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**Strategies for effective intercultural communication for school children: from local initiatives of non-governmental organizations to systemic change**

**Oleg Smirnov  
Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research  
(Simferopol, Ukraine)**

## **Summary of the presentation.**

*The presentation gives an overview of the practical steps in educational area on the way to the conflict free tolerant society on the Crimean peninsula, which is often referred as “a multi-ethnic region with high conflict potential”. The author presents the experience of different inter-cultural communication practices implemented on pre-school and school levels by local NGOs and directed at the creation of a wholesome, inclusive environment: methods and techniques which are already used and those which are now under development. Special attention is paid to the mechanisms of introduction of new inter-active methods of education, provided by local NGOs, into the regional education policy (e.g. through the introduction of the integrated course “Culture of Neighbourhood”).*

## **Strategies for effective intercultural communication for school children: from local initiatives of non-governmental organizations to systemic change**

The Crimea is one of many regions of the former Soviet Union fraught with economic, social and political instability. Forming the southern-most part of Ukraine and bordering the Black Sea, the Crimean peninsula was once a prime vacation spot for Soviet citizens. Today the Crimea is the Autonomous Republic (the ARC) within Ukraine with its own Parliament, Cabinet of Ministers, and its own Constitution regulating Crimean life and its relations with Ukrainian authorities. With a population of nearly 2.1 million, ethnic Russians comprise 63%, Ukrainians 23%, Crimean Tatars 12%, and a further 2% are a combination of Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Germans, and others.

The peninsula was considered a Russian territory until 1954, and the current Russian majority faces a new predicament in that it is now governed by the Ukrainian state. Similarly, the Ukrainian population struggles with the fact that they are a minority in their own land. Even more complex is the situation of the Crimean Tatars. In 1944, the Crimean Tatar population (250,000 people) was deported en masse to Central Asia and Siberia by Stalin. During the last 15 years, about 270,000 Crimean Tatars have returned to their homeland under great difficulties, often giving up a relatively stable living situation in their countries of exile for a precarious subsistence (exacerbated through hyper-inflation) with most living in about 300 settlements primarily in poor suburbs of cities and rural areas.

Tensions arose between the resident Slavic population in the Crimea and the Crimean Tatar returnees when Crimea renewed its status as Autonomous Republic in 1996. The Crimean Tatar claim for recognition as an indigenous people was met with indignation by the Russian-speaking population, accusing the Tatars of “separatism and fundamentalism.” Civil society was extremely weak, stereotypes were revived, political cleavages reinforced, and the poor economic climate in all post-Soviet societies did not help attempts to ease re-settlement of the deportees.

The complexity of transition required an acceleration of social development which forced the state institutions and the civil society to deal with significant challenges. The profound changes occurred without the concomitant development of institutional, social, and cultural mechanisms for the management of diversity at every

level: multiethnic regions, ethnic communities, schools and organizations. These changes in Ukraine have produced political, social and economic upheaval and interethnic conflicts but Government institutions tried to ignore such trends.

The main features of the political-social situation were as the following:

- an uneasy process of adaptation of mainly Russian-speaking population of Crimea to new Ukrainian reality;
- the return of many former deportees (Crimean Tatars , Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks) during a short period of time – about 300000 in total;
- the incapability of the state to meet the deportees’ social and cultural needs to the full extent causing tension in the region;
- the necessity for development of education, culture and civic activities of the deportees as elements of social equality and to prevent the feeling of being discriminated in the social-cultural area ;
- challenges for the Muslim population (about 13%) – assimilation OR segregation OR integration;
- the need to solve specific issues – obtaining of citizenship, protection of civic rights and freedoms, establishing educational institutions with the native languages of instruction, establishing cultural institutions, etc.

