

**INTER FAITH RELATIONS:  
THE UK IN EUROPE**

**Report on the  
2004 National Meeting of  
the Inter Faith Network  
for the UK**



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**2004 National Meeting  
of  
The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

**Held on 28 June 2004  
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## **INTER FAITH RELATIONS: THE UK IN EUROPE**

### **THE THEME**

The focus of the work of the Inter Faith Network is life here in the UK. The membership of the UK in the European Union is, however, increasingly having an impact on faith communities and the inter faith agenda here:

- European Directives, such as that on discrimination in the workplace, with its inclusion of discrimination on grounds of religion and belief, are implemented in UK law and shape life here;
- UK faith and inter faith bodies are increasingly being invited to take part in Europe-wide programmes or events;
- Member states enact legislation affecting the expression of religious identity of those who live in or travel to their countries, relating to such matters as the display of religious imagery in school classrooms or the wearing of religious symbols there;
- Inter faith work is progressing in some other member states and the exchange of ideas and news between different EU countries is likely to become increasingly significant;
- Important Europe wide projects, such as those relating to developing materials for inter-cultural education, involve contributions from the UK;
- Faith community bodies and inter faith bodies are, increasingly, wanting to make contact with their counterparts in Europe to make common cause on issues of shared concern.

The 2004 National Meeting offered a chance to look at the possibilities and challenges presented by being part of Europe and to learn more about how to engage with its structures, influence policies and legislation and develop links with faith communities and inter faith bodies in other parts of Europe.





## PROCEEDINGS

**Bishop Tom Butler**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the National Meeting and welcomed participants to it. He underlined the extent to which the UK is now influenced by developments around the globe and not least in Europe. He said that while the focus of the work of the Network is on inter faith relations in the UK, the meeting provided a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the European dimension. He suggested that we in Britain have valuable experience in the inter faith field which we can share with other countries in Europe, which is the context in which we will increasingly find ourselves working.

The first presentation was from **Jackie Gower, Hon Senior Lecturer, University of Kent Jean Monnet Centre for Europe**, who runs the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's "Introduction to Europe" course for its staff. She described the governmental and legal framework of European institutions, including the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. She also described the way that Europe's commonly agreed policies and Directives inter-relate with the policies and laws of individual member states; the role of MEPs; and the way UK Government Departments handle European issues.

Her presentation was followed by an address by **Mike O'Brien MP, Minister for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs**. In the course of his wide ranging remarks he discussed the position of faith communities in the UK and in Europe and the contribution which multi-faith Britain, with its generally strong inter faith relations, might have to make within Europe.

Following a refreshment break, there were presentations from three speakers on current activity relating to Europe and religious issues. **Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of the Scottish Inter Faith Council**, gave an account of a visit which Scottish faith representatives had paid to the European institutions in Brussels. **Mohammed Aziz, a Commissioner in the Commission for Racial Equality, and a Special Projects Consultant to the Muslim Council of Britain**, described developments and initiatives relating to combating racism and religious discrimination in Europe. **Peter Smith, Senior Project Officer at the Local Government Association**, gave an account of the way in which the LGA has been stimulating the interest of local authority colleagues in Europe in the role which local authorities can play in helping to develop good inter faith relations in their areas.

After lunch, **Rosalind Preston**, Network Co-Chair, introduced the afternoon session. This began with a tribute to Ivy Gutridge, who had recently died, recalling her pioneering work with the Wolverhampton Inter Faith Group and her involvement in the establishment of the Inter Faith Network and the early years of its work.

There followed presentations by **Jehangir Sarosh of Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe and Moderator of the European Chapter of the World Conference of Religions for Peace**, on the setting up of the new European Council of Religious Leaders; by **Win Burton, Coordinator of the Brussels-based Soul for Europe Initiative**, founded in 1994 to encourage

dialogue between the communities of faith and conviction and the European institutions, reflecting on the expansion of that initiative; by **Sidney Shipton, Coordinator of the Three Faiths Forum**, describing its work on making links in Europe; and by **Deepak Naik, of Minorities of Europe**, describing the involvement of young people in the World Parliament of Religions due to be held in Montserrat and Barcelona the following month and the work of the Golden Institute in linking “global” cities to share their experience in work on diversity and community relations.

There followed five workshops on:

- (1) Europe’s multi faith cities – sharing local inter faith good practice
- (2) The evolving legal and human rights framework of Europe
- (3) Educating for inter faith understanding in a European context
- (4) Linking and lobbying: making a difference in Europe
- (5) Linking and sharing good practice between inter faith initiatives in Europe: possible ways forward

In the final session, chaired by **Rosalind Preston**, there were brief reports from these five workshops, followed by closing reflections by **Professor Paul Weller of the University of Derby**, in which he highlighted the key points of the day and reflected on the challenges and possibilities that may lie ahead for faith and inter faith bodies in a changing Europe.

# EUROPE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Jackie Gower, Hon Senior Lecturer, University of Kent  
Jean Monnet Centre for Europe

## Introduction

There are two main European-level organisations with which members of the Inter Faith Network may wish to have contact: the Council of Europe and the European Union. Both deal with important issues of particular interest to you in your work. The Council of Europe has traditionally concentrated on the promotion and protection of human rights and is also active in promoting inter-cultural dialogue. Its other main areas of activity include culture, education and sport. The European Union grew out of the European Economic Community and its agenda has in the past focused predominantly on economic issues. In recent years, however, it has adopted a Charter of Fundamental Rights and its policy responsibilities have been extended into the sensitive areas of justice and home affairs, police co-operation and citizenship as well as the environment and foreign and security policy.

## The Council of Europe

This is the oldest European organisation, having been founded in 1949 in the direct aftermath of World War II with the goal of maintaining peace in Europe by consolidating democracy and respect for human rights. Its institutions are based in Strasbourg and the blue flag with twelve gold stars was originally its flag. The fact that the EU has now adopted the same flag and the European Parliament also meets in Strasbourg has led to a lot of confusion between the two organisations.

The Council's membership has grown dramatically since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and it now numbers 45 member states, covering the whole of Europe. The only European state not yet a member is Belarus where democratic reforms lag far behind those in other former communist states.

The Council of Europe has a number of institutions but generally they meet much less frequently than those of the EU and, with the exception of the Court, their powers are also more limited.

- **Committee of Ministers** – representatives from the governments of the 45 member states
- **Parliamentary Assembly** – not directly elected but instead composed of representatives from national parliaments (18 British MPs go from Westminster for the twice-yearly plenary meetings)
- **Secretary General** – British Labour MP Terry Davis has recently been appointed to this post
- **Court of Human Rights** – plays an immensely important role in ensuring that the Convention on Human Rights is respected.

- **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance** – also playing a vital role in combating racism and xenophobia.

## **The European Union**

The European Union (EU) has developed out of the European Economic Community, which was founded in 1958 by the Treaty of Rome with just 6 member states and an agenda that focused mainly on the creation of a common market. Its membership has grown significantly over the years, most recently when 10 new members joined on 1 May 2004. Several more, such as Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, are hoping to become members in the next few years. The rest of the states in the western Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine and Moldova have also indicated their wish to join the EU in the longer term, but, in at least some of these cases, their application is likely to prove controversial.

There are currently 25 member states: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

It is worth remembering that most of the new member states in central Europe have no recent experience of living in a multi faith society. Their societies are strikingly homogeneous compared to most west European states today and you may initially find both a lack of understanding and interest in many of the issues that concern us here.

## **The EU institutions**

### **The European Commission**

- It comprises 25 Commissioners, one from each member state.
- Commissioners are expected to act independently, promoting the interests of the whole Union rather than their own country.
- They head directorate-generals, which are like government ministries or departments, responsible for all the main policies, such as trade, environment, education and culture.
- The Commission's main role is to initiate new policies and laws and its officials are responsible for the drafting of legislation.
- It has overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of policies and laws, although much of the work is actually done by national administrations.

### **The European Council**

- Summit meetings are held at least four times a year at level of Prime Ministers, French President and President of the Commission.
- The Council takes major decisions on the future direction of the EU.

### **The Council of the European Union (often known as the Council of Ministers or simply the Council)**

- Ministers of the 25 member states meet in various formations covering the main areas of policy responsibility of the Union. Who attends from the UK therefore depends on the agenda: Foreign Secretary at the General Affairs and External Relations Council, Home

Secretary at Justice and Home Affairs Council, Chancellor of the Exchequer at Economic and Finance Council.

- It is the main decision-making body, agreeing new laws by a process known as co-decision with the European Parliament.
- Most decisions today are taken on the basis of qualified majority voting (QMV), which means the larger states have more voting weight than the smaller ones. The main effect of QMV is that member states have to form alliances with other states either to support or block a proposal.

### **The Council Presidency**

- Member states take it in turns to hold the Presidency for a period of six months. Ireland has just completed its Presidency and the Netherlands took over on 1 July, to be followed by Luxembourg after Christmas.
- The UK Presidency will run from 1 July to 31 December 2005 and this presents an opportunity for us to shape the agenda, set the priorities and launch some new initiatives.
- The Inter Faith Network might like to consider trying to persuade the Government to host a high-profile event to showcase good practice in inter faith dialogue.

### **European Parliament**

- The Parliament is directly elected by the EU population every five years – most recently in June 2004.
- There are 78 British MEPs – Conservatives, Labour, Liberal, Green and UK Independence Party.
- MEPs sit in party rather than national groups in the chamber. Some regrouping is likely after the June election so check the European Parliament web-site for the current position on [www.europarl.eu.int/](http://www.europarl.eu.int/)
- Plenary sessions are held for one week each month in Strasbourg. During the rest of the month Parliamentary Committees and party groups usually meet in Brussels.
- The Parliament has acquired greatly increased powers in recent years – most new laws are now decided by a process known as co-decision which means both the Council and the Parliament have to approve them.
- The Parliament has to approve the budget, which gives it considerable influence over the policy agenda.

### **European Court of Justice**

- There are 25 judges. One comes from each member state, but act independently of the government of that state.
- The Court is based in Luxembourg
- Cases are referred from national courts for a ruling on the correct interpretation of EU law.
- Supremacy of EU law has been established since the early 1960s – ie EU law takes precedence over national law. So if a national law conflicts with EU law, it must be changed.
- Take care not to confuse the ECJ with the Court of Human Rights based in Strasbourg which is an institution of the Council of Europe, as has already been described.

## **Inter-relationship between EU and national policies**

There is shared legal competence in many policy areas. This means that there are both EU and British laws and policies covering the same fields. Nowadays, there are very few areas of government that do not have a European dimension, but also there are very few that are the exclusive responsibility of the EU.

As already mentioned in relation to the European Court of Justice, EU law takes precedence over national law. So there is an obligation to ensure that British laws are compatible with EU law. EU policy therefore provides a framework within which British policy is developed.

However, it is important to realise that British ministers, civil servants, diplomats, MEPs and pressure groups are all directly and regularly involved in the making of EU laws. They do not simply 'come from Brussels'. We are part of the process and can influence the outcome.

## **How to influence EU policy**

The key requirement is to try to make your input as early in the policy-making process as possible. It is very much easier to shape new laws at the drafting stage and it may be possible to get crucial amendments accepted before the text is even officially published. Therefore it is obviously vital to have good contacts both in London and Brussels so that you get advance warning of what is in the pipe-line and are able to feed in your views right from the beginning. There are a number of channels through which you can make your voice heard:

### **• Lobbying through Whitehall**

- Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Cabinet Office for general issues and overall strategy
- ministry or department responsible for specific policy areas eg Home Office, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Department of Work and Pensions
- may also be referred to relevant staff at the UK Representation in Brussels (UKREP), who deal with a lot of the negotiations in working groups.

### **• Lobbying through Westminster**

- House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities, which produces excellent reports and is very influential
- House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, plus local MPs or anyone known to have an interest in the issue.

### **• Lobbying the Commission**

- officials in the responsible directorate-generals are the people who will actually be drafting the legislation, so it is very important to try to influence them
- generally they are quite open to receiving advice and opinions from people with expertise in the area
- the Inter-Institutional Directory is a good starting point for trying to identify the name and phone number of the person to whom you need to talk (available online at <http://europa.eu.int/idea/en/pdfindex.htm>)

- **Lobbying the European Parliament**

- individual MEPs, party groups, inter-groups, Parliamentary Committees

- **Working through European-level groups and associations**

- the Commission naturally prefers to talk to representatives of groups which can speak on behalf of people from as many member states as possible, rather than receiving separate 25 delegations

Workshop 4 will also be discussing ideas on how to make your voice heard.

*There followed a brief question and answer session:*

Daniel Wheatley, Baha'i community:

Thank you very much for your excellent presentation. Looking beyond 2007, I understand that the European Union has aspirations to take into membership all of the western Balkan states, (the components of former Yugoslavia), into the European Union in the future. Obviously Slovenia is already a member. Do you think some of the potential resistance to having a Muslim majority state within the European Union would arise if Bosnia-Herzegovina, which does have a Muslim majority population, was to enter into membership negotiations with the Union?

Jackie Gower: Obviously this links with the question of Turkey's membership. Generally speaking, I think it is more widely accepted in the EU that the western Balkans should be future members, because this is seen to be the only real way forward to provide long term security and stability, and indeed reconciliation, in that area. A great deal is made of the fact that the European Union was set up at the end of the Second World War specifically to encourage, through regional integration, reconciliation between what were considered to be historic enemies, France and Germany. That model is now seen to be one for the Balkans too. I think that for this reason there is a greater degree of consensus that all the Western Balkans should be included. This would include Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania as well as Kosovo. But there is undoubtedly some resistance to this.

