

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions NEWSLETTER ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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Editor: Henrik Alberius, JP-Sweden



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Introduction

The work of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (JPE) as an NGO having consultative status at the Council of Europe (CoE) continued in April 2003, as Jonneke Naber (staff JP-Netherlands) was joined by Henrik Alberius (JP-Sweden). During the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg the two participated in the meetings organized by the Liaison Committee of the NGOs recognized by the CoE.

The main focus for the work of JPE this time was to collect information, make contacts and attempt to focus the future work of JPE at the CoE. The latter being of utmost importance, since the scope of work of the NGOs is very wide and diversified.

Three main focuses were identified as coherent with the work already in progress in the JP-commissions in Europe:

- Social cohesion and the access the social rights;
- Migration and the rights of migrants to protection and assistance;
- Inter-religious dialogue, especially as a means of promoting social cohesion.

These three directions will be the focus of the "core-group" working at the CoE until the General Assembly of JPE in October. Then it hopes the continuation of the work will be discussed in the plenary session and the Human Rights working-group and decided upon.

Please note: as of now the "**JPE core-group**" consists of only two members (Jonneke Naber and Henrik Alberius). It is highly recommended that more members join in this work. Do not hesitate to volunteer.

Below you will find short introductions into the three focuses, and some practical proposals for commissions to join in the work.

Social Cohesion

The NGO-grouping on Social Rights, to which JPE belongs, supports the work to develop a common social policy for all the 45

member-countries of the CoE. This common policy is of course based on the **European Social Charter (ESC)** which went into force in 1965 and on the **revised European Social Charter** which entered into force in 1999.

The compliance of member-countries having signed the Charter and the revised Charter is assessed by an international supervisory mechanism on the basis of reports submitted every two and four years.

These reports are of interest to NGOs, among them JP-commissions, as they monitor the progress of social policies in the different member-countries. The reports are available on the web-site listed below, and are well worth consulting. In some European countries "shadow-reports" are prepared by social NGOs, taking into account areas not included in the official reports.

Also of interest to NGOs is the Additional Protocol effective since 1998, which gives **the right to file complaints** against breaches of the Charter at the European Committee of Social Rights comprised of independent experts.

This is a useful tool, available also to JP-commissions in Europe, to evoke action in neglected areas. It can effectively strengthen our role as watch-dogs in the social field. The procedure is fairly simple, still it calls for a registration of JPE at the ESC-secretariat. Should any of the JP-commission wish to use the complaints-procedure, please contact Jonneke Naber.

Learn more on: www.socialcharter.coe.int

Last year the Social Rights Grouping made contact with its counterparts in Brussels to try to influence the EU-Convention process. The work is done under the heading "**For a Social Europe - Fight Against Exclusions**".

Main actor on behalf of the NGOs at the CoE is **Anne-Marie Franchi** of the Liaison Committee, and she is presently working along the following lines: to ensure access to social rights for everyone in view of the enlargement of the EU, and that the EU-convention recognizes not only the European

Convention of Human Rights, but also the Social Charter of the CoE.

She now has support by three key commissioners of the CoE, the secretaries of the Social Commissions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE and of the EU, contacts are established with the Social Platform (grouping Social NGOs at the European Union) and the European Trade Union Confederation. In view are a number of meetings of these partners during the period June through September.

The "JPE core-group" met with Anne-Marie Franchi in March, and is planning a new meeting in June. **JP-commissions** are welcome to send **any remarks and initiatives** they want presented to her to Jonneke Naber.

The "JPE core-group" also has established contact with **Pilar Morales**, Administrator of CoE's Social Policies Department. In a meeting she informed, that the CoE-work on social services now focuses: user involvement, employment, health, migration, equal opportunities, demographic issues, drugs and rehabilitation, and trafficking. She also stressed that access to social rights is an interdependent process.

Again, **any remarks and initiatives** by JP-commissions to be brought to the Social Policies Dept by the "JPE core-group" on these issues are welcome, and should be sent to Jonneke Naber.

Pilar Morales also advocated the report **Access to Social Rights in Europe** publicly launched at the CoE-meeting in Malta in November 2002. The report analyses the obstacles, the measures having been taken, and the measures to be taken to ensure equal access to social rights, including for the most vulnerable in our societies.

The report was also highlighted in the meeting of the NGO-grouping **Extreme Poverty, Social Cohesion**. Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, CoE Director General of Social Cohesion, underlined the urgency of

spreading the report and acting upon it. According to her, the road leading out of exclusion is long and still extremely difficult for many in Europe. The report is presently being translated to most major European languages.

