practice has showed these two orientations compose one amalgam, thus basic empirical observation requires that these two values be researched as one whole. Analytically, these values represent the 'remains' of real socialism, considering that egalitarianism and etatism are two very important elements in the ideology of socialist society.

Finally, liberalism/civil awareness, theoretically speaking, represent a value orientation placed on the opposite pole from traditionalism on the one hand and etatism/egalitarianism on the other. Liberalistic value orientation signifies innovation in structure of social awareness and simultaneously is an indicator of degree of social changes that have taken place in the period of social transformation. The presence/absence of this value orientation should be observed within a context of joint efforts in overcoming re-traditionalism of society from one side and socialist re-vindication from the other side. Methodologically, all three value orientations have received equal methodological treatment, so there are not any doubts about the objectivity of the results.

## Results of Measuring Ethnic Distance in Montenegro (CEDEM, 2004)

Research was conducted during the period 15<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2004. A standard CEDEM's two – round stratified sample was prepared. In total 1005 examinees from 9 municipalities: Pjevlja, Berane, Bijelo Polje, Podgorica, Nikšić, Cetinje, Herceg-Novci, Bar and Ulcinj.

The simplest method of measuring ethnic distance is to establish the total number of positive (YES) answers of examinees to the questions asked (table 1).

If we however calculate the total distance through nine-degree score, we receive coefficients for each group, where the coefficient itself expresses total distance towards each individual ethnic group (chart 1).

Therefore, the total distance towards Montenegrins is the smallest (they are the biggest national group),

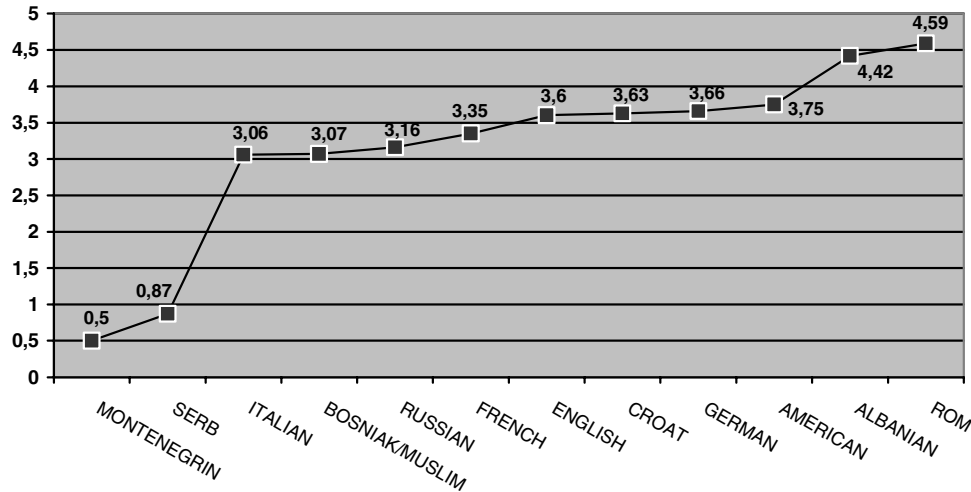
but close to them are Serbs. Or put another way: when this research was conducted ethnic distance towards Serbs was non-existent. Furthermore, one can observe from Italians to Roma population, Bosniaks and Russians towards which the biggest distance was noted. It should be noticed that differences between Italians, Bosniaks and Russians are small, and difference from French to Americans is small, while relations toward Albanians and Romas are characterised by a high degree of total distance.

If instead of total distance, we analyse interethnic distance (table 2), it can be seen that Montenegrins are the least tolerant towards Romas, followed by Albanians, while towards Serbs the ethnic distance is rather small. After Albanians, people who nationally declared themselves as Serbs in Montenegro show the biggest distance towards Americans, and then to English and Romas. It should be noted that the total distance of Serbs

**Table 1:** Total Ethnic Distance – General Distribution in % of "YES" Answers

Statement	Montenegrin	Serb	Bosniak	Albanians	Croat	Rom	American	French	Russian	German	English	Italian
As citizens in my country	97,9	95,6	83,4	69,0	75,2	77,9	64,7	72,0	75,3	66,2	67,5	76,6
As neighbors (on the same building or street)	97,1	94,5	77,3	60,9	70,4	63,3	65,3	72,8	75,7	67,4	68,0	76,7
As my colleague at work	96,7	93,7	80,0	63,3	72,9	61,8	69,9	74,1	76,3	72,4	71,3	78,1
As my superior at work	93,5	88,3	63,3	48,9	56,6	45,8	58,3	61,4	62,9	58,9	58,9	63,6
As an educator of my children	92,7	87,2	57,9	43,3	51,7	39,3	50,5	54,9	56,2	52,6	53,5	57,2
As friend to socialise and visit	97,4	95,3	79,8	60,6	70,5	57,0	69,2	75,0	77,6	70,0	70,4	78,8
As to occupy executive position in my country	95,1	82,6	52,7	39,3	44,4	35,7	36,8	38,5	41,1	38,4	36,6	40,0
As close relatives by marriage	87,4	83,2	44,6	30,8	42,8	23,1	52,2	55,0	56,5	51,4	51,2	58,6
As close relatives by marriage of us or our children	84,8	79,8	38,8	24,9	35,3	17,7	45,7	47,6	49,0	43,9	44,8	51,5



**Chart 1: Total Ethnic Distance**

towards the rest is bigger than all the other members of national (i.e. ethnic) communities in Montenegro. National minorities are in principle more tolerant, but attention should be addressed to Bosniaks who show a relatively large distance towards Albanians and so called

westerners. Croats are generally the most tolerant and Muslims show the biggest distance towards Russians.

Ethnic distance, if calculated through total scores, can be shown in the comparative overview of ethnic (in)tolerance in Chart 2. Presented in this way, it is ob-

**Table 2: International Distance**

Nationality of examinee	NATION					
	Montenegrins	Serbs	Bosniaks/Muslims	Albanians	Croats	Romas
Montenegrin	3,15	2,86	2,92	3,20	3,02	2,57
Serb	<b>5,40</b>	<b>4,50</b>	3,32	<b>4,95</b>	<b>5,06</b>	<b>4,25</b>
Bosniak	2,24	2,69	2,98	2,42	2,29	2,35
Albanian	1,90	2,20	3,65	1,90	2,18	1,71
Muslim	3,28	3,28	<b>3,94</b>	3,37	3,33	2,86
Croat	1,82	1,73	2,73	2,18	2,09	1,64

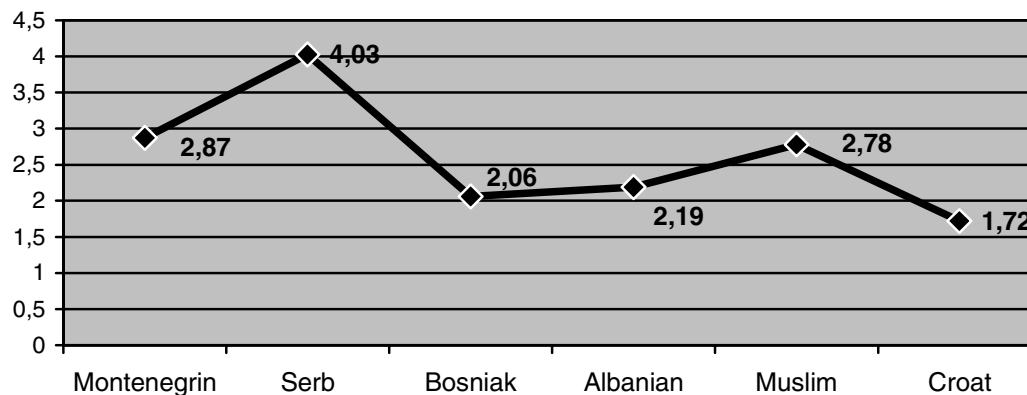
**Second part:**

Nationality of examinee	NATION					
	Americans	French	Russians	Germans	English	Italians
Montenegrin	0,17	0,97	3,31	4,42	3,29	4,67
Serb	0,62	0,16	<b>4,20</b>	<b>5,87</b>	<b>5,06</b>	<b>5,06</b>
Bosniak	1,11	1,60	0,04	2,11	2,09	2,85
Albanian	<b>1,45</b>	<b>2,76</b>	2,31	0,35	2,08	4,55
Muslim	1,13	1,43	0,09	3,87	2,73	4,10
Croat	0,09	1,64	1,73	1,82	0,18	3,09

vious that those who declare themselves as Serbs are almost twice as ethnically intolerant as all the other groups. The most tolerant ethnic group are Croats.

The research showed that different social groups are characterised by greater/lesser ethnic distance expressed in coefficients measuring total distance. In Montenegro significant differences exist (chart 3) in total distance when the age of examinees are taken into account. The results show that younger categories (age

18-34) demonstrate the greatest distance towards domicile national groups in Montenegro (Bosniaks/Muslims, Albanians, Croats and Romas) and a significantly greater distance towards nations from countries of the western cultural type. On the other hand, older examinees (age over 55), are more tolerant towards national groups living in Montenegro and, compared to younger people, more intolerant toward 'foreigners' ( $F = 3,78$ ,  $df, 2$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ).

