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The third annual seminar of the course entitled *Encounter of Religions in the Black Sea Area* met at the Black Sea University Center for Religious Understanding and Cooperation in Mangalia, Romania, July 14 - 24, 1996. Mangalia is on the site of what was once the Greek walled city of Callastis which goes back to the sixth century B.C. Important remains of that ancient community exist to this day. It is close to the ruins of a Roman garrison at Adamclisi, an area where in approximately 100 A.D. the Romans and the Dacians, the original inhabitants, fought a fierce and decisive battle which led ultimately to the domination of Rome.

The theme of the seminar was *The Role of the Religious Communities as Peacemakers*. It was chosen with the awareness that the religious communities in the Black Sea region have vast human and spiritual resources which can and should be mobilized to bring about truly democratic and transfigured civil societies. It was intended to address the tragic spiritual and moral void brought about by the demise and bankruptcy of communism. It was also premised on the conviction that the religious communities with their tremendous influence and power need to be challenged to be authentic peacemakers, agents of reconciliation rather than alienation and disruption, and positive models for their multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious societies.

The strong interest demonstrated in the subject obviously disclosed a tremendous hunger for peace. There were more than 170 applicants for 80 places. The Soros Foundation for an Open Society designated the seminar as an *East-East Program* which enabled participants to come not only from Romania but also from the far corners of the former Soviet Union. The *East-East Program* encourages open dialogue and the exchange of ideas among individuals and institutions to enable them to share and learn from their respective experiences in the post-communist world. Through the *East-East Program* the various Soros offices are able to bring the diverse experiences and insights of the scholars of their particular areas to a
wider regional perspective in order to build creative partnerships and networks. The **East-East Program** concentrates on issues which transcend the national borders.

Among those accepted for the 1996 seminar were university professors, doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows, social science researchers, journalists, officials from the Romanian ministry of foreign affairs, and social workers as well as clergy, religious leaders, and theological students. They came from thirteen countries (Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia) and included members of these communities: Anglican, Baptist (Czech Republic, Romania, and Russia), Brethren (Czech and Romania), Greek-Catholic (Romania and Ukraine), Lutheran, Muslim (Albania, Kyrgyzstan, and Romania), Pentecostal (Moldova and Romania), Orthodox (Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Yugoslavia, and Romania) Orthodox Old Rite, Reformed, and Roman Catholic (Czech, Croatia, and Romania). Every possible effort was made to ensure that not only the majority but also the minority religious communities were represented. There were participants from 27 different religious groups.

Some of the questions addressed were: What are the biblical perspectives on peacemaking? How can the churches serve as peacemakers in ethnically and culturally heterogenous societies going through the process of democratization and economic reform? What are the positive values of cultural, ethnic, and religious pluralism? What are the religious communities doing to promote a just society? How can mutual respect and trust be achieved among the various religious groups in order that they might be able to fulfill their peacemaking mission and enhance the emerging civil society and the process of democratization? There was a focus on the role that the religious communities can play in preventing, ameliorating, or resolving conflicts within a society or among societies as well as on some of the obstacles which prevent this from becoming a reality.

President Mircea Malitza presented his vision for the Black Sea University and the important role that the seminar had within the curriculum of his university. Dr. Ioan Datcu, the former Ambassador of Romania to the UN, lectured on the **Diplomacy of Religion**. Dr. Thomas H. Yorty, minister of the College Hill Presbyterian Church in Easton, Pa., and the co-director of the seminar, presented an important ecumenical keynote series on **The Biblical Witness to Peacemaking**. Professor Earl A. Pope, course director, lectured on the critical importance of dialogue among the members and leaders of the different religious communities, peacemaking as an imperative, and the necessity of religious freedom which he considered a fundamental human right and an integral component of an open, democratic society. Distinguished professors and
scholars lectured or participated on panels from Bosnia, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. Students from the Czech Republic and Romania presented very insightful reports on the peacemaking efforts of their churches and the obstacles which they faced. Three Pew Fellows -- Neven Duvnjak from Croatia, Alexei Krindatch from Russia, and Slobodanka Nedovic from Yugoslavia -- informed the seminar about a unique program in which they had been involved at the Center for Human Rights at Columbia University. This program seeks to promote dialogue and relationships between religious communities and the human rights movement in order that they might work together in support of religious freedom. They also discussed their experiences in the reconciliation efforts being made in different countries and societies.

Some of the major leaders in the churches in Romania (Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic) were invited to present their visions of the responsibilities of the churches in the area of peacemaking, but for a variety of reasons they were not able to attend. Most of them, however, informed us that they were in full support of our goals and would like to participate another year.

There were lectures from a number of different perspectives on the peacemaking efforts being made by the religious communities in the various countries represented in the seminar. On the one hand, participants were agreed that the churches had tremendous potential and opportunities to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation within their respective societies and that significant efforts were being made. On the other hand, they were also conscious of the fact that there remained a pressing, indeed compelling, need for authentic and continuing dialogue whereby they could overcome their misunderstandings and prejudices, respect one another as equals, discover the common assumptions which they share, and be fully supportive of one another in their respective ministries. This would involve their recognition of the full meaning of human rights in a culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse society, including the sacred right of religious freedom.

