

**EUROPEAN NETWORK ON RELIGION AND BELIEF**

**DRAFT REPORT**

**INAUGURAL SEMINAR**

**on the topic of**

**SECURITY IN EUROPE**

**Brussels, May 29-30, 2012:**

**Day 1: European Parliament, Day 2: Centre 'ESPACES'**

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# **REPORT ON ENORB INAUGURAL SEMINAR on the topic of SECURITY IN EUROPE**

**Brussels, May 29-30 2012; Day 1: European Parliament; Day 2: Centre 'ESPACES'**

## **1. Introduction**

This report is a synthesis, based on brief notes and comments from various participants. It is not a detailed formal report on the proceedings: no names are mentioned and no quotations given. It draws on contributions to the seminar and workshops on Day 2, as well as to the Round-Table on Day 1. A full list of speakers and participants is to be found in Appendix 1.

Dr Laszlo Surjan, Vice President, European Parliament opened and introduced the Round-Table. Discussion was chaired by Alan Murray, President, European Network on Religion and Belief. Dr Surjan welcomed the 48 organisations represented at the Round-Table, as a good representation of Europe's diversity of Religion and Belief. He had three hopes for the seminar:

- That participants could demonstrate that the fear, sometimes expressed in EU circles, that representatives of such diverse religion and belief traditions would not be capable of sitting together to engage in an open and frank debate on a topic of EU policy, was a false fear
- That participants could move on from the "debate about the debate" (ie on Article 19) into real debate on a key topic of EU policy on the basis of the EU Treaties
- That the round-table and seminar could yield useful commentaries on the urgent topic of Security in Europe.

## **2. General Responses**

The general response from speakers and participants to this European initiative of a seminar on Security in Europe was overwhelmingly positive. The response to forming a European network in the field of religion and belief - based on the fundamental rights and equalities enshrined in the EU treaties, with the key aims of combating discrimination and promoting mutual understanding - was unanimous. No-one questioned the value of such a network and many pointed out that it was long overdue, when compared with the 10-15 years history of generous EU support for anti-discrimination networks on other equalities strands, such as Race, Gender, Sexual Orientation etc. Three key general points were made, and two reservations were expressed.

### **Key Points**

- Many speakers pointed to the importance and originality of the network in bringing together religious and non-religious organisations, faith community and atheist networks – and of recognising that they share most ethical values and often work for similar aims, despite important differences both within and between religious and non-religious groups.
- Others pointed to the revival of interest in matters of religion and belief, especially among young people and younger adults, has been accompanied, in some areas of Europe, by increased discriminatory behaviour, conflictual incidents, and even violent actions. Discussion and growth in mutual understanding between religious and non-religious organisations is the best way to move forward.

- Publicity, at European level, and effective dissemination in all member-states, for activities such as this which demonstrate how religious and non-religious groups can work together was important to counter media emphasis on conflict, violence and division.

**Reservations** were voiced by two speakers:

- Participation in initiatives such as ENORB should not be understood as replacing or removing the need for different religious and non-religious groups to organise their own forums, European networks and public statements.
- The status of any ENORB seminar or report is quite different from the status of the debates and reports undertaken in the normal EU policy forums under the auspices of Parliament, EU Councils etc. ENORB could make a valuable contribution to EU policy debates if it was seen to be clearly distinct from such structures.

### **3. Discussion on Topics: 1 - Threats to Security: Hate Crime**

#### **3.1 Introductory Points**

Speakers emphasised that hate-crime was a permanent feature of European and other societies: there were religious and anti-religious sources for such crimes, sometimes drawing justification from well-known texts, referring to specific religious groups, or to the non-religious; examples were given. Evidence of the rise of such crimes, against Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Humanists and others in different parts of Europe, and of the hate-speech which often preceded them, was also given. Issues raised included: the seemingly permanent need for communities to find scapegoats, especially at times of crisis (including the current economic crisis, which had seen a rise in the reported incidence of such crimes, noted by ENAR, in some countries). The legitimating of hate discourse by some extreme-right political parties was also raised as an important issue. The special role of Religion and Belief organisations of all kinds was seen as in initiating and contributing to peaceful actions and protests against such hate speech and crimes - as in the work of such organisations as Religions for Peace, Alliance for a Secular Europe etc.

**Positive suggestions** for policy initiatives at European level, and for ENORB support to EU policy implementation at member-state level, were raised by many speakers. These can be grouped under three broad headings: Preventive Action; Effective Response; Engagement and Solidarity.