To be honest, there are people in the European Union, particularly some of the Christian Democratic parties, who do see Europe, not just as Christian, but as Catholic. But I do think that there is a broader consensus that the Balkan States should be included, whereas opinions on Turkey are more mixed. This is partly a question of religion and "identity". The other problem is that Turkey is so large and therefore the prospect of a few quite small Muslim states joining will not have a major impact on the composition of the Union and much less impact on the budget as well. In the case of Turkey we are talking about a country that, if the population demographic projections are proved correct, will be larger than Germany by the time its membership could go through. So we are talking about an enormous country that would have an enormous impact on the cultural homogeneity of the Union, and also on the financial position. If you think about the costs of, for example, additional spending on agricultural

support, you can appreciate that the financial issue is also a very significant one. But I do not think that the EU can actually go back on membership for Turkey. There is a rearguard action on the part of some people who do not like the prospect of the Union changing in that way. The club would no longer be what it was initially. But the British Government has been very firm on the issue of Turkey's membership and I admire them greatly for taking a very clear line, that the Union is already multi faith and that its diversity is part of its strength.

Dr Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network office:

I was very engaged by your idea that the British Government might be persuaded to "showcase" in some way during the period of their Presidency the many good inter faith developments in process in the UK. Could you comment on how we all in our different organisations might try to bring that about.

Jackie Gower: You first need to decide what kind of an event you might like to have happen. I am sure that many different kinds of events will be organised, including concerts and art exhibitions. Why not an inter faith event of some kind? My advice would be to share this directly with Ministers and officials in the Foreign Office. The British Government will be looking for opportunities to present to the rest of Europe the contribution that we can make to intra continental relations within the European Union. It will also be looking to the Presidency as an opportunity to try to relate Europe to the British community, bearing in mind the broader political agenda of the proposed referendum on the European Constitution. Having looked at the sort of work that you do, I think that we do potentially have here something really rather special which we could be helping to develop across the Union. To put it in the context of the previous point about Turkey joining, and all the very sensitive issues that are coming up on the agenda about migration, this could be a way of taking that agenda forward in a much more positive way.

Imam Dr Abduljalil Sajid, Brighton and Hove Inter Faith Contact Group:

Thank you for your excellent presentation and for explaining to us the institutions of Europe so clearly. The European Parliament has interested itself in the rise of anti-Semitism and of Islamophobia. The Council of Ministers adopted a European Directive to address discrimination in the work place. But a number of us, especially inter faith groups, have concerns about the piecemeal approach adopted so far to this issue of hate and prejudice and would like to see comprehensive legal remedies. You have mentioned tensions between Christians and Muslims, which are obvious and visible, and the underlying opposition to Turkey's early membership of the European Union, which has meant that it has been delayed. What do you think we should be doing to address the issue of these "phobias"?

Jackie Gower:

I have been very impressed by the extent to which the European Parliament has taken up these issues. I think the reason it got so involved was because of the shock that the far right did extremely well in European Parliament elections in several of the European Union countries. It has always shocked me, like most people in Europe, that Le Pen, for example, the very xenophobic leader of the National Front in France, has had a seat in the European Parliament. There has been a sizeable far right group in the European Parliament, and that has actually mobilised the vast majority of the members of the Parliament against it as a counter reaction.

Looking to the future, I think it will depend on whether the draft Constitution is actually ratified. If it is ratified and comes into force, then the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which the EU adopted in 2000 as a kind of political credo, will become part of the legal framework of the Union. If you look at that Charter you will find some quite strong statements in it about



equality and against discrimination, which would give the legal powers to tackle these issues, not just to national courts but also to the European Court of Justice. So that would actually strengthen the legal position very considerably. There are also a number of clauses in the Constitution itself which seem to me to put these issues much higher on the agenda and certainly will mean that discrimination is not tolerated within the legal framework of the European Union.

But, as you know, the legal position is only half the battle. The other half is actually to change hearts and minds and this has to be fought through education and dialogue and by demonstrating the kind of good work that can be done to counteract it. There is a very real fear within the European Union of the forces on the far right. This is not just about anti-Muslim attitudes, but anti-semitism too. The fact that this is an anxiety in the European Union sixty years after the Holocaust is absolutely shocking. There are people out there whose views have to be challenged, ultimately through education and through dialogue, as I have said. But I can assure you that although there are people on the far right who take this xenophobic line, the overwhelming majority of people in the European Parliament and all the member governments take a much more civilised, educated and intelligent line.

Rev Alan Gadd, South London Inter Faith Group:

Could you remind us of the state of play with regard to the draft Constitution on the reference to the “religious heritage” of Europe, and how significant that might be in future developments? Should we, as people committed to a Europe open to all faiths, be taking any particular action about that?

Jackie Gower:

The key point, as far as the Constitutional treaty is concerned, is that while it was agreed by the member states, much to everybody’s surprise, it does now have to be ratified by all twenty-five of them. That is going to take a considerable period of time. But, in answer to your question, the preamble to it which was finally agreed, refers to: “drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and the inalienable rights of the human person, democracy, equality, freedom and the rule of law”. I would have thought that was an excellent outcome of the lobbying that took place on this issue, and I would presume that it is acceptable to you. There is no specific reference in the preamble to any particular religion, for which some had pressed. Rather it acknowledges the fact that there is both cultural and religious diversity within Europe.

## **WHY EUROPE MATTERS**

**Mike O'Brien MP, Minister of State for Trade,  
Investment and Foreign Affairs**

Thank you for inviting me to the Annual Meeting of the Inter Faith Network.

I am pleased to be able to confirm, as you have heard on news reports, that the Coalition has transferred authority back to the Iraqi people, as of this morning. We have always been working towards an Iraq run by its people and we are delighted that we have now reached that point. The Prime Minister said: 'The important thing is to understand that the will of the whole international community now is with Iraq as it takes control of its own destiny.' The British Government will continue to support the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people – Shi'a, Sunni, Kurd and Christian alike.

Faith inspires more passionate debate than almost any other subject with, perhaps, the exception of politics. Faith and religion have played a vital part in shaping the world - from the power of the Vatican to the Ottoman Empire.

Today we are in the midst of another shift in world politics. The end of the Cold War has altered the power balance and dramatically changed people's lives. Where religious practices were once brutally repressed in the communist bloc, people are now free to express their faith. Unfortunately, there are still many parts of the world where religious freedom is still repressed.

### **Islam and the West**

The end of the Cold War has also unleashed forces of extremism. Barbaric acts are all too often carried out under a religious pretext, perverting the true faith. 11 September 2001 and the terrorist atrocities around the world since have shown what havoc these forces can wreak. The hideous actions of a few have prompted many to talk of a clash between Islam and the West. I do not share that view.

What has emerged is a much greater awareness of different faiths, a realisation that there has been far too little understanding and knowledge of each other's faiths and an acceptance that we must all now work together to right the imbalance in that knowledge.

The way the world is evolving - the enlargement of Europe; democracy growing in the Middle East; emerging political and economic powers in Asia, Latin America and the Far East; the IT revolution - gives us a unique opportunity to work with faith communities across the globe.

Global communications and greater travel are rapidly expanding our access to information about others' cultures and faiths.

### **Faiths across Europe**

Nowhere is this happening faster than in the new Europe, now embracing 450 million people in the world's largest, single economic and political partnership of democratic states.

This partnership has brought its members political stability, economic prosperity and an exceptionally rich cultural and religious heritage.

While predominantly Christian, other faiths including Islam - in Al Andalus, Islamic Spain - and Judaism have deeply influenced Europe's economic and cultural development. Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and people of other faiths, including the Orthodox churches of the East, are now playing an increasingly important role in shaping Europe's future. And let us not forget the many who espouse no particular faith but who share the ideal of tolerance of others' differences, and respect for others' beliefs.

There are over 15 million Muslims in today's EU. And we hope that it will not be long before the EU opens negotiations for Turkey's accession. Turkey's membership would prove once and for all that the EU is not a Christian club, and that we are open to all cultures and faiths who want a partnership of shared values.

The EU is already playing a central role – through the Quartet of the UN, EU, US and Russia – in moving forward the peace process in the Middle East. Although it will be some time before Turkey joins the EU, even if negotiations do get underway at the end of the year, the prospect of the EU bordering the Middle East could be instrumental in bringing peace to that region.

### **The EU Constitution and Faith**

Let me just say a few words about the EU Constitution.

The new EU Constitutional Treaty clearly states that religion remains a matter for member states. It makes clear that the Union respects equally the status of religious and secular organisations. It emphasises, also, the importance of an open and regular dialogue between such organisations and the European Union. The new Treaty reiterates freedom of worship. We believe that it is crucial that the EU respects this freedom.

Members of many faith communities are worried, I know, about developments in some European countries in relation to religious symbols in schools and public life. As I have said many times, and will reiterate, we in the British Government emphatically do not believe that integration requires assimilation. We are not only comfortable with the wearing of the hijab, crucifix, turban or the kippa. We actually celebrate our freedom of religion, because it has been hard won.

This debate is about the very nature of our society in Europe. We have to decide whether we

are proud of our multi religious, multi cultural societies or whether we should restrict freedom and impose a mono-culturalist uniformity on minority communities.

Our answer in Britain is clear. We all need to be more pro-active in taking part in this debate and in advocating the benefits of a diverse, multicultural and multi-religious society.

### **Faith Communities in the UK**

Our history has brought us into contact with cultures and beliefs from all over the world. And we have embraced those beliefs to make our own society richer, stronger and more prosperous. Today there are one and a half million Muslims; half a million Sikhs; half a million Hindus and hundreds of thousands of Jewish people and people of other faiths living in Britain.

The challenge we face today is to work towards tolerance and mutual respect between faith communities and a basic understanding that people can agree to disagree but still work together.

Last Monday I launched the Alif-Aleph Jewish Muslim dialogue to promote mutual understanding and respect between the faith groups. I also met Professor Akbar Ahmed and Dr Judea Pearl who are promoting transatlantic inter faith dialogue. The Foreign Office organised its first Multi-Faith Week last October, in which many of you took part.

The Government recognises that working with faith communities is an essential part of our outreach to the whole of British society. Northern Ireland has shown us how devastating mistrust and ignorance between religious groups can be. It has also shown us the role community groups can play in rebuilding confidence and bringing peace. The Women's Coalition, whose members were from both sides of the political and religious divide, worked tirelessly for peace and reconciliation, becoming a vital part of the peace process.

A few months ago one of Britain's oldest public schools, Eton College, appointed a teacher of Islamic studies, not just for the Muslim pupils but for the children of every faith in the school.

As I said earlier, I believe that there is a new thirst for understanding of different faiths within British society and a renewed sense of responsibility amongst community leaders to teach - young people especially – about the values of faith. And I am not talking about religious instruction in an academic sense, fascinating and rewarding though that is. I am talking about explaining why people espouse a particular faith and the values of that faith. Only then do we see how much more unites us than divides us.

### **UK Faith Groups in Europe**

The UK has a long tradition of faith communities working with their members and others to foster community development. Today you are exploring how the work and experience of faith groups in the UK can be taken forward across Europe. This is particularly important as Europe embraces many more Christians and non-Christians, bringing into this family of nation states traditions and heritages from their respective faiths.

## Conclusion

I believe that the UK has much to offer and much to learn too from our EU partners. The Government remains fully committed to working with faith communities throughout Britain. And we will support you, in whatever way we can, to help you join forces with those promoting inter faith understanding throughout Europe. I am sure that the meeting today will be inspiring and rewarding. And I wish you every success with your future ventures.

*There followed a short question and answer session:*

Mr Om Parkash Sharma, National Council of Hindu Temples:

It was a very interesting presentation by the Minister. My question is this. I have lived in this country for 52 years and enjoy religious freedom here. Britain is the best country for inter faith relations throughout the world, and we can teach Europe something about this. But I want to raise the situation of people, like myself, who have lived here in this country as long term residents, but who do not have a right of entry to other European Union states. Could there not be some UK law to provide that permanent residents in this country can also go to other European countries as well? As it is, I have to get a visa for such visits, which takes a lot of time and involves dealing with many questions and difficulties.

Mike O'Brien: Obviously, people who are citizens of the EU can travel throughout the EU and there is no restriction on their doing so. But you are asking me about people who are permanent residents in the UK, but not UK citizens, and who are not allowed to travel around the EU. That is indeed the case. They are subject to the national immigration rules that apply in each of the member states. Many of those member states are members of Schengen group. These countries have a particular set of rules about people who are not members of those states. This means that the UK has the right to say that we will only allow certain people to come into this country and to restrict the rights of people of different nationalities to come into this country. We allow citizens of EU states to come in and other EU countries have made a similar decision. However, we have not lifted restrictions on certain other countries. We require their citizens to have a visa and to comply with certain rules.

