

# **Conference of European Churches**

## **Thematic Reference Group on Education**

**Meeting on Tuesday 8 – Wednesday 9 March 2016 in Strasbourg**

### **Draft minutes**

#### **1. Welcome and opening prayers**

Hanna Broadbridge (Moderator) welcomed the participants. Hana Moualla, Peter Schreiner and Maria Wingard had sent apologies for absence but Hana followed part of the meeting on Skype. Ioannis Karamouzis was not able to attend the meeting either.

Richard Fischer led the opening prayers.

#### **2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting**

The draft Minutes of the first meeting were adopted without amendment.

#### **3. Exchange of information and ideas:**

##### **3.1. Feedback from the Governing Board**

Richard Fischer distributed the relevant extract from the draft Minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Board. Board members were particularly interested in the question of dialogue with Muslims on education for democratic citizenship because of the arrival of new migrants. Bishop Christopher (President) had “encouraged the Thematic Reference Group to look at various materials produced in England on religious education in church schools with large numbers of Muslim pupils”.

##### **3.2. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)**

Members of the Group gave brief information about various relevant activities of which they were aware, including:

- Anti-radicalisation programme by Aarhus Council;
- “Prevent” programme in England (programme at schools sponsored by the government: interesting but can also be criticised);
- Several programmes in Finland: “Shoulder-to-shoulder”, “Exit”, “Anchor”, and “Knowledge House”; (See Peacemakersnetwork.org);

Several members gave information about ongoing debates in their countries about the future development of religious education. Despite the wide differences in the national legal frameworks for education related to religion, there was a lot of common ground. Although many people felt that the traditional arrangements for religious education, often allowing an important role for the churches, were inappropriate in increasingly secular societies. There was nevertheless a widespread recognition that an understanding of religions in general was becoming increasingly important for interpreting events in the contemporary world. Initiating children into the religious tradition to which they (or their parents) belonged was, many now felt, not the task of the school, but religious literacy could be seen as a necessary part of citizenship education. Giving religious education in separate confessional groups, as was the case in some countries, was possibly working against the aim of encouraging intercultural understanding.

Christos Filiotis and Vasile Iorgulescu said that in their countries there were longstanding arrangements for the well-established Muslim communities, but much debate and uncertainty existed about what kind of provision should be made for newly arriving Muslim groups.

### **3.3. Update on cooperation between different CEC and CEC-related bodies (CCME, organisations in partnership, etc)**

Richard Fischer informed the Group that staff were starting to exchange information about ideas coming out of the work of the different thematic reference groups.

The Group expressed the view that it would be very useful if members could access the meeting reports of the other thematic reference groups so as to be able to look for possibilities for cooperation.

Following the extensive discussion on the educational implications of the current migration flows at the Group's first meeting, Doris Peschke (General Secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) made a presentation on the current activities of her organisation (see item 4 below for details).

### **3.4. Update on the work with the Council of Europe**

- **Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) meeting (15 – 17 March in Strasbourg)**

Hanna Broadbridge would represent CEC at the forthcoming meeting then would send a report to members of the Group, and possibly submit a short piece for the CEC website.

- **Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (11 – 12 April in Brussels)**

The theme of the Conference will be "Education for democracy: the role of education for the development of competences for democratic culture". Heikki

Huttunen (General Secretary) and Richard Fischer will attend as the observers for CEC.

- **Parliamentary Assembly Report 13934 and Resolution 2097 (2016) on “Access to school and education for all children”;**

John Murray reported on the debate and the Resolution adopted by the Assembly. The Assembly expressed concern that there were still many children in European countries who failed to benefit from decent education.

- **INGO Conference activities;**

Maria Pomazkova reported on the meeting of the INGO Committee on Education and Culture, held during the January 2016 Session of the Assembly. Matters of interest to the Group were history teaching and education for intercultural citizenship. The Committee was also involved in a joint project with the INGO Committee on Human Rights entitled “Towards an inclusive Europe: learning to live together with our different convictions”.

- **World Forum for Democracy.**

Richard Fischer informed the Group that the theme for the 2016 World Forum, to be held in Strasbourg from 7-9 November, was “Education for Democracy: how to bridge the social divides”.

The Group went on to consider whether it should organise a “laboratory” or a side-event during the Forum (e.g. by presenting different models demonstrating how religious education can contribute to democratic citizenship).

### **3.5. Update on the work with the European Union:**

- **European Parliament Resolution (2015/2139(INI) of 19 January 2016 on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values**

Richard Fischer introduced the Resolution which suggested that intercultural education could contribute to employability as well as to more integrated European societies.

- **Erasmus+**

Richard Fischer circulated a note from the EKD office in Brussels The Danish International Cultural Youth Exchange is looking for partners for a project on training for intercultural youth dialogue in the light of current influx of refugees and migrants.

