

## Short report on the 2nd Assembly of the CALL Network in Bucharest, 11-13 May 2011

### “Empowering People for Participation in Society”

This year's assembly was hosted by AIDRom, to which the coordination team expressed warm thanks at its final meeting, after noting that these two-and-a-half days together had consolidated the common purpose within the network.

More than 20 representatives of Churches had gathered to find common ground for the development of their working groups and projects on labour and life.

#### The general line of the Assembly

Linking labour to life means more than getting sufficient income to live from. Participation is at stake, and empowering people for participation requires a set of instruments about which the assembly had to reflect. It also discussed the issues of the 4 CALL working groups:

1. the increasing and more widespread problems of **precarious work**, especially in relation to movement of workers and migration;
2. the need for an economically, socially and ecologically **sustainable economy**, especially in relation to the financial crisis in Europe;
3. **work/life balance**, including Sunday protection, especially in the common European directives on labour conditions;
4. the role of **religion in the work place**, especially the recognised chaplaincy functions in different countries and Churches.

Network members believe that Europe will only overcome the ongoing economic crisis if it looks for **joint solutions**, sharing the burdens in closer cooperation among peoples and leading to greater empowerment for individuals and an expanding social economy. At the end of the assembly they urged the European Churches to support more actively common policies promoting an economy that leads to abundance of life for all citizens.

The first step in the meeting was to witness the **expertise** of the ecumenical service AIDRom in local social action by visiting two of their projects in Bucharest. On the second day this was confirmed by the Church and State representatives who showed how Church social services are expected to contribute regularly with their practical knowledge to experts meetings of the government on social issues.

#### The second day at the Romanian Patriarchate

Bishop Ciprian welcomed the CALL Network on behalf of the His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel from the **Romanian Orthodox Church** and insisted on the church's responsibility towards society. In a message to the Conference the Patriarch had explained: “We are very concerned that the economic crisis will create more gaps between the rich and the poor people in Europe. The churches have to raise their voice against greed and the unjust benefits of speculation.” His position is that Churches are capable and responsible to strengthen Civil Society in crisis times.

The Bishop Vicar of the **Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession** in Romania Dr. Daniel Zikeli pointed out the joint responsibility of church and state for well-being in society. “According to the Lutheran understanding, church and state have different roles, but a joint responsibility to care for the people in a society.”

State Secretary Valentin Mocanu stressed the close partnership between the churches and the state in the field of social assistance. “The strength of the churches is the direct connection with society. This allows us to reach the target groups in a much better way.”

Assembly members listened then with interest to the careful sociological and ethical analysis of Prof.Dr. Radu Preda from Cluj University, who urged churches to develop a “social theology”: “The churches must develop a prophetic practice based on their values and principles”, he said, as an answer to a still weak local entrepreneurship and an insufficient social protection. Not only charitable projects and small enterprises, but also regular ethical dialogues on laws and politics are required. Spiritual capacities of human beings, their life quality, decent work conditions, moderate consumption and active labour are key anthropological elements of a social theology able to contribute to better laws and practices.

As a priest added, the Church has difficulty in always being different from the world and not like the world and to make Christians more generous as disciples of Christ. Greed with no respect for human persons has to be combated by better practical examples, moral education and economic alternatives.

### **Political issues**

The CALL participants learned how empowerment can be experienced as they listened to stories from a local social action in a British city presented by Greg Brown, an activist of “Church Action on Poverty” in Britain. People affected by an injustice have to be made able to take their issue through to the deciding bodies themselves.

As a step towards free movement for workers the new open access for Romanians and Bulgarians to the job market in Germany and Austria was welcomed. But participants felt that on the other side there was a necessity for national minimum wages in order to avoid the phenomenon of working poor and to ensure a living wage for all.

Facing the financial debates in Europe they also insisted in their final declaration that Churches have in this present situation again a role to call for reconciliation and solidarity in Europe as they did after World War II.

### **Expanding the CALL network**

Each group of European Churches has to develop proper strategies as they share the responsibility to expand the membership in this new network CALL after this second assembly.

Sending around the Newsletter, a new leaflet and the reports and invitations of the 4 Working Groups will help to make visible and concrete the purpose of the network and its future outputs. Its third assembly is due to be invited to Britain in Autumn 2012.

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