

Peace messengers are coming !

The Peace Messengers Network Newsletter

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Peace activism

On the eve of the beginning of the Peace Messengers training, this issue of the newsletter is mostly dedicated to reports of activities connected to Peace education and activism (with a picture featuring the Peace Messengers t-shirt among others (- :), and a presentation of an ambitious Peace Messengers project spanning over several Eastern Europe and Caucasian countries involving volunteers from opponent countries - peace in action indeed !

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MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Transnational Peace Messengers project in conflict areas

Next summer, SCI branches along with partner organisations in Eastern Europe (Youth Memorial (Perm), SFERA, Ecocenter Zapovedniks, AVI-Moldova, SVIT-Ukraine, Youth Human Rights Movement), will run a programme aiming at educational sessions in short-term volunteer projects of SCI and partners during summer 2009 on peace, conflicts with specific cases, and non-violent conflict resolution issues, and this in Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

This ambitious projects aims at

- raising awareness of young people on different kinds of conflicts in the region,
- reflecting, in the context of the region, on political, economic, cultural cooperation among the countries of the region
- creating a network of organizations and multipliers working on peace education issues
- developing interactive workshop sessions on peace education, with cases and objective background information from the region
- contributing to the fight against prejudices and stereotypes through fostering intercultural exchange and personal contacts, to a reflection about peace and the situation in the region in an intercultural context (both regional and European/international)
- strengthening the role and possibilities of youth NGOs and activists to combat racism and xenophobia, conflicts of ethnic background, and non-violent conflict resolution through improved regional cooperation and networking.

The project will start with a training for 8-10 multipliers from Ukraine, Moldova and Russia. From July to October, they will then visit short-term international projects in the European part of Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, organizing interactive workshops for the international groups of participants. Multipliers will be working in international pairs, coming from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. Situation and cases from Georgia will be presented by experts to the multipliers and thus integrated to the project (as it is not possible for Georgians to enter Russia now).

For more information, you can contact Julia (zamorochka@gmail.com)

PVP-Camplleader Training in Halle, Germany

9-15th April

(followed by a short study visit to Dresden)

From 9th to 15th April, SCI German branch has run a common PVP-camplleader training in cooperation with VCV-Serbia, VCZ Croatia and CID of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. 25 participants from all four countries and Slovenia gathered in Halle and were led by a joint international team. One part of the training also included a special PVP "advanced training". A full report of the training is not yet available, but - judging by the initial reactions of the trainers - it has been a huge success.

Dejan, trainer from VCV-Serbia, described his impressions as follows:

" In my opinion, this was our best common training so far. It was certainly my most pleasurable experience. The participants groups blended together easily and naturally and the overall atmosphere of the training was positive, friendly, relaxed but hard-working as well. People have connected so well that they are already making some plans for international workcamp leadership teams. The visit to the Dresden local group was just as great.



Speaking more specifically about the PVP-training course, it has been an intensive and interesting learning experience for me. The good side of having only 4 participants was that we could analyze each topic in details, carefully look for personal and common meanings of peace and peace education in SCI and reach deeper understanding of workcamps as tools for peace work and education (deeper than you would usually have in a camp leader training). Our little group consisted of people with very diverse experiences, which allowed us to put different perspectives together and have quality discussions (despite being such a small group). Maybe not all of them will be PVP-leaders, but I think all of them are now experts on SCI approach to peace. "

Ivana, co-trainer from Macedonia, added:



"I would like to express my gratitude to everybody who involved in the project. For me, it was extraordinary and a very good learning experience. The participants, the team, everything was great. I was impressed at how all participants (from both trainings) integrated well and intensely contributed to the group. As for the team of trainers, I was honored to be part of it :) and to work with Sabine and Dejan. I would also like to share my impressions about the visit in Dresden. We were very warmly welcomed and hosted. The volunteers really put a lot of effort and energy. Also, they showed interest for further cooperation. This is going to be a great local group :)"

So, to sum up, I had great time this year, can't wait for the next year - CLT :D"

SCI Germany hopes to make this enthusiasm flow into the planned PVP-travelling workcamp that will take place in Berlin between 4th-24th August this year. Some places are still free for budding Peace Messengers!

Peace Messenger of the month !

Our Peace Messenger of the month is, for once, a boy (-: ; Mehdi comes from Azerbaijan, and took part in a Peace Messengers Travelling Workcamp in Germany last summer. Apparently a memorable experience! He'll joint next week's Peace Messenger training, and we hope he will then spread the Peace Messengers programme in Azerbaijan!



Your greatest joy as a Peace Messenger?

Hmmm...quite hard to remember after such a long time but I can say that Peace Messengering in general is my biggest joy, which lasted long after the 3 weeks on the travelling workcamp. Some things have changed. That's cool to feel that you do something useful for the community, that you are a small part of something big, and that somewhere in the world, right now, somebody like you - peace messengeeeeeerrrrrr :))) I hope we will continue what we have started and that our network will get larger and larger.

