

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN PEACEBUILDING ?

The cooperation in human rights education on the project „Build Bridges not Walls” has continued

The international project „Build Bridges not Walls: The Role of Universities in Peacebuilding” was initiated in the beginning of 2012 by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) with an aim to develop a platform for cooperation between the universities and non-governmental organisations in BiH, Serbia and Kosovo in the fields of human rights, intercultural understanding and peacebuilding. Duration of the project is three years in the first implementation phase and it is financially

supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Human rights, together with multicultural understanding and peaceful conflict resolution present perhaps the most important potential for humanity that societies we live in should apply in this time of globalization. If we want peace, we have to create it ourselves.

Enver Djuliman, the Head of the project „Build Bridges not Walls!”

The specific aim of the project is to identify the role of the universities in peacebuilding, to teach academic staff and students about peace processes, that will result with concrete activities directed to action strategy development in cooperation with education decision makers. Universities, because of geopolitical context in which they act in this region, are often politicized, ideologized and ethnicized. Despite such challenges, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee succeeded in efforts to

establish this project at the universities. The following partner organisations mutually cooperate in this project: the Buskerud University College from Norway, Helsinki committees in BiH and Serbia, Nansen Dialogue Center Mostar and Sarajevo, Sandzak Board for protection of human rights and freedoms, Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) and 5 partner universities i.e. the University „Džemal Bijedić” Mostar, the University of Tuzla, the International University in Novi Pazar (IUNP), the Faculty for legal and business studies „Dr. Lazar Vrkatić” (FPPS) in Novi Sad and the University of Prishtina. By the end of 2012, two conferences (at the universities in Mostar and Novi Pazar) on the role of the universities in peacebuilding were held. Also the human rights corners were established in the libraries of these two universities. The aim of these conferences is to open a dialogue on how universities can be a place for long-term promotion and building of peace in the region, in a professional, integrating and systematic way. The conference in Novi Pazar was opened by **Prof.Dr. Mevlud Dudić**, the Rector of IUNP while the conference in Mostar was opened by **Dr. Sead Pašić**, the Rector of the University „Džemal Bijedić” Mostar.

At the opening of the conference in Mostar, the Minister of education and science in Federation BiH, **Damir Mašić**, emphasized: *„In implementing the multiculturalism, education has a really big role because it prepares and enables young people to perceive, accept and respect the differences between people of different cultures. It also establishes the foundations for intercultural dialogue. We all have duty to provide exactly such conditions for new generations in which they will be raised and educated for non-discrimination and life in spirit of tolerance and interculturalism. We can accomplish that with education on human rights and for human rights. That's the beginning of creation of culture of peace based on human rights and freedoms for all.“*

In the end of 2012 the NHC organized 3 regional webinars (web-seminars) with Prof. Dr. Nenad Veličković, for the students of the partner universities on topics such as literature and indoctrination, ideology, education and nationalism.

NHC initiated also the regional exchanges of both students and academic staff between the universities participating in the project „Build Bridges not Walls“. From the beginning of the project until June 2013, altogether 6 regional exchanges were held with more than 100 students from 4 partner universities in BiH and Serbia.

All participants of the regional student exchanges have also attended the study course in human rights and intercultural understanding. This elective course was introduced by NHC in cooperation with the universities in BiH, Serbia and Kosovo.



Students and teachers from Novi Pazar in visit to the University "Džemal Bijedić" in Mostar



Student and teachers from Tuzla and Novi Sad in visit to International University Novi Pazar



Students and teachers from Mostar in visit to IUNP



Students from Novi Sad and Mostar in visit to University of Tuzla

Namely, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) earlier established the study course in human rights and intercultural understanding at 4 partner universities i.e. both for full-time students of humanities and graduated persons (students at work) that will benefit from the gained knowledge in human rights, intercultural dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution at their jobs. The lectures, beside some full professors, were also held by the regional guest educators and experts in human rights, peacebuilding and interculturalism. This practice has been continued by the NHC in 2013 and the project was joined by the 5th university, the University of Prishtina.

In the beginning of 2013 the regional webinar was held with **Snježana Kodrić**, the prominent linguist from Croatia. In this webinar the students of the partner universities could participate in virtual discussion on topic: „*Our language – a bridge between the people or a wall?*“. The aim of these webinars is to enable the students to gain and exchange their knowledge through discussion with prominent experts who provide perspectives different than the ones existing at the universities.

In April 2013 in cooperation with the University of Tuzla, the two days conference on the role of universities in peacebuilding was held at the Faculty of Philosophy. In this occasion, the Human Rights Corner was also established. The opening guest speakers were **Lilloe Anne Vibeke**, Norway's Ambassador to BiH, **Bjorn Engesland**, General Secretary of NHC and **Prof.Dr. Enver Halilović**, the Rector of the University of Tuzla.

„This subject was very educative and interesting. Through lectures I learned how conflicts start and how to solve them. By participating and working with other students I realized that the number of interested students for successful intercultural dialogue and mutual acceptance and understanding has increased. I hope that interest and number of participants will continue to increase over years because this subject is important for youth of this region.“

Maja Ljubić from Mostar, the graduate participant of the course „Human rights and intercultural understanding“

„These webinars are very good way to network students from different regions. This is also very practical tool to meet with lecturers who are otherwise distantly located from those universities. The students were motivating to analyze concrete experiences from their environment and to show them what is the viewpoint of contemporary linguistics in the world.“

Snježana Kodrić, a linguist



At the conference in Tuzla, April 2013

At the conference in Tuzla, **Lilloe Anne Vibeke, Norway's Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina**, among other things, stressed: „*The universities – at their worst – may reproduce and deepen the divisions and ills in society. But – at their best – remarked the ambassador, universities may build relations, extend horizons and share humanity's common knowledge to all – without distinction and without separation. It was this development that the project sought to contribute to.*“



Students from the region participate in Caffe Dialogue at the conference in Tuzla, May 2013.