#### **3.2 Preventive Action**

**Education** - of young people and of children in the fundamental rights of freedom of religion and belief and in the modern diversity of belief in Europe and beyond, was seen by many as the most urgent area for preventive action at European and member-state levels. Several countries had already introduced such inter-convictional education, and the methods and results should be tested and disseminated through EU networks.

**Public Actions.** Religion and Belief traditions can demonstrate and publicise their agreement on many moral, social and humanitarian issues – as is demonstrated by the work of Religions for Peace, Alliance for a Secular Europe, Oxfam, AFAN, Medecins Sans Frontières and many others - in sharing information, responding to major events, creating cultural events, and working together on campaigns – at local, national and European levels.

**Networking** between religion and belief organisations (and with other networks such as ENAR, ILGA) especially at local level could combat the fact that many such crimes are hidden or go unreported due to a climate of fear and a lack of advocacy groups in the R & B field.

**Media images of Religion and Belief traditions** – that they spend their time disputing and fighting with each other - can be countered through positive initiatives such as this seminar, ENORB and other organisations and networks, and good use of public and social media to publicise positive stories and activities.

### 3.3 Effective Responses

**Local Responses** – Responses to major hate-crimes, as in Toulouse 2012 and Oslo 2011 have been high-profile, inter-faith and usually inter-convictional, involving both religious and secular/city authorities. Examples were given of similar responses to local-level desecrations of Mosques, Synagogues, Christian Cemeteries or even attacks on secular institutions such as schools, Sexual Health Clinics etc. But it was pointed out that in some parts of Europe, there have been no such inter-community responses to hate-crimes – or if there have been, they have not been reported in the media.

**Local and National responses** could be much improved by more effective local networks – inter-faith and inter-convictional – and by trans-national exchanges, training and capacity building.

**European-Level Responses** – It was argued that the possibility for European level responses to specific hate-crimes is limited, partly by EU constitutional limitations – *both* its lack of competence in matters of religion *and* by the principle of subsidiarity. *Implementation* of fundamental rights (including race, gender etc) is within the competence of the member-states, not the EU, though the support given by European networks has been vital. It was suggested in one group that ENORB could organise, in collaboration with others, eg RfP, an inter-convictional presence or visit when an event of European-level importance occurred.

Some speakers welcomed the occasional clear statements by EU Parliament and Presidency on some issues, but argued that they have not had any real impact at grassroots level. The annual formal meetings with religious and non-religious leaders are important symbols, but more effective interaction with religion and belief organisations is needed, many speakers said. The European Commission has, since the 1990s, funded and supported networks on other strands of fundamental rights (eg anti-discrimination networks on race, gender, disability etc), which should be supplemented by a network in relation to religion and belief. Such a network could make a real impact on grassroots climates of fear and hatred, by facilitating training, capacity-building and actions at local level, where few clergy, religious leaders or humanist activists have relevant expertise (including media presentation or working with political leadership).

### 3.4 Engagement and solidarity

One contributor said that hate crimes and hate speech on religion/belief issues provoke two kinds of reaction: firstly a reaction of outrage, sympathy and solidarity – *with* the victims of the crime. Secondly, they provoke an opposite reaction – of further anger, hostility and hate-crimes *against* the victims of the crime.

**Ongoing Support** is needed, it was suggested, to engage with those who have suffered and to demonstrate the solidarity of local people, institutions etc, with the victims, and to support those in the community who have been affected by the event. Engagement is also required with the perpetrators, and with those who support them, especially when young people are involved, to counter the anger and hatred which can build up in communities and lead to further hate-crimes.

**Educational and other Policy Initiatives** at European as well as member-state level can help to support and publicise such engagement, and to provide resources to support local initiatives which may prevent further outbreaks.

## **4. Topic 2: Threats to Security: Discrimination and Violent Extremism**

### **4.1 Introductory Points**

**Conceptual Clarity.** It was pointed out in an opening speech that these two concepts do not naturally go together. Discrimination, especially if it is over a long period and appears to be systemic, of course may provoke extremist reactions, including violence and terrorism. But discrimination also operates in many other forms – especially in employment, social affairs, economics, education, covered by the EU treaties and EU Directorates and by EU funded networks. There was discussion in some workshops of the complexity of these issues: for example, some Western European countries with large religious minorities had totally different historical contexts, and consequently priorities) from some Eastern European countries – eg where the churches had been persecuted under communism.