Your greatest surprise as a Peace Messenger?

I was very surprized to see that the beer costs 2.50 EUR in Germany compared to 10 EUR in my country! I was really shocked =))) More seriously, I'm really proud of my PM team composed of guys who did the workcamp with in Berlin. I had never thought that so many people with different cultures, from different place of the world, could be so close and like one big family. That was cool =)



Also, some members of our beautiful PM team did a small exercise or game (I don't remember) with volunteers during a workshop : they showed the participants some photos of other PM and asked them about their first impression. I was really surprised because I was described as **unhappy, arrogant, of Arabic origin, looking like a dopy italian mafioso**. Not bad :)



What is your greatest hope as a Peace Messenger ?

"...And the latest news for today. Awaited for a long time, today the Nobel Committee finally nominated the Nobel Prize winner for this year, in the field of Peace : the Peace Messengers Network!!! (applause, firework, confetti, balloons, Santa - Claus, Pamela Anderson =))) They have obtained it for disseminating Peace idea and for making this world safe and peaceful. Thank you and good night to all of you, Earth.....BBC World"

1-5 APRIL 09 STRASBOURG: INTERNATIONAL ACTION CAMP AND COUNTER SUMMIT



A few SCI volunteers from SCI Germany, SCI Belgium, VIA-Belgium and VIA-Netherlands (and probably others), were present at the anti-NATO counter-summit organised in Strasbourg at the beginning of April. They tell us why, as peace activists, they decided to take part in this event.

I was there because....

Public funds needs to be dedicated to human development and not to destruction of human beings and values.

Maniseng (SCI-BE)

To change NATO is fundamental to change the world, to build a world of peace.

Christine (SCI-BE)

Living in Western Europe, I have the opportunity to directly pressure those institutions that destroy peace and justice in the world.

Sylvie (SCI-BE)



Promoting the Peace Messengers T-Shirt- and spirit in Strasbourg- Christine and Sylvie from SCI-BE

I wanted to show that not everybody agrees with the militaristic way NATO operates. And to protest against the so-called 'bringing of democracy', where our own democracy is turned down when it comes to criticism. Whether it helps or not, I always say: 'you should at least try! The worst thing is to do nothing.' And personally, I think it does help. A Dutch reporter on national TV, at the NATO summit said 'I cannot see the protestors from here, but I can certainly hear them. Not everybody agrees with the NATO agenda.' Let's keep on bringing a different sound to the world!

Lokien (VIA-NL)

Camping for peace and the battle of Strasbourg

- Hamish (VIA-NL) -

This article has been published in the VIA-NL magazine, as well as in the Conflict Resolution Team newsletter

The first weekend of April, a small contingent of VIA members headed for Strasbourg to say No to NATO. Obama and Europe's bobos were gathering to celebrate NATO's 60th birthday. With thousands of others we didn't see the reason to party.

Why protest? Because NATO is making the world a less safe place. Although Obama talks of nuclear disarmament, NATO reserves the right for first strike of nuclear weapons. Although Obama has scaled

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down George Bush's commitments, a new missile defence system (star wars) with new proposed bases in Eastern Europe is still on the cards. This has the potential to provoke Russia. Last year, NATO helped in provoking war between Russia and Georgia. It has brought instability and not stability to Afghanistan and Pakistan. While the war in Iraq has scaled down the occupation of Afghanistan has escalated. A NATO supported government run by right wing warlords still ignores womens rights, the people are still in desperate poverty, thousands of civilians continue to die from NATO & Taliban attacks and the country still produces 90% of the world opium (heroin).

Four of us, Katinka, Lokien, Marius and Hamish, loaded up with food and tents for the long week-end. After getting lost for an hour driving through the Waterloo battlefield in Belgium we finally arrived at Strasbourg which seemed was getting ready for a battle. 20,000 police and national guard were there to greet us. There were vans full of riot cops at bridges and junctions in the city. It had a feeling of being under armed occupation, like in Belfast in the bad old days. This was what 21st century western democracy looked like and our rights of freedom of speech felt trampled on.

A peace camp/village had been set up in the southern suburbs of the city on farmland and an adjacent organic farm was supplying the campers with some vegetables. We were met at the camp by a group of UvA (University of Amsterdam) activists. Within minutes of our arrival at the peace camp, riots broke out on the perimeter. Police had chased some protestors from the city centre back to the camp after they had smashed windows and paint-bombed army barracks. Helicopters circled overhead with spotlights and tear gas and rubber bullets were used. Protestors set up barricades in the street to "defend" the camp. People were naturally anxious. In London, a few days earlier during the G20 protests, the police had stormed into a camp beating people over the head with batons and cracking skulls.

