

Contribution of *Soteria International* to session 9: Human rights education and conflict resolution

We would like to raise the subject of national identity. Usually we refer to the national or ethnic identities as source of conflicts between different populations living in neighboring countries or within the same country. The differences between these populations are considered to be reasons for xenophobia, nationalism and racism. The reality of immigration is making this situation even more complicated. The trend of globalization, on the other hand, is making the national and ethnic identities quickly fade away, and some believe that this will help avoid conflicts.

We wish to present another perspective. In our perspective, national identity can serve actually as a source for peace and understanding.

In our view, national identity, like individual identity, has a higher aspect and a lower aspect.

The higher aspect is in touch with the heritage and culture of those people, and includes certain values and characteristics which are specific to that nation. These values and characteristics are always of a higher nature – they are everything that is extraordinary and good about that people.

When we are not in-touch with our higher national identity, then all that remains to unite the people is the lower national identity – that means uniting around the fact that we are different than the others, need to reject and defend against the others, we are united by a common enemy. Unfortunately – this is the most common kind of national identity today and is the source of much conflict.

When the higher national identity is developed this problem is resolved.

A healthy national identity, that is focused not upon rejecting the other, but upon knowing who you are, makes one feel very secure and therefore comfortable and open in their interaction with the other.

The development of the higher national identity also makes one develop more the elevated aspects of his nation – becoming the best he can. And every nation has something great and remarkable about it: the Germans have their efficiency and loyalty, the Danish have the ability to make everything around them estetic, the French make everything being romantic, the Romanians put heart into everything, the Jews have intelligence, the Africans have a great vitality, the Russians have a sense of greatness. There are always exception but these characteristics are generally true when we talk about the whole nation.

By developing these higher attributes, we gain then something that we can contribute and give to the other nations. In the same time, we become open to learn from the other nations what is wonderful and good about them, enriching ourselves in this way. Like this, we find a new dimension of peace and cooperation, starting from the national identity. The model is like a great meal, that all the nations are joining, each bringing his own specific dish, making the meal so much more diverse and delicious. Imagine a nation with no identity – what will it bring to the meal?

All this elements are based upon our work with the spiritual universal principles, which are detailed in a paper that we have submitted for this session, called "peace for the 21st century: towards a new paradigm about peace taking in consideration spiritual principles & scientific modern discoveries". This is uploaded on the conference site and you can read more about these principles there.

practical recommendation: that in all OSCE participating countries, it will be promoted through the education system the value of the national identity and the national heritage and values. This should focus upon people learning the higher aspects of their own heritage, encouraged to develop their national identity. In the same time, the educational system should also aim to encourage a study of the heritage and values of other national and ethnic elements which are present in the area – either in neighboring countries or within the same state. This should take place both through the educational system for children, as well as for the teachers themselves, and through

promotion of cultural events for the general population.