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ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND EUROPE

Religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

Beyond EYID 2008



EVENT REPORTS

of the series of seminars
hosted by the European Parliament
in the framework of the
European Year of Intercultural Dialogue
(EYID 2008)

organised by



Commission of the Bishops'
Conferences of the European
Community (COMECE)



Church and Society Commission of
the Conference of European
Churches (CSC-CEC)



Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) -
European Office



"ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY AND EUROPE"

RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE BEYOND EYID 2008

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FOREWORD & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Religions have been, and still are, important factors in shaping European cultures and values and worldviews of people. Religion or rather religious actors have also contributed to societal developments. The Treaty of Lisbon (Art 17 TFEU) recognizes the “specific contribution” churches and religious communities have made to the European integration process.

One of the greatest challenges of today’s Europe is to ensure that the increased interaction between people from different cultural and religious backgrounds results in mutual respect and enrichment, and social cohesion. As a starting point we need a spirit of openness. Knowledge of each other’s cultures and religions is also vital.

With these convictions, the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Communities (COMECE), the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC) and the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) took part in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) 2008. We offered four seminars, which each looked at different aspects of the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

The European Parliament as a venue underlined the public role of religion and the long-standing cooperation between the inviting organisations and the European institutions. We are particularly grateful to the European Parliament, its President Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering and his fellow parliamentarians not only for having hosted the seminars but also for their active role in the debates. We applaud Ján Figel’, Commissioner for Education and Culture for having taken the initiative to dedicate the year 2008 to deepen European integration through intercultural dialogue.

The four seminars under the title “Islam, Christianity and Europe” focused on the presence and the contribution of Islam and Christianity in modern societies. They addressed issues such as the opportunities and limits of intercultural dialogue in

tackling socio-economic challenges, the role of religion in the public sphere and the religious identities of Europe. They also discussed the EU’s external relations with countries with a Muslim majority.

The seminars were organized in the form of a panel discussion with a moderator, an academic expert, a Christian and a Muslim speaker, and with a Member of the European Parliament in charge of the synthesis. They each gathered some hundred participants from the European institutions, civil society, religious communities and the academic world.

As an overall conclusion of these dialogues, we identified two main challenges. Firstly, to strengthen social cohesion and to promote civil peace in European societies must be a priority of the European Union. Both are a pre-condition for a fruitful inter-religious and intercultural dialogue in as much as the inter-religious and intercultural dialogue contributes to social cohesion and civil peace. Secondly, the implementation of human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief, must be the yardstick internally as well as for foreign relations of the EU with any other country, including Muslim majority countries.

This publication offers the reader a description of the findings of each of the four seminars as an invitation to engage in inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. The following summary might serve as an appetizer.

SEMINAR 1: INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: RESPONSE TO WHICH PROBLEMS?

This seminar enabled us to find ways of understanding the assertion of religious identity among Muslim populations with a migration background. Lack of recognition, reflected in difficulties to integrate both socially and economically, is an important - although far from exclusive - factor behind the religious identity quest and assertion. In other words, economic, social, cultural and religious dimensions are interconnected. In this regard, the last two thematic European years – the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All 2007 and the European Year

of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 - should be seen as complementary springboards to take up the present and future challenges ahead. The seminar highlighted the importance of intercultural dialogue as a way to foster social cohesion in Europe but concluded that beyond its value to tackle problems, intercultural dialogue should be seen as an element of a democratic culture. We were also reminded that the biggest challenge for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is to seek ways to involve also those who object to dialogue.

SEMINAR 2: VISIBILITY OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPACE: THE QUESTION OF WORSHIP PLACES AND RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN CLOTHING

The second seminar looked at the issue of visibility of religion in the public space. The construction of mosques and the wearing of veils were debated as questions of freedom of religion, acceptance of change, respect for difference, relations between different religious communities and relationship between the religious and the secular world. Despite the legal guarantees for freedom of religion (including freedom of worship) in Europe, the construction of mosques has been met by particular resistance. Mosques are seen by some as disrupting the familiar urban space of the European societies. The seminar learned about a new architectural approach, which combines high architectural and environmental standards with a serious attention to cultural and local context. Experience has shown that including people living in the neighbourhood in the mosque-building process helped lower the resistance, often caused by fear. At the same time, this approach has enabled the citizens with a Muslim background to better integrate into the local culture. Participatory approaches, involving the local community are part of the process of coping with pluralism in increasingly secularised and multicultural European societies. The seminar saw that one of the barriers to accepting diversity - and to accepting religious symbols in the public space - also originated in the lack of comprehension of and for religious language.

SEMINAR 3: 'CHRISTIAN EUROPE' AND ISLAM IN EUROPE

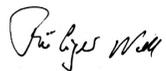
The third seminar highlighted the fact that inter-religious challenges are part of multicultural societies and are present in all spheres of society (work, school). In Europe, many people have a fear of Islam, which is often shaped by historical images and nourished by stereotypes. These perceptions and feelings must be taken seriously, and countered. Schools can contribute by teaching about all religions. Media and politicians should also bear responsibility and provide a more varied and fairer picture of Muslims. This also applies to the majority religion - Christianity. Religious communities should all together seek to identify some common features and priorities - and offer a vision for Europe. The following elements of a potential joint vision were discussed: the concern for the well-being of every human being, the holiness of all life and the commitment of believers in the public sphere around common values and preoccupations such as social justice.

SEMINAR 4: THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION WITH MUSLIM COUNTRIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

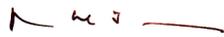
The last seminar engaged in a heated debate. The principle of reciprocity in relation to religious freedom, put forward by the Christian speaker, raised concerns among the Muslims representatives. The Muslim speaker rightly argued that Muslims living in Europe as citizens or guests have the right to practise their religion without being asked anything in exchange. But the perspective presented by the Christian speaker proved in the final analysis to be non-contradictory with the Muslim speaker's one. Indeed, while unambiguously asserting that the Christian vision of reciprocity in no way called for reprisal, he noted that there was also the temptation of passivity, which could also prevent Christians - or indeed reciprocally Muslims or Jews - from claiming equal treatment. The realisation of freedom of religion must be sought all over the world.

We believe that the four seminars we organised contributed to highlight some of the most burning issues of contemporary Europe in relation to religion - and to further reflect on them. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that we are only at the beginning of a true dialogue and that the issues raised will remain with us for the coming years.

With this publication, we wish to encourage a broader public to pursue the debate and to engage in the dialogue. We especially want to raise awareness among the newly-elected members of Parliament - as well as other opinion-shapers and political decision-makers - of the crucial challenges ahead of us. All of us can play an important role in enabling Europe and the world to become a more open and inclusive community. We, the three undersigned organisations, are committed to contribute to that process.



**Rev. Rüdiger
Noll**
CSC-CEC,
Director



**Dr. Peter R.
Weilemann**
KAS, European Office,
Director



**Rev. Prof. Dr. Piotr
Mazurkiewicz**
COMECE,
General Secretary





FOREWORD

by Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering

President of the European Parliament

By declaring 2008 the « European Year of Intercultural Dialogue » (EYID), the European Union has given clear notice of its ever stronger political commitment to making intercultural issues an integral part of all Union policies, both at the internal and external levels.

In this framework I have made this dialogue of cultures one of the main priorities for my term of office as President of the European Parliament. In the same line, during the year 2008, in which I also chaired the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), I mentioned several times the necessity to pursue the dialogue of cultures and religions beyond. I noted indeed that this is not a matter on which it would be possible to reach a conclusion within a limited period of time: dialogue between cultures and religions is a long-term matter where both the heart and the mind must be involved, and it calls for persistence, so that it can become the norm. Intercultural dialogue must continue after 2008, too, and become a permanent European Union activity

This is why I salute the initiative of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the « Church & Society » Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC) and the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) to publish the reports of the four seminars that they jointly organised within the premises of

the European Parliament in Brussels during EYID 2008 on the theme « Christianity, Islam and Europe ».