Today, the Crimea remains threatened by competing ethno-political ambitions which continue to exacerbate the severe economic conditions of the strategic peninsula. The potential for further unrest is significant and troubling. The Crimean peninsula is the setting for simmering ethnic hostilities. The movement from totalitarianism to political pluralism across the republics of the former Soviet Union is connected with the construction of a state and the reshaping of ethnic identities. The concepts of a “nation”, “indigenous peoples”, “national minorities”, included in the Constitution, in Ukraine continue to be undefined. There is little consensus on a Ukrainian national identity and, on a regional level, between different ethnic groups in understanding their rights, possibilities and state guarantees for the preservation of their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identity. People in the Crimea (esp. the formerly deported) are troubled and distressed by social insecurity, crime and corruption. Cases of xenophobia and religious intolerance have been reported; the rights of national minorities are often violated.

Now, in Ukraine, there is a need to decrease ethnic tension through the creation of common values, a vision of the future of society which will permit all ethnic groups feel themselves an unalienable part of a united political nation and preserve all their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural peculiarities.

For a long time the debate about minorities in the Crimea was focused on separate issues. The term “minority” means an isolated, marginalized or oppressed group struggling desperately for recognition of its rights. The stress was laid without hesitation on isolated entities whose distinctiveness was brought out by reference to a certain criterion of an ethnic, religious, linguistic or social nature. What is new in the intercultural approach is the priority it gives to interaction, reciprocal relations and mutual influence. It is characterized by a transition from hierarchic systems to networks. In consequence, the reproduction of an original cultural model, preserved in all its purity, has become a pipe dream: cultures interact and enrich each other within a web of interdependence.

The long-term goal of such considerations is the promotion of active tolerance. Both Russian-speaking and Crimean Tatar representatives do not perceive the need of “being integrated”: while the numeric majority in the Crimea expects the minority to adjust, the former deportees feel already too much “integrated” – or even

assimilated - into the Russian culture. Tolerance building should be achieved not only by providing special knowledge and skills for academics, leaders of NGOs and representatives of mass-media, but also by developing the ground for co-operation and thus achieving tolerance-building and integration as (important) “side-products”.

While a great number of projects of tolerance building in Crimea were supported by international organizations, they were mostly oriented for narrow target groups. Moreover, unfortunately, the activities of different international donors created competition among different institutions, communities and NGOs rather than collaboration between them. Thus the need is to develop the capacity of Crimean communities for tolerance, managing diversity, and prevention of violence by the creation of collaborative networks of representatives of all sectors of society.

Several surveys in 2000-2002 of Ukraine’s cultural diversity (conducted by local NGOs) registered that the general level of ethnic tolerance and intercultural dialogue did not rise since Ukraine became independent. On the contrary, intolerance toward “the Other” seemed to be on the rise. Existing cultural diversity was obviously undervalued and sometimes regarded as a brake on national consolidation. The infrastructure of school education in Ukraine and the Crimea, inherited from the Soviet past and only slightly changed, was ill-prepared for any multicultural initiatives.

One of the best examples of the negative trends in the society at school level are the results of the research conducted by the Tavrida mediation group in 2002 among the students of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades of secondary schools. Their attitude to representatives of different ethnic groups was analyzed using Bogardus scale. The results are represented in the table (see Appendix) and testify that the students are tolerant only to two ethnic groups and display xenophobia and intolerance to the representatives of other groups.

Borrowing from cross-cultural research, ethnic conflicts can be understood in terms of the complexity of dealing with diversity, with multiculturalism. Managing diversity is an on-going process that unleashes the various talents and capabilities which a diverse population brings to an organization, community or society, so as to create a wholesome, inclusive environment that is “safe for differences,” celebrates diversity, and maximizes the full potential of all, in a cultural context where everyone benefits. Multiculturalism, as the art of managing diversity, is an inclusive process where no one is left out. Diversity, in its essence, then, is a ‘safeguard against idolatry’, the making of one group as the norm for all groups. Unfortunately, in Ukraine, the theory and practice of multiculturalism are not well developed, yet very necessary for Ukrainian society.

It’s worth reminding that the creative group of the Ukrainian centre of cultural research believes that “realization of the basics of multiculturalism couldn’t be brought either to teaching the native languages to ethnic minority children (or even to opening of the national schools), or to the total introduction of the school subject “multiculturalism”. It supposes a perspective revision of the whole educational system and methods of teaching of the majority school subjects, from languages and history to natural science disciplines. Hence derive all the problems with writing “multiculturalism-centred” manuals, re-training teachers, and the introduction of the new educational methods.

