

# Routes of Vision, Roots of Change

“There is an irresistible demand to strengthen the leadership of the constructive forces of the world at the present momentous time.”  
(John Raleigh MOTT, at his Nobel Lecture in 1946)

*Heralded as one of the all-time great theatrical releases, Twelve Angry Men by Sidney LUMET (1957), which was remade later by William FRIEDKIN (1997), is based on the drama of Reginald ROSE and focuses on a jury’s deliberations in a capital murder case.*

*A twelve-man jury is sent to begin deliberations in the murder trial of a young Latino, accused in the stabbing death of his father; a guilty verdict at that time means an automatic death sentence.*

*The criminal case appears to be open-and-shut, so eleven of the jurors immediately vote ‘guilty’; only one casts a ‘not guilty’ vote. As the deliberations unfold, the story quickly becomes a study of a difficult decision-making situation of life and death, with diverse and complex personalities, preconceptions, backgrounds and interactions.*

## A Viable Vision on Visible Unity

What are our visions, and how can we realise them? Our two seminars in 2007 focused on our shared historical heritage, present circumstances, and visions for the future. What roots do we hold to? In what areas do we need to develop? What methods lead to renewal and reconciliation? How do current prejudices effect our present and our future?

Due to the division and fragmentation of Christianity, for the current historical period, all those, who rightly call themselves Christians, find it difficult to belong to the same institutional Church.

Nevertheless, young Christians should dream, imagine and make a viable vision on the visible unity of the Church. Such a vision should be based most of all on Biblical metaphors, and on the living Tradition, on the various ecumenical findings, outcomes and results, and on the commitment and creativity of youth and students.

Through this vision gradually arises a new model of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; a model which originates from communication and friendship, will culminate, through dialogue, in visible communion.

We are given examples from the living Tradition based on the Bible (for example, the Council of Jerusalem, the Johannine and the Pauline communities, the role of the prophets), and shaped and inspired by the wisdom of the Church throughout the whole history.

These concern the models of inner dialogue among (members of) Christian communities: for example, the Council of Chalcedon, reformed and presbyterian church order and structure, and the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

An important question concerns the borders of a given community: our responsibility towards those fallen out, oppressed, silenced, excluded, marginalised and excommunicated, forced to leave the institution and the society (the dissenters).

We try to make clear what kind of historical heritage we have, possess and utilize when trying to find the most effective ways of leadership. Our focus is, on the one hand, whether the political history of Central (and Eastern) Europe provide meaningful and fertile models for our social behaviour today; for example, as concerns the Visegrád cooperation (1991).

Or, on the other hand, we deal with the past forms of leadership, hierarchy and counter-selection: whether they rather constitute a burden to be carried by us in the upcoming twenty-first century.

For example, the royal or Communist Party influence on the appointment of bishops, the cooperation and collaboration of secular and ecclesiastical powers, the double measures applied on national and minority rights, or the different autocratic leaders in the midwar and cold war years and today.

An integral part of the decision-making process is the right discernment and reception, in which the community says the final word and expresses the sense of the believers on the realities enlightened by our faith.

We understand pluralistic and representative democracy as the way of harmonizing different values, ideals, interests and visions in dialogue; and as all people's participation and shared responsibility in local, subregional, regional and global decision-making.

Thus defined, we are firmly convinced that there is much to learn from the democratic methods of leadership and decision-making developed in the course of history, culture, and Church history.



At the same time, the Church certainly has much to offer to and share with contemporary communities in this respect, too: for example, as concerns the notions of responsible authority, of collegiality and synodality, of trust-building and consensus, or of mutual accountability.

During a cultural excursion and in a place of spiritual pilgrimage, one becomes acquainted with the traditional, yet nevertheless ever-new forms of communitarian reconciliation, spiritual leadership and contemplative decision-making.

We feel that the ecumenical movement is in a phase where the fruits, outcomes and results of the bilateral, multilateral and global dialogues can be harvested and applied, as far as guidance, governance and teaching are concerned.

