

GIFT of LOVE and interfaith harmony in Bulgaria

Exhibition that builds bridges among cultures and harmony among religions

URI Bulgaria commemorated the **World Interfaith Harmony Week** at the biggest cultural center in Southeast Europe, the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. The Cultural Palace cooperated by hosting the intercultural student exhibition *GIFT of LOVE* for the period 11-20 February. The event was organized by “**BRIDGES – Eastern European Forum for Dialogue**” CC (URI Europe) in co-operation with the Center for European Refugees Migration and Ethnic Studies (CERMES) and the Bulgarian-European Cultural Center.

The interfaith project *GIFT of LOVE* included art works by 35 students from two Bulgarian Universities (New Bulgarian University and Veliko Tarnovo University) made of glass, wood, stone, fine arts, photos manifesting the understanding of young people of LOVE to “the other”, to “our neighbor”, to the different.

The official opening ceremony took place on 11 February at 18:00 starting with enlightening the whole Palace of Culture in purple (to celebrate the interfaith harmony week).

More than 150 people were present during the official opening and they were all of various backgrounds: religious leaders, diplomats, Bulgarian members of the European Parliament, prominent university professors, journalists and students. Christian Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, atheist gathered together for the World Interfaith Harmony Week: the deputy Mufti Biraly Mumun was among those guests.

“Art is one of the strongest tools in interfaith and intercultural dialogue and love is a supreme gift given to the human beings”, were the opening words of Angelina Vladikova (BRIDGES CC chair).

“Interfaith harmony and tolerance are very much needed today. We must educate our children, and cultivate tolerance because it is part of the understanding of harmony”, added the Cultural Palace Director Miroslav Borshosh.

“We consider culture as a forum, as a transformer and changemaker, culture of innovating and experimenting and establishing new room for dialogue with the audience”, concluded prof. Anna Krasteva (CERMES) in her speech of gratitude to the Cultural Palace which no-one had ever imagined to see like that day.

The event was held under the special patronage of Mrs. Mariya Gabrielle, Bulgarian MEP, Vice-Chair of the Group of the European People’s Party in the European Parliament. She gave two awards to the exhibiting students, Denitsa Desheva and Krasimir Metodiev: both of them will visit the European Parliament and European institutions. Together with the students several art works will travel to Brussels in September.

During the reception after the opening, authors of the art works and guests had a chance to talk and to plan next joint interfaith events.

From Sofia “*GIFT OF LOVE*” moved to Blagoevgrad upon the invitation by the mayor Atanas Kambitov and will be hosted there from 23 February to 31 March.

"GIFT OF LOVE" gathered together people and friends from different religions ready to partner and cooperate for better common future for all.