Course: Challenges of a New Europe
Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary European Societies

April 14-18 2008, **Dubrovnik**

Jovana Dikovic, jokileto@eunet.yu

From Cultural Action Towards Cultural Integration

- Building a cultural dialogue between former Yugoslav regions and Europe through an example of NGO`s project "European Rails Of Peace" -

Introduction

In Central and Eastern European countries the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 marked symbolical beginning of the break from communist ideology and definite collapse of the Eastern bloc. Throughout the same year various political and economic turmoils were first & foremost inspired by mass social unrests, like those in Beijing, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany etc. At that period most countries of communist orientation gradually drifted from the controlled to the free market, thus opening up to the capitalist part of Europe and the rest of the world. That inevitably caused transitional movement towards establishment of democratic principles which guarantee not only more private and public freedom but opportunities as well. The freedom of public speech induced need for greater social responsibility and control over government policy, free manifestation of national identity and improvement of cultural-social life conditions on the whole.

While a major part of the Western world transparently promoted concepts of voluntary, public, non-profit association and civil activism, the other part of Europe did not see the revival of "civil society" or "the third sector" until early nineties of the XX century. In almost all parts of the world, particularly in the most underdeveloped countries, the recent years brought an unstoppable wave of interest in wide range of social institutions which function outside the market and state, creating so-called "revolution of associations" (Toepler and Salamon, 2003).

Throughout repressive policy of sham parliamentarism in Serbia during nineties, the awakening of social conscience save organized political protests, was mostly stifled. Systematic suppression of any opportunity for different opinion, through disrespect for the universal right of the freedom of speech, disregard for the value of political "the other" and laconic usurpation of opposition votes, militant nationalistic and quasi-patriotic atmosphere as well as numerous side-effects of the former regime, created favorable conditions for reconstruction and multiplication of civil society along with institutions, consistent championing of the creation of the open society. And, "just as a lot acne on the face of a boy/girl show puberty, i.e. the transitional period, a lot of non-governmental organizations on the social scene are sign of abandoning a totalitarian government and laborious transition to civil society" (Stojkovic, 2002 : 229).

Civil society epitomizes a high degree of social solidarity and engagement, not only in the spheres of political and social activities but in the sphere of cultural policy, as well. Civil society signifies also social drift away from state-ethnic constructs in form of borders and religious barriers. Civil society aims at supporting diversity, not only of cultures and customs but mentalities, as well, which contributes than attainable multinational and multiethnic dialogue. In that sense, non-profit non-governmental organizations, whose actions are often related to the sphere of civil or citizens' society, although some of them just pro-forma fulfill its demands, epitomize forms of the transnational system and global association of institutions.

A main point of this paper is a description of transnational nature of non-governmental non-profit organizations whose goal is promotion of the values of global society, matching the "non-matchable" and integration of opposed cultures. Broadly speaking, a certain

number of NGOs, which by their activities constitute components of cultural policy, do not act, as it is widely thought, towards abolishing differences, but quite the reverse. By their engagement they endeavor to alter the assumption that potential conflicts could occur due to differences. On the example of the partnership on the project of two non-governmental organizations, one Italian (*The Glocal Forum*) and one Serbian (*Associations of Citizens Kontra*), I will demonstrate one of the modes of international cultural and economic networking, which has involved both - the participants in the project and the institutions themselves. This activities of non-governmental, non-profit, sector immerse European and ex-Yugoslav economic sector and institutions, governments, embassies, Ministries of finance, City Councils of the capitals, local government bodies etc, into the process of establishment of cultural dialogue between states and provinces of the former Yugoslavia on the one side, and Europe on the other. Thus the Yugoslav issue becomes topical anew in the European context. But, on this occasion it is neither inspired by the urge to find the culprit for the disintegration of Yugoslavia nor by the need for political labeling, but by the need for cultural similarities and other needs that Europe and former Yugoslav states have in common.

To that means, the project "European Rails of Peace" induces educational, intercultural and "peacebuilding" initiatives. During one month 15 Albanian students from Kosovo, 15 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 15 students from Serbia respectively have had an opportunity to travel together across Western Europe. Besides other activities, the students have visited theme workshops in several capital cities and get acquainted with principles of functioning, organization and integration of European countries and institutions. Thus, through practice, they have affirmed cosmopolitism and interculturalism, as social desirable behavior patterns both in Europe and the regions of the former Yugoslavia.

The idea of the project "European Rails of Peace" direct us to what, in fact, should be the common goal of European cultural and social policies: international and intercultural cooperation which through accepting differences neutralizes the possibility for "the other" and "different'' to be perceived as a threat to European, and, even, world stability.

