CSC/CCME response to the Council of Europe White Paper consultation on Intercultural Dialogue

Introduction

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC/CEC)[1] and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)[2] have churches of various denominations as members and thus serve as forums for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation for them. We thank the Council for Europe (CoE) for having invited us, as representatives of religious communities[3] and migrant organisations, to share our views on intercultural dialogue and to bear witness to our experience and involvement in such dialogue. While we recognise the differences in approach for religious and migrant organisations, we nevertheless seek to give a coherent response covering both sets of questions[4].

Our commitment to foster intercultural dialogue arises from Christian anthropology and the church's pastoral mission, which postulates openness and care for the other. Intercultural dialogue is widely perceived as an instrument to find solutions for the problems associated with international migration. Intercultural dialogue is also regarded as an instrument to address the relationship between religions, and potential conflicts. However, although we recognise the role of intercultural dialogue in addressing problems, we want to stress the importance of dialogue as such. Dialogue is essential for creating relationships between people. Christian anthropology sees dialogue at the centre of the human being – without dialogue a human being would not be human, only being.

We regard cultural diversity as an objective reality. The Christian religion from its very beginning has crossed borders of countries and cultures. Cultural – and religious – diversity has been inherent to societies for centuries. There has been a long history towards the development of a nation state, which included also the domination of one religion (*cuius regio, eius religio*). The inclusion of all citizens and various religions is still a relatively young concept and even today we, unfortunately, observe exclusive tendencies. The relationship between majority and minorities within a state or a region has often been one of domination; European history has many examples of violent suppression and exclusion of religious and ethnic minorities.

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[1] CSC is one of the commissions of CEC. Today CEC links 125 Christian churches. It was founded in the 1950s in the era of the "Cold War" in order to promote international understanding and to build and maintain relations between the churches in Eastern and Western Europe. During its existence, CEC has also built bridges between minority and majority churches, between generations, between women and men, and between Christians of different confessions. Apart from its obvious engagement in ecumenical dialogue, inter-religious dialogue has also become part of its activities.

[2] CCME was founded in 1964 to assist churches across Europe to care for migrant workers. The mandate was broadened to include advocacy work for migrants' rights and for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. CCME with its 23 members serves as the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, refugees and asylum, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. CCME cooperates closely with CEC and the World Council of Churches. Both organizations (CEC and CCME) link Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Churches and Church Councils as well as organizations throughout Europe.

[3] In English the term "religious communities" originally means communities such as monasteries and convents and the people living within them. The term that is nowadays more used is that of faith communities. However, in this document we go along with Cue's usage of the term 'religious communities'.

[4] After each question, the original number of the consultation question is indicated in brackets. For example, RC1 refers to the first question of the questionnaire addressed to religious communities. MO stands for the questionnaire for migrant organisations.

Today migration is considered as the major reason for diversity in societies. Churches regard migration as a normal phenomenon, and the value of freedom of movement and mobility is widely recognised today as a potential asset. International conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stipulate a fundamental right to leave a country and, in addition, states have an obligation to grant refugees protection and a permit to stay.

By taking part in this consultation, we also want to share our understanding of the relationship between culture and religion, which may be more complex than the one proposed in the consultation document provided by the CoE[5]. This response has been prepared in consultation with our constituencies. However, as this paper can only present the key elements of our thinking concerning intercultural dialogue, we would like to invite you to study also our members' individual contributions following this document.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God. "Eph2:19

The overall policy vision on cultural diversity in democratic societies

1. What is the overall vision of your religious community or organisation on the future of the multicultural society and the democratic management of cultural diversity? (RC1/ MO1)

CCME and CSC/CEC seek to promote societies where people live together in justice and peace respecting each other's cultural or religious background. Our vision upholds the right to be different and yet to be equal.

For Christians, the principle of equality is rooted in the concept of *imago dei,* which implies that every human being is created in the image of God and that we should look for the image of God in every human being we meet. Therefore, the dignity of every person becomes the guiding principle. While we acknowledge the existence of hierarchies as a social reality – and do not consider it only a negative phenomenon as such – we seek to look for the best ways to actively include the weak and marginalised in societies. Policy judgements as well as practices derive from this principle. Therefore, the right to be different is in our view a positive approach to diversity. We cherish diversity as a source of enrichment and learning.

However, diversity should not lead to segregation as we strive to build inclusive and cohesive societies. Thus, equality needs to complement diversity: before the law, in access to education and employment, access to services as well as to participation in decision making at various levels of society.