The Moderator suggested sending the EKD request to CEC’s youth organisations-in-partnership and to the youth organisations of the member churches.

### **3.6. Information gathered by members of the TRG (see details in Minutes of the first meeting)**

Richard Fischer reported that, owing to illness of the person responsible, there had not been any progress in developing an Erasmus+ project with Diaconia in the Palatinate (referred to in the report of the Group's last meeting).

John Murray reported on current ideas for developing a course on inter-faith and intercultural dialogue within the provision for religious education in schools in Alsace-Moselle. Participation in the confessionally organized religious education was declining, and indeed the principle of confessional education in schools was tending to come under increased attack as being contrary to French *laïcité*, but, as the Group had noted above (see agenda item 3.2), there was a widespread feeling that pupils needed to develop religious literacy in a broader sense. Christian Krieger (Vice-President of the Union of Protestant Churches in Alsace and Lorraine, and member of the CEC Governing Board) was willing to keep the Group updated about progress with what was still a fairly tentative proposal.

#### **4. Concrete project proposals in close cooperation with CEC's constituency (workshops, consultations, conferences, etc.) :**

- **Migration crisis: EDC and integration of new arrivals**

Following the far reaching and extensive discussion on the educational implications of current migration flows at the Group's first meeting, the Group wanted to see whether its work could contribute to the ongoing activities of CCME. The Moderator thanked Doris Peschke (General Secretary of Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe - CCME) for coming to the meeting and invited her to present the current work of CCME.

Doris Peschke said that the countries of the Near East were bearing the brunt of the refugee crisis: Europe's crisis was not so much a refugee crisis as a crisis of governance. The situation of refugees in camps in the Near East was desperate; finance was very inadequate. Making Turkey the gatekeeper for Europe raised major issues of protection. Contrary to expectations, refugee flows into Europe had continued at a high level during the winter; unfortunately, the public was now getting used to reports of deaths in the Aegean.

Churches were calling for safe passage, humanitarian visas, respect for family reunion and an increase in capacity to deal with asylum applications, especially in countries like Greece. A European solution was needed; some countries were doing very little to help, while others were struggling to cope.

It seemed likely that refugee arrivals in 2016 would be at least as numerous as in 2015. Current fragile moves towards peace in Syria might help, but in Turkey the situation was becoming increasingly unstable.

Very many refugees were minors, some of whom were unaccompanied, and UN agencies were highlighting the need for educational programmes and forms of guardianship. Adult education and literacy programmes were needed too. Moreover, it was necessary to improve religious literacy among the UN and government officials to ensure that asylum-seekers' cases were treated fairly. CCME would like to do more on the education issues, but was lacking in staff and means: would the Group be able to help?

Integration needed to start soon; nothing was more damaging than long waiting periods, with people left in limbo. Many were likely to end up as irregular, undocumented migrants. Schools and churches needed training in how to respond.

The Group went on to discuss these issues with Doris Peschke. One question that was raised was how to respond to the arguments of right wing populists, not to mention the worries of ordinary Christians. Much good work was being done at the local level (a number of projects were mentioned), but it was patchy and uncoordinated.

The Group felt that it could help by sharing examples of good practice. Such stories from the grassroots could be collected and compiled as an on-line compendium on "*best practice for church involvement in education for refugees and migrants*". Members of the Group were invited to send in short reports on examples of good practice in this area; they should be placed in a dropbox. Hanna was willing to edit the English, and when the first few examples had been collected, they could be placed on the CEC website, mentioned in the CEC and CCME newssheets and also communicated through social media.

- **Other topics related to EDC and the churches**

Following on from its discussions under item 3.2 above, the Group decided to start work on organizing a conference on religious education and democracy along the lines suggested by Jan Schinkelshoek (see Appendix 3). This should not be seen as a large event, but as a meeting of a group of interested people aiming to exchange ideas and clarify the Group's thinking about these issues.

Richard Fischer encouraged the Group to keep in touch with the work of the CPCE education network on related issues, based at the Tutzing Academy.

Christos Filiotis gave the Group further information about the Colloquy being organized with the Council of Europe at the University of Thessaloniki in 2017 on religion, *laïcité* and democracy. Given the close relationship of this topic to the theme of its own planned Conference, the Group thought that it might well seek to make a contribution to this event. Indeed, some consideration was given to the possibility of organizing the Group's own event in connection with the Thessaloniki Colloquy. On the other hand, the Thessaloniki Colloquy was expected to be a more academic event, whereas the Group's planned conference would be designed more for people directly involved in religious education. As the Group hoped to organize its own Conference some time in advance of the Thessaloniki event; one of its purposes might well be to help prepare the way for input by CEC and its member churches to Thessaloniki.

