



Euro-Arab Dialogue

The Churches in Dialogue Commission of CEC

Islam in Europe

Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in Europe today. A massive influx of workers and other migrants from the Middle East and former colonial territories in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean region has led to a growing presence of Muslim residents within Europe. Next to that, relatively large communities of indigenous Muslims can be found in Eastern Europe, especially in Albania, former Yugoslavia (Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular), and Bulgaria, and smaller pockets in Greece, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. However the overwhelming majority of Muslims – approximately three quarters of the total in Europe – are living in Western Europe and they are predominantly first and second generation immigrants.

This question of religious minorities and their marginalising is emphasized by the resurgence of nationalisms and various forms of religious extremism or racism at political character, be in the Occident or in the Orient. Beyond the regional troubles and threats induced and magnified by these conflicts, they represent a dramatic step back in Human Rights and in regard to of centuries of struggles to establish an harmonious co-existence between religions.

Considerable changes in the relations

Due to this fact, there have been during the last years quite considerable changes in the relations between Christians and Muslims in different European countries, e.g. in Denmark, Switzerland, Germany, mainly at the social and political levels. These changes are also creating a growing gap of misunderstanding between Europe and the Middle East with stereotypes on both sides. This situation creates a temptation for the Arabs Muslims to take side for the Muslim minorities in Europe and for the European Christians to take side for the Christian communities in the Middle East, while the reality is much more complicated.

The question of the treatment of religious conflict is sensitive. Geopolitical, economic, social, ethnic, cultural issues are entangled and need to be treated simultaneously. And it is even more necessary in the new political and religious context born from the Arabic revolutions.



Conference of European Churches

General Secretariat

What will be the place of Islam (and which Islam?) in the constitutional processes in North African countries, and eventually in the near future in the Middle East and Europe?

There is an urgent need for Arabs and Europeans, Muslims and Christians to sit together, share their respective perceptions and arrive at a common understanding towards a mutual acceptance and positive co-existence among peoples and religious communities in the Middle East as well as in Europe.

It not only raises questions on the ongoing processes but also on the epistemological and cultural capacity of Europeans to understand these processes and to accompany them. Therefore an inter-religious dialogue, between Christians and Muslims, in a Euro-Arabic perspective is not only relevant but also urgent. This inter-religious dialogue is an important, although often very difficult task. Dogmatism weighs heavily within the major institutions and deepens ideological divisions and social tensions.

The dialogue, supported by the Conference of European Churches, may seem very small in regard to the larger religious organisations. However, one reason to continue is the challenge to look for means to increase the impact of the innovative thinking carried on by building bridges of mutual understanding and networks of common reflection which CEC is well placed to facilitate.

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre

General Secretary

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