The first three Christian-Muslim seminars were dedicated to the domestic dimension of the EU, while the fourth one was dedicated to its external dimension. I am thoroughly convinced that Europe's future is largely dependent on successful coexistence between the cultures and religions within the European Union and between the European Union and our neighbours and that the issue of relations with Islam plays a particular role in this regard.

The Islamic culture is both rich and diverse, just as is the European one. It is dangerous and simplistic to see our cultures as fundamentally opposed. The idea of a confrontation between Islam and Christianity is simply misleading and any serious and honest intercultural dialogue must be based on the fact that no culture is entirely homogeneous or, still less, monolithic.

There need be no 'clash of civilisations'. Indeed there is probably just as big a division within Islam itself as there is between Christian values and Islamic values. The real dividing-line is not between religions and cultures, but between those who are committed to respect for the identity, dignity and personality of the human being, of whatever faith, and those who are not.

It is precisely as a consequence of the orientations that will be taken that the Islamic dimension of intercultural dialogue is one of its more burning features. We should indeed be conscious that ways of connecting Islamically oriented and Western societies will be of central importance to the shaping of our lives in the coming years and decades, not only in Europe, but worldwide.

On the domestic level, intercultural dialogue must be an integral part of our policy-making. Immigration has become an important feature of the European Union; millions of our fellow citizens throughout the Union come from countries other than the EU Member States. So the dialogue of cultures is also of great importance within each individual EU Member State, and a way of encouraging the wish for peaceful day-to-day coexistence.

On the external level the dialogue between the great world religions is one of the vital issues of our century. When we speak of globalisation, we generally think of its economic aspects. Globalisation is bringing us closer together than any earlier technological advance. Yet, in essence, globalisation is a matter of how cultures live together and whether they can also survive in conjunction with one another because they coexist peacefully. This is why intercultural dialogue has become an important element of the peace strategy for the European Union, which wants to assert itself as such on the international scene: the dialogue of cultures is in this regard its most important ally.

Europe has a particular duty to engage in dialogue with its Arab neighbours on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and with the Islamic world in general. We must foster open and frank dialogue with the Arab and Islamic world at all levels. There is no alternative, even if that dialogue touches on many controversial issues, as demonstrated by the report of the fourth seminar held at the European Parliament. Let us hope that this dialogue will help to overcome the fears and the misunderstandings existing around the request for reciprocity in religious freedom: freedom of religion is a fundamental right that must be universally respected, everywhere in the world, *within* and *outside* the European Union.

We should not underestimate the important conflict-prevention aspects of cultural cooperation and exchange. Since being elected President of the European Parliament, I have sought to emphasise the importance of dialogue between cultures and civilisations for building bridges and fostering the necessary conditions for peace and stability, where conflict exists. By bringing people from different backgrounds together in areas of cultural and civil society cooperation, we can help foster such dialogue and trust, overcome prejudices and negative stereotypes, and promote mutual respect.

The 'clash of civilisations' that is feared – indeed, almost conjured into existence – by some people is neither constructive nor necessary. It is avoidable, because peaceful coexistence between cultures and religions, both in the European Union and in

relations with nations in all parts of the world, and particularly on the other side of the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, is possible and of the greatest importance for our shared future.

This is why the European Parliament made intercultural dialogue with this region, and the monotheistic religions that were born in it, one of its biggest priorities for the year 2008. In this framework the European Parliament was pleased to welcome high-level religious representatives: among them the Grand Mufti of Syria, Ahmad Badr Al-Din Hassoun, who is regarded as a leading advocate of interreligious dialogue in a country where a wide range of religious communities have lived and worked together peacefully right up to the present day; Chief Rabbi of the Jewish United Congregations of the Commonwealth Jonathan Sacks; and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I. Among the other major activities that took place at the European Parliament we should also mention the « Arab Week », which took place in November 2008, and EuroMedScola, a 'simulated' parliamentary sitting, in a Euro-Mediterranean context, involving 240 young people between the ages of 16 and 18, from almost all the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) member countries - the 27 EU Member States, the 10 Mediterranean partner countries and Albania and Mauritania.

We must now build an intellectual and cultural bridge across the Mediterranean, based on mutual understanding and shared values. We will build that bridge by engaging permanently in an open and honest dialogue in which we listen to one another, openly exchange views and develop mutual understanding. The outcome of this undertaking will have a lasting effect on our shared future. Based on truthfulness, dialogue demands mutual respect for the dignity, religious convictions and views of one's interlocutor without wanting to homogenise the cultural differences between peoples.

The power of religious authorities to make a significant contribution, through wise leadership, to tackling some of today's major challenges should not be underestimated. Within the European context, the churches have always been strong supporters of European integration as a project which brought, in

the first instance, Franco-German reconciliation, and over time to our continent. In those parts of our European continent where intercommunity wounds still require healing including the Western Balkans, it is essential to involve community spiritual leaders in the process.

May the reports of the four seminars organised at the European Parliament by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the « Church & Society » Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC) and the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) figuring in the present publication help to prolong the reflection of EYID 2008 on a this crucial issue for our future. May they help to nourish European political action in general and in particular that of the MEPs who will sit in the new European Parliament following the European elections of June 2009.

Brussels, 5 June 2009



FOREWORD

by Mr. Ján Figel'

*Former European Commissioner
for Education, Training, Culture and Youth*

Cultural diversity – including a diversity of faiths and convictions – is far from being a new feature of Europe. Our continent has been shaped by our long history of intercultural exchanges through trade, waves of migration, and unfortunately also by wars. Putting an end to our history of violence and strife is the main historical significance of the process of European integration which began to materialise after WWII and which has now become the European Union.

The process of European integration can be regarded as a very large, long, and remarkably well functioning exercise in *intercultural dialogue*. In the last analysis, integrating the peoples and countries of Europe requires getting to know each other's traditions, customs and beliefs. In this respect, however, it seems to me that our united Europe is at risk of running out of steam. The voices that call for mutual understanding, tolerance, and dialogue are losing quite a few battles against obscurantism, intolerance, and racial hatred. These worrying developments occur in an increasingly open and complex environment, and against a background of tense relations between ethnic and religious groups in many of Europe's cities and countries. We the advocates of tolerance and dialogue need to close ranks and build upon the achievements of our first half century together if we are to work towards achieving properly inclusive societies in which the diversity of ethnicities, languages, and political, religious and philosophical beliefs is regarded as an asset rather than a threat.

This is one of the crucial challenges that Europe has to face in the 21st Century. We need to find fresh and compelling arguments; we need to develop effective, continent-wide policies that can help us to turn our continent into a place where intercultural societies thrive on respectful exchanges of views between individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds. My vision is of a new age of dialogue where every citizen and community is treated on an equal basis.

Let us not forget that, now that the Union is home to almost half a billion people, every social group in Europe is a minority – no matter how large and tightly knit. The EU is an alliance of minorities bound together by history, common values, and a shared vision for their future. We need to give impulse to a true social and cultural transformation whose objectives include going beyond the notion of mere multicultural societies – where cultures and communities simply *coexist side by side*. Tolerance is no longer enough. We need to nourish an inter-cultural society where different people *live together*, having mutual interest and open communication, enriching each other.