Just as we have, as part of the EU, retained our own control over immigration law into this country, so too we have to accept that other European countries have retained their control over their immigration laws and therefore have the right to restrict people who are not EU citizens from coming into their country. That is their right as independent countries. As I mentioned, some belong to the Schengen group which complicates the issue. But let us leave that aside for the moment. That is a decision that they have reached. Can we discuss with them whether they are prepared to change the position? We certainly can do so, but in the end it is going to be up to them to decide and they will naturally ask what they are going to get in return for this. It is part of the process of developing as a European Union. I suspect these issues will be

discussed again at some stage in the future, but I do not see any willingness at present on the part of other European countries to allow permanent residents to have free access to any part of Europe just as if they were citizens of member states of the European Union. It may, or may not, be a desirable change to make at some stage in the future, but it does not appear to be a step they want to take at present.

Rev David Randolph-Horn, Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum:

This is a question, Minister, for a Foreign Office Minister with Home Office experience! In our inter faith work in many of the cities we see played out in our relations on the street the same tensions that exist overseas. Is there a Foreign Office interest in there being local faith forums and councils in all the cities of our land that could be fed through into practical encouragement for the Home Office?

Mike O'Brien: It is always encouraging when in local areas people decide to come together in inter faith forums to discuss matters of common concern. But if you are suggesting to me that the Government should fund these in some way then I am more reluctant to agree. I am not sure that that much funding is needed. However, in terms of encouragement, providing opportunities for the various faiths to come together has got to be a positive development and if they create their own forums for this purpose that is to be welcomed. But I am always wary when people say that they can only initiate a particular activity if central government or the local authority funds them to do it. If you are talking about a faith forum I do not think that is necessary.

There are ways in which faith communities can come together themselves, independent of the state or the apparatus of government, including local government, and ensure by themselves that they do a good job. As a matter of fact, I thought that Iain Duncan Smith was making some valuable comments this morning about the need for local groups of one kind and another to see that they can take action without the state or the local authority always becoming involved. People of faith can do a great deal of good work and do it in a way that changes people's lives, not just in a religious sense but in a practical sense too, by bringing people of different faiths together. I think that, accepting their responsibility as citizens, people of faith can undertake this for themselves, without having the Government always taking the lead in this.

## **SCOTLAND'S FAITH COMMUNITIES AND EUROPE**

**Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, Chair of the Scottish Inter Faith Council**

Europe has been very much in the forefront with the recent European elections in June, and the enlargement of the European Union in May. It is well known that the turnout for the European elections is usually very low. Suggestions have been made that this is due to apathy, but I believe it is because the majority of people think that the European Union is something that is far away and an organisation that does not affect them in their daily lives.

If only they knew how wrong they are in this assumption! Over eighty per cent of legislation is directed from Europe. This legislation affects all communities in the UK, so it is vital that faith communities are also aware of the importance of Europe and interact with member states of the EU.

Some members of Scotland's faith communities had their first contact with the European Union in February 2003. Scottish Church leaders and faith representatives were invited by the then Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rt Rev Dr Finlay McDonald, to visit Brussels with him.

It has been traditional that the Moderator pays a visit to the European Parliament to meet with Scottish MEPs and also from time to time to other institutions, such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and the Court of Human Rights. Two of Dr Finlay McDonald's predecessors, Sandy McDonald and John Cairns had expanded their visit to include the leaders of other Churches and the Moderator thought the time was right to develop this further, by including leaders and representatives of faiths other than Christianity. The group included representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Baha'i faiths.

His aim was twofold. The first was to provide an opportunity for faith leaders and representatives to learn at first hand of developments within Europe. It is clear that our lives are affected by decisions made in Brussels, and it seemed to him to be appropriate that we should have an opportunity of meeting MEP's and officials, and exploring areas of particular relevance to us, for example, immigration and asylum, enlargement of the Community, the European Constitution and the role of religion within member states.

His second aim was to provide an opportunity for we ourselves to get to know each other better. He felt that there was great value in meeting together to discuss faith issues, and by just doing things together, and enjoying each other's company as human beings. We achieved both aims with great success, and formed strong friendships which continue to grow at our bi-annual religious leaders and faith representatives meetings.

The visit to Brussels was extremely busy, with engagements at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Scottish Office. Our induction about Europe began with an introduction to the European Union and its institutions. This was followed by an item which

related to us all, and that was how the European Union related to European Churches. As far as I could gather, there was not much contact with other faith communities, although there is now an input from the European Council of Religious leaders.

The European Constitution was discussed and a strong suggestion was made that faith communities must make their voice heard to the European Convention regarding the place of spirituality and God within the wording of the Constitution.

We then had lunch with the Vice President of the European Commission, the Rt Hon Neil Kinnock, who was delighted to have such an eminent group visiting him and various discussions took place. Then it was back to listening to talks about the European Union's policy on asylum and immigration, environmental policy and the enlargement of the European Union, its progress and challenges.

The next day we had an input from the Scottish MEP's followed by a question and answer session and a splendid lunch. This lunch was extremely fruitful for me because I met Professor Sir Neil MacCormick who agreed to speak about the importance of the European Union at a conference that I had organised for the Sikh community.

My overall impression of the visit was that it was extremely worthwhile in two ways. It was good for us as a group, because we all learnt a lot about the functions of the European Union and how it relates to our lives here. But it was good for the people in Brussels to meet an inter faith group like ours, and learn from us the areas where faith communities could have an input. And when I think about it further, I believe it is essential that we put the faith and spiritual dimension into all of the European Union's policies; otherwise it will be just a gigantic bureaucratic machine with no heart.

As to friendships that were formed, I can tell you that by our last evening we had all gelled together so well that those of us who were not Christian agreed to have dinner at a restaurant called "Christians"! And from this strong bond with each other has come a tremendous support for each other's faith communities especially in time of difficulties. For example, all communities wrote to various governmental bodies in the UK and France regarding the ban on wearing religious articles of faith.

I believe that it is vital that faith communities and inter faith bodies engage with Europe, as there is so much good practice in the UK, even though there is a need to engage more effectively at the grassroots level. The EU has expanded drastically and I am sure in some countries inter faith work is not high on the agenda. But it is up to those of us who have been working to bring faith communities together to make it high on their agenda.

I believe the world is in a very dangerous situation, with religion being used as a tool to divide people. But we, as people of faith, must not let the minority do that. We must show the world that religion can unite humanity and bring about peace.



## **COMBATING RACISM AND RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN EUROPE**

**Mohammed Aziz, Special Projects Consultant, Muslim Council of Britain  
and Commissioner, Commission for Racial Equality**

I am going to be speaking about combating racism and religious discrimination in Europe. I will start by briefly outlining the context for this: the rise of the far right across Europe, and consequently, the rise of racism and xenophobia in Europe. A seminar was held on this recently at UKREN (UK Race in Europe Network), and the report on it is available at the Runnymede Trust's website ([www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)). Do visit the website and get hold of a copy of this report, called *The Rise of the Extreme Right: Lessons from Europe*, which contains presentations from four experts. However, just to give you some idea about what is happening across Europe, these are some statistics which predate the European elections on 10 June 2004: in Austria the Freedom Party has 10% of the vote, in Portugal the far right have about 10% of the vote, in Belgium, Italy and Denmark they have about 12%; in Norway about 18%; in Holland about 20%; and in Switzerland about 28%. This gives you an idea of the support that the far right enjoy, and, as I say, this was the picture prior to 10 June. We have not been able to do a post-10 June analysis yet, but you will be aware that in the elections the far right gained ground right across Europe, not least in the UK.

My concern is not simply that the far right are gaining votes, but that by gaining votes they are becoming coalition partners. In Austria, Italy, Portugal and Switzerland they are junior partners, but in Denmark and Portugal they play a very important role in terms of how they influence the agenda of the governments there. By doing that, not only are they influencing the mainstream agenda of those countries, but they are influencing the agenda of the European Parliament and throughout the European Union machinery.

One organisation which has done a lot of work on the size and activities of the far right is Searchlight. They produce a very useful magazine, and if you would like to know more about the far right, then do read their magazine or visit their webpage ([www.searchlightmagazine.com](http://www.searchlightmagazine.com)). It will give you an idea of how extensive and how influential the far right have become over the last five to ten years in influencing the mainstream agenda. At the UKREN seminar, which I mentioned earlier, Claude Moraes MEP gave examples of how debates are influenced in the European Parliament by the far right. On one occasion one of its Committees put forward certain recommendations on immigration and asylum. However, when its report came to the floor of the Parliament, despite almost unanimous agreement by the Committee, it was endorsed by only a small margin of votes. So although member governments may be willing to take a more balanced approach to many of these issues, when the European Parliament is voting in public, individual MEPs from the same countries are much more likely to side with what is overtly racist or xenophobic.

What has been the EU's response to the rise of the far right? Its response came in 1997 in the Treaty of Amsterdam, which amended the Treaty of Rome, the basic instrument of the

European Union, just after Heider's party came into power in Austria. The Treaty of Amsterdam incorporated a new Article 13 to give the European Union new competences to work on discrimination issues. Work on discrimination was extended to what have come to be known as the "six grounds" of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability. This was an extremely important amendment to the Treaty, as it has since spurred a lot of developments right across the EU, not least through several Framework Directives on equality adopted by the Council of Ministers. Two of these Directives, adopted in 2000, are of particular importance to us: the first on race and the second on employment. The Race Directive was far more extensive, and covered discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. The second Directive was limited to discrimination in employment and vocational training only, but covered the various strands of discrimination apart from gender, which was subsequently dealt with by revising an earlier Directive on employment and gender.

The Directives and their transposition into UK law illustrate why the theme of today's gathering, the place of the UK in Europe, is so important. In my view, and in that of many other people, if it had not been for these particular European Directives, we would not yet have legislation in this country on religious discrimination. The Directives were spurred by the adoption of Article 13, which then required the UK Government to take action on the issue of religious discrimination. Prior to that, Paul Weller and others were involved in research and discussion on religious discrimination, but other than the provision in the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act to increase the penalties for various offences where the religious identity of the victim was a factor, this was the first time that the UK Government sought to provide protection against religious discrimination in any meaningful way.

Article 13 has also spurred other developments at the EU level, which are perhaps less well known here. Today's event may serve as one way of increasing the knowledge of what else is happening in Europe at the EU level, and, thereby, hopefully encourage us to get more involved and gain more benefit from it. At the same time as the Equality Directives were adopted, the EU launched a Community Action Programme to combat discrimination. This programme has three main objectives: first, to improve understanding of issues relating to discrimination; second, to develop capacity in the NGO sector to address and prevent discrimination effectively; and third, to promote and disseminate the values and practices underlying the fight against discrimination, in particular through mainstreaming the principle of anti-discrimination across other policy areas. Through that programme the EU has so far committed almost 100 million euros, but very few faith communities have tried to benefit from that money, although religion/belief is one of the six strands to which this money is committed. Perhaps you will want to explore, whether individually or collectively as faith communities, how you could benefit from this funding to carry out work on religious discrimination.

There have been other significant developments since then, spurred, as I say, by Article 13, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which hopefully will now become included in the EU Constitution. The Charter is the equivalent of the European Convention of Human Rights, which is an instrument of the Council of Europe, and it extends the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, the highest court in the EU. Of course, the European Court of Justice has been dealing with discrimination in the area of gender for a very long time, but it will now have the opportunity to extend its role to the areas of race, religion and other kinds of discrimination. So it will be important for us to keep an eye on how that happens and how that can benefit our communities.

There have been a great number of initiatives on mainstreaming anti-racism and anti-discrimination objectives. A number of agreements have been directed at this—including, for

example, the Lisbon Agenda, which seeks to address over the next ten years, amongst other things, discrimination in employment faced by faith communities. The European Employment Strategy and Guidelines have similar aims, as do the Social Inclusion Process, the European Social Fund, and the third report on Social and Community Cohesion. All of these initiatives and documents of the EU adopt non-discrimination as one of their guiding principles. There has also been some contribution made by the EU to the wider international scene over the last five years.

The European Union is currently reviewing its work over the last five years and has published a consultation paper on the next steps which the EU should take. Responses to the consultation paper should be sent in by early September. Do please get hold of a copy of this European Commission Green Paper on equality. Try to respond in time, either individually or collectively. This review is particularly important because the issue of non-discrimination will become a much bigger part of the EU Agenda, particularly with the inclusion of the new member countries. It is important for us to get in at this stage to influence the debate on equality from the faith communities angle.\*

All of this work mentioned so far has been carried out by the European Commission's Directorate of Employment and Social Affairs. There is, however, another Directorate which is looking into the issue of religious prejudice, hate crimes and human rights. This is the Directorate General of Justice and Home Affairs. This was the Directorate that produced a draft Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia, which unfortunately stalled during the time of the Italian Presidency. There is no reason why that particular framework initiative should not be revived, particularly next year when the Presidency is held by the UK. You might want to bear that in mind when you are preparing your agenda for the UK Government to pursue during its Presidency. There is another development taking place under that Directorate which is particularly important. Some of you will be aware of the work of the EUMC, the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. That body is going to be transformed into a human rights agency, so it will cover not just race but the whole wider range of issues under human rights. The section of the Directorate responsible for this development is due to release a consultation paper on this in September, but my own feeling is that by that time they will have decided what they want to do and what sort of a new organisation they want. So do try and get in now, if you can, with your ideas on how this human rights agency, or Fundamental Rights Agency, as they are currently calling it, can also take on board issues of religious prejudice, hate crimes and discrimination alongside racism and xenophobia.