We should say that a significant contribution to reforming the system of education and implementing many innovative initiatives comes from educational NGOs and their joint efforts.

During 1997-2003 the Crimean NGOs gained considerable experience of solving regional educational problems, especially in the area of education for representatives of formerly deported Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans and Greeks. Their activities were supported by international programs and donor organizations including the Integration Program of the International Renaissance Foundation. Russian and Ukrainian communities, as well as representatives of other ethnic groups, were involved in collaborative actions.

Today we can speak about certain achievements on the way to **creating equal opportunities** for children of different ethnic communities in providing the rebirth of their native languages, creating conditions for its learning and being taught in native language. The main NGO activities were aimed at creating a situation of “equal opportunities” in the social-cultural area, non-conflict finding by the deportees of their “sector” in the society of the Crimea and Ukraine, and supporting and stabilizing the mechanism of the deportees’ integration into Ukrainian community taking into account the many-sided character of this process in the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic environment. Accordingly, all these together contributed to maintaining peace, mutual understanding, and the democratic foundation of the society development in Ukraine.

The majority of the population understands that this is only one aspect of the multicultural (or inter-cultural) approach to education in poly-ethnic regions. The latest joint initiatives of the Crimean NGOs, community leaders, local authorities involved the creation and publication of Ukrainian and Russian translations of Crimean Tatar books; the popularization of cultures of other ethnic groups, experience of bilingual or multilingual schools, Sunday and non-traditional schools development projects «Ascent to the beginnings»; the creation of special courses on the history and culture of Crimean Tatars for schools using the Russian language for instruction «Ethnology. Crimean Tatars» in the Bakhchisaray district, a special course for institutions of higher learning «Ethnic history and peculiarities of traditional culture of peoples of the Crimea», a special course «Intercultural management», the experience of multi-lingual educational materials for kindergartens and primary schools “In the Crimean Home”, “Fairytale echo”, “Crimean Cradle” etc.). The aim is to move toward the **education of mutual cultural understanding and tolerance** for the representatives of different ethnic (linguistic, religious, cultural) groups.

***Our strategic approach to the development of the education in the region includes:***

- creating a climate of socially and culturally "equal opportunities",
- taking into account state and regional factors,
- involving the general public in the development of the strategy and management of initiatives,
- supporting numerous local initiatives, resolving common global problems by way of local transformation,
- contributing to the maintenance of the peace, mutual understanding, and democratic principles of societal development in Ukraine

How did everything start? The project of the Crimean Armenian Community “Sunday schools: ways of development” in 1997 for the first time made it possible to arrange training not only for the teachers of Armenian Sunday schools, but for the teaching practitioners of the six national cultural communities within Crimea. That was really a new approach to learning the mother tongue, history and culture, where teachers overcame the limitations of their strict national interests and surroundings in order to create conditions for the exchange of experiences and for teaching tolerance. Crossing the Crimean frontier helped local teachers, together with the teachers of non-

traditional schools of Western Ukraine, to break through the estrangement between the regions. This approach stimulated the state educational authorities to give more attention to non-traditional schools.

Among the local initiatives of the Crimean NGOs should be mentioned the following:

- Series of publications “In the Crimean Home” in three languages (native, Russian, Ukrainian). Few could foresee in 1998, what a humble project comprising educational, methodological, historical and ethnographic materials compiled in the album, ‘In Crimean Home: Armenians’, would lead to. That work started a whole series of poly-ethnic trilingual publications about Bulgarians, Greeks, Germans and Ukrainians, aimed at schools. From project to project there was not only growth in the quantity of publications in the languages of the Crimea, and the number of groups and classes learning the native languages and culture, but the numbers of authors increased as did tolerance, respect and wisdom.
- Research and round table discussions on regional educational policy with special emphasis on multicultural issues.
- Supplementary materials for existing courses in history, language and literature.
- Design of special courses for studying the ethnic history and traditional cultures of Crimean ethnic communities and basics of conflict prevention and resolution (school mediation, peer mediation).
- Summer schools of peace for schoolchildren, students and community leaders.
- Empowering education program experience spreading in the Crimean schools.