The European Union declared 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYICD), with the ambitious task of promoting intercultural dialogue as a process in which everyone living in the EU should have the opportunity to improve their day-to-day interaction within increasingly open and complex cultural environments. The EYICD raised the awareness of many people – especially the young – on the importance of developing an active European citizenship open to the world, respectful of cultural diversity, and based on common values. The Year has also been an opportunity to highlight the contribution of different cultures to the heritage and ways of life of EU countries.

The common commitment of EU institutions, Member States, cultural sector and civil society has contributed to a Europe-wide awareness campaign about intercultural dialogue and has touched different areas and policies through events, debates, and other initiatives. Pan-European projects, national initiatives, programmes, actions and other events took place during the year and played a major role in promoting the message of intercultural

dialogue and diversity throughout the EU and beyond our borders.

Intercultural dialogue depends on the commitment of us all. To promote a more structured and continuous dialogue with civil society, the Platform for Intercultural Europe was created. The platform brings together over 400 committed civil-society organisations, from the culture sector and far beyond. Born as a civil-society initiative to contribute to the European Year 2008, and supported by the European Commission, the platform is engaged in intercultural action throughout Europe and beyond – at local, national, and international levels. Its ultimate goal is to make cultural plurality a more accepted societal norm; educating, building capacity in organisations, monitoring for sustained policies, and mobilising actors across borders. The Platform will continue to work on the promotion of its recommendations but also – closer to the ground – on the exchange of practices within the cultural sector and civil society as a whole.

Churches and religious communities were also closely involved during the EYICD 2008. One notable initiative in this context was that of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the 'Church and Society' Commission of the Conferences of European Churches (CSC-CEC), in co-operation with the European Office of the political foundation, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Their valuable contribution was to address the (inter)religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. The current publication of the reports on the series of seminars that were held at the European Parliament during 2008 on the overall theme of "Islam, Christianity and Europe" is a rejoinder to my desire that the themes of EYICD should inspire policy-making in this area beyond 2008. I also hope that similar discussions like these will be organised in the future. If Europe succeeds in its inter-religious dialogue, it will help facilitate the overall success of the European project. But if Europe fails in this effort, there could be grave consequences for Europe's capacities to promote effective intercultural dialogue in general, thereby undermining the very basis of our society and

threatening the future of harmonious co-existence of different communities on this continent.

Within a broader framework, having open, transparent and regular dialogue with the main churches and religious communities in Europe has been a feature of the EU's institutions for a number of years – even before the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which makes a specific reference to this practice. I would like to recall the meeting in May 2008 of the Presidents of the European Parliament, of the European Council and of the Commission with the representatives of the Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, the Orthodox Church, the Muslim and Jewish religious communities. These were –focused on the environmental problems and intercultural dialogue in Europe. In contrast, the meeting in May 2009 discussed the economic and financial crisis, and considered that there is a spiritual crisis and a distorted hierarchy of values which lie at the very roots of the current crisis.

It is significant that during the last meeting, there was a clear call for the number of such meetings throughout a year to be increased, and that the meetings should have a more thorough working character, so that they bring more fruits for the development of the EU and all its citizens. I really hope that this call is heeded, and that this dialogue will be intensified in the future.

Going beyond the projects of the European Year 2008, the notion of intercultural dialogue has since 2007 been incorporated into the new generation of the EU's programmes in education, training, culture, European citizenship, and youth. For instance, the promotion of intercultural dialogue is one of the three priorities of the Culture program and of the European Agenda for Culture.

We are also working to develop a truly cross-sectoral strategy on intercultural dialogue, reaching beyond education and culture. The goal is to establish deeper links with other fields such as integration and migration, regional development, employment,

anti-discrimination and equal opportunities, and external relations.

We call this 'mainstreaming' of intercultural dialogue into our policy work and programmes, and it is a sign of our commitment to pursue this important initiative for the years to come.

The European Commission considers that an excellent way to meet this long-term objective is to focus our efforts especially on education. Europeans need to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare them for a more intercultural Europe: these include such key competences as the ability to communicate in foreign languages, social and civic competences, and cultural awareness. The EYICD has advanced the policy debate, contributed to the exchange of best practices, and raised the awareness of the benefits and challenges of living together in an intercultural society. European institutions, Member states, churches, other communities of faith and conviction, and civil-society organisations have all committed themselves to build upon the momentum created by the Year. The Year must not remain just a one-year celebration - a plant that blossomed for one single season only. Rather, it should become a mature perennial tree that bringing fruits for many seasons to come. If we in Europe succeed in promoting an open-minded and open-hearted intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we will have a more respectful, tolerant, and civilised Europe, a Europe that will be well-equipped to face the challenges of the 21st Century.

Brussels, 5 November 2009



INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: RESPONSE TO WHICH PROBLEMS?

Christian and Muslim perspectives

(17 April 2008)

SUMMARY

Intercultural dialogue is a way to foster social cohesion in Europe and peace and solidarity in EU foreign relations, was the conclusion reached in the first of the four seminars organised by COMECE, the Church and Society Commission (CSC) and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. Intercultural dialogue as well as inter-religious dialogue are ways to improve knowledge and understanding and thereby help overcome the fear and hostility on which discrimination feeds. Beyond its value as a means to tackle problems, intercultural dialogue should be seen as a part of civilized culture. In addition to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the seminar underlined the importance of intra-cultural and intra-religious dialogue. The main challenge for all of these dialogues is to involve those who in the first place object to dialogue.

FULL REPORT

“The European Union must be more than just an economic space,” **Rev. Rüdiger Noll**, Moderator of the seminar and Director of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) emphasized in his introduction. “The European project must be a project of and for its people, it must be a project based on commonly shared values.

This is why the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue is so important”, he added.

Professor Dr. Ural Manço, sociologist of religions at the Faculté Universitaire Saint-Louis (Brussels), opened the seminar by depicting the situation of Muslims in Western Europe who came to Europe in the course of the last fifty years. This group of people has gone through a double shock. The migration of Muslims to Western Europe started in the 60’s when post-war Europe needed manual work force. The “good years” ended with an economic depression of mid-70’s. No longer needed, Muslims who had settled in Europe lost the legitimacy of their presence.

The second shock came when the children of these migrants, whom their parents had hoped would become well educated and well integrated in the job markets, were unable to achieve social promotion. Many of them ended up having no qualifications and therefore either into low-level jobs or unemployed.

In this precarious situation, for some Muslims religion has become a way to regain the recognition which could not be obtained through professional merits. Professor Manço explained that this phenomenon takes place in the overall context of the post-industrial era, where the individual is supreme and people feel the need to constantly affirm themselves and their identity. The demand for recognition has translated into a call for rights such as freedom of religion. Even if the Muslims do not enjoy full freedom of religion in Europe – an issue which needs to be addressed – many Muslims are ready to admit that in Europe they are able to live their religion in a better way than they would in their country of origin.

Imam Tareq Oubrou, the Principal of the Al-Houda Mosque of Bordeaux and a chaplain of Gradignan prison addressed the seminar expressing a Muslim view on the issue. Imam Oubrou started by stressing that inter-religious dialogue is about meeting between individuals, not between “religions”.

According to Tareq Oubrou, there is a huge lack of dialogue between religions but at the same time an intra-religious dialogue which should aim at addressing each religion’s specific problems

is needed. The real challenge in both cases is to include those who are hostile to dialogue in the first place.

Imam Oubrou said that he represents the orthodox Islam, which supports a theological dialogue between Christianity and Islam based on the numerous passages in the Koran mentioning diversity and tolerance. As a believer, he saw 'differences' as signs of God on which one can build. Imam Oubrou regrets that Muslims have not done their theological homework concerning theology of openness and believes that Christianity can teach a great deal on secularism and modernity to the Muslims.