So far I have been talking about developments in the context of the European Union. As Jackie Gower explained, member states of the EU are also member states of the Council of Europe, which is a different body with different mechanisms and tools for dealing with racism and xenophobia. The first of these is the European Convention of Human Rights. There is a whole body of jurisprudence and literature around cases that have been taken on the basis of this instrument to the Council of Europe's Commission on Human Rights and European Court on Human Rights. You will know that the Convention is now incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998. The jurisprudence on the right to freedom of religion, on the right not to be discriminated against on the ground of religion and on how Articles 9 and 14 of the Convention relate to one another, is extremely under-developed. In my view, there is scope for us as faith communities to make an input into how this jurisprudence is developed.

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\* Note Some 1500 responses from across Europe were received to this consultation. The European Commission hopes to present the findings at a conference in the Netherlands at the end of November.

The second, less well known, instrument of the Council of Europe is its Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In my view, this is possibly one of the best human rights instruments that faith communities have available to them, but it is certainly one of the most underutilised, perhaps because it is only six years old, and therefore relatively young and unexplored. The UK is reporting under this instrument this year, as it is under the third instrument that I want to mention, the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance. Both of those mechanisms are, therefore, particularly important for us this year. The reports will cover how minorities are being protected in the UK and the state of prejudice, intolerance and xenophobia in this country. So it is important for us, first, to influence the UK Government's own reports on this, so that they reflect the reality on the ground, and second, to write our own "shadow" reports going straight to the Council of Europe to offer our own assessment and to put forward our own recommendations. Please bear in mind these two opportunities as you develop your work programmes and plans for the rest of the year.

There are two or three important NGOs working in this area, in particular, ENAR, the European Network Against Racism, and the Minority Rights Group, which is doing a lot of interesting work particularly related to the instruments linked to the Council of Europe. Please look up their websites, as well as the UKREN website for more information on this front. [The websites are [www.enar-eu.org](http://www.enar-eu.org) and [www.minorityrights.org](http://www.minorityrights.org).]

What does all this mean for the UK and for us as faith communities? First, I think there is a need to understand and utilise better what is available to faith communities at the European level. Second, we should keep our eyes on what is happening with the implementation of the European Directives, the Race Directive and the Employment Directive, and the impetus these are giving to the plans for a single equality body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, that will come into existence in the next few years here in the UK, and possibly soon thereafter a "Single Equality Act". These developments provide a very important focus for the work of faith communities, particularly with regard to non-discrimination, equality and opportunities to participate in the mainstream of UK and European life.

Finally, what will be our contribution to the EU Presidency in 2005? What will be the UK's contribution through this opportunity to combating racism and religious discrimination in Europe? Please bear this in mind, particularly as the UK Presidency is coinciding with its Presidency of the Group of 8\*. Furthermore, the European Social Forum is gathering in London in October. So there are a whole host of developments which could potentially be of benefit to the agenda of our faith communities. How much we benefit will obviously depend on what we ourselves put into the process.

\* Note: The Group of 8 is an informal group, with no secretariat, which links leading industrialised countries. Its members are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US. Its key meeting is the annual summit of Heads of Government.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND FAITH ISSUES: THE UK AND EUROPE**

**Peter Smith, Senior Project Officer, Local Government Association**

I am going to talk about the role of local government in Europe in relation to faith issues and what we have been doing in the Local Government Association (LGA) in terms of engaging with European local government structures on the contribution which inter faith dialogue can make. But I will begin by explaining what the role of the Local Government Association is. It represents almost 500 local authorities across England and Wales and has its offices in Westminster. We liaise closely with central Government and with other national partners, including the Inter Faith Network, in developing policy across the range of areas in which local authorities work. My own brief is to lead on equality and community cohesion policy, each strand of which contain aspects relating to faith and religious belief.

At European level we have an international arm, the Local Government International Bureau (LGIB), which has an office in Local Government House in Westminster where the LGA itself is based. It also has an office in Brussels. We work very closely with the LGIB as our international arm in lobbying the European Parliament and European Union structures. The LGIB is a member of a European level association that covers local authorities across Europe. (Jackie Gower referred to those European wide associations and suggested that it might be helpful in terms of lobbying the European Parliament to develop a European inter faith structure). The European level local authority association is the Chamber of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE). It is with that body that we have been working most closely in lobbying the European Parliament and other European Union structures, and in developing local government across Europe and its engagement with governments across Europe. CLRAE is, in essence, the Local Government Association of Europe, and it brings together the LGAs from across the European member states.

CLRAE has a number of Subcommittees that look at specific policy issues. The LGA for England and Wales is represented on most of the Subcommittees. The particular Subcommittee that has a brief for addressing inter faith dialogue is that for Culture and Education. During the last year to eighteen months we have been working through that Subcommittee to look at inter faith dialogue across Europe. The Subcommittee first took an interest in this around eighteen months ago following the launch of the document on *Faith and Community* which the LGA produced in association with the Inter Faith Network and Inner Cities Religious Council back in March 2002. I am sure some of you will be familiar with it. It looked at how local government in the UK is relating to different faith groups. It has been used extensively as guidance by local authorities across England and Wales in developing their relations with different faith communities.

This document was picked up by CLRAE as an example of good practice and they were particularly interested in hearing about the experience of our work in the UK with inter faith groups. It has been suggested earlier today that here in the UK we are well ahead of the game,

by comparison with other European countries in developing this dialogue. I think the contribution which local government here is making to facilitating inter faith dialogue at local level is very good. Europe does want to hear about our experiences. So the Chair of the LGA's Equalities Executive and I went to Strasbourg in March 2003 to give a presentation to the Culture and Education Subcommittee of CLRAE on the development of guidance in *Faith and Community* and its impact in the UK. In that presentation we also covered the more recent guidance on community cohesion that the LGA published in December 2002. This guidance followed on from the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. It looked in part at the issues around faith and race particularly in terms of the background to those disturbances. We are currently in the process of updating that guidance and developing some more practical evidence based guidance material as well as further strategic guidance. There have been a lot of good practical developments since the original guidance was issued. This further guidance, which is being developed with our national partners the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Commission for Racial Equality, the Audit Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Inter Faith Network, is primarily for local authorities, but it will be of interest to others as well.\*

Returning to our work with CLRAE, what flowed from that presentation we made last March, was a proposal that CLRAE should produce what is termed a "draft opinion". This is in effect a paper by CLRAE agreed by the various different LGAs that belong to it and is used as a lobbying tool for use with the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, but also as a tool to guide and advise other LGAs across Europe on good practice elsewhere. I went back to Strasbourg in March of this year to give a further presentation on what we had done in developing this work since the publication of *Faith and Community* and *Guidance on Community Cohesion*. The presentation focused primarily on sharing good practice across different local authorities which have tried to facilitate inter faith dialogue and made use of material in a booklet which the Inter Faith Network published last year with examples of good practice from different local authorities in engaging with faith communities and in facilitating inter faith dialogue at local level.

The CLRAE Subcommittee is now looking at developing an "opinion" based on experience in different EU member states with local government and faith groups bringing about that inter faith dialogue. The experience of the UK will be central to the development of that "opinion". There is no fixed timetable for the completion of work on this. The structures tend to move rather more slowly in Europe than we do in developing work domestically particularly since there are now twenty-five member states that need to come together to pool their experience. More often than not you will find that the lowest common denominator needs to be the starting point because European countries are in different circumstances and have achieved different levels of progress. So there is no fixed timetable as yet for the production of this document. But we have started the ball rolling with the presentations which we gave to the Subcommittee. They are now setting up a group of member states to work on that draft opinion. I would expect it to be another year or two before it is ready for use as a lobbying tool with the European Parliament.

You have heard from Jackie Gower about the lobbying processes within Europe at the level of the European Parliament. At local government level you can work closely through the LGA

\*Note: The practical guidance document has now been published as *Community Cohesion: An Action Guide*. Copies can be obtained from the Local Government Association or downloaded from the publications section of [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk).

and the LGIB and we have been doing so with the Inter Faith Network. We consulted the Inter Faith Network office before going out to Strasbourg last March, and we used that opportunity to promote awareness of its work. If similar kinds of structures can be developed in other EU member states then we will perhaps have the building blocks for a European level inter faith association which will have more power in lobbying the European Parliament along the lines that CLRAE does at present for local government.

Looking to the immediate future, we are revising the Community Cohesion Guidance and we will be working closely with CLRAE to develop that opinion to use as a lobbying tool for the future through our work with the Culture and Education Subcommittee. That is just a brief summary of the work the LGA has been doing on faith issues.

*There followed a brief question and answer session:*

Dr Ajit Kumar, Merseyside Inter Faith Group:

The panel touched upon a number of issues relating to racial equality. How, as faith communities, can we act in an effective way to promote race equality, to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between people of different faith communities and racial groups? How can we address these issues? Jackie Gower mentioned the European Court of Justice and said that European law has to be incorporated into national law. The Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 enacted following the Stephen Lawrence enquiry has now come into force as have the new regulations on discrimination in the workplace.

Mohammed Aziz:

The question is: how can we as faith communities contribute to work on racial equality and good race relations? There are some practical steps we can take right now. At the moment the European Union is reviewing the work it has done on discrimination and race is a big part of that agenda. We can offer our views to the EU on where it has done well, what the future challenges are and what more it needs to do. This is a time for us to give the EU credit for what it has done well, but to point to areas where there are huge gaps and suggest what it needs to do to fill these gaps in the next five years. That is one practical step that we can take right now.

Another major issue in which we need to be involved is how the EUMC is going to be transformed into a human rights body dealing with human rights across the board. That could be good for the race agenda, but it could also mean that the race agenda is diluted. How do we avoid that? In a similar way, the current proposal here in the UK is to have a single equality body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Concerns have been raised over what happens to the race agenda if the CRE is dissolved, and race becomes one of six or seven agendas in the new Commission. My answer is that over the last thirty years, since the CRE has been in existence, race has been the concern of about ten per cent of the population. In other words, it is essentially the concern of ethnic minority communities. I say that having worked on race issues for the last fifteen years and now being a Commissioner at the CRE.

This is an opportunity to make race part of a much broader agenda on equalities. Age affects all of us, gender affects all of us. If we can combine race with these other agendas, and make equality, including race and religion, an agenda for 100% of the country's population, then that is of obvious benefit to all the ethnic minority communities. The challenge is to make it an agenda relevant for all and to keep it there as a priority. Let us think together how we can do that. This, of course, is just one response to the concerns about the possible dilution of the race agenda. If time were to allow, we could come up with others.

Dr Indarjit Singh, Network of Sikh Organisations (UK):

We heard from Mohammed Aziz statistics showing the rise of the far right. What I wanted to stress is that the so-called "moderates" in places like France, Germany and Switzerland are quite far to the right themselves. So what we are talking about is the extreme right. What can the British Government do to ensure that religious symbols are properly protected in France and Germany, given a culture in France, and I believe in Holland as well, that says that it is culturally correct for children there to grow up in total ignorance of the religion of people around them. If the answer is that the British government can do nothing, should Sikhs join United Kingdom Independence Party and say that we British will not have anything to do with those policies!

Peter Smith:

I cannot speak on behalf of the British Government! But Bernard Stasi of the French Government came to see me and one of my Committee members before reporting on the issues that have been very well documented in France. It seemed to me that he already had instructions as to what his report should say. Clearly there are fundamental differences between France and Britain in terms of how they view the State and its role in relation to religion and in the educational system. While we can make representations to other European governments through the European Parliament, I do hope that the "opinion" that we are going to help develop through CLRAE will address and confront some of those policies. We can exert some pressure through those mechanisms, but ultimately we are dealing with domestic policies and legislation in France, unless there are future EU directives requiring freedom to express and to wear religious symbols in schools. You could certainly lobby the British Government to seek an EU directive of that kind. But I suspect that it would prefer to avoid the difficult political discussions with France and other countries that this would require. However, I do hope the CLRAE "opinion", when it comes, will tackle some of these issues. For that we will need to have the support of the LGAs from other EU member states.



## **THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS – THE STORY OF A NEW EUROPEAN INTER FAITH INITIATIVE**

**Jehangir Sarosh, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe  
and President of the European Chapter  
of the World Conference of Religions for Peace**

When I meet people in UK and in Europe it seems people have different versions of what is meant by Europe and who are Europeans. The first one, of course, is the actuality that is Europe - the Europe that stretches from the Urals to the Atlantic, from Lapland in the Arctic to the Mediterranean. To me, that is Europe. When others speak of Europe, it may be simply the European Union. Finally, of course, Europe is that bit of the Continent, which gets isolated when there is fog in the English Channel!

Most commonly Europe is confused with the European Union. As you will have noted, even in today's event more than once when Europe has been mentioned it is the European Union which is meant. Recently when I attempted to examine the religious demography of Europe I also found that some statistics suggested Turkey was in Europe, while others had different views.

I mention this for I think that it is important to understand and to accept, I repeat accept, what Europe is. I recall that when we had the Bosnian and Kosovo situation most Europeans suggested that it was a conflict on our doorstep, implying it was not within our house of Europe, and then it was much easier to refer to the Muslims there as Muslims and not as Europeans or Bosnians. Again, I mention this to illustrate how easy it is to separate a faith community and thus not think of them as Europeans.