Multicultural society

The term 'multicultural society' tends to be understood more as descriptive[6] of a social reality, as a social phenomenon. However, we recognise the problems associated with the term 'multicultural society' and are aware that in many cases it has implied a political programme. For this reason, although keeping open the possibilities offered by the use of this term we want to encourage reflection on alternative descriptions such as, 'heterogeneous', 'intercultural' and 'transcultural' society. Often 'diversity' is a sufficient and more feasible expression. "Intercultural' as a notion and as a vision may reflect better that cultures as well as individuals are dynamic and change in encounters with one another.

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[5] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Consultation_document_EN.pdf
[6] However, we are aware that language shapes reality and that 'mere' description of reality shows perceptions of social differentiation and integration.

Integration

Instead of wanting to "manage" diversity, we stress the need to facilitate and promote dialogue. However, we welcome and are engaged in efforts to integrate newcomers, migrants and refugees, in a similar way as we fight against exclusion of any member of our societies. Together with other Abrahamic faith communities, we embrace hospitality as one of our values. Faith communities practice extending hospitality to the stranger in very concrete ways.

Integration is a dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation where all parties give and receive. In this sense integration means respect for different cultural identities. This involves a shift in the majority communities' ways of thinking. It is necessary to understand and accept that cultures and identities – including our own – are not static but changing. Integration is also a process of reducing socio-economic barriers between people or groups of people, creating equal opportunities and enabling people to participate actively in the public, economic, social, and political as well as church or religious spheres. It is a common effort towards a peaceful and equitable society. While some political rights are rightly associated with citizenship, meaningful ways of participation are important for all residents even if they do not choose or cannot become citizens. The participation in elections of local governments[7] is a good example.

Integration is still widely misunderstood as assimilation of migrants. While some migrants opt for assimilation, they may still not be integrated if societies are not prepared for integration. Societies in Europe differ tremendously, some are more ethnically homogenous than others are, and yet, with regard to newcomers, they face similar challenges.

We wish to underline that faith can be an important factor for integration. For many people religion is an essential part of their identity but often in policy approaches to integration religion is subsumed under culture.

2. In your community's view, how important is the global context of cultural diversity for the situation in Europe? (RC2)

Europe has always been a place in which people(s) have intermingled while the current process of globalisation, coupled with the end of the Cold War, is a context for more movement of people and opportunities for meeting. As the Global Commission on International Migration has stated, migration is not unique to Europe but indeed a global pattern. At the same time, interaction between different ethnic groups is influenced by the global hierarchy between countries, which is conditioned by economic strength as well as history of colonialism, and mindsets such as orientalism. Positive or negative discrimination is often dependent of the person's country of origin.

3. Does your religious community impart cultural diversity? How do you deal with cultural diversity within your religious community? (RC3)

Our vision upholds the right be different and yet to be equal.

Along with article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Churches in Europe recognise that 'every person can freely choose his or her religious and church affiliation as a matter of conscience, which means not inducing anyone to convert through moral pressure or material incentive, but also not hindering anyone from entering into conversion of his or her own free will' (Charta Oecumenica, § 2).

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[7] The Council of Europe has promoted this with the European Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers, while in the EU citizens residing in another EU member state have the right to vote in local elections. Some states have extended this right to migrants.

There is substantial diversity within Christianity, which has become more visible through migration. In order to overcome linguistic barriers some member churches have translated their liturgies and other material into migrant members' languages. In other cases, churches support and cooperate with ethnic Christian congregations within an ecumenical framework.[8] While the patterns and methods differ, diversity is recognised as a challenge, and it is addressed under the theme "Uniting in Diversity".

To various degrees, churches are in dialogue with other faith communities as well. CEC together with the Conference of Catholic Bishop Conferences in Europe (CCEE) has a Committee on Islam in Europe, and many churches are in regular dialogue with Jewish and Muslim communities in their country or region.

4. Which importance does your organisation attach to a non-discriminatory, equal treatment of immigrants as a precondition for the development of cultural diversity in European societies? (MO2)

Our organisations advocate for equality of treatment and, in particular, equal access to services and employment. Equality and non-discriminatory treatment of migrants is a prerequisite for mutual learning. CCME is a founding member of the European Network Against Racism and remains active in this field. There are also cases where one has the right to be treated differently and to be subject of positive discrimination. This always needs to be balanced and ought not to be used for segregation. Respect for minorities, ethnic as well as religious, are important concerns in our work and approach.