Fr. Ignace Berten o.p., Dominican Father and Director of the Brussels-based association "Espaces - Spiritualités, cultures et société en Europe" provided a Christian reflection on the theme. He started by welcoming the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue as an attempt by the European Union to reduce the gap between the values and objectives of the Union as stated in the founding treaties and the reality. Inside the European Union, intercultural dialogue contributes to social cohesion. In the EU's relations with the rest of the world, intercultural dialogue contributes to peace and solidarity.

Father Berten outlined the different approaches some European countries have taken to deal with migration. According to the French model, all citizens are - in principle - equal and treated in the same (undifferentiated) way. The English model favours coexistence of different cultures. The Dutch model allows high tolerance for all differences considered as personal choices. Belgium and Germany have not adopted a specific model but hope that with time the newcomers will find their place in the host society. None of the models has been entirely successful.

Father Berten highlighted five elements to be considered in order to achieve harmonious relations. First of all, the integration (not assimilation) is easier if it starts at an early age. The role of school is crucial as many migrant families belong to socially-disadvantaged groups where parents have little capacity to promote this process. Secondly, serious reflection is needed on how much the host societies should change in order to

accommodate newcomers and, on the other hand, to what extent the Muslims should accept to change their traditions. Thirdly, new spaces must be created for meeting. Father Berten mentioned examples like street parties, meetings at school for parents and meetings linked to religious festivities. He also suggested that specific inter-religious dialogue should be promoted as well. Fourthly, a major work should be conducted to read History from a critical perspective taking into account the point of view of the other (e.g. Ottoman Empire). Finally, dialogue between cultures is also necessary for world peace, and here the European Muslims are in a key position to mediate between the different cultures.

DISCUSSION

MEP Margareta Auken (Greens-DK) expressed sadness over the Cartoon Scandal; the negative atmosphere it created among the Danish population and the loss of Denmark's reputation as a tolerant country. Like many others, she called Europeans to tackle the fear related to Muslims and Islam.

It was also pointed out that the West should acknowledge that it is also regarded as a threat by others: Europe is characterized by a fundamentalist secularism.

An attendee said that the perception of migrants had changed since 9/11: before they used to be considered as Arab or Turkish migrants, now they are - unfortunately - perceived as Muslims. Migrants are labelled according to their religion, unlike the host society which is not labelled as "Christian".

Dr. Karim Chemlal from the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE) disagreed with Professor Manço's analysis on religion as a way to gain recognition. According to Dr Chemlal the religious quest should not only be viewed as the product of economic and social marginalisation, but also as an integral part of the identity quest which is natural for each human being. He also stressed the importance of emphasising the contribution of the Muslim civilisation to the European civilisation.

The importance of education, i.e. of knowing one's own and others' religion and history was several times pointed out in the discussions.

Nicole Rückinger from the Council of the European Union questioned the usefulness of the "islamophobia" notion which is potentially harmful as it reinforces the victimisation of Muslims and the image of this population as a monolithic entity. The fight against religious-based discrimination applies to all religions, while intercultural dialogue is also a tool to fight against religious intolerance. With some other attendees, she reminded us that European societies are strongly secularised societies and that, in this regard, intercultural dialogue should be extended to the secular humanists and non-believers.

Professor Manço agreed that "islamophobia" was a rampant phenomenon as well as a problematic term. While inviting not to dramatize the situation, he nevertheless underlined that there *is* a problem of perception and reception of Islam in Europe. He invited to a reflection on the social use and misuse of 'Islam', which sometimes functions in the Western world as a means to avoid to critically questioning oneself by pointing to 'problematic' Islam. "Ignorance (physically!) kills!", he said, adding that we needed to mobilize the 15 million Muslims living in Europe to help them create bridges with their countries of origin so as to fight against ignorance on both sides.

Responding to questions concerning dialogue between religions other than Christianity and Islam and with non-believers, **Imam Oubrou** said that all those dialogues were a necessity. He also expressed the hope that non-believers would not see the religious encounter as a threat to them.

Imam Oubrou's endeavour to have Islam understood as a religion embracing diversity was welcomed by **Mr Seraffetin Pektas** from the Intercultural Dialogue Platform. Mr Pektas said that the Islamic theology of diversity had been lost for the last 2 to 3 centuries and should be revitalised. Mr Pektas further stressed that the Muslims themselves should take the initiative and not only consider themselves as victims.

SYNTHESIS

Ms. Ramona Nicole Manescu (ALDE-RO) opened her concluding remarks with a story she heard from a Muslim friend. As a child, that friend had once asked an old Christian man why people went to two different places to worship as there was only one God. The old man had replied that one day when Jesus felt exhausted he had asked his friend Muhammad to help him and to take care of the other half of the world. MEP Manescu was struck by this story as the simplest explanation of religion she had ever heard and re-stated that this kind of approach and attitude could give hope for dialogue and friendship between the two communities.

While stressing the importance of good relations between Christians and Muslims, Ms Manescu said that she understood if difficulties met by Muslims living in Europe fed anti-Western sentiments. Besides facing social problems, Muslims lack full freedom of religion even if this freedom is in principle provided for in the Constitutions.

Europeans should learn to value the full contribution of Islam to our culture. Ms Manescu emphasised the role of individual citizens, associations and churches in this necessary work. She also called for more commitment on the part of Muslim women. Women, in general, are capable of empathy, a quality very much needed in dialogue.

Ms. Manescu concluded in insisting on the common ground between Muslims and Christians, quoting Imam Tareq Oubrou who had said: "If the "heaven" separates us, the earth provides us with a common destiny and challenges".



VISIBILITY OF RELIGION IN THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPACE

The question of worship places
and religious symbols in clothing

(29 May 2008)

SUMMARY

The second meeting of the series of Dialogue Seminars devoted to Islam, Christianity and Europe took place in the European Parliament (Brussels) on 29 May 2008.

The seminar dealt with the issue of the visibility of religion in European public space, and more specifically with questions concerning worship places and religious symbols in clothing. The construction of mosques and the wearing of veils have acted as a catalyst to public debate about freedom of religion, acceptance of change, respect for difference, relations between different religious communities and the relationship between the religious and the secular.

FULL REPORT

Dr. Vincent Legrand, Moderator of the seminar from the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), explained that following the longstanding ill-ease about veils, the establishment of new mosques has given rise to heated public discussion in numerous European countries in recent years. He drew attention to the fact that this debate takes place in countries with juridical systems guaranteeing freedom of religion including freedom of worship.

Mr. László Surján, Member of the European Parliament (EPP-ED/HU) referred to a recent initiative by a small number of MEPs to ban religious symbols in the premises of the EU institutions. According to Mr Surján, the good news was that the proposal was only supported by 9 MEPs, when at least half of the 785 MEPs' need to sign an initiative to give it serious consideration. Mr László Surján nevertheless saw this as an alarming sign of a return to 'the catacombs' for Christians and other believers in Europe, an experience Christians from Eastern Europe had endured during the 40 years of Communist dictatorship. He stated that instead of denying their identity, Christians should be free and brave enough to appear in public as Christians and called for freedom of religion for all.

According to **Ms Chantal Saint-Blancat**, Professor of Sociology at the University of Padua (Italy), the building of mosques provides an example on how delicate of a process is the normalisation of religious pluralism in Europe. Prof. Saint-Blancat explained that the debate around mosques and religious symbols varies from country to country and that it is clearly linked with the country's traditional understanding of state-church relations, citizenship and its experience of religious pluralism.