The European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) was inaugurated two years ago when Religions for Peace (Europe) invited five of its international Presidents to meet in Paris and consider the proposal to form a pan-European Council of Religious Leaders. The meeting took place 10 and 13 January 2002 in Paris. What we the organisers thought would be a prolonged two and half days of negotiations and discussions in practice took only twenty-four hours.

Let me tell you why. As I mentioned earlier, I had produced a religious demography of Europe, with a view to allocating seats on the Council according to this. We had thought that we would have thirty Council members and would allocate the seats according to the relative size of different communities. But the demography showed that 42% of Europe is Catholic, less than 1% is Jewish, and even less belong to other world faiths. Of course, that would have meant that the Catholic community would have had fourteen places, which would have been a very significant share in a council of thirty. So we looked at alternatives, trying to decide how we could allocate seats on a fair basis. After many discussions, hearing the Orthodox, the Protestant, the Muslim and the Jewish leaders, I eventually asked the Catholic Archbishop of Brussels, Cardinal Daneels: "Cardinal, you have been very quiet. How do you see it?" He said: "If this organisation is going to work through voting, and not on the basis of consensus,

then we shall fail. So everybody should have five seats each.” That generosity of the Catholic community made it possible to reach agreement at the meeting. After the Cardinal said that, there were no negotiations. Rather, every faith community wanted to give, rather than ask for, something.

Being mindful of the fact that ECRL is an organ of Religions for Peace (Europe), I am pleased to inform you that immediately after the recent violence in Kosovo a delegation from ECRL went to Kosovo to meet members of the Inter Religious Council of Kosovo and to invite them to a meeting of the ECRL Executive. This will be in Brussels in October where meetings are being arranged with representatives of the EU, NATO and the Stability Pact.

Some of the challenges in developing stronger links between faith communities across Europe are more an intra faith challenge issue than an inter faith issue. Often it has been said that Europe has a Christian history and a Christian culture, while forgetting the diversity and divisions within the Christian community. Many European countries are monolithic in terms of their particular Christian tradition. However, the other world religions which are present in Europe, although in the minority, can and do play a significant role in helping to build good inter faith relations. An example is the catalytic role played by the Jewish community in the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia Herzegovina

The second element that needs to be remembered is that no country on mainland Europe enjoys the same diversity of faiths and cultures as does the UK. Therefore, the need for them to deal with different faiths and cultures is comparatively recent.

What must also be remembered is that many of the central and eastern European countries are just emerging from a communist era where the religious communities suffered and therefore these communities are more interested in establishing themselves, recovering their properties and building relations with the governments. Therefore, inter faith dialogue and cooperation is not their top priority. They are also concerned about external evangelisation and conversion, which makes them more hesitant to support and give legitimacy to other faiths.

These are some of the challenges we face, yet I am pleased to say that there are many positive signs and let me illustrate just a few of these. Some of you were present at the project Interfaith Europe arranged by the Austrian city of Graz in partnership with various inter faith organisations, including the Hans Kung Foundation and WCRP Religions for Peace Europe. Local and national, and even regional inter faith groups, are being established. Recent training programmes empowering women of faith for social change have taken place in the Balkans, arranged by Religions for Peace and other European and international organisations. This year Genoa is the Cultural Capital of Europe and again multi faith events are being arranged there. The Inter Religious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States was inaugurated in Moscow in March this year, in the presence of his Holiness Patriarch Alexis II and the Russian Foreign Minister Ivanoff delivered a message from President Putin.

Article I-51 of the draft constitution for Europe [*see note below*] requires the Union to “maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue” with churches and other religious groups. At various meetings in Brussels it has been made abundantly clear by EU representatives that structures need to be built within the EU and by faith communities to facilitate this dialogue. This is possibly the greatest challenge to the faith communities: how to offer a multi faith voice and ensure the voiceless are given a voice. It is hoped that the European Council of Religious Leaders will be one of the organs that will offer a multi faith voice in this dialogue. People are united not by living behind the same borders but by sharing the same fundamental values and

principles; and the EU facilitates that by making the national borders increasingly irrelevant, said President Prodi.

Finally, may I mention here that Religions for Peace has set up a project 'Multi Religious Cooperation for the Common Good - Building Healthy Civil Societies'. This project will explore through seminars and workshops the possibilities for sharing good practice. It is aimed at forming new, and strengthening existing, local and national inter religious structures through cross border networking and at linking local and national actors and institutions to mobilise multi religious cooperation to build the European Society. Here, this Network and your expertise can play an important role.

A few years ago at a national meeting of Inter Faith Network of UK in Birmingham I suggested that this Network should itself become the Inter Faith Network of Europe. At that time it was too early for the Network to take up the challenge. However, events have moved on. It is vital that this Network shares the experience and knowledge it has gained, for it is in my estimation at least 15 years ahead of the scene in most other European countries.

Note: The full text is:

Article I-51: Status of churches and non-confessional organisations

1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.

## **A SOUL FOR EUROPE: ETHICS AND SPIRITUALITY**

**Win Burton, Coordinator of the Brussels based Soul for Europe Initiative**

### **What it is and isn't**

A printed sheet is available for you [see page 33] summarising what the “Soul” Initiative is for those who are not already familiar with it so I won't repeat all that information. Please though do note that this is the Initiative called “A Soul FOR Europe”, not to be confused with Donald Reeve's initiative, “Soul OF Europe”. Suffice it to say, it was set up in Brussels in 1994 at the instigation of the European Commission itself. This to some extent explains its composition. The European Commission was a European institution that sought to dialogue with other European-level institutions. The member organisations in the Soul Co-ordinating Committee therefore are not national – for their partners in dialogue are their respective national governments – and are not movements or ad hoc groupings, but somehow, recognised representative and legally and financially accountable institutions.

From this it should be noted that it was NOT the brainchild or the lovechild of the religious communities, or “communities of faith and conviction” themselves. But initially they each had an element – different elements – of self-interest in working together thus, be it financial or credibility or recognition and power, and not (as Jehangir Sarosh may have wished), necessarily, of speaking for those with no voice. This is not a cynical but a realistic observation.

These historical and structural aspects account in large degree for the current difficulties we are in, for we are foundering badly, alas. Nobody actually implicated in the Initiative, except perhaps me (on a good day) wants “Soul for Europe” – and yet the sheer concept, the image its name conjures up immediately in the minds of the non-implicated general public is generally that this is a beautiful – even a vital and an obviously needed instrument.

### **Why is this? What has gone wrong?**

The major players, the stronger religious communities, are quite able, and prefer, to work on their own at European level. Even within the community of Christians, there is less joint work than when I first started working in Brussels 30 years ago, a matter which is hard to imagine in England. No major issue of concern – whether it be the European constitution or questions of bioethics – is going to be dealt with round the multi faith table, and even sharing agendas, let alone papers, ecumenically is far from a foregone conclusion. And let's not even mention joint worship or celebrations, or even silence, let alone spirituality!

The weaker religions in Europe – in terms of their “organisational” capacity (offices, finances, networks) – such as the Muslims and the Jews are, largely speaking, still concerned more with defining or asserting their own identity and community than lobbying the EU institutions on political and social issues in general. So there is no commonly shared agenda at EU level, and

no inter faith work as such at EU level to prompt or feed such an agenda. Education on religion and ethics, which we are trying to tackle at Soul's annual symposium this year, is an example.

In Brussels, in Belgium, there is good inter faith work taking place but it is called for by the local or regional or national context and not readily comparable with local or regional concerns in other member states and therefore not transferable to the European level.

As for the interest within the EU institutions themselves in such work, the original climate in which the "Soul" initiative was set up was very much the product, as so often, of a chance group of like-minded individuals finding themselves at the same time in the same place with a synergy of ideas. Since then times have changed, and the bureaucratic climate in Brussels has changed too – whether because that is what happens when one moves into a new millennium or when a new Commission President takes over or both. The present European Commission, which will not be there much longer, would like the communities of faith and conviction – I am putting this crudely – as an ally and an alibi, a sanctifying rubber stamp – and moreover with a single voice and signature and letter-box. This is the present tendency – to streamline and organise civil society or "participative democracy", as the jargon terminology goes – so that, instead of risking rotten eggs and tomatoes from ecological protesters every time a summit meeting tackles an unpopular issue, they can say "We have consulted the environmentalists, the human rights activists, the development NGO's, and, if possible, the religions of Europe and brought them on board the decision-making process". There is no space here, for someone who might term themselves a "protestant" of some description, to make a protest.

### **What then might happen?**

I would be surprised, honestly, if the Initiative survives in its present form beyond next year at the best. I suspect that there has to be a rising need, in a larger number of Member States, for inter faith understanding, dialogue, action and hopefully spirituality from the local level, from the grass-roots, which ultimately gathers self-confidence, strength and momentum to bring it through to the regional and national – and why not? – ultimately European level, if the issues at the centre of the Initiative's concerns are going to find solutions at the appropriate level where legislation now takes place. It is not easy even within single communities to make such European links. But it is very difficult if not impossible to create this momentum from within the ivory towers in Brussels, and even the Ecumenical Centre where my office is, is an ivory tower, if a very modest one. When the Initiative first got off the ground, as some of you know, it was involved in helping the European Commission allocate funds to deserving multi-national multi faith projects – and at that time, those running the Initiative had, through these projects, quite a lot of contact with what was going on at local level. They were able to bring people together across frontiers who were running similar projects, and even spark some such projects into action as innovatory events or enterprises. But it was unsystematic, very ad hoc, while still being appreciated by those, all too few, involved. (Incidentally as many of you also know, this funding from the European Commission is still available, but since 1999, "Soul" has had nothing to do with the administration of it.)

Over the last few years, I have been seeking for other inter faith and multi faith operations to gain inspiration and new motivation for what "Soul" could do instead and, having been an observer for several years in the meetings of the very loose ad hoc International Interfaith Network, in which a number of you here have also been involved, I made a first move to bring those organisations from that group that have a European focus together in Brussels last

December. It is not yet clear whether this will gain any momentum – whether it is going to be seriously useful and interesting either for the Soul Committee or the other international inter faith organisations to form some kind of European inter faith network. One of the curious things is that practically all those who participated in December were UK based even if their focus was more or less transnational. It has been practically impossible to locate any French, German, Scandinavian or Dutch based international inter faith organisations, although there are various bilateral initiatives, such as those bringing together Christians and Jews, Christians and Muslims, or sometimes “Abrahamic” groups. Why should this be? Is it due to the possibilities afforded uniquely in the UK by such phenomena as the structures and facilities for charities? Or is it because the UK is one or several stages ahead of other EU states in coping with the pluralism of its society? I would welcome your comments. But in time I think there will be more initiatives coming from elsewhere in Europe – such as the very concrete work done in Graz last year (which Jehangir Sarosh mentioned) in the context of Project Inter-faith Europe. And meanwhile I shall keep my ears and eyes – and arms open and see what is called for and whether we can respond. I have started a very amateur “network news” service which still needs a lot more time and work spent on it before it can be in any way public, and we shall take it from there.

### **Some questions for the future**

All is not hopeless (at least on good days when nice people like you invite me over to London). Some of you may have followed the debates in the European Convention to draft a European constitution. Not so much on whether God or any transcendent phenomenon or particular religious heritage should be mentioned in the preamble, but more on the formulation of Article 51 which provides a legal basis for a regular open and transparent structured dialogue between the EU institutions and the communities of faith and conviction in future. This is in fact a FIRST. As many of you know, there has for some time been a person within the European Commission civil service whose job it is to maintain dialogue with the communities of faith and conviction, but Article 51 is designed to give this more scope than before. Now that the Constitution has been passed – though I’d prefer not to talk about ratification! – it is going to be interesting to see how this article can be implemented and what say the various interested parties can have in the process. The Economic and Social Committee, a less well-known consultative organ of the EU decision making process, is keen to widen its remit by providing a platform for the organised sectors and networks of European civil society to meet and discuss, and make their voices heard to the other social partners. The communities of faith and conviction have been invited to be part of this platform. This is, as I speak, a matter of heated controversy so may well not come about. But this is just to say that there are openings of a hopeful nature and Brussels is not by any means just the faceless bureaucracy and the Euro-centred marketplace that the British press would have you believe.

I spoke earlier of an era when the right people were in the right place at the right time – and the “Soul” initiative was born. A huge amount depends, curiously enough, on one person. The background and personal priorities of the next President of the European Commission will make a huge difference, despite the massive compromises she or he will constantly be having to make, especially now to hold 25 member states together. Will she or he come from a tradition where church and state are kept entirely separate, or where there is even a fear of, or allergy to, anything smelling remotely clerical? Or from a tradition where, however secular the society of that state is now in the twenty-first century, the roles of religions and convictions, whether inside, or despite, the institutions that incorporate their manifestations and values, are seen to play a vital part in furthering the common good, and the well-being, of all citizens of Europe - equally - whatever their origins or destinies?

## **A Soul for Europe – *Ethics and Spirituality***

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**Status** <<Association internationale sans but lucrative>> (aisbl) under Belgian law. See statutes.

**Membership and structures** Six founder members: The Liaison Office of the Orthodox Church to the European Union; the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE); The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC/CEC); the Conference of European Rabbis; the Muslim Council for Co-operation in Europe; the European Humanist Federation. In contact with other minority faiths through the International Interfaith Network, and open for membership according to conditions set out in statutes. Each of these members appoints two delegates to the General Assembly (meeting once a year) and Co-ordinating Committee (meeting about 5 times a year in Brussels). Between meetings four Officers (Bureau – composed of one person from each major faith or conviction) meet when needed for general management and execution of Committee decisions and recommendations. These bodies operate in two languages (English/French).

