

Conclusions from the Conference in Golubić (near Obrovac), Croatia

**"Serbo-Croat Relations in the 20th Century – History and Perspectives"**

September 18 - 20, 2008

In a village of Golubić (near Obrovac, Croatia) a conference „Serbo-Croat Relations in the 20th Century – History and Perspectives“ was held from September 18-20. The conference was organized by the Center for History, Democracy and Reconciliation (CHDR) and sponsored by Balkan Trust for Democracy, Serb National Council from Croatia, Town of Obrovac, and Dijalog from Zagreb, Croatia. Participants, who included historians, sociologists, and political scientists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and the United States, discussed in two working groups. One team dealt with past political and cultural Serbo-Croat relations, with emphasis on the 20th century, while the other group focused on the future development of these relations.

Dr. Ranko Končar, from the University of Novi Sad, reported the most relevant conclusions of the working group „Political and Cultural Ties Between the Croats and the Serbs in the 20th Century.“ Following the discussion about several important issues in the area of the Serbo-Croat relations, this group agreed that it makes sense and that there is historical justification for the continuation of the study of these relations. Greater effort should be made to base this research on the maximum level of documentation, or as much as it is permitted by the accessibility of sources. The future research, as well as the re-evaluation of the sources that are used, should use core works from the past research as a baseline, so that the continuity with earlier research is established. It is important to approach the research in a more comprehensive manner while aiming to extend its programmatic orientation beyond political themes to include social, economic, and cultural topics, as well. The use of existing sources should proceed with caution and critically due to the delicate nature of the Serbo-Croat relations and the influence of propaganda on these relations. With that in mind, it is necessary to create space for de-mythologizing or de-mystifying certain prejudices that have been present both in the study and in the approaches to the study of the Serbo-Croat relations. Therefore, the availability and publication of critically-grounded documents from this area of study is of utmost importance. In future meetings, it was proposed to include evaluation of the research conducted outside of this project, as well. Finally, the group concluded that means for the continuation of the dialogues that would contribute to more comprehensive approaches to the study of Serbo-Croat relations should be secured.

Dr. Igor Graovac, from the Croatian Institute of History, introduced the working group „Perspectives of the Development of Croatia and Serbia in the Future.“ This was a smaller group and the first attempt within this project to tackle the future of the Serbo-Croat relations. This group did not only consist of historians, but it also included other social scientists. Among other points of discussion, the group asked whether it was possible to talk about the future of these relations without a constant need to change the current understanding of the past, or how to avoid that historical interpretations limit the future development of the Serbo-Croat relations. Even though the group talked about several topics only, such as return of refugees, protection of minorities, regional development and social exclusion, it is necessary to extend these discussions to other possible themes in order to improve the neighborly relations between these two states within the European context. Dr. Graovac summarized the conclusions of this

working group:

"For the first time within this research project, a working group also considered possibilities concerning the future development of the relations between the Croats and the Serbs, as well as between their respective states. We used examples from the past and the present that contribute to the more comprehensive preparation for the future of our relations. Among the issues that we discussed within the context of the strengthening of the civil society on both sides of these dialogues were the return of refugees, the status of minorities, regional development, and social exclusion. Future discussions should be framed by similar research guidelines. Their success greatly depends on the accessibility of sources, the ability to exchange research findings, and meetings of scholars. It is critical to coordinate the usage of key concepts, research methods and methodology, as well as the interpretation of the past that negatively affects the future relations between the Croats and the Serbs."

In sum, the researchers from this group, who are currently working on different individual projects, showed that there is a need to talk about the conditions of people, both Croats and Serbs, whether they are refugees, minorities, socially excluded, and to coordinate the usage of concepts in the research that is conducted on both sides. The group proposed to continue its activity in the future meetings. Rather than to influence the future of the relations between the Croats and the Serbs directly, the aim is that the results of this research contribute to the resolution of the concrete problems that are common to both Croats and Serbs in both countries.

At the end of the conference, Dr. Darko Gavrilović, Director of the Center for History, Democracy and Reconciliation (CHDR), directed the messages of these two groups to the government representatives from Croatia and Serbia who were present, as well as to other organizations that are interested in this research, as these topics are not specific to this region. For example, the themes that are included within the Salzburg Seminar include Jewish-Palestinian relations, Chinese-Japanese relations, German-Polish relations, Polish-Jewish relations, and German-Jewish relations. The next meeting that will be organized by the CHDR at the end of November of 2008 will deal with refugees in Croatia and Serbia.

Dr. Janko Veselinović, President of the Fund for the Assistance of Refugees and Expellees and Assistant of the Provincial Secretary for Science of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina of the Republic of Serbia, said that it is critical to have greater presence of the media in the future meetings in order to make their results and conclusions more accessible and more useful.