



URI Europe Dialogue-Letter No. 5

January 2006

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1. Welcome and news from the URI EEC (European Executive Committee)

Dear friends,

best greetings to you – may you and all who are dear to you live a rich and joyful year 2006!

We are very happy to present to you the URI Europe Dialogue-Letter No. 5. The Dialogue-Letter is back again, after a break, which was due to the necessary preparations and follow up to our **European URI-Assembly**, “Overcoming irritations and prejudices between people of different cultures, religions and convictions in the EU enlargement-process” in Brussels September 24-26, 2005. You can find more information on the conference below.

Due to the break you will find **some items** in this newsletter **from the past year**, which are nonetheless very worthwhile reading. Some more interesting reports from last year will also feature in the next edition of the URI Europe Dialogue-Letter.

The year 2005 saw the approval of **five new CCs from Europe**, namely the “Steering Committee URI the Netherlands” and the “Interfaith Dialogue Utrecht CC” in the Netherlands, the “Religious Forum in Helsinki CC” in Finland, “URI Germany CC” in Germany and the “Convictions in Dialogue CC” in Belgium. We cordially welcome these new CCs!

“Minorities of Europe (MoE)” which had been linked to URI Europe through its director, Deepak Naik, has officially joined up with the URI in summer 2005 as an **affiliate**. A cordial welcome! You will be able to find some information about MoE in this newsletter.

We foresee the **year 2006** to be one of **consolidation** in which we will be working on issues like a European website, a good leaflet and fulfilment of ongoing tasks.

At the same time we will also make the first steps for a **European URI-meeting in May 2007 in Antwerp, Belgium**. We foresee a meeting, bringing together two people from each of our currently 22 CCs from 11 countries.

This European meeting will take place in connection with a **meeting of URI’s Global Council**, likewise in **Antwerp, Belgium, in May 2007**. **Bond zonder Naam CC has graciously offered to provide hospitality** for this Global Council-meeting **in co-ordination with URI Europe**.

So, beautiful plans ahead.

We are looking forward to being in touch and, as always, invite your comments, suggestions and constructive criticism.

Peace and blessings to you!

Mr. Dr. Raschid Bockemuehl, Dortmund/Germany, Treasurer URI Europe / Global Council Member
Mr. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad Dultz, Bonn/Germany, Member URI Europe / Global Council Member
Mr. Patrick Hanjoul, Antwerp/Belgium, President URI Europe
Ms. Annie Imbens-Fransen, Eindhoven/The Netherlands, Member URI Europe
Mr. Jean-Mathieu Lochten, Brussels/Belgium, Vice-President URI Europe
Mr. Deepak Naik, Coventry/United Kingdom, Vice-President URI Europe
Ms. Heidi Rautionmaa, Espo/Finland, Member URI Europe / Global Council Member
Ms. Karimah Stauch, Bonn/Germany, Co-ordinator URI Europe

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1. a) European URI-conference has taken place in Brussels, Belgium, September 22-24, 2005

“So many really great people met from so many different places. It was exciting.” These words sum up Europe’s most recent regional assembly. The URI European Executive Council CC hosted a highly successful regional assembly in Brussels, Belgium in September 2005.



Participants representing several CCs and a wide diversity of people coming from 22 countries focused on reducing tensions, irritations and prejudices between European citizens of different convictions and religions. This report brings us photos from the event as well as details of the highlights, work, and outcome of the conference.

Read full report under:

http://www.uri.org/blogcgory/URI_Regional_Assemblies.html

with a link to the whole report under: <http://www.uri.org/downloads/euroasmblyreport092205.pdf>

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2. European URI CC-activities – invitations, introductions, reports

2. a) “Berlin Bridges” – invitation to URI-conference in Berlin 29. September – 3. October 2006

You are invited to a URI-conference in Berlin. “Berlin Bridges” will take place at the Catholic Academy from Friday, September 29, till Tuesday, October 3, 2006.