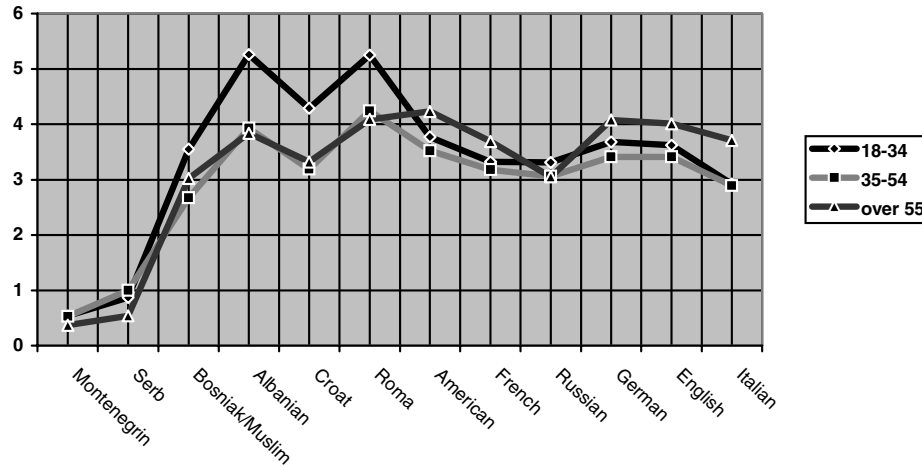
**Chart 2: Ethnic (in)tolerance**

When the level of education of the population is taken into account, Chart 4 illustrates that less educated categories of examinees demonstrate greater distance compared to more educated categories, especially when

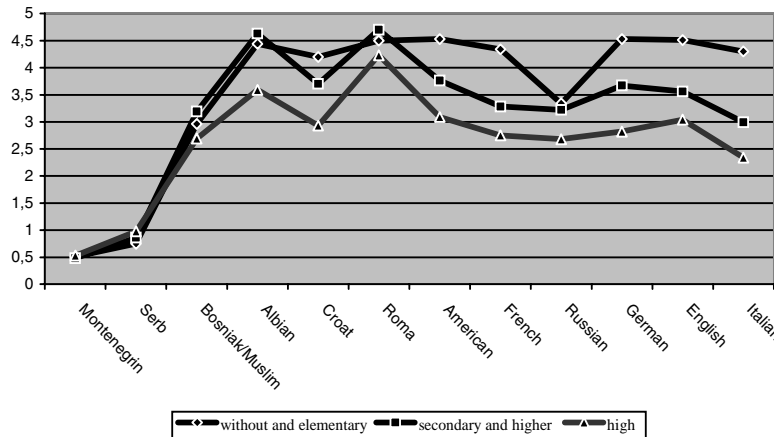
speaking of national groups of the western cultural type ( $F = 6,41, df, 2, p < 0,01$ ).

Finally, this research analysed relations between value orientations and ethnic distance. For this purpose

**Chart 3: Age Structure and Ethnic Distance**



**Chart 4: Ethnic Distance and Education**



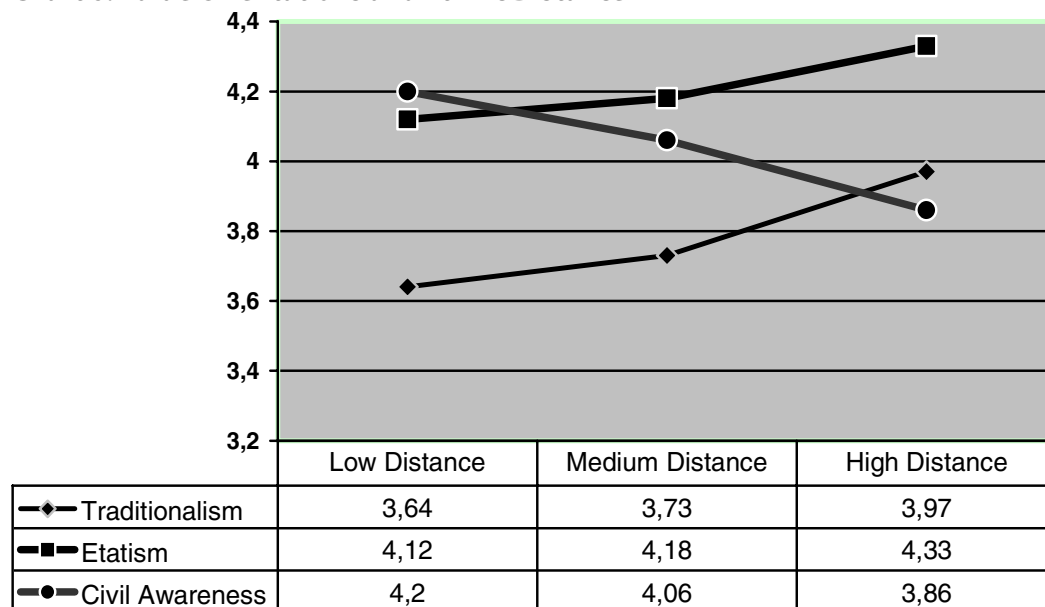
the total distance is divided in three categories (small, medium and high) and observed in relations to scores in scales of traditionalism, etatism and civil awareness (chart 6). Results show that larger degrees of ethnic distance corresponded to higher scores in scales of traditionalism and etatism, while the larger the civil awareness score is, the smaller the total distance is ( $F = 25,3$ ,  $df, 2$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ).

### Instead of Conclusion

Systematic measurement of ethnic distance in multinational societies, like the Montenegrin, is particularly important. Ethnic groups and their relations to a great extent define comprehensive social dynamics, and disturbance in these relations represents one of the key indicators threatening social cohesion as a whole. Measurement of ethnic distance by using the Bogardus scale as demonstrated in this overview has a special analytical value. Ethnic (in)tolerance on the level of the general population can be determined, and the distance can be measured with every particular form of social communication taken into account. The results attained by the measurement of ethnic distance, can help institutions formulate and realize a number of instruments and

measures that could be implemented in order to strengthen social cohesion and contribute to the path of development of a tolerant, civil society.

**Chart 6: Value Orientations and Ethnic Distance**



# Traditional mediation in Montenegro

**M**ediators have been present in Montenegrin traditions for centuries. This institution has foundations in the religions and customs of all nations living there. *Muslihuns* with Muslims and *miritelj* (mediators) with Christians were always distinguished people from the spiritual and religious life of the people. They were respected and well renowned, because they would pacify families in dispute, mark the border lines between estates, propose future brides etc... "In their house and in nine villages around here as well, they were the most distinguished persons", writes the historian Ejup Mušović echoing the sentiments of many people in the region. Many places in Montenegro that carry the name *Mirište* (place dedicated to peace-making) attest to the well established tradition of reconciliation maintained by the highest members of society.

During communism they were called „Negotiators“, or „reconciliation councils“; according to the new terminology introduced with the Law on Mediation which came into effect in 2005, “mediators” or “conciliators”. Montenegro has adopted such a law as one of the first countries in the region.

Examples of reconciliation exist across the whole of Montenegro. The olive tree is not just a symbol of peace; the old olive tree in Bar has become a traditional place of peace-making. In Boka Kotorska in Lady of Škrpjela, a special room in the convent was dedicated for reconciliation between people. Leka Dukagjini, the Albanian general and noble in 15<sup>th</sup> century codified his Codex



**Sead Sadiković** was born in Bijelo Polje on 1964, where he finished Grammar school. In Skopje he attended studies in electro-techniques and acquired a diploma in engineering. He worked as a high school teacher in Bijelo Polje until 1996.

Since 1992 he has written for weekly magazines Monitor and Liberal. Since 1997 he has been a correspondent for the Bosnian magazine Dani and Polje from Bijelo Polje. Since 1999 he has been a correspondent for Radio Free Europe for the northern part of Montenegro. He is a part-time associate for many foreign media. He is the author of the documentary on mediation «Umir» a production of NDC. He has received two international awards for radio reporting.

of traditional methods of mediation of North Albanian tribes, which had already existed for several hundred years. The 1796 Canon of Petar I dealt with such issues as well. Petar I was one of the most influential mediators who, through forms of imprecation, solved disputes and made peace between people and belligerent tribes. The unwritten rules of mediation were used in most disputes, but for the most severe ones – blood revenge – a state instrument, had to be introduced. That was one of the motives behind writing the Canon. Reconciliation and tribal councils were performing their necessary duties. In a spiritual sense their mission was considered holy and among the people. “There was a time when neither state nor state institutions existed in this region, but someone had, naturally, to carry out the job of reconciliation” says historian Edin Smailović, who has studied the occurrence of traditional dispute resolution, which can be considered unique to Montenegro, North Albania and Sandzak.

Compromise is the essence of successful mediation, and the final result of mediation is that there is neither a loser nor a winner. This is also the starting point for traditional forms of mediation as we find them in Montenegro.

For mediation to take place it is necessary that both sides in a conflict show a willingness to take part. Prior to that, there is usually preparatory involved. Mediation can be initiated by either side in the dispute or people close to it, or by the mediators themselves.

Mediation begins when both sides designate people to mediate. Mediation, as an alternative means of solving disputes, also provides the guarantee for the honouring of agreements. Their primary task is to convince the sides that court processes or prolongation of the status quo is more damaging to them than the positive outcome of mediation.

People close to one (neighbours, relatives, members of clan, tribe, godfathers etc) or the other side make preliminary agreements to launch the process. Vicinity to one or other side must be balanced in order to provide total neutrality. At any rate, during the process which might involve ten to twenty mediators, four or six persons close to one or the other side do not disrupt this approach to the problem.

