

From Trondheim to Lyon
CEC Activity Report to the 13th Assembly

APPENDIX A: Interim Report of the CCEE-CEC Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe

The CEC members of the CEC-CCEE Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME) were nominated by the CEC Central Committee already in December 2003 and the CCEE members in 2005. During the year 2004 CEC and CCEE initiated a consultation process in order to identify the new challenges for the dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Europe. Therefore, CRME started its work first in September 2005. The members of this committee are listed in Appendix B.

The first meeting of CRME took place in Paris from 9 – 12 September 2005. Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis and Bishop Jean-Luc Brunin were elected as co-moderators of this committee. Since the two elected co-moderators were not all the time present CRME proposed at its second meeting (Rome, 16-19 March 2006) to consider the two bishops as presidents and to elect two co-moderators who should co-ordinate the ongoing work of the committee. The two co-moderators elected in Rome were: OKR Martin Affolderbach from the CEC side and Mgr. Peter Fleetwood from CCEE.

At its first meeting CRME established the following methodology for its work:

- Analysis: but not repeating work already being done elsewhere. The CRME could compare the process of integration of Muslims in different European countries, which is happening at very different speeds. Eastern Europe has had a very long experience;
- Orientations: CRME should consider whether it can develop common guidelines on particular issues – for example, on selling church buildings, food in schools;
- Offering “impulses” to the churches, leading bodies and bishops’ conferences to deal with the new situation.

As for its mandate the committee identified the tasks to:

- exchange experience and information on the work in the various churches in this area;
- give advice to the churches and Bishops' Conferences in respect to the Christian- Muslims relationship;
- organise meetings with Muslims;
- reflect on the European integration process from an inter-religious perspective.

CRME has dealt mainly with the **following areas of interest** which have been established as working priorities at the meeting in Paris Sept. 2005:

- 1. Violence, terrorism etc.** There is the need to look at both Muslims and Christians in this area, and theological and practical issues.
- 2. Being a citizen: being a believer.** This has wide implications for both faiths in different contexts. How can we live together? Common and different values.
- 3. Education or formation.** CRME should concentrate on the training of clergy and Imams, and of lay people in both communities, including young people. Breaking down of stereotypes was vital.
- 4. Da'wa in Islam and mission in Christianity.** Vital for both faiths. This should include questions of conversion and pastoral care, and involve stories.
- 5. Dialogue.** The sharing of examples of good practice, illustrated by stories.
- 6. Fundamentalism, within both faiths** (however it is called, for example Islamism, extremism).
- 7. Human rights, freedom of religion, rights of women.**
- 8. How to identify potential partners for dialogue and action.** What makes a good and "bad" partner?
- 9. How to help Christians understand the Muslim world.** What is going on in the Muslim communities? Understanding different descriptive terms
- 10. Fear of people of another faith.** Helping Christians who fear Islam because they are not rooted enough in their own faith. How to answer Muslims in ways they can understand. How to gain the confidence to be able to tell the truth in love.
- 11. The media.** This includes how they create prejudices and influence young people.

A lot of these points are questions of clarifying terms, sharing stories, identifying good partners. The committee considered that it is vital to work with Muslim scholars in the area of definitions. Dialogue was supposed to be a method across all subjects the committee was planning to discuss, not only a topic to be studied.

An important part of each meeting of the CRME was dedicated to the country reports, which offered an updated image of the new developments in the relationship between Christians and Muslims in different European countries. As for its future meetings CRME agreed that there could be two main topics in each meeting; one would be a flow on from the previous meeting, the other would be new. It was agreed that Violence would

be concluded in October 2006 and the new topic would be “Religious affiliation and social integration”, with its obvious links to the EEA3.

In addition to these items CRME was asked by its parent bodies to contribute to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, September 2007. After some considerations CRME was ready to take over this task and mandated a working group of CRME members to prepare Forum 5 on “Religions” under the title “Being a citizen of Europe and a person of faith” and Hearings on interreligious experiences in Europe. The committee was happy to hear that these activities have met with very positive response. CRME decided on a report on these contributions including recommendations for further activities in this area of concern.