## **A Decision Made**

Our 2007 winter seminar focused on *Leadership and Decision-making in Democratic Communities*, gathering students from across Central Europe to discuss and evaluate the decision-making models of the past, present, and future both in the Church and in secular society.

The setting, in *Sopron*, Hungary, reflected well the topic, as the city of Sopron (Ödenburg in German) voted, by referendum, to remain part of Hungary after the First World War, in 1921, thus gaining the title *civitas fidelissima*, or the 'most faithful city'.

We examined the historical background of Central Europe, comparing the heritage of its past with the reality of its present, placing emphasis on how this background effects the present: is it a treasure or a burden for us and for our future grandchildren?

Of course, political history contains many lessons for today. Central Europe has often been perceived as backward or belated when compared to the "West". What effects does this backwardness or belatedness have?

Is it always detrimental or can it be also beneficial? It is important to discover that this backwardness or belatedness can be regarded as a merit, for it allows for the comparison of successful and unsuccessful models tested by other nations and communities, and it opens the opportunity to keep the positive solutions of others and adjust their successes to other contexts.

As a contextual problem, there is a general sentiment in Central (and Eastern) Europe that our region is lagging behind in terms of institutions, social development and the quality of life, compared with those of the more developed Western and Northern European countries.

If it is true, one of its disadvantages can be that we let many of the wonderfully elaborated solutions waste and go astray, which further reinforces our inclination to remain and stay where we are.

A possible advantage can be, on the other hand, that we are able to effectively synthesise, summarise and refine the solutions already tried out by other countries and communities, and at the same time we can notice and avoid the dead ends experienced there.

Beyond these, we deal with the other questions of a new inculturation of Christianity through the re-evangelization of the traditional Christian territories or through the dilemma of centralisation or decentralisation of Church institutions.

Furthermore, we tackle denominationalism as a typical phenomenon in the Central (and Eastern) European countries after their political changes, and indigenisation (for example, regarding the Roma culture) as well.

As an example we can take the constitutional jurisdiction in the West, the institution of ombudsman, of enriching institutional pluralism, or minority protection. As an advantage, if negative solutions are

recognised, the practices that result in them can be avoided, allowing us to learn from the mistakes of others.

In addition, topics of centralisation and the division of power are discussed as possible leadership models, including governmental and societal hierarchies and their various levels of decision-making (for instance, the European Union (EU) and subsidiary).

Does cooperation always mean collaboration? Decision-making often has a double-standard, so we study the application of this duplicity on the national level regarding majority versus minority rights.

Real independence is the ability to choose allies to cooperate with, and is not the lonely fight of the individual in society. The conference's final inputs reflected on leadership structures of "authority or consensus".

Addressing the socio-psychological factors behind democratic leadership and decision-making models, the game theory, for example, reveals that in the long run cooperation is always the winning strategy, when players look for dialogue instead of competition against each other.

Various demonstrative games, dealing with the dynamics of making common decisions in order to dramatise and enliven such situations, help participants to identify with the leader(s), the majority stance, the minority opinion(s) and the dissenters.

Genuine independence does not mean at all to be lonely wolves in the community and in the society, but it rather consists of having the ability to choose proper and right alliances. In that way, one finds oneself in the crossroads of a net(work), supported by various links and relations.

Our considerations also included the ability to dialogue and the social sensitivity of different communities (for example, religious, monastic orders, governmental bodies, or youth organisations). How do they communicate, and how effective are they? What are the boundaries and limits of the various communities?

As a practical outlook, we summarize the preparing elements of decisions, like internal publicity and communication, the conciliatory and collegial elements in various communitarian models, and identify the perspectives of education and formation of the future leaders.

Through studies of the past and discussions about the present, we worked to empower each other towards the choices and leadership needed within local and international communities for the future.