I The Project "European rails of peace" As An Example of International Networking of Institutions

Before we become acquainted with one of the examples of international cooperation among non-governmental organizations, state institutions and economic sector I consider it necessary to introduce two non-government associations, The Glocal Forum and Association of Citizens Kontra, and disclose in what social sphere they act, and, consequently, what goals they set. Although non-governmental organizations from Sarajevo and Pristine participated in realization of the project too, in this part of the paper I will introduce only Belgrade non-governmental organization Association of Citizens Kontra, which has functioned as a regional coordinator of the project.

Organizational Concept and Cultural Activities of Assotiation of Citizens Kontra

Assotiation of Citizens Kontra (for more detail about Kontra see www.kontra.org.yu) is a non-profit organization founded by the students of Belgrade University in 2004, aiming through various projects to promote ideas of civil society and cultural cooperation. The management of the organization is based on establishment of local and global partnerships with NGOs, governmental and cultural institutions and economic sector. They are a member of many global youth associations, among them the Network of Organizations Wired[1]. By adopting principles of global social association, they aspire to contribute to creation of global cultural arena where people and ideas circulate frequently.

The activities of this organization quite often cross the boundaries of culture in order to engage in dealing with social issues. Their commitment to the principles of modern democracy, rule of law, observance of human and minority rights, raising awareness of the role the young have in the process of decision-making and the presence in the public, the restoration of socio-cultural dialogue in post-conflict (Yugoslav) regions, greater social mobility etc, are only some of initiatives they set in motion. By media promotion of their activities they try to more transparently influence the change of social landscape in the country.

Organizational Concept and Cultural Activities of The Glocal Forum

The non-governmental organization The Glocal Forum (for more detail about The Glocal Forum see www.glocalforum.org) was founded in 2001 with its main branch in Zurich and operative headquarters in Rome. The Glocal Forum is an international organization that promotes the model of *glocalisation*[2], as a new paradigm of international and innovative

---

[1] Wired Unlimited Cultural Exchange is a network of organisations which creates opportunities and working conditions for young creative artists and thereby encourage cultural growth and exchange.

[2] The term "glocalisation" in its narrow meaning essentialise all the activities of The Glocal Forum: the strengthening of local communities and regional centers and their linking with global resources and networks; initiatives for local and global economic and social progress; promotion of the cooperation between small and great, local and global institutions, etc. In other words, this term in practice presents the synthesis of globalization & localization.

cooperation. Their projects are directed towards striking a balance between the advantages of globalization and preservation of local autonomy on a worldwide scale. By promotion of principles of cooperation "from city to city" local resources are linked, city leaders and young citizens are connected with global resources, and upgrading of professionality is seen as a key element for redressing balance between global progress and local needs. The association of institutions, development of networks and preservation of global balance and stability are the main ideals of this organization.

In a nutshell, this organization has developed seven strategic goals which guide all their activities:

1. Emphasis on the central role of cities in international relations
2. Strengthening of local communities and their mutual connecting with global resources
3. Providing opportunities to local communities for social progress and democratic growth
4. Supporting peace and development initiatives which serve as means of connecting local communities and young people with international companies and institutions
5. Giving young citizens an opportunity to strengthen their role in local and global communities and institutions
6. Gathering young local representatives, who will create sustainable policy for solving local and global issues, around global network
7. The development of strategic activities that promote corporate social responsibility through creation of a unique partnership of private and public institutions.

The social activities of The Glocal Forum are expressed through four basic programs: "We are the Future" is a social and humanitarian program for helping children in poor and underdeveloped countries; "eCitie Network" is an internet program for institutional, technological and financial cooperation of cities throughout the world; "Glocal Youth Parliament" is a program for enhancement and strengthening of the young people`s rights all over the world; "Bridges" is a program which promotes forging of intercultural dialogue through youth meetings organized by The Glocal Forum.

General Concept of the Project "European Rails of Peace"

The Glocal Forum project, in cooperation with Stability Pact for South East Europe and various other partners such as Kontra, saw the daylight in the summer of 2006, and was repeated in the summer of 2007, which leads us to suppose that it is a perennial plan of joining young people from post conflict Balkan regions. The participants of the project, as well as potential future participants, are students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. The idea is for some fifty participants to get to know one another, share experiences and struggle for equal professional opportunities which, in perspective, this project offers during a one-month trip across Europe. Also, through workshops, which have been held in major European cities, students have discussed several pressing political issues which pose hurdles for establishing intercultural dialogue and cooperation, of both - institutions and young people from this area.