At its meeting in Leicester, UK (3-6 May 2007) CRME organized encounters with Muslim communities at Leicester and at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education (Islamic Foundation). The following points emerged from the discussion with Muslims:

- the need to come together, state our beliefs and share our hopes and fears;
- the best way to confront extremism is through education, especially at secondary school level. Interfaith dialogue must begin there;
- what we need is *more* religion and not less;
- a return to more traditional beliefs is a way to understand other people’s beliefs;
- there are various ways of looking at authority. It all depends on the nature and the denomination of a community;
- children need to grow up in a safe environment and they have a right to a sound moral education.

The tasks of the last two meetings of CRME (6-9 December 2007, Berlin, Germany and 17-20 April 2008, Esztergom, Hungary), were mainly to plan a Conference with Muslims in Europe as well as to elaborate two texts: one on violence and a second one on the training of clergy and pastoral workers for relating to Muslims in Europe. The Christian Muslim Conference took place from 20-23 October 2008 in Mechelen, Belgium and focussed on the theme: *Being a Citizen of Europe and a Person of Faith*. The total number of forty-five participants included: the members of the CRME, 20 Muslim representatives from different countries in Europe; representatives of the CEC and CCEE governing bodies as well as of European institutions (EU and Council of Europe). In the evening of Tuesday 21 October, the participants in this conference met with representatives of the EU as well as with the Church and Society Secretaries from different churches in Europe in the Ecumenical Chapel of Resurrection from Brussels. The issue discussed during this special evening was: *Does politics need religion? Expectations towards Muslims and Christians in Europe*.

The final statement adopted at Mechelen underlined the following affirmations:

“As Christians and Muslims we affirm that we are citizens *and* believers, not citizens *or* believers. We are therefore called to work hand in hand in appropriate ways with the state to which we belong without becoming subservient to governments. We

say this because we believe that religious communities and the state should work together for the common good. This stems from our sense of belonging not only to our religious denominations but also to that collective enterprise that is called citizenship. We believe in the unity and diversity of our societies which help enhance and enrich our societies.

As Christians and Muslims we believe that the future of our European societies will depend in large measure on our willingness as citizens and persons of belief to preserve and develop the cultural and religious foundations of Europe and our empowerment to contribute towards it.

As Muslims and Christians we believe in the principle of integration. This does not and must never carry with it the demand to forsake our religious identities. For example, this may happen through prohibiting the wearing or display of religious symbols in public places or neutralizing religious festivities with the pretext that their being allowed would harm the sensibilities of other believers or that they would go against the principles of the secular state.

As Christians and Muslims we acknowledge the right of freedom of conscience, of changing one's religion or deciding to live without a religion, the right to demonstrate publicly and to voice one's religious convictions without being ridiculed or intimidated into silence by prejudice or stereotyping intentionally or through lack of knowledge.

As Muslims and Christians we believe that dialogue is a question of listening as much as speaking thereby deepening our mutual understanding. We therefore affirm the need to listen to women and men in all areas of leadership in civic life".

The participants at this conference recommended a follow up conference in two years time "in order to assess progress on these challenges, and to focus upon further issues".

The text on *violence* should summarize the long discussion on this topic during the meetings of this committee since the beginning of its mandate. The question this text wants to address is how the churches should deal with the issue of religiously motivated violence. The structure of the text is the following: section 1. War and terrorism: The linkage between politics and religion; 2. Violence in urban areas; 3. Violence in prison; and 4. Media and the religiously motivated violence. The text will make also a reference to WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence. In this text positive stories on good neighbourhood between Christian and Muslims from different places in Europe will be mentioned as well as instances of Muslims condemning violence.

The document related to the *Training of Clergy and Pastoral Workers, for relating to Muslims should* document some examples of good practice across Europe and offer some guidelines for churches. In this respect the text will take into consideration training developments in various countries, with examples and case studies. The place of chaplaincy within Muslim patterns of training should also be considered. Finally this text

should formulate recommendations to the member churches of CEC as well as to the Bishops' Conferences in Europe.

These two texts should be finished by the end of 2008 and published as working papers under the authority of CRME, as the CEC-CCEE Joint Committee recommended. Finally the CRME is working on its report for its whole work to be presented to the CEC-CCEE Joint Committee in February 2009.