5. What must be done most urgently to abolish discrimination of immigrants and to achieve equality of opportunities – at legal level, in social and employment policies and in other areas? (MO3) How can the media be encouraged to reflect cultural diversity in a more equitable way, particularly as regards the situation of immigrant communities? (MO11)

An atmosphere of acceptance and respect needs to be created, but also the underlying structures influencing the migrants' situation (power relations, resources) need to be addressed. For migrants, access to employment and decent work are highly significant in order to reduce dependency and exploitation. The residence permits of migrants are important in this respect. We are advocating that migrants receive a permanent resident permit after five years of legal stay. In relation to migrants in irregular situations, we are convinced that regularisation is an important instrument, which ought not to be ruled out. Workers' and social rights derived from work need to be accessible irrespective of the residence status.

We need to raise the awareness of the entire population through means of media and education. For specific groups (lawyers, judges, border guards, aliens, politicians, authorities, police, teachers, and journalists) training on intercultural competences should be offered on a wide scale. Experience shows that voluntary training is more likely to produce positive results and, therefore, incentives for the participation in such trainings are an important tool. Schoolbooks and training material also need to be re-examined and changed to reflect today's realities and cultural diversity.

Social justice is particularly pertinent in relation to immigrants. More efforts are needed to guarantee:
  o participation and active involvement in political matters as foreseen in the CoE Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers
  o access to education
  o access to employment and housing
  o access to health and social care
  o access to religious and cultural life including becoming a member of an association or community, or founding one.

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[8] Among our constituencies, we have organisations that are founded precisely to impart cultural diversity within the Christian migrant background.

Socio-economic discrepancies need to be tackled. Lack of financial resources hinders people from taking part in cultural and social activities – in public life in general – and from promoting their own culture. Cultural minorities need opportunities to participate in public opinion making like other stakeholders and the activities of migrants need to be recognised as a positive contribution to shaping society. Moreover, majority groups need to develop a positive attitude towards participation of minority groups and promote their participation. Research shows in societies where native civil societies are active, immigrants are more active, too. Generally speaking, migrants should not be expected to be more active than average citizens, but their participation ought to be encouraged.

"Love does not insist on its own way." 1Cor 13:5

The concept of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue

While highlighting that different notions have different connotations in different cultures and languages[9] and that terminology must be checked against reality, we try to provide a description of our understanding of intercultural dialogue. In order to do so, clarity ought to be given to some other notions that are inherent and attached to that of intercultural dialogue.

Dialogue

The word dialogue has its origins in two Greek words: *dia* means between, both in the sense of inter and intra. *Logos* encompasses the meaning word and speech but also the meaning of logic and understanding the world. These broad notions are important to understand dialogue as being more than an instrument.

Dialogue is a process of meeting people and of exploring communalities as well as differences. This may happen in different forms and different settings. We would therefore distinguish between several types of dialogue[10]:
- symbolic dialogue, where the representatives of the groups involved meet in public, setting examples for dialogue and symbolising the ideas and ideals the dialogue stands for;
- academic dialogue, where experts from the groups involved meet to discuss certain issues;
- spiritual dialogue, where believers of different religious groups meet, and to some extend take part in or are exposing themselves to the others' lived religious practices and traditions;
- dialogue of life, where people from different backgrounds live together sharing experiences

Through dialogue, the other becomes more human and complex and, ideally, stereotypes are questioned. Dialogue does not only change one's understanding of the other, but it may also change one's perception of and appreciation for the other as well as one's self-perception. In addition, dialogue may serve to balance various interests among the dialogue partners.

However, dialogue differs from other forms of interaction in that it does not aim at converting the other party. It may happen without any agendas or goals depending on the type as outlined above. In most cases, though, dialogue is organised to pursue aims like balancing various interests.

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[9] For example, the English notion of 'culture' has a distinctively different content than the German notion of 'Kultur'. The same applies to the English notion of 'education', which is quite different from what is understood by 'Bildung' in German.

[10] These different types of dialogue may and to some extent should have an effect on one another.

Intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue refers to a dialogue where the *culture* of the other as well as one's own culture is at stake and under scrutiny. One may ask whether there is any dialogue, which – in the end – would not be intercultural dialogue.

