

“Understanding Civic and Faith-Based Education in Albania”

Second Quarterly Report

December 1st, 2004 – February 28th, 2005

During the second trimester, December 1st, 2004 – February 28th, 2005, a series of activities have been carried out in the framework of the project “Understanding Civic and Faith-based Education in Albania”. According to the plan, two round-table debates were successfully organized in the towns of Librazhd and Gramsh.

The round-table debate in the town of Gramsh was organized on December 13th, 2004, with the precious support of the Municipality and the District Department of Education in Gramsh. Nearly thirty participants in this debate included the Mayor of Gramsh, Mr. Tajar Bici, the Vice-Prefect of Gramsh, Mr. Enver Qose, the Head of the District Department of Education, Mrs. Sofie Fejzo, the representative of the Muslim community, the Myfti of Gramsh, Mr. Agim Terziu as well as elementary and secondary school principals, teachers, representatives of students’ governments, civil society, media, etc.

In her opening remarks the Head of the District Department of Education, Mrs. Sofie Fejzo, underlined the importance of the debate and also extended her thanks to IDRA and the American Embassy in Tirana.

Mrs. Violeta Nishku, civic education teacher and principal of a local secondary school said she was happy to see so many people together to discuss about civic and faith-based education. She considered teachers an extremely important factor to the quality of Albanian citizens and demanded teacher’s books and special training sessions for civic education teachers so that they improve their teaching, especially in topics like accounting, law and government.

The chairman of the students’ senate in “Shefqet Guzi” secondary school, Mr. Olian Cenaj, thanked the District Department of education and the Municipality for their support to the students’ governments to organize civic activities. He, and some other participants, including the Mayor and Vice-Prefect, who took the floor afterwards, expressed their concern about the rapid widespread of drug trafficking, especially among youth in their small town, and asked for assistance in promoting an awareness campaign among youth. Their idea is to stage an open debate among secondary school students with a special focus on drugs to try to prevent further widespread and other victims.

The Mayor of Gramsh, Mr. Tajar Bici, insisted that cooperation, which is quite possible in a small town like Gramsh, should be further extended and promised support from his institution to civic projects, particularly to those initiated by students.

In his discussion, Mr. Xhevit Dyrmyshi, specialist in the District Department of Education particularly emphasized the need for training civic education teachers with a special focus on practical civic activities. He and some other participants were of the opinion that the present Albanian seems to be more inclined towards material values and they underlined the importance of serious civic efforts to focus attention to moral and spiritual values, an area where there the religious communities must be considered as partners. We need to join efforts with religious communities and work on a common program to fight against negative phenomena like prostitution, drugs, divorce, etc.

During his discussion, the Myfti of Gramsh, Mr. Agim Terziu, extended his thanks for this wonderful opportunity to discuss about how schools, local authorities, civil society and religious communities can work together to cultivate values that can contribute to a more democratic, diverse and tolerant society. The fact that schools are secular does not mean that education and religion must fight against each other, on the contrary, he said, it inherently carries the message of non-interference, respect and tolerance. Religion and education have one very important thing in common: they both try to prevent through educating values. This provides a very positive ground for cooperation and it is up to us to make it happen. He mentioned some very good examples of vocational training courses offered by the Muslim Center "Kadin Bimbuti" to local youth and adults, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Mr. Pellumb Xhelili, school principal, and several other participants proposed the creation of a Community Forum for Citizenry, which, as Mrs. Luljeta Dollani, specialist in the District department of Education said, must prioritize our needs for local-level civic activities, one of which could very well be the televised debate on drugs. Whereas, Mr. Edmond Hida, representative of CEFA and Mr. Arbër Zaimi, representative of the Youth Parliament, both underlined the need to better use the media to enhance the positive impact of all civic and faith based activities organized in Gramsh.

In their concluding remarks, the Mayor of Gramsh, Mr. Tajar Bici, the Vice-Prefect of Gramsh, Mr. Enver Qose and the Head of the District Department of Education, Mrs. Sofie Fejzo, considered the debate very fruitful and constructive and promised their support to the Community Forum for Citizenry.

The second round-table debate was organized in the town of Librazhd, on December 14th, 2004, in close cooperation and with the support of the District Department of Education and the Municipality of Librazhd. There were about twenty participants, which represented the local stakeholders and community, including the representative from the Municipality, Mr. Ismet Kasa, Head of Cultural and Educational Section, Mr. Musa Alliu, Head of the Human Resources Section in the District Department of Education, Mr. Isuf Sula, inspector for public services in the District Council, Mr. Muhamet Muça, Head of the Local Cultural

Center, school principals, teachers, representatives of the students' governments and youth parliament from various schools, representatives of the media, etc.

The participants thanked IDRA and the American Embassy in Tirana for organizing this round table, which, they agreed, was an important step in promoting the cooperation among local capacities with the purpose of taking joint action to address important issues of a civic and religious character.

In his discussion, Mr. Ramazan Berberi, inspector responsible for social subjects in the local District Department of Education, underlined the fact that the burden of civic education was almost entirely left to the schools and there was scarcely any cooperation with or support from local authorities, parents' community, which makes things really difficult for schools. He called for more support especially from parents and stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation with the parents' community in the future. Issues like city cleaning could provide the ground for taking joint action on a local level. He also said that it was very difficult for them to find ways to cooperate with the local religious community and expressed his reluctance about the influence of faith-based education in public schools.

