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## **Report of the Youth and Peace Education Network of Pax Christi International 2000-2004**

### **1. Dialogue and Exchange**

#### 1.1. South East Europe

In the period covered by this report, local organisations grew stronger and most responsibilities were shifted from international to local staff. The project in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which volunteers assisted with the daily work of local NGOs in refugee camps, ended in June 2003 as a result of the enormous decrease of refugees in and around Zenica. The responsibility for the ongoing initiatives was handed over to the municipality. In Banja Luka (Republika Srpska/Bosnia-Herzegovina) the responsibility for the project was taken over by a local organisation, Mirna Luka, in 2004.

In October 2003, a wide range of civil society organisations linked with Pax Christi from all over South East Europe as well as from some EU countries participated in the seminar "Empowerment of Local Civil Society working for Peace in South East Europe" in Vukovar, Croatia. The main aim of this seminar was to develop a Pax Christi network of local organisations. Participants explored the challenges for young people in South East Europe, exchanged information and good practice and developed new joint initiatives. These were further worked out during more practically oriented training sessions.

In 2003, different cross-border youth activities took place. In August 2003, a 'Peace bus' visited Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia. The aim of this exchange, entitled "Identity between Religion and Nation", was to present concrete projects on reconciliation and peace building by young people to young people from different countries in Europe and South East Europe. Two seminars, on "Youth in Dialogue" in Kosovo in July 2003 and on "Youth and Transition" in Sarajevo in August 2003, brought together youth from Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. In both seminars a different group of participants dealt with challenges facing youth in South East Europe, such as culture, identity and social inequality.

Links with other platforms have been made during the European Youth Forum seminar on "Future Strategy for South East Europe" in Poddvor, Slovenia, June 2004. Participants assessed the current situation of young people and youth NGOs in their countries. At the end of the seminar, participants stressed the necessity of better mutual communication and of promoting future joint projects.

Next to these regional developments, also the country specific approach was continued. The following are some highlights:

*“Kosovo – Northern Ireland Exchange Project”*

This project started with a seminar in Skopje, Macedonia, in December 2000 attended by young Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland and representatives from the different communities in Kosovo. In 2001, several follow-up meetings within the Kosovar group took place in four towns and a seminar during which the Kosovar participants continued their discussions about reconciliation and dialogue and created their own organisation, KONI. With the support of Pax Christi, they developed and trained in different towns mixed groups of people able to promote tolerance and to implement peace-building activities in their communities. In December 2001, a visit of the Kosovar group to Northern Ireland took place.

*“Serbia-EU: from exclusion to integration”*

A conference on *“Serbia-EU: from exclusion to integration”* took place in Brussels and The Hague in March 2001. It brought together a selected group of young Serbian, Belgian and Dutch politicians and NGO-representatives. Pax Christi organised this conference in order to create an effective dialogue between the European institutions and young Serbian politicians, hoping to integrate their country into the EU in the future. The group met with Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, World Bank, NATO as well as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. In preparation, four seminars had been organised in different Serbian cities in December 2000. As a follow-up, the project ‘Democracy and Human Rights in European Integration and Regional Co-operation’ was conducted by Pax Christi Netherlands in co-operation with the Centre for the Development of Serbia. This project aimed to provide organisations interested in European integration with the necessary knowledge and tools, and to connect them with their counterparts in Belgium and the Netherlands. As part of this project, a summer school “On the Road to Europe” took place in Serbia in 2002.

*“Peace Unlimited”*

A big peace festival was organised by Pax Christi and its local partners in Macedonia, September 2001. This festival was part of Peace Unlimited, a nation wide campaign for peace that started on 24 March 2001 with Rock for Peace, where Albanian and Macedonian bands performed together for a mixed audience of thousands of youngsters.