As a rule, there are mediators in every village, brotherhood or tribe. Osman Kurbarović is the fifth *muslihun*, or mediator from his family. He inherited this role from his uncle. His uncle’s description of *muslihunism* was very brief and told to him just before his first case: “You must not be biased to either side, speak little and listen carefully to those you are mediating with, and never allow your words to be thrown away”. These three rules are probably the most concise definition of mediation that has emerged from a profound folk wisdom.

Neutrality is a responsibility toward parties in dispute, and towards oneself. The first principle of the “uncle” has been well described in all modern analyses of mediation theory.

To speak little and listen carefully is much more useful than imposing solutions. To speak little (or not at all) would mean to encourage parties in conflict to say more in order to allow “two truths” to be heard. To listen carefully also means a possibility to better accept and understand the positions of both sides, so that appropriate conclusions could be drawn from the process.

“Never allow your words to be thrown away” is indeed an exotic and picturesque moral that emphasises the authority of people involved in mediation. Their word in the process of mediation and in other situations should be “in place” as people say and guarantee that their efforts are not futile.

“Not everyone can be a Muslihun”, claims Hadži Rahman Ljaić, one of the most distinguished mediators in the municipality of Rožaje, where, especially in the rural areas, that institution is well rooted in folk tradition. Ljaić is the tenth descendent of a family which in the village Plunci at the border of Montenegro and Kosovo has been involved in muslihunism.

“Much of that petty wisdom is needed to solve a dispute”, says him, illustrating diversity of approaches in some cases. Their original weight is not a precondition for finding way through mediation. A small children fight can derive a neighbour’s quarrel or argue with severe consequences. “Our priority is to contribute to intrinsic reconciliation of whole families and to prevent increase of tensions” says Ljaić.

Shariat and Codex of Ljeka Dukagjini have their basis in proposing solutions. In the first phase, which can be several sessions long (i.e. visits to muslihuns), one speaks with both sides separately. Causes, motives, consequences and eventual proposals for reconciliations are heard. The parties become familiar with details from Shariat and the Codex in that phase. It is best if the first proposal for mediation comes from them. The final result might be financial compensation, which in harder cases, with tragic outcomes, is proposed. Its purpose is a temporal existential solution for the injured party that should partially compensate for the lost member of the family. The amounts of compensation are universal for North Montenegro, Sandzak, North Albania and Kosovo, and very close to the amounts that can be prescribed in Central and South Montenegro. The process of mediation in these cases certainly does not preclude the official pursuit of the case before state bodies, but it eliminates

compensation for damages prior to court procedures. After the initial mediation, separately and with both sides, a joint mediation with the complete reconciliation council is prepared. In these long and complex processes over 21 persons can take part. Regardless of the nature of the dispute (marriage, property, lines of estate – these are the most common ones) in mediation a religious community is involved if both parties are of the same religion. In case of dispute between parties belonging to different religions it is compulsory to include both religious communities with as many representatives as possible. It is interesting to note that interethnic disputes in ethnically mixed Montenegro are rare. The muslims processes of mediation begin in the mosque and usually finish there as well. An estimated 90% of initiated mediations are concluded successfully. Cases where agreed solutions are not honoured by one of the sides are rare.

“I can recall only one case where a side failed to honour the solution in the last forty years, and even that was not the result of mistake of the party in question but the very process of mediation”, says Alija Matović, one of the experienced mediators who kept notes on every one of hundreds of cases he had. “If they could, they would split the air”, it is written in one of his notes on neighbours’ dispute that took several months of solving. “They are rare, but there are some disputes that we were working on solving for years”, says Matović.

One of the characteristics of traditional mediation is not to leave a single dispute unresolved as long as there is the slightest chance of compromise. Guarantors, what Albanians would call «dorzoni», are one of the preconditions for successful mediation. Mediators put their reputations at stake as a guarantee, and in cases of financial compensation they leave a financial guarantee as well.

When an omen of the right path for mediation occurs, the path is walked all the way through. Unlike modern, “western”, mediation, in certain phases of traditional mediation pressuring one or both sides is possible, including a possible confrontation with the mediators. Effort invested and authority is the moral background for this kind of pressure. If one side starts obstructing the process, it is legitimate to threaten them. To confront one side is much easier than to cause a conflict with the guarantors, i.e. mediators – the most distinguished members of their community. The conflict with them carries moral and social consequences which can be real threat to the obstructor and an objective ground for bringing ending the obstruction. “It is much easier to have a quarrel with one man than with the whole village or all the surrounding tribes”, concludes Rahman Ljaić simply.

However, that is an extreme mechanism of mediation and rarely used, but its presence is of psychological importance to the process. More often, mediation leads to a solution through proposals made in order to reach a compromise. A solution is not to be perceived as a victory of one or the other side. It is not. Instead, quite frequently it is perceived as a victory of both sides and especially a victory the mediators.

The success of their mission is represented in a highly moral and important way in the effect on the mediator’s reputation and at the same time it forms a “capital” in subsequent mediations. Renowned mediators and muslihuns were invited from other regions to attempt to find a solution to some conflicts. In Bihor region one elder and experienced man from every village “whom people would listen to was involved in reconciliation councils” says eighty-year old Vehbo Hodžić as he describes the contents of this institution during communism. In his

area the well known muslihuns of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century were: Taib Alihodžić, Šučo Hodžić, Mustafa Hodžić, Mula Zahim Musić, Bejto Smakić, Mirun Pavić, Dimitar Radović, Murat Mučić and many others. Their mission was spread across the whole north part of Montenegro. At the same time, in cities, the job of reconciliation councils was often carried out by political officials, party activists, professors, doctors, teachers, priests and hodjas. The practice of some judges was to insist on changing court process with mediation.

The reputation of that informal institution was big. During the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans on the territory of present day Montenegro, society was characterised by patriarchy and a low socioeconomic level. It is significant that a classic Turkish feudal system like we could find in Serbia or Bosnia was not present. Here people had the status of free stock-breeders because the Empire did not have any interest in establishing their institutions. Due to the absence of state bodies a mechanism of self regulation had emerged along with the mediators. Poor areas that the empire had neglected when building institutions developed mediation. This led to one other difference with modern mediation. At the same time, especially with Albanians, that institution played a very important role in “appeasing the blood”, one very complex phenomenon that represented a barrier to development for centuries. In the last decade of the last century several thousand dispute cases were resolved. A significant contribution to this mediation came from Montenegro.

Maybe right here among us more than any other place, now, when we need it the most, these people, mediators, third parties, muslihuns, have shown us that it is divine to assist in reconciliation forgiveness and compromise, that to err is human. To calm down words and cool the blood.



**Example:**

Agency news from 7th of September 2006: *Rožaje - Jusuf Z. Ljajić (17), from Kaluđerski laz nearby Rožaje, was wounded yesterday around 12 o'clock while picking blueberries with his father and relatives in a place called Glođanski stanovi in the territory of Kosovo. Montenegrin police stated that E.E. from Vitimirica nearby Peć was under suspicion for murder, and allegedly fired several shots at Ljajić and his cousins with an automatic rifle. The suspect, a young man, is on the run, and the Montenegrin police have informed UNMIK. Jusuf Ljajić yesterday crossed the state border with his father, relatives and neighbours in order to pick blueberries in the region of the village Glođanski stanovi. Around ten shots were fired at them from a semiautomatic rifle from a distance of 30 meters. The investigative magistrate and Senior State Prosecutor in Bijelo Polje have been informed of the case – a police announcement stated. Jusuf Ljajić was wounded in the abdomen and witnesses stated that it was true luck that no one else was hurt. The wounded young man was carried by his father and relatives down part of the road and was then taken by ambulance to hospital in Berane, where he was operated on and is currently out of danger. Earlier this summer, two other incidents occurred at the border with Kosovo and Albania, after which members of border police were forced to fire warning shots in the air.*

Mountain Štedim where the incident took place is only a few kilometres away from the village Kaluđerski laz and there is a natural road that connects Montenegro with Kosovo. That is an area where cattle traditionally have been taken for grazing and the forest and its fruits are used by the people. Three and a half months prior to the incident it became a state border after the Montenegrin

referendum for independence. The incident therefore had an international character. Neighbouring relationships between Peć and Vitimirica from one and Rožaje from other side were possible endangered. The unique values of the traditionally good relations among the populations of this border area were put in question due to repeated incidents of this kind.

Nothing prior to the incident had occurred that could explain its occurrence, except that inhabitants of Kosovo do not allow people from Montenegrin villages of Kaluđerski laz, Gornji and Donji bukelj, Plunci and others, to access areas with rich blueberry meadows. At the same time the area is one of the most attractive mountaineering sites and places for recreation for people from Rožaje, Peći and Vitimirica.

Mediators immediately began their mission. The desire to find a compromise was very high.

Esat Elsani, was the perpetrator who fired at the boy Jusuf Ljajić and his cousins and friends. "His rifle killed him, and the fact that the Lord left him to live is just Jusuf's fate", the Ljajićs said. "People from Rožaje were warned not to pick blueberries in Kosovo", claimed the other party and Esat Elsani added that at the moment of the incident he was under the influence of alcohol. Kosovo police arrested Elsani.

It was a very difficult situation in which to start mediation.

Hasan Batić, uncle of Elsani, however began looking for a solution. His first step was to convene mediators from Pec and agreeing with them to contact the Ljajićs. Mediator Hadži Rahman Ljajić from Rožaje was the first link to the family of the wounded young man. Readiness for dialogue was obvious. Both the wounded Ljajić and the arrested Elsani who expressed remorse for his act accepted it.