The assumption of the project "European Rails of Peace" is that its participants personify the majority of Balkans population that aspires to European integrations and endeavors to overcome the conflict atmosphere. A lot of young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, whatever their educational level, are continually, due to war effects, political instability, great unemployment, unable to travel freely and communicate with the rest of the Western world. Many of them have never even left their countries, and some do not even have passports. The fact that a large number of donors are involved in this project implicitly leads to conclusion that the support to redressing stability in this area is not only political and economic but cultural necessity as well. The selection of participants was conducted on the basis of their academic achievements, and, predominantly, their desire to become part of this initiative. Owing to great financial support of various institutions all participants were provided with a major part of means for accommodation, transportation and food abroad. The Schengen visa and free Inter-Rail fare have promoted, even symbolically, the need for undeterred exchange of cultural values, professional mobility and creation of "boundless", yet authentic, fields of social communication.

Networking and Partnership Network of the Project "European Rails of Peace"

"Network is defined as a special type of association that joins elements - individuals, groups and organizations - which are called network knots. Communication is conducted by means of channels that transmit messages sent and received by some network members respectively" (Dragicevic-Sesic and Stojkovic, 2003 : 275). Therefore, the role of non-governmental organizations is particularly significant for programs of international association of institutions, that are otherwise known as transboarding projects. "It is a fact that in the last ten years (in Serbia - J.D.) precisely these international connections, and what might be even more important, regional connections have been actually preserved through non-governmental organizations. They have most often created bridges instead of links broken on official levels" (Vujadinovic, 2002 : 238).

Despite the fact that cooperation in ex-Yugoslav region has been significantly impaired by recent wars, with the help of The Glocal Forum`s strategy of cooperation "from city to city", regional institutions joined the network of international partnership relations. This has also significantly improved communication among the regions themselves.

The first level of the internationalization of the project and networking was bringing together delegates of Glocal Youth Parliament from Belgrade, Pristine and Sarajevo and cooperation with these cities` Councils and local partners. The delegates of Assotiation of Citizens Kontra were in charge of the central regional coordination of the project with the help of the Italian office of the Glocal Forum. On the local level, through numerous local media, Belgrade University and three non-governmental web sites, the advertisement with requirements that potential candidates have to meet was published. The selection of candidates was carried out by regional delegates of Glocal Youth Parliament.

The second level of the internationalization and networking was assembling partners and project participants around organization of "peacebulding" trainings held in Vienna and Rome. The workshops in Vienna were organized by "Diplomatic Academy" from Vienna in cooperation with Vienna University and City Council. The moderators of these workshops were the manager of the Stability Pact for South East Europe, the principal of "Diplomatic Academy", representatives of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, members of Vienna City Council, the head of the Department for Children and Youth with Vienna City Council, representatives of "Austrian Centre for European Integrations" and many others. The workshop in Rome was organized by the City Council in the City Hall where the participants were addressed by the highest city leaders.

The third level of internationalization and networking was related to financial linking of local and European partners who supported the project and provided means for accommodation, transportation and food in several European countries. In accordance with that, many multinational institutions such as Austrian government, Stability Pact for South East Europe, Rome and Vienna City Councils, The Council of Europe, The World Bank office in Pristine etc, were partners of this action.

The forth level of internationalization and networking was organization of information services through which the project participants and partners were informed about current activities of the Glocal Forum. Through publishing business, in the form of publications and bulletins, as well as via local and European media (the internet, the press, radio and television) the public was informed about aims and results of the project. Thus the presentation of all partners who contributed to the realization of the Glocal Forum`s plan, was done. By posting partner sites the maintenance of professional bonds and exchange of information, as well as broadening the network of partners for future projects, was accomplished.

The support of institutions and economic sector to non-governmental organizations means creating opportunities to act in those spheres of social life where the others (the government and the economic sector) are not able to, and which are recognized as acute social issues and shortcomings. Development of local and global partnership relations between economic-public sector and NGOs enables swifter and more organized action and, beside that, provides multilateral benefit. Open championing by the state of the cooperation

with NGOs also constitutes a part of favorable national image. This, seen from outside, leads to conclusion that responsible and engaged confronting with modern social needs of a community has taken place.