*“Colore”*

The “Colore” project in Benkovac, Croatia, aims at making the many skills of the people living there more visible. Based on interview with more than 300 families, interest groups were formed to promote exchange among the people in the hope to encourage people to take steps towards reconciliation. In the future, partnerships with similar groups in the EU will be created. Another project is the publishing of the bilingual German-Croatian Benkolist, a newspaper edited by young people. It reports on daily life, culture, environment and sports in Benkovac. Each summer, a two-week youth exchange takes place, alternatively in Germany and Croatia, focusing on intercultural learning.

## 1.2. Commonwealth of Independent States

In August 2001 and 2002, International Routes took place in Northwest Russia. During these 'travelling exchanges', participants visited St. Petersburg, Moscow, smaller cities such as Novgorod and Pskov, as well as the autonomous region of Karelia in Northern Russia. In each of these cities participants met youth NGOs, charitable and human rights organisations and representatives of various religions involved in reconciliation work and non-violent conflict resolution. These visits helped participants, and especially those who had never been before to Russia, to understand more profoundly Russia, its inhabitants, and their traditions in order to step over prejudices, thus contributing to the creation of a culture of peace and non-violence. A special place visited during each routes is the Sologubowka cemetery in Lezye, in a village near St. Petersburg (see also point 7).

In 2004, study visits have been made to other parts of the CIS. In April 2004, a visit was made to Belarus. The aim of this visit was to assess the possibility to start with a pilot project on peace education in one or two Byelorussia schools. Good contacts with Georgian organisations were developed during a visit of Ms Sandra Saakashvili, the wife of the Georgian president, to Pax Christi in October 2004 and during the European Youth Forum seminar in Georgia, also in October 2004. The latter event focuses on how to improve the co-operation between the Central and Eastern European youth organisations as well as with partners from other parts of Europe.

## 1.3. Euro-Mediterranean dialogue

Each year, many visits to the Middle East, as well as of representatives from the Middle East, take place. The aim of these visits is to strengthen the links between civil society organisations in both regions.

On the initiative of Pax Christi, representatives of Israeli, Palestinian and European civil society came together in Brussels in June 2002 for a strategic meeting aimed at mobilising more people for a just peace in the Middle East. The programme consisted of two days of closed meetings and a hearing at the European Parliament. Different youth leaders and representatives of NGOs involved in peace education work participated in this meeting.

Two delegations visited the Middle East at the end of 2002 with the aim to start the process of building a regional Pax Christi network of local peace education organisations. The first delegation visited Lebanon, Syria and Jordan to explore possibilities for concrete co-operation with local NGOs in those countries. The second delegation visited youth and educational groups as well as human rights organisations in Israel and Palestine.

The first major step in this network was the seminar "Promotion of Peace Education in the Euro-Mediterranean Region", Beirut, Lebanon, December 2003, which addressed issues of peace and non-violence, civil and political rights, women as peacemakers, democracy and education. A study visit to Israel and Palestine preceded the seminar in Beirut. The participants in this study visit organised round tables in different cities and made an exposure visit to so-called 'Security Wall' around Qalqilyah. During the study visit and the seminar, participants emphasised on adopting and peaceful means for dispute settlement, giving special attention to peace education. The importance of dialogue was also stressed, since ignorance is the major component of misunderstanding between different factions in the community.

On the level of youth exchanges, good contacts were developed with a Syrian NGO. A representative of the Youth Forum participated in July 2003 in the annual summer hiking tour, aimed at gathering youth from different backgrounds. While hiking in small groups, the participants exchanged on the central theme of the activity: how to overcome 'suffering'. At regular intervals, activities involving all the participants together were organised as well. In 2004, a co-ordination team for the project "School of Communication", composed of Pax Christi International and some of its Member Organisations, has been set-up. This school is an online course enabling youth from Europe and the Mediterranean region to explore intercultural communication between Europe and the Arab/Islamic world.

In order to link its activities with those of other networks, the Pax Christi Youth Forum was present at the launching event of the Euro-Mediterranean youth platform in Malta in September 2003 as well as in a specialised training course in Jordan, March 2004.