There was a discrepancy between the amount of compensation prescribed by traditional laws and financial status of the perpetrator who did not dispute his responsibility. The randomness of the shooting indicated his state of unaccountability at that moment. Responsibility to reach reconciliation was great as well. Future cooperation, even the insignificant picking of blueberries, the important flow of people and commodities in Rožaje – Peć were put to the test. Three meetings of muslihuns in Rožaje were held in the house of the Ljaićs. There were five deliberations with the Elsani family and the same number of conversations with the arrested Esat.

“This incident will not be repeated and not just Elsani, but no one else from that area in Kosovo will allow such a conflict on Štedim in the future”, was the conclusion of the council from Kosovo. They asked for forgiveness for spilled blood.

On the thirtieth day after the incident a joint meeting was arranged in the mosque in Rožaje. “Dorzoni”, the guarantors were the most distinguished members of that society. There were ten of them from each side. While the wounded young man was recovering, his family entrusted Hadži Rahman Ljaić to decide on the acceptance or refusal of any suggestions made. “May you be pardoned for our blood”, were the words that marked the successfully closed mediation. Reconciliation accompanied with a guaranty that nothing alike that will occur again represented a reason for mutual content. Ljaićs and Elsanis became good friends after this settlement. Their meetings are frequent due to commuting of people from Rožaje to Peć and from Peć to Rožaje. The benefit of peace replaced the horror of conflict.

***Strengthening relations of interethnic communities on national and local level through support and capacity building of municipal commissions for relations among communities***

## **„Bona Mente“ Project**



**Sreten Koceski** has been involved with associations of citizens for more than 12 years, working in multiethnic environments implementing confidence building programs in Macedonia. He is a founder of the Community Development Institute (CDI) ([www.mic.org.mk](http://www.mic.org.mk)) and he is a founding member or adviser of many local, regional and international organisations and institutions. Currently he holds the position executive director at CDI-Macedonia. Currently, he is working on his consultancy project for a master program in the area of non-profit organisations.

**T**he Republic of Macedonia is multiethnic state where Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Romas, Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks, Egyptians, Croats and others live equally, making the community and the country richer both ethnically and culturally.

During the last 15 years Macedonia has faced many problems: the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, wars in Slovenia, B&H, Croatia, Serbia (Kosovo) and armed conflict in Macedonia in 2001. All of them had a direct or indirect impact on interethnic relations in Macedonia and unfortunately it all culminated in 2001 with the outbreak of conflict between Macedonians and Albanians on opposite sides.

The conflict has drastically impaired interethnic relations and left permanent repercussions which Macedonian society is struggling to overcome. The conflict lasted approximately 9 months and ended with an agreement – the Ohrid Framework Agreement 2001 – signed by representatives of political parties of ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians and supported by representatives of the international community (EU, US and OSCE) and the President of Macedonia. It included amendments to the Constitution which would guarantee a greater role for and rights of minorities in Macedonia. As a result, all ethnic communities must be equally represented

in public institutions, both on the national and the local level. On the central level in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia a committee has been formed for relations among communities, while on the local level in municipalities the idea of forming commissions for relations among communities was suggested.

### ***Ethnic Minority Groups on the Local Level in Macedonia***

In different parts of Macedonia different groups of citizens with the same ethnic origin represent a minority compared to the rest of the population of that region, e.g. Macedonians are a minority in the northwest part of Macedonia where Albanians are the predominant group.

Commissions for relations among communities, in order to assure equal representation and solve problems and needs among ethnic communities, should be established on the local level in municipalities where more than 20 % of population has a different ethnic origin than the majority. There are 21 municipalities in Macedonia which should according to the law form such a commission, and over 60% of the total population lives in such communities – municipalities. Those commissions are composed of members of the municipal council and other members, which are distinguished members of society. Such commissions have the mandate to propose certain measures to the municipal council but the council has the final say.

The approach of CDI was to examine all possibilities that institutions provide, and which mechanisms

are available to ensure the participation of all citizens in decision-making processes on the local level related to culture, use of symbols, coats of arms and names of infrastructural objects.

Regardless of the fact that these commissions were formed within the municipalities and in accordance with the law, based on initial research conducted by Community Development Institute, we came to the conclusion that the commissions do not possess capacities and knowledge necessary for effective work. The commission is very important by its nature and without its opinion the municipal council cannot pass decisions on use of symbols or decide on issues related to culture on the local level or change of names of infrastructural objects.

Having in mind the sensitivity and consequences of the armed conflict with regards to interethnic relations as a whole, a serious initiative is necessary in order to strengthen the capacities of these commissions to implement their tasks on the local level.

As a result of this political and social situation in Macedonia, Community Development Institute Tetovo developed the BONA MENTE programme to assist in improving interethnic relations on the national and local levels through support and capacity building of municipal commissions for relations among communities. CDI (Community Development Institute) recognised the need for such commissions and developed a programme composed of several segments.

#### **The main goal of BONA MENTE project is to:**

- 1) Develop capacity of Commission for Relations among Communities through organising series of

- trainings for members of this commission;
- 2) Summon the best examples from existing Commission for Relations among Communities' practices;
- 3) Promote the possibility of the Commission for Relations among Communities organising public and TV debates within the municipality, as well as meetings in the community in order to present to citizens the work of this commission;
- 4) Motivate more effective cooperation between civil groups and local authorities in order to improve relations among communities, having in mind decentralisation and its effects on relations within communities.

A preparation period took place in the beginning of the programme where project phases were laid out and the following activities took place:

### ***- Situational analysis and preparation of brochure with case studies***

During the preparatory period a CDI team visited 24 selected municipalities and conducted series of meetings with members of Commissions for Relations among Communities, media and nongovernmental organisations. The purpose of these visits was to select additional activities, consult on programme activities, promote strategic plans and program activities, and consult on the interests and accessibility of members of Commissions for Relations among Communities.

The following was considered:

- Participation of local minority groups in creating public policies on the local level;

- Adequate participation in local communities and decision-making on the local level;
- Work of Commission for Relations among Communities;
- Work of local self-governments and their policies toward minority groups;
- Cooperation among local authorities, nongovernmental organisations and media in solving concrete problems.

The main program activities were launched after the preparatory period, and were undertaken in order to implement the main programme goal fully. These activities were undertaken in the following order:

### **1) Training for members of Commission for Relations among Communities in order to build their capacities**

This project team was established to communicate with municipalities, Chairperson of City Council and Chairperson of Commission for Relations among Communities. Afterwards they would be called to participate in regional workshops which were held in suitable locations accessible to all members. The workshops covered the following topics:

- Strategic planning, programme development, teambuilding and management for members of Commissions for Relations among Communities.
- International and local legislation related to rights of local minority groups.
- Support of more effective cooperation among these commissions, nongovernmental sector and media;

- Development of action plans for each Commission for Relations among Communities individually

Within the framework of these activities four training workshops were held. Each workshop lasted three days and consisted of the above mentioned topics.

The plan was to organise trainings having in mind geographical representation and structure of population. In total 24 municipalities were covered and the structure of participants was as follows:

- I group : Tetovo, Debar, Jegunovce, Mavrovo and Roštuše, Studeničani, Vrapčište
- II group: Kicevo, Kruševo, Vraneštica, Dolneni, Struga
- III group: Petrovec, Šuto Orizari, Cair, Butel, Zalenikovo
- IV group: Cucer Sandevo, Skopje, Drugovo, Kumanovo, Sopište, Gostivar, Brvenica

These trainings encouraged Commissions for Relations among Communities to work on joint efforts to solve problems of local minority groups and to initiate and support their mutual cooperation and participation in decision-making on the local level. The goal of these workshops was, among other things, to develop cooperation and coherence in local teams and to establish better contacts which could be used later with their future partners on the local level.

The workshop took three working days. The total number of participants in the trainings was approximately 45, i.e. 5-6 representatives from Commission for Relations among Communities and from municipality

(total 30), 5 representatives nongovernmental sector and 5 media representatives, 3 trainers/facilitators and 5 members of CDI staff. The work was mainly interactive, including plenary sessions and work in smaller groups.

### 2) Summon the best practices from existing Commissions for Relations among Communities

CDI engaged an expert to conduct interviews with members of Commissions for Relations among Communities and other parties involved in order to identify best practice cases from the work of these commissions and other bodies in the country. Additional international experience and possible solutions were described in a brochure.

Data gathered during analysis, positive examples, actual situations and results of other related activities will be published in a form of a brochure and presented to public as a model. The brochure is scheduled for late December 2006.

### 3) Promotion of Commission for Relations among Communities in municipalities

CDI organised public and TV debates in order to present the work of the Commissions for Relations among Communities. The main goal of this activity was to raise public awareness and to introduce the role and importance of these commissions.

Contact TV debates were organised in local TV stations in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Kicevo and Skopje. Chairpersons of the commissions from these regions were invited to participate and to present the work of their commissions.

Citizens had the opportunity to ask questions and to raise issues through phone calls directly on the air.

Community Development Institute used the following methodology in evaluating accomplishments of its program:

- Questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of the programme
- Interest shown for participation in all activities;
- Increased level of information exchange measured before and after a meeting.

In order to draw concrete conclusions we had to receive feedback from our target group – training participants.