It is organized by a multi-religious planning-team. Sponsoring organisation is URI Germany CC in co-operation with URI Berlin CC and the Catholic Academy.

The program will focus on examples of integration and community-cohesion, hearing from the experiences of Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Baha’i and Buddhist communities in Berlin. Many of the Muslims have Turkish background, many Jewish community-members Russian background. Many Baha’is are by origin Iranian, and the Buddhist community has Korean members.

The evenings will feature creative or cultural programmes. Every morning is started by a meditation offered by people from one of the faith-groups present.

Conference-language will be German.

For further information please contact:

Peter Amsler, peter.amsler@mac.com, or
Taufiq Mempel, TNMempel@aol.com

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2. b) URI Berlin CC meeting the Sikh Community in Berlin, Germany

A friendly and mildly tempered youth welcomed us on April 24th, 2005, at the entrance of the Gurudwara temple in Koegelstrasse, in Berlin-Reinickendorf.

We then entered right away the steps to the first floor where the Sikhs perform there divine services in a large and very clean room, where the main colour is white.

What strikes immediately is the stage that is situated near to a shrine containing the Holy Scripture of the Sikh - the Guru Granth Sahib.

On that stage men and women sing the divine texts that are in the case of the Sikhs fixed in classical Indian music.

Taken from the Morning Prayer (Guru Nanak, GGS 1), Mulmantra:

There is only One God
He is the absolute Truth
He is the Creator
Neither does he know fear nor hate
He is the Omnipresent
Permeating all of the universe
He was never born
He will never die
To be born again.
Recognizable by the guru's grace
Praise His Name

Long time before time the Truth already existed.
When time came into being
He was the Truth. Even now He is the Truth.
The Truth will reign for ever.

The whole book of the Sikh the Guru Granth Sahib was edited by the fifth guru, Arjan Dev (1601-1604) and placed as the altar of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.
In the year 1706 the tenth guru Gobind Singh added scriptures of the ninth guru Teg Bahadur to the Guru Granth Sahib and completed it.
Shortly before his death 1708 Guru Gobind Singh appointed that complete edition to his incarnated successor. Here the chain of the living gurus ended.

It is one of the tasks of the Sikh to get in contact with one or more of the gurus by the grace of the Guru Granth Sahib in order to perfect oneself.

At the end of our meeting we indulged in the traditional *langar* – the common meal of the Sikh following the divine service.

The head of the Berlin Sikh community will visit San Francisco in July and we arranged contact between Mr. Amarjeed Singh and Sally in California

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2. c) Sharing news of URI activities in Finland

Written by Heidi Rautionmaa

There are two events which took place in May 2005 and were co-organized by the Forum of Religions in Helsinki and URI's Christian-Muslim dialogue-group in Helsinki.

"On the Way Towards a Common United Europe"



We had an event under the title "On the Way Towards a Common United Europe" on Europe Day , May 9th. 2005, at Perkkaa Chappel in Espoo. The event was organized by the Lutheran Brigde-group with the co-operation of the Forum of Religions in Helsinki,URI and the URI's Christian -Muslim -dialogue group in Helsinki. The event included speeches by the head of the Finnish Church Foreign Aid Agency, Finn Church Aid, Mr. Antti Pentikäinen, Theologian of the Church Centre of the Missions, docent Timo Vasko and the Peace Promoter Helena Kekkonen - followed by a common discussion. Music was by the Mattanja Choir.

We had a barbeque and other refreshments prepared by all the participants together and a Peace Pole celebration.

World Village Festival

The Religious Forum in Helsinki, URI took part in this year's World Village Festival. Some 200 organisations were at the festival to demonstrate the power of civil society action. The president of Finland Tarja Halonen visited the event but the foreign minister Erkki Tuomioja personally stopped by in URI stand where he talked with the Muslim member for a while. Also the executive director of Kepa, Timo Lappalainen visited the stand in order to make connection for the future. There is a possibility that this new URI CC will help to organize a multireligious prayer event that will open the next year's festival. URI's Christian-Muslim -dialogue group in Helsinki was also in the stand to promote the grassroots interfaith work.