The building of places of worship for new religious communities is said to disrupt what was the traditional and familiar urban space in most of Europe. They clearly and visibly demonstrate the existence of culturally distinctive groups. However, some religious groups are better received than others. For example, in Northern Italy it was relatively easy to establish a Sikh temple while proposals for Muslim mosques are contested. The building of mosques has served as a symbolic catalyst to manifest unexpressed or un-avowed fears of the 'Other' related to migration (invasion), intolerance (religious integration) and terrorism. The way the issue is treated by Muslim communities, the public authorities and the host society living in the neighbourhood of the mosque projects determines conflict vs. negotiation. Overall Prof. Saint-Blancat was optimistic stating that with time and longer presence of Muslims attitudes tend to change towards greater openness. She paid tribute to positive

action by religious communities, recognising that many churches and Christian believers have initiated local dialogue with their Muslim neighbours. There is also greater openness on the side of Muslim communities. The younger Muslim leaders know how to handle with the media, have social networks of support and participate at local decision-making. They want to build a national and a European Islam which related to their local contexts.

Reverend Berit Schelde Christensen, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, shared her conviction that religion is a guide to values and gives meaning and cohesion to human existence and relationships. Making a link with the 1st seminar (17 April 2008), she stated that for economically marginalized Muslims religion can be a means of securing social recognition, but that it is also an integral part of the identity quest of every human being. Rev. Schelde Christensen also reminded the audience that if the religions are not allowed to go public, there is no chance to meet, neither to exchange nor to discuss openly. According to her, what is at stake in the current debate is, on the one hand, the wish and need for the legitimacy of religion in the public space. And on the other hand, the awareness of the responsibility of different religious communities to relate to and contribute to the development of common values and norms so that religion does not threaten but contributes to the coherence of society. The clash between the secular and the religious is potentially very disturbing.

To avoid or overcome conflict individual Christians and Muslims are met with a challenge to tolerate what they may personally reject and to enter into a mutual learning process. Rev. Schelde Christensen saw two obstacles for this process: firstly, the lack of comprehension of religious language and the value and the purpose of religious symbols due to secularisation. Secondly, the use and misuse of religious convictions and expressions as political statements either knowingly or unknowingly. Despite difficulties, Rev. Schelde Christensen considered the responsibility of us all as European citizens to offer goodwill and respect to those who are spiritually different. Referring to Jürgen

Habermas, she said that in our post-secular society, we should recognise both our shared citizenship and our cultural diversity. The secular virtues, which protect human beings, and religious values, which sustain and nurture human life, should work together in today's Europe.

Rejecting both religious/apologetic/absolutist and secularist /materialist/relativist extremisms, **Imam Yahya Sergio Pallavicini**, Vice-President of the Islamic Religious Community in Italy, called for the development of a culture of religious pluralism and acceptance of religious symbols in the public sphere. According to him, believers should accept symbols of believers of other religions. He, therefore, did not see any problem with Christian crucifixes in Italian public schools acknowledging them as a part of Italy's culture and history, but disapproved of the double standards at work in some communities. Iman Pallavicini led the discussion on reciprocity (which will be tackled more in detail in the seminar of 11 September 2008), by referring to the statement of the former Bishop of Bologna Biffi who had said that before a mosque could be built in Bologna, a freedom of religion should be granted for Christians in the Middle East. In the view of Imam Pallavicini it was a legitimate statement, but at the same he expressed a wish not to confuse the lack of freedom of religion somewhere at the international level with the rights of Muslim minorities to have their own places of worship in Europe. Alongside with claiming their rights in Europe, Muslim European leaders should engage for freedom of religion everywhere, including the Middle East and South-East Asia. Imam Pallavicini went on expressing a wish for a qualified Islamic leadership in European mosques, pointing at the question of the training of imams and at the foreign financing of mosques. He recalled the fact that most of the biggest and architecturally important mosques built in European capital cities were financed by Saudi Arabia, and expressed the wish that mosques remain primarily places of worship and not places of political influence for foreign national agendas and extremist ideologies.

Many more mosques are, however, built in former warehouses and garages. This has further strengthened the image and reality of Muslim communities as a part of shadow society. We have to follow the example of Jews and Christians, he said, whose worship places are part of their quarters. We need to have small mosques where Muslims live and where they can pray in a very peaceful and natural way. Imam Pallavicini regretted the French response to incidences of violence against non-veiled Muslim women by Muslim men. Instead of tackling the question as a crime the authorities saw it as an issue relating to freedom of religion. This approach of the authorities did not solve this type of crime nor enhanced freedom of religion.

Finally, **Mr Joël Privot**, architect and co-founder of *Expert-is*, a consultation agency specialising in the construction of mosques, presented an intercultural and participatory approach to building such places of worship. According to Mr Privot, the key is to team up residents, local authorities and members of the religious community in order to conceive and embed mosques as a shared and appropriated project in the local context. Mosque building should be carried out according to high architectural and environmental requirements and mosques should be open and welcoming to all the residents of neighbourhoods where they have been built. Besides societal concerns Mr. Privot has sought to promote the development of European Islamic Architecture. Showing images of mosques all around the world, Mr Privot explained that wherever Islam has settled in history, new Islamic architecture had developed related to the local context. Mr Privot regretted that this architectural contextualisation had not taken place in Europe. According to Mr Privot an intercultural approach requires that mosques are not built on the basis of a 'copy and paste' method of reproducing the architecture of the original countries of the migrant population but the projects should provide a metaphor of adaptation of Islam in Europe with respect to its traditions.

DISCUSSION

Responding to a question from the audience concerning common worship places, **Joël Privot**, recognized the existence of such places in the United States. In the subsequent discussions, both the Christian speaker, **Rev. Schelde Christensen** and the Muslim speaker, **Imam Pallavicini** stressed the importance of maintaining separate worship places, first and foremost, as places where the faithful can worship their religion. They both rejected syncretism of rituals and symbols as unacceptable and confusing. When entering a worship place a faithful person enters a narrative of life she or he is a part of. It was nevertheless highlighted that worship places of distinctive religions can serve as places to meet people from other religions.

One participant said that acceptance of mosques goes hand in hand with acceptance of Muslims. **Prof. Saint-Blancat** responded with the following paradox: in Northern Italy Muslim migrants are welcome to take vacant job positions, but are refused worship places. This indicates that discrimination can be found at different levels.

Mr Andrew Stephen Reed, from the UK Independence Party, appreciated the discussion on architecture as particularly encouraging because architecture conditions our environment and ourselves in an important way. Following Mr Privot, **Mr Fayçal M'rad Dali**, from the Belgian Section of the World Council of Religions for Peace (WCRP), said that mosque building participates in urban renovation.

Dr Karim Chemlal, from the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE), highlighted the East-London example where a synagogue and a mosque stand near one another. This is a way to show acceptance for other religions while preserving one's own character. He joined Prof. Saint-Blancat in believing that 2nd and 3rd generation Muslims living in Europe are more open for intercultural dialogue. He saw that the 'xenographs' of the first mosques in Europe reflect the settlement of the migrants of the 1st generation.

The presentation of impressive (and supposedly expensive) architectural projects for mosques by Mr Privot was received with interest by **Mr Serafettin Pektas**, from the Intercultural Dialogue Platform. He noted that this issue raises the questions about the extent to which governments in Europe are willing to finance such architectural projects. Or, in other words, the extent to which states should intervene in religious matters. Concerning the cost of mosque building, **Mr Privot** answered that the same amount of money can be spent either on good architectural work or on bad quality. He also pointed out to the possibility of public funding from the local to EU level.

According to **Mr Mohamed-Raja'i Barakat** the financing of mosques by foreign actors is a consequence of disrespect of the European states towards the rights of Muslims. The financing of mosques should be guaranteed by the State, the same way Christian and Jewish worship places are financed through fiscal systems.