The village was very impressive with compost toilets, kitchens, cold showers, legal aid, first aid, trauma counselling, internet tent. A separate music field had a stage with ska and punk bands, techno music field, bar and a chill out tent. The village had a very international flavour. A big group of Turkish communists next to us would do line dancing to folk music in the mornings!

Some of us volunteered to help with a Dutch mobile kitchen called "Rampenplan" (Disaster plan). They have been going about 20 years and cater for demos, trade union events, blockades of nuclear trains through Germany, etc. In our village, there were a couple of different kitchens. The one run by Rampenplan was catering for 2000 people every day. They were cooking and serving meals from about 7am in the morning till 1am in the morning. There were teams of about 6 people each for cutting vegetables, serving food, and washing up. The moment I enjoyed most was singing with a group of French cutting cabbages, "Savez- vous planter les choux, à la mode, à la mode", just like on an SCI workcamp.

A counter summit held in another part of the city was badly advertised and poorly attended despite many interesting speakers from across the world. One of the speakers later came to stay in our group of tents. He was a 25-year old American ex-soldier who had gone AWOL (absent without leave) from Iraq. So many go AWOL these days that most of them do not face any legal challenges. Too much paperwork! His campaign group visit American high schools. Some school principals object to their "propaganda". His group respond by saying that the US military drive Humvee 4x4 jeeps into the school assembly rooms to win over recruits. He told of the trauma affecting returned veterans and high numbers of suicides and the bad treatment of Iraqis working for the US military.

The official event and demo against the summit took place on the Saturday. The idea was that the French and German leaders joined hands on a bridge over the Rhine, The Pont D'Europe, which connects the 2 countries. This would re-enact the rapprochement which followed the ending of the 2nd world war and subsequent founding of NATO in 1949. The benign supervision of the American president would echo the role of US in 1945 (ignoring the role of Russia in defeating the Nazis).



However police had formed barricades preventing anti-NATO protestors from moving between Germany and France. For the duration of the summit, the Schengen Agreement which allows the "free" movement of people between certain member EU states had been suspended. To celebrate "free" Europe, Europe was made temporarily less free. Stone-throwing black-clad youth (the black blocks) gave police an excuse to prevent the demo from Germany crossing the bridge between Kehl in Germany and Strasbourg. Several thousand trade union members and others who did not intend to fight with the police could not cross over to Strasbourg. This was an excuse since a few days earlier (before any rioting), a mobile kitchen had apparently been prevented from entering France from Germany. The main official authorised demo and stage were tear gassed by the police as black blockers set fire to a disused customs post and possibly part of an Ibis hotel. We all needed to wrap hankies around our faces against the gas! Speakers from the stage called on the demo to begin and we marched into the path of even more police and had a feeling of being trapped in. During the short-lived march there was a real sense of international solidarity, Congolese held banners for justice against war crimes, Japanese asked us to remember Hiroshima, colourful anti-NATO and anti-capitalist slogans in all languages, ours read "Amsterdam says no to NATO. War is for losers. Peace is sexy". Other SCI groups from Belgium, Germany and France were also present. But the march ended in a riot situation with those who did not seek confrontation with the police stuck in the middle or trying to escape.

Does the presence of 20,000 police (heavily outnumbering the protestors) lead to an inevitable violent outcome? There is much debate about the tactics of the black block. Whether in Iraq, Palestine or Northern Ireland, a military/police armed presence provokes violent rebellion, especially from young men who feel challenged. When elected politicians ignore the will of millions of marching anti-war demonstrators and proceed with their wars, this leads some (the black blockers) to take it into their own hands to declare direct war on the state and abandon the "parliamentary democratic" process.

It is also widely believed the black block are heavily infiltrated by the police. We saw one or two men in similar style clothing merging into police lines at one point. It is not clear that the black block set fire to the hotel. How is it possible to set fire to a hotel with thousands of police hanging around? Some argue that their tactics are counter-productive. The media can show images of kids throwing stones and smashed bus stops and ignore the reasons why we protest, the violence and carnage of the NATO war machine.

Symbolically a burning customs post (it was empty) represents a blow against the state's repressive controls of people but it is better to smash military jets than family cars and bus shelters, as happened in Strasbourg. There were many houses flying rainbow peace flags in the city when we arrived. It shows no solidarity with the local people if you smash up their city. When black blockers throw stones during an official demo, this creates a dangerous space for those who choose a peaceful form of resistance. Demos should be based on solidarity and many condemn the black block tactics for provoking police who seemed only too happy to respond with barrages of tear gas, etc. The police response was disproportionate. The police responded with excessive force, tear gassing indiscriminately, including the elderly. We met one young man his face cut open after he had taken a photo of the police and then suddenly a blast grenade flew in his face. Violent rebellion is used to justify repressive violence. This frightens people from attending demos in the future which is what the state wants.