They were also concerned that, although much had been accomplished theoretically in official dialogues and agreements, there needed to be far more concrete examples of ecumenical cooperation at all levels of ecclesiastical and social life. They were convinced that the religious communities could and should have a creative role in the complex and difficult process of creating transformed civil societies which promote peace and justice throughout the region. They called upon their communities to respond to the challenges and opportunities which confronted them by
demonstrating their love for God and neighbor, by being reconciled with one another, by sharing their faith with one another, and by working together to make their maximum contributions to the moral, social, and spiritual renewal of their respective societies. The participants were convinced that this was a kairos moment in human history and embodied their concerns in a manifesto entitled A Challenge to the Religious Communities in the Black Sea Region.

There was a very impressive group of resource scholars who made very valuable contributions to our program. They spoke eloquently out of their own research and experiences and in many ways enriched our program. Dr. Zaza Abashidze, professor at Tbilisi State University, described the peaceful relations which had existed for centuries with the Jewish community in Georgia; Dr. Nicolae Enache, Program Director of AIDROM (the social agency sponsored by the Ecumenical Association of Churches in Romania), was an eloquent spokesman for the ecumenical mission of AIDROM; Dr. Georgina Szilagyi, a sociologist who teaches at the Sulyok Istvan Reformed College founded shortly after the Romanian revolution in December of 1989, discussed her research in interethnic relations; Ana Maria Matei, archivist of the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, presented her views on the proposed legislation for the religious communities in Romania; Aurora Popp, Project Manager for World Vision in Romania, talked about the efforts being made to improve the lives of the children in the orphanages; and Halil Ismet, Imam of the Esmahan Sultan Mosque in Mangalia, gave his views of the Islamic Vision of Peacemaking.

The members of the seminar participated together in an ecumenical project among the needy and marginalized in Mangalia, most of whom were from the Roma community. The Mayor, a member of the opposition party who had just recently been elected, was most helpful. He provided the transportation and assigned the social workers on his staff to provide what proved to be invaluable assistance. It was a very moving experience as the members of the seminar worked together to bring food and other basic necessities to more than 50 families in tremendous need. A group of American teachers representing various disciplines and sponsored by the Fulbright Commission visited the seminar and was particularly interested in the ecumenical project.

Each participant received more than fifty documents focusing on various aspects of the peacemaking role which the religious communities could play as well as on the problems that they faced, to supplement the lectures and to stimulate the discussions. They dealt with the opportunities and challenges in the former communist world, the importance of dialogue, issues
related to nationalism, the religious communities and war in the former Yugoslavia, the relationship of Christianity to non-Christian religions, efforts being made by religious communities at reconciliation, The World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church and religious freedom, the struggle for religious freedom in Russia, human suffering under communism, the role of religion in the Romanian revolution, freedom of conscience, and religion in the Romanian constitution.

Each morning there was a fifteen minute period of meditation led by representatives of the different confessional groups. There was some excellent musical talent in the seminar, and religious and national songs were sung in various languages. At the end of the course an ecumenical service was held in which members of several different confessional groups participated. Florin Buhuceanu, the National Coordinator for Orthodox Youth, was in charge of the worship program.

The evaluations of the seminar revealed that the overwhelming majority of the participants had had very meaningful encounters with one another, and there was a consensus indicating that such dialogical encounters are integral to building open, democratic societies in Eastern Europe. The participants learned from each other, challenged one another, were enriched by one another as they shared their respective faith perspectives and concerns, and came to appreciate and respect each other. Dr. Nedovic, professor of law at the University of Belgrade who participated in the seminar along with two of her students, wrote a letter about the "wonderful experience" that she and her students had had. "We have learned so much, exchanged so much information, and -- what I consider much more important -- we shared so much." She concluded her letter by writing that her students "returned home with a new light in their eyes, relieved of many of the prejudices we take for granted."

We are indebted to a number of donors from the States, including the College Hill Presbyterian Church in Easton, Pa., and the Presbyterian Church in Sewickley, Pa., for providing the funding which enabled participants from the minority churches to attend and which supported the ecumenical project. Also, the Andrew Murray Scholarship Fund of the Synod Peacemaking Ministries of the Synod of the Trinity, Presbyterian Church USA, provided travel funds for Dr. Yorty. Mr. and Mrs. William Lehr of Easton, Pa., Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Teel of Nazareth, Pa., provided funds for student scholarships as did Mr. Bruce B. Pope, President of Sehnsucht Inc., of Paducah, Ky. World Vision in Romania sponsored several students, and two of their directors were among the lecturers. The Soros Foundation for an Open Society approved the course as a
special East-East Program which enabled participants to come from many of the countries in the Black Sea region. Dana Mares, the Soros Program Officer in charge of the seminar, did all that she could to assist us whenever some unusual problems arose. Dale West, the Director of the Cultural Center and Library at the American Embassy, provided materials on democracy and also received boxes of books and materials for the seminar from the States. Maria Popescu, the executive secretary of the Black Sea University, and her staff were helpful in every way. The International Research and Exchanges Board awarded Professor Pope a Short-Term Travel Grant.

This coming summer Dr. Thomas Yorty will direct the seminar and will be assisted by two co-directors: Dr. Gary Miller, Lafayette College Chaplain, and the Reverend David McFarlane, minister of the Presbyterian Church in Sewickley, Pa. All three of these ministers have distinguished themselves in many different ways within the lives of their churches and their society. Professor Pope is serving as a consultant to the program. The themes in 1997 will continue to focus on the importance of authentic dialogue, will emphasize the religious dimensions of human rights, and call will attention to the importance of conflict resolution among and by the churches and to the critical role that the churches can play as models for national ethnic reconciliation.

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