**Finances** Annual budget of some 50,000 Euros, financed 80% by European Commission on an annual basis, and 20% co-financing shared equally by the member communities.

**Office and staff** Small secretariat located in the Ecumenical Centre and closely linked (for historical reasons) with the facilities team of the CSC/CEC (meeting room, office supplies and book-keeping, computer network, collegueship). Secretariat staffed by one half-time (19 hours per week) co-ordinator (Win Burton).

**Mandate and programme** New mission statement developed in 2003 as resource on inter-religious/convictional issues at EU level. Specificity of Initiative is its interface position between the EU institutions in Brussels and various networks of single faith and multi-faith associations. Normally one major conference per year co-organised with the Group of Policy Advisors (GOPA) in the European Commission.

**Publications** An annual report each spring, which binds together the network of contacts (some 650 addresses throughout Europe), published in three languages. After annual conferences, report published with support from GOPA as Commission working paper, and also put on GOPA website.

June 2004

## **A NATIONAL INTER FAITH BODY MAKING LINKS IN EUROPE**

**Sidney Shipton OBE, Co-ordinator of the Three Faiths Forum**

The Three Faiths Forum (Muslim, Christian and Jewish Dialogue) was established in January 1997 to provide a national forum for promoting good relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews. It became a registered charity in 2003. But it should be pointed out in parenthesis that there was some difficulty since the Charity Commissioners would not accept at first that the promotion of religious harmony was a charitable objective. It took two or three years of legal argument to obtain the agreement of the Charity Commissioners, who then issued a statement to the effect that this was new departure on their part.

The Three Faiths Forum operates at different levels with a representative Advisory Board, local or regional grass roots groups and specialised groups such as the Medical Group. Due to the good relations primarily of Sir Sigmund Sternberg with most of the ambassadors in London, together with the affiliation of the Three Faiths Forum to the International Council of Christians and Jews (which set up an Abrahamic forum chaired by Sheikh Dr Zaki Badawi), the Three Faiths Forum became involved internationally. In this regard the Foreign and Commonwealth Office uses the Three Faiths Forum as a role model and when they consider it appropriate, arranges for visiting foreign delegations to meet with the leadership of the Three Faiths Forum for a presentation. This has led to the establishment of inter faith groups in various countries.

For example, a visit made by an Albanian delegation resulted in the first inter faith conference taking place in Albania some months later, at which The Three Faiths Forum was represented by the Rev Marcus Braybrooke, the third Co-founder of The Three Faiths Forum. A delegation from Bulgaria led by its Prime Minister met with the Forum at a meeting arranged by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and a Three Faiths Forum Group is now being set up in Sofia. I was invited last year to give a presentation to the Herbert Quandt Stiftung in Bad Homburg which has led to a link up between the Forum and the Stiftung.

In October last year Sir Anthony Figgis Marshall of the Diplomatic Corps arranged for some 70 Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps in London to come together in St James's Palace to hear presentations on the work of the Three Faiths Forum which has led to interest in several countries particularly in Europe.

The latest initiative was a series of meetings arranged in Brussels on 14 and 15 April this year. Under the theme of "Apprehensions about religions living together in Europe" a discussion dinner was hosted by the German Ambassador to Belgium, Peter von Butler. The participants included Ricardo Levy, Policy Adviser to Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, members of the Belgian Council of Christians and Jews, led by the Rev Dr Vanescore and two of the co-founders of The Three Faiths Forum, Sir Sigmund Sternberg and Sheikh Dr Zaki Badawi. They were accompanied by Ruth Weyl, consultant to the



International Council of Christians and Jews and myself. Also participating was the initiator of the Brussels Inter-religious Forum, Jos Chabert, a Minister in the Belgian Government.

On the following day meetings took place with members and officials of the European Parliament and the President of the Central Islam Mosque which has agreed to help with the setting up of a Three Faiths Forum group within the European Parliament and to strengthen contacts with the International Council of Christians and Jews.

I believe that there is much that can be done in Europe. But it is important to recognise that every European country is different. In terms of our work within the Three Faiths Forum, for example, we are aware that there are significant differences in the background and character of each Muslim community in each European country. In the UK, 80% of the Muslim community have come from Pakistan and South East Asia. In France, a similar percentage have come from North Africa, from Algeria and Morocco. In Germany, the majority of Muslims have come from Turkey. So in each country the Muslim community has its roots in different countries. If we are considering, as I hope we are, spreading our wings into Europe, we have to recognise that Europe is not, much as some people might like it to be, a single entity. Rather there are different situations in different countries and each has to be approached on an individual basis.

## **EUROPE – NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR LOCAL AND YOUTH INTER FAITH WORK**

**Deepak Naik MBE, Minorities of Europe.**

How far should religions compromise their beliefs in order to fit into society? This is one of a set of questions that have been submitted by the Bluecoat School in Coventry to be put by young people in interviews with religious leaders at the World Parliament of Religions meetings in a few weeks' time in Montserrat and then in Barcelona. This kind of question will be put by young people to religious leaders to ask them about their views and perspectives. They are the questions the young people themselves want to ask, focusing on what matters to young people. Many people think that young people are not aware of these issues or are not interested in religion. But in the work that we do we in Minorities of Europe we find that young people are, on the contrary, very much in touch with questions of spirituality and have an urge and a hunger to finding out what that really means. Not in words, not in textbooks, not in scriptures, not in what religious leaders proclaim, but in what it really means to those religious leaders.

The Minorities of Europe “Sharing the Sacred – Serving the World” inter faith youth project is taking around thirty young people, from different parts of the UK, of different religions and no religion, to attend for 17 days the Assembly in Montserrat, and the full Parliament in Barcelona. The young people will come together for a week back in the UK after doing all of these interviews, taking photographs, making sound recordings, and taking part in workshops, in order to produce inter faith resources for young people. Ten adult professional development people will be going to the World Parliament too in order to give these young people training and advice in various aspects of media skills.

We shall turn this raw material into photographic exhibitions into a CD Rom, into postcards and other resources for youth professionals such as teachers, youth workers and others to use with young people in class rooms, youth clubs, churches, temples and mosques to share with young people how people of faith work for peace, work to protect the environment and work daily with each other in real practical ways that go unreported in the press and the media.

What does Minorities of Europe do? We try to create opportunities - unique opportunities. We are very fortunate that we are able to take these young people to the World Parliament of Religions and to have access to religious leaders from around the world to whom the young people can put their questions. This is the kind of opportunity that we create. Minorities of Europe is a small charity, based in Coventry. We do community cohesion work and inter cultural learning. We make things happen to the best of our abilities. If you want to know more about Minorities of Europe, do please ask. I hope you will want to make use of our resources, the resources produced by young people: the posters, the exhibition, the CD Roms, the inter faith jokebook. We do need to bring humour into religion! If you want to make use of these resources in your localities, for your organisations, within your faith communities, please ask us. We want to see more young people involved in inter faith dialogue and action.

Action is what young people really look for. They want to make things happen, to get on. With your blessing and with your help I am sure that they will. The young people that we are taking to Spain enjoy entertaining fun but also want the possibility of uplifting activity. We have already produced material offering twenty world views, views from people of different religions and from humanists and agnostics.

I also want to share with you information about the Goldin Institute, an initiative of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. I was humbled and blessed to be part of this initiative at a meeting in Montserrat in Spain last year, (in the same way that we are blessed in being connected in the UK with the Inter Faith Network). This is an initiative to link the "global cities" of the world together: Berlin, Leipzig, New York, Dublin, London, Delhi, Birmingham and so on. All these cities are now in a sense global cities. They all have a diverse range of faith communities of people from different cultures. The countries in which these cities are set may not have the same degree of diversity overall. But these large "global cities" certainly do have that diversity. So how can we create the opportunity for these different cities to be local beacons within their countries of good inter faith dialogue and action? This new initiative, the Goldin Institute, will be working to help connect the different cities of the world to share together their best practice. We hope each city will act as a stimulus in their own country to promoting inter faith dialogue and cooperation and will also share their knowledge and experience more widely to encourage inter faith activities in other countries too.

## **Workshop 1: Europe's Multi Faith Cities – Sharing Local Inter Faith Good Practice**

**Facilitator: David Rayner, Secretary to the Inner Cities Religious Council,  
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

**Resource Person: Minou Cortazzi, Vice Chair, Leicester Council of Faiths and Leicester  
Baha'i Community**

Minou Cortazzi offered some introductory reflections on the experience of the Leicester Council of Faiths. Following an earlier visit by some of its members to European institutions in Brussels, three members of the Council (funded by the British Council) attended an international inter faith conference held in Graz in Austria in July 2003 on the theme of “Religious Diversity and Cultural Richness in European Cities”. This was part of a series of events held while Graz was the Cultural Capital of Europe. The tragic fate of Bosnia-Herzegovina just across the border from Graz reminded conference participants of the urgent need for dialogue between different faiths.

The Graz conference included a wide variety of workshops (along with plenary sessions, a key note address by Professor Hans Kung and an interview with Mrs Mairead Corrigan-Maguire, the Nobel Peace Prize Winner from Belfast, as well as receptions and a concert) and many proposals were put forward on political, social and cultural issues, including the need for the participation of more women in inter faith activity.

David Rayner led a key workshop on “Inter faith councils and cooperation in cities”. At this he had described the work of the Inner Cities Religious Council, the Inter Faith Network and other inter faith organisations in the UK. Presentations were given by the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum and the Leicester Council of Faiths, together with accounts of work in Duisburg, a primary school in Graz and police work in the Netherlands, all within a multi faith framework.

There was discussion at the conference about the possibility of creating a broader “network” of inter faith organisations across Europe to share their experience. It was recognised that there is a need for inter faith initiatives at local, national and global level and a strong view that initiatives at local and national level need to be independent of government.

Material relating to the Graz conference is to be found at [www.friedensbuero-graz.at](http://www.friedensbuero-graz.at).

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- The crucial resource for inter faith work is people: those actively engaged in spreading the message of the need to promote good inter faith relations.
- There can be a risk that political authorities use inter faith initiatives for their own purposes.

- Not surprisingly there is wide difference in the quality of local inter faith initiatives in different areas. Examples of good practice in Barnet, Camden and Westminster, London were mentioned.
- Intra faith dialogue is as significant as inter faith dialogue in the work of the Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum. This has been able to build on examples of inter faith dialogue at a personal level carried forward under the aegis of the Leeds Concord Inter Faith Fellowship, one of the earliest inter faith initiatives in the country. The Liaison Forum is in some ways a ‘network of networks’. It has representation on it from Leeds City Council and has received some funding from it, but is independent of the Council.
- In Scotland the Scottish Executive is providing funding for three posts in the office of the Scottish Inter Faith Council for a three year period.
- It would be useful for those local inter faith initiatives in the UK who have been successful in securing public funding, while retaining their independence, to share their expertise with other local inter faith initiatives. The opportunities presented by Inter Faith Network meetings are of value in this respect.
- While inter faith activity may start as a movement at the grassroots level, gathering broader support from faith community structures is important and some support and funding from the local authority can provide a stronger platform for it.
- The continued involvement of faith community members at grassroots level is of vital importance if a local inter faith initiative is to have real impact.

The situation in terms of local inter faith work is very different in the UK from that in the rest of Europe. It should be possible to learn valuable lessons from one another’s experience. It would be desirable to find more effective ways to link inter faith work across different European cities. Where a city has had to face the task of peace and reconciliation in its recent history this can give a particularly strong dimension to local inter faith work. However, cooperative work with local inter faith initiatives in different European cities in itself requires financial resources.

## **Workshop 2: The Evolving Legal And Human Rights Framework In Europe**

**Facilitator: Paul Seto, Inter Faith Coordinator, Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)**

**Resource Person: Mohammed Aziz, Special Projects Consultant, Muslim Council of Britain and Commissioner, Commission for Racial Equality**

Mohammed Aziz in his opening presentation to the workshop returned to some of the themes of his contribution to the pre-lunch panel. He emphasised the need to distinguish clearly between the roles of the two separate European structures: the Council of Europe and the European Union. While at some future point they might become more closely linked, they currently need to be dealt with as two structures which are independent of one another.

The Council of Europe is the older body of the two. It has more member states and has done more work in the field of human rights, but does not have the political and economic clout or the enforcement powers of the European Union. It was from the Council of Europe that the European Convention on Human Rights emerged and to which the European Court of Human Rights is linked. The effect of the Human Rights Act 1998 has been to provide direct access to UK courts for individuals pursuing human rights cases under the European Convention, but they may still go to the European Court of Human Rights on appeal from the UK courts.

Article 9 of the European Convention provides for freedom of thought, conscience and religion, while Article 14 deals with protection from “discrimination” on a variety of grounds including religion<sup>1</sup>. However, Article 14 of the Convention gives protection against religious discrimination only in the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention and subject to the restrictions set out in Article 9(2). A recently prepared supplementary protocol to the Convention (Protocol 12) is intended to introduce a freestanding right not to be discriminated against on grounds of religion. However, only five of the Council’s 45 member states have endorsed Protocol 12 so far, and at least 10 signatories are required before it comes into force.