The World Village Festival is a festival for the whole family that gives the chance to encounter new viewpoints on tolerant multiculturalism, development work and globalisation, as well as find ways to influence things in your daily life.

The main organiser of the World Village Festival is the Service Centre for Development Cooperation, KEPA, the umbrella organisation for over 250 development organisations or other NGOs working on issues concerning development and globalisation. KEPA's work is supported by funding from the Finnish foreign ministry's development assistance budget. There are over 200 other partners involved in the festival – some 180 NGOs as well as educational institutions, museums, public authorities and businesses.

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2. d) Art is a Language of Peace - Tajikistan

Written by Nargis Nurullo, Center of Peace and Dialogue of Cultures CC, Tajikistan

ART IS A COMMON LANGUAGE OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Year Long Project for International Day of Peace:

Following that global formula of time and space, theoretically and practically realized by the world scholars, saints and poets, originated from Central Asia, such as Ibn Sina/Avicenna, Sayf al-Buchari, Omar Khayam and Jalaliddin Rumi...

The Ziyadulla Shahidi International Cultural Foundation made a year-long lasting project of International Day of Peace, started at the Zyiodullo Shahidi Museum of Musical Culture on 21.09.04 and has been actualized toward 21.09.05. Our aim is to create links in between artists and cultural activists in three dimensions: national, regional and global. Here are some descriptions of events, which raised a wide interest of the civil society on all three levels.

1.21.09.04.

The day was widely celebrated within the idea of inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-national dialogue, which has been launched at the museum and continued at the Slavic-Tajik University. It was organized in cooperation with the Sadriddin Ayni Opera and Ballet

Theatre, Universities: Islam, National and Slavic-Tajik, Christian Orthodox Church, Center of the Religions and UN Representative in Peace-Building in Tajikistan.

The head of the Administration of the President of Tajikistan on cultural Affairs took part in the discussion. More than one thousand participants, mainly students participated two seminars and a big concert of pop, national and classic music. THE MAIN AIM WAS TO REALIZE THE POWER OF MUSIC TO BRING THE PEOPLE TOGETHER AND SHARE AN IDEA OF PEACE CREATIVITY OF ART.

2. 17. 10. 04. Meeting took place at Maison de Science L'Homme in Paris, was organized by the 'Open Asia.' French journalists and artists, who originally came from Iran, Afghanistan and Arab countries met for discussion, 'Tajikistan in the Sphere of Art and Peace'.

3. 17-27.08.05. Art-symposium on TRANSFORMATION, organized in cooperation with the Kyrgyz Association of artists and Z.Shahidi International Cultural Foundation. Three artists from Tajikistan were represented in the art gallery. THE IDEA WAS TO DEMONSTRATE THE CAPACITY OF ART TO TRANSFORM PLACES DESTROYED BY MILITARY OCCUPATION OF ISSYK-KUL BREACH AFTER RUSSIAN MILITARY LEFT IN 1998... INTO A LIVELY PLACE.

4. 6-12.09.05 International Symposium was held on 'Ibn Sina\Avicenna in World Civilization'. The theory of peace as a global phenomenon - created by the greatest philosopher from the Islamic world was discussed in many aspects, such as medicine, physics and metaphysics as well as the dynamic impact of his views on world civilization. The conference transformed itself into a Festival of Art, where musicians, vocalists and artists mastered a real sphere of art of life.

6. 11.09.05 The Shahidi Foundation arranged Inter-Islamic gathering of women. All of us (about 35 women) came together for a unique women's Zikr, which has continued only in Central Asia. All women, supervised by aged influential religious leader, Bibi Khalifa, prayed for peace and harmony in the world. Discussion about URI raised attention and curiosity among women, particularly among youth.