In an effort to act upon the report *Access to Social Rights in Europe* the CoE organizes seminars with relevant sectors of society in at least 15 European countries this year. Within the CoE itself the structures now work on the acceptance and implementation of the report's recommendations.

Migration

Migration is becoming a cross-cutting issue within the CoE-organization. The assessment is that the flow of migrants to Europe is very unlikely to be reversed in the near future.

The underlying principle of **the CoE's migration strategy** is: dialogue and co-operation between countries of origin, transit and destination.

In the field of **clandestine migration** the CoE makes an **important distinction** between clandestine migration and clandestine migrants. Clandestine migration is a priority in the agenda of international organizations and governments, while all too often the rights and dignity of clandestine migrants are not.

To deal effectively with this problem the Parliamentary Assembly passed Recommendation 1577 in September last year. It advocates the creation of a single pan-European instrument on clandestine migration to enhance co-operation in dealing with irregular migration and to assert the rights of migrants living in an illegal situation in the CoE member-states.

The Equality between Women and Men Division of the Directorate General of Human Rights is furthermore working for a

CoE Convention **on trafficking of human-beings**. This has reached such an unprecedented level, that it is possible to speak about a new form of slavery.

Further: www.humanrights.coe.int/equality/

In June the "JPE core-group" will meet with a representative of the Division to get more information on this work. The group will also meet with Maria Ochoa-Llido, Secretary of the Migration Department of the CoE, and hopefully with Halvor Lervik, Head of the Secretariat of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly.

It is therefore important, that any **remarks and initiatives by JP-commissions** to be brought to these key-persons in the field of migration should be sent to Jonneke Naber.

For more information consult the website: www.coe.int/migration/

Inter-religious dialogue

In April the "JPE core-group" also met with **Marc Scheuer** of the General Directory's Political department, who coordinates CoE's work in the field of inter-religious dialogue. This work is carried out in a number of departments of the CoE.

For the last 18 months CoE has been active in preparing the ground-work for a continued dialogue. The focus has been **to further social cohesion and lessen tensions in civil society**. As things stand now, the question is how to proceed. Scheuer leaves open if the CoE should, or could, be an active partner in an inter-religious dialogue, but recognizes the value of such a dialogue: "To encourage the communities to stand together against intolerance, and stress the importance of getting along.". He also says that there is an interest for this dialogue among the member-states of the CoE.

What needs to be done, according to Scheuer, is to identify where and how this inter-religious dialogue should be boarded.

He sees **three roles for the states as well as for the NGOs** in the continuation of this work: to provide forums for dialogue, to encourage this dialogue, and to better tolerance in civil society.

Again, any **remarks and initiatives by JP-commissions** in the field of inter-religious dialogue to be brought to Marc Scheuer by the "JPE core-group" are welcome, and should be sent to Jonneke Naber. The group will have a new meeting with Scheuer in late June this year.

For further information:
www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/Culture/
see under Other projects and then Conflict prevention.

Practical proposals

The "JPE core-group" strongly recommends that all The European JP-commissions get copies of and study the two important reports mentioned above: **European Social Charter / The Charter, its protocols, the revised charter** and **Access to Social Rights in Europe**.

Both these reports can be obtained through Jonneke Naber.

Another useful tool is the CoE-publication **Social protection in the European Social Charter**, which is an introduction and explanation to the ESC. It can also be ordered through Jonneke Naber.

European Court of Human Rights

The functioning of the European Court of Human Rights is under discussion at present. On 15 May, the Conference of Ministers will meet in Strasbourg to outline proposals to guarantee the effectiveness of the Court.

In an initiative to safeguard the core-functions of the court, many NGOs have signed a petition put forward by Amnesty International. JP Europe is now one of those having signed the petition.

For more information: www.coe.int and www.echr.coe.int

Meetings with Catholic partners

During the work-session in Strasbourg in April, the "JPE core-group" visited the **Vatican Mission to the CoE** to inform and be informed. It was received by Mgr Paul R Gallagher, and was also happy to find Giorgio Filibeck of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at this meeting. The discussion was long and open-hearted.

Contact was also established with the grouping of **Catholic NGOs** present in Strasbourg, the International Catholic Organizations. The group meets informally before the meetings of the different groupings of NGOs of the CoE to prepare and inform ahead of that work.

Contacts

This very important paragraph will let you easily get in contact with either Jonneke Naber or Henrik Alberius of the "JPE core-group". Please do not hesitate to send direct any question, remark, idea and initiative to:

Jonneke Naber
jna@justitiaetpax.nl
+31 (0)70 31 36 800

Henrik Alberius
henrik@dominikan.nu
+46 (0)46 15 71 14