The fundamental factors, which enable dialogue, are openness towards the other and willingness to listen and to exchange ideas, to learn from the other and to share with the other.

Successful intercultural dialogue

Successful intercultural dialogue, which increases respect[11], care and sympathy for the other's views and opinions, goes beyond mere intellectual understanding. Emotional aspects of dialogue are crucial. In its "most universal" form, intercultural dialogue is a way of thinking, behaving, perceiving the world and relating to the other. It is an ongoing, never-ending process, and it can be learned – it needs to be learned every day. Intercultural dialogue is needed in encountering other people, groups and cultures, but also in reflecting upon one's own cultures. The results of a successful dialogue are not necessarily immediately visible but do bear fruit in the end.

Factors, which enable successful dialogue – besides openness and the capacity to listen –, are respect, trust, equality, "cultural curiosity", religious-ethical intuitive "tact" and readiness to change. All these factors will in turn be enhanced by means of dialogue. In addition, dialogue is likely to be more successful when stakeholders are sensitive to the existing relations between the parties involved characterised by e.g. power relations, prejudices, gender issues, fear, past insults, conflicts and history, and when it takes place in an atmosphere of certainty and confidence. One should not underestimate emotional factors, suspicion, sympathy or dislike of certain behaviours, which can hamper or promote encounter.

Valuing all efforts of human beings to engage in dialogue with one another, we do not want to enforce rules by setting general preconditions. However, it may be useful to set some conditions or recommendations for organised dialogue. Regarding dialogue with political institutions, "open, transparent and regular" dialogue with religious communities as well as with civil society should be self-evident in democratic political systems. The CoE may require parties to share its fundamental values. However, it is important to engage in dialogue even with those who do not share the same values, for example, to achieve conflict resolutions.

Culture – and religion

To arrive at clear-cut definitions for culture is a rather difficult exercise[12] as culture is a dynamic concept, which relates to our way of life. It includes the way of eating, lifestyle, work and working environment as well as meeting with others, and languages. Culture can also mean horizons created with the help of words, pictures and signs, also referring to secularity[13] and religion. Moreover, culture expresses and creates emotions.

For churches religion is different from and something more than a mere element of culture. Religion may be a part of culture but it also informs and shapes culture as culture influences religious expression. Religion

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[11]In this context, we prefer the notion 'respect' to 'tolerance'. Tolerance can refer to a power structure and can mean non-engagement while respect is a more positive recognition of the other.

[12] Attempts to define 'culture' should take note of how sociologists, anthropologists, and those from within the ethnological discipline of 'cultural studies' approach the definitions differently. Historical artefacts *do* constitute contemporary cultures but, in some views, some cultures have only existed for one generation. But for how many generations must a culture have existed? By definition, presumably more than one, but is two enough? Is three better? Or ten? The construction of European identities (individual and collective) draws heavily upon cultural resources, but many are reluctant to allow these resources to constrain identity.

[13] We regard secularity as a part of culture. It exists as a phenomenon *within* time and space, not at the end of it. This justifies the claims of some in the religious communities that post-secular tendencies may also be observed.

furthermore challenges culture and cultural manifestations. The influence of religion is apparent in art, music, architecture and traditions. For example, European languages like English or German have been enriched by the translation of scripture from Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Religion addresses people's ultimate concerns and existential questions. People's faith and values, which relate to one another, play a major role in identity formation. The way religion and faith become visible in history and society through religious communities and faith organisations as well as religious practices and rituals is a constant challenge to all parties involved.

Cultural and religious identities are not homogeneous, isolated entities but are of a hybrid character. This is not only due to the recent decades of globalisation: interaction on different levels has always shaped cultures, religions, and regions.

Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

Therefore, there *is* a religious dimension also to intercultural dialogue but the CoE must understand that religious communities do not believe that they or 'religion' can be exhaustively described with a reference to culture alone. For this reason, religious communities will continue their ongoing processes of inter-religious dialogue. These dialogue processes can include elements that are not described by the discourse of cultural sociology, such as 'transcendence', 'otherness', 'the divine', or 'sanctity'.

Diversity

It is essential to allow the others to preserve their identity and culture and rejoice in diversity as a reality of God's creation. To neglect or combat diversity would go against Christian faith. However, we wish to note that today diversity is rather decreasing than increasing. Whereas diversity has become more visible in many places, globally, and in total terms, it gradually diminishes: ethnic minorities, traditions, languages and life-styles disappear in various regions and are replaced by dominant ones.

