



Church and Peace

International Office

Church and Peace is an ecumenical network of Christian communities, churches and organisations in Europe committed to the peace church vision.

Press Release

The European Community - an unfinished reconciliation project - The countries of the former Yugoslavia and European integration -

Under this theme, representatives of the Church and Peace Network—the ecumenical coalition of peace churches as well as peace oriented congregations, communities, and associations—gathered from throughout Europe in Brussels on the 27-29 April 2012. Alongside the formalities of the Annual General Meeting, such as the election of a new Board, the meeting provided an opportunity to discuss this topic that is so central to European politics.

For many years, Church and Peace has been in contact with partners and members from the countries of former Yugoslavia who are trying to respond to the wounds of war among the various ethnic and religious populations by fostering reconciliation through concrete social action and through training in non-violent conflict resolution. Church and Peace supports the work of these various initiatives and organizations, the formation of an inter-religious network, and the organization of inter-ethnic and inter-religious meetings/conferences under the guidance of experienced facilitators. Church and Peace also supports the development of relationships with initiatives in other regions of Europe working for reconciliation and the non-violent pursuit of human rights and peace.

Andreas Zumach, journalist from Geneva, moderated a lively discussion among the podium guests:

- Tobias Heider, Advisor on Security and Defence for The Greens European Alliance, Brussels
- Elizabeta Kitanovic, Advisor on Human Rights for The Conference of European Churches (www.ceceurope.org, Church and Society Commission, Brussels)
- Nikola Knezevic, Centre for Religious Studies, Novi Sad, Serbia; Co-ordinator of RECOM (www.zarekom.org/The-Coalition-for-RECOM.en.html)
- Snezana Kovacevic, Peace Centre, Osijek, Croatia.

In the podium discussion and in the subsequent small-group conversations it became increasingly clear just how complex are the long-term political processes that strive for integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. How can deeply divided societies find reconciliation if there is no intellectual and political elite supporting the process? What are the effects of decisions by the EU on the situation in each country and between countries, especially with respect to the implementation of human rights standards?

It also became clear that there are currently a number of non-governmental organizations working with great tenacity to foster internal integration within their respective countries—at the social level as well as in the historical investigation of the causes of war and its consequences. Reconciliation will take time. Western Europeans know this all too well from their own history. And at all levels it will need targeted support for the forces of reconciliation. Europe's future depends on reconciliation in her ethnic and religious diversity. The discussions revealed that this is a tall order for the political leaders as well as for those who actively persevere in working with the people for reconciliation.