Each participant received by the end of the training a questionnaire to evaluate the successfulness and effectiveness of the training. Questions were comprehensible and easy to understand. Proposed alternative answers for closed questions were clear, well formulated and could be easily marked. For open-ended questions sufficient blank space was provided. Forms were anonymous and they were done without presence of organisers or trainers, in order to motivate participants.

Results received after each of trainings helped us in organising the next ones, specifically in methodology of work and in designing future activities within BONA MENTE programme.

A total of 4 training-workshops for Commissions for Relations among Communities within BONA MENTE programme was organised in Community Development Institute in Tetovo. 92 persons went through the train-

ing out of which 64 were members of Commissions for Relations among Communities. Participants came from 23 municipalities, there were 20 representatives of the nongovernmental sector and 8 media representatives active in these municipalities.

Besides from field facts, CDI Tetovo made the following conclusions:

- the structure of the Commissions for Relations among Communities is feeble,
- it is composed of members who do not know how they were elected,
- in most cases the members are councillors as well
- the members do not know the role of their commission and do not see a reason for it unless a conflict situation is present
- the capacity and importance of this commission are unknown for the almost all members of it
- There is a clear need in the Commissions for Relations among Communities for theoretical and practical knowledge for their future operating.

### ***Methodology of activities that should assist the region***

Having in mind interethnic relations in the Balkans during the last 15 years, this model of forming commissions for relations among communities on the local level is useful for areas where several ethnic communities live together. This is specifically important in those environments where ethnic groups that represent a majority on the national level are actual a minority on the local level.

These commissions offer the possibility of also involving

representatives of those minorities not represented in the municipal council in decision-making on the local level. Seeing these commissions as advisory bodies to municipal councils or mayors, on issues regarding ethnic relations, can provide an interesting model for other countries in the Balkan region, of course within the framework of local legislation.



***Creation of a network as a support to interethnic dialogue***

# The project „Peace Building Network in the Republic of Croatia“



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## Introduction

Best practices do not exist.

There are good practices, which are good at a certain moment, in a certain field, with certain people and with certain needs in mind. But because of this, good practices or good models cannot just be copied and applied. They can serve as an example of successful recognition and addressing of existing needs, and thus as an inspiration and motivation.

The purpose of this essay is to show the importance of the creation of a network of organisations that deal with the development of peace, and to present a way in which joint actions support interethnic dialogue. It will also present the creation of Peace Building Network Croatia and its key achievements so far.

## How the creation of a network contributes to work on interethnic dialogue

Work on interethnic dialogue is work with people in communities where different ethnicities exist – work

on a *grassroots* level. To facilitate a dialogue means to gain the confidence of people and to motivate them to give dialogue and to listening to each other a chance. Therefore direct contact and continuity are essential for achieving results.

Due to this, activities of organisations in their communities are crucial for increasing the number of people involved in dialogue in that community in spite of doubts, distrust, pain and traumas that they carry with themselves. Recognising work on interethnic dialogue as a precondition for progress in local communities can support the extremely sensitive process of creating trust.

Because of the extreme sensitivity of this process and the numerous obstacles organisations dealing with interethnic dialogue face every day (conflicts with political options that support division of communities, pressures of your own ethnic group, labels "traitor" or "foreign hireling"), the organisations need the support of similar organisations through these hardships.

Work on improving the level of interethnic dialogue cannot be observed separately from the burning, everyday issues of a community, especially with regard to the aftermath of war, for example in solving issues of war crimes; violations of human rights; work with trauma (both war veterans and civilians), exercise and protection of rights of national, religious and other minorities; repatriation of refugees, displaced persons etc; establishment of the rule of law; reconstruction of houses, infrastructure, economy; opening new jobs, i.e. work on all those problems that post-war communities are facing.

For example, a person from a post-war community whom you invite to join your interethnic dialogue project can

have the following profile: the wife of a war veteran declared missing, with two children and without a job, with a house which is still not rebuilt so she lives in a rented apartment and suspects that her first neighbours of different nationality know what happened to her husband but do not want to say it. Or a young man who during the war was 3 years old and now cannot find a job, in spite of the higher education he possesses, because he is a member of minority and due to his name everyone can tell "who and what he is". The few available jobs are kept for members of the majority. He has a girlfriend of a different nationality and because of that he argues with his parents and friends, not even mentioning hers. These are just some interconnected problems that members of divided communities who you want to involve in dialogue can have.

It is highly unlikely that one organisation can successfully manage all these issues. However, it has to have them always in mind and create partnerships with organisations that deal with problems closely related to their area of work.

We can also say that the creation of a network of organisations that deals with building of post-war communities or peacebuilding has the following purposes:

- to influence power institutions on the local and national level through joint actions and advocating the creation of framework/ strategy/ platform for joint action, which would make peacebuilding possible and introduce the public to the necessity of building peace (and interethnic dialogue as well)
- to realise a holistic approach to the interrelated problems of post-war communities through cooperation between organisations that deal with

- various aspects of peacebuilding
- cooperate on projects and programmes
- exchange experience and support
- cooperation with international networks

### Creation of a Network of Organisations: Spontaneous and Organised

The process of creating a network of organisations can happen in a spontaneous or organised way.

The organised creation of a network of organisations can happen when one or more organisations decide to invite other organisations to consider the possibility of associating into a network (formally or informally) and to create a process that would make this possible.

Spontaneous networking is when several organisations together recognise the need for a joint approach in a joint field of work, and invest approximately equal efforts in order to create a network (formally or informally). This is a gradual process.

The Peace Building Network Croatia has been created through a process where the initiative for the creation of a network was taken by one organisation; however that process did not have as its purpose a network of organisations. The desire for joint cooperation came spontaneously, at one of conferences. When the idea had emerged and was accepted, more organisations joined in its realisation. The process from idea to creation of a network of organisations took over two and half years. During that period, the members involved were creating a network identity, a framework of joint actions and undertook several activities.

### What to have in mind when creating a network of organisations:

- **Values:** it is very important that organisations that create a network share same values because everything they undertake together would have those values as their base and their starting point. That is why dedicating time to those values is needed as part of creating your own identity.
- **Common goal:** in creating a network and during its work, it is very important to define the reason/ reasons why organisations are creating that network; what are those common goals they want to achieve and cannot achieve on their own, as individual organisations.
- **Good relations within the network:** network must be based on trust, transparency, involvement and responsibility. The network will never survive and achieve good results if relations among member organisations are disturbed. In every network there are larger and smaller organisations, organisations visible in public and ones that are less visible. Some organisations have been used to working independently for many years and have a strong attitude on certain issues. These organisations face challenges in situations where positions must be agreed on. Due to that, for network members it is very important to recognise these challenges and the possible obstacles involved. The members must consider ways to react in the event of possible discrepancies and conflicts among them.

➤ **Cooperation and efficiency:** every network has a challenge: how to involve its members in decision-making processes and the implementation of decisions, both strategic and everyday ones, and at the same time to work efficiently without members feeling frustrated, or that they are wasting time or possibility for action due to too long processes of consultation and synchronisation. This challenge increases with the number of network members. By involving all interested members in planning and implementation, we create mutual trust, particularly in the initial phases of network creation. However if members do not experience valuable and concrete fruits of their labour, they will fail to see a reason for further existence of the network.

### **Mreža za izgradnju mira (MiM) / Peace Building Network Croatia (PNC)**

Peace Building Network was formed as network of peace organisations from the whole of Croatia.

It consists of 11 organisations:

- Altruist – Centre for Protection of Human Rights and Civil Freedom, Split
- Baranja Civil Centre, Beli Manastir
- Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights, Osijek
- Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb
- Dolphin, Pakrac
- Hoću kući, Knin
- MIRamiDA Centre, Grožnjan
- Nansen Dialogue Centre, Osijek
- Board for Human Rights, Karlovac

- League of Women, Drniš
- Vukovar Institute for Peace Research and Education, Vukovar

**Mission** of MiM is work on peacebuilding in Croatia through defining and advocating key recommendations, and implementation of measures of Platform of Peace Building and principles of Charter on Cooperation in Peace.

#### **Values:**

- Non-violence
- Tolerance
- Solidarity
- Cooperation and dialogue
- Multiculturalism
- Sustainable development
- Responsibility and transparency
- Building of trust and reconciliation
- Inclusion and equality
- Human security
- Respect for human rights
- Respect for international law
- Creativity
- Civil activism and initiative
- Social justice
- Identity
- Respecting individuality

#### **Richness of MiM – what do the member organisations do:**

- Peace activism

- Promotion and protection of human rights and civil freedom
- Promotion and protection or rights of minorities
- Rights of women
- Interethnic dialogue
- Inter-religious dialogue
- Peace work in community
- Work with refugees
- Providing free legal aid
- Monitoring war crime trials
- Work on confronting the past
- Peace education
- Mediation
- Work with veterans
- Volunteerism
- Care for elderly and disabled
- Inter-sector cooperation
- Empowerment of civil society capacities
- Humanitarian aid
- Social responsibility
- Philanthropy and development of trusts

The initiative for the creation of Peace Building Network emerged during the *National Conference on Peace Building and the Prevention of Armed Conflict* (Zagreb, 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2004), a part of a global initiative launched by *European Centre for Conflict Prevention* (ECCP) in response to a challenge from the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan. The Nansen Dialogue Network was the regional initiator of this consultation process for Southeast Europe. Nansen Dialogue Centre, Osijek was the organiser of the project in Croatia. *Centre for Peace Studies* in Zagreb was a partner organisation in this work. Prior to the national conference there were three local conferences for the regions of Slavonia (February

2004), Dalmatia (March 2004) and Central Croatia (April 2004). During the nine months the process lasted, it involved more than 60 nongovernmental organisations/ individuals from Croatia that deal with peacebuilding and the prevention of armed conflict.