Special attention should be paid to two multilingual publications for primary schools: “Crimean Cradle” (in seven languages) and “Fairytale Echo” (in eight languages). Among the positive results of such initiatives we can mention the following:

- it was the first time representatives of seven ethnic groups of different confessions united to work together – positive experience for future initiatives,
- publications stimulate children and their parents to get learn more about values and traditions of their neighbours and form positive attitudes,
- parallel texts of one fairytale allow the study of the native language and the languages of neighbours,
- the books are supplied with special methodological material for a teacher to develop different skills of children,
- the books help children to establish first contacts with representatives of other cultures, and teach how they can communicate with their group or class mates.

Another initiative should also be mentioned, that of local communities finding new forms of communal education in multicultural settlements of the Crimea through home schools, educational and leisure centres. Home schools are a non-traditional form of child development education. A teacher prepares children for school by providing one or two rooms in his or her own house. Along with preparation for school, the centres organize various interest groups (music, language, etc.) and home schools appear to be a cultural centre for children and youth in the community. These models are viable and necessary in communities.

All the local initiatives created the need for a more complex approach to education issues on the peninsula. The main goal of several projects started in 2004 by several NGOs with the UNDP education component support and the IRF and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Crimea is **to educate Crimean civil society**

in a “**culture of multiculturalism**”. These initiatives try to stimulate **state policy transformation** and address all levels of education: pre-school and school education, education for authorities, and education for communities (including local authorities, school administrations, teachers and parents). They can be described in the following way:

- Independent monitoring of textbooks and manuals on issues of ethnic intolerance toward different ethnic groups of Ukraine. A special civic commission, which consists of teachers and representatives of NGOs, monitors programs, textbooks and manuals disseminated by the state in the Crimean schools.
- The integrated course “Culture of Neighbourhood” development including courses:
  - for pre-school education “Crimean Wreath” (kindergartens, community educational centres),
  - for primary schools children,
  - for secondary school pupils,
  - for high school students.
- Special training course including knowledge of ethnic history and conflict resolution developed for representatives of authorities of all levels.
- The Informational and methodological centre for intercultural education and tolerance with a resource library established at the premises of the Crimean Ethnographic Museum in order to provide informational and methodological support for larger community in multicultural studies, management of diversity, tolerance and conflict resolution.
- Web-site development as a resource and discussion forum for teachers, students and community leaders.
- Special educational programs and placements for students and pupils based on the potential of cultural ethno-centers of Crimea.

The core initiative, important for achieving the strategic goal, is by several non-governmental organizations and educational institutions supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Crimea and is directed at the creation and introduction of the integrated course “**Culture of Neighbourhood**”. (See the structure of the course in Appendix 2). The course includes several inter-connected blocks (35 hours per year) for pre-school education (kindergartens, community educational centres – course “Crimean wreath”), for primary and secondary school pupils, for high school students; for the students of institutions of higher learning of the Crimea and for the retraining of teachers. The integrated course “Culture of neighbourhood” consists of several elements and includes basic knowledge of local ethnic groups’ history, geography, languages, literatures, religions, axiology and cultures, and provides conflict resolution skills together with practical and research activities. The main purpose of the course is up-bringing and education of children for efficient intercultural (inter-confessional, inter-language) communication in a poly-ethnic environment. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Crimea is ready to find special time for it within curricula. The course will be obligatory for all schools of the Crimean autonomy.

Getting some knowledge of one’s neighbour’s native tongue is one of the integral elements of the course, because the main peculiarity of Crimean schools is their multinational character. Any class includes children of at least 3 nationalities: Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar. And practically everywhere there are also representatives of other ethnic groups. Elementary contacts and mutual understanding

can be possible only when individuals have an acquaintance with everyday words and phrases: the so called vocabulary of interaction and etiquette (such as greeting techniques, etc.). The work of compiling the “Friendship vocabulary” has already united the philologists of 26 national cultural communities of the Crimea. The teacher himself/herself can choose a language according to national content of the class.