Ms Dorsaf Ben Dhiab, from the European Forum of Muslim Women, demanded the right for European Muslims to decide for themselves and to manage their own worship places (in France public authorities still want to continue to control this). She shared Imam Pallavicini's concern about foreign influence. Furthermore, she invited Europe to accept Muslims as full European citizens instead of considering them as second-rank citizens considered as foreign or as minorities. Instead of using the expression 'Islam *in* Europe', which reflects the neo-colonial management of European Islam, one should speak of Islam *of* Europe. She considered the French position on the headscarf erroneous and described the French law on the visibility of religious symbols in the public space as 'liberticide': forbidding the veil follows the same logics of imposing the veil.

Mr Christel Ngnambi, from the European Evangelical Alliance, reminded the seminar that the French law does not forbid all religious symbols in public space but only *ostentatious* religious symbols. He nevertheless added that he is of course aware that it is not clear what is meant by ostentatious. He congratulated Imam Pallavicini for having signed the open letter of 138 Muslim

religious scholars to the highest authorities of Christianity named 'A Common Word Between Us and You'¹ and deplored that this important document was not well enough known among the wider public.

Several speakers emphasized that worship places of different religions are also communal centres of exchange. **Mr Levi Matusof**, from the European Jewish Public Affairs' organisation, highlighted this aspect with regard to synagogues. In his intervention Mr Matusof also stressed that the recognition of the legitimacy of the presence of the 'Other' is not only a question of time, but also the product of religious leaders teaching the faithful to participate in intercultural dialogue.

¹ <http://www.acommonword.com>



'CHRISTIAN EUROPE' AND ISLAM IN EUROPE

(3 July 2008)

SUMMARY

How does 'Christian Europe' receive Islam in Europe? How to address the fear of 'Islamisation' of Europe and what are the chances for 'Europeanisation' of Islam? These were the questions addressed during the third meeting of the series of seminars devoted to Islam, Christianity and Europe organised by COMECE, the Church and Society Commission (CSC) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) on 3 July 2008 at the European Parliament.

In Europe many people fear Islam and that fear must be taken seriously, and challenged. Much of the fear could be countered if Europeans improved their knowledge of Islam, its history and interpretations and if the media would provide a more varied - and fairer - picture of Muslims and Islam. For Churches, coming to terms with Islam requires reflection on their mission as Churches and as missionary churches. The seminar made it clear that there are no religious reasons that would justify Christians and Muslims to mistreat one another. It also highlighted that Islam and Christianity have much more in common than it is often recognised, including common roots, values and concerns, like social justice. Even if it is Christianity, which has been the frame of reference for the development of European juridical and political structures, also Islam is 'European' in its roots and historic development, and contributed to Europe in the fields of science and culture. 'Europeanisation' of Islam is a fact due to the progressive social integration of Muslims in Europe. This process should not be artificially boosted by an enforced programme of 'Europeanisation' of Islam.

FULL REPORT

Dr Peter R. Weilemann, Director of the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), introduced the seminar by highlighting that in Europe Islam is sometimes perceived as a threat, not only because of fundamentalist terrorism but also because it seemed foreign dominated. Against this backdrop the term Euro-Islam has gotten its own significance. In structural terms, the discussion surrounding the term reminds us on a debate in the seventies and eighties on Euro-Communism. Two of the key questions being then: Can it be reformed to be compatible with Western values ? And can we trust those who plead for reform ?

According to **Sara Silvestri**, Assistant Professor at the City University in London and a Research Associate at Cambridge University, the European context is increasingly secularised but a shared religious heritage will be a crucial factor for the future of Europe. Islam's legacy in Europe is evident in its contribution to science and culture even if it is Christianity which has served as the frame of reference for the development of European thought and culture, and social, juridical and political structures. The fact that Europe's political and legal structures were both inspired by and created to accommodate Christianity is today a problem for the integration of Islam, which is traditionally organised in a completely other way (without clear clerical hierarchy). Silvestri continued that Europe's suspicious attitude towards Islam is symptomatic of an underlying more general hostile attitude towards religion as well as of a crisis about Europe's identity. Not to speak about the terrorist attacks, which have hurt both Muslims and non-Muslims and have made life more difficult for Muslims living in the West.

Muslims in Europe are no longer temporary migrants, but have become European citizens. According to Professor Silvestri, we should rid ourselves of the false perception that identities are fixed once and for all and that Muslims belong to a monolithic category. This is not true albeit that Muslims throughout the world identify themselves as part of the global Muslim community, the 'Ummah', and believe that being a Muslim is an

all-encompassing life experience. Firstly, this trans- and supranational point of reference for Muslim identity does not differ much from the notion of 'Universal Church' in Christianity or from the status of Jewish identity for the diverse Jewish communities all over the world. Secondly, in reference to the feared mixture of the public and private spheres by Muslims (and of politics and personal life), Professor Silvestri added that every faith has a link between the transcendent message and immanent life, and that to be involved in social reality is part of any religion not just of Islam. Moreover, she noted that certain concepts are common to Islam and Christianity, such as concern for the well-being of every person and the holiness of every life. She recalled that Europeans, as much believers as non-believers, share common values and preoccupations such as social justice.

Referring to her recent field studies, Ms Silvestri explained that many ordinary Muslims are very respectful of Christian Churches and even prefer, instead of Muslim schools and possible ghettoisation, sending their children to Christian schools. Most Muslims do not seem to be concerned with the clash between Muslims and Christians but rather deplore the little role religion has in the public sphere: it is the loss of values and spirituality in our secularised societies that worries Muslims. Thus, the research proves that the clash between the religions is more an intellectual construction than a reality. She concluded by explaining that there is a considerable amount of positive interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. There is a convergence, for instance, in political movements. Many Christian, secular and Muslim organisations supported the 'Make Poverty History' campaign, which was launched in the UK in 2005. Similarly, in 2003, the anti-Iraq war demonstrations gathered people of all denominations and beliefs.

Representing the Islamic community of Serbia, Sheikh **Abdullah Nu'man** said that we have to distinguish between the 'pure Islam' and ordinary 'everyday Islam' and warned against false interpretations of Islam which, taken from the Koran, are overlaid with a number of cultural traditions which result in misunderstandings. He stated that from a theological and

demographical point of view 'Islamisation of Europe' is in many ways an impossible notion: Firstly, because the Islamic law, 'Sharia', only applies to Muslims and, secondly, because belonging to the Islamic religion can only be voluntary. At the same time, Islam should not be seen as a visitor to Europe or a stranger in Europe, as Islam has a long-standing history of being an indigenous religion of Europe.

Unfortunately, the acceptance of Islam in Europe is mixed and Islamophobia is used as a convenient phrase to allow racial and religious discrimination against Muslims and belittling of Islam. Europe should not be afraid of Islam, but on the contrary, should be open to receive migrants from Muslim countries and recognise the citizenship rights of all its citizens. In comparison to women who suffer from a glass ceiling, many Muslims are faced with a concrete ceiling.

Sheikh Nu'man deplored that the few verses on Jihad in the Koran imprint Islam instead of the countless references to love. He also regretted that there are imams who use the religion as a way to wage war. No religion is immune to manipulation and all religions can be instrumentalised. For Abdullah Nu'man, Muslims "love humanity because it proceeds from God and love God because he created us". As a Muslim for whom Islam is a religion of love, visiting a mosque means visiting an oasis, which cleanses and brings peace of mind. "Religion is not a disease; it does not kill, but when you catch it, it makes you happy".

Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the EU, suggested that interreligious challenges are part of Europe's multi-faith societies and appear in all spheres of society, be it education, work or civic life. In a culturally diverse Europe it is vital that we engage in authentic and sincere dialogue, built on respect for the dignity of every human person created, as we Christians firmly believe, in the image and likeness of God. According to Metropolitan Emmanuel, as Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam are not in competition but offer together the basis for faith, religious guidance and life planning. However, there is a problem of perception and reception of Islam in Europe. There is a failure to

distinguish between Islam as one of the three monotheistic religions, on equal footing with Judaism and Christianity, and Islamisation as an extreme political ideology.