II Aims and Results of the Project "European Rails of Peace"

In the regions of former Yugoslavia the last decade was marked by civil wars which completely destroyed the economy, cultural system and system of values as well as lives of many people. Although hostilities are not manifested through war anymore they have been maintained in the most susceptible social areas, and have prolonged the period of tacit avoidance. Precisely in the language, the epicenter of communicative misunderstandings, tensions are maintained by nurturing speech and words that neither side is willing to pass over or withdraw. However, in order to avoid or prevent any future repetitions of conflicts, communication as open as possible is desirable as a means of better familiarization with "the others". This diminishes or annuls the hostility towards the unknown. Hence, the language is protected, if not even purified, from expressions and speech that could in any way endanger the identity of "the other" and offend personal or national attributes. In other words, by promoting the language of peace, "although, essentially, is obviously significant is what is going to be said, in the language for its general profile, a lot more decisive could be what is not going to be said, or what is at least going to be withheld as much as possible"(Bugarski, 1995 : 136).

Although the project has had numerous goals the one, which summarizes all the others, could be, in principle, singled out. That is the shift of perception about "the other", in reference to one-time neighbors as well as to Western Europe, and, in compliance with that, creation of opportunities for an open society that would not be a slave to prejudices. It needs to be said that prejudices are deeply rooted in nearly 15 year long isolation of former Yugoslav states which barely communicated with the rest of the world, while with one another practiced a tenuous or almost none exchange. Significant contribution to multiplication prejudices make a large number of young people who, mainly due to visa regulations and financial difficulties, have not had a chance to cross the borders of their country at least once and visit Europe or some of neighboring countries. The knowledge about "the other" has been gained mainly through the experience of other people, media or political stereotyping. Thus quite often paradoxes have occurred which objectively negative values of "our" group highlighted as a quality in relation to positive values of "their" group (i.e. a inclination to heavy drinking and overspending is always seen as virtue in relation to someone else`s rational thriftiness and temperance). Accordingly, conflicts are "rather focused on the control of production, distribution of meanings and social symbols" (Semprini, 2004 : 111). Thus, years backwards, faulty interpretations of semiosphere elements contributed to the rooting of prejudices and stereotypes about others.

Strategic goals of the project "European Rails of Peace" are just some of the ways to alter perception of "the other". During one-month trip they are carried out in three phases: education, "peacebuilding" initiative and "interculturalisation".

Educational activities of workshops were useful in many ways. Both, participants and organizers, took part in the discussion on topics such as cultural heritage, national identity,

remembrance and reconciliation, regional cooperation, legal and visa regulations, high unemployment in ex-Yugoslav region etc. Such interactive communication, exchange and acquisition of variety of new information about lives of young people in post-conflict areas, has indeed, at least slightly, changed and compounded the perception of everyone who participated in the discussion. The absence of ex cathedra attitude made it significantly easier for participants from all three groups to speak more openly about their problems, and, consequently, free themselves and share with everyone else their frustrations and discontent, due to impeded movement as well as a closed society still dominated by a legacy of war. The presence of statesmen and diplomats also raised the quality of workshops to the higher level of engaged tackling the problems of the youth on the Balkans. On the other hand, the whole context of the project succeeded in emphasizing the potential of the youth in strategy of peaceful resolution of conflicts. The certificates, given to participants, symbolically granted them titles of peace ambassadors, hoping that in their future engagements they will spread speech and deeds of peace and intercultural coordination, which combined stand for the basis of European values.

Peacebuilding initiative, to the credit of all participants, organizers and partners of the project, broadly speaking, stands for establishment of international and inter-ethnic cooperation of people and institutions. Representatives of the institutions have communicated with the others by choosing common goals and methods of their accomplishment. Thus, by getting to know people, we have become familiar with institutions, and through them the society on the whole, and we have dispersed the myths of institutions. We have familiarized with their constitutional models, modes of functioning and activities they undertake. For instance, the majority of the project participants, thanks to those who represented them, became familiar with some crucial elements of the organization of European institutions such as the Stability Pact or the Council of Europe. This type of initiative induced greater mobility and flexibility of people/institutions as well as establishment of local and global partnerships based on common interests. Thus, in one of the forms of public space of *corporate multiculturalism* (Semprini, 2004 : 117) whose base mostly lies in economic and market interstate cooperation, values of cultural association and exchange have been gradually imprinted. Hence, the meditation on interstate and inter-regional coordination should be directed to be not only business but cultural necessity.

Interculturalism, by an essential definition of the concept, implies interaction of several ethnic cultures. On the example of the project "European Rails of Peace" the affirmation of interculturality is posed as one of the leading ideas. One-month trip across Europe was main point of the project, and, in accordance with that, the creation of collective itineraries of participants, development of friendly relationships, broadening the perspectives of diversity through seeing European cities, development of organizational skills etc. Therefore, I will single out two levels in the process of "interculturalisation". The first, and, maybe because of social post-conflict circumstances of ex-Yugoslav region, the most important is "interculturalisation" among participants themselves, who belong to three groups of Albanian, Bosnian and Serbian ethnicities. The other level is "interculturalisation" of the participants with Europe, by which I consider cultural influence of European milieu on the participants themselves.