**Taking Religion and Belief Seriously.** This was also seen by speakers as a complex issue - two examples were given – one of an attitude which had been prevalent among some EC officials who interpreted the EU's role in relation to religion and belief as to ensure that a 'fundamentalist' version of laicisme/secularism (ie the eradication of religion and belief from any role in public life, and their relegation to a purely private, individual sphere) was implemented across the EU. This, it was argued, was taking religion and belief (as a threat) too seriously! But the mindset that permeated many communist states, and at least partially some strongly secular states, that religions have no right to contribute to political debate or even participate in public life was declining, according to several speakers from both religious and non-religious perspectives. Others emphasised that any interventions by R&B organisations should be public (ie transparent) and should not use private communication channels which were suspected of having undue influence in some quarters.

The second example given was of the increasing number of seminars and round-tables, on religion and belief topics, being held under the sponsorship of MEPs by groups from the Churches, Muslim, Hindu and other religious - and non-religious groups, such as the Secular Europe group. It was agreed that these initiatives played a valuable role in highlighting the views of different religious and non-religious perspectives, but did not facilitate inter-convictional discussion, did not provide opportunities for identifying common positions on matters of EU policy, and did not have local impact on discrimination, extremism, European security etc.

## 4.2 Preventive Action

**Violent Extremism.** This was the subject of several interventions in the debate. It was pointed out that promoting security from violent extremist and terrorist attacks was a European policy issue of greater importance than many others. Distinctions were drawn between the vast law-abiding majorities of all religious and non-religious traditions, and the small groups of extremists. European-level leadership was needed at political level to show clearly that scape-goating of any community was always wrong, and that violence was an unacceptable political method which could be, and had been, used by non-religious as well as religious minorities and majorities of all kinds. Muslims in France, UK, Spain in the 2000s, no more than Catholics in UK and Holland in the 1970s/80s, should not be subject to discrimination because of the violent actions of a tiny minority.

In general, speakers were supportive of current EU preventive actions in this area: the EEAJ (Foreign Affairs) Directorate's attempts to engage with those countries where violent extremism was being encouraged; its policies of engagement with peace processes in various parts of the world and its position as a mediator, in the Balkans, Middle East, Afghanistan etc. Some of these conflicts and tensions had religious (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) origins, as well as political, post-colonialist, and post-communist origins. There were of course critical voices raised during the discussion, but the EU's emerging role was seen as positive. In terms of the phenomena of violent terrorist attacks, whether from extremist Muslim sources (Toulouse 2012) or from extremist Christian right-wing sources (Oslo 2011), the importance of a European level response, at Presidential and Parliamentary levels, was also vital. There were also calls from participants for active EU support and funding of networks like ENORB which could nurture the development of local inter-convictional organisations which could directly engage with extremist groups from a perspective of tolerance and harmony.

**Discrimination in Employment, Education, Social Provision and Public Space.** This was seen by speakers both from majority and minority religions, and from humanist and atheist organisations as a vital area - where the EU could make a major contribution to preventive action. A number of areas of which impact on employment regulations were mentioned in discussion, such as the freedom to wear religious dress or insignia, where implementation of anti-discrimination policies on grounds of Religion and Belief were not being adequately supported by EU or EU-level networks. Some of these involved current cases with the European Courts, and some involved balancing one area of equality or freedom in relation to another. Others involved morally complex issues concerning possible conflicts between religious belief and sexual orientation, cultural practices such as genital mutilation (male as well as female) for religious or 'hygienic' reasons. Neither EU policies, nor EU officials, were in a position to solve such problems, but voluntary networks, such as ENAR and ILGA were already assisting national equalities bodies and ordinary citizens in tackling similar controversial issues, but had been handicapped by the lack of any specialist EU network on religion and belief in tackling such issues. Such a network, as well as giving a higher profile to these important areas of discrimination could promote more effective collaboration with existing networks, and national equalities bodies. This could make a major contribution to developing effective consultation processes, prevention of such conflicts, avoidance of escalation into serious incidents, and preventive extreme or violent reactions.

Similar points were made by other speakers, and in workshops, about the preventive action which should be introduced in areas such as Social Provision, Education and Culture, and Public Space, where networking and dialogue could prevent discrimination and conflict. In Education, it was pointed out that Sikh children in some member-states

were being refused education in state schools because of lack of understanding of religious obligations on dress, in addition to the more highly publicised conflicts in relation to Muslim girls.

