



REPORT



KAS EUROPEAN OFFICE BRUSSELS MULTINATIONAL DIALOGUE ON DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Training the Trainers seminar

“Social responsibility seminars in Southeast Europe”

Brussels, 6 – 10 December 2010

In cooperation with Akademie Franz Hitze Haus and Sozialinstitut Kommende, a 5 days Seminar was organized in Brussels for participants, representatives of religious educational institutions, research institutes and clerics originating from Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. The seminar was the third and last “train the trainers” event with the purpose of enabling participants to organize social responsibility seminars throughout Southeast Europe. These meetings enhanced interreligious dialogue on the role of religion and religious institutions as a part of civil society towards the state. Furthermore, the opportunity was given to exchange the different concepts of Islam, Judaism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Catholicism towards social ethics, human rights, democracy and political subjects.

This last event was aiming at sharing experiences after the first events had been organised and implemented in the region. Information dissemination on the European integration process and the role and functions of European Institutions in the context of the Lisbon treaty, as well as the exchange with European Actors on the role and responsibilities of religious communities in the European integration process were additional features on the programme agenda.

Summary of meetings and discussions

The seminar started with a round of introduction of the respective participants and their reports on the state of play of the social seminars in their countries. In most of them the first seminars already took place in the second half of 2010. In Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania the target groups for the seminars were university students, journalists as well as KAS partners. In Bulgaria the seminar was organized slightly different as a cycle of evening lectures for the general public. In general the feedback was very positive; participant numbers were around 20-40 per event. In Romania two patriarchs stated great interest in these meetings and it is most likely that they will continue organizing such events.

On 7th December the morning was dedicated to two presentations on the European Integration from a historic perspective (Elisabeth Sandfuchs, KAS) and on the roles and responsibilities of EU institutions after the Lisbon treaty (Olaf Wientzek, KAS). The following discussion focused mainly on EU enlargement and the postponement of the timeline for accession for nearly all Western Balkan countries. Only Serbia and Croatia will probably have the possibility of joining the EU before 2020. The participants criticized the slow

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down of necessary reforms in their respective countries and emphasized the need for the EU to consequently monitor the situation in order to provide a viable incentive for governments to comply with the *acquis communautaire*.

For the afternoon session the group met **Malika Hamidi** from the European Muslim Network who held a discourse on the role of feminism in Islam and the activities of the European Muslim Network as an innovative think tank which tries to promote an enhanced dialogue on Muslim identity in Europe founded on fundamental rights and implements campaigns against forced marriages through the Imams. She also advocated the right of Muslim women to divorce. Women are in need of support in these areas as especially in Belgium the Muslim community is relatively conservative.

The group further met **Elisaveta Kitanovic** from the Church in Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), an ecumenical fellowship of churches, which has member churches from 40 countries. The task of CEC is to follow the development of the European Institutions from a Christian point of view, to implement projects on human rights (training manuals for European churches, training to clergy on human rights), to pursue the EU policy towards the candidate countries and neighbourhood countries. The adoption of the Lisbon treaty has strengthened the role of religious communities through the inclusion of the necessity for an open dialogue with religious representatives. The discussion focused on the fact that neither the Catholic Church nor the Bulgarian Orthodox Church form part of CEC.

On 8th December the morning session was dedicated to a meeting with **Drs. Michael Kuhn**, Deputy Secretary General of the Commission of the Bishop's Conferences of the European Community (COMECE). COMECE follows and analyzes the EU policies for the Catholic Church. Some of the main topics dealt with by COMECE include prosecution of Christians (Iraq), Roma discrimination and the new financial perspective of the EU after 2013. Mr. Kuhn is also representing the Austrian diocese in COMECE and in this function he introduced to the group a summer school, aimed at students from Southeast Europe (SEE) on the EU's policies, which is co-organized between COMECE and Graz University to which he invited the participants to apply. Mr. Kuhn was very interested in how the implementation of the social seminars is progressing and the participants gave him a brief overview on the status quo in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Bulgaria. As an example of a concrete possibility for collaboration, Mr. Kuhn explained COMECE's advocacy activities on the EU Danube Strategy, where COMECE is promoting to include reconciliation projects and where support from local NGOs in SEE would enhance the strengths of such advocacy.

In the afternoon the group met MEP **Doris Pack**, who was rapporteur for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Parliament and is following the developments of the region very closely. One of the discussion topics focused on the issue whether Romania and Bulgaria had been accepted too early to access the EU and what the possible consequences were. Furthermore, a participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina pointed out that the

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progress report on BiH would be assessing the situation concerning schools too positively as the students are separated according to ethnic groups. This positive assessment would pose problems in the further abolishment of such methods. A participant from Bulgaria raised the issue that in Bulgarian schools, no religious education is taking place.

Lastly, on Thursday afternoon, the group got to meet **Pierre Mirel**, Director for the Western Balkans in DG RELEX and **Jorge Cesar das Neves** from the Bureau of European Policy Advisors. Mr. Mirel made a short presentation on the latest developments concerning the EU enlargement and Mr. Cesar das Neves introduced how the EU is dealing with issues on interreligious dialogue especially concerning the adoption of the Lisbon treaty. It was stressed very clearly that even though a dialogue is an obligation the EU has to follow from now on, it will not discuss religious issues as such with faith communities but rather discuss the position of religious communities on EU Policy. The EU would have to remain a neutral actor in these discussions. In the following discussion the points raised previously on schools with ethnically separated classes and the lack of religious education were brought to the attention of Mr. Mirel and Mr. Cesar das Neves.