In Europe many people have unreflected, but historically shaped fear of Islam, which must be taken seriously, and challenged. Inherited images of the past such as 'the Turks before Vienna', the 'Holy War' and recent events, like 9/11 have contributed to this. The concept of Christian Europe as a conveyor of values and common heritage emerged with the spread of the third monotheistic challenge - Islam. This fear is promoted by stereotypical and partial representation of Islam in the media and by the general lack of knowledge about Islam. Consequently, it could be countered if Europeans improved their knowledge of Islam, its history and interpretations and if the media would provide a more varied - and fairer - picture of Muslims and Islam. A new start could be made by more equal treatment of religions in the media and by teaching of all religions at school. It is also essential that the fear of Islam, whether rational or "felt", must be taken seriously by the Churches. Christians engaged in interfaith dialogue should draw attention to commonalities of Islam and Christianity, which include common roots. For Churches coming to terms with Islam requires reflection on their mission as Churches and as missionary churches.

Citing the words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Metropolitan Emmanuel underlined that the conflicts between Christians and Muslims that are mentioned in history have their roots in politics, not in religion. He also stressed that there are no religious reasons that would justify a violent conflict of the Christian and Muslim cultures.

Metropolitan Emmanuel underlined that Islam was and still is European through its roots and suggests that there is less a need to "Europeanise Islam" than to revise the perception of the existing values and traditions in all their diversity. He also explained that the multiple faces of Islam in Europe make it difficult to speak of a European Islam.

DISCUSSION

Bishop of Croydon Nicholas Baines, from the Church of England, commented the speeches, reminding the seminar that what we are facing is not only an ignorance of Islam but also an ignorance of Christianity and religion in general.

Sheikh Abdullah Nu'man suggested non-Muslims to explore Islam and Muslims by spending a day with a Muslim. He explained that if you tell a Muslim woman not to wear a veil she will wear it, because like children we like to do what were are told not to. According to Abdullah Nu'man, wearing a veil must be possible for those who wish to do so voluntarily.

Several participants pointed to the fact that beyond discussing the situation of Muslims in Europe, we also have to consider the situation of Christians in the Muslim world and raise the issue of reciprocity in religious freedom.² **MEP Maciej Giertych** (NI - Poland) mentioned that in the Western world - where Christianity predominates - there is tolerance towards Islam as well as the right of conversion, which in his opinion does not exist in Islam. **Stephen Biller**, from 'Al-Sharatan' Society, echoed this describing the poor situation of Christians in Turkey. **Jesuit Father Carlo Sorbi** reported that the state of Qatar has financed the building of a Catholic Church but that in Saudi Arabia the Church is not authorised. Father Sorbi also regretted that in Islam women do not have the same rights as men and that this includes education and inheritance. **Sheikh Abdullah Nu'man** answered that his son and his daughter will have equality in inheritance and explained that in the time of the Prophet, inheritance rights were founded on the fact that women were dependent on men. Also polygamy was explained by the fact that widows were considered as orphans.

² The theme of reciprocity of religious freedom for Muslims in Europe and Christians in the Muslim world, will be discussed more in depth on 11 September 2008 at the seminar entitled "The external relations of the European Union with Muslim countries and international responsibility of religious communities" (see the last paragraph on background information).

Imam Mustafa Kastit, from the Cinquantenaire Mosque in Brussels, stated that the presence of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions was not something negative in our secularised societies which too often lack spirituality and moral values. Renouncing the attitude of self-victimisation among the Muslims, Imam Kastit called for consideration of Muslims in Europe – now at their 4th generation – as citizens with full rights and duties.

Aristotelos Gavriiadis, from the European Commission, said for his part that there was no monopoly for the Christian and Islamic faiths. In our secular societies everyone is searching for their truth. Mr Gavriiadis expressed his satisfaction that at the European School, his children can choose between the course of religion and the course of secular moral education – something which does not exist in his country, Greece.

Concluding the debate, **MEP Margrete Auken** (Greens-Denmark) who is also a pastor of the Lutheran Church of Denmark, referred to the rise of right-wing populism in Denmark and underlined that it should be understood that this clash is not religious but political. The Cartoon Scandal illustrates how Islamophobia also derives from the lack of knowledge of each other's sensitivities. Quoting a Lutheran pastor of Bethlehem (Palestine), Ms Auken stated that we often have too much of religion and not enough spirituality. Finally, Ms Auken invited us to listen and learn from each other in order to overcome misunderstandings and highlighted that in this context, dialogue with religions as prescribed in the Lisbon Treaty, is “both an obligation and a privilege”.



THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION WITH MUSLIM COUNTRIES AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

(11 September 2008)

INTRODUCTION

The fourth and last meeting of the series of seminars devoted to Islam, Christianity and Europe organised by the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC-CEC), the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) took place on 11 September 2008 in the European Parliament. One of the issues raised was the question of reciprocity in terms of religious freedom. One hundred participants, including MEPs and civil servants of the EU institutions, as well as members of religious organisations and communities, took part in the seminar and in the ensuing debate.

FULL REPORT

Ms **Nicole Reckinger**, from the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union and moderator of this seminar, welcomed the initiative of the three organising parties to examine EU relations with Muslim countries. She, however, expressed reservations about the concept of reciprocity and her preference for the concept of universality of Human Rights, which encompass freedom of religion.

Prof. Dr. Tuomo Melasuo, Research Director of the Tampere Peace Research Institute -TAPRI (Finland) recalled that the

terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 prompted European institutions to become aware of the importance of initiating an intercultural dialogue. After 9/11 this element came to strengthen the three areas of co-operation defined under the Barcelona Process (launched in 1995): international relations and security, economic co-operation and social sector and migration. The importance of religious communities in dialogue between cultures was recognised in 2006 when the first Euro-Mediterranean Award for Dialogue on 'Mutual respect amongst people of different religions or any other belief' was granted by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures to Father Paolo Dall'Oglio from Mar Musa Monastery in Syria.

Professor Melasuo welcomed the establishment of a Union for the Mediterranean in the Paris Summit which took place on 13 July 2008. This French initiative re-engaged France in the Euro-Mediterranean co-operation and has given new impetus to the process. Whereas today more mental distance is felt between Europe and Northern Africa, only fifty years ago, in France, some people used to say that the Mediterranean is traversing their country as River Seine does in Paris.

Professor Melasuo stated that the topic of EU relations with the Muslim countries is difficult because the concept of 'Muslim countries' is problematic. Late Maxime Rodinson's definition of 'countries inhabited by Muslims in majority' would be more correct although somewhat cumbersome alternative. Another point is that the European Union is not defining its foreign relations on religious bases. According to Professor Melasuo, with some exceptions (e.g. question of the EU membership of Turkey), Islam or the fact that a country is inhabited by Muslims in majority, is not a decisive factor for EU relations with a third country. Furthermore, the different political approaches with, for instance, the Mediterranean and the Arab world and Central and South-Eastern Asia are, firstly, due to distance, and secondly, due to political, geopolitical and commercial considerations.

Professor Melasuo asked whether Muslims, Christians and Jews have the same God, and continued that the answer to this

question is crucial to the dialogue. It is more important than the question of the existence or non-existence of God. He also added that in a certain way monotheism is a problem because the three monotheisms exclude the other religions.

