

Spiritual Revival – Bulgaria

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Eastern Orthodox, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Pagan

Location of CC: Plovdiv, Bulgaria

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Approved: 12.10.2014

Key Areas of Focus: folklore, charity, spiritual, religious

Names of CC Profile Participants: Georgi Karadjov, Maryika Gerasova

Date of Interview: 08.07.2015

Summary:

“Spiritual Revival” CC is a new born CC from Bulgaria (2015), working mainly in the city of Plovdiv – one of the places where different religious traditions and cultures have coexisted for centuries. They are working with grassroots people, orphans, and minority groups in the society. Even though Spiritual Revival has a short history as a CC, they have been working on the issues of tolerance, dialogue, mutual understanding and living together since 1991. Many projects have been done since then and some of them are at the national level. The interfaith group has enthusiastic, positive, and creative people wishing to change the world. They are aware that if we want to change the world we have to start with ourselves and connect with others with the same vision. That was the reason we have joined the URI family and become a member of that global network. Since the URI Europe conference in Plovdiv, our group has worked to meet with board members, to share their vision with participants from other European CCs, and to connect with URI Bulgaria. The positive and important product they are producing is an online newspaper with a focus on spirituality, religion, interfaith dialogue, history and spiritual awakening - <http://novosianie.com/> (only in Bulgarian language).

CC Profile Questionnaire:

1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

Bulgaria is multiethnic and multireligious country on the Balkan Peninsula. It has succeeded in protecting ethnic and religious peace during the transitional period after collapse of socialist system, in comparison with the turmoil and wars in the neighboring countries on the Balkans- Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, and Albania. Though there still exists sensitive spheres in need of multiethnic cooperation, we can point out that there is no tension between them.

2. Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC works?

Our country is situated in the center of the so called “powder-keg” of Europe. Here started the First World War. In this region we had the bloodiest wars of the end of the 20th century. At the same time we have great ethnic and religious diversity and we have lived together for centuries.

3. Please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is carrying out? Please specify the year in which the activity took/is taking place.

Though our organization only joined URI in 2015, our history dates back to 1991. We can count the most important activities:

1. Since 1996: Under one roof, in one home-Bulgaria- program connected with the different minorities in Bulgaria
2. Since 1995: Protection of Bulgarian traditions, customs and authentic folklore
3. National movement- purity and health
4. Children of the future
 - a. Children and Folklore
 - b. Purity and Health: National Children & Youth Movement
5. Since 1996: Cultural program with different ethnic groups and religions
6. European conference of URI in Plovdiv 2015 - our secretary Georgi Karadjov participated in discussions and gave a report - “Plovdiv, European Capital of Culture: Crossroad of Religions and Cultures”
7. Currently organizing an international conference with the Philippopolis Church Council in Plovdiv called “East and West Divided: Causes, Consequences- Modern Context.”
8. They are in need of our help - work with children from orphanage homes.
9. Home for mutual help - charity etc.

4. Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?

We work with Eastern Orthodox practitioners, Catholics, Muslims, different Protestant denominations, and related cultures.

5. Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that generally do not engage or cooperate with each other.

The aim of our methods is to create tolerance and confidence between people. We think this approach gives the necessary results.

6. Why do the activities your CC is carrying out improve cooperation among people of different traditions in the broader community?

Our activities improve cooperation because they lay the foundation for equal rights dialogue. They also create opportunities for cooperation in different spheres of life and help accomplish national and international projects.

7. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? Have there been any challenges?

We try to overcome challenges through mutual understanding and respect. Challenges can exist in atmosphere of contradictions and mistrust. In cooperation we want to achieve high ethical standards.

8. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?

Yes, there is improvement in that sphere. We think that the slogan "Together" of the successful campaign for *Plovdiv: European Capital of Culture* indicates the importance of mutual understanding between religions and ethnic groups in Plovdiv.

9. What does your CC hope to achieve?

Our goal is to usher in an improvement of understanding, cooperation, and tolerance between different ethnic groups, religions and cultures. That includes developing joint projects aimed at real improvements in the lives of people. Most importantly: we aim to achieve peace for all people on earth.

10. Aside from funding, what are some specific ways URI can better support your CC in reaching its goals?

It is important for us to point to URI as co-organizer of our projects and activities, though without financial support. Special letters of support would be a useful tool.

11. As you know, the Purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. In what ways do you feel your CC's work helping to achieve this purpose?

Our activities are aimed at improvement and stimulation of multiethnic and multicultural dialogue.

12. What value or benefits does your CC receive from being a member of URI?

URI is an international organization and it brings an international dimension to our activities. It increases our prestige in communication with Bulgarian authorities and nongovernmental organizations.

13. What value or benefit does your CC currently provide or could potentially provide the URI network?

We have broad relations with different ethnic, religious and cultural groups in Bulgaria. We are in close contact with *Plovdiv 2019*, a foundation in charge of many activities in connection with the program of *Plovdiv: European Capital of Culture 2019*. We think there is an opportunity for our joint projects with URI to be included in this program.

14. Do you communicate or work with other CCs in the URI network? If yes, please share a few examples. If no, please explain why you have been unable/ uninterested to connect with other CCs.

We became members of URI only recently - in 2015. We made our first serious contacts in the International conference of URI that was held in April 2015 in Plovdiv. We identified there possible partners for future projects. We are happy to be in contact with other Bulgarian CCs.

15. As a CC that works on improving interfaith relations, perhaps you have seen, heard, or experienced something interesting. Please share a very important personal experience or lesson related to interfaith/intercultural relations that changed impacted your beliefs OR a story about something that happened in your community related to interfaith relations.

Our most important experience was the International conference of URI in Plovdiv. We were happy to become acquainted with people who share a broad view and understanding, not only of the function of URI, but also of the world we live in. Secondly, we are impressed by the systematic effort to build understanding and cooperation between representatives of different religions and cultures. And last, but not least, we were excited about the real opportunities for joint projects with international influence.