As important inputs and contributions, our articles are closely

related to the overall topic. They are written by (young) historians, sociologists, politologists, psychologists, pedagogues, philosophers and theologians, in order to broaden and widen further the horizons of the students and young intellectuals.

Through these, the readers become able to exchange their concepts and ideas on the new and pluralistic society of Central Europe in the perspective of viable and feasible decision-making alternatives.

## Modern Steps to Overcome

By the banks of the *Slnéčné Jazerá* (Sunny Lakes) in *Senec*, Slovakia, our 2007 summer seminar commenced on the topic of *Overcoming Nationalism, Xenophobia, and Populism within Modern Societies of Central Europe*.

The issues of nationalism, xenophobia and populism have been attracting increasing attention, especially considering the situation in the Central European countries in recent years. The general rise of populism in politics, growing nationalistic tendencies and open xenophobic incidents have become part of the daily life throughout the region.

The reasons for this development are complex, but in reality our lives are confronted with negative societal tendencies, which might affect our neighbours and ultimately ourselves as well, not only in our homeland, but also beyond the borders.

In this situation, we are witnessing a worsening and more polemical perception of *the others*, revealing the urgent need to address and openly discuss these issues. Exploring topics of nationalism, inputs and discussions compared nationalism and patriotism, reflecting on these close, yet duelling concepts throughout history and today.

While nationalism regards one's country against others, patriotism celebrates one's state, but not in opposition to another. Nationalistic tendencies and myths divide nations and cultures, justifying the violence of the past.

Through patriotism, heritage and tradition can be celebrated and valued, but not at the expense of the others. Aware of these tendencies, we should strengthen future cooperations transcending borders.

Issues of xenophobia, manifest in our rich yet diverse cultures, are addressed both on the personal and societal level. We focus on national memory and traumas affecting the psychology of future generations, highlighting the necessity of reconciliation.

Reinforcing the need to combat xenophobia, and deal with past wrongs, we may focus especially on Shoa denial and its consequences and effects, examining deeper questions. We evaluated and shared stereotypes taught to us by society, and explored ways to combat 'soft' xenophobia.

Examining our political systems together, we explore the manifestations of populism within our societies and national politics, seeking to define populism and its effects, as well as to combat its deceptions.

Experiences with overcoming nationalism, xenophobia and populism in South Africa, Northern Ireland, the United States of America (USA), as well as in historical and present-day processes in Central (and Eastern) Europe are presented in order to acquaint ourselves with different approaches to the discussed issues.

To make effective decisions for the future, we must learn from our current setting and historical heritage, looking to overcome barriers of prejudice that separate us, in order to be able to grow in additional cooperations.

## Past and Future

The idea of a Central European subregional project was born in 2001 in Praha, Czech Republic, amongst a group of young people from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, who came to know each other through the activities of WSCF Europe.

We feel that the youth in our respective countries are facing similar challenges and could benefit from addressing these issues in a multinational context, which would also further awareness of cultural diversity and help to establish a Central European identity within Europe as a whole.

The cooperation was originally conceived as a set programme of joint activities every year: at least two seminars, language and leadership trainings, and the publication of an ecumenical anthology.

The first seminar on *Ecumenism and Central European Identity* was held in the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI) in Pannonhalma, Hungary, in 2002. Austria joined the subregional cooperation at this event.

The second seminar that year, on the topic of *Ecology and Environmental Protection*, was held in Vilémov, Czech Republic. Following it, the anthology *A Pentatonic Landscape: Central Europe, Ecology, Ecumenism* was compiled and published in Budapest, Hungary, by BGÖI.

Cooperation among these five countries has continued in the years since then. Further seminars were organised, with responsibility for hosting the seminar rotating among the different countries.

Our aim is thus to constantly create an open and a welcoming forum for students and young intellectuals, where we can discuss and contemplate together the leadership models of different communities.

We can also debate and meditate the distinct characteristics of (Central and Eastern) European decision-making, both those inherited from totalitarianism and those apparent in the present day. We aim to promote mainly Central (and Eastern) European students to be engaged in seeking consensus as future leaders and decision-makers.