### 4.3 Effective Responses

**EU Institutions: Implementation of Anti-Discrimination Policies.** Speakers recognised that the most effective response, to both discrimination and violence, was at local member-state levels. EU policies and funding could support the sharing of expertise and experience, as with other areas of equalities, but only in support of local and national work. Speakers argued that effective implementation of EU policies against discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in employment, education, social services, economic opportunities etc, were vital, and were the most effective EU level response. The EU directives and treaty obligations in the field of equalities were seen as crucial – as were the networks which support them – but it was suggested that the current lack of expertise in the field of discrimination on grounds of religion and belief was preventing progress in some countries. More effective networking, training and action, leading to more visible implementation of anti-discrimination policies, would have immediate *short-term* local effects, in raising awareness and reducing discrimination. But it would also attack some of the long-term root causes of violent extremism - in real and perceived discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and attitudes among religious and non-religious majorities.

**EU Non-governmental and Civil Society Structures: Implementation.** Many speakers argued that a new Religion and Belief network, along the lines of ENORB, is needed in order to emulate the success of other similar EU networks, not only in combating discrimination and supporting the implementation of fundamental rights and equalities, but also in facilitating engagement between minority groups and ‘mainstream’ society so as promote tolerance and understanding. One speaker saw it as especially necessary in the field of Religion and Belief because of the *huge contextual differences* in historical traditions and contemporary contexts of different regions of Europe, different member-states – *and* different regions and localities in some member-states. Only such a European Network of national networks could achieve the necessary geographical coverage of all Europe, and maintain a balance between the priorities of the huge Christian populations of the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches, the National Churches, the priorities of the other large Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam, those of smaller minority religious groups (notably Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs) *and* the comparably huge numbers of the non-religious, especially those represented by humanist, atheist and ‘free-thinking’ organisations.

### 4.4 Engagement and Solidarity

**Dialogue and Education** – Several speakers emphasised the importance of ensuring that myths, prejudice and misunderstanding of both religious belief *and* unbelief are countered, especially among young people who may be particularly susceptible to extreme ideas. Education, including dialogue across the generations and between communities, are the most effective *long-term* methods of reducing discrimination, conflict *and* attacking the root causes of violent extremism in minority communities and among far-right groups, and of everyday, normalised discrimination at local and European levels. Although these were member-state's responsibilities, several participants argued that EU could play an effective role by supporting networks and EU-level mechanisms to promote dialogue and inter-convictional education.

**Community Action** is the other important response at local level in the long term, to emphasise the shared European traditions of non-violence in both religious and non-religious communities, to demonstrate the shared common values across all traditions, and to build local communities of trust. But it was pointed out by several speakers (including speakers from Sikh, Bahai and Shia Muslim communities) that smaller minorities do not have access to any European-level networks or institutions, and are often ignored in their member-states. Their specific needs may well be great, but can be ignored by state authorities, unless they can make their voices heard through community action, with solidarity from inter-convictional groups that, thus building their capacity to make an effective contribution to European society.

## **5. Topic 3: Secular European Traditions: What Contribution to European Security?**

### **5.1 Introductory Points**

**Historical Legacy** – the origins of the European secular tradition – with the initial aim of protecting freedom of religion and belief of all kinds – were explored by the speakers in this part of the discussion. The role of a secular state, entirely distinct from the Church, free from interference or undue influence by powerful religious institutions, especially in preventing war in earlier periods of European history was emphasised by several speakers.

The different forms of secular settlement between church and state in different member-states were explored, with various degrees of separation. For example, some speakers spoke out against the ‘fundamentalist’ forms of ‘laïcisme’ which in some EU countries were excluding some children from schools, or their parents from public employment or even from being a visible presence in public spaces such as town halls, because of dress and other regulations. No contributors spoke in favour of this form of ‘hard’ secularism, but several argued that much work was needed by ENORB and other EU institutions to work out new definitions of secularism for the new century.

**Secular Policies.** Other contributors emphasised that such policies did not seek to ban religion from the public square, or anyone from expressing views on politics or on specific policies. Where this occurred, as in the case of some Christians and Muslims in some recent high profile cases, it was opposed by most Humanist organisations. Secular policies made an important contribution to security by removing one cause of a sense of discrimination emerging among religious or humanist/atheist minorities. A secular state and Europe should protect the freedoms of religion and belief of all, and balanced and humane policies should ensure that all had equal access to education, social and other forms of public provision.