5. 21.09.05. Z. Shahidi International Cultural Foundation in cooperation with UNTOP and Opera and Ballet Theatre will organize a concert 'Harmonia Mundi', dedicated to International Day of Peace. Tajik composers Tolib Shahidi and Zarrina Mirshakar's pieces will sound together with the world-known composers Mozart, Bizet, Shostakovich, Barber, Khachaturyan, Jenkins, Shostakovich. The soloists: B.Mamatkulov, A.Galiachmetova, Z.Umarova, Kasimova, V.Latipova.

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2. e) Minorities of Europe (MoE), with seat in Coventry, United Kingdom, has joined URI as an affiliate

"Minorities of Europe" has been linked to URI for many years through Deepak Naik, who is a member of the URI Europe Executive Committee and was a URI (Interim) Global Council Trustee from 2000-2005. In May 2005 "Minorities of Europe" officially joined up with URI as an affiliate. A cordial welcome!

Following some information about MoE.

Minorities of Europe (MoE) Information Leaflet

One Europe for All
'Difference is our common asset,
equality is our common goal'



Minorities of Europe (MoE)

Minorities of Europe works towards the advancement of education, empowerment and civic participation of people, in particular of young people from minority/disadvantaged communities through promotion of positive intercultural relations throughout the community of Europe.

We pursue our activities in observance of the spirits of international conventions and covenants regarding human rights, minority rights, women rights, and will do our utmost to overcome and prevent discrimination based on criteria such as cultural origin, nationality religion, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic background.

Background of MoE

We are a 'Pan European Inter-minority project, which supports and assists the co-operation, solidarity and exchange between different minority communities and young people in Europe.

MoE was established in 1995 as a result of the Council of Europe's "All different –All equal" campaign against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance in Europe.

The initiators, concerned by the isolation and lack of contacts between minority groups and by the rising levels of racism and xenophobia, shared a vision of inter-minority co-operation to address those challenges and to achieve equal participation for minority young people in Europe.

The development of MoE was further enhanced by the Council of Europe's Year Against Racism in 1996.

Today, MoE brings together projects and people from religious and faith minorities, national and language minorities, Ethnic and immigrant minorities.

Aims and Objectives

- * To support and promote positive intercultural relations between minority and majority communities
- * To sustain the participation and integration of minority communities in Europe
- * To overcome mutual prejudice among minorities and majorities and the perception of powerlessness that minority young people often experience
- * To initiate and promote concrete projects and examples of community development between people of different faiths, cultures and traditions
- * To provide a framework for co-operation and exchange between minority groups, especially those who feel most isolated in Europe
- * To contribute to the development of an intercultural Europe, open to/and based upon the contribution and participation of all communities in Europe, particularly those facing exclusion or alienation from the European integration process.

Areas of Work

As a European organisation, Minorities of Europe focuses on European activities

that have a multiplier effect on the local organisations and communities where young people are directly involved, such as:

- * Support and monitoring of local projects: Minorities of Europe seeks to be particularly active in initiating and supporting local projects that aim at improving the environmental and social living conditions of minority communities and groups across Europe.
- * Training courses: Training is given in areas that are particularly important to the development of minority young people and their communities, to enhance their full participation in Europe. These include intercultural education, organisational development, Europe & European integration, leadership training and local project development.
- * Information and networking: An important mission of Minorities of Europe is to provide information to, from and between minority communities themselves and with National and European institutions. For this purpose, we publish a regular newsletter and put our web site at the service of our membership and partners.
- * Seminars and conferences
MoE organises seminars and conferences that focus on present common issues of importance to minority young people, the challenges they face and the ways to overcome them. In such environments minority youth leaders and activists share their realities and support each other for future co-operation.
- * Special events
MoE also organises exceptional events to celebrate diversity and give grassroots organisations and young people the possibility to experience diversity, solidarity and intercultural action. For such projects MoE is open to co-operation with other organisations and institutions.
- * Community Cohesion
MoE is developing the 'Beyond Tolerance' model, through the Swapping Cultures Initiative project which involved 2600 young people. The project aims to bring together young people from mono and diverse cultures to share and learn from each other's similarities and differences.
- * Interfaith
MoE is a leading Interfaith Youth Organisation. Throughout 'Sharing the Sacred Serving the World' project, we intend to help build up Interfaith dialogues and actions across Europe.
- * Training and Resources
We train young people in Project Development, Intercultural Education, European Funding and Community Cohesion. We plan to create a range of resources (exhibition, posters, leaflets, DVD, education packs) for use by youth professionals, teachers or community organisations.
- * Legacy House
Establish a 'show case' community resource facility which is used by diverse communities, potentially by the most disadvantaged such as asylum seekers, refugees, black minority ethnic communities (BME) and others for their own individual activities and other activities which brings diverse communities together to establish mutual understanding and respect.

