

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
COMMISSION CHURCHES IN DIALOGUE
REPORT ON

**The Workshop on the "healing of memories"
Trondheim, Norway, 18 May 2002**

There needs to be a collective sharing of the pain and collective responsibility for dealing with the past and for the process of healing of memories. If not all have been there and cannot therefore personally and existentially remember, then there is the need for empathetic remembering, a solidarity in remembering. But the collective responsibility is also responsibility for the past.

Those taking part included, besides the members, of the CEC Commission Churches in Dialogue: Revd. Dr. Johnston McMaster of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin; OKR Reiner Rinne of the EKD Church Office, Hanover, Germany; Rev. Andrej Wojtowicz, director of the Polish Ecumenical Council, Warsaw; Ms. Synnove Brevik, General Secretary of the Sami Council of Churches of Norway; Mr. Leif Larsen, Leader of the Romany People's Organisation in Norway, and Deacon Egil Brenne of the Church of Norway.

(1) The first session of the workshop was devoted to the "healing of memories" process in Northern Ireland. Rev Johnston McMaster gave a paper on the theme "Healing of memories in Northern Ireland: a process of generations". It dealt with the following themes:

1. Peace-building increases the pain
2. Responding to hurts
 - 2.1 Walking through history together
 - 2.2 Sharing the journeys of pain
 - 2.3. Preparing for the future
3. A theological praxis of healing
 - 3.1 The Isaianic model
 - 3.2 Forgiveness as liberation
 - 3.3 Memories of the future

Using various examples, the speaker described how difficult this process is in his country, and how only a small group of people is committed to it. This impressive contribution was followed by an intense discussion which emphasised the importance of having a theological basis for a process of "healing of memories". It is a learning process

which can develop over the long term, and should lead to particular groups of people being freed from the burden of a conflict-filled past and being helped to enter into a new sense of community with one another.

(2) The second session was devoted to the process of reconciliation between the Sami and Roma peoples on one hand and the Church of Norway on the other. Ms. Synnove Brevik told about how the injustice experienced by the Sami was psychic rather than physical. Through their integration into the Norwegian nation and the Church of Norway the Sami were threatened with losing their identity, because for a long time they were not allowed to practice their own language and culture. The reconciliation process between the Sami and the Church of Norway was helped to get under way by the World Council of Churches in Geneva. The Sami Council was founded at the 1992 Synod of the Church of Norway and began its work in 1933. A new era in the life of the Sami in Norway began in 1997 when the Norwegian government asked their forgiveness for the injustice committed against them. The Sami want to be seen as an integral part of the Church of Norway, and not as objects in this relationship, but as subjects.

(3) After a few questions for clarification, Mr. Leif Larsen presented a paper on reconciliation between the Roma people and the Church of Norway. The Roma, who emigrated from India around the year 1000, have lived in Norway for over 500 years. For a long time they were persecuted, most recently by the policies of the "Mission for Homeless People", which threatened to annihilate them. In 1998 the Norwegian government asked their forgiveness for the injustices against them. But the Synod of the Church of Norway was not ready to do the same.

These affecting stories and the discussion which followed showed plainly how painful, and yet liberating, a process of reconciliation can be. The dynamic of the relations between minority and majority groups is obviously very powerful and should be respected at all times.

(4) In the first afternoon session the reconciliation process between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Polish Ecumenical Council was presented by Rev. Andrej Wojtowicz. This has taken place in three stages from the 1960s to the 1990s, and has contributed to reconciliation between Germans and Poles since World War II. Today, the two ecumenical partners have also brought the churches in Belarus and Ukraine into the conversation. OKR Reiner Rinne added that at present the Polish Ecumenical Council and the EKD are discussing the process of growing together in Europe.

This discussion included the prospect of Poland's joining the European Union, thereby pushing the eastern frontier of the EU from its present position at the German-Polish border to the Polish border with Belarus and Ukraine. Will this move lead to a new "curtain" being put up in Europe? Will it lead economic, social, political and cultural divisions to become entrenched in an area which has a complex and painful history going back hundreds of years? This issue is being discussed with representatives of the countries which are Poland's eastern neighbours, so that the churches in all this region are contributing to European integration.

(5) Finally, in the second afternoon session, reconciliation between Germans and Czechs was discussed. OKR Rinne emphasised that there had already been contacts between the EKD and the churches in Czechoslovakia as it was then, before the political changes in 1989-90, with regard to reconciliation between their two peoples. An initiative by the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) decisively brought about a new quality in the relationship after 1990. This church carried out a three-year process of thorough discussion at all levels, including all its local congregations, and finally its Synod passed a resolution "On the problem of the expulsion of Germans from the Sudetenland" on 25 April 1995.

In January 1996, the EKD Council replied to this resolution by thanking the ECCB for it, confessing the guilt on its own side and proposing that they set up a joint working group for further study of the issue. On 7 November 1996 the EKD Synod replied formally to the ECCB Synod's paper. It was crucial, in this situation, that both sides refused to be deterred by the doubts and, in some cases, drastic interventions of interest groups in politics and the society, but continued to reach out to one another.

In late 1996 both churches named their representatives to a joint working group, which met for the first time in December. It committed itself to do the following at all its meetings:

- to inform one another about the current situation of church and society in Germany and the Czech Republic;
- to study together the critical period when Czechs and Germans lived together, from 1914 to 1947, with regard to the role of the churches;
- to look into projects and initiatives to be undertaken as part of present and future partnerships.

During consultations in May 1997 it was proposed that a "reader" or booklet be prepared for use in German-Czech church partnerships and encounters. The above-mentioned study of their common history forms a substantial part of the book which was later developed from this booklet. The book was published in 1998 with the title "The dividing wall is down. On the agreement between Czechs and Germans". It was published in German and in Czech, and has been requested by many individuals, partnerships and encounter groups.

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Frieling explained many details of this reconciliation process as one who had been a direct participant. The discussion led to further clarification of this reconciliation between the two peoples, which is being determinedly supported by the churches.

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