Throughout the last decades the European and global ecumenical movement has developed its model of societal integration in its internal dialogue. This concept called "reconciled diversity", which supplements the theme of "Uniting in Diversity", implies both community building based on common values and a continuing discourse on the differences between the different stakeholders in society. The concept "freedom through community", postulated by the CoE during the late 1980s, went in the same direction as "reconciled diversity". We would encourage the CoE to embrace this concept again, which successfully contributed to the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Whereas reconciled diversity is a concept on how people should live together, there has also been theological reflection on how churches should relate to diversity. "Contextual theology" is a form of Christian theology, which – conscious of plurality of religions, worldviews, philosophies, cultures and socio-political systems –adapts in form and language to various historical and social milieus. Contextual theology does not undermine the conviction of all Christians that the message of the Gospel is universal and therefore addressed to all people regardless of their national, ethnic or cultural background. For churches, contextual theology provides a sound basis for intercultural as well as inter-religious dialogue.

8. In addition to the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, are there in your view other values that are important for the promotion of intercultural dialogue? (RC5)

The CoE framework values (democracy, human rights and rule of law), which are codified by the European Convention on Human Rights and which express the CoE's non-confessional commitment to the dignity of the individual, provide good guidelines for life together in societies.

The extent to which the CoE's values and the churches' values cohere is unsurprising. The heritage of Jewish-Christian thought in the development of Europe today is undeniable. For example, it is often held that human rights are inherent in human dignity. Christian theology draws its understanding of human dignity from the Bible by affirming that the human being was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Even the rule of law, the right to property and the right of freedom of speech may be seen as implemented in one of the Bible's narratives, the parable of Naboth's vineyard (1 King 21).

Values need to be declared or agreed upon, but in order to give them significance, they need to be lived and implemented in everyday life. We recognise that the CoE's 47 member states do not all and always live up to these principles. Also in the Christian community, we do not deny that the implementation of some Christian values had to be fought for against the churches as historical manifestations of Christian religion. This is especially true for the time of the Enlightenment. We may say that we have learned, and are still learning, letting ourselves and our lives be challenged again and again by what we stand for, recognizing our human fallibility and need for divine guidance.

Beyond the CoE's basic values, Christian denominations share values such as solidarity; social justice; brotherhood between all children of God; concern for the weakest, forgiveness; love, responsibility for the other, and peace; these reach beyond the egalitarian solutions offered by law, and may even contradict the excessive value placed on competition in our European societies.

Among churches and religious communities, there is discussion on the relationship between truth and recognition of the values of other religions or the political systems. There is recognition that in certain historic situations and within various religious communities, including Christianity, this has lead to exclusion of others and sometimes to fundamentalism. In the ecumenical movement and organisations, we seek to counter fundamentalism and to promote respect. Values, religious, cultural or political, need to be seen, interpreted and proven in the historic setting.

9. Does your religious community or organisation place particular emphasis on one or several aspects of intercultural dialogue, such as non-formal education, gender equality, human rights protection or inter-religious dialogue? (RC6/ MO7)

While regarding all aspects of intercultural dialogue as vitally important, religious communities have a special responsibility concerning inter-religious dialogue, especially as there seems to be a lack of understanding of religious beliefs and expressions between more secular and more religious societies. Whereas CSC/CEC and CCME as platforms are actively involved in promoting human rights including issues such as gender or ethnic equality, our constituencies also emphasise the importance of both formal and non-formal education. According to our experience, having knowledge both about one's own as well as about the others' religious and cultural identity contributes significantly to a successful dialogue. Education needs to encourage a sense of reflective self-identity and respect of the other.

10. Has your religious community or organisation published any major statements, reports, research papers etc. on intercultural dialogue? (RC7/ MO8)

- Charta Oecumenica (CEC, CCEE)[14]
- Open Letter Church Leaders' Meeting[15]
- Uniting in Diversity – Ciampino conference recommendations (Being Church Together with migrant churches) (CCME-FCEI)[16]

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[14] http://www.cec-kek.org/content/charta.shtml
[15] http://www.cec-kek.org/content/openletter13.shtml
[16] http://www.cec-kek.org/English/ccmeunitingdiversity.pdf

"Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples." Isa 62:10

Stakeholders

Intercultural dialogue starts at the level of individuals. Organised entities like public and private authorities, international and non-governmental organisations set frames and provide opportunities for dialogue, which have an impact on how individuals relate to one another and how an individual embraces the values of successful dialogue (respect, openness, capacity to listen, trust, equality, "cultural curiosity", religious-ethical intuitive tact, readiness to change etc.).