The goal of the process was to define the role of civil society organisations in peacebuilding and the prevention of armed conflict, and to explore possibilities for cooperation with other actors in peacebuilding.

The preparatory phase consisted of the following:

- Research and developing a database of organisations in Croatia working on peacebuilding. With the help of partner organisations in Croatia and OSCE, initial data on organisations in Croatia that work on peacebuilding was gathered. Every contacted organisation was asked to list other organisations they knew of that deal with peacebuilding. With the collected data, the database was created.

- Preparation of conferences:

Preparatory meetings were organised in several towns in Croatia (Split, Knin, Zagreb, Osijek, Vukovar, Beli Manastir) where the project was presented and organisations were invited to participate in further design and implementation of it. Also, organisations in question received questionnaires where they were asked how their organisation could contribute to peacebuilding and how they would like to be involved in it.

Working teams were formed in three cities in Croatia: Osijek, Split and Zagreb, where local conferences were planned. Through the volunteer work of

the teams conferences were planned, organised and managed. Each of the conferences strove to deal with topics and respond to needs listed by organisations in the questionnaires.

The idea of the organisers was to create a process which would provide an opportunity for organisations to talk about important issues for them, starting with the needs they have in the field, and to steer this process in the direction they feel would lead to results. Such a process demanded a lot of time, energy, patience and negotiation skills; however, all these efforts led to very important results.

- Local conferences:

The goal of local conferences was to respond to particularities in peace development in three different regions in Croatia (Slavonia and Barania, Central Croatia and Dalmatia). Invitations to attend conferences were sent to representatives of local self-governments, political parties, religious communities, academics etc. as well as representatives of organisations. At the local conferences recommendations were adopted to further peacebuilding, and representatives were elected to present the conclusions and recommendations from the local conferences at the national conference.

- National conference:

The national conference gathered representatives from the whole of Croatia who presented conclusions from the local conferences and discussed important issues relating to peace building on the national level, and how some of the recommendations

could be put into practice. At the closing it was said that organisations that dealt with peacebuilding in Croatia possessed great knowledge, skills and long years of experience in peace building, but that there had not been sufficient cooperation between them. The decision was made to form an initial group that would represent a base for establishing a template of future cooperation and implementation of conclusions and recommendations of the conference.

**From Initiative to Formal Network – Major Accomplishments:**

In a two and a half year period (May 2004 – December 2006), the Peace Building Network gradually developed its identity, membership, programme and organisation; cooperated with other organisations and networks in Croatia, in the region and internationally, including representatives of institutions on the local and the national level. Finally on 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, Peace Building Network in Zagreb held their initial assembly where the decision was made to transform it into a formal network of organisations, and to launch the process of registration.

Here are some major accomplishments of Peace Building Network:

➤ Platform for Peace Building in the Republic of Croatia

The major accomplishment of Peace Building Network is development of a document called Platform for Peace Building.

From the national conference in 2004 and onwards network members worked on drafting the Platform for Peace Building. The platform was finalised and published in 2005 with financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway and the OSCE mission. The platform was promoted at the *1st National Conference on Peacebuilding in the Republic of Croatia* held in December 2005 in Vukovar.

Platform for Peace Building is a programme of practical recommendations that provides a basis for cooperation and represents a body of action for peace activists in Croatia for the following five to ten years and an opportunity to involve a number of actors from other social circles. Platform for Peace Building was supported by 38 nongovernmental organisations, 5 municipalities and two towns in the Republic of Croatia.

#### Aims/functions of Platform:

- Inspiration for new long-term initiatives
- Connecting and coordinating existing projects
- Mutual support and learning
- Promoting peaceful civil initiatives on the local level
- Involvement of new partners, especially local self-governments
- Influence on local policy-making
- Influence on national policy-making
- Influence on international organisations operating in Croatia

Platform for Peace Building contains values and principles which represent the foundations of its work, and recommendations and measures for peacebuilding in Croatia are divided in following fields of work:

- Peacebuilding and educational policy
- Peacebuilding and policy of dealing with the past
- Peacebuilding and development policy
- Peacebuilding and security policy
- Peacebuilding and policy of protection of human and minority rights and freedom of belief
- Peacebuilding and gender equality policy
- Peacebuilding and culture of public dialogue and democracy
- Peacebuilding and foreign policy

Platform for Peace Building is a living document which means that its content is not *carved in stone* but represents a starting point for discussion and dialogue, for expressing various stands and opinions.

#### ➤ 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Peace Building in the Republic of Croatia

The conference held on 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2005 in Vukovar, under the patronage of City of Vukovar and financially supported by Mission of OSCE in Croatia, had over 120 attendees. The attendees were from all Croatian districts, except ones of Istarska and Primorsko-goransko, most of them from areas of Croatia affected by the recent war.

The objectives of the conference were: promotion of Platform for Peace Building in the Republic of Croatia; involvement of participants and defining their roles, and creation of partnership for implementation of the platform; finalising and adoption of implementation plan of Platform for 2006.

The participants signed the Charter on Cooperation

in Peace Building at the conference. 57 organisations and individuals, 6 municipalities and 5 towns signed the charter.

➤ Two study visits to Nansen Academy in Lillehammer – Peace and Public Policy Building – Implementation in Post-War Areas

8<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2005 and 13<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2006 Lillehammer, Norway

The study visits were conceived of as a support to work of Peace Building Network through involvement of representatives of self-governments in our work. Study visits gathered 24 representatives of self-governments and nongovernmental organisations from 6 towns in Croatia (two per local self-government and two per NGO from each town): Beli Manastir, Osijek, Vukovar, Knin, Karlovac, Drniš. One of the major objectives of the visit was initiating cooperation on peacebuilding in each of these communities.

The study visit was organised by Nansen Dialogue Centre Osijek and Nansen Academy in Lillehammer, with financial support of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

➤ Work on inner Capacity Building of Peace Building Network and Formalisation of the Network

After two years of informal networking activities, we recognised a need for developing a clearer identity for the network, the development of its organisational structure, defining roles and responsibilities of the members, decision-making processes and models of communication within the network and towards external partners and actors, and development of

programme guidelines for our work.

In the period from May to December 2006 with financial support of AED, Peace Building Network had three meetings and adopted the following documents:

- Strategic and Operative Plan of Peace Building Network
- Document on Organisational Structure
- Document on Models of Communication within the Network and Towards Partners and Actors

The members of Peace Building Network signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and worked on preparation of network's Code of Ethics.

The members of Peace Building Network reached a decision on formalising and registering the network in order to seize the full potential for development and work. In order to achieve this, the members of developed Statutes of Peace Building Network and other documents needed for formal registration and organised an initial assembly which took place on 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2006 in Zagreb.



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## E-learning: Online programme “School of tolerance - ethnic and religious communities in a period of transition”

**B**elgrade Open School (BOŠ) is a non-governmental, non-profit, educational organisation that contributes general development of society through additional education and training of carriers of social changes, research and development of public policies with the purpose of building a modern community based upon democratic values. Already in 1993 BOŠ was established, and its founders, students, lecturers and associates have been active participants in many dramatic events and profound changes in recent Serbian and Balkan history. During these 13 years, BOŠ has, along its original activity of additional postgraduate studies in social and humanistic sciences for talented students, formed a number of centres that developed various educational research and other activities in diverse fields of social life. The project presented in this essay, has been conceived and realised by Centre for Religious Studies (**CIRel**), using the experience and capacities gained by earlier projects and through the activi-

ties of Centre for Research of Information Technologies (CePIT).

CIRel has got six years of experience in providing additional education related to various aspects of religious life, support to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation in countries of the West Balkans, organising (round-table)conferences, panel discussions and educational programmes. One of the most significant activities of CIRel, „Religions of the Balkans“, had a duration of one year and was divided into three educational cycles. During the period of 2001-2004, a network of attendees and lecturers was created and supported. This network consisted of more than 80 young persons of various vocations and educational profiles, religious and ideological qualification (theologians, religion teachers, students, peace and other social activists, politicians and journalists) as well as 37 lecturers (university professors, theologians, experienced NGO activists), representing more than 50 organisations and institutions (religious communities, NGO, parties, media, educational institutions etc.) from 35 towns across BH, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia.

CePIT is committed to the research and development of the information society through empiric research of mutual impact of information – communication technologies and various segments of modern society (till this day 5 of these researches have been conducted in Belgrade, Serbia and capitals of Southeast Europe), promotion of issues related to information society in the public sphere (seminars, campaigns of public advocating, panel discussions), support to electronic publishing. Another very important issue for the project presented here is the development and conducting

of the so-called e-learning educational programmes (education „on distance“, i.e. the use of opportunities provided by the internet as a medium). Within a period of five years CePIT performed 13 of such programmes.