*The main tasks of the “culture of Neighbourhood” course are:*

- to form an active civic position, a sense of national dignity, a positive attitude to cultural and religious diversity in Ukraine, respect of common human values and values of own and neighbouring cultures,
- to teach the culture of peace, ethnic and confessional tolerance, communication skills,
- to draw the attention of pupils to the local ethnic history of the region, the way of living and traditions of ethnic groups of the Crimea,
- to provide students with basic knowledge of neighbours’ languages, their folklore and literature for friendly communication,
- to develop skills of critical thinking, conflict analysis and resolution.

*Main principles of the “Culture of neighbourhood” course:*

- Equality of all religious and ethnic groups irrespective of their status, numbers or length of domicile in the territory of the Crimea;
- Pluralism of opinions on the issues of ethno-genesis and ethnic history;
- Rebirth, preservation and development of ethno-cultural identity and dialogue of cultures;
- Priority of up-bringing tasks;
- Unity of the curricula, extra-curricula and extra-class activities, creative organization of educational activities (not only to learn modern ethno-cultural traditions, but to reconstruct them, trace their development and changes in time);
- Links with other courses;
- Possibility of modifying the course into a subject of the invariant part of the curriculum, or a special or faculty course depending on the availability of teaching hours in the school curriculum;
- Continuation of the course at all the levels of education process: from kindergartens through schools to institutions of higher learning;
- Maximum involvement of students into practical activities aimed at getting to know the home land through participation in the every-day life of the Crimean autonomy, their town, village, community, school;
- Involvement of a family or a community as a source of information and active participant of the education process;
- Using no less than one third of the education time for practical activities, non-standard lessons and excursions, which will permit the full presentation of the subject;
- Implementation of trainings, inter-active educational forms and methods.

The introduction of such a course will demand the teacher training. And now a working group is preparing such a course for practising teachers and for students at colleges of pedagogy.

One of the main directions is going to be the informational support of teachers and professors. The Informational and Methodological Centre for Intercultural Education and Tolerance with a resource library was established at the premises of the Crimean Ethnographic Museum in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture. It makes it possible to conduct activities for educators as well as lessons for students. The first step has been the creation of special programs for school children using the



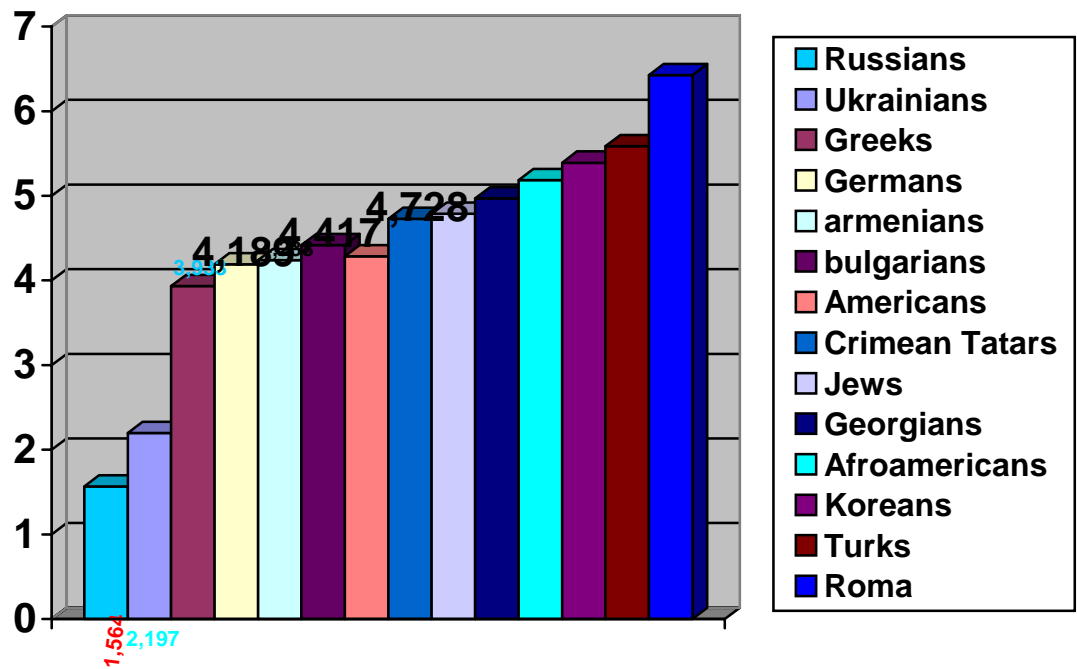
potential of ethno-cultural centres. A school for national handicrafts for Crimean children, representing different ethnic communities, was conducted in August 2004.