For more information, please contact us:

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2. f) El Cielo de la Vera – a spiritual meeting-centre in Spain

Written by Mauro Conversi, URI affiliate in Cáceres, Spain*

El Cielo de la Vera is a meeting point burned almost ten years ago in a spirit that is very close to the U.R.I. purpose. It works as a country hostel but its clients normally are spiritual or therapeutical groups working in the inner growth. It is located on the south side of the Sierra de Gredos (about two hours from Madrid going west) far away from urban areas and surrounded by oak woods. The next neighbourhood is a Zen temple and by here there is a Sufi center. To have a look of the place and to know how to get there (Uri people are welcome here), visit the web site: www.cielolavera.com



* Cáceres is located two hours by car from Madrid.

Mauro Conversi can be reached under info@cielolavera.com .

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2. d) URI affiliate Tatomir Ion-Marius participated in pilgrimage to the Memorial Museum Prison Sighetu, Romania

Written by Tatomir Ion-Marius

On 14 may 2005 I was present at a pilgrimage from the Memorial Museum Prison Sighetu (in the past generator of hundreds of victims of communism) to the Poor's Graveyard (outside of the town) where there are burried prisoners who died in the terrible prison.

A great crowd of ordinary people, priests, bishops walked slowly from the Prison to the Graveyard, singing religious songs and praying; and here in the Graveyard was officiated mass in the remembrance of the victims; his Excellency Msgr. Jean Claude Perisset, papal nuntius was one of the high ecclesiastic officialities keeping the mass.

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3. URI global

3. a) Executive Director's Letter December 05

Thema: **[uri-contacts] ED's Dec 05 Letter**
Datum: 22.12.2005 22:59:37 Westeuropäische Normalzeit
Von: bhartford@uri.org
An: uri-contacts@uriglobal.org, uri-gcandstaff@uriglobal.org, uri-sac@uriglobal.org
Internet-eMail:

Dear friends--Charles has just begun a well-deserved holiday with his family all about him. His last act before turning off his computer was to write this moving message to all of us. It will appear in the e-Update shortly, but he would want you all to receive it personally. May we walk in love through this turning time. --Barbara

22 December 2005

Dear Friends of the URI,

Greetings of love and peace.

I write this the day after the solstice - winter and the longest night of the year here in the northern hemisphere; summer and the longest day of the year in the southern hemisphere. Solstice - the time of greatest light and greatest darkness, a pivot point in time, a turning of the seasons, a fitting symbol for the times we live in, for the year now drawing to a close.

This past year has been one of extraordinary natural and human made darkness. Nature's "anger," arguably often fueled by human destruction of the environment, was expressed with great destruction - tsunami, hurricanes and earthquakes. Human anger and fear was evidenced through the unspeakable violence of humans killing, maiming and raping other often innocent humans all over the world.