**Distinctions among Secular States.** It was argued these were also important to European security. One speaker focused especially on such differences – as between the French/S. European stronger notion of secular ‘laïcité’ as compared to the British/N. European notion of a secular state, with a national church which had certain formal political roles, sometimes in relation to monarchy. Different concepts of laïcité in different Muslim traditions were explored, including some where there was little or no distinction between the roles of religious and state authorities, and others where such differences and power relations were very subtle. It was also argued strongly that Muslims living in Europe, in their immense majority, accepted and often welcomed the European secular traditions.

Different concepts of the secular had also emerged in some Eastern European countries, with the emergence of post-communist regimes in countries where there had been persecution of the Churches, or harsh policies to prevent any form of religious self-expression.

## 5.2 Preventive Action

**Implications for ENORB and other R&B Networks.** Contributors said that the most important precondition for preventive action in any disputes over secularism, laïcisme and over policies deriving from these was clarity about definitions and contexts across Europe. It was recommended by some participants, that there was work to do (perhaps by ENORB) on different concepts of the secular tradition, different definitions of secularism, and the different forms of 'laïciste' or secularist policy/policies across Europe, which could lead to a report, possibly published by the EU.

There was both a need to move away from automatic negative reactions to each others' motives, by both religious and non-religious organisations and a need for religious and non-religious organisations to stop seeking privileged or undemocratic channels to advance their views.

**Implications for the European Union.** It was suggested by several participants that the complexities of definitions and concepts of secularism, and their implications for Europe and member-states, could be acknowledged and explored openly at EU policy level, including by Parliament and Presidency rather than being treated as 'no go areas' for discussion. Such clarification, one workshop speaker argued, could be of great benefit to EU officials in developing and implementing policies in relation to religion and belief.

**5.3 Effective Response: Engagement and Dialogue.** It was also argued that the most effective response to conflicts over secularism and laïcité, was by promoting more dialogue *between* religious and non-religious activists and authorities. Dialogue - between the EU and the different actors, religious and non-religious - could also help to improve understanding and dispel misconceptions which could lead to potential extremism at national and local levels. The EU could promote such dialogue, specifically between religion and belief organisations, in order to improve mutual understanding and social harmony between radically different groups.

Some speakers emphasised that the dangers from far-right extremism were at least as great as those from Al Qaeda, and potentially much greater for European security in the long term. Further work, to support that already being undertaken by ENAR, was needed on this issue. Again it was argued that the networks or forums which brought together religion and belief groups had the necessary knowledge and understanding to promote such exploration at national and local levels, in collaboration with anti-racist networks.

## 6. Legitimate Disagreement: Moving from Anger/Violence to Dialogue and Joint Action

### 6.1 Introductory Points

**Dialogue and Exchange.** Speakers on this topic initially focused on the many opportunities which already exist for inter-faith and inter-convictional dialogue, encounters, visits and exchanges. Most of these are of course funded by foundations, individuals, religious, humanist, inter-convictional and other associations, churches, faith communities etc, but some have been funded through the EU, especially in its Year of Inter-Cultural

Dialogue. There were also follow-up meetings and exchanges, via speeches and intervention on Grundtvig. The Council of Europe and the OECD have funded other meetings and seminars, but for the EU, it appears that until this year, religion and belief have been 'no-go' areas, in the period when public interest in religion, belief and unbelief, and in dialogue across boundaries have become stronger. The interpretation put on the EU's 'lack of competence' in matters of religion and belief in some quarters, plus the increasingly strong secularist reaction after 2001 (9/11) and 2005 (7/7), has meant that even EU funding for important Europe-wide initiatives, such as Soul for Europe and SERIC(Semaines Européennes Islamo-Chrétiennes) has dried up since 2006.

**Leaning to “Agree to Disagree”**, on some issues, usually of belief or unbelief, but to explore how to work together on the much greater areas where there was fundamental agreement, usually issues relating to values, was felt by one speaker to be the major outcome of seminars such as this – and was also an urgent need across the whole of European society. Debates on differences (both on issues of belief *and* values) were important, and the divisions were of as great, or greater, within religious and non-religious traditions, than between them. But the practical reality was, it was argued by several speakers from countries with experience of inter-religious and inter-convictional dialogue and joint action, that whenever different groups came together, either in relation to a major public event, or in relation to a minor local problem, they normally found themselves in agreement, and were able to make joint statements, organise demonstrations of solidarity, or to work together at grassroots levels.

