



European Network on Religion & Belief

ENORB BULLETIN - Summer 2016

Greetings to you all

First ...

It is hard to accept that we are sending out this bulletin after another period of horror and violence in Europe. First we want to remember in love the victims of the attacks in Nice, Rouen and Bavaria: families, children, tourists, visitors and local residents. As well as mourning the dead, and sending love to the injured and their families, we, as representatives of the very different religions and belief traditions across Europe, express our solidarity with the French and German people at this time of horror, pain and suffering.

We also remember those who died in the attacks in Ankara on the government of Turkey, the injured and to all families and friends of those who have suffered during the attempted coup, and its aftermath, along with all who continue to suffer as a result of war across the Middle East. We unite across all traditions of religion and belief to call for peaceful settlements of disputes and for building solidarity across divisions and reject all acts or policies of revenge which employ violence or repression.

DATES FOR DIARIES

Next Seminar – September 13-14 – Reconciling Values, Religion and Human Rights

The next ENORB seminar will be held in Brussels on September 13-14, on the topic of:

Reconciling Values, Religion/Belief and Human Rights, register at: enorb9@Eventbrite.org.uk .

It will focus especially on those aspects of Human Rights, including some key components of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which have come under attack by far-right groups in parts of Europe and also regrettably, by some groups, including members of the hierarchies, of the key European religion or belief (R&B) traditions. ENORB's support to Europe's religious minorities - particularly those who wear some form of religious dress or symbol - and our support for solidarity between religion and belief and LGBT communities, have also been the subject of attack. This seminar will be an opportunity to exploring these challenges, and to reaffirm the implications of human rights for all.

The aims of the seminar will be both exploratory and practical:

- To identify shared and positive values which can be subscribed to by all R&B traditions across Europe in all its diversity
- To build campaigning partnerships between R&B and LGBT organisations for local action to combat hate crime and implement key fundamental rights which are under attack in several parts of Europe.

Religion, Belief and Gender - January 18-19

This topic was identified as a priority by our AGM, and we have been holding discussions with the EWF (European Women's Lobby), which is the EU Equality Network covering these issues, as well as our member organisations such as the EWFN (European Women of Faith Network), and WIN (Women's Interfaith Network) on how best to organise this seminar.

The coming year is the EU Year Against Domestic Violence, so that as well as covering the topics of women's position in the churches and religions, it will be able to explore that issue, and will also provide a safe space to address some of the highly controversial debates around family and reproductive rights, where ENORB's experience in managing such discussions may be helpful.

NEW ENORB PROJECT FUNDING FOR 2016-17

We have signed contracts in the last month for two one-year projects. The Open Society Foundation has again supported us with a small grant towards our core work and to build our capacity as an organisation in the field of communication and advocacy. This will also enable ENORB to support 2-3 small projects in member states, especially in Western Europe, to organise local seminars on a topic in the field of freedom of religion and belief, and could possibly include some capacity-building for participating member state national inter-faith networks. Contact enorb@enorb.eu if interested.

Our main project funding this year comes from the Arcus Foundation, which is supporting the ENORB/ILGA programme of member state seminars on religion/belief and LGBT Rights, primarily in Eastern European countries. These seminars are designed to support a process of exploring and reviewing the current positions on LGBT rights held by the major churches and religions. Funding of €500+ is available to organisations from any member state which did not participate in the 2016 programme. For more information, contact mark.barwick@gmail.com or info@enorb.eu but if you want your country to participate, you should first sign up for the coming **ENORB Seminar on September 13-14 at: enorb9@Eventbrite.co.uk**.

Churches which have already led or participated in such action have included Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Anglican and Pentecostal. Other religions which have been involved in hosting internal exploratory seminars include Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs.

Member states involved in last year's programme included Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Malta, Spain, UK, Belgium. The report of the project is available on the website at www.enorb.eu. Do contact us if you would like to find out more information about what is planned in your own country.

Other Project Funding for ENORB partners in Member States

ODHIR have recently issued a call for small-scale funding for local projects on combating Anti-Semitism: (deadline August 7th!!). Application form at: www.osce.org/odhir/254901

ENORB AGM 2016

This was held in Brussels on May 30th and was followed by a Workshop on '**Security, Freedom and Solidarity: Responding to the Current Crisis in the European Union**'. The keynote speech was by Professor Erica Howard who spoke from her experience of the situation in the Netherlands, where politics has become increasingly polarised and aggressive, at least partly as a response by politicians from mainstream parties who feel the need to match the populist rhetoric of the far-right politician Geert Wilders. She also cited the campaign against the EU in UK, where right wing politicians had also resorted to lies and abusive language. The use of inflammatory language against migrants, refugees, minorities in general, especially Muslims, using urban myths and exaggerated anecdotes, is increasing across Europe, contaminating the public sphere, and creating an "us" versus "them" atmosphere.

She then explored whether the comments and speeches by Wilders and other right wing politicians are permissible within the limits of the human right to freedom of speech, or whether they amount to hate speech, inciting to hatred and violence. She concluded that using hate speech law is not the answer, but 'more speech is needed': ie seminars, debates and interventions from organisations like ENORB which show positive and alternative narratives.

Other inputs came from Nasr Erami, from the Inclusive Mosque in Paris, who pointed out the difficulty that mainstream and liberal Muslims had in being heard, especially in a context where secular was increasingly being interpreted as anti-religious, or at least anti-Muslim. The debates continued during and after the seminar, and a report summarising the AGM debates in 2015-16 will be published on the website later this year.

Seminar on Education on Religion, June 1st

This seminar was led by ENORB's vice-president, Robin Sclafani, director of CEJI, which has developed the Belieforma programme providing resources for teaching on religion in schools and adult settings, and opened by the Mayor, Emir Kir. The full title was '**Exploring the Positive Potential of Education on Religion, Conviction and Belief: a Smorgasbord of good practice**'.

The keynote speaker was James Barnett, from the Coordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe (COGREE), who had been chair of the Council of Europe's working group on this topic. His speech focused on the need, greater than ever before, for today's young people to have a proper grounding, not so much in the facts of each religion, but in what religion means to those who practice it as a basis for a good way of living. He quoted the Council of Europe proposal, in its White paper on Intercultural Dialogue, that we could teach religious facts - not, of course, confined to one religion - basic practice and doctrines, but the document is written in French and uses *les faits* in the plural. The problem is that *le fait* and *les faits* are not quite the singular and plural of the same concept. *Le fait* is more global and less easy to define. One can make a list of *les faits* but learning them does not initiate a person into the practice and ambiance of a religion, which is the essential basis for mutual understanding of belief or non-belief. His very extensive paper drew on his many years of experience in this field, and will be published in the report of the seminar.

A Round Table followed, which included contributions from Arnaud Benizri from the Belgian Ministry of Education, Danae Anasopoulos from the European Commission DG Education and Paul Weller, Professor of Inter-Religious Relations at the University of Derby, each of whom gave examples of the ways in which learning about, and where possible, experiencing other people's religion or beliefs, including those of atheists and humanists, through dialogue and discussions, visits and meetings, was vital to young people's understanding of Europe today and some of its major challenges.

The afternoon was devoted to exchanges and demonstrations of resources for schools and communities, including Belieforama www.belieforama.eu, Mo and Moos (www.mo+moos.nl) from the Netherlands, also offering intercultural resources, and All Faiths and None (AFAN), which demonstrated its interactive methodology based on the Big Questions - about God, Sex, Death etc - suggested by young people (with resources and video-clips at: www.afan.uk.net).

A report, gathering together the main inputs and workshop discussions will be published later this year and available on the website.

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).