#### 1.4. Northern Ireland

Each summer during the 'Marching Season', the British and Irish member organisations recruit volunteers for play schemes organised by local organisations throughout Northern Ireland in order to provide children with constructive alternatives to the violence in the streets. The schemes in which Pax Christi was involved took place in Belfast, Dungannon and Ballyduff. In August 2002 and 2004, young people of the Flemish member organisation engaged in an exchange project with youth organisations from Northern Ireland. The focus was to learn more about the conflict, and the different actors and factors that play a role, including religion, the paramilitary organisations and the police.

## **2. Conflict Management, Prevention and Non-violence**

### *Russian Federation*

In 2003 and 2004, Pax Christi and the Soldiers Mothers of St Petersburg organised joint projects on "Your Role as a Citizen" and "Peace in the Class", which aimed at enhancing the capacities of Russian youth to stand up for their constitutional rights. Activities included a series of training courses in Belgium and Russia focused on peace education techniques for classroom use, as well as different seminars in Russia aimed at promoting the concept of peace education in the Russian school system. Relevant materials have been translated into Russian. Through these projects, extensive contacts have been made with human rights activists and schoolteachers from Chechnya and the autonomous Komi Republic. They could participate in the various project activities, leading to a reflection process among the participants on violent conflict within the Russian Federation.

### *Media awareness*

An expert of Pax Christi Flanders participated in a meeting of experts on violence in the media, which was organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, June 2003. In October 2003, a Pax Christi dialogue project brought together Serb and Albanian journalists from the divided town of Mitrovica, Kosovo. Due to the tense situation in this town, the seminar itself took place in Ohrid, Macedonia. On the domestic level in Macedonia, Pax Christi continued to support the work of the radio station "Radio Life", which broadcasts the same programmes

in Macedonian and Albanian. This radio station was invited to present its work at a conference on “Media and Conflict”, organised by Pax Christi in the Netherlands in December 2003.

### **3. Refugees, Minorities, Racism and Xenophobia**

An international seminar on “Migrant Realities: Integration and Preservation of Culture” took place in Lisbon, Portugal, April 2000. Participants representing host communities as well as migrant youth living in a EU member state examined and shared the experience of immigrants in a new country, the ways they adapt to a foreign society, and how the host community receives them and their culture. As a follow up, the Portuguese participants and other youth interested met again for a seminar in September 2000, during which they reflected on the meaning of choosing a culture of peace and non-violence as a way of living.

In June 2001 a youth seminar entitled Fremd oder friend took place in Trier, Germany and Echternach, Luxemburg. This seminar dealt with questions of tolerance and xenophobia. Participants concluded that through the exchange of cultures and views of life, and through getting to know each other, prejudices and fears could be reduced.

Pax Christi International participated at the Conference organised by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, Brussels, September 2004. During this conference, the links with organisations working on ethnic minorities in Europe, such as the Roma, were reinforced.

### **4. Peace Education**

#### 4.1. Peace Weeks

Pax Christi member organisations promote a unique model for advancing peace education in a local context through the organization of peace weeks. A peace week begins each year with the selection of a theme related to non-violence, peace and justice. During the peace week itself, events are organised and related literature is distributed in public places, schools and parishes, which raise awareness about issues and inform civil society about what they can do to make a difference. These events have proven effective in attracting public support, media attention, and in affecting local and national political decision-making. Well-established annual peace weeks take place in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Germany.

Pax Christi and organisations in Israel, Palestine, Belgium and the Netherlands organised in 2003 and 2004 a campaign on “Six Days for Justice and Peace” coinciding with the dates of the six days war, 1-6 June. In each country activities were organised promoting knowledge on the occupation and non-violent ways to overcome it. As part of the campaign, a Dutch, Hebrew and Arabic version of a newsletter containing articles by Israeli, Palestinian, European and American analysts was distributed.