Mrs. Nexhmije Prrenja, civic education teacher in "Genc Leka" elementary school was of the opinion that there has been considerable improvement in civic education textbooks. Yet, there are still concepts borrowed from American Literature, which need to be adapted to the Albanian reality. Textbooks include practical activities, which are always neglected, and this is another reason why a lot more needs to be done for strengthening the practical skills among students so that they can act as active citizens.

Mr. Pandi Popovski, principal of the elementary school in Prrenjas, pointed out the big changes that have occurred in the mentality, outlook, and family background of the Albanians during these last 15 years. He said that civic education and the acquisition of universal moral values should be given special importance in this period of rapid change. However, he, and some other participants, underlined the fact that the organization of successful civic activities largely depended on funding, which was extremely difficult to get.

In her discussion, Eneida Krasniqi, representative of students' government, agreed that there were very few activities or projects, which could help students to take active part in school or local civic life. Students' governments think that annual educational plans prepared by teachers and students are scarcely fulfilled and most of the activities are routine and boring. She suggested that there be fewer activities but which should catch the students' interest and also demanded that school principals and teachers have more confidence and provide more support to students' governments. Eneida said that many activities could be organized with no or little funding and that funding would be good for local-level projects of interest to the community.

Mr. Ismet Hasa, Head of the Cultural and Educational Section in the Municipality of Librazhd, agreed that there was very little cooperation between local authorities and schools for civic issues of common interest to the community. He mentioned some activities organized by his office, but which, as he said, were insufficient. However, he underlined the importance of working together with schools, students, parents and religious community to address issues of concern for the community, especially drug and prostitution, which had made several victims among the youth of the town in the recent years. The participants concluded that it was very to realize that good citizens were not made in a day and that every little and modest civic activity was worth the effort.

On January 6th, 2005, a meeting was organized with Mr. Saimir Rusheku, Head of Department of Education in the Albanian Muslim Community, the principal of the Medrese of Tirana, Mr. Flamur Gjymyshka and representatives from the newly created youth parliament of that school to discuss about how they could organize a week of solidarity with the Victims of the tsunami and make their modest contribution.

Representatives of the youth parliament, teachers and the principals created a team, which worked for the whole week, 10 – 14 January, 2005, and collected contributions from the students of the Medrese, mainly clothes, food and some cash, which were sent to the Albanian Red Cross on January 17th, with a dedication from the Medrese students. The next day, the representatives of the youth parliament and the school principal organized a short meeting in the school hall to thank all the students for their contributions and underlined that such events contribute to love, harmony and peace and bring people closer.

Another interesting activity was organized with the Medrese of Tirana on January 19th, on the occasion of the famous Muslim Holiday, Bajram. The first and second year students of this school, who last year took part in the small project “Religious Holidays for Tolerance”, invited their team members from the public secondary school “Çajupi” to take part in their celebration of Bajram. Students greeted one another with songs and poems and celebrated together.

During this period, there have also been two meetings in Kavaja and Lushnja, with representatives from Municipality and Departments of Education, to discuss the idea of initiating a small project called “What is Local Government”. The purpose of this project is give students of grades 6 and 7 from one elementary school in each city an opportunity to learn about local government through visits in their respective Municipalities, with the possibility of making this a regular event and open these municipalities to similar visits from school students.

The meetings in both cities were very fruitful. In Kavaja, the Mayor, Mr. Refik Rrugia and the Head of the District Department of Education, Mr. Sulejman Dakoli, appreciated the idea and pledged their support. There was equal

appreciation of the proposal in the city of Lushnja from the Mayor, Mr. Kadri Gega, and the Chief Inspector in the District Department of Education, Mr. Agim Bakushi. Both Mayors said they would be very happy to welcome students in their offices and establish a tradition of regular visits from school students to their municipalities. They said this would not only be an opportunity for them to learn about local government, but also to understand that Municipalities are their and all other citizens' institutions. It was agreed that the District Departments of Education in both cities would select the schools and make a plan of visits during February and April. The Department of Education in Lushnja selected the elementary school "Kongresi i Lushnjes", and in Kavaja they selected "3 Dëshmoret". The first visits to the respective municipalities will be organized within March 10th, 2005.

On 20-21 January, 2005, two meetings were organized with Mrs. Sharon Moran, from the Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, California, to discuss the potentials for future cooperation with this Center. Mrs. Moran was informed about the state of civic education in Albania. Mrs. Mariana Sinani, from the Institute for Pedagogical Research, also took part in the second meeting. The discussions mainly focused on three issues: 1. the possibility to introduce Project Citizen in a local university; 2. an in-service certification program for teachers of civic education; and 3. cooperation for a South-East European Freeman Butts Institute on civic education.

Work for the future will focus on these main activities:

- a) Efforts to organize a debate on drugs with secondary school students in Gramsh, first on a school level and then in a local TV studio;
- b) Replication of the project "Religious holidays for Tolerance in Shkodra, Elbasan and Berat;
- c) Follow up on the activities of the small project "What is local government", in Kavaja and Lushnja; and
- d) the organization of two round-table debates in Kavaja and Lushnja

Project Coordinator

Shefqet Shyti

shytish@idra.org.al