## **HOW THE IDEA CAME UP**

The experiences and capacities of these two centres of BOŠ were recognised as an outstanding possibility to combine two occurrences which significantly determined contemporary societies in the region of former Yugoslavia: Religion and ethnicity on one side and the open communication and intensive educational processes with use of information and communication technologies on the other. The consequences of inter-ethnic conflicts in the region (one can misinterpret it as religious conflicts too) during the 1990's are unfortunately still visible: Thousands of deads, hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons, vast areas struck with “ethnic cleansing”, hundreds of destroyed or damaged, some of them religious, objects. A tall and firm wall has been built between the nations and the religious communities, and the cohesion of the region as one has been almost completely destroyed. Armed conflicts as such are the consequences of a low level of knowledge and the lack of understanding. They seriously disturbed the flow of information and knowledge, they shattered mixed communities on the local level, they caused interethnic and inter-religious intolerance, the evident lack of interest for different types of religious and cultural heritage (in some cases even the repulsion towards it), a misinterpretation of one's own religion and open hostility towards other's etc. Years after the ending of armed conflicts, the mutual trust and reconciliation, the open and free communication,

including the one of educational character, are still at the very beginning, even though they represent the only paths to development of healthy multicultural societies. Learning about one's own religious and cultural community as well as about the other's, which should be understood and respected, means the gaining of a wide range of information that determines each of them: History, culture, institutions and organisational structure, customs and holidays etc.

One of the causes of this situation, and the inadequate qualifying of recent armed conflicts, can be found in the religious communities themselves, whose representatives often did not have capacities to successfully confront those challenges. Without any prior experience of how to operate in an environment of democratic institutions, religious communities were caught by surprise with its introduction during the 1990's (like most of the other social actors) and failed to face the social reality of time and the significance of their own role and responsibilities in it. In addition to that, the communistic heritage had completely denied the role of religious communities in public life and their possibility to act as organisations of civil society. The problems that violently culminated in the 1990's were not created in the beginning of that period. Former Yugoslavia was a country where the communistic regime by law had banned the role that religious communities would have in stable democratic societies. Faith was violently suppressed, exclusively in the sphere of personal belief, while institutions of the system insisted upon atheism as an inevitable precondition for any active involvement in political and social life in the country. Such approach led to alienation of a large part of the population from religious (and sometimes even ethnic) heritage, and

in some cases to complete loss or at least neglect of own identity. The result was an occurrence in the beginning of the 1990's, when Yugoslavia dissolved and the civil wars started, the easiest way of inciting wars and strengthening power for authoritarian regimes at the time, was to manipulate with religion and ethnicity, being the most painful and weakest points of a wide population.

Another important aspect of the social role and treatment of religion in the region is the deep division among the bulk of almost all traditional religious communities and also a big part of the wider intellectual, academic and activist circles in all countries formed within the territory of former SFRJ. These two very influential groups of social actors most often address each other with serious accusations that "the other" played a key role in tragic events and processes in the region during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, these allegations are almost always sent in a form of statements or another indirect shape of communication, with an almost complete absence of true dialogue, public debate of different actors or attempts to get to know or understand the other side. Most of the harsh ideological clashes of these social groups is not a result of open, interactive confrontations of their views on the world, which might lead to findings related to their irreconcilability based on reality, but the result of some ideologically founded prejudices deepened by "dialogue" between persons of the same opinion. This implies that walls have been built not only between but also within ethnic and religious communities. Unfortunately, some distinguished laymen intellectuals in the countries of former Yugoslavia consider a complete exclusion of religious communities from social and public life as the only valid proof of their true au-

tonomy from the state institutions, being prescribed by all constitutions in the region. Such an a priori negative attitude toward religions is also one of the repercussions of a multi-decade communistic regime and its influence on the intellectual and social atmosphere. Certain circles within religious communities tend to see a verification of the fall of the communistic regime exclusively in the will of current political players in their addressing to the public and actions to peremptorily be in service to religious dignitaries and authorities. It is conditioned with comprehension of society and politics typical for undemocratic regimes that only vary in different ideological symbols. This situation is often used by extreme groups to demonstrate that there are unavoidable severe divisions within and among societies, because out of these divisions they exploit their political legitimacy and provide sustainability and influence on the political scene.

### **PROJECT „INTERNET AS AN INSTRUMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA “**

In the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2004 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2005 the two mentioned centres of BOŠ conducted the project, „Internet as an Instrument of Religious Studies and Reconciliation Process in Former Yugoslavia “. The centres were motivated by the general situation and got financial support from the Dutch foundation Pax Christi Nederland. A virtual space on internet was constructed, offering the possibility and technical support for a presentation of all religious communities in BH, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia (including Kosovo and Metohija), information on their studies, history, cultural heritage, activities,

organisational structure etc. – website under name of „Religion – Knowledge – Peace“ (<http://veraznanjemir.bos.org.yu/> or [www.bos-dijalogzamir.org](http://www.bos-dijalogzamir.org)). This is the first web directory in the countries of former Yugoslavia which presents most of the different religious and laymen initiatives (launched by governmental institutions and civil society) in the area dedicated to prevention of conflict, peace-building, social development and religious/multi-confessional education, local and international legislatives that regulate position of religious communities, maintenance of religious and ethnic cultural heritage, human and minority rights, institutions in charge of implementing such acts, religious and media as well as competent educational institutions.

This project has a wide spectrum of objectives: The use of information – communication technologies in religious education, support to inter-religious reconciliation processes and cooperation in the region, clarification of the role of religious communities in civil society and their relations to other social actors, presenting mentioned peace and other initiatives directed to support synergic effect of their activities, monitoring, statistical analysis on media coverage of topics related to various aspects of religion and religious life of the Western Balkans and their influence on societies of the region (primarily through the monitoring of electronic issues of influential daily press, clipping included). All objectives are focused on assisting the establishment of stable peace in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies in former Yugoslavia. At the end of the project a publication was issued i.e. a record of texts, named as the website where they were originally published, in order to expand the range of users to those individuals and groups who still do not use internet as a tool in

exchange of ideas and the gaining of knowledge. The texts are essays of experts in various fields of the projects, interviews and conclusions of debates led in an internet forum. Authors, moderators and participants of the debates are members of almost all notable religious groups present or significant schools of thought. The publication was disseminated largely to (over 500) institutions competent for the above mentioned activities related to religion and reconciliation, and two press conferences were held, in December 2004 and in June 2005. A segment of the website is translated into English, in order to provide a source of valuable facts for an interested audience outside the region.

As a medium of explicit democratic potential, offering possibility to overcome physical and administrative boundaries, the internet offers access to a wide and very heterogenic audience. Anyone with computer and internet access is a possible user of this presentation of religious communities, peace initiatives, political, educational and other aspects of religion and ethnicity, can play an active role in its development, according to own interests. As the website was constructed, BOŠ invited the foundation of Pax Christi Nederland and all partners (priests, theologians, peace and other social activists and NGO, political parties, professors and students from universities, media, employees of public administration etc.) to an active participation in its development and a share of information on its existence with colleagues and partners.

The staff at the Belgrade Open School believe that people deserve and have the rights to be informed, to receive elemental quantities of knowledge on religious and ethnic identity matters and on their role in mod-

ern civil society, in order to be less liable to frequent manipulation with identities. People have the right to confront stands, beliefs and ideas that are not dominant in their society, place of living or institutional surrounding, what rarely is a case in Balkans. In that light, people from BOŠ believe that the only correct and sustainable positive transformation of instability and insecurity, due to that mostly confronted and hostile identities (still a predominant scenario in former Yugoslavia) development of a stable and defined sense of belonging not to some ethnic or religious community, or ideological/value-based school of thought, without resent or fear of others i.e. different ones.

### **PROJECT "SCHOOL OF TOLERANCE – ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN A PERIOD OF TRANSITION"**

During the implementation of „Internet as an Instrument of Religious Studies and Reconciliation Process in Former Yugoslavia“, the project team of CIREl gained important experience, especially from forum debates.. By comparing the statistical data on the number of visitors of forum and the active participants in the forum debates, it was concluded that the former amount was ten times higher than the latter. The estimation is that this was a consequence of guidelines given to moderators in sense of maintaining a high level of theoretical debating and academic style and language of communication. Those instructions were given in order to avoid an aggressive and common tone of the debate which often can be found in forums dedicated to identity issues.

Namely visitors of internet forums dedicated to political and similar topics high level of emotive identification of debate participants can notice stands expressed rarely in vis-à-vis debates, not even formulated in pre-elections or other TV duels or addressing from the parliamentary tribune, broadcasted by television. A great part of stances found in forums stand off with aggression even from public addressing of political and religious leaders, even in environments marked by intolerance and conflicts. The cause of such occurrence is probably anonymity, a privilege of internet forum participants, especially those commercial ones, where the number of visitors is more important than the level, the character and the consequences of the debate.

Anonymity not only incites a more aggressive tone and crude vocabulary than in discussions where participants are present under their real names, but often there emerge representatives advocating systems that are in extreme minority among the general population. Beside anonymity i.e. the possibility of bringing up ideas which are unacceptable from the point of view of the system of values of the majority without a risk of judgement, explanations for these occurrences we can look for in presumption that supporters of such attitudes are simply more present among internet users than in the population in general. Such an explanation can be interpreted in two ways. It is possible that those supporters following a minor and counter-systematic points of views have recognised internet as an instrument of breaking the isolation they have been exposed to by institutions and the majority of the population in democratic societies, to infiltrate to a bigger number of potential supporters, so among internet users they are disproportionally present. The reason for this developed

motivation may be due to their belonging to small and isolated groups, strongly coloured by identity and who consider their identity as being threatened and to defend it, which makes them more eager to make use of new technologies. This is present in former Yugoslavian territories where extreme groups keen to violence motivated by identity in last years noticeable but too slowly move from official institutions to margins of present society. Those groups are therefore more frequent on the internet, adopting models of behaviour and communication which are typical for similar circles in democratic societies.