Following a preparatory visit to Central Africa in February 2003, partner organisations from the region and Europe gathered in Bukavu, DR Congo, in May 2003, and in Kampala, Uganda, in August 2003 for training sessions on non-violent conflict resolution. These training served to prepare the First Peace Week in Central Africa, which took place in a

number of localities throughout the region during the first week of October. The same organisations met again for an evaluation of the peace weeks and a new training session in Kinshasa, DR Congo, November 2003. The materials gathered during these events were used to promote better understanding about the situation of youth in Africa among their contemporaries in Europe, for instance during workshops on child soldiers organised in the framework of the “Day of the African Child” in Belgium, June 2003.

#### 4.2. Focus on the South

Different projects to send a young person experienced in peace education and community building work, to spend some time abroad in order to assist local organisations in countries in the South have been developed by member organisations. For instance, a young German recruited via Pax Christi Germany spent one year with Pax Christi Philippines.

The Dutch member organisation, which is involved in Colombia since 1988, organised in November 2003 in the framework of the Pax Christi network a youth initiative bringing young people from Europe and Colombia together. As a first activity, a delegation of youth from France, Belgium and the Netherlands made a two-week visit to the Department of Cauca in southwest Colombia. Participants explored the local efforts by young people in the fields of peace building, local democracy and sustainable development.

The local Pax Christi group in Szeged, Hungary, organised a series of open-air games and family programmes in the centre of the city. They used information received via the network of the Pax Christi Youth Forum. The event aimed at raising tolerance and creating positive images about the Third World. This was also the topic of the “How Big Is Your World” youth event, organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in May 2004. During this event, the Pax Christi Youth Forum participated with a steering committee member from South East Europe on the topic of conflict prevention and reconciliation in Europe and the South.

Pax Christi actively participated at the conference “Europe, Youth and Globalisation”, in Strasbourg, May 2004. Under the slogan “How Big Is Your World?” more than 400 young representatives of civil society organisations from across the globe, as well as minority and student associations took part in this seminar which to encourage good governance and protect human dignity worldwide.

#### 4.3 Youth Building Peace

A process of reviewing past activities, and building strategies for the future took place in 2001 and 2002. In November 2001, young members Pax Christi came together in Mainz, Germany, for a seminar on “*Building Peace Day-to-Day*”. Together, they explored why young people become active in civil society and how they can contribute to peace-building projects. In order to enhance the awareness of the similarities and differences in the way young people from other parts of the world are involved in peace-building activities, trainers from India and the Philippines worked with the participants on conflict resolution skills and peace as a lifestyle.

This reflection process was continued during the workshop “*Youth Building Peace*” in Antwerp, Belgium, October 2002. The focus of this workshop was on topics such as ‘motivation to work for peace’ and ‘intergenerational dialogue’.

## **5. Empowerment of Young People**

### 5.1. Reconciliation of Varieties

This aim of this project, called “Reconciliation of Varieties” is the creation of a network of youth leaders able to support youth organisations in borderland regions in Eastern Europe, and to encourage cross-border exchanges, which should break down stereotypes and enhance regional co-operation. Following a study visit in north-eastern Poland, Lithuania and Belarus in February 2001, a regional training course on regional co-operation was organised in June 2001 in Lublin, Poland. During this training course, which started with exposure visits to the former Concentration Camp of Majdanek and exploring the Jewish heritage of the old town of Lublin, participants explore options for concrete co-operation.

### 5.2. Representation

Representatives of the Pax Christi International Youth Forum were present at various international events, including the bi-annual General Assemblies and annual Council of Members of the European Youth Forum, of which it is an observer member and the World Youth Days in Rome 2000 and Toronto 2002. It also participated in several events organised by the Youth and Sports Directorate of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and by the European Parliament in Brussels.