The seminar programme itself normally consists of a combination of lectures, panel discussions, workshops and discussion groups, as well as first-hand experiences through cultural excursions.

Aside from these, time is also reserved for board meetings, informal socialising and cross-cultural exchange, and even common celebrations. Further ecumenical anthologies have also been published annually, reflecting the themes of the biannual seminars.

In this way the core partners have built up a long experience, both of organising events and assembling publications, and of working together in an international context. Our website ([www.wscf-cesr.org](http://www.wscf-cesr.org)) is continuously updated and maintained throughout the year.

It provides the latest information and application materials in advance of events, and incorporates interesting and thought-provoking reports and photographs of them after they have taken place.

These endeavours will lead not only to direct descendants of this project, but also to many other diverse projects connected by the common thread of student and youth initiatives in pursuit of a more hospitable, peaceful, ecumenical and dialogical Church and world.

## **Heritage before us**

WSCF Europe has been involved in our cooperation from the beginning, not only as the medium through which the founding mothers and fathers of the subregion came together; but it has also provided encouragement, advice and some financial support for the Central European cooperation.

Established in 1895 as the first ecumenical movement and the first international student and youth organisation, WSCF has more than a hundred years of experience in activities very similar to ours.



These include organising international student conferences and seminars, publishing ecumenical journals, ecumenical reviews and ecumenical books. Equally important, WSCF has members or contacts in more than twenty countries across our continent.

This status allows for a mutually beneficial relationship between WSCF Europe and the partner organisations, with the former providing experience and international contacts, and the latter bringing increasingly more and more innovative ideas and creative working methods into the life of WSCF Europe.

We also find, develop, encourage and raise many leaders who go on to be active in WSCF Europe and global, as well as in their national organisations. And later on they can go on to become leaders in the Church and in its ecumenical movement.

WSCF Europe clearly sees her role in our fruitful cooperation as that of a facilitator, providing resources to allow the partners to realise their vision, and to renew and rejuvenate their vocation.

It is clear, then, that there is a solid foundation upon which to base our cooperation. The main emphasis of our working together is on the virtue of *sustainability*: we envision it as a long-term collaboration between sister and partner organisations, implemented in two or three year cycles.

All of our activities and structures are oriented to this end: the four-tiered leadership training, the board and proxy system, and especially the careful and thorough documentation of past experiences to ensure that they are handed down to next generations.

This is also the reason why we emphasise students and youth returning to their national and local contexts to employ and implement the wisdom and knowledge that they have gained in our international events.

Our strong and well-based hope is that by focusing on developing sustainable and innovative activities and firm but at the same time dynamic structures, we achieve a highly cumulative effect in our functioning.

## Contemplate, Pronounce and Describe

The illustrator is chosen from a different country of the cooperation each time. Using original artwork in the book allows young artists a forum in which to develop their work, and it provides another opportunity for youth and students to become more involved in the project.

Aneta KORDALA studies graphic design and photography at *Kunstuniversität* (University of Arts) in Linz, Austria. She comes from Poland and is Roman Catholic, but she currently attends the meetings of the Evangelische Hochschulgemeinde (EHG). Her email address is [Aneta.Kordala@ufg.ac.at](mailto:Aneta.Kordala@ufg.ac.at).

She has always been keenly interested in arts, especially in painting, drawing and graphic design, because art allows her to contemplate and find answers for many difficult questions bothering her and us.

Art is also a medium to understand and deal with the world and life, to express thoughts difficult to pronounce or describe, and, finally, to have a deeper look into reality and to go behind it somehow.

She probably prefers not to give any detailed explanation to the illustrations, because she would like people to take part in the process of finding the answers to their questions by contemplating the pictures.

Another reason for that conscious reservation is that she respects fully the individual ideas and perceptions of the audience, and therefore she would not want to influence their feelings and ideas.