But there's also been much light in the past year and URI has been part of it. For all the heartbreaking devastation, the year's natural catastrophes also produced some of humanity's best. The tsunami yielded countless acts of heroism and generated the largest outpouring of charitable giving in history. A URI CC, the Shanti Sena Brigade of the Sarvodaya Movement was and continues to be on the frontlines of tsunami relief in Sri Lanka and many URI members offered financial contributions to support their work.

Global Council Secretary, P.K. McCary, was central to a faith-based effort in Houston, Texas to provide relief to survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Fr. James Channan, a URI Global Council Trustee, has led an extraordinary and ongoing effort by URI's Multiple Cooperation Circle in Pakistan to provide comfort, clothing and essential supplies to victims of the earthquake that devastated so much of Pakistan. URI members all over the world have offered financial support for this humanitarian effort.

Then there is the work of enduring, daily interfaith cooperation that is the hallmark of URI's presence in the world. More than one million people from 130 faith traditions in 60 nations participated in URI activities this year. The number of Cooperation Circles grew 28%, passing the 300 mark. We have 50 CCs in India alone and the first ever in China and Iran.

An example of the URI at work, in the Philippines, amid sporadic gunfire between rival religious clans in Manila's poor neighborhoods, members of the Peacemakers Circle CC stepped in to avert outright war, heal the deep rift between rival leaders and help negotiate a peace agreement.

There are so many more inspiring stories to tell. So much good, so much light shining amidst the darkness in the world. I pray this is a pivot time in human history - a pivot from an era of terror to a time of transformation, as the solstice is a pivot time, from darkness to light.

But there is much work to be done if humanity is to turn to the light that leads to peace, justice and healing. URI will continue to be an important part of that work, in partnership with countless other organizations and individuals around the world, as we grow stronger each day in our work to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing.

Thank you for being part of URI's global community and for your generous support. We have ambitious plans for 2006 on this journey toward the day when interfaith cooperation will overcome religiously motivated violence and help make our world new. We look forward to sharing the journey with you.

Love,

Charles Gibbs

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4. Europea and Global Interfaith News

4. a) Annan announces new initiative to bridge gap between Islamic, Western worlds

ANNAN ANNOUNCES NEW INITIATIVE TO BRIDGE GAP BETWEEN ISLAMIC, WESTERN WORLDS

New York, Jul 14 2005 4:00PM

Amid concerns that extremists are exploiting the sense of a widening gap between Islamic and Western societies, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan today announced the launch of a new initiative, co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey, which aims to overcome hostile perceptions that sow discord and foment violence.

The initiative, called "Alliance of Civilizations," is intended "to

respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community – both at the institutional and civil society levels – to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace,” Mr. Annan’s spokesman said in a <"http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=1581">statement at UN Headquarters in New York.

The call for the alliance was initiated by Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and co-sponsored by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Mr. Annan called on the international community to contribute to a trust fund to support the Alliance.

“The Alliance will aim to address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal such divisions,” the statement said.

“Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between Islamic and Western societies – an environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies,” it added.

“The Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces, as a movement to advance mutual respect for religious beliefs and traditions, and as a reaffirmation of humankind’s increasing interdependence in all areas – from the environment to health, from economic and social development to peace and security.”

In answer to questions at the daily noon briefing spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said the initiative was not “linked in the calendar” to last week’s terrorist attacks in London that killed more than 50 people and injured 700 or to other attacks, adding that the two prime ministers had been working on it for some time.

“But I think any initiative that can help bridge understanding between civilizations and especially between the Western world and the Islamic world is very much a welcome one,” he declared.

The statement said the Spanish and Turkish Governments would continue, as co-sponsors, to provide support and several other Governments and organizations had expressed interest in joining them.

“The Secretary-General hopes that more will do so,” it added. “The co-sponsors have already pledged substantial initial contributions to a Trust Fund set up to finance the initiative, and the Secretary-General will be inviting other Governments and entities to contribute.”

Mr. Annan is bringing together a high-level group of eminent persons to guide the initiative. The group is expected to present a report with recommendations and a practical plan of action in late 2006.

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THE END