One of prospective areas, students' activities, will be supported through the creation of an inter-university student centre for multicultural education. It is planned to develop case studies of cultural narratives (research local practices of conflict resolution and management of diversity in school and university environment, among the varied ethnic groups of the Crimean peninsula), to be used in the curriculum, as well as in training and intervention.

We hope that the timely and task-oriented education activities, first of all at the school level, directed at promoting tolerance in relations between representatives of different cultures on the Crimean peninsula, will remove the threat of instability and promote conditions for economical and social rebirth. Taking a cultural perspective on ethnic conflicts permits and supports a focus on diversity and invokes strategies for promoting multiculturalism; this perspective contributes to the theoretical frameworks, as well to as the practical tools, that can be used in the resolution of ethnic conflicts. Concomitantly, this cultural focus functions as a preventive approach, for the interventions associated with cultural differences involve building cultural competency and respect for diversity.

## Social and Ethnic Distance (2002)

10-11<sup>th</sup> grades students



## Appendix 2

Integrated course “Culture of Neighbourhood” or “Neighbourhood”  
1 hour/week = 35 hours = 25 theory + 10 practice

Grade	Course title	Obligatory thematic lines															
		Geography			History			Traditional culture					Language of a neighbour			Axiology (work of values)	
		Natural environment	Ecology	My care*	My region*	Me and my neighbors	We are the Crimeans	General knowledge. Material culture <sup>1</sup>	Handicrafts and traditional arts	Spiritual culture	Religion	Traditional way of living	History of languages	Vocabulary for communication	Folklore*, national literatures	Of my people	Of my neighbours
Pre-school level																	
3-4 years	Crimean wreath																
4-5 years	Crimean wreath																
Primary school																	
1	Me, my family and neighbours																
2	Place where we live																
3	Work, study and rest together																
4	We are proud of Crimea																
Secondary school																	
5	Different voices of Crimea																
6	Travel in the history of peninsula																
7	Palette of cultures and religions																
8	Hospitable peninsula																
9	Flourishing in unity																
High school																	
10	By the roads of millenniums																
11	Crimean mosaic: charming diversity																
12	Me and my peninsula today and tomorrow																
Higher educational level																	
1	Introductory course																
5	Special course																
Teacher retraining level																	
K	Special course																

\* these thematic blocks can be conducted as practice in a form of trainings, excursions, festivals, choreography lessons, master-classes, «lessons of nature care», etc.

**Presenter information.**

**Oleg Smirnov**, a Candidate Degree in Philology (Odessa State University, 1991). An associate professor of the Department of Inter-Language Communication and Journalism at Tavrida National University named after V. I. Vernadsky, head of the Board of the Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research and Regional resource agency “Crimea-Perspective” (NGOs), director of the Crimean projects of the International Renaissance Foundation (The Soros Foundation). In 1997 - 2003 he was the director of the Program “Integration of Formerly Deported Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans, Greeks into Ukrainian Society” at the International Renaissance Foundation. Responsible for developing Program strategy, initiating proposals for the Program competitions, for grant management of the approved projects. Conducts research on ethnic relations in Crimea, systems of early conflict prevention, education and management of diversity practice in the Crimea. Participated in projects: Council of Europe, project “Universities as sites of Citizenship” (1999 –2000); US Institute of Peace, project “School of Peace” at the Tavrida National University (2000 –2001); Joint project of Tavrida National University and G. Mason University (USA) on the introduction of conflict resolution and peacebuilding courses for students of Crimean Universities (2000 – 2003). The results of his research were presented at more than 20 international conferences. He conducts seminars, round tables and training for leaders of NGOs, national community leaders, school teachers and government officials.