



Conference of European Churches • Conférence des Églises Européennes • Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen • Конференция Европейских Церквей

Church & Society Commission

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REPORT XIII CEC ASSEMBLY, LYON, JULY 2009
WORKSHOP ON “HUMAN RIGHTS BEGIN WITHIN THE CHURCHES”
CHAIR: FATHER HOVAKIM MANUKYAN

RAPPORTEUR: REV. PETER CIACCIO

HUMAN RIGHTS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, ELIZABETA KITANOVIC, GAVE A FEW EXAMPLES OF ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS AND TOLD ABOUT THE GENERAL ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING ACTION OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMISSION REGARDING THESE SUBJECTS. THE WORKING GROUP WAS, FOR INSTANCE, ACTIVE IN THE DRAFTING PROCESS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DOCUMENT REGARDING “HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMED FORCES” AND HAS LATELY CONCENTRATED ON WORKING ON THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING MANUAL. THE MANUAL WAS WELCOMED BY PARTICIPANTS AS AN IMPORTANT TOOL TO SUPPORT THE HUMAN RIGHTS’ WORK OF THE MEMBER CHURCHES AND FOR ORGANISING THE HUMAN RIGHTS’ TRAINING SESSIONS WITH THE CEC MEMBER CHURCHES. THE HUMAN RIGHTS SECRETARY ALSO PRESENTED THE BOOKMARK AND POSTCARD PREPARED FOR DECEMBER 2008, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. SHE ALSO INFORMED THE MEETING THAT THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMISSION IS A MEMBER OF THE EU FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY’S PLATFORM SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT LAST YEAR, AS WELL AS ONE OF THE NINE-MEMBERS OF THE EU FRA ADVISORY PANEL.

AFTER THIS INTRODUCTION, THE MEETING CONCENTRATED ON A DISCUSSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS MANUAL. REV. ANTHONY PECK INTERVIEWED REV. JOHN MURRAY AND DR. PETER KRÖMER, TWO OF THE THIRTEEN AUTHORS OF THE FIRST TWO CHAPTERS OF THE MANUAL. REV. MURRAY INTRODUCED HIS CONCEPT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS A DAILY MATTER THAT CHURCHES SHOULD ADDRESS AND TRAIN THEIR MEMBERS ABOUT. DR. KRÖMER PRESENTED HIS ARTICLE ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF.

THE FLOOR WAS THEN OPENED AND THE (MORE OR LESS) FORTY PARTICIPANTS COULD ASK QUESTIONS AND EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS AND CONCERNS. AMONG THE MANY QUESTIONS, TWO MATTERS WERE AT THE CENTRE OF A BRIEF BUT FRUITFUL DEBATE: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE EU LISBON TREATY AND THE REACTION AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ON HUMAN RIGHTS. UNFORTUNATELY, AS FOR ALL CEC EVENTS SINCE OCTOBER 2008, NO RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PARTICIPANT WAS PRESENT.

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THE NEED TO FURTHER CEC WORK ON HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY THROUGH A SPECIFIC WORKING GROUP, WAS EXPRESSED BY MANY PARTICIPANTS. PARTICIPANTS SUGGESTED THAT, WITH REGARD TO HUMAN RIGHTS, CSC COULD WORK ON:

- RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: FOR MANY MEMBER CHURCHES THIS IS A REAL PRIORITY;
- FACILITATING DIALOGUE AMONG MEMBER CHURCHES ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS, ESPECIALLY AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE EXPRESSED A CLEAR POSITION, SUCH AS THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE (CPCE);
- EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY TO DISCUSS HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS WITH OTHER FAITHS;
- DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION.
- STRENGTHENING THE COLLABORATION WITH THE CHURCHES' COMMISSION FOR MIGRANTS IN EUROPE (CCME) ON THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS;
- RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA: PARTICIPANTS SAID THAT THIS IS A GROWING PROBLEM IN MANY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

IN ADDITION, ORTHODOX PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE RIGHT TO KEEP THE MEMORY OF THE TRADITION OF CHURCHES IN AREAS WHERE THE MEMORY OF THEIR HISTORICAL PRESENCE IS IN DANGER FOR POLITICAL REASONS AS PLACES OF WORSHIP, HOLY SITES AND RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS.

A FEW PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED THEIR CONCERNS ON THE UNCLARITY OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE, DUE TO THE EVOLUTION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (WHEN DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN? WHEN DOES IT END?).

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WERE HIGHLIGHTED AS A MATTER OF DEBATE AND ACTION AS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WANT TO BE BOTH SUBJECT AND OBJECT.

THE AREA OF "SOCIAL RIGHTS" WAS SUGGESTED TO BE EXPLORED, BOTH IN THE TRADITIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THIS MATTER AND IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND RIGHT TO SECURITY WAS ANOTHER MATTER OF CONCERN FOR THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS.

FINALLY, A QUESTION WAS MADE ABOUT THE PRIORITIES OF THE CSC HUMAN RIGHTS WORK TOWARDS INSTITUTIONS AND TOWARDS CHURCHES. ACCORDING TO PARTICIPANTS, TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, PRIORITIES SHOULD BE MONITORING AND ADVOCACY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE EUROPE. THE MAIN GENERAL TASK AND ROLE OF CSC-CEC WORK IS CONSIDERED TO REPRESENT EUROPEAN CHURCHES WITH A COMMON VOICE, EVEN HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSE POSITIONS IN CHURCHES.

Regarding priorities towards Churches, participants expressed their interest and approval of the process to publish and implement the Human Rights Training Manual. They suggested having a Consultation on the subject, human rights seminars and debates. In other words, the CSC should facilitate churches' human rights' trainings in the future and use the Human Rights Training Manual for this purpose. Another area on which the CSC could act towards the member Churches is the relationship between Religious freedom and Human rights, which is something that some people find contradictory.