## With Appreciation

We remain thankful to the Benedictine Archabbot of Pannonhalma, Bishop *VÁRSZEGI Asztrik OSB*, the director of the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute (BGÖI), for his strong and unceasing support.

We are also grateful that we can publish his important article on *Christian Ecumenism in Dialogue with Judaism and Islam, as a Basis for Constructive Collaboration with Society and State in Europe*. We remain grateful for the support of the Dominican province of Slovakia and its provincial, Benedikt Róbert HAJAS OP.

We are especially grateful to our seminar donors: the *Youth in Action Fund* of the European Union, the *International Visegrád Fund* (IVF), and Council of Europe's *Solidarity Fund for Youth Mobility*, and the *Subregional Development Fund* of WSCF-Europe.

In particular, we would like to thank our mother organisation, the *World Student Christian Federation Europe Region* (WSCF-E, [www.wscf-europe.org](http://www.wscf-europe.org)), and the European Regional Committee (ERC), especially her chairperson, *Alessia PASSARELLI*, and her regional secretary, *Hanna TERVANOTKO*, for their support and valuable incentives.

Finally, we would like to thank the preparatory and the hosting committees of our two seminars, as well as our coordinator, who

spent valuable time and care planning and working for the realisation of our activities.

At our winter seminar, in Sopron, the preparatory committee members were *LEKENY Hajnal* from Hungary, *Ján BLAHO* from Slovakia, *Tobias HECHT* from Austria, *Alexandra LUKSZA* from Poland, and *Pavel POKORNÝ* from the Czech Republic. The hosting committee members were *JAKAB Rita*, *LÉVAI Ildikó*, *Kristin NICKEL* and *OROVA Csaba* from Hungary.

In Senec, in the summer, the preparatory committee members were *Eduard MARČEK* and *Peter ŠAJDA* from Slovakia, *Aneta KORDALA* from Austria, *Kristin NICKEL* from Hungary, *Pavel POKORNÝ* from the Czech Republic, and *Grzegorz SAWICKI* from Poland,. The hosting committee members were *Katarína BABICOVÁ*, *Zuzana BABICOVÁ*, *Samuel KUNZO* and *Juraj MAČURA* from Slovakia.

The preparation of both of the mentioned seminars was overseen by our coordinator Rachael WEBER, whose excellent work and experience greatly contributed to the smooth course of the events.

Together, these teams of members of our sister organisations worked to fundraise, organise, implement, and follow-up our joint activities. We are utmostly grateful for all their efforts and vision.

## Are Murphy's Laws Applicable to the Church?

A humorous and satirical look at the (mal)functioning of the multinational companies, and offices in general is presented in *Office Space* (1999) by the Ecuadorian American director, Mike JUDGE.

In the movie, the main protagonist is completely miserable with his job as a small cog in a multinational company. Then he visits a hypnotherapist, who dies just after putting him into a state of complete bliss.

He decides not to go to work, and at the same time his company is laying people off. Free of worry about making a living, he no longer feels the need to keep his job, just as the company is going through a massive downsizing.

His new attitude, however, only makes him more valuable in the company's eyes, and two of his friends are fired instead. Therefore, together they conspire and scheme to plant a computer virus inside the company's computer system that will pull and embezzle money into their own account.

This hilariously funny movie constitutes a satirical study and a parody of the dysfunctions of leadership, hierarchy and decision-

making situations in bureaucratic, profit-oriented workplaces and communities.

All these stories, movies, discussions, friendships, and our seminar activities intertwine together, all providing routes of discussion addressing historic, current, and future circumstances of dialogue.

This fifth ecumenical anthology of our subregion seeks to continue our deepening dialogue, focusing on the themes and topics of our activities for 2007 and looking towards future cooperations.

Each section elaborates on the themes presented, focusing on overcoming prejudices and deceptions inherited from yesterday and clung to today and continuing visionary leadership at ecumenical, societal, and personal levels.