Noting that the scope and nature of the Thessaloniki Colloquy would become clearer after a planning meeting in April, the Group asked Christos Filiotis to inform the Secretariat and the members of the Group about the results of this meeting. In the light of this information, and subsequent discussion by electronic means, the Group would then a) decide how it might make a CEC contribution to Thessaloniki and b) start detailed planning of its own Conference.

Meanwhile, all members of the Group were invited to start thinking of suitable speakers for the conference as well as projects which could be presented there.

## **5. Communication issues**

The Group addressed two separate communications issues: a) communication between members of the Group, and b) communicating information and ideas to the outside world.

The Group considered that it was important to find ways of communicating within the Group so that work could continue actively between the relatively infrequent formal meetings. Among the possible platforms for such communication were: Facebook, LinkedIn, Dropbox, Google+, the intranet section of the new CEC website, maybe a dropbox and/or a “newsletter” twice a year, or indeed simply using e-mail. When the Group needed to engage in a discussion between meetings, it might be possible to do this by means of a webinar.

The Group also wished to find an effective means of sending short information items on new developments or interesting events in the field of education for democratic citizenship to interested outsiders. It was important to explore the possibilities offered by the new CEC website shortly to be launched.

The Group was also informed that CEC now organised monthly webinars; it might be possible to devote one of these to education issues.

## **6. Dates of our next meetings**

The Group agreed to fix the date of its autumn meeting (probably in October or early November) by means of a doodle enquiry in a few weeks’ time.

## **7. Any Other Business**

### *Retirement of Richard Fischer*

While being sorry to learn that he would not be available to guide its work after the summer of this year, the Group congratulated Richard Fischer on his forthcoming retirement, thanked him for all he had done for them so far, wished him well for the future and presented him with gifts as an expression of their gratitude.

## **8. Closing Prayer before departure**

The meeting closed with prayer led by the Moderator.

## Appendix 1

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Ms Hanna Broadridge (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark – *Moderator*)

Mr Vincent Dubois (United Protestant Church in Belgium)

Protopresbyter Christos Filiotis (Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Rev Vasile Iorgulesco (Romanian Orthodox Church)

Rev Dr Ioannis Karamouzis (Church of Greece) *unable to attend*

Ms Hana Moualla (Czechoslovak Hussite Church) *unable to attend*

Mr Jan Schinkelshoek (Protestant Church in the Netherlands)

Dr Peter Schreiner (Evangelical Church of Finland & Intereuropean Commission on Church and School) *unable to attend*

Rev Tuula Vinko (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland & Christian Council in Sweden, Uniting Church of Sweden)

Ms Maria Wingard (Church of Sweden) *unable to attend*

## **Appendix 2**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Conference of European Churches**

#### **Thematic Reference Group on Education**

**Meeting on Tuesday 8 – Wednesday 9 March 2016 in Strasbourg**

#### **Draft Agenda**

**Working times: Tuesday 14h – 18h30; Wednesday 09h – 12h**

1. Welcome and opening prayers
2. Adoption of the Minutes of the last meeting
3. Exchange of information and ideas:
  - 3.1. Feedback from the Governing Board
  - 3.2. What is going on in our constituencies (part of Europe, churches, country, international institutions we are related to...)
  - 3.3. Update on cooperation between different CEC and CEC-related bodies (CCME, organisations in partnership, etc)
  - 3.4. Update on the work with the Council of Europe:
    - Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE) meeting (15 – 17 March in Strasbourg);
    - Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (11 – 12 April in Brussels);
    - Parliamentary Assembly Report 13934 and Resolution 2097 (2016) on “Access to school and education for all children”;
    - INGO Conference activities;
    - World Forum of Democracy.
  - 3.5. Update on the work with the European Union:
    - European Parliament Resolution (2015/2139(INI) of 19 January 2016 on the role of intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and education in promoting EU fundamental values
    - Erasmus+
  - 3.6. Information gathered by members of the TRG (see details in Minutes of the first meeting)
4. Concrete project proposals in close cooperation with CEC’s constituency (workshops, consultations, conferences, etc.) :
  - Migration crisis: EDC and integration of new arrivals
  - Other topics related to EDC and the churches
5. Communication issues
6. Dates of our next meetings
7. AOB
8. Closing Prayer before departure



## **Appendix 3**

### **PROVISIONAL OUTLINE FOR A CONFERENCE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY**

**Theme:** Religion, education and democracy: religion's contribution to democratic development in Europe through education and training.

**Date:** early 2017 (January/February?)

**Place:** Brussels?

#### **1. Past and present**

Keynote speakers from Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern Europe.

- Set-up, experience, status
- Presentation of results/performance
- Differences/common ground

#### **2. Present and future**

Keynote speakers: politics, church, education

- Challenges ahead (Europe/Democracy)
- Added value/relevance religious education

#### **3. Discussion/Resolution**