

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

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Introduction

At the 10th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 16 - 17 October 2003, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, **Walter Schwimmer**, made the following remarks:

"I am representing here 800 million European citizens, including 100 million who may claim to have an Islamic faith or culture...

As all other citizens, Muslims have important stakes in the building of a wider Europe of peace and stability, based on respect for the equal dignity of all...

Their freedom of religion, as everyone else's, is guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights and protected by the European Court of Human Rights...

They can expect full protection against hate speech and islamophobia, just as a Jewish citizen can expect protection against anti-Semitism. But I will not hide the fact that there are still problems. This is why the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has proposed many measures to address discrimination against minority Muslim communities...

I firmly believe that the challenge of harmony will be made easier by the Council of Europe's efforts to promote standard education curricula that will broaden the knowledge, and promote understanding of religious diversity and democratic practices...."

These excerpts from the speech given by Mr Schwimmer show the concern of the Council of Europe (CoE) to build a European society open and welcoming for all. Not least for the increasing number of immigrants from East and South now arriving - legally or illegally - to Europe.

This is one of the reasons why the CoE has put **inter-religious** and **inter-cultural dialogue** as one of the primary targets on its agenda.

This is also why one of the results of the attendance of the "**JPE core-group**" of the Conference of European Justice and Peace

Commissions (JP Europe) during the Parliamentary Session of the CoE in the first week of October this year was very positive. In a meeting with a representative of the political directorate of the CoE, the possibility of an active role for JP Europe in the field of inter-religious dialogue at the CoE opened.

More on this below.

In this long Introduction also some words before our General Assembly in Geneva. The idea was that Mr Daniel Zielinski, the President of the Liaison Committee of the NGOs at the CoE, was to address the General Assembly. Just a couple of days ago he had to cancel his participation. But he will be replaced by the first vice-chairperson of the Liaison Committee, Ms **Annelise Oeschger**. She will address our meeting on the possibilities and challenges of NGOs at the CoE.

Ms Oeschger is active in, and represents at the CoE, the **ATD Fourth World**, which is an NGO engaged to support individual as well as institutional efforts to alleviate the situation of people in extreme poverty. The organisation, founded in 1957, is present 26 countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and connects anti-poverty efforts across 100 countries through the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World".

She will be an interesting participant at our Assembly.

Inter-religious Dialogue

The hopes that the CoE *ad hoc* committee GT-Dialogue, which promotes the initiatives of the CoE in the field of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue – one of the Councils priorities, should re-activate its efforts through a meeting in September was a disappointment "because of **political reasons**".

The "JPE core-group" learned this in a meeting with Mr **Jean-Charles de Cordes**, Advisor of the Directorate General of Political Affairs of the CoE, in the beginning

of October. These "political reasons" will be removed by the end of October, and new meetings of the GT-Dialogue are planned for November and December.

Mr de Cordes, who together with the Director of the Directorate General of Political Affairs Mr Marc Scheuer (see Newsletter #2) coordinates efforts within the CoE in the field of inter-religious dialogue, is very optimistic on the re-start of this initiative. Among others the League of Arab States will be invited to the upcoming meetings to strengthen the ties with the southern Mediterranean shore.

Mr de Cordes also stated that the willingness of the ambassadors of the CoE member-states is very strong to develop the links with Africa on the Middle East and to forge contacts to better the understanding between Europe and the Muslim world.

The "JPE core-group" presented Mr de Cordes with two Swedish initiatives in the field of inter-religious dialogue to lessen tensions in the society. The first one – **Double Exposure** in Stockholm, Sweden – unites Catholic, Muslim, and Syrian-Orthodox families in gaining better access to social rights for immigrant families with handicapped members. The second one – **Inter-Religious Dialogue on Hisingen** in Gothenburg, Sweden – unites persons of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish beliefs in projects to better the understanding between the inhabitants of the city.

This was very appreciated by Mr de Cordes, and he expressed the hopes, that the European Commissions of Justice and Peace might become one of the partners that the CoE is searching for to promote the inter-religious dialogue.

He also underlined, that the CoE now needs to go on towards practical and concrete actions in this field. In this endeavour the CoE needs the help of the NGOs in Europe.

Learn more on: www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural%5FCo-operation/culture then click on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention.under Other Projects.

Social Cohesion

The NGO-grouping of the CoE "Social Cohesion" did not meet this week in the beginning of October. Instead the work in this field continued through the grouping "Civil Society in the new Europe".

The meeting was a thorough run-through of prostitution and the persons caught up in it in Europe today. The numbers are alarming, as well as the fact that 95% of the victims of prostitution are women, while 95% of those making a profit from it are men.

The whole industry of prostitution in Europe is today heavily dependent on **trafficking**, which has lead the CoE to hasten its efforts to arrive at a common policy – a European Convention – to come to terms with the problem.

The foundation for this Convention will be the Palermo Protocol of the United Nations, adopted by 121 of 148 countries represented in Italy in December 2000. The Protocol carries specifically on the trafficking of persons.

Still the plight of trafficking, while centering on women, does not stop there. Also children are being trafficked for prostitution, and men for low-cost and slavelike labor as well as prostitution. The total number of victims per **year** is estimated at 1 million.

The seriousness of the situation was confirmed in a meeting the "JPE core-group" had with Ms **Anne Marie Faradji** of the CoE's Division Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) following the meeting of the NGO-grouping.

Still, Ms Faradji also confirmed that the first steps towards a new Convention have been taken. In September the first meeting of the *ad hoc* committee on action against trafficking in human beings (CAHTEH) with representatives from all the member-states as well as the General Directorate of the CoE and observers met, and launched a first

text of the new Convention. But she could not disclose anything of the text, since it is considered as a working-paper. The next meeting of the working-group is scheduled for November 2 of this year.

Ms Faradji said, that there is a genuine will to advance the work on a new Convention, and that it will centre on help for the victims, prevention and protection, and a legal frame-work for the prosecution of those active in trafficking. The work is expected to be finalised at the end of 2004.

Already the CoE is engaged in so called "flying consultancies" in the south-eastern part of Europe to help countries setting up a legal frame-work for trafficking and prostitution. Albania, Serbia-Montenegro, and Bulgaria are some of these countries.

To learn more:

www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/trafficking/

Furthermore, in the end of September the CoE's Committee of Ministers replied positively to the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE on the ratification of a **European Code of Social Security**. This treaty is intended to guarantee better social protection in Europe towards a society based on common values and the equal dignity of all human beings.

To learn more: <http://assembly.coe.int>

Then click on Documents, then Working Papers, then search document #9929.

Migration

The will of the Parliamentary Assembly to create a Charter of intent on **clandestine immigration** was however turned down by the CoE's Committee of Ministers, also in the end of September.

While sharing the concerns of the Assembly, the Committee of Ministers does not see it opportune to create a new international instrument on clandestine immigration. It considers it sufficient to

make greater use of the already existing texts, in particular the United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organised Crime* and the UN's *Palermo Protocol* mentioned above. It also recalls the work underway to draft a European Convention against trafficking in human beings, also mentioned above.

Practical proposals

Any **remarks and initiatives** by JP-commissions in any of the areas enumerated above are welcome, and should be sent to Jonneke Naber.

As the work at the Council of Europe will be one of the topics discussed during our General Assembly in Geneva the 25th and 26th of October 2003, the "JPE core-group" encourages all commissions to react and act and participate in the discussion. Jonneke Naber and Henrik Alberius will also be present at the Assembly. So do not hesitate to take contact with them.

You can always reach them by using the information below.

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 send any question, remark, idea and initiative directly to:

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