

Report from meeting of the CCEE-CEC Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME) 17th to 20th April 2008 in Esztergom, Hungary

v/Associate Professor Dr. Gerd Marie Ådna and General Secretary of CCEE. Mgr. Aldo Giordano

This report is mainly based on The General Secretary of CCEE Mgr. Aldo Giordano's press release April 20, 2008. Ådna's comments are in bold italics.

European Christians and Muslims Meet in Esztergom, Hungary 17th to 20th 2008

The meeting of the CCEE-CEC Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME) took place from 17th to 20th April in Esztergom.

CRME is an Ecumenical Committee set up in 1986 by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). Its task is to inform and support the Churches in Europe in their encounter with Islam, and to intensify relations with Muslims. *[The present CRME has been gathered twice a year; in 2007, in Leicester in May and in Berlin in the beginning of December. Gerd Marie attended both meetings, which were characterized by interesting talks with Muslims in Leicester and politicians and EKD members in Berlin.]*

A number of Muslims from different European countries were also at the Esztergom meeting along with the members of CRME with the aim to plan a European **Christian-Muslim Conference** together, which is to take place in Malines/Brussels from 20th to 23rd October 2008. The theme of the meeting will be *European Citizens and Believers. Christians and Muslims as Active Partners in European Society*. The conference in Malines will open with the presentation of both Christian and Muslim perspectives concerning the theme. The [50] participants will then work in seminar groups on the following themes:

- The role of religion in a secular society. *[Gerd Marie Ådna will be one of two moderators in this English/German seminar group. The other one will probably be a Muslim from Germany, not yet appointed.]*
- Religion as institution and as personal faith
- How do Christians and Muslims consider each other? How can mutual respect be promoted by way of education?
- Building Bridges: Challenges facing our communities

The conference in Malines will be followed by a 24 hours working unit with only the CRME committee.

In his speech Cardinal Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest and President of CCEE, who hosted the meeting, expressed his profound wish that Christians and Muslims in Europe deepen their relationship of collaboration. [...]

The agenda of the Esztergom meeting also featured discussion on two documents currently being developed. The first one concerns instances of violence where the religious dimension is involved *[So far, the text has, unfortunately, been almost useless. It will hardly be*

finalised, I fear. This working group has quite opposite views within themselves, and it will probably be difficult to agree upon one text.]; the second, formation of the clergy and pastoral practitioners on the consequences of a Muslim presence in the life of the Church in Europe. These documents will be finalised in the beginning of 2009.

[Gerd Marie Adna worked in the second committee with Andrew Wingate and Bénédicte du Chaffaut during a successful writing weekend in Paris in the beginning of March 2008. The text was positively evaluated by CRME in Esztergom but needs more treatment to be finalised. Hence, Martin Affolderbach and Paul-Lucian Brusanowski will join the working group (minus B. du Chaffaut) in a meeting in Leicester, UK, Wednesday and Thursday July 16–17, 2008.]

The dialogue that took place between the members of CRME and their Muslim guests in Esztergom concerning the *Open Letter by 138 Muslim Religious Leaders addressed to the Authorities of the Churches and Christian Confessions*, dated 13th October 2007, was an indication of the interest that this text has roused. It expresses a will to dialogue on a spiritual basis which is free of political and ideological conditioning. Numerous responses have been sent or are being prepared. The World Council of Churches is undertaking an important project with its member churches regarding the *Letter*. Great interest has also been shown concerning the Catholic-Muslim Forum that is being established as well as in the encounter between a delegation of the 138 Muslim scholars and Pope Benedict.

