



Students for Stability in South East Europe

During the past year, ESIB - the National Unions of Students in Europe - has organised two projects in Kosovo and has helped to initiate a number of others in Kosovo and the whole region of South East Europe. ESIB has taken an active part in the political developments of the Stability Pact as a partner in the Task Force on Education and Youth. In this article I will reflect on our experiences of working in Kosovo as well as on developments within the Stability Pact relevant to young people.

by Manja Klemenčić

Working with students in Pristina

"It was a unique experience such as one rarely gets in life", my colleague said as we were sitting in a little hamburger place in Pristina facing the central building of the student dormitories where the student union UP-SUP has its centre. It was Saturday, 24 July 1999, our last day in Pristina, and this place was our usual breakfast place during our five-day stay in the city. The seven of us from all over Europe were reflecting on our experiences of the past five days in Pristina, moved by the enthusiasm and energy of the local students and their willingness to study, organise projects, run activities and be part of the European student community. We were still shaken by our visit to Peç (Peji) the previous day, where local students had taken us to places that used to be their homes; shaken by bursts of gunfire in the middle of the night, by euphoric evening walks of supporters and former soldiers of the Kosovo Liberation Army UCK on the main boulevard and by the constant presence of KFOR soldiers. Suddenly, all our little daily troubles back home seemed nothing in comparison to what we saw in Pristina.

Our first project was part of the initiative by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe to support young refugees from Kosovo as the bombing of Belgrade stopped. We were one of the 16 different organisations that received support to organise activities, and by the time we came to Pristina in mid-July we were the first and only one to run activities for students. At this time of changes and uncertainty our aims were modest: to gather students, to assist them in organising themselves, to lead discussions on their role in rebuilding the University in Pristina and Kosovo society, to show them that we wished to include them in our activities and to work together with them. To call upon the students in Pristina we put up notices in faculty buildings and cafes, and on trees; we made

announcements on the local radio, and talked to students in the street. The following day, 80 students came to the introductory meeting, which started with a moment of silence for all the students who died in the conflict. Those who came stayed with us for the next four days and brought their friends along.

Looking back on the meetings I can say as a trainer that despite the language barriers and with students translating we had full participation in the sessions, and more than this. By making our purpose clear and by showing interest in students' experiences, their knowledge and especially their ideas and plans on how they could participate in rebuilding Kosovo, we overcame the first tensions. It was sometimes hard to manage emotions about the past and keep to the programme. We tried to provide enough space for personal stories that students really wished to share with us and still work on planning the future of students' organisations and students' projects, of the University in Pristina and Kosovo as a whole. The evenings were social events with music, traditional dancing and story telling. At one point or another, each participant shared the story of his or her life with some of us.

We returned to Pristina in October and December for our project "Exercising Democracy - Student Elections at Pristina University", which was supported by the Council of Europe Directorate of Education, and we organised public debates and training on self-government of student organisations and project management. Our experience was somehow different this time. The students were studying; many of them were working for international organisations or looking for jobs. The euphoria of July was gone, and many students were worrying about earning their living. Their needs, however, had become clearer and their wish to work was more evident than ever. They presented ▶



thousands of ideas to us about what they would like to do. Their message was clear: they wanted to learn how to develop and manage projects well, to take part in our projects and learn where and how to find support to implement their projects.

Preparing the ground for future support of youth work in the region

Just at the time when our last project ended in December 1999, the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe held an evaluation meeting for leaders of the Kosovo projects which had received support from the European Youth Foundation. The meeting introduced a plan to support youth initiatives in the region of South East Europe. The highlight of this plan is certainly the possibility to support many small-scale projects in the region, which will, in my opinion, involve many young people and bring results far beyond the level of the financial input. This plan of the Council of Europe provides for flexible and immediate support for young people in the region.



ESIB is also involved in preparing the ground for future support for youth work in the region. Through taking part in the Working Group for Youth and the Working Group on Higher Education, which are part of the Enhanced Graz Process of the Stability Pact for South East Europe, we are developing some possibilities for youth and students' organisations in the region to receive support for implementing their projects. We also want to create possibilities for other organisations like ESIB to receive support for offering training to local organisations and for involving them in our activities, as a contribution to capacity building of some of the most promising actors in the region.

This work is based on one of the recommendations on goals and principles of action in support of the region of South East Europe made by the Conference on Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy, which took place in Sofia in November 1999. These recommendations include under priority areas for action; "Support to youth and student organisations in the region as key partners with the motivation, creativity and responsibility to carry through the transition process". (Recommendations, Expert Conference in the framework of the Enhanced Graz Process, Stability Pact for South East Europe - Working table 1, p.3)

Finally, I would like to appeal to all youth organisations in Europe to undertake activities in South East Europe, use the possibility offered by the Council of Europe and other partners in the Stability Pact and share an experience which exceeds by far the results of our regular work.

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Reports of ESIB projects are available at <http://www.esib.org>

Stability Pact for South East Europe

The **Stability Pact for South East Europe** was launched in June 1999 in order to respond to the need to establish peace, stability and economic development in the region. In this framework, three Working Tables were created and made operational through Task Forces to develop and co-ordinate the initiatives of different governments, institutions and organisations in different priority areas. Following the so-called Enhanced Graz Process, the Task Force on Education and Youth was set up within Working Table 1 on Democratization and Human Rights. A Working Group on Youth has been established within this Task Force. The current partners of this Working Group include the Council of Europe (Directorate of Youth and Sport), European Commission (Directorate for Education and Culture), World Bank (Budapest Office), European Youth Forum, ESIB, and representatives of the Foreign Ministries of Hungary, Greece and Romania. Peter Lauritzen from the Directorate of Youth and Sport is the co-ordinator of the group. Manja Klemenčič from ESIB has been appointed regional representative.

More information on activities in the region of South East Europe and on the Stability Pact is available at <http://www.see-educoop.net>

Pilot fund for youth activities in South East Europe

As an immediate support initiative following the war in Kosovo, the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe created a special pilot fund for youth activities in the refugee camps in the spring of 1999. 16 projects with children and young people from Kosovo were supported within this framework during the year. This year, the EYF has enlarged its action to provide support for youth pilot projects in the region of South East Europe as a whole.

More information, including criteria for grants, can be found at: <http://www.coe.fr/youth>

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