## 6.2 Preventive Action

**Short-term benefits.** There have been immense benefits from these exchanges and encounters, in terms of preventive action to reduce threats to security both in areas of recent conflict, such as Bosnia and N. Ireland, and in areas where there has been a history of conflict between religion and the state, as in some E. European countries. Benefits have been felt at all levels - City and National Governments, different religious authorities, secular/religious authorities, sometimes leading to concrete immediate benefits in terms of reduced discrimination and violent incidents (eg UK, Ireland), in addition to increased mutual understanding .

**Longer-term benefits for European Security Priorities.** Some speakers pointed out that the main threats to European security came not from the leadership of political and religious/belief traditions – despite the irresponsible speeches and activities of some such leaders – but from smaller groups of EU citizens, who felt themselves abandoned by mainstream society. Inter-convictional structures in some EU countries had developed successful strategies to bring representatives of such groups together with local citizens and their representatives to ensure their views were heard and to engage them in local political and European processes in order to make a long-term impact on the security situation in member-states. The strategies quoted included:

**Local Action** - to tackle directly discrimination against excluded groups in areas such as employment, education, religious observance (eg unemployed young people in several EU states from majority and religious minority groups; members of smaller religious minorities who were sometimes excluded from mainstream political activity) had been undertaken by several organisations represented at the EP Round-Table.

**National and European Actions** - This sort of local action had been networked and developed in other localities (and even in other EU member-states) by some organisations

represented. If inter-convictional structures and networks could be set up in each EU member-state, they could undertake training and capacity-building activities for local inter-convictional groups in key cities and regions, to enable similar local actions wherever they were needed.

### 6.3 Effective Responses

**European Level: EU Consultative Processes.** Two speakers pointed out that there are currently no consultative structures by which either EU officials or European Parliamentary representatives (MEPs) could seek the views of Religion and Belief organisations<sup>1</sup>. It was also argued that the annual meetings with the EU and EP Presidents, though useful in terms of media/photo visibility and publicity, had proved ineffective in generating real consultation and discussion on issues important to EU policy.

**EU/EC Networking Processes** - Other speakers pointed to the successful role the European Commission had played in disseminating EU policies, both in member-states legal and administrative structures and in stimulating real citizens' uptake of the Equalities and Fundamental Rights directives on the different Equalities strands: Race, Gender, Age, Disability, and Sexuality (ENAR, for example, had made a significant contribution to the organisation of this seminar). Each of these strands raised different legal and moral issues, and there were areas of confusion, conflicting priorities and doubts about applicability (in terms of combating discrimination) in different member-state contexts. The same was true in the complex area of Religion and Belief. The lack of a network where these issues could be raised and explored, one speaker pointed out – was contributing to the difficulties experienced both at EU level (officials *and* Parliament) and at member-state levels, in supporting fair and consistent implementation of the fundamental right to freedom of religion and belief.

**Local and National levels** - Specific examples of effective responses given included:

- Measurable reductions in racist or religiously prejudicial views after inter-convictional educational activities/visits/exchanges
- Health improvements following discussion on the applicability of religiously-based dietary restrictions in new geographical contexts
- Conflict resolution between different religious groups and between religious and secular groups on building religious worship spaces
- Removal of discriminatory legal restrictions eg removal of discriminatory employment legislation against atheists; and against wearing culturally and/or religiously required dress at school and work.

### 6.3 Engagement and Solidarity

**Mutual Understanding and Social Harmony** - For many participants, the most important result of the engagement and dialogue achieved through such exchanges and visits – including the example of this seminar – was the reduction in fear, anger and hostility which occurred during *and after* such meetings, which then led to the setting up of *ongoing structures* which could work for practical results. In several contexts (eg Milan, Rotterdam, Tampere, Krakow) such local inter-convictional groups had achieved funding from the City

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<sup>1</sup> One session on Day 2 explored with an MEP the possibility of a European Parliamentary sub-group on Religion & Belief

Authority for regular meetings which had organised public demonstrations of solidarity on specific local conflicts.

The view that revival of interest in religion – and in humanism and in some rural regions, paganism and other attempts to make sense of human life - has, in some parts of Europe, led to increases in hostility between different worldviews was explored by two speakers. Examples were given of angry and conflictual stances by some religious and atheist leaders, and intolerant and extremist rhetoric and action (including violence) by some political groups, which had actually been defused by local peaceful action (eg East London). The importance of actually meeting and engaging in dialogue with ordinary people from groups which have been defined as ‘other’, and demonised and caricatured by media and other biased presentation was cited by several speakers.