The present legal position, therefore, turns on the interpretation of Article 9 *vis à vis* Article 14. The European Court of Human Rights has interpreted Article 9 more narrowly than it has done with other Articles in the Convention. It is interesting to speculate how its interpretation might

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<sup>1</sup> The text of Article 9 is:

“1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

The text of Article 14 is:

“The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”

have developed if there had been no concerns in European countries relating to Islam and Muslims as a threat. The Council of Europe has also developed a Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The definition of ‘minorities’ in the context of this Convention is left to member states, and the UK Government has decided to interpret it as relating to ethnic minorities, but it is arguable that “minorities” in this context covers religious minorities as well.

Mohammed Aziz said that legislation propagated by the European Union which, (by contrast with the Council of Europe), is more concerned with the economic framework of the European Common Market. He went on to explain how the European Union had developed its policy work and related directives under the new Article 13 of the Treaty of Union (as amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997), which gave the Union a new competence to tackle discrimination issues. The directives made so far in this field have spurred on other developments across Europe. Some member states have now gone beyond discrimination on grounds of religion in employment to cover discrimination in the provision of goods and services. The directives have also led to institutional developments, including in the case of the UK the proposals for a unified Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Following on from these developments there has been pressure here in the UK for the introduction alongside this of a “Single Equality Act”.

The European Union has also promulgated a Charter of Fundamental Rights, which has now been incorporated into the text of the European Constitution, but the legal status of this Charter is unclear. There are also plans for setting up within the European Union structures a “Fundamental (or Human) Rights Agency” which would subsume the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

The combination of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the regulations made in the UK to give effect to the European Directives under Article 13 have together created much more powerful protection against religious discrimination in the UK than existed before.

In discussion the following points were noted:

- A UK citizen can now argue in relevant contexts that he or she is not relying on the force of domestic legislation alone but is seeking a judicial review in the light of general European practice. However, the principle of “margin of appreciation” (ie taking the national context into account) applies in interpreting the exceptions for which provision is made in Article 9 of the Convention. The “margin of appreciation” does not entitle domestic courts to avoid the application of the fundamental rights for which provision is made in the European Convention on Human Rights, but only to take account of the national context in which they are being applied. The doctrine of margin of appreciation is itself, however, subject to the principle of “proportionality” (which requires a proportionate response given the overarching objectives of the Convention’s provisions). The challenge for faith communities may be twofold: on the one hand, to construct a justification based on the principle of “margin of appreciation” to allow some flexibility in the protection against discrimination which the European instruments provide, and on the other hand, to rely on the principle of “proportionality” to achieve the rights as set out in the instruments. It is more and more difficult for national courts to use the “margin of appreciation” principle to justify restrictions on these rights, given the current pressure for parity, uniformity and certainty in this field.

- It is important to appreciate the freedom which members of faith communities can exercise in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, while, at the same time pressing for extensions in the legal protection against religious discrimination.
- The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provides protection for groups within member states, not rights for individuals, (with which the European Convention on Human Rights, and therefore the UK's Human Rights Act 1998, is concerned). France is among the few member states in the Council of Europe which has not yet added its signature to the Framework Convention, since its national approach does not recognise the concept of "national minorities".
- So far, few other European states have established bodies in the field of race similar to the Commission for Racial Equality. However, the European Directive on Race requires all member states of the European Union to establish independent support mechanisms. This means that other member states are having to decide whether to set up a series of anti-discrimination bodies for different "strands" or a single anti-discrimination body, as the UK Government proposes to do, drawing into this the separate bodies already established here in the UK to deal with discrimination on grounds of race, gender and disability.
- It would be desirable for faith community organisations to offer comments in the current consultation on the future development of European anti-discrimination work.



### **Workshop 3: Educating for Inter Faith Understanding in a European Context**

**Facilitator: Priti Shah, Institute of Jainology**

**Resource Person: John Keast, UK Representative on the Council of Europe Project on “Inter Cultural Education and the Challenge of Religious Diversity and Dialogue in Europe”**

John Keast offered an introductory account of the Council of Europe project on which he serves as the UK representative. There is a great variety in both conceptual and practical terms among the approaches to Religious Education in different European countries, for example, whether it is confessional or non-confessional; whether it is provided by faith communities or by the State; the sources of funding for it; whether or not it is compulsory; whether it focuses on Christianity, is multi faith, or covers both different faiths and non religious philosophies. The overall educational frameworks in the 45 countries which belong to the Council of Europe are very different too. This is the first project on RE undertaken by the Council of Europe and was prompted by the events and aftermath of 11 September 2001.

A meeting of experts in Paris in 2003 started work on recommendations for a meeting of education Ministers in Athens later that year. The focus was on teacher training and policy recommendations on RE. The Athens meeting decided to focus the work of the project on the religious dimension of inter cultural education, looking at an appropriate curriculum to promote this; the needs in terms of teacher training; and questions of “governance”. At a subsequent meeting in Oslo it was agreed to produce a compendium of good practice at school/college level in late summer 2005; to hold a seminar on teacher education; and to produce a website and CD Rom. Work on the project has to take account of different circumstances in each country in the provision of RE. It raises issues about the relationship between religion and truth; religion and identity; religion and culture; and religion and the secular authorities. He said that the project would only be able to offer guidelines and good practice because it would be for each country to decide how it wanted to draw on this material for use there.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:-

- It was surprising that the Council of Europe did not recognise the need to promote community cohesion until the events of 11 September 2001.
- It would be desirable to change the “challenge of diversity” in the project title to the “opportunity of diversity”.
- Not all those at project meetings are RE experts since some are concerned with the teaching of humanities more broadly and with citizenship education. For example, in Holland RE is set within a broader humanities approach. In France teaching about religion is through

literature, philosophy and the humanities, and conveys knowledge “about” religions rather than seeking to offer learning “from” religions, to use the basic distinction familiar to RE in England. This was the context for the policy approach in France to the display of religious symbols in the classroom.

- The extent to which faiths other than Christianity are taught about in schools varies considerably across Europe.
- Even with the effort which goes into RE in Britain knowledge here about different religions is less than it needs to be.
- The need for intra faith dialogue needs to be recognised as well as the need for inter faith dialogue.
- Increasingly many young people do not have any formal religious affiliation and in this context “inter faith” dialogue may be a difficult concept. There is a need to leave room for a focus on searching as well as commitment. However, there is no reason why the concept of dialogue should not apply quite broadly as a way of involving young people whatever their faith or belief position. Religion is dynamic and not static and RE has to take account of this.
- It is important to find ways in which young people from different traditions can meet and talk together informally since the building of personal relationships across faiths and cultures is crucial.
- In the context of other European countries it may be that RE can only be dealt with in a broader inter cultural curriculum.
- Observers from North African countries have been present at some project meetings.
- In the context of the overlap between racial discrimination and religious discrimination in Europe, a focus on anti racism is needed, as well as multi faith RE, if good community relations are to be encouraged.
- Holocaust Memorial Day has a role in helping young people to understand the importance of mutual understanding and respect and in that context to explore issues of racism, violence and bullying.
- There can be a conflict between education seen as the pursuit of truth or as the means to secure knowledge and qualifications in pursuit of wealth. Many young people, whether or not they have a formal religious commitment, have a sense of spirituality and an appeal to the pursuit of truth can be based on this.
- It is important to bear in mind the interests and concerns of parents when discussing educational issues. Parents have a key role in passing on their faith to their children and it is important that the educational system should work both with parents and with faith communities.

## **Workshop 4: Linking and Lobbying: Making a Difference in Europe**

**Facilitator: Rev John Kennedy, Coordinating Secretary for Church and Society,  
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland**

**Resource Person: James Bridge, European Political Adviser, Age Concern England**

James Bridge gave an initial presentation on the work that Age Concern has undertaken within Europe, in order to illustrate ways in which to work with European institutions and partner organisations.

To act effectively within Europe it is necessary to define a focused objective towards which to work. This is particularly important for small organisations. A strategy then needs to be put in place to achieve this, which must be consistent with the legal framework of the European Union and involve effective targeting, have realistic expectations of outcomes and make the best use of limited resources.

In addition to engaging with the formal European institutions of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, it is crucial to work with other voluntary organisations. For example, AGE is the key European platform for work with older people and links European organisations concerned with issues relating to age. It also includes organisations from non EU countries such as the United States and EU “candidate” countries such as Turkey, with observer status. An AGE UK has also been established to link UK charities working in the age field who are interested in and affected by EU laws.

The platform of European Social NGOs links Europe-wide NGO alliances ([www.socialplatform.org](http://www.socialplatform.org)). In the European Parliament MEPs sit by political group, not national group, therefore the political groups are made up of members drawn from up to 25 states. There are also “intergroups”, comparable to “all party groups” at the UK Houses of Parliament, which facilitate informal discussions across the different party groups on particular issues. For example, there is an “intergroup” on age which was established 20 years ago.

It is important for organisations engaged in lobbying in Europe to understand the legislative processes there, the structure of the European Parliament and the way in which policy is developed. It is important to engage with MEPs regionally, nationally and across the EU as a whole. The role of Committees of the European Parliament is a significant one as they produce valuable reports on, and amendments to, proposed legislation and bring forward resolutions to the Parliament. It is very important to understand how these Committees work and to know which MEPs sit on the Committees of particular interest to your organisation.

The European Commission can propose legislation to the European Parliament, provided that under the European Treaties there is an “EU competency”, in other words a legal agreement saying what the EU can and cannot do, covering its subject matter.

There is a need for organisations to engage with the political process both in Brussels and in the UK. In order to engage with the European Commission it is best to partner with other organisations in Europe, as the Commission is more likely to listen to a European voice, even though it will accept representations on a national basis. It is important to lobby the UK Government in London on European issues and not just focus on Brussels. The most effective way of lobbying in the UK in relation to the Council of Ministers is through national lobbying of UK Ministers, coupled with co-operative working with other European organisations to lobby their respective Ministers in order to influence the Council of Ministers as a whole.

The UK will hold the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in the second half of 2005 and this will provide a special opportunity for UK organisations to lobby to get their issues onto the European agenda. In influencing the UK Government it is important to get in touch with its official representatives in Brussels, as well as lobbying in Westminster and Whitehall, and also to be in touch with UK officials who are working on secondment in the European Commission.

The recent enlargement of the European Union brings both challenges and opportunities. Many of the new member states are less multi cultural than the UK. However, the UK may therefore be able to offer experience which will be of use to other European countries and it needs to be at the forefront of combating far right activity across Europe.

In discussion the following points were made:

- To secure European Union funding organisations must be registered charities or have a legally recognised structure. Current work on issues of discrimination and anti-racism provides a key opportunity for UK based organisations to apply for European funding, but only projects which have a European dimension to them will be successful. The time and effort involved in applying for European funding can consume a good deal of resources in itself. Local authorities in the UK also have access to European funding for projects conducted in partnership with other European cities.
- Finding partner organisations in Europe is not always easy, but in the current climate there are good opportunities for those concerned with inter cultural issues to join with other anti racism groups across Europe.
- Voluntary organisations should consider joining up with a European framework such as ENAR, the European Network Against Racism ([www.enar-eu.org](http://www.enar-eu.org)) or AGE ([www.age-platform.org](http://www.age-platform.org)).
- The websites of the various alliances of NGOs are a valuable source of information as is the site of the UK Permanent Representation to the EU ([www.ukrep.be](http://www.ukrep.be)). Other sources of information are the London offices of the European Parliamentary Commission.
- UK MEPs are good sources of advice and help. If you are uncertain who your MEP is the European Parliament Office will be able to advise you and also to provide the names of MEPs who serve on relevant Committees of the European Parliament. It is a good idea to invite your MEP to meetings to discuss your particular project.

- On the whole, work in the UK on inter faith issues is ahead of both theory and practice elsewhere in Europe. The recent Home Office report *Working Together* is a clear indication of this and has been noted within Europe as an example of good practice.
- An example was given of a European project of the Baha'i community. A local youth project in southern England successfully applied for £30,000 of European funding. The community has arranged exhibitions both in Strasbourg and in Brussels with the support of two of the UK's MEPs.

## **Workshop 5: Linking and Sharing Good Practice Between Inter Faith Initiatives in Europe: Possible Ways Forward**

**Facilitator: Dr Harriet Crabtree, Deputy Director, Inter Faith Network**

This workshop took the form of a “brainstorming” session on possible ways forward in linking inter faith initiatives across Europe. The following points were made in the course of the discussion:

- In other European countries there is no linking structure for inter faith work along the lines of the Inter Faith Network for the UK.
- It is important for the UK to share its experience of inter faith work with other countries and to work with others towards setting up an “Inter Faith Network for Europe”. But it is important to encourage the development of national inter faith structures before moving to create a pan-European organisation. There needs to be an “organic” approach to networking across Europe as structures are built. Perhaps a pan-European conference could be organised to discuss inter faith work.
- Not enough is known about the pattern of inter faith activity elsewhere in Europe and it would be helpful to have some “map” of this, perhaps in the form of a European directory.
- Opportunities should always be seized when they present themselves, for example, when there are requests from elsewhere in Europe for visits here. It is also important for visits to be made to other countries by those engaged in local inter faith work in the UK.
- It would not be helpful to try to establish a “top down” European inter faith structure. Inter faith work is still in its early stages elsewhere. More promising approaches would be twinning, exchange visits, and greater use of the internet.
- It is important for those involved in inter faith work in the UK not to be complacent. It is clearly possible for the UK to learn from other countries and the exchange of ideas and experience is not a one way track!
- No model is capable of being transferred from one country to another without some adaptation to its particular circumstances. There is a need for sensitivity to the dangers of arrogance, particularly given the powerful role which the English language has as a medium of communication. The slogan should be to “share with modesty”!
- It is important to raise the level of awareness of inter faith issues within individual faith communities both locally and nationally and across Europe.