Award ceremony of certificates in human rights and intercultural understanding for students at work

In May 2013 the two-day conference on the role of the universities in peacebuilding was organized by the Faculty for legal and business studies in Novi Sad (FPPS), as the Human Rights Corner was established. The conference was opened by **Prof. Dr. Mirjana Francesko**, the Dean of FPPS, **Dusan Jakovljević**, Vice President of the Assembly AP Vojvodina, **Sonja Biserko**, President of the Helsinki Committee in Serbia and **Enver Djuliman**, the Head of human rights education department in NHC. The guest speaker **Dino Mustafic** and famous film and theater director, in this occasion spoke about the role of art in culture of memory.



The conference on the role of the universities in peacebuilding, May 2013, Novi Sad



The students participate in the panel discussion



Sonja Biserko at the opening of the Human Rights Corner in Novi Sad

„It was the most difficult to enter at the universities and this is a big success that we implement this programme at any faculty in Serbia. It is important to get into this environment as well in order to educate and enable young people to deal with processes of europeization and transformation facing Serbia. These processes require knowledge not only of human rights concept but also of tolerance, especially in the society which suffers from consequences of conflicts that left their marks on whole Serbia and especially on Vojvodina.“

Sonja Biserko, the President of the Helsinki Committee in Serbia

The international project „Build Bridges not Walls: The role of the universities in peacebuilding“ also includes the exchange of education resources, best practices and lessons learned. Accordingly, the compendium – collection of readings – has been updated. It is an educational resource for both full-time students who attend the elective subject in human rights at the universities and for graduate persons (students at work) who will use the lessons learned in this human rights education at their work places. The prominent local, regional and international educators and experts in the fields of human rights, intercultural understanding and peacebuilding, participated in preparation of the Compendium. **Enver Djuliman**, the Head of project „Build Bridges not Walls“ and the editor of the compendium, in introduction of this Compendium, among other things, says: *„In order to create life and real culture of human rights, there have to be mechanisms of raising awareness, and that could be multicultural understanding and the knowledge about conflict resolution. These skills increase our possibilities to function in a community and to participate in democratic processes, on which modern society is based.“*

In April 2013 the regional meeting of partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo was held in Sarajevo with an aim to further coordinate and plan the project activities. In this occasion, Prof. Dr. Sc. **Vedrana Spajic-Vrkas**, the Head of Research and Education Center for human rights and democratic citizenship at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and the candidate for UNESCO Award on Peace Education, presented her standpoint on inclusive strategy of change when it comes to the role of the universities in peacebuilding.



In cooperation with the University of Prishtina, beside the study course in human rights and intercultural understanding, NHC will organize the conference on the role of the universities in peacebuilding by the end of 2013. The Human Rights Corner will be also established. In addition, the student exchanges will take place universities in Prishtina, Novi Sad and Novi Pazar.

Human Rights Corner is the result of an extensive regional initiative of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 2012 and it was supported by 27 non-governmental and international organisations and some individuals from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Around 2000 books, magazines and documentary movies were collected for the libraries of the partner universities in BiH, Serbia and Kosovo. Additionally, NHC financed the purchase of certain number of publications of local and international authors for these corners.



The opening of the Human Rights Corner in Novi Sad



The opening of Human Rights Corner in Novi Pazar



The opening of Human Rights Corner in Mostar



The opening of Human Rights Corner in Tuzla

The following 27 organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia supported the initiative: The Helsinki Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Helsinki Parliament of Citizens Banja Luka, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Republika Srpska, Trauma Center, Sarajevo Open Center, the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (MKSJ) in BiH, Peace Academy, Youth Initiative for Human Rights in BiH (YIHR), UŽ Seka Goražde, Center for Nonviolent Action (CNA) Sarajevo/Belgrade, UNICEF B&H, Foundation Heinrich Boll Office for BiH, Center for empirical research of religion in BiH, Open Society Fund BiH, Faculty of Law of the University of Sarajevo, Association „Women for Women“, the Bosniak Institute, Human Rights Education for Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans, Center for Peace Studies, Association Zora, DOCUMENTA – Center for dealing with the past, Fund for humanitarian law, Victimology Society of Serbia, Center for development of civil society (CRCD), Association 484 and Sandzak Board for protection of human rights and freedoms.



The Facebook page of the project was launched with an aim to provide primarily to students but also other internet users (educators, librarians, educational and international organisations etc.) the information about project „Build Bridges not Walls“ under the title “Uloga univerziteta u izgradnji mira” at the internet address:

<https://www.facebook.com/Build.Bridges.Not.Walls>

On this page one can also find the virtual library (LIBRARY room), watch educational movies and video clips, get informed about current seminars and conferences (APPLY! Corner) and participate in online discussions (discussion corners).

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„Build Bridges not Walls:
The Role of the universities in peacebuilding“