The project team faced a dilemma – how to expand the number of active participants of debates outside a closed circle of interested experts in order to enrich them by presence of protagonists of number of diffused system of ideas, schools of thought and personal opinions. At the same time the question is how to set some non-administrative obstacles to an aggressive, exclusive or simply vulgar approach to issues that deserve better. The project team decided to apply the experiences from the e-learning educational programmes. The cohesion and interaction within each group/generation of programme attendees, is created by the fact that all of them participate in one coherent and topically structured educational process. This provided a sufficient number of motivated and competent (thanks to a professionally conducted selection) participants of debates who already posed and showed interest in sharing their well defined points of views with the other participants. The engagement of lecturers, who were obliged to prepare and submit material, unlike to moderators in the project above of CIREl, provided the necessary and elementary theoretical cohesion and the academic level of debates,

not restraining vivacity and attractiveness. Of course, the reading of the material is just a preparatory activity for a one-week debate on each topic in forum, during which attendees were obliged to give answers/comments on questions or topic-related theses given by the lecturers. and if needed to ask anything related to topic or challenge their theses expressed in preparatory material or the initial phase of the debate in question.

Along these two types of interaction (texts and forum), the participants had not only the possibility but also the obligation to take part in scheduled chat sessions (once a week) with lecturers, where the interaction moved into a more direct (still virtual) manner. The basic difference is that the communication was in real time and among all present in the chat room. That set a challenge to the session moderators and lecturers and based on previous experiences, the number of participants was limited to no more than six along with moderators and lecturers. This is a limited total number of programme attendees, so by evaluating the effects, one should have in mind what has been the goal – quality and intensity of communication and degree of interaction are necessarily reversely proportional to number of participants, unless we withdraw the time factor from the equation, which, realistically spoken, is an impossible situation.

The participants have the possibility and the responsibility to once a week contribute with new content to their blog – own web presentations technically created by tech team of the project but character and scope of contents are totally up to themselves and their creativity. Their blog-topics can cover programme topics but can also be dedicated to more precise ones, closely

or remotely related with the basic theme of the programme if the participant shows such interest. The participants are recommended to fulfil their responsibilities related to forum and blogs from the beginning of the programme, but an eventual falling behind schedule is not a sufficient reason for losing the certificate. That right is lost by not attending two chat sessions which are unrepeatable like any activity that undertakes the assembling of more members in certain term, even in virtual space.

As described above, CIRel realised the online programme “School of Tolerance – Ethnic and Religious Communities in a Period of Transition” at <http://veraznanjemir.bos.org.yu/tolerancija>. The programme topics were defined to comprehend all important aspects of the impact of religious life on modern society, with special stress on Western Balkans and larger religious communities in this region:

- Religions of Balkans: New Ground for Dialogue, Dr Milan Vukomanović
- Orthodoxy and Other Religions, Mr Aleksandar Đakovac
- Islam and Other Religions, Mr Ahmet Alibašić
- Catholicism and Other Religions, Dr Andrija Kopilović
- Religious Communities and Civil Society, Milorad Bjeletić
- Forms of Participation of Religious Communities in Political Life, Milan Sitarski
- The Balkan Border Line of Religions, Srđan Barišić
- The Building of Religious and National Identities on Balkans, Dr Slobodan Marković
- Politics and Religion on Balkans, Mr Vladimir

- Petrović
- Balkans' Religious Traditions Facing the Post-Modern Sense of Religion, Mr Miroslav Keveždi
  - European Identity and Religious Communities, Mr Vladimir Pavićević
  - Religion and War, Sršan Barišić

This programme, first of its kind realised in this centre, was to some extent different than previous ones, done and used as models by CePIT. Firstly, the initial (real) meeting of all participants and lecturers with the project team was not foreseen in its implementation, as it is normally practiced in order to strengthen the cohesion and the additional motivation for the interaction of a group. Later it was shown that this had some negative effects. For example, CePIT's eight-week programme „Information Society II“, which was implemented in spring 2006 with an initial meeting, 20 out of 21 participants passed the course successfully. The programme presented here, and based on the initial assessment of the project team that quitting would be big. The course was launched with 24 participants of which 18 participants completed, showing a drop-out of 25%. One must have in mind that the duration of School of Tolerance was 12 weeks, which is almost 50% longer than similar prior activities. The intention was to substitute a live meeting and provide the participants a more intensive interaction, exchange of opinions and knowledge with lecturers and among themselves. This effect was achieved, judging by the amount and the scope of texts, which lecturers and participants posted in forum, whereas the unwanted effect of the drop-out was the inevitable consequence of duration and prolongation of the programme. The amount and scope of the texts gradually decreased after the first few weeks, during which the intensity of activities went above what one has noted in previous online programmes.

An additional problem of implementation in this kind of programmes is the low percentage of people that have mustered necessary skills to use tools of on-line communication in order to respond in fullness to the responsibilities of lecturers above. This problem becomes even more evident when we recruit lecturers that possess the needed skills among experts in more or less clearly defined themes. The system and the human resources policies of universities and research institutes conditioned the presence of somewhat senior researchers among top experts for social studies, where the potential pool of lecturers for Belgrade Open School is. According to statistics on use of internet, not only in the Balkans, the older population is less inclined to use this tool than younger people, both for private and professional purposes and even among intellectuals and researchers. This problem in online programmes of BOŠ is solved with initial meetings, where lecturers who are less keen on using the internet address participants. In regard with the School of Tolerance programme, this problem is resolved only thanks to the above mentioned widely spread network of young associates of CIRel, among whom some managed to become eminent experts despite their relatively short careers.

The network of present associates and partner organisations not only CIRel and CePIT but also other centres of BOŠ, was built over the past decade and as such it provided some extremely positive experiences in recruitment of participants for this project. For the programme announcement and the competition for participation no money was spent on advertisements in printed or electronic media, a cost which would normally be of significance in the budget of similar projects. The only tool of advertising was the Outlook Express. The



associates and partner organisation of BOS received an invitation to participate in programme and to forward the invitation to their partners and associates and/or to post it on their websites if they had any. The effect was that after sending 640 e-mails, 89 candidates applied. In a rather economical way, almost 4 candidates competed for the seat of one participant, a situation which provided us a selection of participants of high standard. While selecting, the team had in mind the proportional representation of participants, in sense of territorial, ethnic and religious affiliation, gender equality and the need to adequately involve candidates from academic circles, political structures and NGO activists.

The most challenging moment came, when a group of internet users, not being part of our group, involved in the debate in forum. After initial surprise of the participants and project team, from the content of posted messages it became clear that new visitors presented themselves as followers of Serbian Orthodox Church, advocating that the interaction with other religious communities in the process of mutual understanding and reconciliation, including ecumenical dialogue, is fatal to the purity of learning of the SOC and its interests as well as for the entire Serbian people. Soon enough, we were informed by one of our lecturers that these were "his true" followers, following him from his own internet forum. They had been excluded because of language and behaviour, including the insult of church leaders. Now, they were setting up their own forum, where they continued the development of their thesis, however with a rather limited circle of people, sharing their extreme stands. Having observed the ongoing activities of this online lecturer, members of that group caught a wind of his involvement in CIRel programme

and used our forum to continue their attacks on him and ones, who shared his views, what resembled to their forum. Provocative questions, some of them insulting, were addressed to other lecturers of this programme, so the true question of how to react in this situation was raised before the members of project team.

There were technical possibilities for the forum administrator to deny access to unwanted visitors, but the project team decided not to peruse that course of actions avoiding to give them an argument that can be used in favour of the basic thesis of the new participants – this debate of members of various religious and other systems of belief and ideas is futile, senseless and wasteful, and in sense of open, sincere and benevolent exchange of stances and beliefs – even impossible. On the other hand, it was not acceptable to allow them to post provocative messages to the lecturers on already well covered topics and not possible to be answered regularly nor was admissible to leave those messages unanswered. The following solution was recognised as the least bad: Those lecturers were asked to answer to already posted questions and afterwards those topics were locked i.e. all participants were denied further posting there. The new visitors were explained that this was done for technical reasons and that this action did not represent any form of censorship nor restriction from participation, for but it was technical (not thematic or content) , redirecting to small number of recently open forums in order to allow moderators to perform their function successfully. Interestingly, the enthusiasm of those visitors declined significantly after introducing new measures and after a few days, practically only one of them was still active in communication with certain participants and project coordinators. Considering the

realistic possibilities of one individual to lead a meaningful communication with more persons at same time, it did not come as a surprise, when after one week the last of them stopped any further participation in the forum. It is an interesting fact that after the intrusion the programme participants, who initially showed significant differences in stands, as a result of the criteria applied in the selection period, became coherent in later debates.. This even led to the erosion of earlier differences among them and sometimes to a “frontal” approach, perhaps unfortunately addressed to the only visitor who, at least, showed a declarative will to debate.

Based on previous experience and analysis of described problems, Belgrade Open School has the intention of pursuing further development and implementation of these programmes, as well as to the exchange of experiences with other organisations in the region that want to implement them or at least plan to begin with. One of the most important motive in that direction is the perspective of developing the internet structure in the Western Balkan countries, what must lead to amplifying effects of all online activities to a wide population, which at the moment is still on the wrong side of the „digital division line“.