"Interculturalisation" of the participants has, to some extent, contributed to a reverse perception of low-level potential of mutual cultural differences. In this way, slight social and cultural differences do not have to lead necessarily towards the process of homogenization and anaculturation of ethnic groups, the way it was among other things presented throughout several decades on the Balkans. Thus, they do not have necessarily to mean disintegration of ethnic groups, but opposite - their facilitated integration, when their cultural cooperation is taken into consideration at least.

On the other hand, the other aspect of "interculturalisation" is a unique way of exchange and interaction of cultural and social values, that are adopted in the best way via personal, more concrete, contacts with the other and different (Europe), which does not mean more disparate. But, thus, we become familiar with a different model of European social system, that implies *integrative multiculturalism,* against Balkan type of *segregative multiculturalism* (Semprini, 2004 : 156), which, above all, underlines unique similarity of all European societies - differences - because of which people cooperate and communicate, not self-isolate themselves.

The goals at the same time epitomize attained results of the project too, at least concerning the majority of participants. Upon the completion of the project, most of the participants from all three groups have kept in touch until now, by means of mailing lists, public portals or private communication, respectively. Both, The Glocal Forum and Assotiatin of Citizens Kontra, still occasionally gather former participants and engage them in the new programs for promotion of glocalisation.

Conclusion

"Interculturality as dynamic and multidirectional interaction of cultures of the ethnic collectivities which construct a multiethnic society, that as such would be warrant of its permanent stability, in its ideal-model variant is a utopian (positively utopian, indeed) project which should be approached as such" (Radojicic, 1995 : 409). Although social reality sometimes leads to conviction that it is impossible to implement model of interculturalism, still, we should not overlook all positive potentials it possesses.

One of the crucial, operating potentials is initiative for cultural cooperation and interaction of ethnic/national groups. Nevertheless, it is of vital importance that initiative is reciprocal, and that it is induced by different social groups in a community. Although it quite often represents merely manifestation of political image and formal, cosmetic, dimension of existence, intercultural initiative, as such, could produce positive social effects of cultural interaction among groups.

The attitude of governmental institutions and private sector, in post-conflict Yugoslav regions, to the significance of cultural integration, which is often overlooked, has been changing with constitution and strengthening of civil society. Therefore, non-governmental organizations sooner diagnose acute shortcomings of the lack of cultural integration, so, consequently, they raise public awareness about necessary change of the course.

The project "European Rails of Peace" is among more successful and encouraging examples of cultural integration, which gathered European and local partners around common ideas. In the more narrow sense, they embody initiatives directed towards interculturalisation and spreading of the cosmopolitan spirit by familiarizing with "the other". In the broader sense, they contain reference to the future of the European Union and inevitable cultural cooperation of European nations. Finally, this project, maybe mostly because of value potential it comprises, should be paradigm for establishment of interstate relations in ex-Yugoslav regions. Thus, the perception of insurmountable disparities of the region and us, Europe and us, the world and us, would be to some extent altered. This perception, I believe, would at some moment highlight the fact that all of us are more alike than we have ever thought.

Bibliography

- Bugarski, R. (1995), „Towards Language Of Peace", in: *Interkulturalnost u multietničkim društvima*, Beograd

- Dragićević-Šešić M. and Stojković B. (ed) (2003), *Kultura. Menadžment, Animacija, Marketing*, Beograd:Clio

- Radojičić, M. (1995), „Interkulturalnost i multietnička društva - između kulturnog modela i društvene stvarnosti", in: *Interkulturalnost u multietničkim društvima*, Beograd

- Semprini, A. (2004), *Multikulturalizam*, Begrad: Clio

- Stojković, B. (2002), "Nevladine organizacije kao činioci kulturne politike", in: *Kultura*, No 103-4 : 227-33

- Toepler S. and Salamon L. (2003), "NGO Development in Central and Eastern Europe: An Empirical Overview", in: *East European Quarterly*, Volume 37, Issue 3

- Vujadinović, D. (2002), "Nevladine organizacije kao činioci kulturne politike", in: *Kultura*, No 103-4 : 236-39

Internet pages:

- www.glocalforum.org,14.02.2008.

- www.kontra.org.yu, 14.02.2008.