The other theme that was discussed with the Muslim guests was the *Charter of Muslims in Europe* which was signed on 10th January 2008 by 400 Muslim associations and organisations in Europe. *[We were told that this document has raised little interest in Muslim circles. Are there responses from Norwegian institutions?]*

Esztergom, 20th April 2008

Attendees

CEC

Prof. Dr. Paul-Lucian Brusanowski, Romanian Orthodox Church, Romania
Mrs. Dr. Gerd Marie Adna, Church of Norway
Dr. Martin Affolderbach, OKR, Evangelical Church in Germany
Rev. Berit Schelde Christensen, Lutheran Evangelical Church, Denmark
Canon Dr. Andrew Wingate, Anglican Church, England
Mrs. Rima Barsoum, World Council of Churches, Geneva *[her first meeting with CRME]*
Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita, CEC Staff, Geneva

CCEE

Mme. Prof. Bénédicte du Chaffaut, France
Fr. Joseph Ellul OP, Dominican Father, Malta (also the Delegate of the Holy See)
Fr. Dr. Claudio Monge, Turkey
Herrn Dr. Erwin Tanner, Swiss Bishops' Conference, Switzerland
Fr. Hans Vöcking, Secretary of the CCEE Commission for Migration, Germany
Prof. Kari Vogt, University of Oslo, Norway
Herrn Helmut Wiesmann, German Bishops' Conference, Germany

Mgr. Aldo Giordano, CCEE General Secretary, Switzerland
Ms Donata Bricci, CCEE Secretariat, Switzerland

Muslim Partners in Esztergom-Budapest

Imam Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini, Vice-President of CO.RE.IS., Italy. *[This Muslim man is a very interesting believer, a moderate and an intellectual who speaks many languages fluently. It would have been interesting to invite him to Norway some time.]*

Ms. Sughra Ahmed, Islamic Foundation, England *[The Norwegians who attended the Sibiu EEA3 meeting in September 2007, know Sughra Ahmed. She is a person who contributes positively in discussions especially on female issues.]*

Dr Azzedine Gaci, Conseil Régional du Culte Musulman -CRCM Rhone Alpes, France *[Gaci speaks French and Arabic and is a friendly and skilled person, but not as clear and interesting as Imam Yahya.]*

Hosting Local Church

H.E. Card. Péter Erdő, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, CCEE President, Hungary
Rev. András Héray FSO, CCEE Secretariat, Hungary

Additional comments by Gerd Marie Ådna:

I have been a member of the CRME group for the past 3½ years. With Kari Vogt and Berit Schelde Christensen I am representing the Nordic countries. Those of us who have attended regularly have become good working partners.

The problem has been those who do not attend, namely the appointed Methodist man from Portugal (came once), Metropolitan Emmanuel, Brüssels / Paris (came twice), and the Russian Orthodox representative who did not come at all, before a new one, Father Georgy came from Moscow a couple of times. Hence, the Orthodox presence has been weak. The latter one promised to attend the working group on training of clergy and imams, but he never showed up, nor answered E-mails. Luckily, the Orthodox Paul-Lucian Brusanowski from Sibiu has been a positive contribution to the CRME as well as in the working group on training clergy and imams.

The CCEE group has been quite constant. Unfortunately, CRME-member, Father Gordian Marshall, Scotland, passed away last year.

I assume that if Martin Affolderbach, EKD, had not administrated the CRME together with Andrew Wingate, the Anglican Church, the committee would have died. Viorel Ionita from the CEC secretariat shows little initiative for this work, but brought some interesting comments in the discussion in Esztergom. Mgr. Aldo Giordano, CCEE, has contributed to a positive renewal of the total work of CRME since the Berlin meeting in Dec 2007.

In every CRME meeting we bring country reports that have brought meaningful ideas for the total discussion in the group. Unfortunately, there are no plans to make these reports (must be revised) known to a wider public (CEC/CCEE homepage or similar).

I will also emphasise the morning prayers where the vocal voices from Catholics and Protestants (the Orthodox members seldom attend the Catholic Mass) have been united. These moments happen to be among my best experiences during the 6 past meetings.

That the Esztergom-Budapest meeting, thanks to H.E. Card. Péter Erdö, ended by going to the Budapest Opera and to a delicious meal in a restaurant near by was an extra that we have never experienced before.

As mentioned above, the conference in Malines/Brussels, CRME will be followed by a regular CRME meeting in January 2009 where the two texts will be finalised. At that point my responsibility in CRME will also be finished. I am grateful to be a part of this interesting process.

23 April, 2008