## **6. Reconciliation and Peace Spirituality**

The August 2000 International Route “Meeting Challenges” started in Austria, Italy, Croatia and Hungary. At the end of the week, all participants met in Split, Croatia, for a final weekend sharing their experiences. The themes of this exchange included the status of refugees and the difficult process of returning their homes after a war, social problems, environmental issues, inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue.

Young members of Pax Christi Portugal organised a seminar on Meeting Different Natures: In Dialogue with Creation in September 2000. During this seminar, 20 participants had the opportunity to relate ecology with peace and ecology with religion as they met members of the Portuguese Baha’i community and stayed in a Buddhist Centre located in the mountains of Monchique, in the South of the country. The participants also discussed the topic of globalisation in the sense that it is an irreversible process which can either be a way to further divide the world between rich and poor or a way of bringing people closer, independently of their culture, religion or nationality.

Pax Christi organised in 2001 a tour in Germany and Belgium for the young members of the Pezinok choir, which is closely linked to Pax Christi Slovakia. This choir uses different types of vocal music to spread a message of understanding.

The Pax Christi Youth Forum participated at an expert meeting on “Intercultural Dialogue, Interreligious Dialogue: the Role of Stereotypes and Prejudices” organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in June 2003. It also participated at a debate “Muslim Youth in Europe

today: an enrichment for society!?” organised by the European Youth Forum and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Students Organisations in the European Parliament in Brussels in September 2003. As a direct result of these two events, a group of faith based youth organisations is organising regular meetings aimed at getting to know each other better, and at developing joint projects. In November 2004, the European Youth Forum formally accepted this group as an expert group on Interreligious Dialogue.

## **7. Integrating the past and re-imagining the future**

Each year, participants from different countries participate at the summer work camps in Krzyzowa, Poland. The Polish village Krzyzowa was part of Germany prior to 1945. During the Second World War a German resistance group met here at the home of Helmut James von Moltke. His former estate is now converted into a Youth Meeting Centre. During the camps, participants renovated the park of the estate, and engaged in workshops on the role of young people in constructing European civil society.

In 2001 and 2002, different visits of young Germans linked with local Pax Christi groups to Poland took place. The aim of the visits was to break down the stereotypes about Poland that exist in Germany. Starting from the difficult historical relations between the two countries, during these visits the process of reconciliation was examined. In September 2003 young people belonging to a group from Oswiecim (Auschwitz) studying the atrocities committed in their hometown during the Second World War, as well as the history of their town and of German-Polish relations, travelled to Germany to exchange with German youth groups.

In August 2004, the French member organisation organised a 10-day tour for young people from Verdun over Paris to Caen, visiting some of the major battlefields of both the First and Second World War in France. The participants reflected on the horrors of war and exchanged on the potential of a Europe free of war in the future. And in September 2004, youth from Germany, Austria and Latvia gathered in Riga, Latvia for a summer camp exploring the history of the holocaust in Latvia. They met with holocaust survivors, traced the Jewish history of Riga and visited many places related to the Second World War. Enough time was set aside for personal reflection on the horrors of war.

During the summers of 2003 and 2004, international youth camps in the village of Lezye, near St Petersburg, explored the impact of the Second World War on Russia's relations with Europe. In this region there is still a lot of resentment about the past. As an act of reconciliation, the Orthodox priest of Lezye convinced the local parish to take care of the largest German military cemetery in this part of Russia. He is currently constructing a Peace Park and museum around the cemetery, which is to become a centre of reconciliation. During the camps, participants contributed practically to the construction of the Peace Park. They also visited some of the most significant places linked with the Second World War in the surrounding region, each time meeting with local people, veterans, and historians. During one visit participants engaged in a lively exchange with veterans who had fought on opposite sides in this area more than 60 years ago. It was emotionally moving to see how these people – for some on the German side it was the first time after the war that they visited Russia – overcame their fear and started talking with one another. This exchange was followed by discussions on war and peace inside the group, when the participants of South Eastern Europe spoke about their own war experiences. The 2003 meetings were recorded and a video documenting the camp was prepared.