Speaking with an outsider's perspective, Professor Melasuo pleaded religions to foster tolerance towards one another and to communicate with each other, and thus make respect an everyday reality. In European relations with majority Muslim countries, politics and religion have the potential to be mutually beneficial. If the European Union creates good relations where human rights - including freedom of religion - are promoted, religions will follow and vice versa. Besides religions, the secular society plays a crucial role in this work.

Professor Melasuo also raised the question of secularism in the Muslim world, inviting to pay also attention to Muslim or North-African Enlightenment and Muslim Humanism.

The contribution of **Father Prof. Dr. Edouard Divry**, Dominican Doctor in Theology and Diocesan Delegate for the Interfaith Dialogue in Montpellier (France), to the discussion on the external relations of the EU focused on reciprocity in religious freedom in international exchanges. According to him the concept of reciprocity is embedded in the 'Silver Rule' ("Do not do to others as you would not have them do to you"), but also in the 'Golden Rule' ("Do onto others as you would wish them do onto you"). Fundamentally any relationship, from a moral point of view, necessarily implies reciprocity. The ethics of international relations should therefore examine the reasons underlying calls for reciprocity in terms of religious freedom.

For the Catholic Church freedom of religion is based on the dignity of the human person and the call for reciprocity is clearly based on its Social Teaching; religious reciprocity has been a permanent request of the Catholic Magisterium during the last decades. Father Divry proceeded in pointing to the risk of two extreme interpretations of the international virtue of reciprocity: retaliation and passivity. Reciprocity, when underpinned by a Christian vision, is not a call for retaliation. The Christian vision

of forgiveness is opposed to reciprocity conceived as a threat of reprisal. But there is also the temptation towards passivity which often relegates religion to a mere private belief devoid of public rights within or outside the State. This is a passivity which could also more generally prevent Christians - or indeed Muslims or Jews - from claiming equal treatment. The Christian reality (and reciprocally the Jewish and Muslim realities) should be protected. Father Divry reminded of two cases. H.H. Pope Paul VI did not oppose the building of the big mosque of Rome and had responded to those who had reacted in saying that he should have asked for reciprocity that the Church would not sink to such a low level. In contrast, the former Archbishop of Algiers Henri Teissier had stated in the beginning of the Islamist turmoil that one should ask for reciprocity in Saudi Arabia and that everywhere else Christians are deprived of freedom of worship. Thus the Catholic Church has evolved in asserting reciprocity as an urgent issue while opposing both laicist passivity and retaliation. Father Divry concluded in calling for an increase in exchanges in order to gradually allow the "political virtue of religious reciprocity" to appear in international relations.

Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid, Chairman of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony (UK) and President of the task force for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, began his intervention by stressing the importance of distinguishing between "Islam" and "Muslims". The word "Islam" should be used exclusively for the "Way of Life" based upon divine sources: Qur'an and Sunnah. "Muslims" as human beings free to abide by and deviate from Divine Guidance as they feel fit according to their own conscience.

He refuted the concept of reciprocity (understood in a restrictive way), arguing that Muslims living in Europe as citizens or residents have the right to practise their religion. The problem of lack of freedom of religion in Mecca is not the problem for Muslims living in Europe. Rights of Muslims in Europe should be respected without expecting something in exchange. The values which should guide us are rather those of equality, equity, and justice for all citizens and residents of the EU Member States.

From their part Muslims living in Europe, have the duty to respect and abide by all laws of the land and to work for the common good.

Imam Sajid also disagreed with those who consider that the equilibrium reached between Christians and Muslims in Europe will be disrupted because of immigration and called for openness to welcome Muslims. Imam Sajid also reminded the seminar that Prophet Muhammad had respected Christians' religious rights: Christians were allowed to pray in mosques following their own beliefs and rites in strict equality and mutual respect. The mosque was considered as God's home – as the home of the same God.

Concerning the external relations of the EU with Muslim countries, nothing will be achieved by coercion, domination and imposition; more effective would be the application of the rule of law and international justice. This also applies to European countries, which should practise what they preach.

As many times noted in the previous seminars, Imam Sajid too underlined the Muslim contribution to European history. Europe does not only have Judeo-Christian roots but also Islamic ones. In former times Westerners' tutors were Muslims. Unfortunately, this is not a fact recognised enough in European history.

DISCUSSION

Reacting to the comment on reciprocity of **Imam Sajid** who saw it as a negative – and therefore unacceptable - concept maintained by the dominating groups, **Father Divry**, reiterated his understanding of reciprocity as a virtue of general justice. He also disagreed with an intervention from the floor which claimed international relations and responsibilities to be solely a matter for states and other actors recognised by international law, not for individuals. According to Father Divry we should go beyond passiveness. Besides individuals religious communities – not to forget the international status of Vatican – too bear international responsibility.

Professor Melasuo agreed. Even if from the point of view of law, European citizens including Muslims enjoy their rights without responsibility concerning the rights of others, a strictly juridical perspective is insufficient. Individuals and communities do have an international moral responsibility. He gave as an example the case of the moral international responsibility of the Danish journalists in the 'Cartoon affair', which had tremendous effects on a world-wide scale.

Even if **Imam Sajid** disliked the concept of reciprocity, and would like to see individuals relieved from responsibility over freedom of religion in other parts of world, he did call politicians to encourage – but not impose - the leaders of Muslim countries to embrace democracy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 – he said - is an excellent document that is not respected by many Muslim countries. Imam Sajid also raised his concern about the misuse of freedom of expression in the West to insult and hurt others.

The speech of Father Divry also sparked a discussion on the relation between politics and religion. **Imam Mustafa Kastit**, from the Cinquantenaire Mosque in Brussels, disagreed with Father Divry who had mentioned the political dimension of mosques (in contrast with simple "musallas"). Imam Kastit stated that "musallas" are places of worship where no sermons are made, in contrast with mosques. Even if there are mosques that are regrettably instrumentalised for political purposes, mosques do not have a political dimension. **Father Divry** responded saying that according to his knowledge in Islamic theology a mosque is a place of religious-political expression. Unlike in Christianity ("Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Matthew 22:21)"), there is no separation of politics and religion in Islam.

Stefan Lunte, interim Secretary General of COMECE, observed that Father Divry had tackled the issue of reciprocity in a very subtle way devoid of any intention of retaliation and that Imam Sajid had rejected it. He expressed his interest in Professor Melasuo's view on the perspectives to further freedom of religion in the new process (the Union for the Mediterranean) in case

reciprocity as an approach is rejected. **Professor Melasuo** believed and confirmed that this issue is being promoted as part of the human rights agenda without the mentioning of this word³. He stated that the issue of freedom of worship is fundamental, but that it would be better to use other tools and concepts than reciprocity. One voice that Melasuo was missing in the current debates over this theme was that of Christians living in the Middle East in countries like Egypt, Palestine and Iraq, who have a field experience from which we might learn.

SYNTHESIS

In concluding this last seminar, Ms **Eija-Riitta Korhola**, MEP (EPP-ED- Finland), a trained philosopher and theologian, indicated that the approach towards reciprocity is a part of social justice but must not be applied in a restrictive way. Rights of Muslims in Europe should not be diminished and these citizens and residents should not feel guilty about violations committed elsewhere. The use of religious rights – she said - is an indicator of the respect for human rights. Faced with a relativist secular liberalism that rejects the existence of absolute truth, she advocated a pluralist liberalism which allows the public sharing of certain values, including religious values. These values represent the foundation of a dialogue which is a source of hope for our multicultural societies.

³ In the final declaration of the Paris Summit to launch the Union for the Mediterranean (13 July 2008), the Heads of States and Governments confirmed that “they are determined to do everything in order to promote human rights, (...) to enhance intercultural understanding and guarantee the respect of all religions and beliefs.”