Religion with its manifold ties with and within culture makes its historical manifestations – churches and religious communities – natural parties in intercultural dialogue at all levels from local/parish level to national, regional and international level. Churches do not only serve as representatives of religious communities but they also provide place for personal encounters.

Furthermore, business communities should be involved as they are in a key position regarding issues such as access to labour market and services. Similarly, there are numerous other important stakeholders such as employers' organisations, welfare and cultural associations, ethnic minority associations and migrants' organisations. It is also important to find the level and the form of dialogue, which better suits the aims of a particular dialogue (in case the dialogue has defined aims). For example, it may be useful to provide guidelines for certain types of dialogues at national or international level. Churches see an added value to develop and communicate guiding principles at an international level as well as to organise international forums for intercultural dialogue.

11. What is the place of religious communities in a policy promoting intercultural dialogue? (RC8a)

At their best, religious communities are concerned with the well-being of the whole of society and therefore have a place in promoting intercultural dialogue. Faith and the feeling of belonging to a (religious) community are at the core of the human being and therefore vital for identity formation. As they are also key elements for one's culture, religious communities play a substantial role in promoting intercultural dialogue. Churches as well as other religious communities with their widespread network of local parishes reach people even in the most remote areas.

Religious communities can contribute to intercultural dialogue e.g. by
- developing a positive social climate in society;
- developing the intercultural competences of their own personnel;
- creating space and room for encounters between natives and migrants; and
- advocating for the poor, weak and marginalised of our societies.

12. Does your religious community or organisation propose specific or innovative measures for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, or has it done so in the past? (RC8b/ MO10)

CSC/CEC and CCME are in a way also platforms for intercultural dialogue. In addition to our activities as platforms, our constituencies are involved in a multitude of measures which, either explicitly or implicitly, serve to promote intercultural dialogue. To highlight some concrete measures (for more see our members' individual contributions, especially the examples of best practise):

- Promoting personal encounters by means of exchange programmes and camps. When talking about dialogue the importance of personal encounters should be obvious. We would, therefore, like to stress it as a crucial 'measure'. Having shared experiences influences vitally the deepening of mutual understanding.
- Education, formal as well as informal, can be an instrument for promoting intercultural dialogue. Addressing affective and transformative dimensions is as important as addressing the cognitive dimension of the people involved in order to have an impact concerning action and attitude towards one another.
- Training in 'intercultural competences' and awareness raising methods (cf. Dialogue for a peaceful change). Promoting dialogue is also promoting an attitude that enables people to engage in dialogue.
- Empowering certain groups (minorities, migrants, "the marginalised of society") to enable them to speak for themselves.

13. Which significance has the dialogue between religious communities? Is your religious community engaged in dialogue with other faith groups (inter-religious dialogue)? (RC9)

Inter-religious dialogue can contribute to peaceful cohabitation and social cohesion and is therefore crucially important, even if this may not be the sole or immediate aim of inter-religious dialogue. Many religious organisations, churches as well as specialised related organisations have considerable experience and expertise in inter-religious dialogue at various levels. This dialogue has various forms, including dialogue of life, academic theological dialogue, spiritual dialogue and symbolic dialogue (cf. question 7).

For Christians, the interdenominational dialogue is as crucial as the dialogue with other faiths. When addressing reconciliation among Christian believers, the sacrament of the Holy Communion plays a crucial role. Celebrating religious services together with others may foster a sense of community and belonging. However, this is an area where churches themselves seek to overcome division and it is a very sensitive debate within our constituencies. We assume this will be similar for other faith communities. Thus, faith groups' boundaries need to be respected.

14. In the view of your religious community, what are the biggest obstacles to intercultural dialogue? (RC10/ MO6b)

Setting aside what may be deduced from what was said in the answer to question RC4 about factors enabling successful intercultural dialogue, we would like to stress the following points:

Obstacles to intercultural dialogue are often connected to the socio-economic conditions of the parties involved. Immigrant or ethnic minority populations are at risk of belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged parts of society. Exclusion and discrimination, to which they are often subjected, separate them even geographically (e.g. ghettoisation), from the mainstream population, which continues to regard them as strangers even in the second or third generation. Due to this separation as well as to prejudice and stereotypes, it can be difficult to identify representative persons from both sides to engage in a meaningful dialogue.