Some contributors went further and spoke of ‘transformations’ in their understanding and behaviour as a result of engaging with those whom they had been encouraged by their social/cultural/membership group to see as ‘an enemy’. It was agreed in two workshops, that wider availability of such exchanges and visits between City/Governmental representatives, Religious leaders and leaders of Humanist, Atheist organisations would lead to major long-term benefits and a long term increase in shared values across European society.

## **7 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This was not a formal seminar, and there were no formal mechanisms for formulating, debating, amending or approving resolutions. Any recommendations which emerge from the seminar have no status apart from the fact that they represented the major consensus views which emerged from this first seminar of major European Religion and Belief organisations of all kinds. As such the recommendations have been circulated, as part of this report, at a draft stage, to all members of ENORB and all those organisations which were represented at the Round-Table and/or Seminar. (See Appendix 1 for full list)

### **7.2. Conclusions**

**Security** is one of the fundamental tasks of any state or union of states, and threats to security arise especially at times of rapid change. For example, in Europe in the present crisis, when the old political discourses of monetarism and 'hard' materialism, are no longer perceived as adequate by the majority of the population, they are being supplanted by new languages of morality, ethics, and purpose, which are more akin to the languages of religion and belief than to the language of economics.

In such times security needs to be seen not only as a political, economic and military issue, but as an issue which raises fundamental questions about human values and purpose in modern European pluralist society. Europe's Churches, religion and belief networks have been addressing this crisis, both as individual religious or non-religious organisations, for many years.

**European politicians and institutions** have to find ways of consulting and communicating with the religion and belief networks, and encouraging them to work together to identify what they hold in common, in terms of shared values, and, if possible, to identify consensus positions on key issues which affect European security.

**Threats to security** in relation to religion and belief arise from deep-rooted causes, usually based in ignorance, fear and misunderstanding, and have deep and diverse historical roots in Europe. Violent and hate-fuelled security incidents – whether mounted by the majority religious population or its institutions, by minority religious communities or individuals, or by the non-religious - usually arise as a result of perceived or real discrimination.

**EU institutions** can tackle the root causes of these fears and insecurities by supporting European *and* local action in each member state both to combat discrimination and to promote better understanding in the field of religion and belief.

### **7.3 Key Recommendations to EU**

**7.3.1 Religion and Belief and European Security** – the valuable role of Religion and Belief Organisations in relation to Security and related EU policies has not been sufficiently recognised. The role includes:

- **Access and communication** with religious and non-religious organisations and networks of all kinds, including:
  - those against whom threats to European security (eg hate-crimes) are directed

- those which experience threats to security through discrimination and prejudice
- those from which threats to security (eg violent extremism) may emerge
- **Prevention** – having the potential to defuse threats to security through supporting:
  - inter-convictional dialogue to promote understanding and harmony
  - public demonstrations of solidarity, eg against extremism
  - inter-convictional education and other activities for young people
- **Effective Response** – potential for inter-convictional responses to threats to security:
  - highlighting incidents of discrimination on grounds of religion and belief
  - demonstrating solidarity between religions, and between religious and non-religious organisations, at times of crises due to hate-crimes, violent extremism etc
  - on-going inter-convictional and other grassroots anti-discrimination practical work
- **Engagement and Dialogue** – Dialogue and community engagement are key methods for preparing the next generation with inter-religious and inter-convictional understanding. The EU Year of Inter-Cultural Dialogue showed many ways in which inter-religious (and in some events, inter-convictional) dialogue and understanding can be delivered in formal and informal education contexts. But there has been little follow-up in many member-states, and there has been no specialist European network, and no funding, to support member-state governmental or civil society organisations who wish to draw on the experience of the Year to encourage ongoing activities.

### 7.3.2 Threats to Security: Hate Crime

The four main topics (7.3.2-5) for discussion each yielded recommended actions at EU level in three areas: Preventive action: Effective Responses; Engagement and Dialogue.

#### a) Preventive Action

**Dialogue** and community engagement are key to preparing the next generation with inter-convictional understanding (eg EU Year of Inter-cultural Dialogue). Follow-up needed.

**Education** - in the fundamental rights of freedom of religion and belief and in the modern diversity of belief in Europe, was seen by many as the most urgent area for EU action

**Public Actions** Religion and Belief traditions can demonstrate and publicise their agreement on many moral, social and humanitarian issues.

**Media images of Religion and Belief traditions** – that they spend their time disputing and fighting with each other - can be countered by EU initiatives such as this seminar.

