

# GORIZIA 18/18 - FROM THEATRE OF WAR TO LABORATORY OF PEACE

## FIRST WORLD WAR

In January 1919, after 5 years of battles and blood shedding, more than 30 countries and nationalities that took part in the First World War sent their delegations to the Paris peace conference in order to bring war to an end. The meetings, talks and assemblies lasted for several months, even after June 28, the day in which the Treaty of Versailles between the Allied and Germany was signed. Even though the Peace Conference led to several important achievements, such as the creation of the League of Nations and the promotion of national self-determination, it was and still is highly criticized and controversial.

The decision-making process deemed to include all the countries eventually concentrated in the hands of the Allies and thus resulted in a revengeful and punitive attitude. The Versailles Treaty took a strong sanctioning approach towards the losing countries thus creating the pre-conditions for the next terrible world conflict rather than promoting peace through fairness and equality.

## GORIZIA: FROM THEATRE OF WAR...

Theatre of some of the harshest battles of the First World War, the city of Gorizia has since then experienced on its soil the weight of conflict, from the Second World War to the Cold War. In the second half of the XX century, indeed, the Iron Curtain has been a concrete element of the city's landscape, affecting the everyday life of its citizens, as well as that of their Nova Gorica neighbours. This border not only implied physical separation, but also the structuring of a specific border economy and culture. However, even in this situation, communication and exchanges between the two populations never stopped, fuelling the cross-border renaissance of the area that, in the last years, experienced a renewed impulse.

The collapse of the Soviet Block and the bipolar world represented a turning point for the area since it determined the increase of bilateral relations and exchanges, culminating with the definitive dismantling of the border and the entry of Slovenia in the EU in 2004.

## ... TO LABORATORY OF PEACE

These recent years witnessed the transformation of Gorizia and the whole border area. From theatre of conflicts and segregation, it developed into a laboratory of peaceful cooperation. Cross-border cooperation projects were and are implemented in all fields, such as infrastructures, health services, education and cultural activities, etc. In 2009, the creation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation by the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and San Peter-Vrtojba marked a further step in this direction, facilitating the implementation and management of cross-border tasks and projects in the field of territorial cooperation.

# THE CHARTER OF GORIZIA

## PREAMBLE

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Versailles, recognizing the role of that "wrong peace" which sparked the conflicts that have made its territory a "theater of war", today, the city of Gorizia affirms its role as a "laboratory of peace", a place of negotiation, multicultural dialogue and solidarity among the European peoples. With this strength, it drafted the "Charter of Gorizia" to offer itself to the international community as a center to overcome present and future challenges, proud of its cultural, scientific and social heritage.

The city of Gorizia presents its Charter to the representatives of Austria, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia: today four European countries, in which the world war, fought and suffered on the different frontiers of the tragic.

Acting in the spirit of the Statute of the Council of Europe ratified the 3 August 1949 that states its mission to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage, the key points upon which bulding the Europe of the future are:

### 1. European identity

European Identity is based on those values and principles expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: human dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy and the rule of law. The strengthening of such European identity should be a priority for the future development of the Union as well of the states the compose it.

### 2. Peaceful cooperation

In 2012 the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize with the motivation that "for over six decades [it] contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe".

Drawing from this experience, peaceful cooperation and diplomacy shall be promoted and brokered as pillars for present and future international relations.

### 3. Human rights and social cohesion

The experience of the First World War and the outcomes of the Paris peace conference showed how, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "disregard and contempt for human rights" result "in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind". In order to avoid the reiteration of these errors, the affirmation and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms shall be implemented in all countries of the European Union and on a global scale.

### 4. Cultural diversity

The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions affirms that "cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity". In this spirit, the respect, appreciation and promotion of cultural diversity in all its forms shall be promoted, since it "forms a common heritage of humanity".

### 5. Participation

"Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives". The words of Article 25 of UNESCO International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights stress the pivotal role that participation must play in contemporary democracies. Citizen participation and the guarantee of their political representativeness are therefore indispensable conditions for the future development of European democracies.

#### 6. Good governance

The Council of Europe defines good governance as "the responsible conduct of public affairs and management of public resources". Good governance has a particular impact of the local level since local authorities are the closest to citizens and provide them with essential services. Desiring to improve good governance in their respective countries, local authorities should thus be encouraged to respect and promote the *12 Principles of Good Governance* set by the Council of Europe.

#### 7. Sustainable socio-economic development

If socio-economic development is crucial for the welfare of present societies, the *World Commission on Environment and Development* stressed that this need shall not compromise "the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [*A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development – Commission's proposal*]. Therefore, sustainability shall become a key factor to be taken into account when attempting to increase economic development, in a manner that preserves natural resources and the environment for future generations.

#### 8. Environment

The EU *Environment Action Programme to 2020* set for the Union the objective of "becoming a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy by 2020 with a set of policies and actions aimed at making it a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy". However, many challenges still persist and, as the younger generations reminded us, our time is running out while much still need to be done for safeguarding the future of our planet.

It is for these reasons that urgent action is demanded to stop the destruction of natural habitats and funding for green development shall be increased.

#### 9. Education

Quality education is one of the 15 goals enshrined in the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Even though in the last decades the education levels have increased globally, further efforts are needed to achieve universal education goals. In order to reach these objectives, the implementation of universal education policies at local, national and European level shall be promoted.

The Charter of Gorizia has been promoted by the Municipality di Gorizia in collaboration with ISIG – Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia and the bachelor programme “International Diplomatic Sciences” (SID) of the University of Trieste. The document has been drafted over a series of seminars and workshops with SID students coordinated by Professor Georg Meyr, associate professor of History of International Relations at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Trieste.

## References

- European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, [ratified the 7 December 2000].
- United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, [ratified the 10 December 1948].
- UNESCO, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, [adopted the 20 October 2005].
- UNESCO, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, [adopted the 23 March 1976].
- Council of Europe, *European Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level*, [15-16 October 2007].
- European Commission, *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development*, [Commission's proposal to the Gothenburg European Council].
- Directorate-General for Environment (European Commission), *General Union environment action programme to 2020 – Living well, within the limits of our planet*, [published the 31 March 2014].
- United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, [adopted the 25 September 2015].