- Local inter faith groups should link up with similar groups elsewhere in Europe and smaller faith communities need to form pan European links.
- Local authorities may be of help with funding the building of European links with other cities.
- In some other European countries, less secular than the UK, there can be opposition to inter faith work from those who belong to the dominant Christian tradition, as they may feel they have more to lose through the development of a multi faith approach.
- Inter faith work is often more marginal in the eyes of larger faith communities than it should be.
- There are good resources which can be used in developing inter faith work across Europe.
- Building on informal contacts can often work better than trying to create formal structures.
- The approach needs to be one of organic networking, taking opportunities as they arise and, in particular, arranging more cross-country visits and twinning between cities and towns in different European countries.

## LOOKING AHEAD: FAITHS IN A CHANGING EUROPE

Professor Paul Weller, University of Derby

My son recently reached his sixteenth birthday and soon after received in the post a passport. It was the passport of the Federal Republic of Germany because his mother is a German citizen and I am a UK citizen, so he is a citizen of both countries. Both of his passports are passports of member countries of the “European Union”. From Thursday to Saturday night of this last week I was in Brussels, working on developing a training module on religious diversity supported by the European Jewish Information Centre and the European Network Against Racism. This, more or less, for each of us as individuals, families, groups and communities, is now part of our reality. How do we deal with it?

First of all, by taking seriously the context. The context is one of rapid change. There are people here who remember the Second World War, who remember the Holocaust. There may even be survivors present with us. Time moves rapidly. A year or so ago one of my children asked me, “Dad, what’s the USSR?”. Enlargement of the European Union today is another truly historic development in the life of our continent. I doubt if we really yet understand the significance of it. Religions, too, are changing rapidly within this context. Some of you may know of a project called the European Values Study, which has been carried out over a number of decades and looks at religious belief and practice in the countries of Europe. We know from our own experience of the 2001 UK census that demographics, in terms of simple labels and categorisations of self-identification are not the only aspects of religious realities. It is important to look at demographics not only in terms of the absolute numbers in Europe, but also to understand what is going on religiously in our continent and within it, in the European Union.

The second important part of the context is its complexity. The sometimes bewildering complexity of institutional layers, with which inter faith groups and faith community organisations will have to learn to deal (and somehow find the energy to do so, and to identify the resources for this). In some ways, engaging with the European dimension is rather like a magnified version of trying to engage with the English regions which can already be bewildering, complex and challenging for faith communities that may not have sufficient geographical spread across a region to be able to build an infrastructure at that level. There are similar challenges at the level of the European Union.

Also part of the complexity is the need for patience: to try to understand something of the diverse histories of different communities and countries. Why is it that some of the issues in France present themselves as they do? Are they simply an expression of religious discrimination and racism? Do we in the UK understand the background to how these issues are debated in France? Because if we do not make the effort to understand the French context for these issues, then it is unlikely that changes in attitude can be brought about there. For example, against the background of French history and the notion of *laïcité* and of human rights, might it be that, if some of the issues around wearing the veil were to be addressed in a



human rights framework, rather than in a religious discrimination framework, that would perhaps chime much better with French society's own self-understanding and normative values?

It is difficult to be patient, but in part this involves recognising that languages matter. Operating in the European context languages really do matter and we "Brits" are not very good at languages. If that capacity for language is not very widespread in all our communities, it may be a particular challenge in some of our minority faith communities. If there are some practical steps that Government could take to assist the capacity of faith communities to participate in Europe, then perhaps support towards language training in major European languages within all our communities would be a very helpful way forward.

Why is patience so difficult? Because there is also danger in our European context and the issues are pressing and urgent. When I was in Brussels I opened a newspaper to read about the stabbing of a young student, who had been participating in a Jewish *yeshiva* in a Belgian city. The attack followed some weeks of verbal abuse and harassment of him and others leaving that institution. We know that war and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans was not on the doorstep of Europe. It was in part of Europe, and these matters are urgent.

What other dimensions do we need to take into account? The "secular". Do we as faith communities and inter faith organisations really wrestle with the challenge of the secular? Some years ago I was at a Council of Europe seminar entitled "Religion and the Integration of Migrants". Interestingly, this ended up grappling with the complexity of the understandings of 'secularism' and 'the secular' when used in different national contexts. There is a need to understand that and tease it out. We have said quite a lot today about what the UK can contribute to others in this diverse world of faiths and beliefs in Europe in terms of inter faith dialogue, but, in terms of philosophical dialogue with Humanist and secularist associations, we in the UK may well have something of importance to learn from the wider Europe.

What can we press our Government, and our Government as part of the European Union, to do? The fact that the UK will be assuming the European Presidency next year has been referred to many times today. Obviously it will be important for the Network Executive Committee to consider what the Government could be asked to do in terms of highlighting good practice in the UK. Being "wise as serpents", the UK Government needs a good story in the European Union context. Without being unrealistic, there are good, though fragile, stories to tell and maybe this will be an opportunity to do this.

What else can we do with regard to our Government and its participation in the EU? What is very significant is that the new European Union Constitution does include clauses that confer a competency at the heart of the European project to do with religion and dialogue, and upon which we will be able to build in the future. The European Union Green Paper on Equality and Non-discrimination is something to which each organisation here can respond. It is an open invitation both to organisations and to individuals and there is until the end of August to do so. The Green Paper looks at such questions as whether, for example, the provisions on religious discrimination in employment are sufficient or wide enough. It is an opportunity to review that question, and for us perhaps also to press the question of whether or not there should also be legislation on religious discrimination in the provision of goods and services.

One of the important *leitmotifs* in our discussions here today has been the question of creating inter faith structures at a European level. This is a very challenging though crucial issue. I believe that we can, with modesty, contribute something from the UK experience. Not that the

Inter Faith Network for the UK can itself become a European inter faith network, but it has experience to share about its own coming into being. How was it that this Network emerged here in the UK? It required patience, foot slogging, confidence building, and all those processes, rather than a quick fix, which were needed in order for it to be effective. But here there is a real tension because of the urgency of the issues and perhaps, in contrast to the time when the Network started, there is also an invitation coming from the bodies of governance, in this case at the European level, to participate, to respond and to contribute. This was not the case at the time when the Network was founded. So this significantly alters the dynamics and the nature of the challenge. The challenge now is how to participate fully and to do so also with integrity as faith traditions, not just being co-opted into a political exercise, but to engage with legitimacy and with communication and accountability to the faith communities and inter faith bodies of our continent and of the European Union.

Lastly, I did notice that, in his presentation, the Government Minister Mike O'Brien said, with regard to the development of inter faith structures and inter faith contributions in the European Union, that the Government "will support you, in whatever way we can, to help you join forces with those promoting inter faith understanding throughout Europe". I think we should pick up on that commitment and pursue it, because while I am sure that the Network of itself does not have resources to bring to birth a wider European initiative, it may be that the Government could be persuaded on the basis of that kind of commitment to see how the Network could make a contribution to this in a specifically funded and supported way. Maybe that would be a lasting legacy of the UK's Presidency.

Two personal observations in which I hope you will indulge me for a few moments. First, nobody here today has mentioned New Religious Movements. I think that in the European context it is important to take account of this dimension. Particularly in former communist countries it can, ironically, be the case that the "social space" for some religious groups has now become more restricted than it once was. Many groups that in the western part of the continent we may view as being mainstream are, in other parts of our continent, frowned upon and treated with great suspicion and often have their individual rights curtailed. So I would want to say that, in tackling these issues on a European level, this is also a dimension that has to be considered. Questions of religious freedom and participation are ultimately indivisible although, as with political processes, they might need to move on more than one track at a particular time.

Second, sixteen years ago or so some of us in the Inter Faith Network, including myself, had a dream about how good it would be to have a directory of religions in the UK. At the moment it is not clear how we can carry that particular project forward, but I am an incorrigible dreamer. I believe in dreams and then in trying to make them into reality. If that UK directory had some success and made some contribution to raising the visibility of religions and promoting contacts between them in the UK, it was because its time had come and a way forward for it was identified and the two came together. Perhaps somewhere, somewhen, the time has now come for a "Religions in the EU" directory!

## **The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK was founded in 1987 to link inter faith initiatives and to develop good relations between people of different faiths in this country. Its members include the representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths; national and local inter faith organisations; and educational and academic bodies with an interest in inter faith relations. It is run by Trustees of all the faiths whose representative bodies it links.

With its member bodies, the Network works to “advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Britain, including an awareness both of their distinctive features and of their common ground” and “to promote good relations between persons of different religious faiths”. It does this by:

- Holding meetings of its member bodies, where social and religious questions of concern to the different faith communities can be examined together
- Setting up multi faith working groups, seminars and conferences to pursue particular issues in greater depth
- Proceeding by consensus wherever possible and not making statements on behalf of member bodies except after full consultation
- Fostering inter faith co-operation on social issues
- Running an information and advice service
- Publishing materials to help people working in the religious and inter faith sectors
- In consultation with member bodies, helping to provide contacts and participants for inter faith events and projects and for television and radio programmes

Further information about the Inter Faith Network can be found on its website: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk) or obtained by writing to the Network office.

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## Member organisations of the Inter Faith Network for the UK 2004-05

### Faith Community Representative Bodies

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (UK)  
Baha'i Community of the United Kingdom  
Board of Deputies of British Jews  
Buddhist Society  
Churches Agency for Inter Faith Relations  
in Scotland  
Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith  
Relations (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland)  
Council of African and Afro-Caribbean  
Churches (UK)  
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order  
Hindu Council (UK)  
Imams and Mosques Council (UK)  
Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park, London  
Jain Samaj Europe  
Jamiat-e-Ulama Britain (Association of  
Muslim Scholars)  
Muslim Council of Britain  
National Council of Hindu Temples  
Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)  
Network of Sikh Organisations (UK)  
Quaker Committee for Christian and  
Interfaith Relations  
Roman Catholic Committee for Other Faiths,  
Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
Sri Lankan Sangha Sabha of GB  
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission  
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Interfaith Subcommittee  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
World Ahlul-Bayt Islamic League  
World Islamic Mission (UK)  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe

### Inter Faith Organisations

Northern Ireland Inter Faith Forum  
Scottish Inter Faith Council  
Inter Faith Council for Wales/Cyngor Cyd-  
Ffydd Cymru

Alif Aleph UK  
Christians Aware Interfaith Programme  
Council of Christians and Jews  
Interfaith Foundation  
International Association for Religious  
Freedom (British Chapter)  
International Interfaith Centre  
London Society of Jews and Christians  
Maimonides Foundation  
Religions for Peace (UK Chapter)  
Three Faiths Forum  
United Religions Initiative (Britain and  
Ireland)  
Westminster Interfaith  
World Congress of Faiths

### Local Inter Faith Groups

Bedford Council of Faiths  
Birmingham Council of Faiths  
Blackburn with Darwen Interfaith Council

Bradford Concord Interfaith Society  
Brent Inter Faith  
Brighton and Hove Inter-Faith Contact Group  
Bristol Inter Faith Group  
Burnley Building Bridges  
Cambridge Inter-Faith Group  
Canterbury and District Inter Faith Action  
Cardiff Interfaith Association  
Cleveland Interfaith Group  
Coventry Inter Faith Group  
Derby Open Centre Multi-Faith Group  
Dudley Borough Interfaith Network  
Gateshead Inter Faith Forum  
Gloucestershire Inter Faith Action  
Harrow Inter Faith Council  
Huddersfield Interfaith Council  
Lancashire Forum of Faiths  
Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship  
Leeds Faith Communities Liaison Forum  
Leicester Council of Faiths  
Loughborough Council of Faiths  
Luton Council of Faiths  
Manchester Interfaith Forum  
Medway Inter Faith Action  
Merseyside Council of Faiths  
Merseyside Inter-Faith Group  
Interfaith MK (Milton Keynes)  
Nelson and Brierfield Building Bridges  
Newcastle Council of Faiths  
Newham Association of Faiths  
North Kirklees Inter-Faith Council  
North Staffordshire Forum of Faiths  
Northampton Faiths Forum  
Nottingham Inter Faith Council  
Oldham Inter Faith Forum  
Oxford Round Table of Religions  
Peterborough Inter-Faith Council  
Reading Inter-Faith Group  
Redbridge Council of Faiths  
Rochdale Multifaith Partnership  
Sheffield Interfaith  
South London Inter Faith Group  
-Southampton Council of Faiths  
Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource  
Watford Inter Faith Association  
Wellingborough Multi-Faith Group  
Whalley Range (Manchester) Inter Faith Group  
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group  
Wycombe Sharing of Faiths

### Educational and Academic Bodies

Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations  
Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim  
Relations  
Community Religions Project, University of Leeds  
Institute of Jainology  
Islamic Foundation  
Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby  
National Association of SACRE's  
Religious Education Council for England and Wales  
Shap Working Party on World Religions in  
Education  
Sion Centre for Dialogue and Encounter



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