#### b) Effective Responses

**Responses** to major hate-crimes, as in Toulouse 2012 and Oslo 2011 have been high-profile and inter-convictional. Similar responses are needed to smaller incidents.

**Local and National responses** could be much improved by more effective local inter-convictional networks, and by trans-national exchanges, training and capacity building.

#### c) Engagement and dialogue

**Ongoing engagement** is needed to demonstrate solidarity with those who have suffered. Engagement is also required to initiate dialogue with the perpetrators, especially when young people are involved, to counter hatred which can lead to further hate-crimes.

### 7.3.3 Discrimination and Violent Extremism

#### a) Preventive Action

**Violent Extremism.** European-level leadership is needed to show that scape-goating of any community is always wrong. EU support of networks which could directly engage with extremist groups from a perspective of tolerance and harmony is needed.

**Discrimination.** Implementation of anti-discrimination policies on grounds of Religion and Belief is not currently effective and not adequately supported by EU or EU-level networks. EU action is required, especially in the context of morally complex and conflictual issues.

#### b) Effective Responses.

Member-state action is key. EU policies and funding should support the sharing of expertise and experience, as with other areas of equalities, to resolve immediate short-term local issues, and tackle deep-rooted long-term causes.

**c) Engagement and Dialogue.** The EU should apply its long experience of supporting engagement with communities to the increasingly important and sensitive area of religion and belief.

### **7.3.4 Secular European Traditions: What Contribution to European Security?**

**a) Conceptual Clarity.** Much work is needed by EU institutions and by ENORB to work out new definitions of secularism for the new European context, exploring different issues: some in multi-faith member-states, and some in those with recent histories of persecution of religion.

**b) Preventive Action.** More EU support for inter-convictional dialogue is needed, to prevent misunderstanding and questioning of motives, by both religious and non-religious organisations, and to improve transparency with EU communication channels.

**c) Effective Responses.** Dialogue between religious and non-religious organisations on conflicts over 'laicite' and secularism is usually successful when it happens, but is sometimes prevented by opponents. An EU-supported network is needed with the authority to initiate discussions.

**d) Engagement and Dialogue.** Far -right extremism needs religion and belief expertise as well as anti-racist expertise. EU could ask for support for ENAR's initial actions in this field to improve understanding and help to dispel misconceptions which cause violence.

### **7.3.5 Moving from Anger/Violence to Dialogue and Joint Action**

**a) Leaning to “Agree to Disagree”**, and discovering the huge areas of fundamental agreement, both within and across religious and non-religious traditions, is a major outcome of seminars such as this. More were needed, and greater confidence among EU leaders and officials in addressing religion and belief issues.

**b) Preventive Action.** More exchanges, and opportunities for inter-convictional dialogue will give immediate short-term benefits in preventing crises in specific areas of tension. Long-term inter-convictional structures, involving marginalised groups, will have long-term effects by examining and removing the discriminatory causes of violence and extremism.

**c) Effective Responses.** The lack of any European level consultative structures by which EU officials or MEPs could seek the views of Religion and Belief organisations should be remedied. The value of current meetings and photo-opportunities was questioned. EU/EC Networking Processes, as for the Equalities strands (Race, Age etc) should be supported.

**d) Engagement and Solidarity.** Grassroots work between religion and belief and other networks, such as ENAR, ILGA, could improve security by decreasing conflictual misunderstandings and combating hidden or unreported hate-crime and discrimination.

## **7.4 Key Recommendations to ENORB**

- Further seminars should be organised, bringing together religion and belief organisations of all kinds, to hold seminars on other important aspects of EU policy.
- An adequate central presence, with the capacity to support R&B organisations across Europe, with a high profile website, newsletter(s), new media presence etc is needed.
- ENORB should collaborate with other EU networks, Directorates to identify its appropriate role, especially on issues where there are 'conflicts between equalities'.

- ENORB should develop a project to report on the existing conditions and structures for inter-convictional dialogue in all member-states, to explore the potential for new structures, beginning with a national conference of all interested parties.
- ENORB should initiate actions, to demonstrate solidarity between religions, and between religious and non-religious organisations, particularly at times of crises due to hate-crimes, violent extremism etc.
- A European Forum for consultation on key matters of European policy, and on areas of potential conflict over religion and belief is needed.
- An (annual) conference on a specific topic – possibly, in 2013, “New forms of secularism and laïcité for a new European century”, is needed, and should be preceded by some preliminary conceptual work.