In relation to religious communities, many majority religious communities are well provided with salaried staff and established structures in order to engage in dialogue of all kinds, whereas minorities often have to rely on involvement on a voluntary basis, depending on the majorities' 'good-will' to invite them to take part in dialogue and to listen to them. We cannot establish real dialogue on an asymmetrical relationship, in which one side is dependent on the other's good will.

Other obstacles to be named are racism, lack of common language and, as already stated, the lack of attention paid to the role of religion. In addition, the fear of losing one's own religious or cultural identity may be an obstacle for engaging in intercultural dialogue.

CCME and CSC/CEC members have a great variety of programmes for the inclusion of migrants and refugees (legal advice, counselling, language training, mentorship etc.) on regional, national and international level. Furthermore, the programme "Uniting in diversity" addresses particularly the concerns of black and migrant churches, and a study process seeks to look at the changing situation of churches across Europe. Dialogue between majority and minority churches as well as churches' witness in society are key concerns for the Church and Society Commission, particularly in relation to CoE priorities. There are challenges to intercultural as well as to intra-religious and inter-denominational dialogue and to cooperation.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil." (Eccl. 4:9)

Expectations towards the Council of Europe

16. How can international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, support initiatives by religious communities for the promotion of human rights, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and gender equality? (RC 11) – Given the specific competences of the Council of Europe, where does your organisation see the "added value" of the Council of Europe action on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the promotion of common values? (MO13)

European and international organisations have an important role to play in providing a legal framework, in launching and maintaining the political dialogue among their member states (and between member states and civil society actors), which fosters a favourable political climate and culture and leads to common initiatives, in supporting civil society actors in promoting human rights, intercultural dialogue, social cohesion and gender equality, and in setting themselves good examples in the dialogue with all stakeholders.

One of the strengths of the CoE in this regard is certainly to provide a legal framework. Religious communities as well as minority and migrant communities need an environment in which they are recognised, in which their rights are protected and which provides a space where they can contribute as equal partners.

By setting the legal framework, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights as well as the European Social Charter and conventions, such as the Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers, the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life on a Local Level and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but also monitoring mechanisms such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, are important instruments.

These treaties and mechanisms need to be further developed and enhanced. member states must be urged to ratify all conventions, and effective monitoring and implementation mechanisms need to be strengthened and sufficiently resourced in order to challenge member states to live up to their commitments. The role of civil society actors in the monitoring and implementation within member states and on the European level should be strengthened.

Besides the legal framework, the CoE should use its capacities to foster a political climate and to take political initiatives, which enhance the intercultural dialogue on all levels. To this effect, we commend the initiatives of the CoE to engage member states in enhancing international standards and to learn from best

practices. The development of a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue is an important step in this direction. An effective follow-up, however, requires effective mechanisms to be put in place and to be included in the White Paper in order to monitor and foster the implementation of its recommendations and in order to draw conclusions from the examples of good practice.

We equally commend the Council of Europe's effort to foster an active involvement of civil society actors in member states as well as in the framework of the CoE. We want to recommend, however, an even stronger interconnectedness of the intergovernmental activities of the CoE with the non-governmental organisations in participatory status. In fostering intercultural dialogue, the continuous interaction of all stakeholders is essential. In order to achieve this, utmost transparency on the intergovernmental level is a pre-requisite. Besides the involvement of the non-governmental sector as a whole, it seems important to us to involve representative stakeholders from civil society (including representative organisations of religious communities), for instance, as observers in Steering Committees of the CoE. The CoE should play an active role in involving stakeholders from civil society in its activities on all levels. The process leading to the development of a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue could serve as a good example.

17. In the framework of initiatives previously taken by the Council of Europe, it has been proposed to organise a dialogue between the Council of Europe and the actors of religious life, dealing with the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue and referring to the values of the Council of Europe. To what extent would the organisation of such a dialogue meet the interests of your religious community, and which aims should this dialogue have? (RC12)

We welcome the "Proposal for Council of Europe annual exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue", as one mechanism to enhance the involvement of civil society stakeholders and as a good example for member states. Experiences with similar exchanges in other European institutions, however, show that they have limited effects, if they remain isolated events without joint preparation and follow-up. We therefore urge that annual dialogue meetings are an additional mechanism, not replacing permanent and continuous involvement of religious communities and their European organisations on the working level. In order to foresee an effective follow-up, we recommend, that annual meetings of the proposed type have a well-defined theme and that the follow-up strategy is a constitutive element of the annual meeting itself. Participants in the meeting should meet for an "open and transparent" dialogue on an equal footing. Participants from the side of the religious communities should be selected by the religious communities themselves in relation to the selected theme of the dialogue, ensuring that the diversity of the religious communities in Europe is well reflected among the participants.

