



European Network on Religion & Belief

ENORB BULLETIN - Winter 2014 - 2015

HAPPY NEW YEAR?

The New Year has started no better than the old year, in relation to the concerns of ENORB and its members. The Paris massacres of journalists, police and artists at the office of Charlie Hebdo and in a kosher supermarket have underlined once again the urgent need for transnational work towards a genuinely plural Europe.

The responses from communities across Europe have demonstrated the commitment of the mass of EU people of all faiths and none to the European ideals of peace, freedom and human rights. The reality of the EU slogan of unity in diversity, and the balance of basic rights - of freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief - and between freedom and responsibility - have been severely tested. But the ongoing discussions at local and national levels on how these can be reconciled, given the differing cultural contexts and understandings of a secular state in different parts of Europe, are evidence of how far fundamental values are shared.

ENORB's task of promoting such dialogues, as well as struggling against all forms of discrimination and hate-crime, has been recognised at a recent meeting at the new European presidency as being more urgent than ever. The good news in the rest of this bulletin and the responses from European institutions, member states and grassroots organisations, faith communities and humanist associations is further testimony to our hope that we are working along the right lines.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND MEMBER STATE SEMINARS



Our two main policy priorities, approved at our 2014 General Assembly, have both attracted (very) small grants: for both the collaboration with ILGA on the interface between LGBT rights and freedom of religion and belief, and with ENAR on freedom of religious dress and symbols. Both of these are key issues in exploring the role of religion and belief and Europe's secular cultures in a plural Europe.

The funding will permit small subsidies to those member state organisations which take responsibility to organise local seminars; a minimum of five for our collaboration with ILGA, and two or three on issues around freedom of religion and belief. ENORB's voluntary executive members will also be available - in the form of speakers and organisational support for each local seminar.

Please email enorb@enorb.eu for details and a preliminary conversation or visit!

NEXT ENORB SEMINAR - March 26 - 27

The promised ENORB/ILGA Seminar will be held on March 26-27 in Brussels, on the interface between two key aspects of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights - freedom of religion and belief and LGBT rights.

We apologise for the postponed date for this, and because this is a joint seminar, and our venue will hold only around 50 people, places will be strictly limited. Priority will be given to those coming from more distant parts of Europe. ENORB has a small grant to contribute to the costs of travel for those from community or underfunded organisations. Please email enorb@enorb.eu for details.

NEW EUROPEAN PRESIDENCY

Most of you will be aware that new President Juncker has made the implementation of draft Equal Treatment Directives a priority. This extends equalities and anti-discrimination legislation to areas outside employment, such as education, health and other services, and has been blocked by several member states since being passed by the European Parliament in 2008. He has given responsibility for

this task to First Vice-President Frans Timmermans, who held an initial meeting with all the EU Equalities Networks on January 9th at which ENORB was represented.

Mr Timmermans also has responsibility for the 'Article 17' EU dialogue with Religion and Belief communities, and ENORB, along with the other European level R&B organisations, has requested a meeting under this dialogue process. Similar meetings will follow in February with the new Commissioner, Vera Jourova at DG Justice, which has direct responsibility for our work, and with the European Parliament presidency.

FUTURE STRATEGY

In Summer 2015, ENORB will complete both 5 years work on developing the concept and reality of a European Network on Religion and Belief, and the 3 years as a formally registered ASBL (not-for-profit association) in Brussels, which is a requirement for us to be eligible for core funding as a Network. There is of course no guarantee that we will be successful in any application for funding, but the increased recognition at EU institutions is evidence that we are taken seriously in this field.

RELATIONS WITH ECRL AND OTHER BODIES

The European Council of Religious Leaders has recently re-located from Norway to London, with the appointment of Jehangir Sarosh as General Secretary to succeed Stein Villumstad, who spoke at last years AGM.

Our Vice- President, Yolande Iliano (also President of Religions for Peace), is a key member of ECRL, and relations have always been close. We are currently talking about working more actively together with a joint project, and other possible shared activities in the future.

Our links with other bodies, such as HRWF, EPRID, CEC-KEK, COMECE and EHF continue to be a priority for the coming five year period.

EU PARLIAMENT - NEW FoRB INTERGROUP

Congratulations to Dennis De Jongh on his success in attracting support from MEPs to formalise his form EP Working Group into a new EP Intergroup on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FORB) and Religious Tolerance, which gives them access to better funding as well as status.

Their focus is still on FORB beyond Europe, but we hope to organise a joint meeting or seminar with them, probably on the links between FORB in the Middle East and Europe later this year.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

SERIC (Semaine de Rencontres Islamo-Chrétiennes) with its November week of interfaith activities in European countries, had participation from nine countries in 2014. Its annual conference will be held in Bergen in Netherlands on January 23rd-25th. Contact Han Steijnebrugh at training@stein.net to attend.

ENORB UK held a successful Interfaith Week event in November with Humanists, addressed by Andrew Copson, President of BHA (the British Humanist Association).

Regional Workshop on EU Volunteers Initiative, 26 January 2015

As part of the Slovenian Development Days, organized by Slovenian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and SLOGA Platform, a Regional Workshop will be organized on the topic of EU Volunteers Initiative.

It will be held on 26 January 2015. The Workshop will take place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Prešernova cesta 25, Ljubljana) between 13.00 and 16.15.

Prior to the workshop, an informal meeting of NGOs will be organized by SLOGA platform with the aim of identifying cooperation possibilities. The meeting will take place between 10.00 in 11.30 at SLOGA (Metelkova 6, Ljubljana).

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For further information and to contact ENORB, email enorb@enorb.eu, visit the website www.enorb.eu and follow ENORB on twitter [@enorb_eu](https://twitter.com/enorb_eu).