Furthermore, we suggest that such annual forums for dialogue on issues related to intercultural dialogue are not only established for representatives of religious communities, but be established also for other stakeholders such as minority and migrant communities.

As representative organisations for non-Roman-Catholic churches in Europe, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and its Church and Society Commission (CSC) as well as the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) are at your disposal for further discussions about enhanced working relationships as well as about the organisation and follow-up of the proposed annual dialogue meetings.

With regard to the aims of such annual dialogue meetings, we recommend that they

- set a good example (also in their preparation and follow-up) for a similar practice in member states of the CoE;
- raise awareness of the religious and ethnic diversity in Europe as a richness of the continent;
- raise awareness for the positive contribution of religious and minority communities in the intercultural dialogue and for society at large;

- strengthen the protection of minority communities and enhance the legal and political framework, in which an intercultural dialogue can develop;
- recommend common initiatives and projects of the CoE and the religious communities in order to enhance intercultural dialogue and the implementation of common values in European societies; and
- foster a continuous working relationship between the CoE and religious communities/minority communities.

18. Given the specific competences of the Council of Europe, where does your organisation see the "added value" of Council of Europe action on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the promotion of common values? (MO13) How can the Council of Europe and the religious communities best cooperate in order to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and human rights? (RC12)

In response to this question, several aspects and practical suggestions have already been elaborated throughout this text.

We want to highlight, however, that we regard it as the primary task of the religious communities themselves to engage in inter-confessional, inter-religious as well as intra-religious dialogue. The Charta Oecumenica (cf. main publications) and the many ongoing ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues already bear witness to how much religious communities are engaged. We do not expect and have no reason to believe that the CoE wants to interfere with the internal affairs of religious communities. We hope, though, that the CoE will support the ongoing initiatives of the religious communities and draw on their results.

The common tasks of the CoE and the religious communities are to be found in particular in the fields of awareness raising and education. It is our strong conviction that international organisations such as the CoE, and religious communities should cooperate in raising awareness on religious and ethnic diversity in Europe, as well as being good models of cooperation. Exchange programmes and partnership programmes, involving persons primarily from the local level, should be encouraged and promoted. In this regard cooperation with the EU programmes under the heading of "Lifelong Learning", in order also to involve participants from non-EU member states, would be desirable.

In the field of education, further training modules in the area of formal and informal education, which foster intercultural dialogue and human rights, should be developed, promoted and tested. In this regard, we welcome the proposal, which was developed under the auspices of the CoE's Commissioner for Human Rights, to establish a European Centre or Platform for the training of teachers in the field of intercultural learning. Though we believe that intercultural learning cannot and should not replace education in accordance with one's own identity and religion, the CoE and the religious communities should cooperate in establishing the suggested Platform or Centre and in establishing respective curricula.

19. How should the Council of Europe cooperate with other international institutions, in order to achieve a maximum impact of activities promoting cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and common values? (MO 14)

In their efforts to promote intercultural dialogue, human rights, social cohesion and the implementation of common values, civil society stakeholders as well as religious communities do not only cooperate with the CoE, but also with other international organisations and institutions, such as the United Nations and its initiative for a "Dialogue of Civilizations", the International Labour Organisation and its programmes for migrants' inclusion, the European Union Institutions, currently of course with regard to the 2008 Year For Intercultural Dialogue and the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its Advisory Council for Freedom of Religion and Belief. It would be beneficial for all stakeholders to cooperate closely and to develop joint concepts and strategies in drawing on the respective strategic advantages of each

institution. For example, the CoE's special legal expertise could be better used in the OSCE field missions. The European Union has an important role in working towards social cohesion as an important pre-requisite for intercultural dialogue. The coherence between the strategies and programmes of the different international actors is essential to provide space for dialogue and interaction, and to overcome tensions existing in Europe today within societies and between countries and nations.